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## On View | Japanese Artists Respond to Fukushima



*Courtesy of Friedman Benda Gallery, New York*

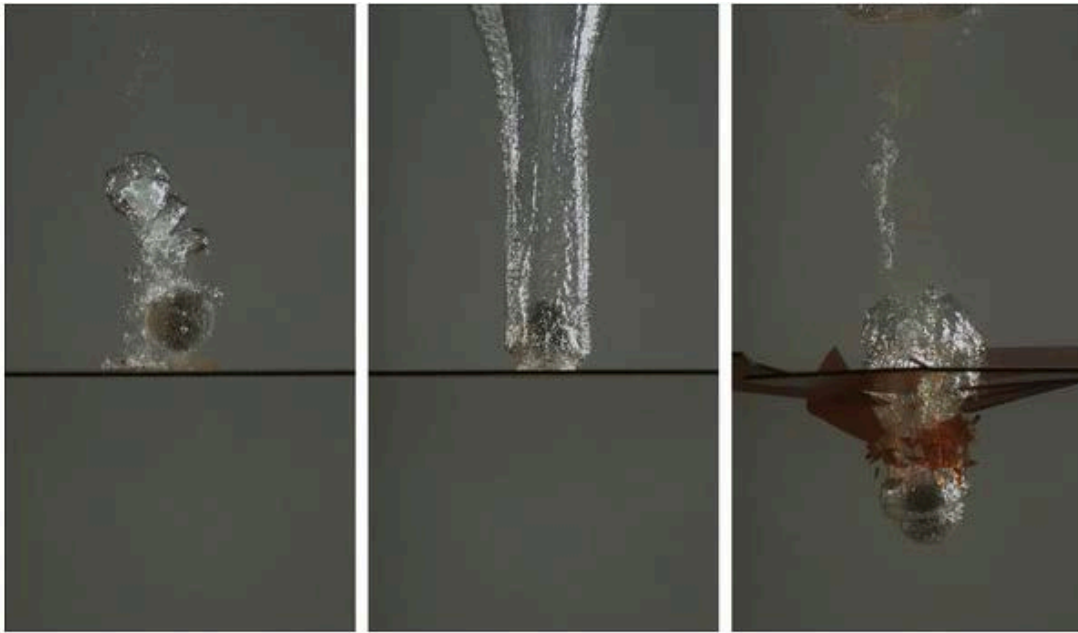
A painting, part of Yusuke Suga's "Swapping Tragedies" triptych (2012-2014) combines references to the Fukushima and 9/11 tragedies. The work is on view in a new group show at Friedman Benda in Chelsea.

More than three years after a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck the northern region of Japan, causing a tsunami that killed more than 15,000 people, its effects are still being felt. The impact of the tsunami and earthquake damaged some of the reactors in one nuclear plant in the city of Fukushima, causing radiation to escape into the area — and scarring the national psyche.

For the seven Japanese artists chosen for a group show opening this week at Friedman Benda gallery in Chelsea, called “Duality of Existence – Post Fukushima,” the subject of March 11, 2011 is personal. They were selected by the curators Thorsten Albertz and Reiko Tsubaki — who traveled through Japan to find what Albertz calls “a wide range of artists, from experienced to new” — to offer their perspectives on the events. Here, a few highlights from the exhibition and the stories behind them.

Rupani-Smith, Sylvia. ‘On View: Japanese Artists Respond to Fukushima,’ *New York Times*. June 27, 2014.

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Courtesy of Yamamoto Gendai

Motohiko Odani, "A Dead Man Sleeping," 2013.

**Motohiko Odani** chose to focus on the fragility of land in his piece "Dead Man Sleeping." The video, made last year, shows a heated iron ball dropped several times into a small aquarium filled with water, to varied results. "I wanted to see if it would break," the artist says. Like the ball, he explains, Japan is volatile: islands floating in the sea, subject to earthquakes.



