

FRANCIS, Anna (2015) *Indefinable Cities - exhibition at AirSpace Gallery and 5 Cities in Japan.* [Show/Exhibition]

Exhibition Information:

Location: AirSpace Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, UK from 10th April to 16th May, 2015.

The exhibition then travelled to 5 cities in Japan,

'Indefinable Cities' an exhibition which took place at AirSpace Gallery in Stoke-on-Trent, England where the work of 6 artists was shown and then travelled to 5 Cities in Japan, where 5 of the artists works were shown in solo exhibition with Tsukiyo to Syonen. Curated by Koh Yoshida (JP) and Anna Francis (UK) Details for the Japanese leg of the exhibition: from the Tsukiyo to Syonene website.

Artist : Rebecca
Chesney
Venue : Atelier
Sangatsu / Osaka
Date : 18 Jul, 2015 – 2
Aug, 2015



The word 'Indefinable' means not able to be defined or described exactly. A city is made up of many variables and cannot be defined by any single characteristic. Listening to the distinctive birdsong amid the noisy urban environment in Rebecca Chesney's work, both easily distinguishable as if operating at different sound frequencies, we are invited to consider the distant and separate relationship between human life and the natural world in the bustling city.

Of the 5 cities hosting exhibitions for "Indefinable Cities", nowhere is this separation between the built environment and the natural world more apparent than Osaka.

Artist : Ben Cove
Venue : Art
Takahashi / Hikone,
Shiga
Date : 20 Jul, 2015 – 2
Aug, 2015



Located on the eastern shore of Lake Biwa, Hikone is an old castle town, rich in heritage and characterised by its traditional Japanese architecture. In contrast, 'Art Takahashi' is completely different from its traditional surroundings.

'Art Takahashi' has a unique gallery space. Its main wall slopes sharply downwards from right to left as the viewer looks, a feature unseen in any of the neighbouring buildings. This distinctive form makes it the ideal space in which to exhibit the non-traditional, modernist work of artist and former architect, Ben Cove.

Artist : Hirofumi
Suzuki
Venue : Higashiyama
Building / Uno,
Okayama
Date : 23 Jul, 2015 –
16 Aug, 2015



50 minutes from Okayama, a train passes through beautiful countryside and arrives at the port town of Uno in the city of Tamano. Once a busy shipbuilding and port town linking the main island to Shikoku, Uno's population has been decreasing since the 1970's and typifies a once thriving, now post-industrial urban centre.

Through connections with friends who live in Tamano, I perceive a sense of emerging regeneration there as it seems that people from the larger cities of Tokyo and Osaka are choosing to relocate there, despite the harsher conditions.

Appropriately, Higashiyama Building, housing the Osaka-set drawing works of Hirofumi Suzuki, once almost abandoned, now embodies this renewed sense of regeneration.

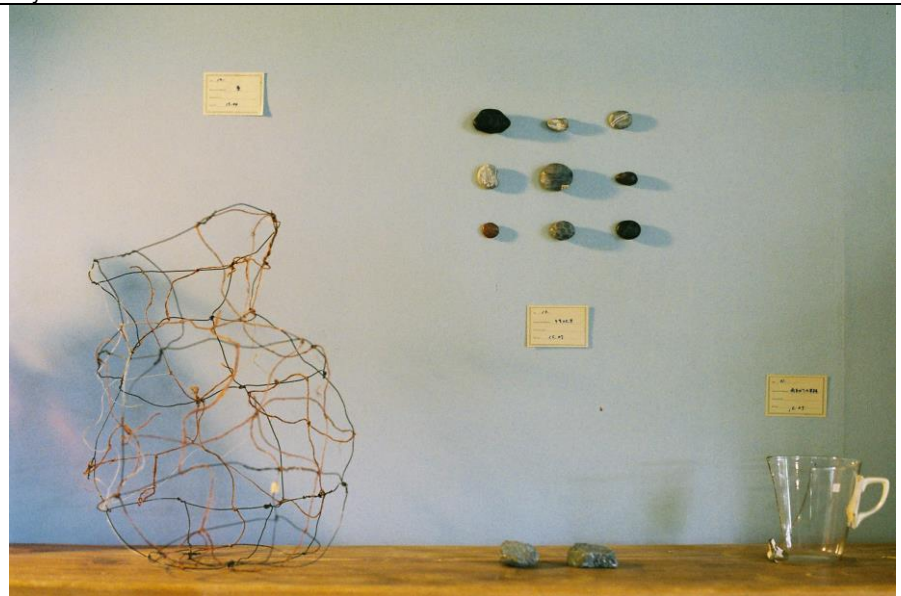
Artist : Emily Speed
Venue : Komyoji
Kaikan / Onomichi,
Hiroshima
Date : 25 Jul, 2015 –
17 Aug, 2015



Summers in Onomichi are really hot. Walking up the mountain path, to Senkoji Temple, you will quickly start to sweat. The paths are narrow, too narrow for vehicles, and so walking is the only way to get to the summit. Once reached, the view from the Temple overlooks downtown Onomichi, its buildings completely covering the valley's flatland and slopes.

