

Report on research residency at Youkobo Art Space

by Marta Gracia (ArtMotive)

2017

Youkobo Art Space, Tokyo

Report on the short-term research residency at Youkobo Art Space

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Residency Period:
15th of December 2017 - 3rd of January 2018.

Introduction and Overview:

I first came to Youkobo in 2009 as an intern. At that time, Youkobo had been running the Global Internship Programme for a year, and were hosting international art managers for a period of up to six months. My internship initially lasted from January to July 2009, and I subsequently extended it for two extra months.

I remember my original reasoning for applying to the programme was based on the image of Youkobo that I understood from the information that I had found online - it seemed to me a small, flexible, and human-sized organisation located in the enormous city of Tokyo. It was this aspect of Youkobo that interested me the most and what in the end made my experience there as an intern most rewarding from a professional and personal level.

As an art professional I gained experience in the day-to-day aspects of running an international residency programme that really works (and lives) close to the artists: the programme is shaped each time according to the needs arising from their art processes. Although the internship programme had a pre-established general framework, my own internship was also adapted according to my experience and the common interests that were uncovered during ongoing conversations between myself and the staff. This organic way of developing the programme made it particularly fruitful for both sides.

The fact that Youkobo is rooted in the local art scene and its neighborhood (it has been in operation since the late 1980s and the co-director Tatsuhiko Murata grew up there) further made it easy for me to establish new professional and personal connections in Japan as well as feeling at home while being away.



*Trip to Okutama looking for locations for the artwork of artist in residence at Youkobo Art Space, David Franklin.
In the picture: Hiroko-san, myself, Jaime-san and Murata-san. February 2009.*

Once I was back home, I started to work in the AIR field in Spain, leading me to set up the first information platform on Spanish AIR programmes, a project which developed from a research project that I carried out during my internship at Youkobo.

Being back to Youkobo now after eight years has been an opportunity for me to strengthen the ties with the people that I met and worked with during my first time in Tokyo, while at the same time giving me the opportunity to learn about new developments in the field of AIR programmes in Japan.

This time there was also a general framework of discussions and research meetings set up in advance, but a lot was also decided and adapted according to the interests and topics that arose once I was there. The main work focus was on micro residences. The staff of Youkobo and I conducted a work session on the Microresidence Network and collaborations between universities and micro residencies (which is a field that I'm currently researching); we met with the Culture Dutch Delegate at the Dutch Embassy to exchange recent information related to micro residencies in Holland, Spain and Japan; and we visited the rural area of Fujino in Kanagawa prefecture (during the Second World War, it also became the destination for evacuation for many artists due to its rural location and rich water resources). During this visit, we surveyed developments relating to art and community that the village has undertaken in recent years in addition to plans to establish an AIR program, while the trip also provided the opportunity for new encounters. (for more details about the contents and conclusions of these activities please see each activity report).



*Studio visit to new AIR programme in Fujino.
In the picture: Hiroko-san, myself, and David Franklin (artist, Youkobo Returnee programme). December 2017.*

In conclusion, having the opportunity to come back to Youkobo Art Space for a short-term research residency has allowed me to gain new first-hand insights into AIR programmes and the current situation in Japan. Currently I am processing the information, ideas, and inspiration I received and which I hope to crystallise into new research projects and exchange activities between residencies in Spain and Japan.

Attachment:

1. Report of the visit to Fujino
2. Microresidence Mtg
3. Meeting with Policy Officers, Cultural Affairs, Dutch Embassy, Tokyo

Report of the visit to Fujino by Marta Gracia

Motivation of the visit:

I was interested in visiting the K-AIR programme in Kamiyama by recommendation of Heidi Vogels from Transartists. What interested me about K-AIR was that it's an AIR programme in a rural area which was initiated by local people. Since at the end I couldn't arrange my visit to K-AIR for this trip, Murata-san recommended me and David to visit Fujino, a mountain village one hour away from Tokyo which has a long history (since the 90's) hosting artists and artisans. In fact for a while Youkobo Art Space had an annex studio for artists there as a part of its international residency programme.

Fujino versus K-AIR

From what I heard about K-AIR and from my first visit to Fujino, my impression is that Fujino has the experience and the potential of being a more organic, flexible and decentralised AIR programme. In Fujino there is not just one managing organisation or person behind the AIR programme but different people and initiatives are involved in making the residency experience suitable to the profile and needs of the hosted artist. Something that I also like about Fujino is the importance of the natural surroundings and resources and the awareness of locals regarding sustainability. Moreover the fact that Fujino is just one hour away from Tokyo makes collaborations with art initiatives in the big city an interesting possibility for both, the Fujino AIR programme and the artists invited to the residency.

