Foreword

International travel has become, more than ever, part and parcel of the activity of the artist. However this is spurred less by historically rooted ideas around the value of the experience gained, and more by the globalised structure of the contemporary art world. Set against the background of a wider, expanded global culture, where a portion of the world’s population is familiar with travel between national capitals and tourist destinations, it is perhaps a relief to find that in the everyday aspects of lives in these places, it remains possible to detect the otherness of elsewhere.

These issues come very much to the fore in Saki Satom’s project To-Lo Tokyo–London art exchange. The Stephen Lawrence Gallery is therefore very pleased to have hosted the London stage of the project at The University of Greenwich as part of the gallery’s Borders and Identities season.

Six months earlier, Saki Satom completed a residency in Tokyo with two other London-based artists: Klega and Caroline McCarthy. These artists share a concern with materials and behaviour patterns located in the more mundane parts of every day life, low grade products and daily routines. As Hugues Le Roux points out in his catalogue essay for the Japanese part of the exchange, while the visiting artists’ response to this material in Tokyo was reflective of concerns brought over from London, for the Tokyo audience the work generated “also reflected their own city back to them”.

In April it was London’s turn, where, sustained by traditional bed & “full English” breakfast, Japanese artists in residence Midori Mitamura and The Are You Meaning Company enquired into (among other things) notice boards, nursery rhymes, postcards, wallpaper and waiting rooms. Again, in the resulting work, our own realities have been reflected back to us while we also gain insight into our visitors’ preoccupations and ideas.

The subsequent exhibition, at the Stephen Lawrence Gallery (21st April – 16th May) presented work emerging from the London residency alongside work by Klega, McCarthy and Satom. The dialogue that emerged was gently able to tease into view the structures that created it. While the project necessarily exists somewhere within the machine of global art production, it has been able, through its focus on the everyday in both cities, to present a refreshing account of cultural exchange.

The Stephen Lawrence Gallery is grateful to Saki Satom and all the participating artists for their invaluable contribution towards the successful completion of this project and to the Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation, The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation and The University of Greenwich for their generous financial support.

David Waterworth
Curator, Stephen Lawrence Gallery
May 2008
To-Lo-To-…

To-Lo’s art exchange returns to London, bringing back with it the works made by those artists who went to Tokyo, and bringing with it also those artists from Tokyo who will in turn be briefly resident in London, to live, experience, think and make work. To-Lo has made the international round trip, so to speak, and in doing so continues the exchange of people and things, and the dialogue between artists and artworks. What can we see in the works that have come to London, and what can we say of the experience of coming and going, of making and moving, of transition, exchange, translation and displacement?

Let’s say, straight away, that when it comes to visual artworks, the notion of translation is much overrated. It would be easy to resort to the clichés of the film like ‘Lost in Translation’ to remark on the experience of displacement and disorientation that the European visitor to Tokyo, or the Japanese visitor to London, must undoubtedly feel when faced, for the first time, with the other city. It is an experience made up of a mix of contrasting, social, architectural, visual, cultural and – above all – linguistic differences that makes each place endlessly exotic to the visiting stranger.

But if language always suffers in translation, visual artworks are different. Languages necessarily can only be translated one into the other, so that we can never, in fact, ‘check against’ the original, unless we speak both languages – in which case, it is no longer translation in the full sense, but recognition. Artworks, however, always look like what they look like, independent of who is looking at them: it is impossible to ‘translate’ an object visually. It is only possible to ‘speak differently’ of an artwork, but – given that even within one language culture many people can speak differently of the same artwork – this is a common condition of the relationship between visual artworks and the language we bring to them. And this common condition is what an artist in Tokyo shares with an artist in London. The act of looking, rather than speaking, connects us across countries and cultures.

