



Crystallizing Ideas - The Youkobo Returnee Residence Program Part I  
A Two-month research residency by David Franklin

**LLLL** institut  
ramon llull  
カタルーニャの言語と文化

Supported by the Agency for Cultural Affairs Government of Japan in the fiscal 2017

## Contents

1. Introduction to the Program
2. The Youkobo Returnee Residence Program - Part I
  - Artist introduction: David Franklin
  - Summary of residency
  - Artist Talk and Discussion with David Franklin
3. Artist Bio
4. Evaluation of the Program

## 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, Youkobo Art Space launched the Youkobo Returnee Residency Program on December 1, 2017, 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 at Youkobo Art Space, while public talk events 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.

## The Youkobo Returnee Residence Program - Part I

Period: December 1, 2017 – January 31, 2018

Artist Introduction: David Franklin

In Part I of the Youkobo Returnee Residence Program (hereafter YRRP), Barcelona-based visual artist David Franklin was invited to undertake a two-month residency at Youkobo. David first joined the residency program in 2009, when he stayed for eight months to develop a body of work related to urban ruins, Japanese and Western visualizations of landscape, and Japanese post-war culture. Having built a successful career in Barcelona and participated in a number of other AIR since then, participation in this program not only offered David a chance to build on the research he initiated in 2009, but also served as a valuable opportunity for Youkobo to reflect on the significance of its role in artists' careers through dialogue with the artist.

## Summary of research

For his second residency at Youkobo, David initiated a new long-term project exploring the connections between landscape and society in relation to the Japanese context. Deliberately leaving the outcomes of the project open-ended in order to welcome unexpected elements, David's two-month residency focused on field research in two areas: Documentation of urban spaces in Tokyo, and interviews with Atsushi Matsuda, a Butoh dancer and member of Dairakudakan as he prepared for a new performance scheduled for March 2018.

Central to this research was the notion that a landscape is “an area that is perceived and constructed in the mind of the viewer [...], and that our concept of self is intrinsically linked to our perception of our environment.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, David's motivations for following the activities of Atsushi

---

<sup>1</sup> From David Franklin's proposal to YRRP, December 2017.

Matsuda were to observe the subtle influence of the urban environment of Tokyo on Matsuda's work and creative process.

Currently planning his return to Japan later this year, David intends to develop this area of research in addition to visiting various locations in the dynamic Japanese landscape that have been shaped by volcanoes, earthquakes, and other geologic activity. These investigations will combine to form an abstract look at how landscape has shaped human activity and how people react to their environments, and will result in the production of new video artworks, as well as new drawings and paintings.

#### Exhibition at Youkobo - *Curse*

Date: January 24 – 28, 2018

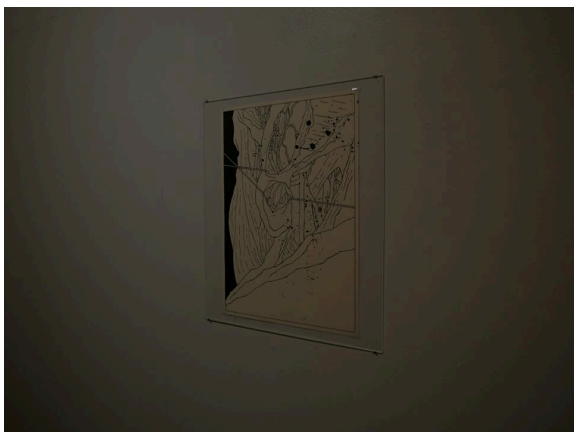
Venue: Studio 3, Youkobo Art Space

For his exhibition at Youkobo, David presented two video artworks, *Views of Distant Stations* and *Company*, both of which feature footage shot during his first residency at Youkobo in 2009. These videos explore connections between individuals and their surroundings, focusing on somewhat banal everyday locations. *Views of Distant Stations* takes as a starting point *ukiyo-e* series which feature images based around a motif such as the moon or Mount Fuji. *Company* references Samuel Beckett's text of the same name, and presents an existential meditation on our spiritual connection to our physical surroundings, contrasting intimate human environments with the cosmological.

In addition, the exhibition featured a selection of ink drawings that explored an intersection between the human body and physical landscapes.



Image from *Company*, 2014/DV/ 5'14"



## **Artist Talk and Discussion with David Franklin**

**Date:** Jan 27, 2018

**Speakers:** David Franklin (invited artist), Jaime Humphreys (AIR coordinator, Youkobo Art Space)

**No. of participants:** 20 (among the participants were artists, dancers, photographers and other art professionals, some of whom were friends made during David's first residency in 2009)

What follows is a summary of the artist talk and discussion with David Franklin.

### **Session 1: Presentation by David Franklin**

In the first session, David introduced the main ideas behind his practice with a video essay and live text presentation. The topics covered included painting and the evolution of visual language; the role of technology and science in artistic developments; Dutch landscape painting in the 1600s; the expansion of our concept of space throughout history; space exploration and the possibility of humans surviving away from Planet Earth; philosophical concepts of landscape in Chinese painting; science fiction; and how we interpret our surroundings.

