

# The Reflective Eye

Haruka Kojin produces artwork that beckons the viewer to another world.

“reflectwo” exhibited in the *Genbi Shinkansen*

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NATURAL phenomena are full of surprises, wonder and fear for young children, who are completely free from common sense or conventional thinking. Artist Haruka Kojin expresses such pure sensibilities in her work, separating the viewer’s consciousness from reality and intuitively leading them to another world.

“When I was in kindergarten, I was lying on my back, doing gymnastics. Seeing the sky’s texture, I was overcome by a fear that my body would be taken in. I have had so many feelings and emotions since I was small,” says Kojin. Partially because of her mother’s advice, “That’s important for you, so you shouldn’t forget it,” Kojin kept talking to others about her strange experiences since she was a little girl.

When she was in the third grade in junior high school, such

an experience connected with art for the first time. She saw work by young British artists at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art. “I felt so connected to every piece of artwork exhibited there and how I had told people about my strange experiences in the past. I was very shocked. For the first time in my life, I learned that one could express oneself in this way.”

Without hesitation Kojin decided to pursue a vocation in the art world, and entered the Department of Intermedia Art of the Tokyo University of the Arts. Immediately her talent began to blossom. The work she produced for graduation called “reflectwo” received the “Graduation Works Purchase Award 2007,” in which the university purchases one work from each department each year to exhibit at the University Art Museum, Tokyo University of the Arts. The work “reflectwo” was inspired by the scenery reflected on the surface of a river at the



“Day With a Man’s Face Floating in the Sky” on show at the Utsunomiya Museum of Art, 2014

moment when the river stops flowing. Colorful artificial flower petals are superimposed vertically and symmetrically from the center line of the work, resembling shoreline plants reflected on the surface of water. The work was also exhibited in museums in Sao Paulo and New York.

After graduating from the graduate school of the Tokyo University of the Arts in 2009, Kojin



Haruka Kojin (center) with Kenji Minamigawa (left) and Hirofumi Masui  
Photo: Tsushima Takahiro

continued to enthusiastically create artwork, attracting more and more attention.

### **Me**

In 2012, Kojin formed a group of contemporary artists called “Me” (meaning “eye/s” in Japanese) with Kenji Minamigawa and Hirofumi Masui, stepping into a new form of expression by ending her individual activity.

“I thought that if three of us try seriously, we could go beyond our respective past work,” says Kojin. “Each of us has a basic shared role - concept development, general direction, and embodiment of work. My inspirational source - embodying phenomena into work - is the same, but the process leading to its completion has completely changed.”

One of the major works of Me to date is “Day With a Man’s Face Floating in the Sky,” showcased as an outdoor project at the Utsunomiya Museum of Art in 2014. Inspired by a dream of a man’s face floating in the sky over a town like the moon, which Kojin had when she was a junior high school student, one face was chosen from 218 photo applicants, which was

then made into a huge balloon-like object to float in the sky over the town for two days. This created a sensation, with “babies crying out, people falling down laughing, and even some old lady shedding tears on the bridge. We had so many reactions.”

“Elemental Detection,” which was exhibited at Saitama Triennale 2016, is another work that shot into the limelight. The group created a fictitious pond with glass-like material at the site of a ruined former ethnic cultural center, beckoning visitors to another world.

“Reflecting the sky, the mirror appeared to be a pond so real that dragonflies came to lay eggs by mistake,” says Kojin. “One elderly woman took off her shoes, rolled up the cuffs of her trousers and walked on the pond to the other side, saying, ‘I am very happy that I could have this experience before I die,’ with tears in her eyes.”

In April 2016, East Japan Railway Company (JR East) started

weekend operation of an eye-catching train running between Echigo-Yuzawa Station and Niigata Station on the Joetsu Shinkansen railway line, a service it dubs “the world’s fastest art appreciation.” Called the “*Genbi* Shinkansen” (“genbi” is shorthand for *gendai bijyutsu*, meaning “modern art”), the colorfully painted train showcases the work of Kojin among other artists inside the cars. The work is based on “reflectwo.” Kojin says, “When the train enters a tunnel, the artwork, illuminated in a showcase, is reflected on the window against the dark tunnel wall.” Passengers can enjoy a unique art experience in a moving space.

“People leave their house to go to an exhibition event by train. Even this moving path of people can be a work of art. I’m considering such a magnificent project,” says Kojin. “Once you step in, your daily life will change. It would be interesting if such a strange city exists.”

“Elemental Detection” exhibited at Saitama Triennale 2016  
Photo: Tsushima Takahiro