But while the object remains the same, the way we look at it is, in part, conditioned by how we speak about it; the conventions, fashions and traditions that influence how we look at things, and which influence how we look at things in terms of ‘art’. As a project of exchange, To-Lo makes the important point of bringing the works made by artists in response to one location back to the city they came from, to present them a second time to a different audience. Because each artist responded to the experience of their visit in the work they made, each work is in some way marked by that experience. The artists involved examine their own sense of dislocation from the local meaning of the things they experience, as in Klega’s chopstick sculpture or Caroline McCarthy’s sushi made from toilet-paper papier mâché. What might these strange, self-conscious objects mean to their Tokyo viewer, and in what ways might this contrast to her London counterpart, for whom chopsticks and sushi are already defined by their strangeness, their otherness? The object remains the same, yet its effect changes.

The works of the To-Lo exchange project fold back on themselves to reveal that both making and viewing artworks depends on where and who we are. Because their subject is really about the artists finding themselves becoming a stranger, being elsewhere, conscious of their displacement, the works are, we might argue, perpetually ‘homeless’ – homeless in their place of first presentation, and yet no more at rest when they return to where the artist ‘comes from’ – because the work now refers to a ‘somewhere else’. But as they maintain this tension between here and there, they make us understand that, as they move between the two, the experience of strangeness and homelessness is something we come to share with each other – only the particulars are reversed. It’s no longer a question of translation from one language to another, but the recognition of mutuality that is promised in the act of exchange itself. Being neither in one place nor another, the works and artists involved in To-Lo offer us the possibility of becoming a community whose common trait is the recognition that our difference is of little importance. In an epoch where cultural difference has become a way of holding back the great and positive dynamic of mutual encounter offered by the globalisation of a shrinking world, the works made through the To-Lo exchange remind us that artworks always hope that we will speak of them in the same language – whichever language that happens to be.

JJ Charlesworth
Chiaki Sakaguchi interviews Saki Satom

Chiaki: Why did you organise To-Lo Art Exchange?
Saki: I was going back and forth between London and Tokyo and wondered whether I couldn’t put those travels to use. Also there were a lot of things I learned from my own experience of artists’ residencies. It was a challenge for me as an artist to make work within a short period of time and to make work that existed in dialogue with my temporary surroundings. So I thought it would be interesting to invite artists from one city to the other and vice versa. At the end of both residencies, we wanted to stress ideas and processes rather than formal outcomes, so we put on informal open-house-style shows rather than finished exhibitions, encouraging participants to experiment and to show works in progress. This is unusual in Tokyo but not in London. I felt that the art works I see in Tokyo are often beautifully finished products, but a little conservative in conception, so I thought it would be good to put on a different kind of exhibition, placing more emphasis on ideas and process. It was also important to do this in both cities.

Chiaki: What were your criteria in choosing artists?
Saki: First, I was looking for artists who are making good work of course, but I also wanted to find artists who would react flexibly to new situations—and with whom I would get along.

Chiaki: Wasn’t it difficult to do a residency and show in just 2 weeks?
Saki: Yes, but having myself done a couple of 2-week residencies I knew it would work. Having to respond to an unfamiliar situation and make new work in just 2 weeks is a good challenge, it gets your adrenalin going. You have to use your imagination to make something happen—and to make it happen quickly! It can be upsetting, but all the artists reacted very calmly.

Chiaki: How did you feel on completion?
Saki: It was great to watch as the artists responded to local conditions and took up local materials while developing their long-standing concerns and methods. And I was intrigued by some of the coincidences that came up—I think in a situation like this coincidences do occur. For instance Midori Mitamura happened to bring music composed by a Japanese composer, the tune of which was, she found, exactly same as “London Bridge Is Falling Down”. That led her to make a new video installation. Are You Meaning Company got an idea from the office partitions and plinths in the exhibition place, and used them to make a big bench on which people could sit and relax. The artists could make these works, of course, because they were alert to the multiple uses and meanings of these materials. Also, they knew I’m an artist and not a curator, so we helped each other and went about our work in a way that was friendly and relaxed.

