



Crystallizing Ideas

- The Youkobo Returnee Residence Program Part 2, Two-month residency by Saara Ekstrom

Contents

- 1. Introduction of the program**
- 2. Two-month Residency by Saara Ekstrom**
 - 2-1_Artist introduction**
 - 2-2_Summary of residency**
 - 2-3_Exhibition at Youkobo**
 - 2-4_Artist Talk and Discussion**
 - 2-5_Interview with Saara Ekstrom**
 - 2-6_Artist Bio**
- 3. Activity Report by Saara Ekstrom**

Supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs Government of Japan in the fiscal 2018

1.Introduction to the Program

Artist residencies play a vital role in artists' creative practice, offering spaces for experimentation in a supportive environment that help artists to explore and connect in meaningful ways to different cultures and surroundings. This leads to new discoveries that "crystallize"—often at some indeterminate later stage in the artists' career—in new forms of creation.

To celebrate and reflect on 30 years of hosting and supporting art professionals. During these period not a few of artists were already returnee to Youkobo Art Space.

We were launched the Youkobo Returnee Residency Program, in 2017. These inviting artists who have previously undertaken a residency at Youkobo to further develop their creative research. In addition, the participating artists will present work in an exhibition (as a collaboration a Japanese) at Youkobo Art Space, while public talk event will be held to discuss, among other things, the significance of residencies for artists and hosts in relation to the invited artists' previous and current experiences at Youkobo.

2.The Youkobo Returnee Residence Program - Part 2

Period: 1,October, 2018 – November 30, 2018

2-1_Artist Introduction: Saara Ekstrom

In Part 2 of the Youkobo Returnee Residence Program (hereafter YRP), Finland /Turk-based visual artist Saara Ekstrom was invited to undertake a two-month residency at Youkobo. Her first residency at Youkobo was in 2006 when she took part of the exhibition the "Light and shadow " at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum. And again in 2009 she stayed for three-month residency and made an impressive exhibition at Youkobo. Her art work are mainly by photography and 8mm film work which are dynamic, yet have a subtly and delicateness that pulled at the heartstrings.

2-2_Summary of the Residency Program

For her third residency at Youkobo, Saara continued an environment issues which had initiated project in Finland. Her two-month residency focused on field in two areas: one was 8mm movie work and the other was Photography for the daily foods and materials. Her result had shown as the collaboration exhibition with Japanese artist Ms Miki Ukai. Then also she got a special chance to visit the studio and took his Noh masks photos and had interviews with Mr Shigeharu Nagasawa, a craftsman of Noh mask carver. She had very big impression from his Noh mask. The outcomes of the project open-ended in order to welcome unexpected elements, she will looking for some chance for its collaboration with him.

2-3_Exhibition at Youkobo

Date: November 3 – 23, 2018

Venue: Studio 3, Youkobo Art Space

Title: "Amnion" (a thin membrane that protects the developing embryo)

For this exhibition at Youkobo, Saara presented a video and photographs.

In the 8mm film and series of photographs titled "Amnion", Saara Ekstrom combines material from Finland and Japan to create visions where the organic merges with the synthetic, polymer molecules imitate the DNA, and new life begins to take shape under transparent membranes of plastic wrapping.

As a project of Youkobo, Saara held an exhibition which was held at the same time with the invited Japanese residency artist Miki Ukai's exhibition at Youkobo, and interacted with each other through the works. Both exhibitions are dynamic, yet have a subtly and delicateness that pulled at the heartstrings and the work to show the change of materials and motifs in the transition of time forced the viewer to ask certain questions.

Image from “ Amnion ”



2-4_Artist Talk and Discussion

Date: 10, November, 2018

Speakers: Saara Ekstrom (invited artist), Miki Ukai, Kalisolaite Uhila (Artist)

No. of participants: 20 (among the participants were artists, photographers and other art professionals, some of whom were friends made during her residencies in 2006 or 2009)

The artist catalog "Amnion / The world in between" published in commemoration of the simultaneous exhibition of Saara Ekstrom and Miki Ukai.