Rural/urban AIR collaboration in Japan (pilot project/programme)

I imagine the possibility of developing a pilot collaboration between Fujino AIR programme and Youkobo Art Space for an international three months residency programme during which artists spend one month (at the start or at the end of their residency, depending of their needs and residency plans) in Youkobo in Tokyo and two months in Fujino. This would give artists the possibility of taking advantage of the benefits of both an urban and a rural residency programme.

Rural/urban collaboration and exchange within the Microresidence Network

Youkobo could share the idea of the pilot project and invite other members of the Microresidence Network to set up the same kind of pilot programme in their own areas and (maybe at the same time of the pilot experience or maybe later) to develop together an exchange programme for artists from the different countries involved. I think that for this kind of invitation it is better to do it talking with some selected members of the network that Youkobo thinks that are suitable for such kind of programme and that maybe Youkobo already has a previous relation/communication with them. From the links that Murata-san shared with me I found specially interesting for this kind of initiative the programmes Balkankult Foundation Intereg Residency in Serbia and Planeta Chaos in Czech Republic. I think that this kind of collaboration would really help the network to strengthen ties and inspire all the members about the possibilities of the network and how they can work and gain new experience together.

Rural/urban collaboration and exchange Japan/Spain

After the experience in Japan and within the Microresidence Network I think a similar pilot project could be implemented in Spain as well. Nowadays there are several independent initiatives in rural areas in Spain. Depending of the focus of the programme (sustainability, crafts, landscape, nature or other) and how we would like to develop the link between rural and urban areas, the partners would be different. Also we have to have in mind that with some residencies in Spain funding is always an issue that raises when thinking of setting up a new exchange programme. This is why I think that to have a successful previous experience in Japan and within the Microresidence Network can help Spanish residencies to get excited about taking part in the programme. In the meantime I will keep an eye on possible interesting residencies and funding schemes for such kind of programme. So let's keep this conversation going! :)

Microresidence Mtg with Marta

December 20, 2017

Participants: Marta, Tatsuhiko, Makiko, Jaime

1. Report about Art Motile from Marta

Initiated in 2010 by four administrators. It developed out of research Marta conducted when at Youkobo.

Objectives:

- To offer Spanish and international artists information about AIR in Spain.
- To conduct research into AIR in Spain.

Issues:

- Which AIR to include in the database → The dilemma of being open to diverse programs but also only including relevant information.
- Sustainability. Finding the funding and time to maintain the network.
- Taking responsibility for answers to questions about members and AIR in general. Becomes more difficult when network reaches a certain size.

Art Motile stopped in 2016.

Currently, Marta is conducting research into collaboration between AIR and universities. AIR as a place of learning (non-formal education).

Also researching online/offline AIR and universities (virtual residencies: e.g. [Solitude in Stuttgart](#) is currently running a trial). Further reading:

Opening keynote at Transcultural Exchange 2016:

<http://www.transculturalexchange.org/archives/panels/20/page01.html>

Virtual residencies is also included as one of the residency trends in the Residencies Handbook published by the European Commission in 2015:

<http://www.worldculturesconnect.com/?id=-100430>

In this magazine special issue on artist mobility there are a couple of articles about virtual/online residencies and artist mobility (I think the website has a bug cause you can't really go to the article through the links though...):

<https://interartive.org/2013/09/issue-55>

2. Advice for Microresidence Network

Two defining features of the network:

- **Flexibility** → is different from more established networks and institutions (Res Artis, air-J, etc.).
- **Transparency** → a sense that the network is run by individuals, human scale.

Important things to consider:

- **Member involvement** → How can members be involved in decision-making? More involvement of members will mean that more people have a vested interest in the network. Not passive but active members.
 - Suggestions:
 1. Create a board or a committee of key members (a representative for each geographical area, for example).
 2. Ask new members how they can contribute to the network. Shared responsibilities. On the Move questionnaire is a good example : <http://on-the-move.org/members/join/>
 3. Job shadowing. Mutual learning between members through an exchange of staff, directors, etc.
- **Advocacy of AIR** → what are the benefits of AIR for artists, hosts, society?
- **Clear aims for the network** → Is it for artists, as a means for AIR to meet project partners, etc.?
- **Visibility**
 - Suggestions:
 1. Participate in conferences and events.
 2. Maintain strong connections with members of network.

