

Shiro Matsui: *Far Too Close* Artist Talk & Gallery Tour
Charles Worthen (Sculptor / Professor, Hiroshima City University, Faculty of Arts) & Shiro Matsui

2019.11.16 17:00-18:30 | at ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka

Shiro Matsui: My guest for this talk, Charlie, and I met around 1990, maybe at a gallery in Tokyo. At the time, he was a student at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. After that, we saw each other again in 1992 or '93 in Cologne, Germany. During the winter in '92, we met again in Düsseldorf where I had a studio, through our mutual artist friend Keiji Uematsu—maybe at his studio. Since then, we've been to art fairs, carnivals, and exhibitions together. Charlie is just the right teacher to consult about talking about artwork, and putting ideas into words. I learned a lot from him about how to convey the concept of my work, or why I used a certain material.

PERCEPTION MOVES ACROSS DIMENSIONS:
FROM THE SILICONE RUBBER SERIES

We will start the discussion with this project proposal from '94 entitled *Sky fall* [fig. 1]. The text which I will show you now, I consulted Charlie to see where I explained the concept in my own words in English, and he brushed it up into natural-sounding English. There was a group exhibition of Japanese artists at the Toronto Sculpture Garden, and while the main exhibition was in a museum, I wanted to install in this outdoor area, an open space between two chimneys on a building where it almost seemed like an entire small house had been removed from the wall. There was a waterfall in the middle of this brick wall between the two chimneys that operated during the summer. Now, after a quarter century, I am impressed at how well Charlie explained the ideas I had at the time.

The site I have chosen for this project is the brick wall between the two chimneys (see sketch) that becomes partially veiled by a waterfall during warm weather. I intend to activate this site by employing pigmented silicone rubber as both a two-dimensional painted surface, and as a three-dimensional cast object. In this way, viewers will have the opportunity to view the color I have chosen, sky blue (which incidentally in Japanese is *mizuiro*, or “water color”), in two incarnations: as a flat stroke on a wall and as a free-standing mass.

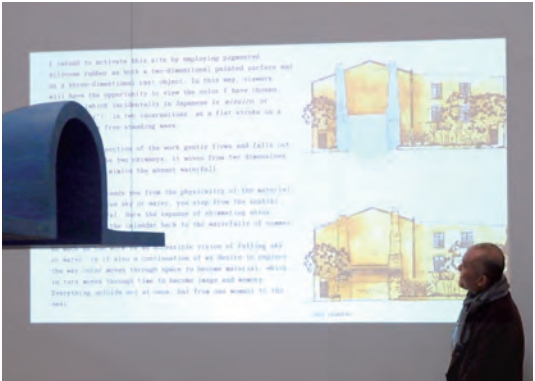
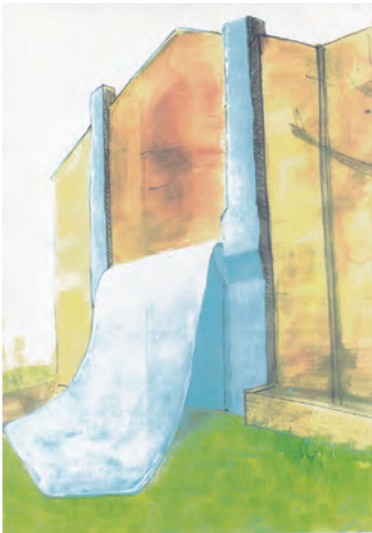
As the center section of the work gently flows and falls out from between the two chimneys, it moves from two dimensions into three and mimics the absent waterfall. Once the work leads you from the physicality of the material to images of blue sky or water, you step from the spatial into the temporal. Here the expanse of shimmering shiny silicone turns the calendar back to the waterfalls of summer. As much as the work is an accessible vision of falling sky or water, is it also a continuation of my desire to explore the way color moves through space to become material, which in turn moves through time to become image and memory. Everything unfolds not at once, but from one moment to the next.

The project was planned for the wintertime, when the waterfall wasn't running. My plan was to apply silicone rubber with blue pigment on the wall then peel away the material from between the two chimneys, letting it flow and fall to cover and mimic the absent waterfall. In the proposal, it says, “Here the expanse of shimmering shiny silicone turns the calendar back to the waterfalls of summer.” The color of the material is sky blue, which is *mizuiro* in Japanese, literally translating to “water color.” I think this statement and the last paragraph capture my concept for this work.

