



サカサゴト

Sakasagoto

-Inverted Ordinary Life-

岡 ともみ

Tomomi Oka

“shiseido art egg” is an open-call program that offers up-and-coming artists the chance to exhibit at the Shiseido Gallery, now dedicated to the discovery and creation of new kinds of beauty for over a century. This 16th edition of the program received 260 applications from all over Japan, including, once again, a large number of extraordinarily creative proposals making optimal use of the Shiseido Gallery exhibition spaces. From these, the artists Tomomi Oka, YU SORA, and Soma Sato were chosen for their unconventional takes on today’s new values and aesthetics, with solo exhibitions by these artists being staged in turn at the Shiseido Gallery from January to May.

Tomomi Oka makes devices in which she encloses minor, often overlooked stories, such as people’s precious personal recollections, and disappearing customs, taking memories and establishing them in the space.

Notes on *Sakasagoto*–Inverted Ordinary Life–

In Jomon-era Japan the other world was believed to be an upside-down version of this one. If it was evening here, it was morning there; if it was night here, it was day there. If we wear a kimono folded right over left, they wear it the opposite way. This mode of thought is called *sakasagoto*, literally “upside-down things,” and is still practiced in many parts of Japan as the custom of reversing various daily actions when someone dies.

In this room, the faces of actual clocks are reversed, their hands turning backwards, in *sakasagoto* fashion. When these old clocks run in reverse, images play within as if to remind us of funeral customs all but forgotten. Each clock, itself on the verge of being forgotten, stands there like the grave site of a forgotten custom, blurring the boundary between the world beyond and this one.

At the time of her grandfather’s death, Oka placed a blue hydrangea in his coffin, and when his cremated remains were found to be beautifully stained a pale blue, came to believe that placing the hydrangea had been her own ritual send-off for her grandfather. Looking into the funeral customs that once existed in Japan, one finds that each harbors the unique thoughts and feelings of a small community and the people in it, to make sure that the dead do not become lost on the way to the other world, for example, or to serve as a substitute for the soul. Originally, many people’s attitudes toward death and the afterlife were doubtless shaped by such modest wishes and considerations for the dead. By reexamining funeral customs and views of the afterlife that remain in various parts of Japan, Oka takes a fresh look at the increasingly ossified format of funeral services, and different approaches to engaging with death.

Tomomi Oka

2019 Study abroad, Berlin University of the Arts

2022 MFA Tokyo University of the Arts, Department of Intermedia Art

Currently enrolled in the doctoral program of the same department

Career highlights to date

2018•2019 “Open Space” InterCommunication Center (ICC), Tokyo

2019 Solo exhibition “Nowhere Door,” art space kimura ASK?P, Tokyo

2022 Solo exhibition “Twilight Room,” art space kimura ASK?P, Tokyo

SHISEIDOGALLERY

January 24 (Tue)–February 26 (Sun) 2023

Weekdays: 11:00-19:00 Sundays and holidays: 11:00-18:00

Closed Mondays (including national holidays falling on Monday)

Organized by Shiseido Company, Limited

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Content and schedule are subject to change depending on the status of Covid19 infection.

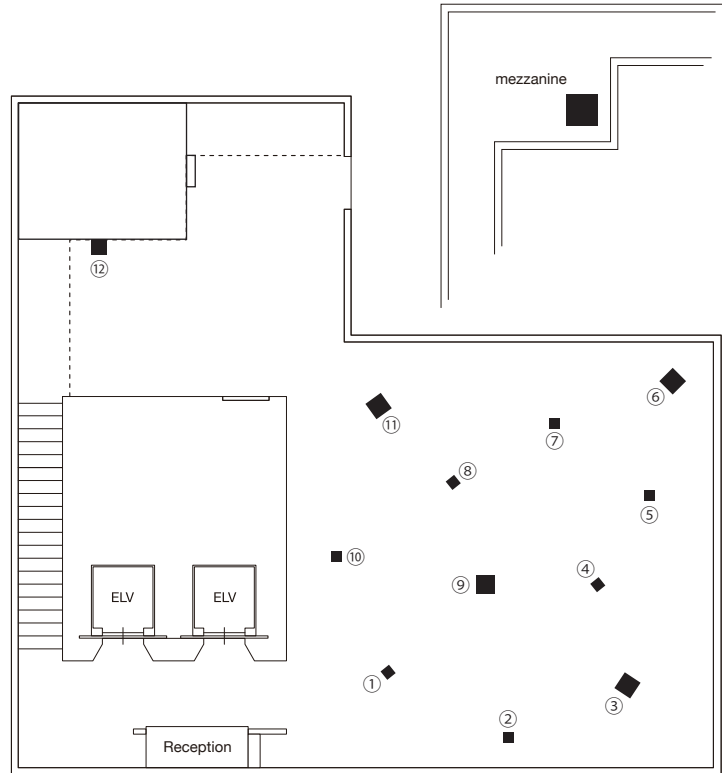


*Sakasagoto*–Inverted Ordinary Life–, 2022, old clocks, video installation

Technical cooperation: tettou771

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Production assistance: Junichiro Endo



① Fire

Fire in a house in mourning is deemed inauspicious, so using its flame to light tobacco, or eating food cooked on it, will result in you too taking on the mantle of grief. When a person going in and out of a household in mourning falls ill this is termed *himake*, literally meaning to be made ill by fire, and there are various associated healing rituals, including the custom of charring part of the cord on the coffin.