- **Differentiation** → How does this network differ from Res Artis, MAJ, etc.?

➤ Suggestions:

1. Reflect defining feature of the network in its design and language, i.e. images and introduction to founding members, etc.
2. Focus on specific issues related to some or all members, i.e. “family-oriented AIR” or “remoteness”. Each member researches according to a fixed framework, and shares with others. Researchers could be invited to facilitate the process of information sharing.

- **Where to draw the line for new members**

➤ Suggestions:

Limit the criteria for new members. The minimum requirements. In the case of Micro Network, members such as Tenjinyama may be a little different to others but are important for the network to get greater recognition and visitor numbers.

Other suggestions:

Microresidence Network as an international perspective on Microresidencies. MAJ is the regional version.

To organise a regional meeting or working group in Japan can be a good starting point for stronger relationships within the network. It is also easier to find common interests/issues to work on among organisations sharing the same geographical and cultural context. Attendance to the meeting is also usually easier and cheaper if the meeting takes place in the your own country. Tatsuhiko suggested a Tebento meeting.

Meeting with Mr. Bas Valecx and Ms. Kim Dang, Policy Officers, Public Diplomacy, Political and Cultural Affairs

December 22, 2017

Participants from Youkobo: Mr. Tatsuhiko Murata and Marta Gracia

1. Dutch Embassy in Japan and AIR programmes

- AIR programmes are included as one of the fields to work on/with in the current plan for culture of the Dutch Embassy in Japan. The current plan goes until year 2020. Because of this from the office of culture they are interested in knowing and meeting all those who are working in the residency field in the country.

- Some of the activities and interests of the Embassy regarding AIR programmes are:

- **Go and see activities:** They have funded the trip of some staff from ARCUS who went to visit some residencies in The Netherlands: <http://www.transartists.org/article/culture-talks-air-japan-december-19>
Staff from ARCUS will share their experience and the information they gathered in the framework of a kind of forum organised by the Embassy that will take place at the start of the year.
- **Networks and information platforms:** The Embassy wants to contribute to find ways for the existing networks and information platforms in Japan to collaborate among them.
- **AIR programme and European Capital of Culture programme (ECOC):** Next year (start of the year) the Dutch Embassy is going to host a reception with the delegates of several ECOC. 2018 is also the year of the Dutch ECOC, Leeuwarden. Youkobo will be invited to the reception. Even if it is maybe late for starting a collaboration with Leeuwarden for 2018, the Embassy offered the possibility to arrange one-to-one meetings between Youkobo with the delegates of its interest.

Tatsuhiko's idea after the meeting at the Embassy: would it be an interesting idea to create a AIR programme network link to the ECOC programme?

- Dutch AIR programme in Japan?: We don't know for sure but it seems that the Dutch Embassy is looking at / in contact with the French residency in Kyoto (Villa Kujoyama, director Charlotte Fouchet). Maybe they are thinking to develop a similar programme in Japan for Dutch artists?

2. Youkobo Art Space and Microresidence Network

- Tatsuhiko introduced a little bit Youkobo Art Space (They already knew the initiative and Bas had been at Youkobo once as well for a presentation) and the Microresidence Network.
- They were very interested in the Microresidence Network and told us about an online information platform developed by Heidi Vogels from Transartists and another person from the artist collective The Naked: <https://alternativeartguide.com/>

After the meeting at the Dutch Embassy we found this article about two mapping initiatives of artist run spaces/projects:

<http://artistrunmap.com/artistrunmap.html>

Some ideas after the meeting at the Dutch Embassy:

Maybe a collaboration/ exchange can be developed with the support of the Dutch Embassy between a regional Microresidence Network in Japan and the network Platform NL (<http://www.transartists.org/airplatformnl>) in The Netherlands. Platform NL is the network of AIR programmes in The Netherlands coordinated from Transartists (Heidi Vogels). It can be interesting to know their experience as a network and also maybe to do some job shadowing/staff exchange between microresidencies from both networks or carry out some research about some common topic. Platform NL/Transartists has a specific programme called Mutual Impulse for developing collaborations between Dutch AIR programmes and residencies/AIR networks from other countries: <http://www.transartists.org/activities/mutual-impulse>