Seeing the city laid out before you, sandwiched between the mountain and the sea, you get a sense of the transitory nature of human life and you start to consider the many stories and memories, passed from generation to generation, which collectively make up a city's community. This relationship between the human, architecture and city planning is brought to life in Emily Speed's, "Garbuglio/Tangle" provoking a consideration of the space between a city's built hard outer shell and its soft inner human soul.

Artist : Ayaka Nishi
Venue : South
Patagonia Cafe / Kofu,
Yamanashi
Date : 2 Aug, 2015 –
23 Aug, 2015



When I think about the town of Kofu, I have a mysterious feeling that it is floating in the air. I wonder if Kofu has thinner air, because it is surrounded on all sides by high mountains. It's as if it's isolated from the world.

South Patagonia Cafe, whose name itself embodies a place standing, still, alone, at the end of the world, exhibits the works of Ayaka Nishi, perfectly sited here, offering a hint of a recalled memory of a story that used to be there.

The exhibition explores the development of cities worldwide, and in particular looks to capture the way that artists are responding to and documenting Cities in flux, and more; how artists impact on their environments and the regeneration of Cities.

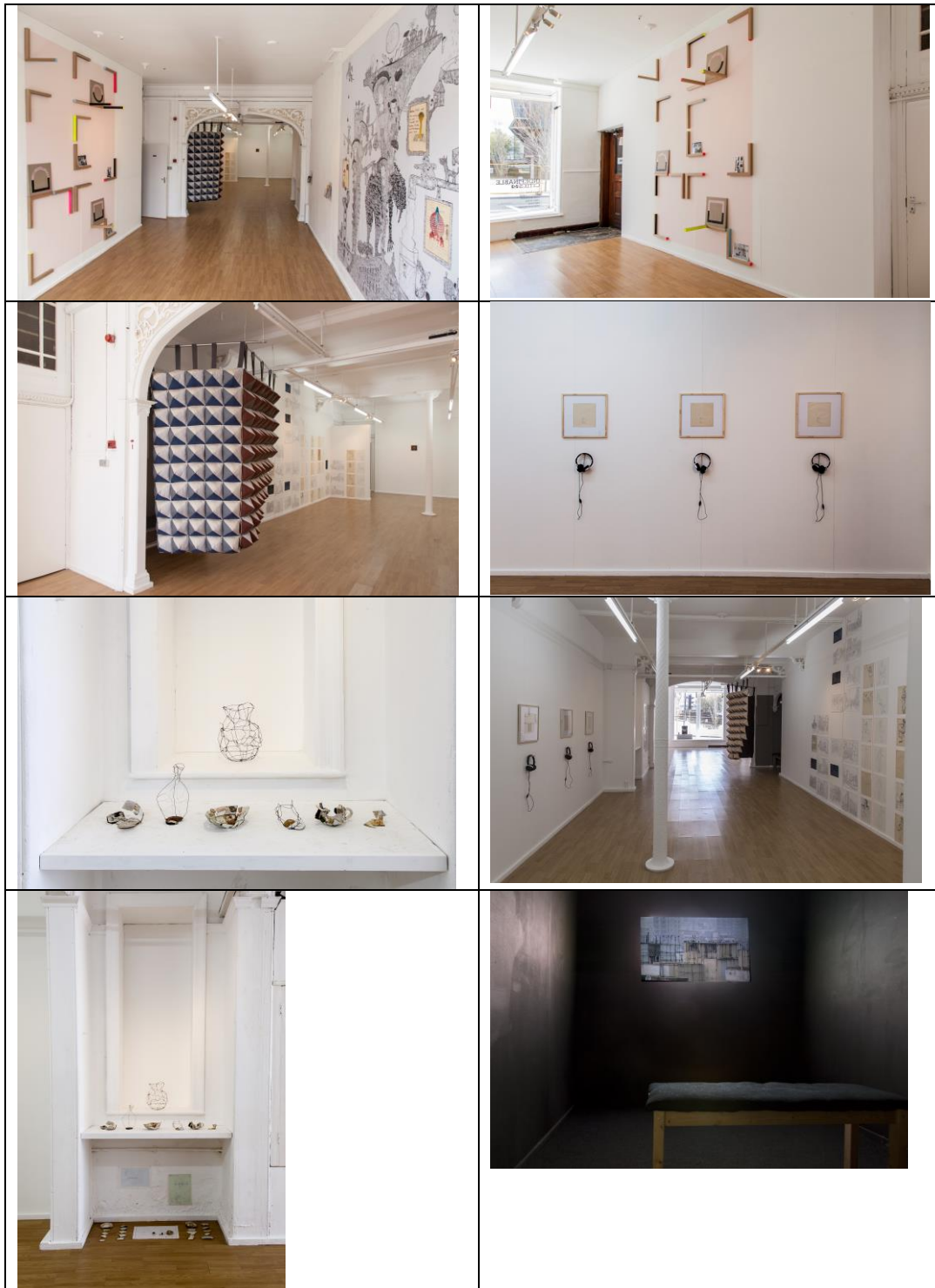
AirSpace Gallery and Tsukiyo to Syonen (Osaka, Japan) are working together to realise this ambitious project which forms a dialogue between artists in Japan and the UK, to explore the nature of artist-led activity in the two countries. The two organisations have strong visual arts programmes, but in addition, have shared interests in exploring the interface between art and environmental concerns, regeneration, development and citizenship. The '*Indefinable Cities*' project provides an opportunity to form a dialogue around this area of practice, and creates a space for International Conversations around the role that artists may have in contributing to the development of healthy, happy cities and what it means to have a socially engaged practice as an artist.

