

frieze

JAPAN

DON'T FOLLOW THE WIND

Various venues, Fukushima & Watari Museum, Tokyo

A simple description of a formidably complicated exhibition: 'Don't Follow the Wind' is a selection of 12 artists commissioned to produce new works onsite in the Fukushima exclusion zone. Initiated by the artist collective ChimŋPom in 2012, its three-year gestation entailed the formation of a 14-member committee and four designated curators: Kenji Kubota, Eva and Franco Mattes, and Jason H. Waite. The project was recently unveiled over two sites: the first, linking four locations within Fukushima (courtesy of residents who graciously allowed their evacuated houses to be utilized for the artworks' display); the second, a suite of re-versionings installed at the Watari Museum in Tokyo, titled 'Non-Visitor Center'. Due to radiation levels within the exclusion zone, the Fukushima works will remain invisible to the public until – if ever – the zone is deemed safe to re-enter. The Tokyo works are visible, yet placed behind a glass wall to prevent direct contact. In a canny curatorial gesture, the commissioning of artworks echoes the decommissioning of the TEPCO Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which suffered a meltdown after the tsunami of 11 March 2011 breached its protective walls.

It's impossible to extricate the artworks from their site-specificity, especially considering the overloaded 'disaster aesthetic' I experienced when standing inside a dilapidated house, dressed in a radiation-protection suit and mask. Normally, I regard these curatorial conceits with suspicion. However, 'Don't Follow the Wind' deliberately implicates you as a participant – firstly, by confronting you with the current state of life in Fukushima post-3/11; secondly, by presenting work sited in the once-vibrant locations of what is now deemed the 'Difficult-To-Return Zone'. In this sense, it extends two famous post-Fukushima artworks: ChimŋPom's *Real Times* (2011), where members of the group entered the exclusion zone to hoist a nuclear danger flag a few kilometres from the nuclear power plant; and *Finger Pointing Worker* (2012), a video made by an artist who worked on the clean-up, standing in front of one of the plant's CCTV cameras and



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pointing his finger directly at it. In this show, Kota Takeuchi's *Time Travellers* (2015) is a life-size hi-definition photo documenting him and a colleague in an evacuee's bedroom, dressed in clothes discarded on the bed prior to the residents' hasty departure. Takeuchi and his friend stand on the bed looking at the camera. Their impassive gaze beautifully fuses their incursive presence with the cursive absence of the couple whose house they now invade. ChimŋPom's *Making Blueprints* (2015) – true to form – involves a partially illegal action, which I'm prevented from describing. Though some regard ChimŋPom as sensationalist punk pranksters, as curatorial instigators of 'Don't Follow the Wind' their commitment to interventionist interrogations of Japanese society draws an incendiary arc toward politically engaged art collectives who came before them, like Hi-Red Centre (1963–64).

The non-Japanese artists' works in the show tend to favour more familiar internationalist artistic strategies. Eva and Franco Mattes photographed banal or decorative domestic textures found inside the evacuated homes, then digitized them into wallpaper patterns and placed them online for copyright-free use. Taryn Simon assembled an online database of Fukushima residents' last photos taken before they had to evacuate; Trevor Paglen produced a cube smelted from glass found within the exclusion zone combined with Trinitite, the element formed by initial nuclear bomb tests in New Mexico.

'Don't Follow the Wind' offers an unwieldy quantity of curatorial dissection, political enquiry and socio-strategic manoeuvres. To my mind, its density of perspectives grappling with the TEPCO incident and its impact on Japan's infrastructure recalls the feeling of being in the country during the first three months after the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami – a period of incessant reporting and analysis of how difficult it was to assess the devastation wrought across the Tohoku region. This exhibition refuses to forget the chaos and confusion that ensued, which is slowly being either forgotten or rewritten. I can recall any number of exhibitions intent on grappling

with global ethical quandaries in the guise of agitprop gestures and site-specific collaborations. But 'Don't Follow the Wind' seems cognisant of the pitfalls of globalist grandstanding in the name of politicized art, and has chosen to frame two Japan-centric concerns: how to deal with the Fukushima incident and how to make art in its wake. I think, for the Japanese artists, this impels a compressed response that folds the two questions into a kind of self-interrogation. The non-Japanese artists provide a range of meta-commentaries – aware of their distance from issues of being part of Japan's post-atomic psyche, yet intent on connecting such narratives to international streams of interrogation. Accordingly, all the works shift between global anti-nuclear stances and Fukushima-specific considerations, grounded in experiences within the exclusion zone and wishing to transmute their effect into art.

PHILIP BROPHY

1
Taryn Simon, *Final Photos*, 2015, server, website, photographs and text from former residents of Fukushima Exclusion Zone, installation view

2
Trevor Paglen, *Trinity Cube*, 2015, irradiated glass from the Fukushima Exclusion Zone, Trinitite, 20 x 20 x 20 cm

3
Ron Nagle, *Centour of Attention*, 2014, ceramic, glaze, catalyzed polyurethane, epoxy resin, 14 x 15 x 9 cm

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Ron Nagle, *Lotta Wattage*, 2012, ceramic, glaze, catalyzed polyurethane, epoxy resin, 18 x 15 x 17 cm

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Ron Nagle, *Mutha Fakir*, 2015, ceramic, glaze, catalyzed polyurethane, epoxy resin, 10 x 10 x 7 cm