A simple description of a formally complicated exhibition: 'Don't Follow the Wind' is a selection of 12 artists commissioned to produce works onsite in the Fukushima exclusion zone, initiated by the artist collective ChimPom in 2012. The three-year project included the formation of a 14-member committee and four designated curators: Kenji Kubota, Eva and Franco Mattes, and Jason H. Hsuan. The project was recently unveiled at two sites: the first, linking four locations within Fukushima (courtesy of residents who generously allowed their evacuated houses to be utilized for the artwork's display), the second, a suite of nine-rooms installed at the Yuzan 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 veil to prevent direct contact. In a curious curatorial gesture, the commissioning of artworks echoes the decommisssioning of the TEPCO Daichi Nuclear Power Plant, which suffered a meltdown after the tsunami of 11 March 2011 breached its protective walls.

It's impossible to eradicate the artwork from their site specifically, 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 concepts 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 preventing work from the concomitant locations of what is now deemed the 'Difficult to Return Zone' in this series. It expands two post-Fukushima artworks: ChimPom's Red Times (2011), where members of the group entered the exclusion zone to hold a nuclear simulator flag a few kilometers from the nuclear power plant; and Fujin: Painting Storl (2012), a suite made by an artist who worked on the clean-up, standing in front of one of the plant's CCTV cameras and poising his finger directly at it. In this show, Kon's Takenouchi's Time Travellers (2015) is a life-sized in-definition photo documenting him and a colleague in an excreas bed, dressed in clothes discarded on the bed prior to the residents' hasty departure. Takenouchi and his friend stand on the bed looking at the camera. Their imposing gaze beautifully fuses their incipient presence with the virtual absence of the couple whose house they now invade. ChimPom's Adapting Blasphemy (2015) -- true to form -- involves a partially illegal action, which I'm presented with describing. Though some regard ChimPom's sensationalist punk practicality as curatorial instigation of 'Don't Follow the Wind' their commitment to 'interventions into interactions of Japanese society' and their 'incidental way toward politically engaged art collectives who came before them', like HI-Reid Centre (1963–64).

The non-Japanese artists work in the show tend to favor more familiar internationalistic artistic strategies. Eva and Franco Mattes photographed literal or decorative domestic scenes from inside the evacuated zone, then digitized them into wallpaper patterns and placed them online for copyright-free use. Taney Simon assembled an online database of Fukushima residents' last photos taken before they had to evacuate. Bree Flegler produced a cube assembled from glass found within the exclusion zone combined with brick tiles, the element formed from initial nuclear bomb tests in New Mexico. "Don't Follow the Wind" offers an unwieldy quantity of curatorial direction, political inquiry and socio-strategic manipulations. To my mind, its density of perspectives grappling with the TEPCO incident and its impact on Japan's infrastructure provides 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 encourages me to reflect 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 political boundaries in the guise of 'lightning-guns' and site-specific collaborations. But 'Don't Follow the Wind' seems cognizant of the pitfalls of globalist grandstanding in the name of political 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 impetus is a complex response that holds the two questions into a kind of self-interrogation. The non-Japanese artists provide a range of media-commentaries -- aware of their distance from issues of being part of Japan's post-atomic psyche, yet interested, connected, some narratives to international streams of intervention. Accordingly, all the works shift between global and national 'existences and Fukushima-specific considerations, grounded in experiences within the exclusion zone and wishing to transpose their effect into art.\n
PHILIP BROPHY

1. Taney Simon, Dead Photos, 2010, color, websites, photographs and text from former residents of Fukushima Exclusion Zone, variable size.
2. Bree Flegler, Torn, 2015, redwood glass from the Fukushima Exclusion Zone, Tramway, 35 x 52 x 23 cm
3. Ron Nagle, Centric of Attention, 2014, ceramic, glass, catalyzed polyester resin, epoxy resin, 14 x 13 x 9 cm
4. Ron Nagle, Little Wastage, 2015, ceramic, glass, catalyzed polyester resin, epoxy resin, 18 x 15 x 17 cm
5. Ron Nagle, Mutual Fault, 2015, ceramic, glass, catalyzed polyester resin, epoxy resin, 10 x 10 x 7 cm