花

HANA

MARIËLLE VAN DEN BERGH - MELS DEES

Preface

This book is intended as a record of two hugely interesting and prolific months in our lives. Between the 24th of June 2012 and the 24th of August we lived and worked at the SCCP in Shigaraki, Japan, where Mariëlle had obtained an artist's residency. The Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park is a multifunctional complex which includes a museum, a permanent open-air exhibition of ceramic sculpture, a presentation building for local industrial ceramics and an Institute of Ceramic Studies which carries out a famous Artist-in-Residence programme.
Together with our 14-year-old son Quirijn - who already came with us on previous residencies to Spain, Ireland, Canada, Tasmania and India - we worked our heads off, travelled around a bit and were constantly surprised and amazed by this strange country and its wonderful inhabitants. Mels already had been dappling in Japanese literature in the seventies, while Mariëlle became interested in Japan through her residencies at the EKWC in 's-Hertogenbosch, Holland – the SCCP's counterpart at the other side of the world.
She started to work on her project 'HANA' (flower) immediately on arrival, using the surprisingly supple, even sensual local clay to create haunting images of budding and wilting flowers and a tall, impressively decorated 'flower tower'. The pieces were shipped to Holland, and will be on display at 'Land en Beeld', in Asperen in next year's spring.
Mels started gathering material for a series of Japan-inspired photo works, some of which are included in this book.
Our book should be read as a kind of children's (Christmas) annual: it contains connected, but widely diverging pieces of information, images, riddles and reflections. There are the blogs we wrote in Japan, picture reports of trips, for instance to the islands of Naoshima and Inujima, documentation of work processes and essays about Japanese items. We also interviewed a number of Japanese friends in Japan as well as Holland, and we included excerpts of Nel Bannier's article on Shigaraki – she set Mariëlle on this trail. Included are also some artist's prints: cyanotypes, handprinted details of photo works and/or etchings.

The book does not intend to create a consistent story or present a body of artworks. Rather, it is an attempt at recording our experiences in Japan as directly as possible.
This is also the reason why none of the 100 copies is exactly the same. Not only is the cover of each book unique – handbound in original Japanese cloth - but there are also subtle variations in its content.
At the end of the book you will find the usual acknowledgements, but we want to express our particular thanks to the Van Abbemuseum and Curator Diana Franssen, and to the Dutch Embassy in Tokyo and its Counselor Ineke van de Pol for supporting our project. We are also grateful to Lydia van Oosten for performing the opening speech. And finally of course, we thank the SCCP staff, and every single artist friend and colleague we met during our stay there.

Mariëlle van den Bergh
Mels Dees

Voorwoord

Met dit boek willen wij verslag doen van twee geweldig interessante en vruchtbare maanden in ons leven. Van 24 juni tot 24 augustus 2012 hebben we gewoond en gewerkt in het SCCP in Shigaraki, Japan, waar Mariëlle een plaats als artist in residency had verworven. Het Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park is een multifunctioneel complex waarin een museum, een permanente openluchtexpositie van keramische sculptuur, een presentatiecentrum voor locale industriële keramiek en het Institute of Ceramic Studies zijn ondergebracht, waar een beroemd artist-in-residence programma loopt.
Samen met onze veertienjarige zoon Quirijn – die al eerder met ons is meegegaan op residencies in Spanje, Ierland, Canada, Tasmanië en India – hebben we ons een slag in de rondte gewerkt, een beetje gereisd en ons voortdurend laten verrassen en verwonderen door dit vreemde land en zijn bewonderenswaardige bewoners. Mels had zich al in de jaren '70 bezig gehouden met Japanse literatuur, terwijl de belangstelling van Mariëlle was gewekt door haar werkperioden op het EKWC, de tegenhanger van het SCCP aan de andere kant van de wereld.
Direct na aankomst begon zij aan haar project HANA (bloem), waarbij ze met de verbazend soepele, bijna sensuele lokale klei aangrijpende beelden van bloemknoppen en verwelkende bloemen creëerde – en een grote, sterk gedecoreerde 'bloementoren'. Deze werken zijn naar Holland verzonden, waar ze het volgend voorjaar zullen worden getoond bij 'Land en Beeld' in Asperen. Mels begon materiaal te verzamelen voor een op Japan geïnspireerde serie fotowerken, waarvan sommige ook in dit boek zijn opgenomen.
Ons boek dient te worden gelezen als een soort Groot Winterboek: het bevat allerlei weliswaar onderling gerelateerde, maar zeer uiteenlopende stukken met informatie, beeldmateriaal, raadsels en bespiegelingen. Zo zijn er de blogs die we in Japan hebben geschreven, beeldverslagen van onze reizen - bijvoorbeeld naar de eilanden Naoshima en Inujima; er is de documentatie van het werkproces en er staan essays over Japanse zaken in. Ook hebben we een aantal Japanse vrienden geïnterviewd, zowel in Japan als in Nederland, en een samenvatting opgenomen van het artikel dat Nel Bannier over Shigaraki heeft geschreven – zij was degene die Mariëlle op dit spoor heeft gezet. Daarnaast zijn ook een aantal grafiekbladen opgenomen: cyanotypieën, handgeprinte details van fotowerken en/of etsen.

Het boek wil geen samenhangend verhaal vertellen of een oeuvre presenteren.
Het is veeleer een poging om onze ervaringen in Japan zo direct mogelijk weer te geven. Om die reden is ook geen van de 100 exemplaren van deze editie precies gelijk. Niet alleen is de omslag van ieder boek uniek – elk exemplaar is met de hand gebonden in originele Japanse textiel - maar zijn er ook in de inhoud subtiele variaties.
Achterin dit boek staat de gebruikelijke reeks dankbetuigingen, maar we willen nog een speciaal bedankje richten aan het Van Abbemuseum en conservator Diana Franssen, en aan de Nederlandse ambassade in Tokyo en cultureel attaché Ineke van de Pol, voor de ondersteuning van ons project. Ook Lydia Oosten van het EKWC danken we voor het uitspreken van de openingswoorden. Tot slot bedanken we natuurlijk de staf van het SCCP, en elk van de vrienden en collegakunstenaars die we daar hebben ontmoet.

Mariëlle van den Bergh
Mels Dees

まえがき

まえがき

本書は我々の人生で非常に興味深く、多作な２カ月間となった日々の記録として誕生しました。2012年６月24日～８月24日の間、我々は妻のマリエル・ファンデンベルフがアーティスト・イン・レジデンスとして招かれた滋賀県立 陶芸の森で生活し、制作しました。滋賀県立 陶芸の森は陶芸美術館、陶製の彫刻が並ぶ野外常設展示場、信楽産業展示館、そして有名なアーティスト・イン・レジデンスが行われる創作研究館からなる多機能施設です。

これまでにスペイン、アイルランド、カナダ、タスマニア、インドにおけるレジデンスに同行した14歳の息子キーリンを連れ、私たちは猛烈に制作し、少しだけ旅行をしてまわり、日本という不思議な国と素晴らしい住民たちに魅惑され驚くことの連続でした。メルスはすでに70年代に日本文学をかじっており、マリエルはオランダのスヘルトーヘンボスにあるヨーロピアン・セラミック・ワークセンター（EKWC）でのレジデンスを通じて日本に関心を持っていました。

滋賀県立 陶芸の森に到着したマリエルは、さっそく自身のプロジェクト「HANNA（花）」に取り組みました。制作には驚くほどしなやかで官能的でさえある地元の粘土を使用し、芽吹く花、そしてしなびてゆく花々の残像を、さらに背が高く見事に飾りたてた「フラワータワー」を創作しました。 作品はオランダへ送られ、来春、アスペーレンで開催される展覧会「Land en Beeld」に出品されます。対してメルスは日本に触発された写真シリーズ用の素材を集めはじめ、そのいくつかを本書にて紹介しています。

本書は、子供向けのクリスマス年鑑のようにお読みください。 日本滞在中につづったブログ、直島や犬島へ旅行した際の写真レポート、制作工程の記録、日本で見かけた品々に関するエッセーなど、広く多岐にわたりつつ互いに関連のある情報、図版、謎かけと考察から構成しています。加えて日本とオランダで日本人の友人達をインタビューした記事や、マリエルが陶芸の道を進むきっかけを作ったネル・バーニアーが信楽焼について書いた記事を引用しています。さらに青写真法、写真印画および／または銅版画の技法を用いたアーティスト本人の手によるプリントも掲載しています。

本書は一貫したストーリーを意図したものでも、まとまりのある作品群を発表するものでもありません。日本で私たちが経験したことをできるだけそのまま伝えようとするものです。限定100部発行され、一冊として同じものがないのはそのためです。日本製のオリジナル生地で手綴じされた表紙は一冊ごとに独特で、その上内容も微妙に異なります。

本書の終わりには慣例である感謝の辞を述べましたが、特に私たちのプロジェクトを支援いただいたファン・アッベミュージアム、キュレーターのディアナ・フランセン、オランダ王国大使館のイネケ・ファン・デ・ボル参事官に深い感謝を申し上げます。 またオープニングの際にスピーチをしていただいたリディア・ファン・オーシュトンにも感謝の意を表します。最後に、滋賀県立陶芸の森の職員の方々、そして滞在中に出会ったアーティストの友達そして同僚達一人一人に、心から感謝を申し上げます。

マリエル・ファンデンベルフ

メルス・ディース






Inujima used to be the centre of a thriving copper and granite industry.
Now only about 50 people live there, and the island is dedicated to art.

Residency in Japan 2012

ブログ BLOG

日本

Some weeks ago we arrived at Kansai Airport in Osaka, for a two month residency in Japan. Our basis will be Shigaraki, a small but very special town in Shiga prefecture and relatively near Kyoto. We are: my husband and fellow artist Mels Dees, our fourteen-year-old son Quirijn and myself, Mariëlle van den Bergh.
A year ago I met the ceramist Nel Bannier (New York/ Amsterdam) during my residency at the EKWC (sunday-morning@ekwc) in Den Bosch. She had spent a year at the SCCP, Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park and was full of stories that triggered my curiosity. I wrote an application and a work plan, based on the butting, flowering and dying of flowers. My grandfather from my mother's side was a flower-bulb farmer in Hillegom. In Holland, this will usually not be regarded with any special interest, but I already had met a Japanese Ikebana Master, who nearly fainted at the idea. Flowers often stood for weeks in my vases at home, long after they had withered, shrivelled up to a mere relic of their original size and texture. The transformation fascinates me and I had decided to focus on this theme in Shigaraki.
Mels had developed a project of his own for Japan, based on his work with manipulated photographs, of which he creates large-scale prints in a graphic studio in Hilversum. He was lucky enough to borrow a good camera from our colleague Paul.
Quirijn would bring loads of books and would "work" on my computer with his new and not so new computer games. Since there is fast internet in the apartment at the SCCP, he can chat online with his chums. That is: sometimes, because there is an eight-hour gap between Tokyo time and the Dutch time zone.

We have planned a couple of spin-offs from this residency. Some of the ceramic work, which I will make, will be on show at Land en Beeld in Asperen and some of Mels' photo works as well. We will produce an artists' book on the Japan residency after that, which will be on show in the library at the Van Abbe Museum at the end of the year. This blog will appear on the websites of both Land en Beeld and the Van Abbe Museum.

Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park

Quote from one of their publications:
The Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park was built and opened in 1990 as a multifunctional complex for creating, studying and exhibiting ceramics, for promoting local industries, for encouraging the creation of new cultures through human, material and information exchange, and for disseminating information from Shiga Prefecture to the world. The park is managed and operated by the Foundation of Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park.
The Artist-in-Residence program at the park's Institute of Ceramic Studies fulfils the creative and educational missions of the park.
Since opening in 1992, the Institute of Ceramic Studies has accepted over 700 ceramic artists from 47 countries through application and invitation.
Lengths of residencies vary among artists, but the program provides exciting opportunities for interaction between artists with different styles and nationalities. Another benefit of working at the institute is the excellent equipment available for use to create works not possible at private studios.
The principle of Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park's Artists-in-Residence program is to help push their work to a higher level by taking full advantage of the environment on offer.

When we arrived at the SCCP, at the end of June, there were some Japanese artists and one from Hong-Kong working at the centre, and one Chinese artist was just leaving. Together with us another Japanese artist arrived, together with an artist from India, based in Singapore and a Japanese artist, based in Berlin. The latter flies in and out while making sculptures at Shigaraki. In the next blogs I will tell more about them.