Following a general introduction to his work, David then went on to introduce the research he has undertaken over the past two months. The focus of this research was a series of interviews with Atsushi Matsuda, a Butoh dancer and member of Dairakudakan who was preparing for a new performance in March 2018. This led to a broader introduction to David's interest in Butoh, its founder Tatsumi Hijikata and his involvement in Eikoh Hosoe's groundbreaking book *Kamaitachi*, as well as Japanese art in general from the post-war New Wave.

### **Session 2: Discussion about the Role of AIR in artistic practice**

Reasons for doing a second residency at Youkobo

The discussion began by focusing on David's motivations for wanting to return to Youkobo for a second residency. He explained that with his first residency, there was a very clear purpose for wanting to come to Youkobo, namely, to leave Ireland and put himself in as big an environment as possible. He noted that he had been fortunate during his first residency to be able to step into a strong context for making his work by connecting with a group of artists close to Youkobo.

As for this residency, David explained that, as it marks the beginning of a long-term project, he didn't come with the aim of producing a finished work, and deliberately chose a way of working that was open-ended. For him, Youkobo achieves a good balance between providing a structure of support while also allowing the artist to work freely, and David was grateful to be able to step into a supportive environment in which he could concentrate on research and production.

David also talked about his conversations with Atsushi Matsuda in relation to a way of working that they both shared. Atsushi had spoken about the freedom of Butoh, and how each new performance begins in an open-ended way, with a starting point from which the work must be discovered, as opposed to deciding beforehand what the final result will be. He also spoke about the necessity of creating some kind of restriction or limitation in the artist's methodology. David felt a strong resonance with this approach, and explained that while chaos and uncertainty of the outcome were important elements in this project, so too was the supportive framework that the residency program at Youkobo provided.

Experiences after the first residency, and thoughts about the diversification of AIR

In response to being asked how his experiences during the first residency at Youkobo had affected his later career as an artist, David talked about his first residency as a starting point for much of what he has done since, not only in terms of the work he made but also his approach to production.

The discussion then shifted to focus on how AIR have changed dramatically in recent years, and that now a wide range of AIR programs can be found, including some that offer short stays of just one or two weeks. In relation to this topic, David explained that it is now almost expected that artists do a residency at some point in their careers, and that such changes in the meaning of "success" in relation to "artist" as career may be having a detrimental effect on the role of AIR. He believes that

both AIR organizers and artists need to carefully consider their reasons for wanting to host or participate in AIR respectively, in order that meaningful art-making (at any stage in its process) and exchange can still be achieved.

#### On similarities between Irish and Japanese Culture

Following the dialogue between David and Jaime, a lively Q & A session with the audience developed. Among the questions posed, David was asked whether he had been conscious of the fact that both his country of origin and Japan are islands when first applying to do a residency at Youkobo. David explained that it wasn't a conscious decision, but that through his residency he came to find similarities between Japanese and Irish people in relation to how they express themselves. Specifically, there is a vagueness in verbal communication that may relate to the environment. Whereas people living on continents would encounter one another only once or infrequently, the chances that inhabitants living on an island will encounter the same person again are higher, and speaking in an indirect manner may be understood as a means of avoiding conflict.

David went on to talk about how we might perceive the influence of the natural environment on Irish identity in relation to aspects of Irish history, giving the example of how, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Christian theology came to be preserved by monks in Ireland due in part to the isolation afforded by its geographical location and smaller offshore islands. He finished by emphasizing how the connection between our environments is so strong that it shapes the human psyche.



### **Artist bio**

Based in Barcelona, Spain, David Franklin works primarily with painting, drawing, and video. His current work looks at the intersection of landscape and the use of images in constructing our conception of our environment, drawing on, among other things, the influence of technology on visual art and images; astrobiology and the expansion of the human environment; animation techniques and aesthetics; the history of plagues; Japanese post-war art; and the philosophy of Chinese painting. His recent publication, *Empire of Rats*, combines text and photos to explore the phenomenon of modern ruins in Japan and Spain and their connections to commercialism, nationalism, and cultural memory. It has been included in the archives of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MACBA) in Barcelona. Throughout 2017 and 2018 he has been conducting a research residency at the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, in Barcelona.

### **Evaluation of the Program**

Returning to Youkobo in December of 2017, David is one of 297 artists who have joined the AIR Program at Youkobo since it first started hosting artists in 1989. Established as Youkobo approaches its 30th anniversary in 2019, YRRP is a program that also provides an important opportunity to consider the value of AIR. It is said that the activities of AIR are difficult to evaluate. This program offered a chance to discuss, quantify and make visible the value of AIR, an important research theme that Youkobo has pursued over the past few years.

We would like to give concrete form to the experiences gained by artists undertaking residencies for the first time, the developments that occur after their residency, and the experiences gained from a second residency through working directly with the artists. While it is difficult to quantify and give visible form to such experiences, we have a strong wish to consider the value of AIR.

