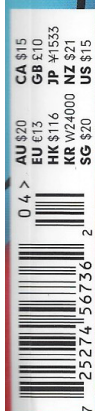


artasiapacific
Contemporary Visual Culture

LEN LYE, SHAHPOUR POUYAN, TIFFANY CHUNG,
IN TERMS OF ART, KOREAN BIENNALES, TAYEBA BEGUM LIPI

ISSUE 100 SEP/OCT 2016



"In the fifteen years..." *Art Asia Pacific*, September – October 2016.
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Sponsored Feature

In the fifteen years since Oki Sato founded *nendo*, the Japanese design group has established a global following. With offices in Tokyo, Milan, and Singapore *nendo* (which means clay in Japanese), has the continuing goal of offering the world small aha (“!”) moments. Their first-ever large-scale retrospective, *The Space In Between*, opened at the Design Museum Holon, Israel in June of this year and *50 Manga Chairs* will make its American debut at Friedman Benda in New York; Gallery partner, Jennifer Olshin speaks to Sato about his design ideology.



Oki Sato with Cabbage Chair, 2008. Courtesy of Design Museum Holon and nendo, inc. Photography: Shay Ben Efraim.

Oki Sato used the pleated paper normally, a discarded bi-product of fashion designer Issey Miyake’s process, to create the Cabbage Chair. Today, Cabbage Chair is in 15 international museums where it is seen as an early 21st-century commentary on sustainability.

Rain bottle, 2014. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and nendo, inc. Photography: Takumi Ota.

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50 Manga Chair installation, Facoltà Teologica dell'Italia Settentrionale, Milan, 2016. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and nendo, inc. Photography: Takumi Ota

JO: You have said that its not design if there is no idea. What kinds of ideas do your designs express?

OS: It's always about giving people a small smile in the end. I'm trying to look for smaller and smaller ideas that affect people's emotions and make people's lives so rich and comfortable.

JO: Repetition mixed with, or interrupted by, iteration, is crucial to your design aesthetic and to your overarching message. Would you say that that your meticulously simple and repeating frameworks, structures, and grids are your tools with which you then amplify the smallest iterations—thereby exposing what you have termed aha moments (“!”) ?

OS: I really was not aware of the repetition, and now that you mention it, it may be one of my ways of thinking. Perhaps, I was influenced by “copy and paste generation” like SANAA. When I was a student, we were the first generation that learned design with CAD and 3D software, not hand drawing. Also, there is the architectural way of thinking about things, and that is my background, I am interested in the ideas that spread, expand and develop.

JO: Uncovering the nuances of a word or concept through design is something you explore in “rain bottle,” your installation of 20 identical bottles filled with slightly varying contents. What is the metaphor in this work for you?

OS: The installation consists of clear acrylic bottles lined-up, each containing a different kind of ‘rain’. ‘Kirisame’, ‘biu’ and ‘kosame’ refer to different degrees of fine drizzle, while ‘niwaka-ame’ is a sudden downpour. ‘Mizore’ is sleet, and a ‘yudachi’ falls in the evening. ‘Kisame’ is rain that drips from the ends of tree branches, and ‘kaiui’ is rain that falls mixed with dust and pollen. We also included seasonal rains, from the ‘samidare’ that falls in the spring, to ‘shigure’, rain specific to autumn and winter. By exhibiting twenty different kinds of ‘rain’, we hoped to express both the nuances and sensibilities of Japanese as a language, as well as Japanese culture’s unique and deep relationship to nature.

JO: Transparency is a feature of your work that harks back to great Japanese designers including Shiro Kuramata, but many of your designs challenge the importance of transparency (or seen) as a virtue, by juxtaposing it with the unseen. Are you more interested in the known or in the unknown?

OS: I think it is definitely one aspect of the Japanese culture to use transparent material as a result of expression of the respect for the invisible value. For me, on the presupposition that there is no material that is completely clear, I would always like to use the transparent materials as a “filtering effect” rather than to make something disappear. In other words, I’m interested in the phenomenon and state of mind when people’s eyes or lights pass through or reflect the material.

JO: Manga, as in the traditional manga comics, was the subject of your presentation in Milan this spring (coming to NY in the fall). In a historic courtyard, open day -to-night, 50 chairs made of stainless steel glistened in the open air and changing light. What does manga mean to you?

OS: When I was a small child, I liked reading manga books all day, and my mother was angry with me, but if I would go to the museums, she was happy. So I start thinking what is the difference between going to museums and reading manga? Then, I really didn’t understand the difference and that fact was in my head for quite a long time. Quite recently I did a little bit of research about manga and learned that it’s deeply rooted with Japanese culture, and I started thinking can we use the techniques used in manga for furniture and objects? It’s a way of expressing feelings and emotions and movements...

JO: ...And stories? Is this why you chose the name “Ghost Stories,” as the name of your first monograph (also, the name you used for your first exhibition in NYC)?

OS: I think design is about the story behind or around the object that I am interested in beyond the object itself. What I’m trying to see is the boundaries between the products, and the narratives or processes that unfold.



Manga Chair, 2016. Courtesy of Friedman Benda and nendo, inc. Photography: Kenichi Sonehara.

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