Mariëlle, 20 juli 2012

コウッウアンゼン

First impressions of Shigaraki

Sculpture Parc, kiln rooms and studios at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Parc (SCCP)

陶芸の森

BLOG ブログ

Engrish

The first restaurant menu we were confronted with in Japan did not take hours to decipher, but days.
We photographed it, so we could work on it at our leisure: It took us some serious puzzling and (later) a fast Internet connection to find out what we could order to drink – we would never have had enough time to find something to eat…
But the lady at our first Shigaraki pub was nice enough. Although she did not speak anything but Japanese, she managed to get our meaning and translate our wishes into drinks without the interference of language.
To understand Japanese English (Engrish, as it is usually called) you have to do some reverse engineering. The point is that you have to reprocess their rendering of English through the entire conversion the Japanese themselves have to do to make English or other languages remotely pronounceable. Japanese is a syllable-based language, I think, while we have a different sound system. Many European sounds (like 'l' and 'r') are more or less meaningless to them, and for a Japanese person it is quite natural to pronounce 'milk' as 'miruku' – and even spell it like that.
I would have loved to make the translation of the list of drinks above into a competition with prizes, but Japan is expensive enough as it is. So I will print the solution upside down, and all can cheat at their hearts' content.

Mels, 6-7-2012

Q's blog

1. Pachinkos are gambling halls, they are huge and incredibly loud. There's a pachinko in every town or city. In Kyoto even children went in to gamble there.
2. People are friendly, they always try to help you. So if you want to go somewhere and they don't know, they will take you to someone else who may know the address.
3. The language is weird, because it is completely different from ours. In French or English you may understand some words, but not in Japanese. The writing is completely different as well. They often confuse the r and the l in English, so they say 'Cora' instead of 'Cola'.
4. I saw snakes. There are a lot of them, I already saw four. One was asleep on top of a dam, one was asleep with its fat belly in the middle of the road and the other two were in the bushes.
5. The drum training was something special. They were rehearsing for a special event. We went to a room with about thirty people, both children and grown-ups. The youngest kids were about seven. There were small, average and huge drums. The big drums were on legs and they were really enormous. They beat the drums with thick sticks. Even very young kids were allowed to play the big drums. Everybody was in front of a large mirror, so they could keep up with the rhythm. They played the drums and in between they held up their sticks in the air. It all looked very well-disciplined.

Quirijn, 29-7-2012

BLOG ブログ

Open-air concert in Seito

Aquarium located in the port of Kagoshima

Tanuki

God is in the details

Somewhere between Osaka and Kyoto they entered the compartment, barely twenty and obviously in love. They hardly touched each other, but their eyes kept interlocking. However, almost as soon as they sat down, they fell asleep. They spread out unceremoniously, the girl with her fleshy thighs protruding from a short, plaited skirt, the boy snoring with his mouth half open.
After a while the conductor entered the carriage, bowing stiffly and deeply. He checked the passengers' tickets slowly, carefully, smiling and offering advice. Clearly, this was a man who took his job seriously. His uniform was spotless, his movements quiet and efficient. He even wrote out the fine for a ticketless bum with a pained look on his face, as if he felt personally responsible for the man's sloppy behaviour. After working his way through the sparsely populated train, he arrived at the sleeping couple. However, he left them alone. After bending over their seats for a moment, the conductor left the compartment, bowing deeply again, without waking the couple to ask for their tickets.
Only after I inspected the cotton covers on the headrests did I discover why this conscientious official let the couple go on sleeping. The cotton antimacassars on the seats of some Japanese trains are equipped with a tiny pocket, just large enough to hold the train ticket for the passenger in the seat behind it. A negligible detail, but one which almost brought tears to my eyes.

Mels, 28-06-2012

ブログ

細部

Festival in Shigaraki

Parties at SCCP










火の用心
すすがうまくなる
ぼいすて













Leiko Ikemura is a Japanese artist, who lives in Berlin. She flies to and fro to Japan and works on a couple of works at a time. The staff of the SCCP is completing a giant bunny in a dress, following her instructions. When we arrived we saw two butterfly-like sculptures being glazed with lustre. Weeks later we recognized them in an important show in the Toyota museum of Modern art.

Toru Kurokana is a young and very talented artist. Since we have been here we saw his work growing and his working space expanding. He works exclusively in abstract forms, which are always complicated and detailed. Often holes appear in a double walled surface. Some of his sculptures perform a balancing act which mocks gravity. He never uses glazes, but endlessly sands the surface of the raw clay. The skin of his work is polished and sensual. We saw some of his work in a gallery in Tajimi.

Toshizi Yoshimura is a specialist in large-scale work, done by hand building. Currently he is working on two standing figures. Next to it stands a giant hand with fingers clasped in a friendly gesture.

In the other room of the SCCP eight artists are at work, four of which are potters. In Holland you would call the potters designers. Japanese Makiko Suzuki works under the label *La Maison de Vent*. She sells her delicate and exquisite tableware in Tokyo and in London.
Her speciality is extraordinary turquoise and thin tableware, which could have been burial gifts from an Egyptian grave.

The other Japanese potter is Machiko Ishii from Tokyo. Currently she is researching tableware for handicapped and elderly people. Her cups have curved and dented surfaces, so you can hold the cup better, and lids with holes for straws. I asked her if these were the prototypes for a production line for plastic cups, but that was far off the mark. Like many Japanese, Machiko values the individual ceramic cup; the ultimate and treasured gift for any person.

BLOG ブログ

Blog 2

The artists in the residency アーティスト・イン・レジデンス
program of the Shigaraki
Ceramic Cultural Park work in two big spaces.
Three artists work in the front room:
Leiko, Toru and Toshizi.

Mariëlle, 29-7-2012

Taiwanese potter Ciao Fong Shen is a postgraduate from the Tainai University of Art and is in Shigaraki for the experience and to broaden her expertise. She was one year in the U.S.A. in an exchange program. Although she started out as a sculpture student, she changed to design because in that way her work would be of more service to the people. But her tableware tends to grow into sculpture, like the vessel with 3 cascading lids and interchangeable felted handles. She told the story of how she, together with other students, built a large wood-kiln in 3 months, working day and night. After that, everybody spent a month making work to fill this wood-kiln. When the moment came to inaugurate the kiln, is was loaded and then… an major earthquake struck, which destroyed some of the wood-kiln and all of the work inside it.

The 4th potter also works as a ceramic artist and gives performances/ workshops. Hong Kong-based artist Siu Kam-han is working on a ceramic interpretation of the Japanese rice paper sliding door. Her inspiration derives from the story of famous potter Bernard Leach, who failed to work well in his London studio and discovered that the light was wrong. After he covered his windows with Japanese rice paper, the atmosphere became serene and visually shut out all urban noise. Serenity is a goal in Siu's work and whatever she undertakes to do and what materials she uses, she will pursue this serenity. She is investigating human behaviour, especially in urban circumstances. In Shigaraki she organised a blueprint workshop. She got many local people to lay out objects on (light) sensitive paper, with exposure rates of half an hour in full sunlight. The merry event was a social gathering for all ages and was hugely enjoyed by both Japanese and foreigners.

Shizuka Okada's residency is a year long. Just last week her solo show *For Anything, for Nothing* opened in Tomio Koyama Gallery in Kyoto. Her world is populated by strange animals, ghosts that imbibed golden statues, trees with eyes and gloomy foliage, wriggling mushrooms and twin bears, that hide their faces behind shells. This intriguing artist will never be out of inspiration. Shizuka's world is very rich in stories, fabulous forms, magnificent colours and double meanings.
Her comment on a sculpture of a curved snake was that there are snakes which bite their own tails an that they are symbols for eternity. Her snake missed its tail and was just an ordinary snake. But what a snake it was!

Saeko Kuwana was working on a huge black skull when we arrived at SCCP. On a small black and white picture in her studio space we found the image which had triggered this work: a painting of a skull on a open book, surrounded by some objects. In the weeks to come, we witnessed the creation of the open book, mirrors and the strange objects, all overgrown by intriguing patrons in relief. The skull and the book were very large indeed and the race against the clock with the ultimate deadline of the booked kiln was in full swing. The skull was on put on a scaffold with a glowing light-bulb under it, to make it dry faster. Then it was raised even higher so more air could pass under it. Saeko was working for two solo exhibitions in Tokyo, to be opened only weeks later.

Singapore based Indian artist Madhvi Subrahmanian had a short residency of only 3 weeks, but managed to make 3 tall towers. To value this effort one must know the extraordinary flexibility of the Shigaraki clay, the humidity in mid rainy season and the limited timescale while working with ceramics. Yet Madhvi created a dream-like landscape with slender, elegant towering silhouettes, painted in tribal slip patterns. One of these minarets will be permanently on show in the sculpture garden of the SCCP. In 2013, Madhvi will be one of the Indian artists representing her country in the U.S.A. and China.

Naoki Koide is a famous Japanese artist, whose work was featuring in the Doki Doki show in the SCCP museum. This work is a cloud on stilts, with inside the cloud a scene of a domestic gathering, complete with living figures and grandparents-in-heaven. Strange, leering animals can be seen in corners and other out of tune details. All is made in highly detailed ceramics and painted in beautiful watercolours. One has not enough eyes to take in Naoki's world: the enchantment is total and breathtaking.

When we came at the SCCP the Chinese artist Wu Hao was leaving after a residency of 3 months, for which he was awarded a Chinese grant. Wu had studied in Japan and spoke fluent Japanese. Moreover, he also was highly valued by his Japanese colleagues for his skills in ceramics. His work, fired in a wood kiln, was on show in a small exhibition. I saw big sculptures, made on a potter's wheel, but shaped with a mature artist's twist. Some had a strange surface: it seemed only half fired on one side, yet it was dripping with a green ash glaze, which indicates a very high temperature. At Wu's farewell party we had fireworks and a lesson how to build and eat sushi. Weeks later we discovered a set of very beautiful chairs, the underglaze painted with funny fat toads and cherry blossom trees in Chinese style.

Opposite page | Guardian foxes
This page | Glaze samples from Shigaraki Ceramic Research Centre





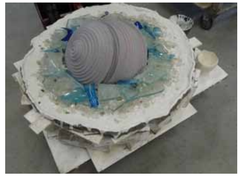


The studios at SCCP, with Toru Kurokana, Makiko Suzuki, Machiko Ishii, Siu Kam-han, Shizuka Okada, Madhvi Subrahmanian, Saeko Kuwana and Naoki Koide at work















大杉和夫
ŌSHUGI KAZUO
お花 OHANA

Studio for mentally disabled, Shigaraki

Rice paddies on pilgrimage trail, Nara

Food

Eating is a major issue in Japan. It is one of the ways in which the position of Japanese culture in the East might be compared to the place of France in Europe. Of course, we cannot afford real Japanese haut-cuisine. Simple food is expensive enough as it is. Prices are high, mainly because most farming is necessarily small-scale –a large part of Japan consists of mountains, and much of the arable surface is urbanised. You can see tiny rice paddies, only slightly larger than a *futon*, squeezed in between railways or buildings. And every single rice plant is planted, tended and harvested by hand.

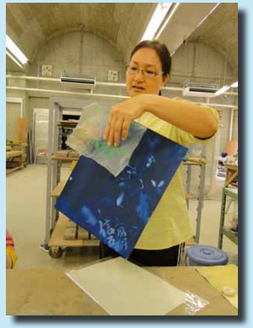
To protect the small farmers, the government has put heavy import duties on rice and other agricultural products. Rice in Japan costs several times the world market price, fruits are very expensive, but seafood is relatively cheap, and exquisitely fresh fish is available practically everywhere – another parallel with France.

Cooking in Japan is an adventure, even more so if you don't speak or read the language. Japanese love wrapping and packaging things, including food. And in the supermarket, even if you can see through the wrapping or if there is a picture on it, you can never be sure what a familiar-looking product will taste like. Plums are salted, black beans are canned with sugar, grapes have a faint medical taste.

But some of the new smells and tastes we discover are spectacular. We quickly learned to appreciate the green tea with roasted rice (Genmaicha) people generally drink here. There are some spices and herbs (I keep forgetting their names) which taste like nothing I ever had before. Fish and mushrooms (two of my favourite foods) are terrific, so cooking up a good meal is no problem at all. The funny thing is – even if I try to cook a European dish, it will always acquire a faint Japanese aroma, whatever I do. It's in the water, or in the air, I suppose. Japanese culture is pretty pervasive.

