

Genta Ishizuka: *Polyphase Membrane* 石塚源太「多相皮膜」



Untitled (Hung in a box) #1, 2019 | Urushi, hemp cloth, gold leaf, masu (antique) | 14.3 x 14.3 x 7.5 cm
Surface Tactility #12, 2019 | Urushi, styrene foam ball, 2 way tricot, Kanshitsu-technique | 95.5 x 84 x 80.5 cm

Genta Ishizuka studied Urushi Lacquering at the Kyoto City University of Arts, then after participating in an exchange program at the Royal College of Art, London and graduating with an MFA in the late 2000s, he began exhibiting his works as an artist. While exploring various forms of expression with *urushi* as his main material, he became fascinated with the “gloss that lies within the *urushi*”. He unified his ideas and his artwork, focusing on the possibilities of creating abstract forms with the phenomena of the material, such as the new ways of perceptions that the glossiness creates, and the work’s “membrane” whose presence sparks the viewer’s senses. Ishizuka has been deftly capturing the consciousness and sensations going back and forth between the borderline that is the transparent “membrane” distinct to *urushi*. By reflecting the painted surface and space to the viewer, he is working to reach an uncharted world brought about by this gloss.

The works by Ishizuka represent the shape of a thing as a membrane using *urushi*, but everything from the perception of the work to the depth lying within that gloss is also encompassed in the artwork, thus these pieces possess multiple “phases”. In recent years, he has been interested in polishing the gloss to a mirror-like surface and incorporating the reflected world into his work, keying in on what is in between and around this membrane.

Surface Tactility (2015-) is a series of sculptures made with a range of spheres creating a fluctuating three-dimensionally curved surface, which is then given a *kanshitsu*-technique finish, creating an autonomous “membrane”. He utilizes styrene foam balls and elastic fabric to create the foundation of his works that may look like a torso, or appear as if energy is expanding from within them, and the glossiness of the surface tension emphasizes these shapes. The two-dimensional works that use *maki-e* (gold lacquer) technique which he has been using since early in his career, are made with pieces of metal such as washers, needles, and cutter blades, arranged to look like countless stars drifting in pitch-black darkness. The viewer will not only become aware of the expanse and depth of this cosmic image, but will also feel how it is charged with the question of the origin of matter.

As an *urushi* artist, Ishizuka has also honed his sense for sculpting forms by actively connecting with the material’s history along with the everyday implements and craftwork of the past, which in turn deepened his interest in the relationship between this medium and religious faith. He began to develop a new series in which he covers the curving surfaces of semi-sculptural works with gold leaf, and hangs them inside Edo and Meiji period *masu* (measuring box) acquired from antique stores. *Untitled (Hung in a Box)* was made after he discovered *kakebotoke* (votive Buddhist plaques) and learned about the custom of praying for prosperity to a sculpture of Ebisu (the Japanese god of fishermen and tradesmen) placed inside of a *masu*. These pieces are also connected historically to how Buddhist figures made with the *kanshitsu*-technique were typically finished with gold leaf.

The craft and wares of *urushi* cultivated through daily life, mainly in the East Asian region, have achieved a high standard in Japan, becoming well-known across the world. It can be said that behind the process of thoroughly polishing and finishing with no trace of any brushstrokes, there lies the Japanese mentality of placing importance on how the quality of the base will reveal itself on the surface as color and glossiness. Recently, Ishizuka has been continuing to deepen his creative awareness, from the things both real and unreal reflected in the gloss, shifting towards the inner quality and essence that one can begin to see through the presence of the “membrane”.

Last year, Ishizuka had his first solo exhibition in London. This year, he was selected as a finalist for the Loewe Craft Prize, and received the Best Young Artist Award by the City of Kyoto. In this exhibition, he will be showing ambitious new works produced while garnering global attention. There will be an artist talk held with Mami Kataoka, a researcher and curator of contemporary art in Japan and Asia. Continuing to confront the polished *urushi* form and the “membrane”, Ishizuka can be expected to create artwork that will open the doors to a new frontier.