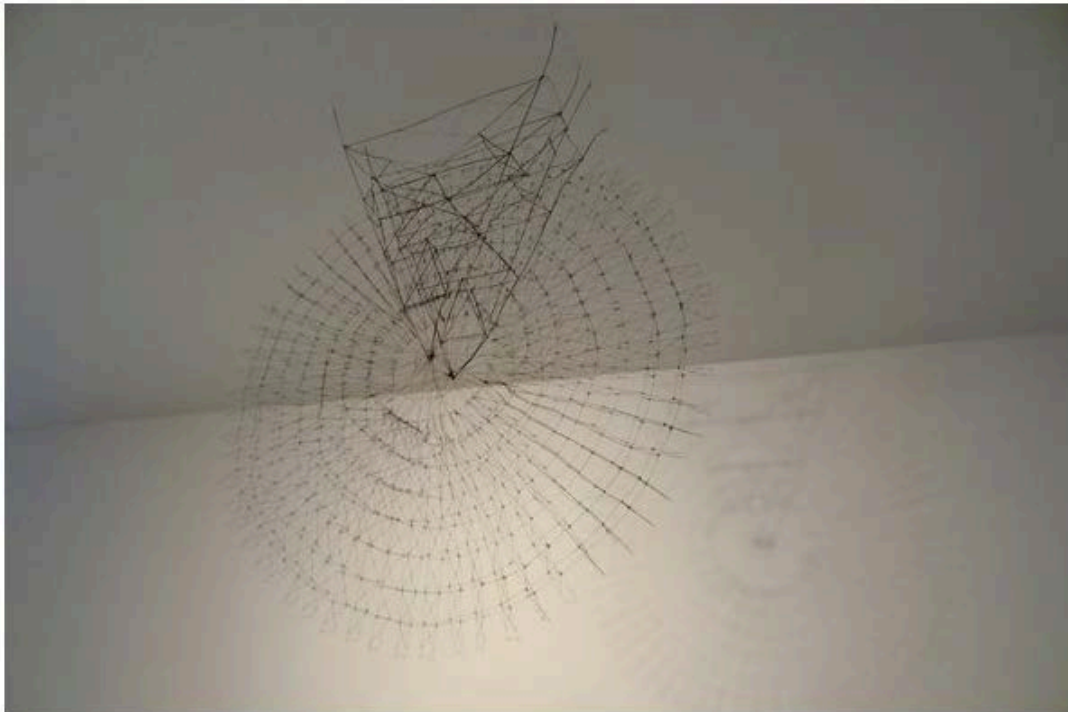
Courtesy of Friedman Benda Gallery, New York

Art collective Chim Pom's installation-in-progress, an adaptation of "I Like America and America Likes Me."

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Many of the featured artists experienced March 11 firsthand; in fact, some were close to the epicenter of the earthquake. The members of **Chim Pom**, an artist collective known for making strong political statements, actually traveled as close as they could to the damaged nuclear plant itself, and planted a white flag at the site, spray-painting it with the universal sign for radiation — which also bears a resemblance to the country’s Rising Sun flag, used during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The collective is planning a performance inspired by Joseph Beuys’s famous 1974 coyote-accompanied piece “I Like America and America Likes Me”; one member, currently barred from entering the United States, is hoping to clandestinely enter the country, coyote in tow.



*Courtesy of the artist*

Takahiro Iwasaki, "Out of Disorder (Ferris/Web)," 2014.

The artist **Takahiro Iwasaki** was in Yokohama, Japan’s second-largest city, when disaster struck. “There was no light, no electricity, it was dark,” he recalls. “The first thing to stop moving that I noticed was the ferris wheel. I was walking there at night, and saw it, unlit, and it resembled something like ancient ruins, like sculpture. It felt eerie. Without its electricity, it felt like it belonged elsewhere, like an imaginary world. It looked a lot like a spider web.” Iwasaki felt inspired to recreate the ferris wheel out of human hair to evoke its dark, delicate state. It’s one of three sculptures he created for the show.

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**Masaharu Sato**, an artist based in Ibaraki Prefecture, an area quite close to Fukushima, created “Calling,” an updated version of a film he initially made in Germany, where he lived for 10 years. Both the original and the update are 12-scene films which cover a time period from morning to night, with a phone in each scene. While in Germany, “I was a foreigner, and I called home a lot,” he explains. “I would wonder why no one would answer.” This, he explains, caused his mind to consider all sorts of possibilities for what might have gone wrong. For the Japanese version of the film, he wanted to portray the desolate mood and abandonment of the city. The final scene of the film takes place in a karaoke parlor; on the screen is the Japanese flag, with the national song playing.



Yusuke Suga's 2013 work "Mediator" is part sculpture, part film.

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**Yusuke Suga** took a more literal approach to depicting tragedy by creating a triptych that combines several events in history: the bombing of Hiroshima, 9/11 and Fukushima. “Swapping Tragedies,” his series of lenticular paintings, was inspired by Susan Sontag’s “Regarding the Pain of Others,” which examines how humans react to images of war photography and suffering. Another piece, “Mediator,” is a life-size statue of a motorcyclist with a projector inside of it; the film, a looped sequence of a road being driven, is displayed in the helmet, or the face of the rider, by using a mirror. “I wanted it to resemble a ghost, a zombie,” he said. “These days there’s so many ways to receive information, it can be overwhelming. It’s hard to strike a balance, to find identity.”

*“Duality of Existence – Post Fukushima” is on view from June 26 to Aug. 9 at Friedman Benda gallery, 515 West 26th Street, New York; [friedmanbenda.com](http://friedmanbenda.com).*

*Interviews have been translated by the writer from Japanese, edited and condensed.*