



studionAme & Youkobo Art Space - micro residency pilot collaboration-

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I. studionAme & Youkobo Art Space - micro residency pilot collaboration.

Yuka Namekawa & Steven Allbutt
Director & Founder
studionAme

Over the last year studionAme has been working with 2 separate organisations based in Tokyo to explore the potential of an international artist exchange. This is the exchange that took place between studionAme and Youkobo Art Space, told from the perspective of studionAme.

The idea of an exchange between the UK and Japan came from a conversation about the different ways that art is made, thought about and talked about in each country and how there were lessons each country/culture could learn from the other to help improve what they already did.

To put this very simply, Japan has a reputation for craft and technical require while the UK, a reputation for critical analysis and discourse. The two had something to teach one another. Our aim therefor, was to enable a cross cultural and technical conversation to take place, not just between organisations but between the artists and their guest cities/countries.

Our hope was that this conversation would then seed some small interventions that would, perhaps, later grow into larger positive changes or at least, a wider understanding of strengths and weaknesses, so that we might all improve our knowledge and skills in the future.

We have been very honoured and happy to be able to work with Youkobo Arts. Their long experience in the field of artist residencies means that we were kept well informed and supported throughout this pilot programme, making our jobs much simpler and stress free.

We were very impressed by Youkobo Arts, from the beginning. The standard of work by their residency artists, their space in Tokyo and their dedication to helping artists. We were also very touched by the effort that was made to visit studionAme and meet with some of the key decision makers in person.

The selection process was a little difficult for us. Only having a research residency to offer the Leicester based artists meant that we lacked the depth of available candidates we would have liked to have offered Youkobo and it was purely good fortune that we were contacted by a very impressive PhD scholar from Leicester University who fitted the brief - perfectly.

Similarly, we felt (with our limited experience) that the number of artists who applied to the studionAme residency was a little disappointing and that out of those available for selection there was only 2 viable candidates.

We were excited to welcome Akira Ishiguro as we felt that he had something a little different to offer because of his technical ability and also his non-traditional rout to becoming an artist.

Getting a better response in the future, to such a fantastic offer of residency will be a key area for us to work on, to help maximise the benefit of such a large investment of time and money.

Communication between organisations was (in our opinion) very good throughout and we never felt like we were misunderstanding one another. Youkobo Art Space organisation skills and experience was priceless and made our lives very easy in what could have otherwise felt like a complex and difficult process.

We were very happy to deliver our side of the program, as promised, despite some minor difficulties along the way, as our DMU point of contact resigned from his post as head of Fine art and Humanities just before the residency began and DMU did not replace him until half way through Akira's residency. This caused a break down in communications between studionAme and DMU which we were only able to rectify in the second half of the residency but Akira still had access to the workshop facilities when he needed and time was still scheduled for an artists talk (which did not take place for other reasons). Akira did give a short presentation on his work and his career, when presenting with Alison Carpenter Hughes, our artist who had recently returned from a residency with our other Japanese partner organisation.

We were very pleased (with some help from Yang and Yang's PhD supervisor) to gain a personal introduction to professor Jan Zalasiewicz. One of Akira's main goals was to meet professor Jan and yet after some difficulties and one missed opportunity, Akira managed to persist and eventually met professor Jan in person. Professor Jan also later came to Akira's show.

Akira was well looked after by both us and the studionAme artists. We did not make any special requests of the artists as we wanted to see what, if anything, would happen - organically.

Akira was taken out on day trips, walking around Leicester, for dinner, to the pubs, to openings, to artists homes and was constantly dropped in on (at his studio) by passing artists. He was, one of the studionAme artist family while with us. For this we are very grateful to our artists and very happy that they fully engaged with Akita's residency.

We fulfilled our time and exceeded our funding commitments to Akira, such as his accommodation, flight & stipend funding. We made sure we were in Leicester for an average of at least one day per week (as stated) and made sure we did everything we could to make his journey and stay as easy and as comfortable as possible.

How much Akira has taken on board, we cannot say? He is a very determined artist and has a very strong idea of who he is and what he is doing. We tried to engage in critical discourse, but this was not always welcomed, we tried to get Akira to engage in other artists work, including ours but he was dismissive. Akira came with a very clear idea of the work he was going to make and he achieved this, without any distraction.