2-5_Interview with Saara Ekstrom

Date : 21 November, 2018

Participants : Saara Ekstrom, Tatsuhiko Murata, Hiroko Murata, Makiko Tsuji (Youkobo Art Space)

A summary of interviews with Saara Ekstrom who experienced residency at Youkobo three times. Listen from her opinion about characteristics of our program and feedback for program development.

- As a recent trend, there are many who accept young and up-and-coming artists such as around 35 years old, but Youkobo has no age restrictions and is characterized by various ages mixed.

Also, there are things that can be done just because with the tiny residency program also it is not a commercial gallery.

The program and exhibition, including the interaction with Miki Ukai, are not included in the type of exhibition that you often see while riding on the trendy. She likes this mode.

- It is an advantage that keeps private environment for creative studio and accommodation in Tokyo. In addition, the location where you can experience both downtown and suburbs are nice.

In terms of support, good response to the needs of each artist, and great appreciation for connecting specialist and/or professional to lead own art works.

In addition, it is very respected outcome for publication of the exhibition catalog just after the program, it will important record/evidence and good for the future activities.

- This time she participated a two-month residency program with exhibition and it was a precious opportunity itself, but to be honest, it was quite difficult to prepare in one month for production and preparation for exhibition in one month, some artists are suitable for one to two months. Next time she will residency for research and production only and stay for more than three months without exhibitions, for example. Youkobo as such flexible program to accept the returnee artist, though there are AIR programs only accept once.

She likes our program because of it supporting policy with using their network and program that respects the wishes and intentions of artists and researchers, including the duration of stay.

- It would be nice to be able to participate in the opening of exhibitions and so on during the period of stay, introduce more artists in Japan, and have more opportunities for interaction.

I think almost every AIR programs do their best but there seems to be a device not only for providing information but also for creating opportunities. It is important issue for not only artist also program coordinator.

2-6_Artist Bio

Saara Ekstrom (1965)

1983 -1985 Turk Art Academy, Turk, Finland

1995 -1996 Northern Arizona University, USA

She lives and works in Turku, Finland. She received the AVEK- Finnish media Award in 2018, and the Art Prize of SW Finland in 2017. Her videos and works have been shown in several Finnish and international film festivals, and in group and solo exhibitions, among others at the Kiasma-Museum Contemporary Art in Finland, Tokyo metropolitan museum of photography ISCP in New York, Grand Palais in Paris, Ludwig Museum in Koblenz, royal academy of fine arts in Stockholm, ECCO in Spain and Charlottenborg Art Hall in Copenhagen. Her works have been acquired to public collections in Finland and abroad.

3. Activity Report by Saara Ekström

Returnee Residency Program at Youkobo Art Space, October 2018 – November 2018

I felt privileged to receive an invitation from Youkobo Art Space for a Returnee Residency Program in October – November 2018 to commemorate the 30 years of important and pioneering artist-in-residence activity in Tokyo.

My first residencies at Youkobo Art Space in 2006 and 2009, became very significant working periods for my artistic practice. These periods allowed me to research and develop a personal approach to the Japanese art of flower arrangement – Ikebana – and to explore the Japanese aesthetical culture on a deeper basis. I got to know the avant-gardist and powerful flower arrangements of Yukio Nakagawa (1918 – 2012), which, as deeply profound works involving the cycle of life and death, still continue to amaze and inspire me. The series of photographs made at Youkobo Art Space during the residency was presented among others in the extensive and touring solo exhibition “Limbus” shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma, Kuntsi Museum of Modern Art and Åland Art Museum in Finland in 2010 - 2011. Not only were the residencies important for producing a series of new works – the experience remained with me also on a very profound level.

The returning residency program at Youkobo Art Space offered an important possibility to revisit the place that had made a meaningful impact on my art. The 2-month period included a chance to both make and present new art works produced at and by Youkobo during a 3-week exhibition at the gallery space. Linking the exhibition schedule with the Trolls in the park – exhibition, Youkobo was able to share a larger audience and join forces with likeminded artists and professionals from the local cultural sector.