Chiaki: Why do you curate when you are an artist?
Saki: Why shouldn’t an artist curate shows? I want people to be exposed to interesting ideas and art works, to ideas and works that relate to my own interests. I don’t think these are 2 separate categories. My own work concerns itself with relationships and social patterns, and I suppose that’s what I’m concerned with as a curator as well.

Chiaki: Wasn’t it a lot of work, finding grants and so on?
Saki: As an artist I often have to do that sort of work anyway, I don’t just spend my time making work in my studio, I find grants and look for the optimal spaces for the display of my work. The only difference is that as a curator I did it on behalf of other artists as well. Here I received a lot of help from the gallery curator, David Waterworth, and his staff.

Chiaki: What is your next plan?
Saki: It would be interesting to continue the To-Lo project. I would like to work on a bigger scale; this time it was put on by a small group, so there were of course clear limits to what we could do. It would be great if we had venues in both cities, and the assistance of support staff. And it would be fun if more people could be involved in the project.
Are You Meaning Company
Born in Tokyo, Japan. Lives and works in Berlin.

This gallery is not only an exhibition space, but also a passageway between a conference room and a lecture room: it’s a place where students wait before lectures. Are You Meaning Company turned office furniture into a bench and in so doing turned the passageway into a distinct space, which functioned as a kind of waiting room. *The Bench* was an experiment to see how different concepts of value could be combined in everyday objects.

アーユーミーニング カンパニー
東京都出身、ベルリン在住

この展示スペースは、大学構内の教室へ続く通路の一端にあり、生徒達が行き交い授業前に彼らが待つ場所でもあります。そこに、アーユーミーニングカンパニーは、そこにあった間仕切りを倒し、ベンチ/場所を制作しました。

日常のモノ
1. 日常の中で役割を果たす→組み合わせ作品へ
2. 展覧の対象物になる→新たなモノに変化
3. 日常の役割に戻る。

このプロジェクトは、展示スペースにて、人々がモノを通常とは違うカタチで見た場合、どのように反応するのかを見る実験でもありました。
Midori Mitamura
Born in Nagoya, Aichi prefecture. Lives and works in Tokyo.

Mitamura takes inspiration from memories and documents of the past, and reconstructs them in visual creations that carry narrative impulsions. Rondo-n was inspired by guitar music from Japan which had the same chords as "London Bridge Is Falling Down". She combined the two songs and reconstructed photo images of the sights she saw and the places where she stayed during her time in London, thereby making a video work that seems to convey a number of mysterious, interwoven short stories.
To-Lo Video Screening: recent video art from Japan

Curated by Chiaki Sakaguchi and Saki Satom
Video compilation shown in conjunction with the exhibition.

Video screening artists

Kyoko Ebata
Taro Izumi
Meiro Koizumi
Hikaru Suzuki
Chikako Yamashiro

Kyoko Ebata
Born in Tokyo, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo.
This work is a series of portraits of people on the train in Tokyo. Each portrait has a title from a famous film as if lining up in a rental video shop. In this series of work, the viewer is given the opportunity to look at people long enough to undermine the separation between their public and private selves. But even such long observation does not provide reliable insights into the personalities of the models.
Taro Izumi
Born in Nara, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo.

Most of Taro Izumi's works are based on his performances, and subject them to complex editing processes. He combines videos in low-key installations brimming with black humour. In "Lime Lake", Izumi’s figures are captured in CCTV like footage and smacked and squashed with the palm of a giant hand like mosquitoes.

Meiro Koizumi
Born in Gunma, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo.

Koizumi’s video installations use repetition and awkward timing to prompt feelings of both hilarity and distress in the viewer. In Human OperaXXX a man with a scar on his forehead is invited onto a cheap film set to tell his own tragic story in front of a video camera. But as his story unfolds, the artist interrupts by giving him unnecessary props and directions, the whole situation slowly descending into absurdity.

Hikaru Suzuki
Born in Fukushima, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo.