Mels, 28-07-2012



Siu Kam-han's cyanotype workshop for Fukushima victims






Flower, watercolour, Mariëlle van den Bergh, 2012

Blog 3

Just now I am reading Sei Shonagon's *Pillow-book*, dating from around the year 990, which is regarded as a model of linguistic purity and highly valued by readers because of the extraordinary beauty and evocative power of her language. Since the book is owned by Mels, I came across a passage he had marked decades ago: *It is night and one is expecting a visitor. Suddenly one is startled by the sound of rain-drops, which the wind blows against the shutters.* (page 51 under 16. Things That Make One's Heart Beat Faster)

That night Mels and I talked about how time seems to fall away and how words from a thousand years ago still can sound so fresh and so nearby. We compared various Japanese writers we had read and then I realised that Japanese are very moved by impressions, like for instance a pond or lake with water lilies and dragonflies and a certain light at a certain hour of the day. That happened to be the very thing we had seen a week ago. We travelled for a week, while my big work was drying in the studio of the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park. We visited the art projects and museums on Naoshima and Inujima, two islands in the Kagawa and Okayama prefectures. On Naoshima there are three very beautiful museums, all built by the architect Tadao Ando.

The main museum is the Chichu Art Museum, which has a permanent exhibition of works by Claude Monet, Walter De Maria and James Turrell. You go up the path towards the museum surrounded by lush flowering shrubs and past a long pond with water lilies drifting along. Standing in the huge Monet gallery you are overpowered by his five paintings from the *"Water Lily"* series. The works hang in a vast and empty white space, with beautiful neutral light, with a white floor. Even the frames of the spacious paintings are from white marble. As a visitor you start to float and get sucked into these paintings. One realises after a while that here in this museum everything, and I mean really everything, has been done to honour these art works.

The way to the works is paved with the real thing as you go up to the museum along the pond with surrounding flowers. After you have been in the Monet gallery, you can sit in a white marble empty space to digest the experience. Of course you are walking in slippers provided by the museum and in deep silence, as if walking in a shrine. And a shrine it is! A shrine to art. Standing there, facing the Monet works, I thought: yes, these works are at home here in Japan! I know where they came from and I know how the impressionist's paintings hang in the Musée d'Orsay and how Paris feels like and many of these paintings seem at home just there. But having a museum built around these art works as a tribute to them is something I never have seen before. I saw it now in the Chichu Art Museum.

Inujima is something special. You can take the ferry from Naoshima or take the one from Hoden. For centuries this small island has been the quarry for castles and monuments on the mainland, like the Okayama Castle. Find Keiko Arimoto and you will discover a lot of the history of Inujima. She is the archivist and storyteller of the island and published five books about Inujima, observed from different angles. Sit in her restaurant en enjoy her food while you chat about her passion: Inujima, Dog's Island. A big boulder along the coast has the shape of a sitting dog.

The main art project is situated in the old ruins of a copper refinery which was only in use for a very short time. It opened in 1909 with the newest technology to retrieve the copper from the earth. It closed after just ten years because the copper price fell. At that time between 3000 and 5000 people lived on Inujima. Now, in 2012, the population has shrunk to 50.

Architect Hiroshi Sambuichi writes about his Inujima Art Project Seirensho: *My interest is in expressing the details of the earth through architecture. I wanted to turn Inujima into the most sophisticated art island in the world, powered by natural energy.*

He did make a very balanced artwork by renovating the copper-mine and building an art museum in it. The voyage down the mine shaft in pitch dark corridors (you get taken along by a guide) is spectacular. At every turn is a mirror, reflecting the image of the sky at the end of the labyrinth. You start your adventure with the smoldering image of the sun in your back. This work is a collaboration by Hiroshi Sambuichi and the visual artist Yanagi Yukinori, whose art works fill the rest of the museum and some of the art house projects on the island.

Mariëlle, 12-8-2012

BLOG ブログ

Made Where? Made in Shigaraki, Japan

by Nel Bannier

A closed door, bare walls, a window in the ceiling, an empty studio, and wintertime grey at the European Ceramic Work Center (EKWC) 2010, The Netherlands, my home country. How different a start this was from my artist-in-residency at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park in 2007. It was summer then. I arrived at Shigaraki in the dark, at midnight, not knowing any Japanese, unable to decipher the characters, or understand how to pay my bus fare. But the sky was bright with stars, the smell delicious, the people at the bus stop warm and helpful, and after a shower and a good night's sleep, I woke up in a woodprint-like surrounding. The studio was communal, no doors, windows everywhere, people working everywhere, and a vast sprawl of sculptures in the park. No cell-like environment full of envy, but openness, both in space and mentality.

Winter 2010. When it was my turn at the EKWC to give a presentation to staff and artists-in-residence, I took them on a tour of the 20 years that had passed since my first stay there in 1992. Back then I made my first full size figurative work, coarse and heavy, in red earthenware. Building the work went well, though I had not much knowledge of the figure, clay or firing a kiln. The loading of the kiln went fine but not the firing. The whole experience made me look for an opportunity to learn more about clay. Through clay contacts I ended up in Carbondale, Illinois, USA, in 1995. During the years at Carbondale I learned clay in dept and I was completely free to experiment with figure building, firing the work and glazing it. All this hard work was aimed at being accepted at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, about which I had heard so much in Carbondale. In 2007 they accepted me for a seven-months stay.

It was after my EKWC 2010 presentation that Mariëlle van den Bergh and I got acquainted. Together we looked at many pictures of Shigaraki, the workplace, people's work, the countryside and so on. To her a most amazing image was me shaking hands with the Emperor and Empress of Japan. From the article I wrote for Ceramics: *Art and Perception/Technical, issue 29, 2009*, "Made in Shigaraki, Japan" I quote: "It was around this time that the Emperor and Empress of Japan came to visit Shigaraki and our facilities. Who would ever believe one was to shake hands with the Emperor and Empress? Of course we had been hilarious about this visit, but when they entered the studio everybody fell silent and relaxed. The Emperor and Empress carried an atmosphere of serenity and gentleness with them. They were well informed on us, our country, our work. It was an impressive day".

Photographs top from left to right
Wailing Flute Player (red earthen ware) |Construction about 250 cm high | EKWC 1992
Wailing Flute Player (fired)
Nether World (stone ware) | Construction about 230 cm high | Carbondale, IL, USA 1997
Nether World (fired)

Photograph left
Meeting the Emperor and Empress of Japan | Shigaraki Ceramics Cultural Park, Japan, 2007

2 photographs left
Defeated (porcelain) | About 300 cm high
Shigaraki Ceramics Culture Park 2009
Defeated (fired)

I want to add, that the day before the visit of the Emperor and Empress to the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park, the Japanese Times ran a front-page article about the WWII comfort girls and the Dutch reimbursement claims. Here we were, the Emperor, Empress and I, representing two versions of the same history. And what I felt that very moment, was that sincere sorrow on both sides about decisions made a generation earlier only could be bridged by a handshake and deep interest in each others culture. It was the earth, the clay bloodied by suffering wherever you went, which made me shape my suffering bodies on behalf of my history and on behalf of Japan's history.
Mariëlle applied to the Shigaraki Ceramics Cultural Park and got accepted. In the summer of 2012, an email arrived from Shigaraki, because she had problems building up the clay. We discussed my burlap laminate solution, about which I wrote the following in my article: "Of course I made a clumsy start. Small squares of fabric, which I smeared on both sides with clay and placed like a slab around a metal rod. The rod was wrapped with plastic and as a shrinkage buffer I had rolled cardboard around it, too. The work went up square-by-square of fabric. But ... it stood up, it didn't come down after 15 inches of work. Soon enough I found that the burlap/clay slab, when used over the diagonal, like a diamond shape, was much easier to pull up and out and shape. It was nearly as easy as making a pot on the wheel, but it was not a pot, it was a figure."

The Pacifiers I made at Shigaraki in this new technique were kids, each placed with one leg in one adult leg. The staff were so intrigued by my way of working that I was invited to extend my stay and to have a solo show in the museum. And with more months ahead of me, I started on Walking through Paradise with a height of about 3 meters unfired, a dream size for clay, which became a big pair of legs 2.85 m tall after firing. And then, yes, then I made my giant figure in porcelain, also 3 meter high, unfired. But ... after the firing I was defeated. Defeated? No, I just kept on dreaming.

2 photographs left
Pacifiers (Shigaraki clay) | About 165 cm high | Shigaraki Ceramics Cultural Park 2008
Pacifiers (fired)

3 photographs top
Walking Through Paradise (Shigaraki clay) | About 300 cm high
Shigaraki Ceramics Cultural Park 2008 - photo top
Walking Through Paradise (in the kiln) - photo bottom
Walking Through Paradise (fired) - photo left

After nearly one and a half years in Japan, the EKWC invited me to submit a plan for a second work period, giving me another chance to refine my technique of clay/burlap laminate and to try another firing approach for a big figure. The building went well, but the stacking of the piece in the kiln and the firing were not to my desire, but the result of firing high first and then using metal sulfate solutions to color/glaze the work was more than I could dream off.

Now I hope and dream and work and dream to fulfill my hope of being admitted once more to the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park. Building big, building complex is not a problem anymore. By firing high first and then glazing big pieces and firing them at a lower temperature with sulfates, the firing and glazing problem is solved, but … but … the stacking in the kiln and the right firing temperature are still somewhat of a mystery. The open atmosphere, the work ethics, sharing the same space, and the knowledge of the staff, which were so inspiring during my stay at Shigaraki in 2007, might be the right environment to have this dream come true. Clay, my figures, techniques and motivation are the advocates, they travel ahead of me to bridge historical and cultural differences, and glaze over sad stories. This is what made my experience in Japan so wonderful.
Clay is able to help heal.

Molested (porcelain) | About 220 cm high | EKWC 2010/11
Molested (fired) - photo right

The excerpts quoted are from "Made in Shigaraki, Japan" by Nel Bannier Ceramics: *Art and Perception/Technical, issue 29, 2009*. They are reprinted with the kind permission of the editor of Ceramics: Art and Perception.

Nel Bannier has a sculpture degree from Rietveld Academy, The Netherlands, and an MFA in ceramics from Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA. She maintains a studio in Brooklyn, NY, USA, and in Amsterdam, NL. Her work is represented in international museum collections.

ブログ

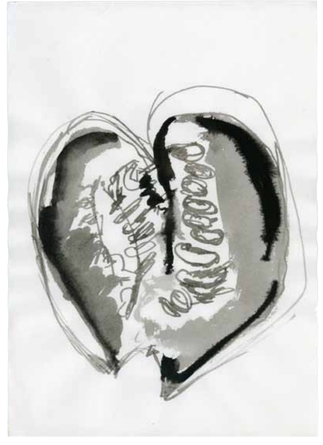
Fake

偽物

Apparently, Japanese attitudes towards imitation are thoroughly different from ours. Our western obsession with authenticity, both materially and psychologically, is utterly foreign to their culture. Imitation is stimulated, in art and craft as well as in education. When we witnessed a kodo training for children and adolescents (Kodo – you know, the big Japanese drums), I wondered if European children would be *able* to perform on the same level – 26 kids playing very fast during an hour-long performance at 32°C without missing a single beat. In Holland, it would certainly be hard to find so many children even willing to undergo the necessary exercise.

But the funnier side of fake can often be seen in architecture and design. In the middle of a wildlife park close to Shigaraki, my son and I found that the only piece of fencing in miles and miles of forest was made of – probably expensive – plastic poles and stakes. Everywhere you see real and fake (bamboo, wood, cloth) being mixed promiscuously. Maybe people just refuse to see the difference.
And many highly esteemed traditional arts and craft are imitations of nature in a medium that is far removed from it. On the Nishiki-market in Kyoto we saw some of the terrific plastic display meals that restaurants use, while they were prodded enthusiastically by schoolgirls.
I suspect there may be no such thing as fake in Japan.

(To be continued)
Mels, 20-07-2012



Both pages | Flowers, watercolour, Mariëlle van den Bergh, 2012

Q's blog 2

Q. How do I survive my parent's residency, when I am 14 years old?

A. I am busy with the computer: I game, watch You-Tube video's, I communicate with friends at home.

Q. How do you communicate with your friends, 7 hours away in Holland?

A. I use Steam to chat with a couple of friends. I mail with others. Usually my friends know what time I am available: that would be after 3 o'clock here in Japan. That is 8 in the morning in Holland.

Q. What else do you do?

A. I prepare things I want to do in Holland, for instance making appointments with friends, planning to buy a new game etc.