For our own part, this experience has been both frustrating and rewarding. We have learned so much about what we want a residency to be, what it could be and what we would change. We have also learned about what we do well and how we often do more than is expected or indeed standard practice for international residencies.

So, beyond all of the daily lessons of life and art, we have proven our initial hypothesis - that art is made and viewed differently in Japanese and British cultures and that we need to work harder at understanding one another and learning from one another.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone at Youkobo Art Space for all of their hard work, assistance and guidance.



II. Outline of Exchange Program 2019

1_Program overview

The exchange between studionAme (Leicester, UK) and Youkobo Art Space (Tokyo, Japan) began in 2018. Both microresidencies* have a common issue and concept that it's important to make AIR opportunities for young artists and researchers to give some chance to try own activities in a different culture and also have some expectation of the possibilities through the program and artists's activities. (Y-AIR*)

Through the mutual space visiting by the directors, the residency exchange program was developed in 2019. Yang Chen was hosted by Youkobo, while Akira Ishiguro was hosted by studionAme.



at Youkobo in 2018



at studionAme 2018



at De Montfort University in 2018

2. Artists' Activity

Yang Chen

October - November (2 months) at Youkobo Art Space

Born 1991 in China, based in London. Yang Chen is a third-year PhD researcher in Museum Studies at the School of Museum Studies, University of Leicester, UK. Her research aims to develop a theoretical framework to understand the relationship between the postwar Japanese art collective Jikken Kōbō (JK) and the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.

Report : "The Vortex System in the Histories of Japanese Museum and Art"

(in the "Artists' Talk - Reflection and Expectation" at Youkobo Art Space on 10 November)



Akira Ishiguro

September - November (3 months) at studionAme

Born 1974 in Yokohama Kanagawa, Japan. Lives and works in Saitama. Akira Ishiguro is a self-taught artist whom began his career in 2008. When he was painting faux-marble surface as an artisan, he was interested in the uncertainty of the concept of "Genuine" by painting "Fake". He presents his artworks that delve into "the interval of the torsion of the truth and falsehood" from a unique perspective.

Exhibition : "PERSPECTIVE" at Project space in studionAme from 22-29 November.



III. Activity report

1_Understanding Japan: Two Months Residency at the Youkobo Art Space

Yang Chen

When my supervisor forwarded the email from studionAme about the research residency programme at Youkobo, I thought it was a rare opportunity because, usually, organisations only provide residency for artists. I applied and hoped that this residency could allow me to gain a deeper understanding of Japan. I had been to Japan several times previously but only stayed about ten days on average. I felt such a short period could not let me see the other side of Japan, which was more than tourism. Additionally, I discovered more documents on the National Diet Library's digital database that could only be viewed at the site in Tokyo. So I hoped if the residency accepted me, I would be able to spend enough time in the library to get those documents and might discover something new. Fortunately, I was selected. As the time of departure got closer, I had a mixed feeling of excitement and anxious because I was about to start a new life in a more or less unfamiliar country.

After I arrived at Youkobo, I immediately had the chance to meet the other artists. All of them were much older than me, so I was hoping to learn new things from them. Surprisingly, the organisation entered its thirtieth year and would hold a talk event. I was glad that I participated in the preparation and execution of the whole one-day event. It was my first time to be surrounded by Japanese. Some of them could speak English while some could not. Even we had the language barrier, people were still trying their best to communicate with each other. One of the most valuable experiences I had here was that I finally got a chance to learn how the Japanese art world works at the present. I was impressed that Gadan was still so powerful in controlling the Japanese art world. As a system that has existed for over a hundred year, its vitality made me wonder how they persistently protect the tradition. During my research, I noticed Japanese culture had two sides, tradition and innovation. This two sides could be seen at the moment. For example, you could see the most advanced and human-like robot at the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, and you could also see Japanese artisans continuously producing handicrafts using the skills that never changed for over hundred years. Additionally, before the talk event, I visited every artist's studios to get a sense of their works. This year Youkobo had four artists in total: two from New York, one from New Zealand and one from Japan. The two New York artists did their residency here twelve years ago; they were invited back to reflect on Youkobo's thirtieth anniversary. The Japanese artist was also an old friend of the organisation. It was inspiring to see their works and noticing the conceptual differences between Japanese and Western artists. During the talk event, I learnt that people in the Japanese art world were having concerns about the Tokyo Olympic 2020; this event might significantly alter the Japanese art world in the future.