② Shadow

*Kage-kakushi* (shadow hiding) is another name for a funeral, and in some areas also refers to temporary burial. Shadows are treated as not the actual thing, substitutes, things that imply existence, and to hide a shadow is to vanish.

③ Boat

In Muromachi Japan the bodies of plague victims in Kyoto are said to have been consigned to the Kamo River, while in Tottori, there was a custom of throwing bones and ash after cremation into Lake Togo at the Hawai Onsen hot springs. Even today a coffin is commonly called a boat (*fune*), and placing the body in the coffin *o-fune-iri*, among other probable relics of water burial, including use of the term *norifune* (boat) for a coffin on the Shima Peninsula, and *funa-udo* (boatman) for a funeral attendant on the coast of Hitachi (now part of Ibaraki).

④ Mission for two

The first formality following a death is to despatch someone to inform relatives of the deceased, and although referred to by different names in different regions, most often this task is delegated to two individuals working as a pair. The reason for this is uncertain: some say that if just one person goes, the deceased will follow them, while others say two people are more able to combat the force of grief. Conventions in different parts of Japan include certain clothing to be worn by the messengers, an obligation to eat a meal at their destination, a ban on stopping along the way, and carrying a lit lantern even during daylight.

⑤ Windmills

Temples for the spirits of babies who died before birth, like Seiryuji in Aomori with its huge bronze Buddha, and Jizo-ji in Saitama, are famous for their offerings of children’s windmills, and their grounds are crammed with these spinning toys. Each vane of the windmill represents part of the Nembutsu prayer: Namu - Ami - Da - Butsu.

⑥ Telephone

One theory has it that the phrase “Moshi-moshi” used on the telephone comes from the legend that ghosts call to people using the word “Moshi,” and to respond is to lose one’s soul, so uttering a repetition of the word, ie “Moshi-moshi” proves to the other person that one is not a ghost or monster of any kind. Thomas Edison is also said to have had a lifelong interest in communication with the spirit world, and in later years devoted considerable energy to developing a “spirit phone” to enable such contact. Dating back to

the 1900s, electronic voice phenomena or EVP is an area of research into the posthumous survival of consciousness, in which electronic equipment is used in attempts to communicate with the afterlife. During this period many such attempts were made using voice transmissions, ie telephone-like devices, to connect to the spirit world.

⑦ Facing mirrors

A plethora of Japanese urban legends exist around *awase-kagami* (two facing mirrors). Positioning mirrors this way is said to summon up demons, for example, or to show the future you, or even your visage at the moment of death. In Edogawa Ranpo’s short story “The Hell of Mirrors,” a man entering a round mirror-lined room is driven mad by the “terrible sight within.”

⑧ Upside-down screens and ghosts

*Sakasa-byobu* refers to the posthumous Buddhist rite of placing an upside-down (*sakasa*) screen (*byobu*) at the bedside of the deceased, the logic being that if the world beyond is the opposite of this one, then the screen should also be upside-down to match. Upside-down ghosts also feature frequently in ukiyo-e prints to signify the strange limbo-like interlude before the ghost’s final form is defined.

⑨ Watery reflections

There are numerous traditions around the notion of a future self being reflected in water such as a lake or river. Expanding on this idea of the future self, a lack of reflection often also suggests death. Alternatively, the reflection may show the circumstances of one’s demise.

⑩ A single bloom

The custom of placing a single flower at the bedside of the newly deceased persists in much of Japan. The choice of a sole stem is so that the bloom will serve as a vessel or *yorishiro* for the spirit of the departed until the funeral. This flower was also taken to the grave as part of the funeral procession. When there are more people to carry flowers at the funeral, there is a tradition of increasing not the number of flowers, but the varieties.

⑪ Roadside lanterns

Lanterns made from finely-split bamboo topped with leaves and candles were once stuck in the ground lining the route of a funeral procession. Street corners where multiple roads intersect represent where the six paths of transmigration divide, and lanterns were positioned there to ensure the funeral procession did not lose its way.

⑫ Blue hydrangea

When the artist’s grandfather died, she laid a blue hydrangea in his coffin, and when his remains emerged from cremation dyed a faint blue, she interpreted this as symbolic of her grandfather’s death and of bereavement. This comes from the tradition that when a blue hydrangea loses its color, the blue has transferred to the remains of the dead, and that on the death of the Buddha, the flowers of the sal trees turned white with sorrow. The arrangement in the clock’s interior is inspired by Meigetsu-in, a Kamakura temple renowned for its display of hydrangeas.