

Director Igarashi says quake memories still fresh

[Edan Corkill](#) Aug 22, 2013



Taro Igarashi

The Japan Times sat down with the artistic director of the Aichi Triennale, the architecture critic and historian Taro Igarashi.

The theme of the triennale is "Awakening — Where are we standing? — Earth, Memory and Resurrection." Why?

I was conscious that the triennale is not a festival for Aichi Prefecture alone, but a festival for the world, so we needed to be conscious of how people from around the world would view it. The disasters of March 2011, are still obviously on everyone's minds, and this is actually the first major international art exhibition planned for an urban venue since those disasters. So it was an obvious choice. We have 76 or so contemporary artists in total and about 20 percent have made works related directly to the disasters.

What characterizes those works?

Many are about memory. I think that one of the strengths of art is that it is good with memory. And when I say that, I don't mean record, but memory. A record is empirical; memory is emotional, and art is good at that.

Could you give an example?

There are many. The artist Lieko Shiga once lived in a small village in northern Japan that was washed away in the tsunami. She has created an installation of large photographs that try to capture the spirit, the ghosts of the village.

New York-based artist Alfredo Jaar made a memorial for a school that was washed away, using one of its tsunami-damaged blackboards.

One of the key exhibits, Kenji Yanobe's wedding chapel, seems to be more about the future.

Yes. Yanobe made "Sun Child" after 3.11 (a 6-meter-high model of a boy wearing a radiation suit, but with the helmet off). It was a very deliberate message of hope, positivity about the future. What caught my eye for the triennale, though, was an equally positive project related to wedding chapels.

I specialize in architecture, and Japanese wedding chapels have always fascinated me — for their garishness. When I heard Yanobe wanted to make a wedding chapel that had a March 11-related message of hope, I thought it could work. At first I wanted to do it in a real wedding chapel, but they didn't want it, so we decided to make it in the museum. And we'll hold real weddings there.

How else did you try to incorporate an architectural perspective into the event?

There are a number of architects involved as exhibitors: For example, the architect Katsuhiko Miyamoto discovered that the dimensions of the triennale's key venue, the Aichi Arts Center, are about the same as one of the reactor buildings at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant — that the latter would fit in the former. So he decided to make an exhibit that would transpose one on the other.

That's also a very architectural approach — it, in effect, uses architecture to convey the immensity and reality of the disaster. He is also exhibiting his proposed "The Fukushima No. 1 Nuclear Power Plant Shrine."

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