Beyond the talk event, I was invited to give a presentation at the Musashino Art University. It was out of my expectation. I valued it a lot because you would not have a chance to be in touch with people in the university as a mere tourist. The audiences were first-year and third-year students from the oil painting department. So I decided to walk them through the history of the Japanese art museum. They were quiet and did not ask me any questions. Their tutor told me they were also having difficulties in inspiring young art students. I was curious about whether this situation would be changed after 2020.

Indeed, I spent a lot of time working in the National Diet Library. I discovered many new documents, including the official reports about establishing the museum system in the Meiji period. The material mentioned Japan needed to learn from the South Kensington Museum and the Grand Exhibition at Hyde Park. Basing on the new documents, it is clear that the art museum for contemporary (Meiji) artworks was never a part of the museum system. Instead, the promotion of art related to awarded competitions which were decided by the government. The relevant discussion about the emptiness of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum never occurred in documents since Meiji and even until the postwar period, which is the gap that my research can fill. I also had a new idea about the museum canon and the Gadan canon. Unlike the Western museums which artists are trying to enter, the art museums in Japan did not have this function. Instead, Gadan decided whether an artist can be promoted. Avant-garde artists tried to challenge Gadan in the postwar period using alternative spaces but failed continuously.

Overall, the two months I spent at Youkobo allowed me to see Japan and the Japanese art world from a different angle. I'm happy to come back again in the future.



2_Editing stratigraphy

Akira Ishiguro

I started joining the exchange program between Youkobo and StudionAme when I knew Prof. Jan Zalasiewicz who is the leading researcher of Anthropocene is at the University of Leicester and I found the open call for Leicester. As it happens, they were the same timing.

I have never studied geology. It's still a short time since I knew the word Anthropocene. However, I had known about the concept of it since over 20 years ago. I learned it through the marbling by self-taught and I caught vein of the earth as a kind of style. The new word Anthropocene was fused to me in a very natural way.

I read Prof. Jan's book "THE PLANET IN A PEBBLE" before I leave from Japan. Even though I don't have knowledge about geology, I found the sentence in which I was very sympathized. The sentence was matching with the concept of marbling. I should write a letter to him but I was very careful about it. Because of my poor English and importance. In the end, I left without being able to send him a letter. After arriving, I tried to take a contact to him with the director by political way. I know that way has not effective. Just as I had feared, the project ended in failure and I was disappointed. I wrote a letter to him with my passion for the regret that I left the most important part to others. It captured his heart deeply.

In his books, the words "coast of Wales" and "our pebble" often appear. They mean a pebble coast on Aberystwyth on the west coast of Wales, and I went to there the day before the appointment day and picked up pebbles on the beach on a dark night of rain. The pebbles wet with rain were shining like jewels, reflecting the light of the streetlights. The "our pebbles" I brought back sparked his curiosity as a geologist, and he took the loupe out of his pocket and the analysis of them began immediately.

The topic moved on to Anthropocene and I asked him directly. "Is Anthropocene already started?" Three years ago it wasn't clear yet, but the answer was that it had already begun. A concrete time was also presented. It began in 1950. Its rationale continues dramatically over a wide range of human activities to this day and the growth rate is skyrocketing at about the same time. It is a major change due to the so-called Great Acceleration. Our earth was defined as entering a new stratum age called Anthropocene. In other words, in the history of the earth of 4.6 billion years, it means that a geological change occurred during only one generation of our human beings on the surface of the stratigraphy.

And we talked about The Future of Anthropocene. It's a future no one already exists. I told him the image of Marblesque, whose shape was broken down and various things were mixed. He agreed to it and added that everything would be mashed and like Silt. And when I said that gravitational force would be acting in that world as well, he said "Yes". My image of Anthropocene, painting in Marblesque, matched the image of him. This will mean a lot in the future.

The "our pebbles" brought back from Aberystwyth were sliced in his laboratory, accompanied by images of the micro world that looked under a microscope and analysis of their history. Then, I knocked on the door to geology.

Dec 17, 2019



IV. Encounter and Beyond

Tatsuhiko Murata
Co-Director
Youkobo Art Space

The first point of contact with 'studionAme' in Leicester, UK, one of the micro-residences around the world, is in 2018. It was late April that two of the artist units, the founders of 'studionAme', Steven and Yuka, visited Youkobo.