Q. Did you read a lot, since you have a lot of time at hand?

A. Yes, "Gone 3", "Gone4", "Grijze Jager 11", "Password", "Hunger Games" and now I read "Broederband".

Q. What else did you like?

A. I cycled to the Ninja Museum in Ueno. It is a fortress. In a house there were trap doors, hidden doors, hiding places. There was a show, where they demonstrated what ninja can do: throwing shurikans (werpsterren), throwing knives, throwing chopsticks through a wooden board, sword fighting. Among the other visitors was a guy with a missing part of his little finger. In Japan this is a sign that this person is probably a jacuza member (Japanese mafia).

Quirijn, 26-8-2012









shigaraki-cho

信楽町









Ceramic Research Centre Shigaraki

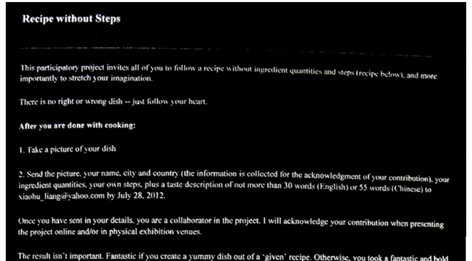
セラミック研究センター信楽

SIU Kam-Han is a Chinese artist, doing a ceramics project in Shigaraki. She is from Hong-Kong and obviously participatory art is very much the thing to do there. The faintly political, but inoffensive nature of this kind of art practice may be the reason for its popularity.
Anyway, a friend of hers, Teresa Leung, asked me to participate in a cooking project: *Recipe without Steps*.

I liked the idea, although I almost never cook from a recipe, and I fail to see what is so special about 'following your heart' in cooking. I usually follow my heart (and my nose, and the contents of the fridge) when I cook a meal – I would not know how to do it in another way. However, following my heart did mean that I refrained from using chicken meat or stock. So my contribution was this: (left image)

The recipe tastes really good, especially with a glass of Suntory whiskey. Which goes to show again that less is more - at least in a Japanese kitchen…

Mels, 26-7-2012



Recipe without Steps

This participatory project invites all of you to follow a recipe without ingredient quantities and steps (recipe below), and more importantly to stretch your imagination.

There is no right or wrong dish -- just follow your heart.

After you are done with cooking:

1. Take a picture of your dish

2. Send the picture, your name, city and country (the information is collected for the acknowledgment of your contribution), your ingredient quantities, your own steps, plus a taste description of not more than 30 words (English) or 55 words (Chinese) to xiaohu_liang@yahoo.com by July 28, 2012.

Once you have sent in your details, you are a collaborator in the project. I will acknowledge your contribution when presenting the project online and/or in physical exhibition venues.

The result isn't important. Fantastic if you create a yummy dish out of a 'given' recipe. Otherwise, you took a fantastic and bold step by stretching your imagination. Congratulations!

Photo Size and Resolution: The photo should be roughly 15cmx12.5cm in size, with a resolution around 150-200dpi. You can send in a picture of a larger size but I will crop to fit the space given.

Exhibition: All received photos will be shown in a blog dedicated to this project and possibly in an exhibition to be held later this year or in early 2013.

Submissions and inquiries: xiaohu_liang@yahoo.com

To view my past projects and works, visit http://www.teresart.net

The First Recipe without Steps

Ingredients:

Chicken
Garlic
Chicken Stock
White wine
Lemon
Olive oil
Butter
Parsley
Salt
Black pepper

Dear Teresa,

Enclosed you will find a picture of the dish I created for your project. As I am a vegetarian, I had to leave out some of the ingredients – the dead chicken, and the chicken stock. However, I used all other ingredients to create a kind of spiritual chicken, as you can see.

Ingredients:

Chicken	none
Garlic	4-5 bulbs of 6-8 cloves each
Chicken Stock	none
White wine	2 glasses (fairly sweet Japanese white wine)
Lemon	one
Olive oil	1 tablespoon
Butter	50 grs or more, if necessary
Parsley	some twigs
Salt	a pinch
Black pepper	quite a bit, to spice the sauce

The crux of this recipe is in the preparation of the garlic. If you put an entire bulb of garlic in the microwave and heat it at full power for a minute or so, the garlic will be cooked and lose practically all of its sharpness and obtrusive smell. In fact, it will be quite sweet, rather like other roots. The cloves can be loosened from the bulb easily.
For the sauce I used two glasses of Japanese white wine, which I reduced to a third, together with a lot of black pepper and some salt. I mounted the sauce with cubes of very cold butter and a tablespoon of olive oil. If the sauce stays too liquid, you can add some starch.

Drip lemon, sprinkle parsley and use both to garnish the dish and you have a wonderful appetizer, or a dish to accompany a drink. The sweet garlicky taste is offset by the pungent / sweet and sour sauce. Of cause, you could develop it into an entire meal, but I never tried that. Anyway, it's a dish that may save a chicken's life…

Best regards Mels Dees

Making the torches for the annual Fire Festival, Shigaraki

鎮火祭祈禱神符

Photos opposite page | the old industrial ceramic town of Seito
Photo this page | tiles on the bridge show how the clay was prepared

生徒

Blog 4

In this blog I will write about the work both Mels and I made in Japan during the residency at the SCCP, Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park.
Mels prepared computer-manipulated photographs for large-scale works, which he will print on a huge printer the Graphic Studio het Gooi in Hilversum later this year. The images are based on pictures taken while he travelled through Japan. Some of these photo collages will be exhibited in the Van Abbemuseum's library next November, together with the artists' book we make about this residency.
The other work Mels did in Japan was throwing clay. Now throwing clay is nothing new for Shigaraki, because this is a very famous potter's village with an ancient ceramic tradition, with many masters and deep knowledge of clay, glazes and techniques, on a par with other famous ceramic centres in the world. But Mels threw the clay in his own original way: he didn't mould a pot on a turning wheel, but literally threw blocks of Shigaraki clay from a small bridge at the centre.
This performance-like work was a direct sequel of the performance he had done during his residency at the EKWC (sundaymorning@ekwc.nl) in Den Bosch. There he let industrially produced ceramics fall to pieces by burning away the wires on which they were suspended from the studio ceiling. Now he dropped blocks of clay on top of each other, the impact deforming each block and the ones he had dropped before, and thus creating a sculpture.
Since the works where massive and firing massive work is a very bad idea in ceramics, they were hollowed out. That is, as much as possible. In consultation with the Japanese assistants, a very long firing process was decided upon, with some drying in the kiln. Biscuit firing took place at 900 degrees. Later Mels applied various glazes and fired these also slowly, up to 1250 degrees. Not only the clays, but also the glazes are typical of Shigaraki.
My work plan, which I had sent to the SCCP a year ago, was about the budding, flowering and dying of flowers. In the meeting with the staff at the start of the residency, their first question was: pressing into moulds or hand building? I chose hand building. I wanted to work with both clay and porcelain. Off we went to the clay shop. Shigaraki produces a vast variety of clays. In the clay shop you can find many small squares of samples, stuck on boards. They come in many colours and varieties for different techniques, like hand building or throwing, with different amount of grog (chamotte), shrinkage and other qualities. In the clay shop you will also find samples of the same clay fired in oxidation and in reduction, when oxygen is removed during the firing process. With glazes, this will usually result in a more or less bluish hue, while colours fired in an oxidative atmosphere tend to be brighter.
After choosing a white clay and a porcelain we went next door to the glaze shop. All glazes were displayed in blocks of four tiles: the two on the left were white clay, the ones on the right were red clay. On top was oxidation, bottom was reduction. When I saw the difference between the same glaze applied to white and red clay, I decided on the spot to make this the basis for my project. We purchased 6 different glazes and went next door again for red clay with the same shrinkage. This does not sound like anything special for non-ceramists, but in fact it is not done so often: mixing two or more clays together is usually avoided, because each clay is different and mixing clays can cause problems.

I made a test piece of 40 cm high, built around a plastic pipe covered with newspaper. I carved the surface of this small tower with a clay tool while the clay was wet. It gave the impression of fluid material, streaming clay. This was a surface that interested me a lot, because with it I could represent the idea of flowers more than depict actual flowers. After this test piece I built a tower of 240 cm, in six sections and getting narrower to the top.
This proved to be quite a challenge and things got even more difficult because of the air conditioning, which made the work dry faster on one side, which caused severe local shrinkage. Moreover, I obtained the best surface while the clay was very wet, which was possible with the first two top parts, but the lower parts had to be partially dry, since they had to support all the weight further up.

This Shigaraki clay was quite difficult to build with, because it has a very fine structure, which of course allowed my flower work to be beautifully detailed.

We dried the piece in the studio and later in the dry-room. The firing process was extra slow and the biscuit firing went up to 900 degrees. I fired in a gas kiln, o.8 (m3), with 10 gas burners. In Shigaraki the assistants instructed me how to handle this kiln. You start with lighting two burners and after one hour the kiln will reach 100 degrees. Next you fire two more burners, at the opposite side. After 4 hours all 10 burners are working and you can open the air valves and start turning up the gas pressure. You have to do that every hour or thirty minutes. You have to follow a firing curve the assistant makes for your work. If, for some reason, the kiln stays behind schedule, you have to find out why. In my case burners had extinguished and I hadn't opened the air valves enough. If the kiln is too fast, you may have given too much pressure. Depending on where you are on the schedule, this may not be a problem and you can continue. It was amazing to operate this huge machine by hand and fine-tune it this way.
The glaze firing I did later took 18 hours, and I had to work through a whole night, going up to the kiln every hour and getting the pressure up and up while dawn was colouring the Shigaraki landscape around me. My glaze firing went up to 1240 degrees. The glaze came out rather nice with rich details because the semitransparent colour was varied by the unpredictable colour changes of the clay.
I also worked with porcelain, making small flowers, with I painted with underglaze and covered with a transparent shiny glaze. These will be on show in the library of the Van Abbemuseum in November. The big work, *Flower Tower*, is on its way back to Holland (by ship) and will be exhibited in Land en Beeld (www.landenbeeld.nl).
Some artists are asked to leave a work behind for the collection of the SCCP. I donated my test piece and a choice of porcelain flowers to the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Centre.

Mariëlle, 26-09-2012

Kagoshima seen from the active volcano of Sakurajima

ブログ BLOG

This system (a tap on top of the toilet cistern, which when the cistern is filling) is a solution for many problems at once: it saves water (the water used for washing your hands is used again for flushing); therefore it also creates less sewage; it saves the space and money needed for the extra tap and washbasin; it saves you the trouble of opening and closing a tap; and it prevents contamination by handling a dirty tap. I think this design (which is not common in Japan, but which I have not seen anywhere else) deserves to be applied all over the world – mandatorily.

I don't often wear suits or trousers with a crease, but whenever I do, I have to struggle to keep it in the right place when I put my trousers on a European hanger. They are just too narrow. The Japanese solved the problem - in style, of course.

The same goes for clothes-pegs: the Japanese peg is better, sturdier, opens wider and is infinitely more beautiful than our models…

I'm not sure if this idea is in the same category as the design left… It is the key-board attached to most lavatory bowls here. It has been awarded prizes and is in the collection of (Japanese) design museums, but I have simply never dared to use it. I think it looks too much like the operating panel of the ejection seat in a fighter plane…

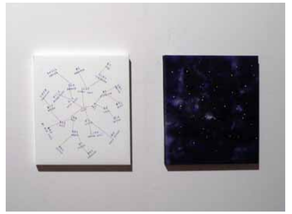
More details

In many respects, Japan is like other countries in the world - with a twist. Of course, they drive on the wrong side of the road, but there are more places where they do that. They also have red, orange and green traffic-lights, but they call the green blue (and sometimes it is). They use can openers like everybody else, but after 15 baffled minutes I found out that the Japanese models work counter-clockwise, instead of clockwise, as can-openers in the rest of the world do. The same goes for the direction in which keys must be turned to lock and unlock doors. And for the way books are read (from back to front).
But I discovered that, apart from the ticket pocket on train seats (see last blog), Japan also made some major breakthroughs in the small commodities that are so important in human life:

Mels, 26-8-2012

Pictures from the Nara pilgrimage trail

奈良



Top left to right | Yuko Ebina
watercolors on paper - Behind the words (2 x)

Photographes taken at Museu Molí Paperer Cappellades, Spain, 2008

Bottom left to right | Toshihiro Hattori
Axis - Eponymous - Flower

面接

A virtual interview with Yuko and Toshi in Tokyo

We met Yuko and Toshi during an exhibition in Cappellades, Spain, in which they as well as Marielle participated. Yuko Ebina is a painter and book artist who studied at the Tama Art University in Tokyo, and received several scholarships and prizes. Toshihiro Hattori also is a well-known paper artist, painter and sculptor, who graduated at the same university.
From 1995 onwards, the two of them exhibited widely, together or apart, in Japan, Sweden, Lithuania, Slovakia, the Netherlands and South Korea. And from 2004 till 2007 they lived and worked in Amsterdam.
We conducted a small online interview with them, as we could not find the time to visit them in Tokyo.

