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Junior Year Writing

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### **Seemingly Unconnected**

While in the newest exhibition in the Hampden Gallery, five Japanese artists guide their viewers through a series of themes. In four of the five works presented – *Collapse* by Izuru Mizotani; *Kegare* by TANJC; *Primal Memento Series* by Yoshiaki Kita; and *I Dropped Something* by Yuriko Yamamoto – there is a theme of the unimportance of order; a viewer could stumble across any of these works and the particular sequence of images (or scenes) wouldn't matter in their understanding of the work. There is also a theme of time in the sense of formation and ruin working together in a loop in these four works. Between these works, there is also an underlying presence of the artists' handiwork, meaning their process can be seen or felt in their piece. Throughout the *Foreign Affairs: 5 Artists from Japan* exhibition, there is a common theme of a continuous loop, destruction vs. creation, and the visibility of the artist's hand in their work.

Each of these four works seems to demonstrate some sort of cycle, be it of life, a legitimate loop in the work, or in the way the audience can view the piece. In *Collapse*, the artist has created a video loop that shows a glass object being broken as it falls to the ground and then the feed is reversed as the entire projection is reflected in a shallow pool below. No matter when the audience begins viewing this piece, they will understand what is Izuru Mizotani is demonstrating. TANJC's work is also a video loop and, again, as long as the audience watches a majority of the film, when they begin watching is insignificant. In this loop, there are scenes of a funeral and a couple visiting a gynecologist, creating a theme of life and death – the classic “loop.” Although Kita's series of photographs is initially read left-to-right, upon further

inspection, the importance of order seems irrelevant as they do not depict an event chronologically but a collection of images of children, rubble, and a group of armadillos. In Yamamoto's interactive mixed-media work, the order of events in which the viewer completes is initially important – from exploring her makeshift house to receiving the map to the site-specific work, to walking up the stairs, to opening the door and looking over the artificial balcony. After the first viewing, I, personally, skipped over the map portion, went through the little house and walked up the stairs to open the door again to pick up on some details I had missed, such as the diary pages being posted on the door. There is a sense of surprise that never evades this sculpture because the environmental differences – a strange, cramped series of rooms; the motion detectors that perform creepy noises when someone walks by; wooden, creaky stairs being illuminated by a single orange light; blue, ominous endless pit of curiosity that emits sounds and lights – are so important to the piece. Together, all four works contain a seemingly never-ending loop of entertainment for the audience as they explore the pieces.

Although some examples are more obvious than others, each work expresses a theme of destruction and creation. In *Collapse*, the viewer observes the destruction of a falling glass bottle as it shatters onto the floor and is then magically picked up and pieced back together through the reversal of the film; the glass is re-created from its broken pieces. In Kegare's work, he mentions an architecture friend who goes to visit and help reconstruct a part of Japan that has recently suffered the effects of a tsunami. He asks his friend, why do you go rebuild what can easily be ruined again? His friend replies that without destruction, there cannot be new creation. In the *Primal Memento Series* photographs, there is an obvious image of destruction from natural forces upon some building, but the creation aspect is not as obvious at first glance – the images of the children. Future generations will rebuild what is continuously lost by forces of nature and

unfortunate events. In Yamamoto's piece, the aspect of reconstruction after ruin is present in the interactive portion – the recycled papers that have a map written on them. These papers are discarded at the entrance to the room with the staircase and are given to later viewers as they arrive in the exhibition space. Each of these four works demonstrates a common theme of ruin and reformation which links these works together in the exhibition space.

Upon further inspection, each of these works contains an essence of the artist. For Mizotani, this essence is in the physical dropping of the glass bottle. Although it can be argued that a machine could have dropped the glass and Mizotani filmed the process, I believe a tripod held the camera as Mizotani performed the act of shattering the bottle. In *Kegare*, TANKC can be heard narrating the work and his words are then subtitled in English on the bottom of the screen. I found the incorporation of the voice and subtitles to be extremely helpful in this film because I do not understand Japanese or the various scenes throughout the video. I feel that I might have been able to analyze the images and found a funeral scene as well as a scene from a gynecologist's office, but would have had a more difficult time understanding the scene about the architect friend. With my experience in the darkroom, I was able to "feel" the essence of the artist as I inspected the paper Kita's prints were made on – fiber paper that is very susceptible to curling and dark tones. Without that knowledge, viewers can see the artist at work in the eyes of the children: Kita and her camera are reflected in the same pose in each of their eyes as she captures their picture. In *I Dropped Something's* piece, the artist's hand is present in the hand-drawn maps as well as the hand-written notes on the door. The writing seems rushed; I had a feeling that this combination of sketching and writing were used to portray the artist's physical thought-process, particularly in the notes on the door that don't seem to connect until you read all of them. In the room portion of the piece, there are several piles of broken glass piled up on

tables that have been precariously arranged. I rather enjoy being able to see the hands of these artists in these works – it seems more like a creation they made rather than an emphasis on the final product.

Separately, these four works seem dissimilar in everything but their location. However, after spending some time with the pieces, viewers can connect themes that the curator must have wanted, such as cycles, ruin vs. creation, and the presence of the artists' hands. I'm glad that these works of art are displayed together because I might not have picked up on some of these themes. It was also interesting to watch how the works interacted in the same space – for example, sound carried from the different works and added unintentional distractions to otherwise silent works. My question for these artists would be if they intended these interactions to be present, because collectively they work very well as a whole.

**FOREIGN AFFAIRS: 5 ARTISTS FROM JAPAN**

Hampden Gallery, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

September 8<sup>th</sup> – October 7<sup>th</sup>