

Hara Museum of Contemporary Art

Press Release 2016/01/26

Hara Documents 10: Masaharu Sato - Tokyo Trace

January 23 (Saturday) – May 8 (Sunday), 2016



[1] *Tokyo Trace*, 2015 - 2016 12-channel video

This spring, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art is proud to present *Masaharu Sato - Tokyo Trace*, the tenth installment of the Hara Documents exhibition series.

Masaharu Sato meticulously and precisely traces each frame of video footage with a software pen to produce hundreds of frames needed for a single animation. This time-consuming, seemingly pointless process results in the subtle difference with reality that gives Sato's animations their unique and intriguing quality. Sato perfected this method in his previous work *Calling* (2009-2010) which drew much attention in Japan. In his newest work *Tokyo Trace* (2015), Sato presents a number of vignettes of present-day Tokyo in which he extends the idea of tracing to the act of "shadowing." *Tokyo Trace*, *Calling* and newly created two-dimensional art comprise the centerpieces of the exhibition.

[Artist Profile]

Born in Oita, Japan in 1973, Sato received an M.F.A. in painting at Tokyo University of the Arts in 1999. He studied sculpture at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, Germany from 2000 to 2002. He received the Special Award at the 12th Taro Okamoto Award for Contemporary Art in 2009. He has held solo exhibitions at the Kawasaki City Museum (Kanagawa) in 2013 and Gallery αM (Tokyo) in 2014. He has participated in group exhibitions that include the 6th DANDANS exhibition *No Man's Land* in the former building of the French Embassy, Tokyo in 2010, *Duality of Existence – Post Fukushima* at Friedman Benda (New York) in 2014 and *Everyday Life/Off the Record* at KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theater (Yokohama) also in 2014. He resides in Toride city in Ibaraki prefecture.

Official website: <http://masaharu-sato.tumblr.com/>

[What is Hara Documents?]

The Hara Documents exhibition series was launched in 1992 to promote the work of curators and emerging artists. Made possible by contributions from Hara Museum supporting members, Hara Documents has been held nine previous times, the first featuring Miran Fukuda in 1992 and the last Masako Ando in 2012. It has placed a spotlight on creators active in fields other than the fine arts such as the doll designer Namie Manabe, creator of the "fashion doll" Momoko.

[Detailed Information]

"Following the other, one replaces him, exchanges lives, passions, wills, transforms oneself in the other's stead. It is perhaps the only way man can finally fulfill himself. An ironic way, but all the more certain."

--Jean Baudrillard^{*1}

Masaharu Sato entered the faculty of painting at Tokyo University of the Arts. According to the artist, during his time at the school, he found no meaning in painting and never picked up a brush, even as a graduate student, turning instead to conceptual art and installation. Having come to an impasse in his art making, he eventually traveled to Germany and ended up staying for ten years. By the end of his stay, he had developed a unique approach towards animation.

The process that Sato developed is based on the meticulous tracing of actual video images. He uses a movie camera to shoot ordinary scenes of people or landscapes, and then uses a software pen on his computer to lay down one line after another. His goal is to "get as close to the video image as possible by emphasizing nothing and leaving no trace of his pen behind."² The immense time and labor, more than that required for an entire painting; the repetitive tracing of prosaic scenes captured by the camera's eye; the production of hundreds of frames that comprise the animation - this seemingly pointless process is one that produces the subtle difference with reality that makes Sato's work special.

All who face a work by Sato experience a momentary feeling of puzzlement. They sense something amiss in the apparently ordinary scene. They feel visual and emotional agitation instead of calm. This feeling is different for each person. Some feel a loneliness or dis-ease, others see a dystopia or some parallel world, while others feel nostalgia or humor. This variety of response seems to be a manifestation of the complexity or ambiguity that lies within the mundane. Let's examine one of the artworks in the exhibition entitled *Calling* (2009-2010), a piece in which Sato perfected his tracing technique and which garnered much attention in Japan.

Calling (German and Japanese versions)



[2]



[3]

Calling (German version), 2009 - 2010 animation, loop (7 minutes), single-channel video

Sato describes the act of tracing as a kind of ritual by which he subsumes within himself the subject he is tracing, a process that may be likened to a painter who by carefully copying a famous painting, vicariously experiences the creation of the work to arrive at its essence. In the German version of *Calling* (2009-2010), Sato traced 12 neighborhood scenes, interweaving within them subtle indications of the passage of time. One senses in this act of tracing an attempt to understand and forge a closer bond with a land, the city of Düsseldorf, where he had spent 10 years without ever finding a sense of place. We hear the abrupt ringing of a phone, a sound that seems to signify Sato's loneliness and anxiety, exacerbated by his inability to communicate or connect in a foreign land, and also the faint hope of breaking through the feelings of despair and entrapment.



[4]



[5]

Calling (Japanese version), 2014 animation, loop, single-channel video

The Japanese version of *Calling* (2014) appeared in *Duality of Existence - Post Fukushima* held at Friedman Benda in 2014. Sato created the work after living through the Great East Japan Earthquake which struck shortly after his return to Japan, and consecutive bouts of illness experienced by himself and another member of his family. Like the German version, he traced ordinary scenes in the city where he lived. Also like the German version, there is the constant ringing of a telephone. Here, the artist's directs his gaze not only within himself, but extends it also to the outside, to streets devoid of people which convey the anxiety and loneliness of an abandoned city.