Suzuki tries to understand the world order by looking at a room as the smallest unit of a landscape. Based on a highly popular family cartoon in Japan, Doraemon is a series of short edits and scenes from the interior and exterior of a cartoon house. The scenes chosen are those in which nobody appears – a collection of voids in the house.

Chikako Yamashiro
Born in Okinawa, Japan. Lives and works in Naha, Okinawa.

Japan’s southernmost island Okinawa, formerly the Ryukyu Kingdom, has a unique culture involving complex ancestral beliefs. With its American base, the island has had a bitter post-war history. Yamashiro’s work touches on the past and culture of the island in humorous, layered reconstructions.
ト・ロ・アート エクスチェンジが、短期間ながらロンドンでのレジデンシーを生活経験し、考え、作品制作するために、東京に行き作品制作の作家と、今度はさらに東京からの作家を引き連れてロンドンに戻って来た。ト・ロ展は、いわば国際間での往復旅行をしたのだ。そうする事により人と事柄、そして作家と美術作品との対話を交流の中で行く。ロンドンに来た作家は何が見て取り、その行ったり来たりの経験、作品制作と移動、解釈や置き換えなどから何が言えるだろうか。

まず、すぐに言える事は、視覚芸術では解釈という概念は過大評価されすぎているという事だ。西欧人訪問者が東京に行こうと、日本人訪問者がロンドンに来るのだろうと、他の都市へ行ったその旅の始めにはまず間違いなく直面する感覚である置き換えや混乱の経験をロスト・イン・トランスレーションのような映画のように述べるのはありきたりで安易であるだろう。それは、対比や社会、建築、視覚的に見える物や文化などが混ざり合って出来る経験で、そして何よりまず言語の違いが訪れる外国人にとってそれぞれの場所を終わり無く魅惑的な場所にし続けるのだ。

だが、もし言語がいつも解釈の点で不利であるとしたら視覚芸術はそれとは違う。言語は1つの言語から他の言語へと必然的に翻訳される、だから我々は決して実際にそのオリジナルと比較しチェックする事が出来ない。両方の言語が話せる場合を除いてはいあいにしてもそれはもう完全な意味での翻訳では無く、認識である。美術作品はかならず誰がそれを見るかという視覚的に見た目は変化が無い：作品を視覚的に翻訳する事は不可能である。美術作品を違う視点で解釈する事においては、1つの言語文化内で同じ作品も如何に違うかを言語と視覚芸術と言語の関係共通する状況である。そしてこの共通する状況は東京側の作家とロンドン側の作家が分かち合った物である。見ることの行為は話すより国や文化をつなげるのである。

だから、その物体の見た目と同じにとどまっているとしても、それをどのように話すかによってはある程度解釈が異なる：慣習、ファッション、伝統等、また美術芸術内に置いている私が物をどう見たかに影響を及ぼす。交流プロジェクトとしてト・ロは滞在した都市における反応として作られた作品を、今度は違う観賞者に提示するという重要な点をついている。各作家は作品にその訪問の経験を反映させている。そのため各作品はどこかにおいてその点ではその経験によって特徴づけられている。グレードの若者やカリスマ、マッサージのトヨペットベーカーで作った寿司のように、経験その地方で定義されている物語から自分が感じた転置/混沌に注目する。この奇妙な大衆化の強い物体は東京の観賞者にどういう意味をもたらしたのだろうか。そして言葉や素材が既に異文化的な物であると定義されているロンドンの観賞者にはどのような対比をもたらしたのか、その物体と同じ、効果が変わるのだ。

ト・ロ交流プロジェクトは私達がどこにいるか、または誰であるかにもとって作品を制作と観賞の両方であなたという折り返しの出来るプロジェクトである。なぜなら彼女のプロジェクトは、実は作家自身が新来者になり、どこか他の地に身を置いてその転置を意識し、そしてその結果としての作品は永遠に「ホームレス」であるというわけではない。そうした一連の作業の場所でホームレスで、しかし彼らがそこから所属する場所に戻って来た時でも休む所は無い：なぜならその作品は今では「どこか他の場所」を言語としているからだ。しかしこの「ここ」と「そこ」の間での緊張を維持し、その2ヶ所を移動した事で、奇妙さや日常さの経験がどうにして分かち合えるか我々に理解させる——ただその詳細が裏返されているだけなのだ。