You spent so much time in Holland, so you should know: What is the difference between being an artist in Japan compared with being an artist in Holland?
Holland and Japan, a lot of things are very different, Art is also different. Some Japanese artists live in Japan, they believe Dutch artists can receive a lot of subsidy from government. You don't need to do any jobs. You can pay tax by your works. A lot of people buy paintings often at gallery or art fair…etc. They think Europe is Fairyland for artists. Because, in Japan, we don't have any subsidies for artists' life. (We got subsidies for staying in Holland. But it's very special, only for overseas deployment) Most of Japanese artists have to do job harder for their life and do art after job. So, Japanese artists think Japan is the hardest place for artists in developed countries…

And what about the art scene?
Art scene is also different a lot. For example, in Japan, we don't have a border on artwork and craftwork. Craftwork is very popular in Japan. Some craftsmen are respected as artist more than painter. In fact their works are quite artistic. Most of Japanese people don't buy so many paintings for their house, but they pay a lot of money for craftwork (ceramic, lacquer ware, bamboo craft, handmade paper, fountain pen, sword… a lot of things!). So, Japanese people like artistic things very much, but artists can't be rich…

And is there a difference between being a male or female artist? How does Japan compare with Holland or Europe?
Last century, for Japanese female artists it's very difficult to continue to be an artist. Most of them stopped their art activity by marriage and parenting. However, recently, for male artists, it's difficult to be an artist. Because Japanese Economic situation got worse, male wants to work at usual jobs for stable life. In art academies, many students are girls. And now, most of art fans are women. They do empathy more to female artists.
In Japan, the female artists seem to be enjoying their art activities further than the male artists.
Anyway, environment of art is different, but we think being an artist is some in Japan and Holland. Artists' life is not easy, but we can receive a lot of pleasure from Art, in Holland, in Japan, too.

You stayed both in Holland for years. Did you consider staying on here?
We really enjoyed life and art activity in Holland. It was very happy 3 years. But we didn't consider stay longer in Holland. We stayed in Holland by subsidies from Japanese government and some culture/art foundations. It was enough money for stay 3 years. But if we stay longer, we have to work in Holland. Of course we have to study Dutch language harder. Then we are not so young like student. (Age was about 35-40.) It's late to start learning new language. We will be able to speak Dutch, but it's not highest level. Toshi has worked as a curator at museum and Yuko has worked as a secretary at institute before life in Holland, and now we're working as a designer and an editor. All jobs need language of high level for presentation, negotiations and writing. So, we thought we couldn't do these jobs in Holland (and other country). We have to do more hard job, and it must be low rewards. If we stay in Holland longer, we'll be poor and busy compared with our Japanese life, and be so difficult to continue art activity.
We think staying 3 years was nice for us. 1 year was short. But if we stay in other country many years, building again our life and art activity in Japan is very difficult after we come back to Japan. We love both countries, Japan and Holland. But we had to be realist as life planning. Now we're satisfied our life in Japan, and really want to visit to Holland again, with our son!

And now - do you make different work in Japan than you did while you were in Holland?
Some Japanese friends said, "Your works were changed after you went to Holland." Some one said, "You didn't change. You're going on your own way." In fact, we tried to use some new materials and techniques in Holland. It was very interesting to try and we got good results. Of course, we've tried to something new before Holland. We visited to other countries and made a lot of works in Slovakia, Sweden, Lithuania… and Japan.
But we think we have much influence from Holland. It's not on works, it's in our minds. When we make works and exhibitions in Japan, we remember a lot of faces of Dutch artists and friends of art even if they couldn't come to see our exhibitions in Japan.

What would you do if you had lots of money and you were free to choose?
If we're millionaires? We live in Holland from summer to Sinterklaas, and live in Japan from New Year's Day to the season of cherry blossom. That's perfect!

Eindhoven / Tokyo, 13-10-2012

ブログ BLOG

Religion onsen

I grew up in a Calvinist part of Holland, which did not mean that there was only a single or even a prevailing denomination in my home town. On the contrary, apart from a single morose Jew and a handful of Catholic outcasts, there were literally dozens of protestant churches, such as the Reformed church, the Lutheran, Baptist, Presbyterian, Redemptorist church, the Dutch Reformed church, the Orthodox Reformed church, and so on. And that is without counting the more obscure sects – Lou the Eel Seller, Latter Day Saints etc. And all these groups did not only have their own preachers, but also their own bakers, greengrocers, butchers, and gravediggers. They would all rather go hungry than buy their food at a grocer's who frequented a different church. And they were all convinced (and usually happy to be so) that every person belonging to other denominations was doomed, as soon as the Day of Judgement would arrive.

How different it is in Japan! Although there are two main religions, Buddhism and Shinto, and a host of different schools and sects, they all seem to live happily together. Most people see no objection in belonging to both religions at the same time. In general, Shinto seems to be the religion of choice for weddings, births and festivities, while Buddhism is associated with funerals and death. The stern Zen Buddhism (also subdivided into dozens of different schools) which Japan is known for, is not very noticeable in public life. Shinto, however, is everywhere: there are around 100,000 Shinto shrines in Japan, and Shinto is very much part of everyday life. At the more famous shrines, religion, commerce, superstition and traditionalism mingle happily and form a kind of religious soup, in which Japanese visibly feel at home.

Just out of Shigaraki town, across the river, there is a large Buddhist temple. It even has a small train station of its own, and there is a modest suspension bridge to get there. Although it is obviously an important temple, few people go there. Usually it is very quiet.
On asking around, I found out that this particular temple was dedicated to the souls of unborn children. And they are there, row upon row of children who never saw the light of day. Is there any other religion which worries so much about the souls of the unborn, about the untold, unrealised potential lives?
I was touched.
Last month we were invited for Shigaraki's annual fire festival. It is an almost pagan ritual, in which huge torches - at the SCCP everybody had to make his own – are carried from the main Shinto shrine to a tiny shrine for potters, an hour's walk into the mountains. The almost 1,000 participants made a long, flaming line in the dark. It was a smoky and hazy affair, very wild and communal with Kodo drummers, and firemen in the dark putting out the burning wood shed by the torches, and it was actually the first time that I really felt I was far from home.

Mels, 30-8-2012

Traditional ceramic industry in Japan is in decline. But, in spite of the recession which has been going on for dozens of years, and against the trend toward standardisation and globalisation, traditional crafts manage to stay alive - and even prosper- in some remote places.
Shigaraki is a mountain village, about 80 km southeast of the Japanese metropolitan area of Osaka. Although irregularly, traditional ceramic objects are still created here in wood-fired kilns. The small town is known as one of the six 'Old Kilns' of Japan, the six most important pottery towns, where ceramics have been produced since the early Middle Ages: Shigaraki, Bizen, Tanba, Echizen, Seto en Tokoname. In the past the emphasis was on unglazed stoneware and when traditional pottery was at its peak (about a hundred years ago), hundreds of kilns – some of them enormous - were in operation in each of these ceramic centres. They produced mostly semi-industrial pottery, ranging from sake bowls, pots and jars to funerary urns.
Because of the high quality of the stoneware, and the 'accidental' forms and patterns created during the hard-to-control production process, the ceramic objects were used in the Japanese tea ceremony at an early stage. Nowadays only a few dozens of the great old wood kilns – called *anagama's* – remain in Shigaraki. Most companies switched to gas, producing large quantities of relatively cheap ceramics, like the *Tanuki* statues which can be seen all over Japan. Tanuki is a magical, fox-like creature from Chinese-Japanese folklore. The ceramic version of this simple-minded, but cheerful creature can usually be found around pubs and restaurants, carrying a bottle of sake under its arm. There seems to be a competition among Shigaraki ceramic companies to build the most impressive Tanuki sculpture – the largest I have seen there was at least twenty feet…
At the moment, small-scale ceramic industry in Shigaraki is going through hard times. Fuel prices keep going up and because of the persistent recession the number of tourists and buyers has declined sharply. But most companies carry on, although at a slower pace. And more emphasis is put on high-quality, traditionally fired pottery, which also fetches much higher prices. The government actively supports the ceramic industry, for instance by sponsoring the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park (SCCP). Apart from exhibiting industrial ceramics and ceramic sculpture, it also organises international residencies for ceramists and other artists.

The Shigaraki kilns
Traditional anagamas were dug partly into the hillside - their form and size making them relatively energy-efficient. Shigaraki anagamas, sometimes called *noborigama*, usually consist of a number of man-sized brick corridors, built above each other across the hillside. The hot, reducing gases produced by the main wood fire are conducted by air shafts from one gallery to the next. The largest kilns have capacities of 100 cubic metres and more, divided over a dozen corridors. One by one these are successively fired through the side entrances until they reach the required temperature. During firing, each of the corridors has its particular temperature curve and gas composition. These kilns allow enormous amounts of ceramics to be fired at once – something like the annual production of a fairly large group of potters. Increasing fuel cost and declining sales are not the only reasons for the fact that large noborigamas are hardly used anymore. Changes in society also contributed, such as increased competition and mobility within the population. Moreover, cutting firewood from the beautiful forests around Shigaraki has been restricted, not just by the establishment of nature reserves, but also by the extensive golf links (for the super rich) which occupy large parts of the hills surrounding this town and many others – you can easily see it on Google Earth.

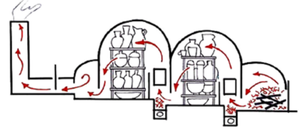
Traditional ceramics: Shigaraki is known for its traditional ceramic *tanuki*, a mythological creature which is made in hundreds of different shapes and sizes – varying from less than an inch to many meters tall

Retired anagama: This fairly modest *anagama* was last fired at the start of the seventies. Nowadays, firing a huge traditional wood kiln like this would cost a fortune

Noborigama near Kagoshima

Tablet: There is a rough clay plaque on the large anagama with the name of Kenzaki-san's father

Ceramic tradition: Everywhere in the family home Kenzaki-san's and his father's pottery is to be seen – and used



Noborigama: A diagram of the path followed by the flames and hot gases in a traditional noborigama

Lost forest: The area taken up by golf links around Shigaraki is clearly visible from the air

A quick look: The interior of the kiln at about 800°C. The ash particles on the ceramics are clearly visible

Moulds and templates: Tools for the production of pottery

Gift to the gods: Before the anagama is lighted, a small offering of salt, rice and sake is placed over the kiln door

Aging wall: The intense heat causes the kiln wall to age rapidly. Every four years – on average, the kiln is used four times a year – the glazed and cracked walls have to be scaled and resurfaced

Cut and dried: the firewood is traditionally supplied in small, uniform bundles

Bisque: The pottery was bisque fired first, among other reasons because bisquit has a lower failure rate than greenware during the costly wood firing

Loading: Shusaku and his friend Yoriko clean the kiln and load it according to Kenzaki-san's instructions

Day and night: The fire must be kept going for four days and nights before the kiln reaches the required temperature of 1300°C (2375°F)

Concentration: Kenzaki-san at the potter's wheel, working in the traditional posture of Japanese potters (kick wheels are quite rare in Japan)

Tranquility: There is a spirit of contemplation about Kenzaki's studio

The Kenzaki family

The Kenzaki family in Shigaraki is keen on traditions – even more so than the average Japanese. They live in a beautifully maintained wooden house, with tatami on the floors, a family altar and sliding walls. The old cupboards are filled with samples of master ceramist Kenzaki-san's art – as a decoration, but also to be used as crockery. The house is characterised by a typically Japanese mixture of sublime peace and random signs of everyday life. Beside the austere, well-balanced composition of a Buddhist altar you will see a gaudy bib lying on the tatami floor.

Kenzaki-san's studio is as simple and down-to-earth as possible. It is pervaded by an air of confidence and by the lack of pretentions which usually surrounds an artisan working within his own traditions. Precision, care and the utmost concentration, that's what it's all about. Close to his studio, Kenzaki created a modest reception room – at the time when large amounts of pottery were still being produced here, it contained the machines for crushing and mixing the clay. The huge belt wheels are still suspended over the table, which consists of a large slab of cedar wood, three or four metres long. Kenzaki spent weeks to sand and polish it until it was an ode to the sacrificed tree, as well as the perfect place to offer visitors a cup of green tea.