The 300th artist to join the AIR program is Erik Sille. He is also a returnee, having stayed for three months in the spring of 2013 as a participant of a mutual exchange program with KAIR in Slovakia. Taking Erik's second residency and his participation as the 300th participant in our AIR program as a valuable opportunity, we would like to begin a survey of artists who have returned to Youkobo (including artists who have returned to Youkobo on a number of occasions) in order to find out what they have been doing since their first residency, in addition to their experiences on other AIR. Our aim is to make visible the value of AIR for artists committed to the pursuit of their practice.

## Report — David Franklin residency at Youkobo Art Space

December 2017 — January 2018

I was very fortunate to be invited back to Youkobo Art Space for a residency during December 2017 and January 2018, as part of their new Returnee Residency Program, which marks thirty years of their hosting artists. I had previously been a resident at Youkobo from December 2008 until August 2009 and my experience at that time was key in defining the direction I would subsequently move in as an artist. In the intervening years I relocated to Barcelona and established myself in the art scene there, but I had been looking for ways to return to Japan to begin work on a new project that had been stewing at the back of my mind for some time. Being invited to return to Youkobo was the perfect opportunity for me to start this new work, and at the same time it presented a neat kind of symmetry: I would return to the place I considered to be the starting point for a lot of my work, to begin a new phase that built on my previous experiences.

The project I presented to Youkobo, and which I am now working on, is a new work involving collaborations with performance artists, looking at their methodologies and following their process as they rehearse and prepare their performances. I was interested in working with dancers as I felt it would allow a broader look at the influence of the environment on the individual, and there are cultural and historical connections relating to art and performance from the post-war period in Japan that underpinned this interest. The project will also expand to focus on various specific locations in the Japanese landscape. These were the starting points I had in my mind for this project, and I was aware that they were somewhat vague, even though I had a very strong idea of what I wanted to do, particularly from a visual point of view — this new work would involve video as well as drawing, and I had concrete images around which the project would be constructed. However I had deliberately resisted trying to shape or define the project at such an early stage, as I wanted to leave it open for chance developments and the input of collaborators. In this sense, it was important that I could work in a context that tolerated this seemingly open-ended approach, and I was grateful that Youkobo understood what I was hoping to achieve, and that my residency would allow me to start this new work but not necessarily produce final results.

Thanks to the context that being a resident at Youkobo gave me, as well as the support, assistance, and contacts I received from the staff, I was able to begin work immediately, and I made greater progress with the project than I had anticipated. I began working intensely with Matsuda Atsushi, a butoh dancer with the company Dairakudakan, and his intuitive understanding of what I wanted to work on meant we could very quickly begin collaborating. I was able to follow his working processes and his daily life, and through a series of interviews and other exchanges we explored various philosophical and artistic themes which would form a foundation for the work. In addition, I made contact with Kawaguchi Takao and a group of dancers connected with him, and my experiences with them also fed into my work. At the same time, I was recording video and audio of various locations around Tokyo. As a result I came away from the residency with sufficient material to begin working in a concrete way on this new project, and with enough to plan the next phases of the work.

In addition to beginning work on a new and complicated project, during the residency I was able to present an exhibition of new and older works which were thematically linked with the new project; some of the work was begun during my previous residency in 2009. There was also a talk event hosted by Jaime Humphreys of Youkobo where I presented my work and my new projects, and where we discussed various questions related to artist residencies and their place in the lives and careers of artists, and the art world more generally. At almost three hours, this talk brought up a lot of interesting points, and I was happy to have the opportunity to present my work and new ideas in

this format. During my residency I was also able to make new contacts with artists, residencies, and other cultural professionals, and I have prospects for hopefully continuing to work on this project in Japan in the near future.

Three other artists were also at Youkobo during the two months of my residency, Anna Samsøe and Andreas Stoubye Johansen from Denmark, and Ari Saarto from Finland. We all arrived at the same time and quickly formed friendships that made the residency a much richer experience. This camaraderie and exchange of ideas was particularly helpful during the stressful final weeks, when we were all preparing our own exhibitions, talks, and various other duties.

The first residency I undertook at Youkobo was quite exploratory, and over a period of several months I absorbed as much as I could, while exploring and experimenting. This time my residency was much more focused on a specific artwork, but it nonetheless built on many of my prior experiences. Thanks to the hard work and support of the staff at Youkobo, I feel I was able to achieve a lot in a very short space of time, and although the pressure was intense I made more progress with my new work than I had expected to. This residency was an opportunity for me to reconnect with Japan, to build on the previous experiences I had at Youkobo, and to open the door to a new stage in my work.

David Franklin  
February 15 2018

E-mail: [contact@davidfranklinonline.com](mailto:contact@davidfranklinonline.com)  
Website: [davidfranklinonline.com](http://davidfranklinonline.com)  
Facebook / Instagram: davidfranklinonline