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Art 370
Art Review

Humanity and Disaster

From September 8th till October 7th, the Hampden Gallery is hosting a collaborative art show of five different Japanese artists. The show is called *Foreign Affairs* and seems to have a recurring theme of how an individual or community deals with a disaster. Is the disaster ignored with the hope that the individual won't be affected, or do the individuals come together as a community to prepare for the disaster and rebuild what has been destroyed? This theme is explored through different mediums and on different levels. As an example: Mizutani uses video, while Kita and Amano use photography. The viewer can get immersed in these works, being thrown into situations one could not imagine. The viewer is considered in these artists works, allowing for a new level of experience.

Upon walking up to the exhibit the viewer automatically hears serene, almost hunting music. The tune is not cheery, but seems to have a relaxing affect. Once inside, there is a video being played on a large projector screen that takes up its own wall, overwhelming your senses. It is a work by Izuru Mizutani called *Collapse*, and shows broken glass on the floor. Throughout the video the glass is moving around, putting itself back together in time with the playing music. Once the object begins to form itself, it is lifted off the ground and vanishes upward off the screen. The video is then played forward, allowing the viewer to witness the crash at a regular speed.

Mizutani, in his artist statement, makes a reference to the earthquake, tsunami and the resulting nuclear meltdown Japan suffered in 2011. As a result of this natural disaster many aspects of Japanese society collapsed. Mizutani believes that there was a negative and positive outcome, even though the positive would seem hard to see at first. Even with all of this

destruction Mizutani believes it gives Japan a chance to create a new world. He seems to display this belief by showing the glass orb coming together in slow motion. The viewer witnesses the glass shatter at a fast speed, like the short instance it takes for a home to collapse in an earthquake, but it also allows the viewer to see it coming back together. This process might take longer, but it is still possible, it allows space for something new.

Contrasting Mizutani's sense of community, Masahiro Amano's fifteen pictures called "*87th & Lexington, Snow*" give the viewer a feeling of isolation. They are displayed in a row along a white wall at eye level. Setting up the photographs this way makes the series appear to be in a chronological order, perhaps depicting a story. The photos are taken from the perspective of a street corner covered in snow, the amount varying from picture to picture. In one, it seems that the walkway was plowed then re-blanketed with snow in the next scene. The viewer sees the pedestrians struggle to get through the snow; everyone is bundled up and oblivious to the photographer. They deal with this disaster alone, almost ignoring it as they move through the city. The attitude of the subjects make this series come across as a scientific study.

In some pictures a reflection of a glass door can be seen. The photographer seems to have taken these photos from inside, avoiding the cold weather. Seeing the reflection isolates the viewer, putting them in the photographer's shoes, like we are not a part of this community as they deal with this disaster. All walk with their heads down, pushing through the snow to go about their day, all except for one woman. She is walking with one other person in the foreground and seems to look right into the viewer's eyes. This one woman challenges the photographer and the viewer, like she is envious we are not suffering with her. While Mizutani's piece has a sense of community, the shards of broken glass coming back together, Amano's

series seems more isolated by how the subjects do not converse with each other and how they are visibly separated from the photographer.

While the other two artists depict an individual or community dealing with a disaster that has already happened, another photographer named Yoshiaki Kita depicts the preparation of a disaster. Kita had a series in black and white called *Primal Memento Series*. Each section has a subtitle; the most interesting was called *Animals*. This is a picture of animals, which appear to be armadillos huddled together burying their faces into a set of rocks. The animals are trying to protect themselves; they are shielding their bodies in hard stone against whatever is coming. Armadillos have a hard shell to protect them from their predators and the elements. The fact that animals that already have their own armor are hiding in hard rock is very moving. This can also be reflected in humanity, even though one may feel safe in one's own life, like the armadillo's armor, one may need extra protection. The dark photograph sets a tone that something is coming, perhaps something the animals can sense, giving them time to prepare. The viewer could have the point of view of another armadillo, making its way toward the others, running for the protection, are we going to be too late?

Throughout this exhibit, Izuru Mizutani, Masahiro Amano, TANJC, Yoshiaki Kita and Yuriko Yamamoto seemed to have strived to make the viewer an active participant. They made it seem like we were behind the camera, participating in the picture, or immersed in the installation. The different level of participation gives a different viewpoint of how cultures, and humanity deals with disaster. Whether through community and rebuilding, taking it on alone, or preparing oneself for the worst, the viewer can leave with a different level of understanding.

Foreign Affairs at The Hampden Gallery, University of Massachusetts Amherst.
September 8th-October 7th Tuesday to Friday 1-6pm