それは既に1つの言語から他の言語への翻訳では無くその交流自体で約束された相互関係の認識である。ト・ロに参加した作家と作品は1つの場所でも他の場所にいる訳でも無く、その共通の特徴は認識で我々の違いはあまり重要でない。と私達が共通体になり得る可能性を提供する。新時代における文化の違いはグローバル化の報ずる世界によって提供された相互間の出会いの、従って可能で異なるダイナミズムを遅らせる手段になった。何もかれアートエクスチェンジで制作された作品は、美術作品はいつも同じ言語で話しかけて来るという希望を我々に思い出させてくれる——どの言語を使うにしろ。JJ・チャールズワース
坂口千秋インタビュー サキサトム

Chiaki: なぜト・ロを企画したのですか?
Saki: 東京とロンドンを行き来する生活をしていて、この状況を使って何か出来ないかと思って最初です。知らないところへ行って地域と関わりながら、作家としてどう取り組むかを学ぶことが多かったので、それぞれの都市から作家を呼んで滞在制作してもらったら面白いと思いました。作家が何を作りたいのかという部分が見えて面白かったから、より実験的で活動的になれるオープンハウス形式を選びました。ロンドンでこうした展覧会は珍しくないのですが、東京ではあまり見られないようですね。東京で見る展覧会は完成度が高いけど、ちょっとおとなしくて消費的に感じたので、もっとアイディアに重点を置いた気軽な展覧会があってもいいのではないか、という気持ちもありました。両方の都市でやることが重要だったんです。

Chiaki: どういう基準で作家を選んだのですか?
Saki: 第一に良い作品を作っていて、そして色々な状況下で柔軟に反応してくれそうな作家で、あとは私、うまく合っている人。

Chiaki: なぜアーティストなのか他人の企画をするんですか?
Saki: 作家が企画しても別にいいじゃない？いい作品は見て欲しいと思うし、それは自分の作品であっても他の人の作品であっても同じ。領域をひとつに区切る必要はないですよね。私はいつも自分の生活の中での社会との関わりに興味があるので、他の作家と展覧会をすることも関係あるかもしれない。

Chiaki: 次にやってみたいことは？
Saki: ト・ロはまた続けに行く面白いかと思います。今回は自分がマネージ出来る限界だったから、次はもう少し大きな規模でやりたい。そのためには、ロンドンと東京の両方にベースがあって、どちらにも一緒に仕事が出来るスタッフがいるといい。もっといろんな人を絡めていきたいですね。

Chiaki: 約2週間で滞在制作、発表というのは短くないですか?
Saki: 自分が経験した2週間のリゾートに突入があったから。今ある環境の中で短期間で何が出来るかという点で挑戦で、アドレナリンがすごく出ますよ、やらなきゃ！って、作家はみんなとてもクールに対処してくれました。
To-Lo Tokyo - London art exchange
This project is organised by Saki Satom and David Waterworth

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Exhibition schedule
Residency: 7 April–16 April 2008
Exhibition: 21 April–21 May 2008
The Stephen Lawrence Gallery, Queen Anne Court The University of Greenwich,
Old Royal Naval College Park Row, London SE10 9LS, UK

Participating artists
Residency artists: Are You Meaning Company, Midori Mitamura
Exhibiting artists: Klega, Caroline McCarthy, Saki Satom
(Curated by Saki Satom)

Video Screening artists
Kyoko Ebata, Taro Izumi, Meiro Koizumi, Hikaru Suzuki, Chikako Yamashiro
(Curated by Chiaki Sakaguchi and Saki Satom)

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