

# Arising from the Margins

## Artist Statement

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Azumino in Nagano Prefecture where we live, is the home to Azumizoku (安曇族), who inherits the memory of the people by the sea. Although it is located in an inland area, *Ofune matsuri* (お船まつり), a traditional festival in which people carry huge boat-shaped structures and crush the two boats representing men and women, is performed inside the shrine. As if we were to follow the sea route that our ancestors passed through, we researched the indigenous people in Taiwan, Indonesia, and Malaysia. Moreover, during this residency we also studied about Azumino Isora (安曇磯良), the ancestor figure of Azumizoku, who is enshrined in Shikaumi Shrine in Shikanoshima, the island located on the way of our journey to the previously mentioned regions. We went to see the Isorazuka (磯良塚, a huge piece of sacred stone) in the Fuurogu Shrine, and also the *Isora Ebisu* (磯良恵比須, the stone of worship in which the God is believed to dwell) in the Wadatsumi Shrine in Tsushima where we found *Funaguro* boat. *Funaguro* is the ritual conducted by rowing a boat, which invites the God of the sea, believed to be hiding at the bottom of the ocean.

The landscape of islands which we saw as students on a ferry trip to Busan, felt like a déjà vu to us, evoking memories of the sea route that our ancestors had traveled. The name *Isora*, derived from the scale-patterned stone we saw during that trip in Tsushima called *Isora Ebisu*, which was surrounded by the *Mihashira Torii* (三柱鳥居, triangle-structured shrine gate), left an unforgettable impression on us. The boat that we made from connected seashells refers to this image of scale-patterned stone. *Isora* has its given name *Okurina* (諡) called *Ebisuhikonmikoto* (戎比古命). *Okurina* is an honorific title based on the belief that a person becomes a guardian deity after death. *Ebisu* is known as not only the God of fishery but also the God of water and *Hyo-chaku-shin* (漂着神), the God that exists in objects drifted by water or wind. *Isana* (勇魚), an ancient word meaning dolphin or whale, is also referred to as *Ebisu*. The boat that looks like a whale also is also linked with a memory related to the log boat, which symbolizes the hero of the Asmat people in the Papua region, which we saw in the National Museum of Indonesia in Jakarta.

*Uminonakamichi*, the tombolo that connects Shikanoshima through its sandbar was called *Uchiage-no-hama* in ancient times, where bright red seashells are washed up on the shore. We picked up these seashells and connected each piece together with *nikawa* (animal glue) to make a seashell boat. We have also found marine sponges that reached Shikanoshima through sea waves. Marine sponges are often associated with women as it was used for their makeup puffs or menstrual pads. We felt like we were following the track of the tide as we collected these sponges – after which we combined each piece using *nikawa* and strings. They turned into a boat for *Isora* that looks like a flower bouquet representing the ocean. The boat creates a place where two boats – a female boat crafted from marine sponges that belong to *Wadatsumi*, the God of the sea and a male boat consisting of seashells – conduct “funaguro” to call the God *Isora*.

Ohuri Park adjacent to our studio in Artist Cafe Fukuoka was an inlet called *Kusagae* (草香江). When we were going back to our accommodation from the studio, it was quite a nice feeling to walk down to Ohori Park where we saw an open landscape nearby water, with many people spending time walking or jogging around. It was like tracing back the memory embedded in this terrain of the inlet called *Kusagae*. Three small islands are bridged as to cross the *ohori* (pond) of the Maizuru Castle constructed after reclamation of the inlet area. The pathways of these islands built on a

place which used to be part of the sea, give us a feeling of tracing Uminonakamichi. We set up the sandbar in the gallery space so that it visually overlaps with those pathways that connect *Uminonakamichi* and *Kusagae*. This exhibition venue used to be the school kitchen of the former Maizuru Junior High School. Inside the Maizuru Castle, there was *Tsukushinomurotsumi* (筑紫館), which later been called *Korokan* (鴻臚館), a reception hall which welcomed diplomatic mission to Tang China. *Azumi-uji* (安曇氏, the family of Azumi) was appointed as *Naizen* (内膳), who served to work at the culinary department in the royal palace. During our research at the Shinpo-kan in Munakata Taisha (shrine), we saw a stone arrangement constructed on top of the miniature model of the giant rock representing Okinoshima Island. We also remember seeing decorated *kofun* (ancient tomb) and boat-shaped stone coffin. All of these different memories overlap on each other, woven into forms to create this whole space.

According to *Taiheiki* (太平記), a chronicle of medieval Japan, Atobeno (Azumino) Isora (阿度部磯良/安曇磯良), who lived at the bottom of the sea was invited to meet the Empress Jingu (神功皇后, Jingū-kōgō). At first Isora felt embarrassed to show up as abalones and oysters were sticking on his face. However, encouraged by the luring dances, Isora decided to come over to offer the Empress the sacred balls of *shiomitsutama* (潮盈珠) and *shiofurutama* (潮乾珠), loaned from the ocean, both of which possess spiritual power that controls the tides. Dances called *yudate kagura* (湯立神楽, performed in front of deity spirit by shrine maidens and priests who sprinkle hot boiled water with bamboo leaves) are performed as part of the *Mekari* (和布刈), a ritual conducted at the Mekari Shrine, where the *shiomitsutama* (潮盈珠) and *shiofurutama* (潮乾珠) are enshrined. Through our research on performing arts such as *Myobu no Mai* in Tsushima, or the night ritual dance *Isora no Mai* in the Takasu Shrine in Fukuoka, we encountered *Omura Kagurako* (大村神楽講); one of the *Buzen Kagura* (豊前神楽, rituals) which includes *yudate* influenced by *yamabushi* (山伏, ascetic), and is designated as Important Intangible Folk Cultural Properties by the ministry of culture. Together with *Omura Kagurako* and the Primitive Sense troupe from the SHINANO Primitive Sense Art Festival which we organize annually in summer in Omachi city of Nagano Prefecture, we present an improvisational performance of Isora, on the last day of the exhibition. We will be wearing the mask of Isora, crafted from pieces of seashell joined together with *nikawa*, and woven rush called *Chikugo Midori* of Fukuoka Prefecture. Through the performance, we wish to evoke memories of the boats by which the Azumizoku, the people of the sea had traveled.

## Sugihara Nobuyuki×Nakamura Ayaka

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1. *Isora of Path through the Sea*  
Shells, sponges, animal glue, powdered green tea, shell powder, cotton thread, whalebone, rush, horse hair, sand, stones, discarded fishing nets, and shelves/installations  
500cm × 1600cm × 243cm / 2024
2. *The Boat of Porifera - Yubutanomori*  
Sponges, animal glue, powdered green tea, and cotton thread / 243cm × 500cm × 74cm / 2024
3. *The Boat of Shells - Isana*  
Shells, animal glue, powdered green tea, and shell powder / 55cm × 65cm × 360cm / 2024
4. *Isora of Path through the Sea - The Mask of Isora (Ancestral Man)*  
Shells, whalebone, rush, and horse hair / 2024
5. *Isora of Path through the Sea - The Mask of Isora (Ancestral Woman)*  
Shells, animal glue, powdered green tea, shell powder, horse hair, and cord /  
40cm × 50cm × 8cm / 2024