

おもかげのうつろひ 佐藤 壮馬
Transient Traces Soma Sato

“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.

Taking as his theme the question of body and mind in time and space, Soma Sato contemplates the memories and customs behind representation, using duplicating technologies to incorporate archived material in his practice, in order to express the temporal flow of objects and spaces, and the relationships between them. At this exhibition Sato will explore the mismatch and intersection in recognition between science and faith, and the state of our souls, primarily through a new work that uses 3D scanning to duplicate and assemble a giant cedar worshipped for centuries at the Shinmei Shrine in Gifu that was toppled by torrential rain back in 2020.

I have an interest in the invisible culture, people’s memories, customs and so on behind things archived using means such as photography, film, and 3D scanning.

On July 11, 2020, a sacred tree at Okute Shinmei Shrine in Okutecho, in the city of Mizunami, Gifu, was toppled in a night of torrential rain. This giant cedar, ancient symbol of Okute, a town that looks much the same as when it marked the 47th station on the Nakasendo route linking Nihonbashi in Tokyo, and Sanjo-Ohashi in Kyoto, somehow avoided nearby homes and came to rest without injuring a single person. Some months after the cedar’s collapse I visited the location, returning a number of times, and on December 17 recorded the tree in photographs and a 3D scan. The larger gallery space is composed of photos and a three-dimensional work based on scanner data obtained on that occasion. On visiting Okute once more to see the rebuilt shrine in October 2022, I learned from a local resident of some debris remaining from the cedar, and obtained permission to take a number of pieces home with me. The works in the smaller gallery were made using those pieces of wood. Visible in the fragments of fallen tree, are traces of the flow of life. When I was gathering up the pieces to take home, the arborist told me about the calluses that grow on trees to cover damage. Observing the traces of such action by the tree left me in awe of the power of nature, and with a visceral sense of the dynamism of life and death.

The vestiges of an object of worship deeply rooted in local custom changed by its documenting and reproduction: into the data void remaining flow the invisible, such as people’s memories, and customs, forming a new relationship between us and the object. It is my hope that viewers will sense the cycling and rebirth that become apparent by tracking the sacred tree before and after its demise, and the behind-the-scenes endeavors of the people involved in its journey.

Soma Sato

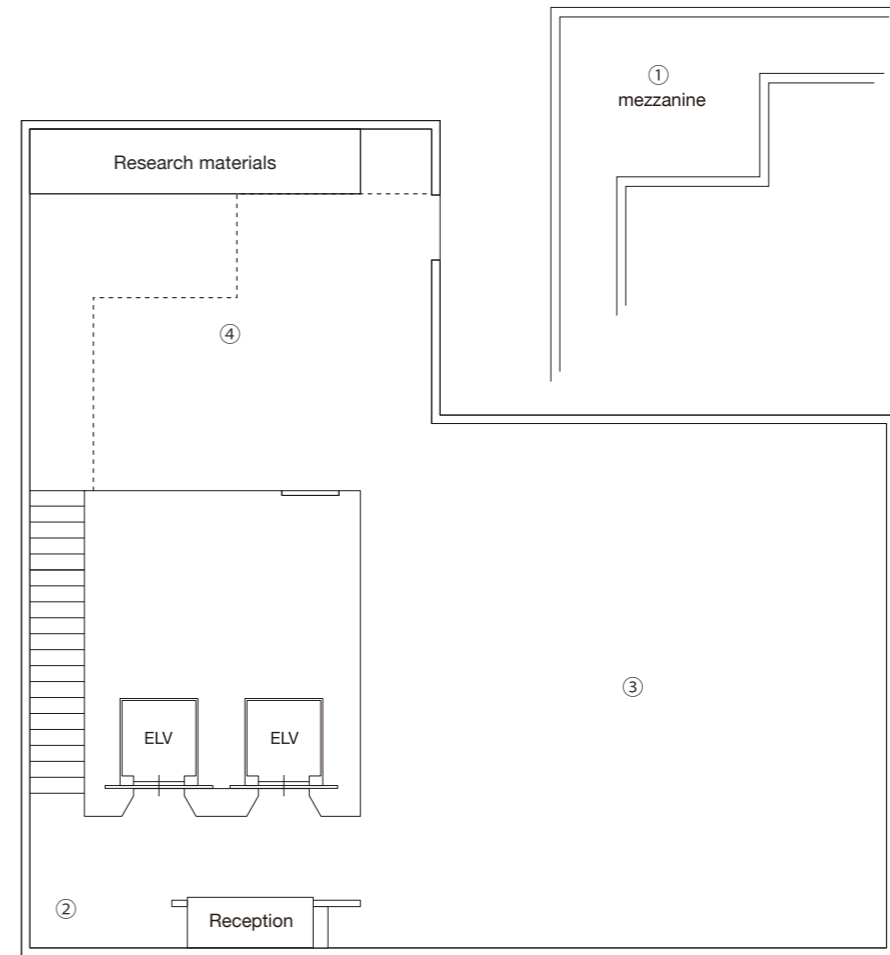
Soma Sato

1985 Born in Hokkaido; based in Hokkaido.
2011–12 Foundation course in Humanities and Social Science, UCL, University of London (Modern European Art & Literature, Human Geography, Critical Theory).
2012–15 Undergraduate studies in Architecture, Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL, University of London.
2020 23rd Japan Media Arts Festival, Art Division, Jury Selection
2022 Participated in Kyoto Steam 2022 (Kyoto City Kyocera Museum of Art, Kyoto)

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SHISEIDOGALLERY

April 18 (Tue) – May 21 (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



①
《Of Flowers (Rose)》 2022
Inkjet print, polyester film, resin, sound

②
《Of Flowers (Tsubaki)》 2022
Inkjet print, polyester film, resin, sound

This work is made up of point-cloud images of flowers, numerical data, three-dimensional objects, and words about flowers. A “flower” is an object that is seen, and at the same time, possesses an invisible, symbolic significance rooted in a particular cultural background, such as in the language of flowers. The idea for this work with a floral motif came from a 3D scanner (LiDAR*) that directs a laser light at an object and records a shape from the cluster of reflected points, and the similarity between this and our own tactile way of perceiving.

In order to experience myself the existence of a “flower” unable to be seen, I spent some time with a blind person, learning different ways of using the body in space—ideas about front and back, impressions of colors expressed verbally, the size of spaces grasped aurally, the loss of distance from an object through touch, and past experiences and memories—and used this knowledge to develop the work.

*LiDAR is short for Light Detection and Ranging, a technology that involves shining a laser on an object and using information about the reflection to gauge variables such as distance and shape. LiDAR is now gaining wider currency with applications such as smartphone facial recognition, and as a spatial recognition sensor in self-driving vehicles and robotics.

③
《Transient Traces》 2023
3D Fragments: Resin, acrylic, other
Photographs 1–7: Inkjet prints
*Please refer to the artist’s statement on the left page.

④
《Physis》 2023
#1-7
Wood (cedar), resin

The idea for Physis came from the modes of storing human remains seen in various religions, such as Christian relics, or the ashes of the Buddha, in this case enclosing the cedar wood brought back from the shrine. Physis is a Greek word that translates as “nature” and was deemed the opposite to human endeavors such as logos (language, logic) and nomos (custom, law). Humanity’s move away from first-hand experience of the currents and transformations of the natural world, and toward a scientific stance of empirical explanation, became increasingly pronounced with the appearance in the 17th century of the word “physics,” derived from physis.