

Dialogue — Deeper and Further

Artist Statement

Eyes of the Sky

I came to Fukuoka with a desire to construct kites in the forms of eyes, a motif which has been recurrent in my works. When I worked with a Vietnamese kite artisan I used a set of eyes to work with the feeling of a gaze I sometimes feel over me, humorously touching on anxiety and the difficulties I have with relationships.

The experience of kite flying is also something that I am fascinated with: the sense of freedom while connected by strings, feeling close and connected while the object is far away etc. We can note that a gaze too has an aspect that is far away and an aspect that can feel very close. To further explore the significance of kites as a medium for artistic practices, I decided to dedicate my residency as a time to explore our relationships with kites.

Looking for kites in Fukuoka City, soon enough it became evident that there are no kites that are considered traditional. While contemplating why that is the case, the article I stumbled across introduced the world of Shohei Suzuki, a poet who used to make Shiragidako. Suzuki started making the kite commonly known as Korean fighter kites in his 40s (around 1970s), remembering his childhood in Busan, South Korea, during the Japanese occupation. His kites reflect his personal life story of longing for the place where he grew up, while complex relationships between two countries linger for him.

Firstly, I visited a local shop that used to sell his kites and which produced the article I was reading. There I was introduced to a close friend of Suzuki who owns a collection of his kites and has countless memorable flying experiences with him. This friend then introduced me to another friend, a kite master who learned how to make kites from Suzuki. This series of encounters was not what I preconceived, but the research progressed effortlessly where an encounter brought me to another encounter with someone who would introduce someone new. This sense of discovery was fascinating in its own right, allowing people to dictate how I discovered about Suzuki, while my interests grew and grew in all sorts of directions. It was as if I was a kite swimming in the sky.

In parallel to this, I visited workshops of artisans in different regions in Kyushu: Iki Island, Nagasaki, Hirado and Kita-kyushu. This was a great opportunity to learn ways of making kites and saw numerous examples.

Kites were once a popular toy for children, but now they are generally regarded as regional souvenirs that tell local stories and for some areas became like a mascot of the city. Kites seemed to have lost their ability to fly here. Or perhaps we are meant to imagine them flying in our minds. Furthermore, people in this field are aging and we are losing artisans who could make kites that require a certain set of skills. For some, material sourcing has become more challenging since associated manufactures such as paper makers and bamboo shops are also reducing in numbers. It felt like the fate of their kites rely on these artisans' passion.

Now, as the residency comes to an end, I am making my own kites with the help of people, experimenting with different ways of making, and thinking about it day and night. The main piece will be a set of eyes flown individually, where two flyers may try to form a pair of eyes up in the sky. Allowing the flyers and winds to dictate the look (or the gaze) of the piece reflects my experience of this residency well.

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