Wood-fired ceramics

Nowadays, Kenzaki-san only fires his kilns for his own pottery and the products of friends and relatives. He relates how his father used the big anagama on the grounds for the last time, in the beginning of the '70s. At the moment it would cost a fortune in wood (probably something in the range of 5 million yen or 50,000 euro) to fire up the monster kiln to the required temperature of 1250 to 1300°C. And usually a gas kiln and the much smaller wood kiln are quite enough for Kenzaki's needs – he built them himself, together with his family and friends. The wood kiln is a modest construction which does not look much like the many-chambered anagamas of old, but it has proven its worth. Kenzaki documented the kiln's construction thoroughly. The pictures show how a layer of fire bricks is laid over a paper-and-bamboo frame, using a mixture of clay and fire cement. On top of that, he put a number of layers of black Shigaraki clay. The kiln's interior too was covered with a layer of this fireproof mixture, which has to be replaced regularly (after ten to twelve firings). The chimney is at a distance of three to four metres from the kiln, to provide the horizontal draught needed for the glazing pattern and to keep the kiln from spreading too many sparks – traditional Japanese housing is built from wood and paper. Only when the final temperature is reached will the flames shoot from the chimney.

Preparations

Before firing, the kiln has to be cleaned and glaze residues must be chipped off the kiln shelves. Shusaku and his friend, Yoriko Mazuda, take on that task and the load the pieces, while Shusaku's father gives instructions. Not all pieces for this firing (which already had been bisqued in a gas kiln) are made by Kenzaki-san. Some were thrown by Shusaku and Yoriko. A few other pieces were made by a Chinese ceramist, Siu Kam-han, during her residency at the SCCP.

Loading the anagama is one of the most important parts of an anagama firing. The location of the pieces influences the air flow and the flame path – and is therefore decisive for the result. Moreover, the temperature, the composition of the smoke gases and the amount of wood ash deposited on the pieces depend on their place in the kiln. After loading, a sizeable space in the front part of the kiln is left empty to be used as a fireplace.

Vulnerable ceramics, such as porcelain cups, used to be protected against the flames and ash produced by the wood fire by placing them in a box-like container, a *saggar*. Nowadays these stoneware containers are hardly used anymore, because wood/coal firings are so expensive that they are almost exclusively used for the production of Shigaraki stoneware.

Contrasting colours: Traditional Shigaraki stoneware characteristically combines red-firing clay with a greenish transparent ash glaze

The heat: Even after four days, when Yoriko and Shusaku start unloading it, the kiln still is uncomfortably hot

With bated breath: Everybody is waiting for the results of the firing

Judgement: Kenzaki carefully assesses the quality of the fired works – it will determine the price he can ask for it

Burnt: Some of the pieces close to the fire were obviously overheated

Interior: A look into the kiln after the first kiln shelves were removed

A Shigaraki plate is positioned so that flames and hot gases will play over it in a general direction.
By putting obstacles on top of it – such as wads of fresh clay – the roaring fire itself is imprinted in the clay.
Kenzaki-san shows a masterpiece which already captured several prizes

Perfect bowl: Yoriko is quite happy with the perfect, pentagonal bowl she took from the kiln

Up in flames

Finally, the kiln is closed with fire bricks and some clay to fill the cracks, but a small window is left open to feed the fire. It is fired with chopped conifer wood. The wood has to be of a consistent quality and very dry – far from easy in the damp Japanese climate. The lumberman supplies handy-sized bundles of about 8 kg. About 200 of these bundles are needed to reach the desired temperature. At the present price of 800 yen per bundle, a wood firing in this small kiln costs a lot of money – roughly 1600 euro. The firing is executed very carefully and during the entire process, which takes four days, the fire and the temperature is monitored closely, day and night. Shusaku, his father and Yoriko take turns watching over the kiln.
The fire is kept burning for days and produces a tremendous amount of wood ash, a small part of which is deposited on the ceramic. Most clays from Shigaraki and the surrounding area contain a lot of feldspar, which clearly shows in the small white 'bubbles' on the surface of the fired clay. Feldspar acts as a flux, and together with the wood ash it forms a greenish, transparent glaze. Inside pots and bowls it will run down the sides and collect on the bottom. But in the path of the roaring flames the ash particles get no chance to settle down – so here the colour of the red-firing clay becomes visible. This is how the characteristic pattern of Shigaraki-ware arises: red and white-flamed stoneware on the outside of the bowl, with a natural, transparent ash glaze on the inside.

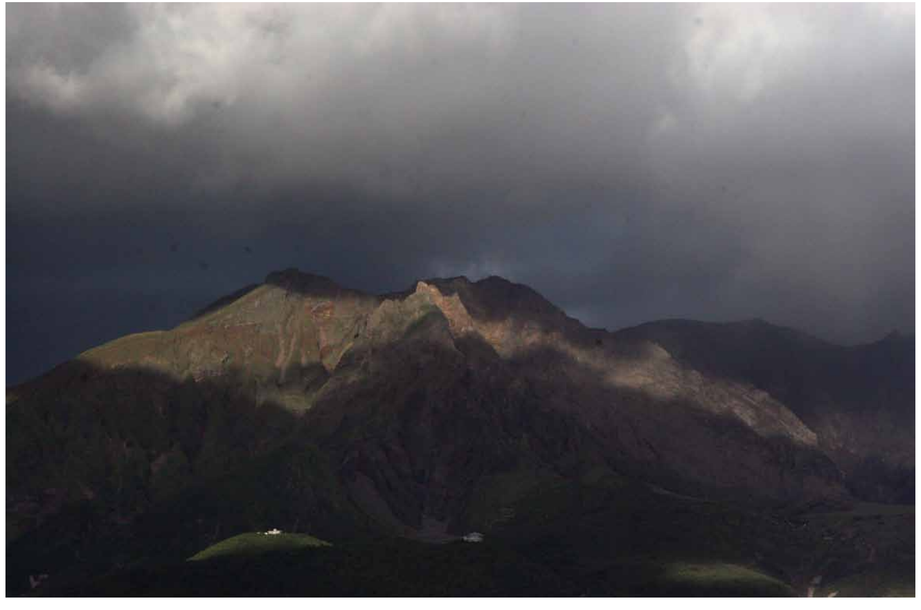
Treasure hunting

Unloading the kiln was very much like digging up a treasure. Obviously, almost volcanic processes had taken place in the interior of the kiln. Some of the pots in front had burst, due to the large differences in temperature between the intensely hot fireplace and the cooler atmosphere behind. In some places, the clay had even melted. One must bear in mind that, in order to melt the ash glaze and create the characteristic Shigaraki colour pattern, the temperature must reach 1250 - 1300°C everywhere in the kiln. This is possible only when the fire place temperature is at least 1350°C – but not much higher. The loss of some pots and cups is taken into account. Kenzaki-san nodded and looked quite satisfied when the first large vessels and dishes came out. The main thing is that most of the load shows the characteristics of a real wood firing, but master potters like Kenzaki also hope for a piece of exhibition quality. A large pot or a dish which shows exactly the kind of glowing colours and subtle deformations which make it into an incontestable masterpiece. Yoriko's work was also quite impressive. The two large, lightly pentagonal vessels she made are fired perfectly, with a fiery glow on the outside and a thick layer of glassy green ash glaze inside. In Japanese eyes they may even be too perfect. They do not have the powerful character of a master's best pieces, work which sometimes calls to mind natural phenomena rather than refined craftsmanship. In Japan, ceramic art should live: the idea behind it, the design and the form the artist had in mind must be visible, as well as the abandon with which it is entrusted to the fire, to those natural powers we have hardly managed to harness.

Mels Dees, Shigaraki, Japan
July/August 2012

桜島

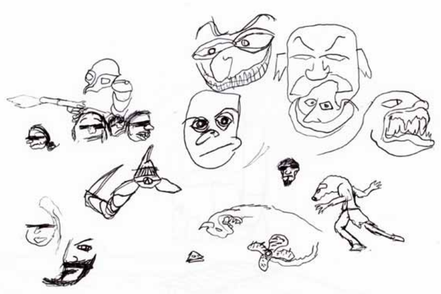
Sakurajima is an active volcano constantly ejecting
ashes on the neighboring city of Kagoshima



陶芸の森

Blog 5 SCCP, Japan

Japan is a very *safe* country, something people hardly know. When we travelled from Europe two months ago, dragging our luggage around airports, in trains and finally in buses, we kept an eagle eye on our suitcases and handbags. We are used to do so while travelling and at home as well, shopping on our famous Saturday market in Eindhoven. In Japan there is less need to be so vigilant. You can relax.
People are very courteous, will patiently wait for you until you passed in a supermarket or on the streets. They get into lane on the reserved spot on the platform, waiting for the train or bus. They will treat you with respect and greet you politely: "konichiwa!" and bow slightly. One day, while walking an old pilgrim trail with lots of shrines and temples near Nara, we met with a bus-load of pilgrims. This resulted in forty times greeting and bowing: every person individually and face to face.
There are many pottery shops in Shigaraki. All of them have an indoor sales area, with a lot of the ceramic wares on display in the spacious yard in front of it. Sometimes there are special items to attract attention, like a huge tanuki (a mythical raccoon bear), a line of four meter high Buddha's, or a moving display with big, colourful ceramic animals. Often you see rows and rows of tanuki's, pots and other ceramics. At night all the shops leave their merchandise outside. In the morning, At half past seven in the morning the owner will arrive and unhook the string in front of his parking ground. In the evening he closes the lot by hooking the same string again.
When we arrived from Holland, we were amazed. In our country it would be impossible to leave all these ceramic merchandise outside: it would be stolen or vandalized. As artists we had some bad experiences showing artworks in public space. Mels' work was vandalized several times - that is: in Holland. Sometimes the culprits had the nerve to drive a four-wheel drive some kilometres through a plantation of young trees to destroy and steal his artwork. Another time the vandals went to a lot of trouble in the middle of the night in a desolate place, and had to cut an 8 mm steel cable to bring down his work. These criminals actually had to *work* to destroy his art.
It is not at all like that in Japan! During the nine weeks we stayed in Shigaraki, the pottery displays in front of the shops changed only when an item was sold (which was pretty rare).
For Dutch visitors like us, there is an even more telling example: bicycles. In the back of the accommodation centre at the SCCP there is a small shed with several bicycles, to be used by the artists. They are not locked. In front of the supermarket you will always see unlocked bicycles. No bicycles skeletons in the small river, next to the road. No bicycles in lampposts or bushes. All bicycles seem to be in good repair as well.
Usually we worked until quite late in the evening. We had to rent an apartment on the other side of Shigaraki, due to a rule that children (under 20) were not allowed to sleep in the SCCP. Cycling at midnight on small or major roads in Shigaraki was completely safe. One stillingly hot night, I saw something you will probably only encounter in Japan: a man was walking his dog, holding a fan. But he was not fanning himself – while strolling along, the man was slowly waving his fan over the back of his dog!
We travelled to the active volcano Sakurajima, covering some 1000 kilometres to the south by Shinkansen, the bullet train. When we looked out of the window, passing through big cities like Hiroshima and Kyoto, we never saw a single bit of graffiti. We have not visited Tokyo, though.



Pages from sketchbook, ballpoint on paper, Quirijn Dees 2012

It may be different there, since Tokyo is a huge (9 million) metropolis. But the places we saw in Japan were safe and without a trace of violence or vandalism. In my eyes, this is something very valuable – it is something to be treasured in a country. In Holland we lost this treasure a long time ago.
In Japan it is quite obvious that there is a crisis, and the economical decline has been going on for a long time - in fact for about 20 years. Business is down, prices are up and people have a hard time to make ends meet. The paint is peeling from many buildings and many facilities in public space need to be repaired or replaced. The pavement and streets are uprooted and weeds grow everywhere. But somehow, the Japanese disposition is the cement of the society and people are guided by tradition and rules of behaviour.
I admired the way the Japanese volunteered after the tsunami in the Fukushima area: teenagers and adults took some days off and came from everywhere to clear away the rubble and restore what they could. This happened within two weeks after the disaster took place. They made their own personal contribution to society, simply to make the world a better place.
On the way home, to Holland, something remarkable happened, which is a perfect illustration of this Japanese character trait. We couldn't reach the airport in one day from Shigaraki and had to make a stop-over for one night in Kyoto. Our airplane left from Kansai airport at the end of the next morning. We had a fool-proof schedule for the trains to take, leaving us some hours to idle away in the departure section of the airport. We were on time (Japanese trains are incredibly punctual) until the Haruka express from Kyoto to Osaka halted at a small station, where we weren't supposed to stop. Some explanation followed in Japanese over the intercom. All people around us took it in resignation. We waited for a while, than some more Japanese over the intercom and the doors opened. We gazed around in panic. A young woman on high heels told us, in good English, there had been an accident and this train wasn't going any further. We had to make a detour and catch a succession of other trains. She asked where we were going. She was also heading for Kansai airport, since she worked for the FedEx office there. She promised to take care of us. The accident turned out to be a suicide. The detour involved hopping from one to another of at least three or four different trains and dragging our 90 kilograms of luggage from platform to platform - once even from one station to the next, two streets away. Our Japanese guardian angel started to phone the airport right away, in an effort to warn our Air France desk. She carried our suitcases on stairs, while reassuring us that we still would be able to make our flight. She sprinted to the other side of the platform to a waiting conductor to inquire about destinations and timetables. Then she got us running again from one train to the next, in the meanwhile making phone calls to the employees at the airport. Finally we reached the check-in desk at Kansai airport. The employees were already waiting for us, papers ready and we were rushed through the security checks. I tried to give our Japanese helper some money for all the phone calls she had made for us. She wouldn't hear of it and answered: "It is my duty". We hereby thank you. Without your efficient way of dealing with this and without you sticking to us and guiding us through the maze of Japanese railways, we would never have made it. Just before take-off we entered the plane to Paris!

