Social Art Lab

Faculty of Design
Kyushu University
Social Art, often referred to as socially engaged art, is defined as art practice that engages with social issues and creates new relationships between people. Social Art Lab has engaged in research, education, practice and advocacy since 2015 at Kyushu University. The primary aim of this interdisciplinary laboratory is to find new directions for the potential of art in society today.
Art in the Modern Era was thought of as an autonomous expression of artists’ inner world. However, today art is a form of mediation to reconnect our inner world with society, as well as facilitate diverse relationships. Social Art Lab draws upon interdisciplinary approaches of art, technology and environmental design to confront social issues while fostering interaction among diverse communities. The laboratory will continue to promote new perspectives on art and society.

Principles

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Mission

Social Art Lab undertakes research, education, practice, and advocacy in an interrelated way.

Research
- Relationship of art and society
- Evaluative methods for the effects of art
- Assessment of project management
- Consideration of future communities

Education
- Critical awareness of social issues
- Understanding of diverse values
- Integrated learning programs
- Practical learning opportunities

Practice
- Engagement with social issues
- Making art projects
- Collaboration among diverse people
- Raising public awareness

Advocacy
- Cultural policies in post-global society
- Values for co-existence
- Networking strategies for community design
- Models for socially engaged art projects
Fukuoka × Yame Remix

Inner Yame is a rural area approximately sixty kilometers from Fukuoka recovering from a flood which occurred in 2012. The Social Art Lab made an art project linking these two regions based on the concept of “remix.” With the goal of encouraging social interaction, two art programs were implemented: a bus tour to Inner Yame and an exhibition in Fukuoka.

1 Art Bus Tour
Re-imagining Satoyama

October 15-16, 2016

Satoyama is a place where people and nature coexist. These places are woven together with many memories of people and nature. Re-imagining Satoyama was a seven-hour bus journey from Fukuoka to Inner Yame, where visitors experienced art in the landscape.

In the gymnasium of former Kasahara elementary school, visitors encountered Koutarou Ushijima’s work, Un-illuminated Places. Domestic objects collected from the school and the local community were installed to float in space along with a poem written on the floor of the gymnasium (see cover).

Koutarou Ushijima
Un-illuminated Places
2016

Objects from former Kasahara elementary school and the local community, and vinyl lettering (lower left and right photos)

How can socially engaged art affect a region?
While walking through a campground closed after the flood, James Jack’s sound installation Eight Layers of Dirt can be heard. Through the open windows of four scenic cottages, the voices of a woman from Yame and a woman from Fukuoka fade in and out of the air. Inside of each cottage, life stories of these eight women unfold slowly from speakers above, to be appreciated while gazing at the landscape near and far.

Through diverse encounters along the journey, visitors re-imagined the region together with local inhabitants.
Mamoru Fujieda
Tea Gathering at Shonankyo

Tea gathering unfolded on the stage of the historical building Shonankyo over the course of three lively days. Entertainment included a series of conversations, the playful event “Tea Tasting Battle,” a live performance “Strumming Tea” with a rare Japanese lute, as well as an artistic tea ceremony performance newly composed and produced by artist Mamoru Fujieda.

James Jack
From Stone to Sand

Waterways flowing between Yame and Fukuoka were created in this historical building with stones and space. The footsteps of visitors took the shape of rivers, seaside, moats and surrounding islands as the stones were shifted by hand each day of the exhibit. Amidst these changes, participants wrote a reflection on the stone of their choice. After the exhibit, the stones were returned to Yame for local revival projects to insert positive energy into the future of the region.
What is the role of curating in regional art projects?

Social Art Lab conducted an adult education program for art management on the topic of “Curating Perspectives on the Region.” In the basic course, eight lectures were held along with corresponding workshops. In the practical course, management of the Fukuoka × Yame Remix project was taught.
How are art projects linked with recovery movements?

Kumamoto Earthquake Recovery
Mikako Tomotari

Survivors of the Kumamoto Earthquake in April 2016 were forced to live in shelters and sleep in their cars amid repeated aftershocks. Tiny House Project was launched to build itakura cabins on the survivors’ residential land after evacuation occurred in the village. Itakura, a traditional Japanese method for building a cedar wood cabin which provides fragrance of the wood and has a superior earthquake resistance, both of which comfort survivors. It can be built at a low cost, using forest resources (timber) from Aso district.

In June, an itakura community house was completed in collaboration with local carpenters and volunteers, using donated cedar wood. A workshop was also conducted for children on building wood furniture and accessories using the remnants of lumber and wood waste from damaged homes. Finished products were then sent to the survivors as presents. In this project, we have learned that people can be empowered by recreating cabins from the remnants of the earthquake. It is our hope that these houses built using Kumamoto cedar and art works made of the wooden remnants will serve to reinvigorate the life of the region.

How can technology assist in the reconsideration of local culture?

Spiritual Culture Revival
Mikako Tomotari

After the Edo Period, many cultural traditions were persecuted by the Meiji Reformation across Japan. At Mount Hiko (Hikosan) in Northern Kyushu, religious objects were destroyed and Shugendō rituals were halted for over a century. Historically, Shugendō was an ascetic practice that combines Shinto, Buddhism and mountain beliefs. Today society does not fully appreciate the spiritual significance of customs from this local area. Mikako Tomotari’s sculptures utilize digital technology to recreate religious objects, thereby restoring historically marginalized religious culture. This work revives philosophies based on the coexistence of people and nature today.
Core Members
Akira Omoto, Director (Professor, Applied Acoustic Engineering)
Mia Nakamura, Deputy Director (Associate Professor, Sociology of Music and Arts)
Kazuo Asahiro (Associate Professor, Landscape Architecture and Conservation)
Mikako Tomotari (Associate Professor, Sculpture)
Yuichiro Nagatsu (Assistant Professor, Arts Management)
Hazuki Kosaka (Research Fellow, Arts Management)

Project Members
Mamoru Fujieda (Professor, Music Composition)
Minako Ikeda (Associate Professor, Information Design)
James Jack (Postdoctoral Fellow, Socially Engaged Art)
Haruka Inomata (Shunshundō, Arts Management)

Advisors
Torao Osawa (NII Research Institute, Center for Arts and Culture, Associate Senior Researcher)
Kan Ito (Part-time Lecturer, Community Planning)

Staff
Yomei Ishigami (Technical Staff)
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