Charles Worthen: The “waterfall” can refer to the flow of time or of space. This is also the “flow” that runs through Shiro's works hereafter. Even though it keeps changing and flowing, the object itself continues its existence. Normally, when something is flowing, it is getting away from you. But the waterfall is changing from one moment to the next, while always remaining there, like a paradox. His works after also suggest this, metaphorically.

Matsui: The phrasing of this explanation of the work is what led to that idea. I thought that was great, how this concept was already forming at the time.

To explain why I like silicon rubber, one reason is the color. In this case, its glossy, vivid red color. At the same time, it



[1] Proposal for *Sky fall*

has a biomorphic, fleshy quality, like a squished intestine. The material has a strong character. And both of those aspects catch my eye, as it keeps shifting between the material and the image. The work doesn't represent a clear image, but that was not important. It was about guiding you to an experience in which how you perceive it, and what you see, keeps shifting.

This work is entitled *Rundlauf* [2] (with *rund* meaning “round,” and *lauf* meaning “run”), a word coined by Manfred Schneckenburger who was the director of documenta 6 and 8. This space was called the Wewerka Pavilion, built for documenta 8, though the building was moved to Münster afterwards. People can't enter the space, so you go around and around the pavilion to check and see how the work is installed, how it is in the space from each side. From one viewpoint, it seems like a flat shape of color, but then from another, looks like a three-dimensional object, which also has a hollow space inside. The viewers actually walk around the pavilion to see the work, and at the same time your perception of the work also goes around. Schneckenberger tried to capture that idea with the work's title.

Worthen: It's like a vitrine. The building is a giant vitrine and the fact you cannot enter is almost frustrating. Usually, you can crouch and get up close with a sculpture, but the fact that you can't makes it really interesting.

Matsui: The material has characteristics of being heavy and biomorphic, while on the other hand it appears as a vivid image of color like a painting, which fascinated me. During this time, I made many series of works out of silicone rubber.

Worthen: You said the color made it painting-like, but more than painting it's like a coloring book. Primary colors, right? Like yellow, blue. Instead of using complementary colors or blending like in painting, you only use the primary color itself; almost childish, like the color of toys. But there are no giant toys like this in the world! There's some tension there.

Matsui: Indeed. Yes, actually I loved the feeling of the material's edges. It still has a feeling of moisture, with a sticky presence that makes me want to touch it.

This *Shadow Casting-Circuit* [3] is also similar. There is a hole that continues through to the other side, and it's a silly, ghostly shape, but it then becomes a tube going around the back that comes forward and back again. It's as if the front and back are flipped.

Worthen: It's like a Klein bottle, in how it can keep going and going within the viewer's mind. Not just with this work but especially with your works that meld with the architecture of a building, the viewers must complete the work in their own memory and imagination. It's up to viewers to figure out its overall shape, or to guess how it all works. And it's quite funny as well.

Matsui: Like Oba-Q [a Japanese cartoon ghost character from the 1960s].

Worthen: Like a platypus.

Matsui: Is that a compliment?

Worthen: Sure. I love animals.

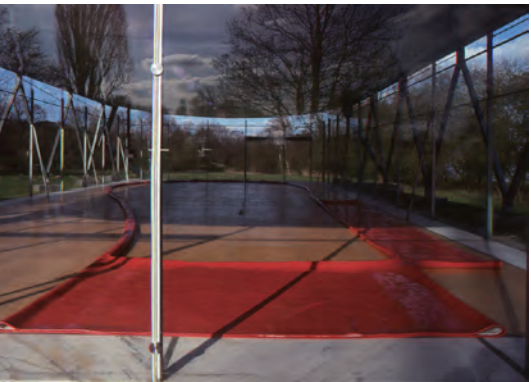
Matsui: There's also my interest in holes in general. If there is a hole, there is a division somewhere. My artist friend, Toru Koyamada, describes this concept that “there is a border, and the curiosity arises beyond it.” Inviting your attention and curiosity, it leads you into an imaginary world.

Worthen: Traditional sculptures are *in situ*, they stand on the pedestal independently, but Shiro's work is actually “dependent,” in a way. It says, “Please, floor, I'm counting on you.” I don't think artwork is gendered really, but the more I look at it, the more your works seem feminine. They emphasize the soft and curved; the negative spaces, rather than positive—holes; and temporary installations, and shadows.

Matsui: You're right. There's a positive shape, and there's a shadow.