Mariëlle, 30-08-2012

Top left and right | Nao Ishizaka
Untitled

Bottom left to right | Hisashi Shibata
Platipus EKWC - Bauhaus Archive Performance - Untitled, EKWC

面接

A talk with Nao Ishizaka and Hisashi Shibata, in Amsterdam

Both Nao and Hisashi (to many known as Q) studied in Holland, and live in Amsterdam now. We met them when Hisashi was doing a residency at sundaymorning@ekwc at the time when Mels was working there. They are now struggling to create a more permanent foothold in Holland. Nao studied at the Hogeschool for de Kunsten in Utrecht, Holland, after working as a musician, a cook and sales person in Japan. Hisashi graduated from the Rietveldacademie, and subsequently the Sandberg Instituut in Amsterdam. They both did shows and performances – a few times together – in Holland and Germany. We had a talk at a pub in Amsterdam.

What is the difference between being an (Japanese) artist in Holland and being an artist in Japan?
Hisashi: : I don't have any experience being an artist in Japan, but fundamentally for contemporary artists in Japan, there is no way to survive, except when they are famous and commercially successful. Here in Holland art is quite being appreciated and understood by the public. In Japan artists have the difficulty to be understood. Most people think art is a hobby, not serious enough.
Nao: If I show in a museum, people think it is important and they will appreciate my art.
Hisashi: Yes, artists like Yoshitomo Nara, Yayoi Kusama, Takashi Murakami. And potters and ceramists, they are quite being appreciated, I think, because of their skills.

As a craftsmen or as an artist?
Hisashi: That is confusing; Japanese don't know the difference between a craftsmen and an artist.
Nao: I was a musician, not an artist and for me it was the same feeling: craftsmen in Japan make good quality work in wood and ceramics and so on. It is different from being an artist so far.
Hisashi: In Japan many people still don't know art is content. They don't understand the concept of art.
How people see art is historical defined and crafts and beauty are valued. Japanese people don't know how to examine art and how to value. Here in Europe it is pretty much developed how to look at contemporary art.

That is very strange because a lot of art from Europe and the USA is inspired by Japanese art, by Zen and the Japanese No theatre, while these are just appreciated in Japan as traditions.
Hisashi: They had it before, this conceptual development of literary base of No and theatre as a conceptual art form. I don't know, somehow we lost it; this deep thinking, this philosophy. It's very complicated. It was conceptual but not any more. A strong point is that this art scene was suppressed, but the subculture and young artists like Tabaimo, who makes impressive films, are very tough, conceptual and very deep. We lost it, I think, some period to liberal things and temporary benefits. Japanese love design, because design is more in the field of consumerism.

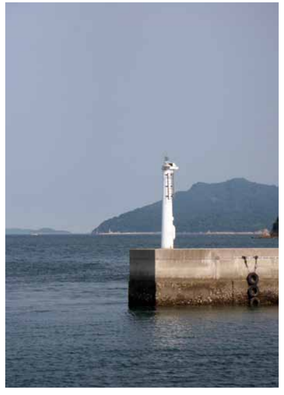
Is this one of the reasons you are in Holland?
Hisashi: Personally I think I couldn't live in Japan. When I was 19, I wasn't happy living in Japan. I have an opportunity to speak to artist of my own generation who also live here, and they had the same problem.
They had to work hard and weren't appreciated as artists. Here you have a job for 3 or 4 days, and the rest of the time you can do whatever you want to do. I don't know how Japanese artists do it. They don't have freedom.

Our experience in Shigaraki is different. But maybe Shigaraki is different, being an art centre. The artists there were from all over Japan, and they were very strong, really in the sense of being artists like here. They managed to survive, although some of them had grants or maybe rich parents…
Hisashi: It is very difficult if you don't have support of your parents. I was fighting with my parents, they don't understand me at all. My parents were running a men's fashion company. I have been to the European Ceramic Workcentre and they were saying: "You are still learning how to make ceramics! Now you are getting to know at least how to make a pot or dishes."

Suppose you were living in Japan? Would you be making art?
Hisashi: No, I don't think we would continue.
Nao: No, maybe I would be just working as a cook. I know how difficult it is to survive, even as an office woman.
Hisashi: I don't have any artists friends in Japan. I never have been to a gallery then. I even don't know if there are any in my place. Maybe if you look for them, but very few.

But Tokyo must be different…
Nao: Yes, it is different. There is this fashionable Mori Art Museum.
Hisashi: Trendy art place, top of the bill. Everything is part of fashion and trend. They don't like their own style, but go for following the trends. Very much commercial everything.
But in ceramics for instance, it is all about tradition and not trends.
Hisashi: That is very much appreciated. Lots of skills, philosophy, crafts and Mingei (folk craft).
Yanagi Sõetsu, he was a philosopher some 40 years ago and promoted folk craft to the public.
So I want to question you, how is the difference between Shigaraki and EKWC?

In EKWC I learned. I went there twice. In EKWC you will ask an expert and they will teach you. Shigaraki is a ceramic place and you can also ask and they will help you. Everybody is very nice and they are willing to teach you what they know. But it is a centre for ceramists and EKWC is a centre for artists. That is a difference.
So in Shigaraki there are more ceramic experts and potters. You wouldn't find potters in EKWC. Wouldn't you like to go to Shigaraki, if you had a grant? And could you do there what you did in EKWC (a performance)?
Hisashi: Maybe if I go to Shigaraki and I focus on learning technical skills, or in the sense of beauty. Maybe I could adapt myself to Japan or maybe I would challenge the concept of making and giving them more difficulties or they give me more difficulties. I don't know if I go there, how I will react.
Nao: To my opinion Q (Hisashi) is too much scared to go to Japan!
Yes, maybe it is a bit between your ears. Since you have been away for 15 years, a lot of things have changed… and what about you, Nao? Would you work here rather than in Japan?
Nao: Now I am working in a restaurant in the kitchen with 18 men and 2 women.
It is an international restaurant and the staff is international: Indian, Russian, Italian, Japanese, Thai and Dutch. I realize now that the working atmosphere in Holland is not so different from the one in Japan: it is really a Men World! Women have always a tough time. Men are shouting and making big noise!



直島

Naoshima is an art island with several museums and a major art house project









直島ダム周辺コミュニティ広場整備工事
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Panoramic view of abandoned copper factory at Inujima

Railway employees bow for (the passengers in) a departing Shinkansen, the Japanese bullet train

One of the pleasant results of Japanese perfectionism: the oshibori, a damp rolled towel, used to clean the hands before a meal

Top | Typically Japanese: railway engine drivers keep their concentration up by pointing at all important signals and calling out their names

Even the fountain cleaners wear a uniform

Service in Japan

By Mels Dees

奉仕

In Kagoshima, the nearby active volcano keeps spreading ashes over the city - billboards are washed daily by professional cleaners

Japan is a country which provokes contradictory reactions. Some Western observers look upon it as a kind of conformist hell, others look upon it as a spiritual heaven (or haven). But all agree that Japan is a paradise – not exactly for workers, but for consumers. And yes, the customer is pampered in Japan. Thanks to the traditional courtesy and hospitality, combined with a highly developed perfectionism, service in Japan is on a level unknown in the west – but only within a narrow, well-defined framework. If you want something really out of the ordinary, you have a problem.

Okyakusan

From an early age onward, respect for older people – for their parents in particular - is drummed into the minds of Japanese children. They are taught to think of others first. In Japan, the group an individual belongs to, such as the family, a company or the Japanese people itself, is considered to be more important than the individual. These factors alone will foster a service-minded attitude, but there is more.

If a Japanese employee is asked for a service – within his duties – he (or she) will consider it to be his personal responsibility to comply with the request, and he will not rest before he has fully satisfied the customer. In Japanese, there is not even a literal translation for 'customer': the standard expression is *Okyakusan*, which means 'honored guest'. Not quite the same thing...

Konbini Keigo

You can find this service-minded attitude in the business world, but also out in the street. If you ask someone for the way, he (or she) will usually walk along with you to make sure you find it, or even offer you a ride. Shop assistants in supermarkets and department stores are wonderfully polite and attentive. Exceptions occur, of course, but the level of hospitality in hotels and restaurants is usually much higher than what we are used to in the West.

This almost ritual courtesy also has its drawbacks. Everywhere in Japan you will find so-called *Konbini*, or convenience stores. These are shops where you can buy a limited range of household and drugstore goods, often open from early in the morning till late at night. One of the biggest chains is 7-Eleven, with more than 13,000 shops. The shop staff are trained to speak *Keigo*, the honorific form of Japanese. However, over the years a kind of *Konbini Keigo* has developed, consisting of polite phrases which are pronounced extremely rapidly (to keep up the number of customers served). Actually, the words have lost all meaning and can only be found in the shop's training manuals. It annoys a lot of Japanese and it is completely incomprehensible for foreigners.

Kaizen

Perfectionism is one of the basic principles of Japanese culture. However trivial or humble a task may be, if it is worth being done, it is worth being done well. A fine principle, and probably one of the reasons why waste collectors and street sweepers have a kind of dignity they lack in most other countries. Perfectionism is everywhere in Japan: in the endlessly lacquered and polished cups and boxes, in the perfect finish of furniture and buildings, in the attention to detail of a simple paper wrapping.

This philosophy is known as *Kaizen* (improvement) and has been implemented at companies and industries all over the world. It stands for a method of continuous improvement of all components of a production process, involving everybody from the top down. At every single instance where mistakes are made, or material or human effort is wasted, action must be taken immediately to mend the production process. It is a management system which proved its worth in the Japanese car and optical industries, just to name a few. However, Japanese perfectionism also has its downside, which is obvious when you are confronted with the tremendous bureaucracy – in the government as well as within Japanese companies. Following rules and regulations too strictly and not daring to break the rules is fatal to creativity – to many Japanese, thinking out of the box is a fearful undertaking.

Shisa Kanko

If you live and work in Japan for a while, you will be impressed by all the Japanese inventions which really make life easier, but are ignored by the rest of the world. To mention a few: the small, damp towels you get before a meal to refresh yourself, the communal hot baths and the beautiful and functional clothes pins. *Shisa kanko*, 'point and call' belongs to the same category. It is a technique, used by Japanese railways and many other companies, to improve concentration and safety at work. Japanese railway engine drivers, for instance, keep pointing at the signals and dials which are vital to the train's safety, and calling out their names. This requires coordinated action of the hands, mouth , eyes and brain and is a good way to keep your attention from flagging. To Europeans it looks a bit strange, but I am sure that it is one of the reasons why rail transport in Japan, which has an incredibly complex and crowded railway network, is safe, accurate and efficient.

Ichiban

One may ask if there are any elements of the Japanese attitudes and systems we can adopt in the West. A lot of them, of course, are tied up so closely with the country and its culture that they just cannot be copied. It is hard to imagine that European railway employees would accept the strict training which is essential to *shisa kanko*. But the method might contain routines which could make a considerable improvement to services like the railways. I have the feeling that very little research has been done in that direction.

The same goes for the service-minded attitude of Japanese employees. There is no need to bow continually to each other (although if I find it not inconvenient at all – after all, it is a sign of respect), but the basic idea is not so strange to us: *You* are personally responsible for the customer's happiness.

