

## **The 6<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture, Santiago de Chile**

### **Parallel Session: Creative Spaces 1**

#### **8. New formats of international exchange programs and engagement with local contexts**

##### **Art explores local resources**

##### **From experiences of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale**

Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT) is an international art festival held every three years and has taken place five times since 2000. It was initiated in partnership of Niigata Prefecture and local municipalities as a regional revitalization project.

Echigo-Tsumari is a large rural area, located at a two-hour train ride from Tokyo, and one of the world's heaviest snowfall areas. Although its total area is 760 square kilometers, its population is only 70,000 residents. With the exodus of its young people to jobs in the cities and the increasing abandonment of agriculture, the area has suffered depopulation, ageing, collapse of local communities, and loss of identity. Nevertheless, its landscapes, livelihoods and communities have been connected to nature through agriculture for more than 1500 years. At a turning point of the modern age, in the midst of an unprecedented global, environmental and ethical crisis, Echigo-Tsumari's sustainable life provides an opportunity to reflect on the modern paradigm. The basic concept of the Triennale, "Human beings are part of nature" permeates all of its work of art, events and architectural program.

In contrast to biennales typically organized in big cities, it has been organized in a remote rural area, and opened up contemporary art to non-urban art. For every Triennale, more than 150 works of art, temporary and permanent, were newly created and there remain over 200 works. We have chosen an inefficient way of scattering artworks around 200 communities in the large region, instead of concentrating them in one center. People experience the nature and community people and life through visiting artworks.

The setting of Echigo-Tsumari Triennale is not a white cube. The artist wanting to create something in a particular spot has to win the agreement of the owner of the site and other persons involved in his or her proposal. It breaks down the exclusivity related to private ownership and gave rise to conflict, communication, cooperative behavior and collaboration.

**Ilya Kabakov's** work exemplifies this typical process. When we asked the owner of the land to allow us to use his rice fields for the creation of Kabakov's work, the owner refused as he was intending to stop cultivation. He was old and had no successor for rice production, as his son had left. The artist made great efforts to study the area, the life of the people and local agriculture. His proposal showed respect for the farmers who cultivated the land and worked very hard. It moved the owner, who eventually allowed the artist to use the land.

The poetry on the wired screen, describing all process of the rice production stands along the river bank, while the sculptures of farmers are placed in the rice paddies on the opposite bank. Seeing from the viewing platform, the text and the sculptures, overlap and form a single painting.

Visitors appreciated Kabakov's work as well as the owner's rice fields as product of his hard work. The owner regained his pride and continued farming.

Artists, as strangers, discover and explore local resources and open up the region to the outside world. Participating artists have created site-specific works of art as devices to discover the charm and potentials of the region. They have given form to the life and time that run through the land.

**Christian Boltanski** is the artist who participated in all five editions of ETAT. For the first Triennale, he installed numerous used white clothes collected from local people in a field. They suggested the spirits of people who passed away and left the region. For the second edition, he used a whole closed school building and revived the time of the children who had lived there. For the third edition, he used the same school and created a permanent installation, inspired by the winter life and landscape in Echigo-Tsumari.

Echigo-Tsumari Triennale has made use of things that already exist to create new value.

The resources that we have on Earth are finite. The abandoned houses and closed school buildings are regarded by the communities as useless relics, but with the involvement of artists, architects and other experts in the project, have become outstanding resources. This is because the region's long history has brought added value to them.

**Marina Abramovic** transformed a 100 year old farm house into "Dream House" for the first Triennale in 2000. Based in a remote village, Dream House is a place for dreaming whereby visitors stay overnight and wrote down their dreams in Dream Books the next morning.

The local community people took care of it, where about 42,000 people visited on one day trips and more than 2,000 people stayed overnight. In March 2011, the great earthquake

caused severe damage to the Dream House, leading to its closure. But following a large-scale restoration, it was opened again on the occasion of last Triennale. Then, the dreams collected there for over 10 years were published as “Dream Book”. For its preface, Marina wrote as follows:

“This project was made for the Triennale, but something really incredible happened. The villagers where the Dream House was situated, decided to adopt the house as their own and continued to take care of it. The house has become part of their own community. This is the first time for me that my work came out of the art context into real life.”

We have done more than 100 abandoned house projects and a number of houses have been rooted in the communities as restaurants, accommodations and galleries, and they have been taken care of by local inhabitants.

The process of realizing a work of art served as an opportunity to open up communities that had felt “left behind” from the rest of society. It promotes collaboration of local residents with the artists. However, the number of local people was not enough. We needed a lot of help to investigate the land, create and manage the artwork and attract visitors. Many people joined a volunteer group, transcending locality, generation and occupation. .

In particular, young urban volunteers have been a driving force. The charm and fragility of the art pieces connected locals and visitors, and brought joy to their festivities. Art reminded people of its fundamental power to surprise, the pleasure of collaboration, and its celebratory nature. Art is like a baby. The baby is not productive and cannot live by itself, but its very existence creates ties and linkage among people around it. Art has functioned and been treated in the same way, linking humans and nature.

The last Triennale in 2012 drew about 500,000 visitors from all corners of the world to this remote area inhabited by only 70,000 people. ETAT enjoyed the participation not only of visitors but also of various collaborators and staff stemming from many countries other than Japan. The involvement of people from abroad has increased with each edition.

Echigo-Tsumari Triennale has brought about international relationships and exchanges to many local communities..

East Asia Art Village and Australia House are good examples of platforms linking the local communities to foreign countries.

**East Asia Art Village** originated from that **Cai Guo Qiang** created Dragon Museum of

Contemporary Art (DMOCA), transplanting an old kiln from his home country, China, for the first Triennale in 2000. For every time, as its director, he curated an exhibition inviting an artist like Kiki Smith and Ann Hamilton. Since then, we have invited Asian artists intensively to the area. The Asian artists stayed and worked together with local residents. One of the communities which hosted Asian artists has concluded a sister village agreement with Taiwanese villages.

For ETAT, many students and young people from Hong Kong, Shanghai and Asian cities worked as volunteers.

**Australia House** is an artist-in-residence facility built in collaboration between the local municipality and Australian government. Australian government has supported participation of Australian artists since the beginning of the Triennale and Australia House is a fruit of their long term relationship. It was first built in 2009 using an old empty house, but it was collapsed by the earthquake in 2011. However, it was rebuilt on the occasion of the last Triennale. We organized an open competition with Tadao Ando, jury in chief and selected the Australian architect, Andrew Burns. It received Jorn Utzon International Award of Architecture last year.

Through our experiences in Echigo-Tsumari, we feel that many people seek to engage with real people in real locations. Not only can an art festival like this one help in taking a step forward towards the resolution of local problems, it also contributes to tearing down the unified, codified veneer of globalization and gives concrete form to individual situations.

It has explored new format of international art exhibition by restoring the function and role of contemporary art as a medium to question the present, draw on local assets and resources, and bring people together.

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