[Exhibition]

Exhibition title : **Genta Ishizuka: *Polyphase Membrane*** 石塚源太「多相皮膜」

Duration : **July 2 (Tue) - September 21 (Sat), 2019**

*Closed on Sundays, Mondays, national holidays, and 8/11 - 8/19 [Open on 7/21 (Sun)]

Venue : ARTCOURT Gallery OAP ARTCOURT 1F, 1-8-5 Tenmabashi, Kita-ku, Osaka, 530-0042

Hours : 11:00am - 7:00pm (Saturdays - 5:00pm)

◆ Related Events: July 21 (Sun), 2019

Artist Talk : 2:00pm - 4:00pm [Mami Kataoka (Deputy Director & Chief Curator, Mori Art Museum) & Genta Ishizuka]

Reception : 4:00pm - 5:00pm

*RSVP is required for the talk. Please email info@artcourtgallery.com or call +81-6-6354-5444. *Free admission.

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 With cooperation from Kyoto City University of Arts

* Please contact Miwa Ohba, Mizuho Haida or Yuki Hamada at ARTCOURT Gallery for any inquiries including photographic materials.

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Dual Phase, 2019
 Urushi, plywood, washers | 30 x 30 x 3 cm

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| Essay |

The coexistence of light and dark, the self and the non-self

Taisuke Karasawa (*Associate Professor, Graduate School of Transdisciplinary Arts, Akita University of Art*)

When I stand in front of Ishizuka's artworks I feel a pleasant dizziness. The polished "pitch-black" membranes **both absorb and reflect light**. And the image of myself reflected in them appears distorted, stretching and contracting across their curved surfaces. This image is **not me, but neither is it someone else**. The coexistence of light and dark, of self and non-self. As someone accustomed to three-dimensional space and arrow-like time, the simultaneity of these purely opposite things arouses dizziness in me. Still feeling dizzy, I am drawn into Ishizuka's works. And I am lured into a primordial place. This experience is truly "myo."

God said, "Let there be light." In the West, what followed these words is deemed "the beginning." In other words, things began after light and dark were divided and came to confront each other. In the East, however, we try to capture the very "moment" God utters these words. This is the state immediately before the division of light and dark that has the most potentiality. D.T. Suzuki (1870–1966) writes, "The dark mystery of dark mysteries (gen no mata gen) of the Eastern mind lies in capturing this moment. Unless one touches this dark mystery, one's intellect will always remain restless." (D.T. Suzuki, *Toyō Bunka no Kontei ni Aru Mono* (The fundamentals of Eastern culture), in *Shinpen: Toyoteki na Mikata* (New edition: The Eastern way of looking at things), Iwanami Bunko, 1997). Is not this very "moment" the "pitch-black" where light and dark coexist?

In the Book of Genesis, it is said that humans acquired knowledge by eating the forbidden fruit. Here, "knowledge" means the ability to clearly distinguish between the self and others. Immediately before eating this fruit, Adam and Eve were in the state of the "dreaming spirit" (Kierkegaard). This signifies a state in which the distinction between self and others is still vague. Is not this very "dreaming spirit" the "pitch-black" in which the self and non-self commingle?

In short, with his "pitch-black" membranes, Ishizuka is trying to capture the very "moment" God utters his words and show us the "dreaming spirit" immediately before the self and others are distinguished. According to Ishizuka, he "listens to the voice of the lacquer and surrenders himself to it." (Interview: "Membranes: In Between and Around," @ACG Villa Kyoto, 2019). At the same time, however, the balance between the spheres within each work and how they look from the outside are carefully calculated. Ishizuka clearly moves between a dimension in which he becomes one with the lacquer and a dimension in which the self and others are clearly distinguished. Perhaps without such a process, he may not have been able to express so well to date either the "moment" or the "dreaming spirit."

The **complete** unification of Ishizuka and lacquer signifies "mu" (emptiness). In the sense that it means nothing is lacking, "complete" is synonymous with "mu." It is the very dimensional transformation point midway between "mu" and the real world that is his basic position. In this sense, one could say that lacquer, a material that affirms a double negative, was the most suitable material for Ishizuka.

Neither light nor dark (meaning both light and dark). Neither self nor non-self (meaning both self and non-self). Perhaps another word to express this state is "myo." According to Suzuki, "the very moment before the deepest metaphysical things divide into two dimensions" (D.T. Suzuki, "Myo," in *Toyoteki na Mikata*, p. 103) is "myo." Through his works, Ishizuka shows us this "moment" and makes us feel the "dreaming spirit." And he takes us extremely close to "mu." The very sensation one feels at this time is "myo." I hope that upon confronting his work, viewers also become aware of "myo."