My plan for the exhibition was to use previously filmed material from Finland, and to combine it with material filmed on site in Tokyo. Through the film I hoped to direct the attention to environmental issues. The work, shot on 8 mm film, focused on mountains of waste which we are producing and that now are expanding beyond our control. The series of slides were like specimens of a dystopian future, where synthetic plastic slowly merges with organic matter, to create hybrid life forms in the giant incubators of landfill sites on the outskirts of cities.

October was an intensive period, during which I worked with the 8 mm film and a series of slides for the exhibition. With the great assistance from Youkobo Art Space we were able to get the films developed and scanned at Retro Enterprise film lab, where the staff, specially **Koji Seki** devoted his personal time to help in solving technical problems and realizing the project. Finding unconventional and fresh ways of presenting the new series of photographs, instead of printing them, I wanted to use a lightbox to exhibit the slides. Through Youkobo's good connections, I was able to order a skillfully crafted lightbox specifically made for this purpose by Ozeeki san. How to present the works and how to build up a balanced and captivating exhibition is for me an important part of the project.

My working process was also affected in a positive and inspiring way by the work of Miki Ukai, a very interesting Japanese artist working and presenting her art simultaneously at the residency. Our exhibitions were curated by Youkobo Art Space and I am happy that we were chosen to show our art next to each other. It became clear how beautifully our work stood in dialog, contributing to each other and opening multiple possibilities to view and experience the works. I much admire Miki Ukai's timeless, direct, strong, physical and yet sensitive art, and her sincere understanding and sense of material, ephemerality and balance. I'm also impressed by the insightful way of how the Youkobo curates their exhibitions. Unaffected by trends they create a space where communication along with contemporary, alternative and ambitious art flourishes in tune with Youkobo Art Spaces personal vision of what is important in art and life.

To preserve this unique meeting between two artists in a space that welcomed us, Youkobo Art Space is also producing a catalogue of Miki Ukai's and my exhibitions. The elegant publication is both a documentation and an artwork of its own, which will continue the life of our exhibitions and experiences at Youkobo, long after they have ended.

During the residency I very much enjoyed the company of my fellow artists: I got a chance to be involved in collaboration suggested by Miki Ukai, which resulted in a series of small artworks, merging the materials we use. We also realized another collaboration involving all the artists present at Youkobo – I photographed a staged portrait of performance artist Kalisolaite Uhila from New Zealand, dressed in plastic and seated in front of Miki Ukai's large silicone panel.

Together with other artists we held artist talks at Youkobo Art Space and I also participated in a FIN/JPN LAB - seminar in the Finnish Institute in Japan, where I had a good chance to meet other residency artists and to make contact with the personnel among others from TOKAS residency, Finnish Institute in Japan and Waria Art Break AIR.

I was also invited by professor Teiko Hinuma, who I had the pleasure of meeting at Aomori Contemporary Art Center in 2006, to do a lecture in the program "International Cultural Exchange and Study" at Joshibi University of Art and Design.

In addition to the exhibition realized for Youkobo Art Space I began filming material for a new short film. Hiroko and Tatsuhiko Murata assisted me in getting in contact with Mr. Shigeharu Nagasawa – a craftsman of exceptional character and a Noh mask carver in three generations. Together we visited his studio and I was able to document his work and extensive collection of fascinating, captivating and expressive masks. These masks that belong to a long tradition, have specific meanings and represent certain archetypes in the Noh play. However, they also started to speak with individual voices of their own, as they simultaneously were embodying universal feelings of human joy, tragedy and anger. Since the time was almost running out, this is a project that I will continue researching, and hopefully will have a chance to do so in Tokyo in the near future.

During our many discussions and meetings with the people creating the unique atmosphere at Youkobo Art Space, I have gained some more understanding on how a residency functions and what is demanded to keep it going. I hope that Youkobo will be doing its important work for many years to come. I wish they will be granted both support and a possibility to continue a mission as an artistic base and temporary home for both international and Japanese artists – the residency directly affects the work that we artists create, and it also functions like an ambassador of culture both inside and outside of Japan. Among Finnish artists Youkobo Art Space has established itself as a concept with a heart – a highly regarded one.