Maybe the main profit can be made by nurturing the self-respect an employee derives from his job – even if it is a modest one. In Japan, even a cleaner, gardener or waste collector (m/f) will wear a uniform: suitable clothes, spotless gloves and a helmet, if necessary (and sometimes if it is not). It will help him to perform his task to perfection. He wants to be *Ichiban* – number one.

kyoto

京

Kyoto temples

Hana (left) and Nippon | 2012 | tapestry | 160 x 200 cm | Jacquard woven at Audax Textile Museum Tilburg

案

WORKPLAN

I like to focus on flowers. I always have flowers in our house and when the season permits, in my garden. My grandfather on my mother's side was a bulb farmer from the West of Holland. He grew tulips, daffodils, crocuses and hyacinths. I inherited my love for flowers and the sea from my mother.
I like the time when a flower comes into bud and when it is in full bloom.
But I particularly like it when the flower decays. This phase fascinates me.
When an amaryllis flower blossoms, it is a wonder, a miracle of colour and texture in nature. But when it decays, it starts to shrink and becomes transparent.
The texture almost looks like paper. The colours fade and the material becomes very delicate and brittle. The expression and posture of the flower looks broken, shattered.
I would like to study all this in ceramics. I looked for years at the growing process of flowers and I let them wither away for a long time in their vases.
I find beauty in this process as well.

Mariëlle van den Bergh

ドキュメンテーション 日本 蘭国 Documentatie

Bep Goemans (right) in a hyacinth plot around 1933

Torii, M. van den Bergh, 2012, Gallery Land en Beeld, Asperen






Painting withered flowers in underglaze on ceramic seat
Each new artist at SCCP is invited to decorate one of these seats

Work in Shigaraki

信楽で働く

My grandfather on my mother's side was a flower bulb farmer in Hillegom. My mother had her own daffodil plot in the garden. Somehow flowers are always around in my life. A Swiss friend once told me: "You always leave your flowers in the vase for such a long time." Until then, I had never really noticed. I like watching them growing, developing their shape and gaining energy - then the explosion of the unfolding, the stretching of the silk leaves. But at that point it gets really interesting : the flower decays and during the withering process its appearance changes completely. The volume is reduced to a tenth of the original size, the structure and skin will dry up to a papery relict. A fascinating process.
I wanted to focus on this process and Japan was the place to do so, being a country with a culture and traditions which have flowers at the centre of their rituals and art. Of course, the SCCP is a ceramic centre and to work with clay on the theme of flowers sounded like a real challenge.
I wanted to work as directly and spontaneously as possible, so I chose hand building instead of the more indirect mould-pressing process.
What happened next was something you can never predict, because it is how things develop when you go on a residency and are confronted with new and unforeseen circumstances. This is, in fact, what I love about residencies. The SCCP staff took me to the clay shop. Shigaraki has fossil clay, which is dug in the mountains. From the hundreds of samples, which were stuck on rows of boards, we chose one type of white baking clay, suitable for hand-building, with little grog. Then we went next door to the glaze shop. Again many boards, this time with glaze samples. There I discovered that the same glaze looked quite different on white-firing and red-firing clay. In fact I decided right on the spot to make this the focus of my experiment in Shigaraki. I was going to use 2 types of clay, one white-firing and one red-firing and mix them. Later I would use 5 different glazes on them and in that way I could double the number of colours I had. I also got hold of a semi-porcelain clay body.






Proces in studio space and loading kiln with Matsunami and Watarai

Glazing proces and visit by
Ineke van de Pol from the Dutch embassy

At Shigaraki I started by drawing withered flowers to get used to the form. I used water colour and Indian ink and Japanese brushes. Somehow the idea of streaming and fluidity got into the process just there. I started to make samples with the famous Shigaraki clay, mixing the two types at random. I also worked with the semi-porcelain clay and got some real porcelain. I loved the details you could get with the porcelain and thought it was very sensual, in fact it was ideal for depicting flowers. A sample was fired in a kiln and came out in pieces. This was very educational for me. I was working quite fast, being used to the Dutch clay with a lot of grog. Moreover this was in the middle of the rainy season and the humidity was enormous. How could I hand-build a work with this very flexible and unforgiving clay? I slowed down the speed and tried to keep myself from trapping any air in the clay. I started to build a sample around a plastic pole, covered with newspapers. I could get to a height of 50 cm because the clay would stick to the newspapers. Somehow I started to carve the flowers out of the surface by using a wooden clay tool. It was more like cutting then modelling, but it proved to be the right thing to do. The Shigaraki clay was perfect for this: very strong and exquisitely detailed. Moreover, the mixture of two colours clay resulted in an intriguing surface while the inside folded open where I cut holes. I could work very quick. In fact the wetter the clay was, the better the impression of fluidity, streaming and falling down.
By then I wanted to built a big tower. Big in the sense of my own natural size. I made a tower by installing a couple of plastic poles and covering them with rolls of news papers, allowing considerable shrinkage. The height of the tower was 240 cm, which would result in a work of at least 220 cm after firing.
Building a big work is something else completely. The separation into parts was difficult, because I lost track where parts were hidden by the cloth I had put between them. The pole in the middle with all the newspaper was in the way as well, but it proved to be a good guide for the angle under which I had to build the upper parts. It took quite some time to build a big ring of 60 cm height, because it had to dry long enough to support itself.

Glazing and work after glaze firing

Selecting work for the SCCP collection

But by then it would be almost too dry to carve the supple, rich streaming surface I preferred. The carving was done very fast so the expression would be very direct and spontaneous. Opening up the clay skin there was still enough moisture to be able to pull down parts. When I had the two rings at the bottom, I started to work on the top parts. The middle rings were the last. Then everything had to shrink at the same pace and in the same place. This proved quite difficult with air-conditioning blowing from one side.
The staff of SCCP and neighbour artist Siu Kam-han guided me through every step of the process. The firing of the hand regulated gas kilns is described in blog 4, as are more details of this working process.
In the end the work survived both firings: biscuit at 900° and glaze at 1240°. The glaze turned out to be nice and gave a rich, detailed surface. We assembled the work provisionally to take pictures before shipping it to Europe.
Looking back at the residency at SCCP in Japan, after I overcame my original panic I loved every minute of my work with the Shigaraki clay. My experience with this clay is the most important part of my residency. experimented with mixing two types of clay, which is a guaranteed recipe for trouble. I invented a new kind of technique by carving the surface, which turned out to be perfect for this clay with its sharp details. The beautiful Shigaraki glazes turned my Flower Tower into an exotic and baroque piece of work.

Mariëlle

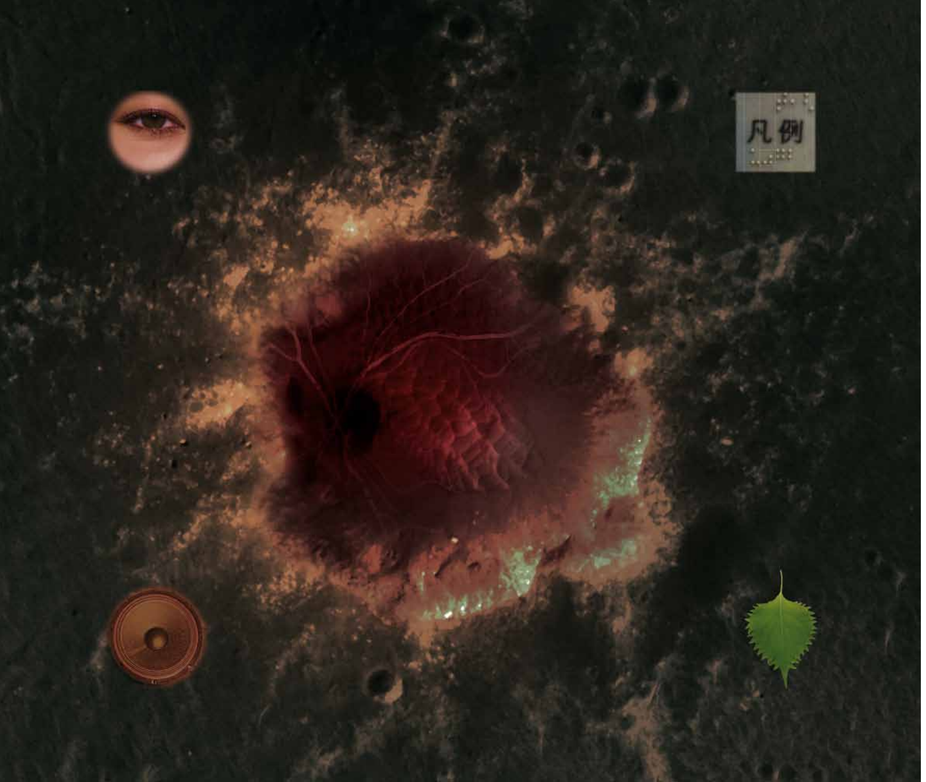
Flower Tower with Minori and Erika and porcelain flowers






Page left | *details Flower Tower*
This page | *Flower Tower* test piece and porcelain flowers (middle)
- both selected for SCCP-collection

INNEN | photoprint | 106 x 56 cm | 2012



Left page | KATAME | photoprint | 68 x 58 cm | 2012

Contradictory images

Mels Dees

I was trained as an architect, and man-made constructions are the starting point of much of my work. I often find them impressive, but at the same time slightly ridiculous. There is beauty and sadness in the objects produced by our dream of independence from nature. Like all things, however, they are subject to the unrelenting second law of thermodynamics: man-made products are doomed to disintegrate and disappear.
Realising this puts our relation with nature in a strange perspective. At a certain level, there is a kind of equality – we are part of nature after all – and on another level we try to confirm our tottering dominion over nature by trying to preserve it. There are few cultures in which these complexities are as obvious as the Japanese. At first sight, their culture seems to be exclusively focused on technology, tradition and their community. However, if you ask the Japanese themselves, they will invariably state that nature is central to Japanese life and thinking. Nature, I think, may mean something quite different to Japanese than to us. Last August, on a local Kansai 'nature day', people came out in droves, equipped with saws and scissors, to cut back the trees, shrubs and plants in their neighbourhood. I gave me the feeling that whatever was growing out there had to be tailored to the generally accepted idea of what is, to the Japanese, 'nature'. Sometimes I get the feeling that the Japanese perceive wild, unfettered nature just as chaos – or that they do not see it all. Maybe that is why the beautiful mountains, woods and wildlife reserves around Shigaraki usually are completely deserted, while the valleys and plains between the mountainous areas are utterly crowded and urbanised.
In many of the photos I took during our stay in Japan I tried to catch fragments of this paradox. By deconstructing and combining the images I wanted to create an idea of the country without reverting to conventional japonaiserie. The size of the individual pieces really matters, as they are constructed by continually zooming in and out of the image, in anticipation of an active spectator who keeps discovering contradictory images.

Unvoluntary ceramics

Mels Dees

My plan was to restrict my activities in Japan to writing, taking photographs and working with them on the computer – I had already spent a large part of the year working on ceramics at EKWC in Holland. But the extremely flexible local clay started to fascinate me as soon I saw Mariëlle wrestling with it. At EKWC I had started my residency with a performance during which I created a lot of shards. I suspended a cloud of pottery from the ceiling, and let it crash on the floor in a rain-like rhythm.
It occurred to me to experiment with the Shigaraki clay in the same way as I started working at EKWC – by dropping it. I found a convenient place where I could drop the clay from about 3 meters on a potter's tray and I was surprised by the sculptural, voluptuous nature of the results. They will certainly lead to more ceramic sculpture in the future, I would like to use this technique to make the kind of uncertain, wobbly monuments I have been thinking about for some time.

Left | glazed work in kiln

Left page | PATCHINKO | photoprint | 106 x 56 cm | 2012

This page bottom left and middel | Thrown Shigaraki clay

Performance at EKWC, Den Bosch NL

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Graphic design | Marc Niessen
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Translations | Mels Dees, Sari Uchada
Digital printing| 5NUL8 Grafische producties
Limited edition - 100

We thank the following people and institutions for their support:
SCCP in Shigaraki, its Director and Section Chief, Minori Kuroda and Erica, Yoshimi Matsunami, Shusaku Kenzaki, Yasuhiro Watarai, Yoko Yoshida and all other staff members, the Netherlands Embassy in Tokyo, a Not-to-be-Named Foundation, GAG Grafisch Atelier 't Gooi, mrs. M.S. Dees-van Zweeden, Ranti Tjan, the Van Abbemuseum, Ernst Löwensteyn from Land en Beeld, Kenzaki sr., Siu-Kam-han, Paul Legeland, Tina Zlatina, Eise Clason, Tomoka Kawakami and Yamagishi Daisuke, staff Seito Ceramic and Glass Centre, Mrs and Mr Arimoto at Inujima and many others