Surface Tactility #12, 2019; *Stellar Dance*, 2018
Exhibition view of ACG Villa Kyoto, photo: Nobutada Omote

This past February, when Ishizuka exhibited his works at the ACG Villa Kyoto, he participated in an artist talk with Taisuke Karasawa, a Minamata Kumagusu researcher. From both a philosophical and a folklore-centered point of view, they discussed what is symbolized by the world reflected in the "gloss" of urushi, and tried verbalizing the complex experience of perception that is slowly revealed through this membrane, touching on dreams and reality, consciousness and unconsciousness, as well as faith, which all helped to lay the groundwork for this exhibition, *Polyphase Membrane*. After the talk, Karasawa contributed this essay for us.

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| CV |

Genta Ishizuka

1982 Born in Kyoto, Japan
 2006 BFA, Kyoto City University of Arts, Kyoto
 Exchange program at the Royal College of Art, London, UK
 2008 MFA, Kyoto City University of Arts, Kyoto
 2019 Awarded the Best Young Artist Award by City of Kyoto

| Solo Exhibitions |

2018 *Membrane*, Erskine, Hall & Coe, London, UK
 2017 *Relative Tactile*, Art Space Niji, Kyoto
 2015 *Surface Tactility*, Art Space Niji, Kyoto
 2013 *Gloss Reaction*, Art Space Niji, Kyoto
 2011 *Drifting Boundaries*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka
 2010 *wonderment*, Art Space Niji, Kyoto
 2009 *Extra dimension*, Art Space Niji, Kyoto
 2007 *Sign from the surface*, Art Space Niji, Kyoto

| Group Exhibitions |

2019 *Loewe Craft Prize 2019* [selected as finalist], Sogetsu Kaikan, Tokyo (June 26 - July 22)
ACG Villa Kyoto Vol.002 Kyotaro Hakamata x Genta Ishizuka, ACG Villa Kyoto, Kyoto
 2018 *15 Years*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka
Japanese Lacquer Work, Kanazawa Yasue Gold Leaf Museum, Kanazawa
 2017 *Hard Bodies*, Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis, USA
Takamijima-Kyoto: On the Far Side of Daily Life, participated via APP ARTS STUDIO, Gallery Fleur, Kyoto Seika University, Kyoto
Open Theatre 2017, KAAT Kanagawa Arts Theatre, Yokohama
 2016 *Setouchi Triennale 2016*, participated via App Arts Studio, Takamijima, Kagawa
Reflection, Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu
Bi no Yōkan ["Sign of Beauty"], Takashimaya Art Gallery, Tokyo (traveling exhibition to Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, and Yokohama)
Feather, Kyoto City University of Arts Gallery @KCUA, Kyoto
 2015 *Rendez-vous*, Onomichi City Museum of Art, Hiroshima
Japan spirit x 15, ORIE Art Gallery, Tokyo
still moving, participated via APP ARTS STUDIO, Former Sujin Elementary School, Kyoto
Selected Artists in Kyoto Celebrating 400 Years of Rimpa, The Museum of Kyoto, Kyoto
 2014 *New Horizons in Contemporary Craft Art / Part 1: Lacquer and Pottery Beyond Materiality*, Shibuya Hikarie 8/ CUBE 1, 2, 3, Tokyo
Selected Artists in Kyoto – The Way of PARASOPHIA, The Museum of Kyoto, Kyoto
 2011 *Rokko Meets Art*, participated via (yu), Hyogo
VOCA 2011, The Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo
 2010 *Kyo-Sei*, Kyoto City University of Arts Gallery @KCUA, Kyoto
 2008 *Art Court Frontier #6*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka
CRIA, Kyoto Art Center, Kyoto
 2006 *Kyoto Gense Art Museum*, Kennin-ji Zenkyoan, Kyoto
 2005 *FRAME*, CASO (Contemporary Art Space Osaka), Osaka

| Public Collections |

Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, USA
 Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
 Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, Kyoto

image: *Surface Tactility* #12, detail

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