Tokyo Trace (new work)

"..a wonderful reciprocity exists in the cancellation of each existence, in the cancellation of each subject's tenuous position as a subject."

*--Jean Baudrillard^{*3}*



[6]



[7]



[8]



[9]

[6][7][8][9] *Tokyo Trace*, 2015 - 2016 12-channel video

The graphic designer Shuji Sugihara, a friend of Sato, once characterized Sato's tracing as a kind of "shadowing."⁴ Sato said this description made him realize why he had come use tracing as the basis of his work. When shadowing someone, you follow him or her without being noticed. During that time, you share that person's time, space and thoughts, and simultaneously consign in him or her your time, space and thoughts. Through shadowing, Sato subsumes the subject within himself and at the same time is released from the role as subject. It was this act that allowed him to make a smooth return to the practice of drawing and art making after a hiatus of many years.

Conscious of this new understanding, Sato began making his newest work *Tokyo Trace* for the present exhibition. The results are animations based on videos that he took while walking around Tokyo in 2015. In his experience of the city, Sato was guided by the things he shadowed, which he eventually made into the subjects of his work. These ranged from the iconic to the mundane, such as the Japanese Diet Building, a hydraulic shovel at a construction site, people crossing a pedestrian overpass, ice cream and an alley cat.

What makes these new pieces different from his previous work is the fact that only a part of the actual footage is traced. By animating only a part of the image, Sato draws a clear distinction between the animated part and the underlying layer of real video, making it clear that the video is a unification of fact and fiction, something to which viewers paid no attention in his previous animations. Furthermore, the animus one senses in the animated, i.e., the fictional part, is different and perhaps even more real than the animus that inhabits the factual part. This contrast draws attention to the ambiguity between the real and unreal in the things that we see, even as it underscores the potential that lies in the unreal.

Today, work continues everywhere in Tokyo to shore up buildings against earthquakes. The city is also starting to gear up for the Olympics four years from now. In a way perhaps analogous to the time of the Tokyo Olympic half a century ago, a vast change may occur not only in the external appearance of the city, but also in the values, customs and character of the Japanese and their society. But even as these tracings/shadowings of modern-day Tokyo trigger in viewers complex feelings of hope, anticipation, fear or anxiety towards the future, they may also provide premonitions of a great many unknowns that will take shape from now.

Of the two-dimensional works included in this exhibition, Sato says, "through the act of tracing, I use drawing to copy a subject that is itself a copy."⁵ In these works, Sato uses a structure that straddles photography and drawing to explore the current situation and aura of art within an era of reproduction.

* 1 Jean Baudrillard, *Please Follow Me* in Sophie Calle's *True Stories*, Bay Press, 1988 (translated by Dany Barash and Danny Hartfield), p. 189

* 2 Sugihara Shuji blog, <http://artbookwho.com/modules/wordpress/index.php?p=68>

* 3 Jean Baudrillard, op. Cit., P. 189

* 4 Shuji Sugihara blog, <http://artbookwho.com/modules/wordpress/index.php?p=68>

* 5 *Masaharu Sato 1 x 1 = 1* (brochure of exhibition at imura art gallery, April 18 - May 23, 2015)



[10] *Bye bye come on*, 2010 animation, loop, single-channel video

[Exhibition Details]

Title: *Hara Documents 10: Masaharu Sato - Tokyo Trace*

Dates: January 23 (Saturday) - May 8 (Sunday), 2016

Venue: Hara Museum of Contemporary Art (Galleries I and II)

4-7-25 Kitashinagawa, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo 140-0001 Tel: 03-3445-0651

E-mail: info@haramuseum.or.jp Website: <http://www.haramuseum.or.jp>

Mobile site: <http://mobile.haramuseum.or.jp> Blog: <http://www.art-it.asia/u/HaraMuseum>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/haramuseum> (in Japanese only / account name: @haramuseum)

Organized by: Hara Museum of Contemporary Art

Supported by: Hara Museum Supporting Membership

Special Cooperation provided by: imura art gallery

Hours: 11:00 am - 5:00 pm, Wednesdays until 8:00 pm (except national holiday / last entry 30 minutes before closing)

Closed: Mondays (except March 21), March 22

Admission: General 1,100 yen; Students 700 yen (high school and university) or 500 yen (elementary and junior high); Free for Hara Museum members, students through high school every Saturday during the school term; 100 yen discount per person for groups of 20 or more.

Directions to the museum: 5 minutes by taxi or 15 minutes on foot from JR Shinagawa Station (Takanawa exit); or from the same station take the No.96 bus, get off at the first stop (Gotenyama), and walk 3 minutes

Related Event: *Meet the Artist: Masaharu Sato*

To be announced. Details will be posted on the Hara Museum website at a later date.

Concurrent exhibition: *Trace: Selections from the Hara Museum Collection* (Galleries III, IV and V)

As the title implies, this show features works that relate in one way or another with the tracing method used by Masaharu Sato in *Hara Documents 10*. For example, in Sophie Calle's *Exquisite Pain* (Part 2), the artist tries to relativize her own unhappiness by tracing the unhappiness of others, while Yasumasa Morimura impersonates the subjects in famous paintings and contemporary icons in order to "copy" that painting or that person.

For publicity materials, please contact the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art (Watanabe, Kajita) by telephone or e-mail.
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