Indefinable Cities features the works of 6 artists - 3 from the UK - Emily Speed, Ben Cove and Rebecca Chesney and 3 from Japan - Ayaka Nishi, Hirofumi Suzuki and Daiki Murakami. The exhibition will open at AirSpace Gallery and then move to Japan, where the works will be exhibited at 6 venues across the country.

AirSpace Gallery instigated the conversation with Tsukiyo to Syonen back in 2012, during a research visit to Osaka, where curator and artist Anna Francis was interested in exploring the differences in artist led activity in the two countries. AirSpace Gallery were keen to find a partner to work with on the ambitious Indefinable Cities Exhibition, which picks up from the first 'Indefinable City' exhibition held at AirSpace in 2007, where 11 artists explored the consequences and effects on humans of our changing cities. City development and the artists role within it have continued to be a research concern for AirSpace Gallery, since 2007. Many of the gallery's projects have sought to form dialogues around the nature of culture-led regeneration, advocacy and support for artists in making a difference in the places they live and work, and the adoption and nurturing of disused spaces in cities, in particular, recently with a connection to green space growing projects.

The particular geography and social and economic context of Stoke-on-Trent means there are many empty spaces around the city – this includes buildings, brownfield sites and other undeveloped plots. This affords particular opportunities for temporary activity to take place, which questions and proposes future use, as space can be acquired cheaply, and sometimes freely. Osaka, as a city has much less available space, and the cost of space is high, making it very difficult to sustain arts programmes in urban spaces. For this reason Tsukiyo to Syonen no longer run a permanent gallery space in the city, preferring to work with temporary pop up spaces, allowing them to be more responsive and flexible to the needs of the projects they work on, and far reaching in their geographic scope. In recent years Tsukiyo to Syonen has held exhibition and concerts in Yamanishi, Ishikawa, Shiga, Okayama, Hiroshima and many other provincial towns. In addition, since the 2011 earthquake many artists have left the big cities, for more rural locations. Indefinable Cities Exhibition will tour to 6 cities in Japan between July and August 2015 - exploring how geographically distant places can be connected. Conversations instigated and taking place during the exhibition will explore the differences between the two countries, and the impact that this has on the way that artists work.

Images of Exhibition Installation at AirSpace Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent.



Information about the artists and their work at AirSpace Gallery:

EMILY SPEED

Emily Speed's interests lie in the relationship between people and buildings and her work explores the body and its relationship to architecture. The idea of shelter and the inhabitant is at the core of much of her work; how a person is shaped by the buildings they have occupied and how a person occupies their own psychological space.

The word inhabitant contains the root habit (dress) and implies a habitat (dwelling) and Speed's work often has this double function of being both shelter and clothing. The shelters act as an expression of the layers that we surround ourselves with; skin, clothing and walls.