The opportunity to visit the site for us soon came here in June of that year, deepening mutual visits and understanding, and the exchange program between both through artists from both countries began.

We participated in an international conference of residency program "ResArtis 2020 Kyoto" with another micro residency from the world, 'Res Artis' is an membership organization of artist in residence through worldwide.

Leicester, the center of the world biggest textile industry, is a thing of the past, and it is easy to find a studio space that artists want to use, but it is halfway, near or far from London, the capital. It was important to understand the situation of Leicester, which is located at a distance. And we also had the opportunity to talk with stakeholders from two local universities along with the studio visit, we were impressed by the situation to prepare for not only mere exchange of artists between AIR also cooperation with local educational institutions.

After that, specific consultations on the exchange program proceeded, and preparations for the realization of the exchange program in 2019 the following year came to a close conclusion.

Yuka-san research revealed that Yuka's father, Toru Namekawa, was a classmate in my college days. It is honest that I felt something strange, we had a relationship!

We hope that the continuation of this activity, with the background of direct exchange between AIR operators, will open up a new path for exchange of artists with AIR program.



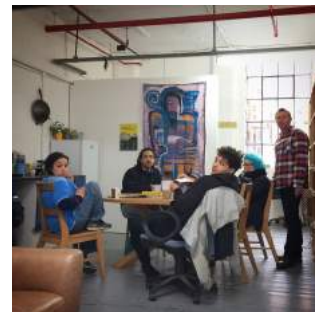
Appendix

Residency Organisations

StudsonAme

The studionAme(Toru Namekawa residency) was established in 2016 in memory of Toru Namekawa and to help local, Leicester based, emerging artists and makers gain time in the studio while working towards a solo show in our project space. Local residencies come with a free studio for at least 3 months, a cash stipend of around £700 and a funded solo show. studionAme has now expanded the local residency to link with other international organisations and offer at least one international residency exchange each year - this is the Toru Namekawa International Residency.

<http://www.studioname.co/>



Youkobo Art Space

Youkobo Art Space manages an Artist-In-Residence Program providing accommodation and studio space to artists for a set period of time, and a non-profit studio and gallery for creating and the presentation of new work by Tokyo-based artists, while also promoting community engagement through art and culture. To date, 300 overseas artists from 50 countries have been welcomed to Youkobo, and exhibitions of over 250 Japan-based artists have been held in what has become a place for rich cultural exchange.

<http://www.youkobo.co.jp>



Microresidence Network

What is an artist in residence? The present situation is such that when I am asked this question, it is not possible to make any generalization. This is because a plethora of AIR exist, from business models and administrative organizations to those of various forms and scales. "Microresidence" is proposed here as a general term to refer to organizations and activities focused on AIR, where the basis of AIR is perceived as being the provision of opportunities and venues for the creative activities of artists as ordinary residents.

The Microresidence.net, website was initiated with the expectation that it would bring greater visibility to microresidencies and promote their mutual activities, leading to the establishment of AIR as vessels for society. In the autumn of 2012, preparations for the site began following a gathering of microresidence directors in Tokyo (including those who participated via the Internet), based on an understanding between respective AIR operators that each would take responsibility for the conveyance of their own activities on the site. The site was later launched in January 2014.

There is great expectation that even more microresidencies will participate as the site gains the recognition of numerous artists and others who share similar concerns, bringing greater awareness of venues and opportunities for artists' creative activities. At the same time, the site will serve as evidence that art is essential to society, while increasing awareness of the activities of AIR as important social vessels.

www.microresidence.net

Y-AIR

Launched in 2013, the concept of Y-AIR (AIR for Young) is an initiative that aims to create an environment granting easier access to artist-in-residencies (AIR) for art university students and young art graduates, implemented with the understanding and support of various art university professors. The concept of this initiative is being developed through collaboration between the micro-scale Youkobo Art Space and macro-scale universities of art. The initiative is expected to contribute, through trial AIR experiences for the participants, not only to the fulfillment of artists' creative activities as regular citizens, members of society and internationally-minded individuals, but also to the provision of an essential place for AIR within the education programs of art universities, thus establishing them as vessels for society.

http://www.youkobo.co.jp/en/related_activities/en-page2.html