Her work takes the form of sculptures, installations, performance, artist's books and film. Speed's work is often worn or performed, with sculptures constructed specifically to fit the body.

BEN COVE

Ben Cove's initial training in architecture continues to feed directly into his art practice, particularly in terms of the physical and cultural legacies of Modernist practices and their associated visual languages.

He is primarily interested in forms of construction: the processes and languages of building; the construction of historic and personal narratives; the manner in which hierarchies are established and their relationship to the individual; notions of endeavour, failure or collapse and the relationship of the body to that which is designed and built around it.

He makes work across a range of media with individual works often conceived to form coexisting relationships to one another, frequently conceived with specific spaces in mind. Some works continue to utilise direct appropriation with a move towards a progressively more abstract painting and sculptural language that often questions the relationship between image and object.

REBECCA CHESNEY

Rebecca Chesney is interested in how we perceive land: how we romanticise, translate and define urban and rural spaces. Her practice looks at how politics, ownership, management and commercial value all influence our surroundings and within this field has made extensive investigations into the impact of human activities on nature and the environment.

Exploring the blurred boundaries between science and folklore, Chesney's work is also concerned with how our understanding of species is fed by the confused mix of truth and fiction.

Her projects take the form of installations, interventions, drawings, maps and walks and are underpinned by research into the protection of the environment, conversations with scientists and a desire to make work specific to chosen locations.

AKAYA NISHI

Ayaka Nishi's practice takes as its starting point the Japanese literary tradition of 'monogatari', which is an extended prose narrative tale, comparable to an epic, and often related to the oral tradition of the telling and retelling of stories. In Nishi's case this relates to the anthropomorphisation of natural objects, where pebbles, twigs and shells etc are found to possess a small voice; in the work, even artefacts like old books, broken glass and plastic packages are found to speak, and these voices allow the artist to construct tales and conversations.

Nishi's work takes the form of collage, drawing, lithography and installation and aims to create poetic and nostalgic feelings in the viewer, summoning the viewer to a place between dreaming and waking when experiencing the work.

For Indefinable Cities Nishi has immersed herself in the fabric of Stoke-on-Trent, drawing on what the city has to offer, salvaging and rummaging in the cities overlooked spaces, Nishi has collected various discarded objects and materials. In a return to an installation work created in Hiroshima, Japan in 2011, where Nishi created small landscapes in the gallery, here works have been made with scrapped and discarded things, timber, iron, glass, plastics and shards of pottery are transformed.

HIROFUMI SUZUKI

Hirofumi Suzuki's enduring practice, spanning over 30 years, takes the form of simple pencil drawings. Produced quickly, in large numbers and predominantly focusing on common aspects of everyday life.

Suzuki's drawings invest a value in a subject that may, on the surface, seem a touch mundane. Repeated journeys in various forms, provide the impetus for nameless portraits, or landscapes of nondescript urban locations.

The importance for Suzuki, however, lies as much in the activity as in the output - the act of stopping and focusing on a scene and then spending what may only be half an hour carefully recording the subject, transcends the mundane into something altogether more significant.

For *Indefinable Cities* Suzuki has produced drawings of urban locations in Osaka, Japan, making repeated visits to the same sites, in this way the drawings capture a city as it changes and the passage of time is captured within the parallel drawings. In addition, Suzuki has been making drawings of strangers on trains over many years - and these anonymous portraits are shown in a city far away from their origins.

DAIKI MURAKAMI

Daiki Murakami is an artist, cartoonist, journalist and author. His wide-ranging practice spans manga, animation, drawing, installation, and sound art. Within his work he explores the human condition - its constantly shifting, fragile nature and personal and collective hopes and fears in contemporary life. This has variously taken the form of investing soon-to-be-demolished buildings with intricate wall drawings and allowing sculpted works made from degenerating materials to decompose in natural situations.

In 2013, Murakami moved to a small island in Hiroshima, where, unfunded, he transformed an old abandoned house into a gallery and project space, hosting art and music events both for island residents, and a broader visitor population. "A Happy Social Studies By An Anarchist", Murakami's first book, was published in December, 2014.

Within Daiki Murakami's practice he explores the crossovers between art and politics. Part political statement, part artwork, he will run for mayor of Onomichi City, Hiroshima. In anticipation of the upcoming election he first proposes to run for the mayor of art. He presents "An Anarchist Mayor's Town Development Project" for the exhibition, exploring the notion that 'Art can not only make us believe that the imaginary world on paper is a reality but also change our perspectives.'

Review by This is Tomorrow: <http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/indefinable-cities>