Worthen: Yes, and the hidden parts are incredibly important. It may be a natural critical response to the history of sculpture, but I think this series makes you feel that the days of sculptures standing atop pedestals are gone.

Matsui: Thank you.



[2] *Rundlauf* exhibited at the Wewerka Pavilion, Germany | 1995



[3] *Shadow Casting-Circuit* | 1998

WHERE THE SPACE YOU ARE IN CONNECTS TO:
FROM THE CONDUIT SERIES

Matsui: The idea to activate the imagination—about where the space you are in connects to, and how you are connected to the space—is always influential to the development of an idea for my work, which comes about shaped like a hole or a tube. This next work is from '94 at the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken, entitled *Voice - Scope* [4]. Normally, you look through a telescope with your eye, but here, you look through it with your voice—with sound.

Around the same time [ca. 1994], I made a series of small-scale works with the themes of inside/outside entitled *Channel* [5]. The word “channel” is used in many different cases, like a water channel, or a television channel; the word indicates something that links one thing to another. The copper tube connects the two holes in the glass vitrine, so the inside of the copper tube is actually “outside” space. At first glance, you only see the positive form of a copper tube in the work. However, when you look closer, your imagination grows and you realize what might actually be the inside/outside, or here/there. This was the concept of the work, but it’s sometimes hard for people to fully understand. As an example, this is a collaborative work I made with Nara Yoshitomo where a sculpture of a girl is trapped inside a glass case [6]. Here, I can instantly explain the way that the tube connects the outside with the inside. It doesn’t let the imagination grow, though, and the viewer becomes the one who is trapped instead.

Another example of a work dealing with material and image was this piece exhibited at Shinanobashi Gallery in Osaka [7]. The tent material used here is a rather thick blue sheet, sort of similar to silicone rubber, which divided the gallery space and had an image of the blue sky with clouds silkscreen printed on one side but leaving the other side as just the material. I cut a hole into middle of the sheet, and laid that flap onto the other side.

Worthen: This is an anomalous work. You have hardly any works that introduce a photographic image in them. I just realized while I was preparing for this lecture on the train, on my way to the gallery, that there were clouds on the sheet.

Matsui: There really aren’t many. The reverse side doesn’t have any image, though; I played with the idea of showing opposite extremes, like the front and back, the image and object.



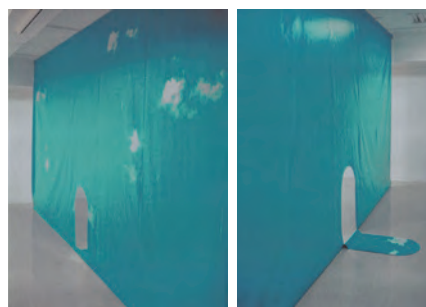
[4] *Voice - Scope* | Exhibited at the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken | 1994
Collection of the Stadtgalerie Saarbrücken



[5] *Channel* | 1994



[6] *Channel* | 1994



[7] *sky exit* exhibited at the Gallery Shinanobashi | 1997

IMAGINING THE ENTIRETY WITH X-RAY VISION:
SCULPTURE BUILT INTO ARCHITECTURE

Matsui: This project I’m about to show you that was never realized either,*¹ and was going to be installed in a courtyard space in Munich that was lined with many boutiques. Connecting the courtyard and the main street was a thin, tunnel-shaped passage, or alleyway. I wanted to install my work in the vertical chute within this passage between the two spaces [8]. This work made of yellow awning fabric was hidden inside the building, with the exception of part of the awning that projects two meters into the courtyard. My intention was to make people aware of a space they normally wouldn’t notice, and they will only be able to see the work once they are inside it, as it is invisible from the outside. People passing through it could imagine themselves looking with X-ray vision at the entire work and the space itself from outside.

Worthen: Even though it was unrealized, wasn’t this your first attempt at making a sculpture built into architecture? In your proposal, it says “X-ray eyes,” right? It was probably one of your earliest works where the viewer interacts by using their imagination like X-ray vision to view it.

Matsui: The two meters of material you can see in the courtyard is a clue to imagine the yellow submarine-shaped object stuck inside the passageway, the positive form that is actually hidden inside. This phrase “X-ray eyes” comes from Charlie’s sense of humor.

Worthen: Oh, did I write this?

Matsui: Yup. Charlie chose this kind of concise wording.

Worthen: It’s what Superman has.

Matsui: Really?

Worthen: Yeah. You didn’t know? Superman has “X-ray eyes”. With Shiro’s works, you can use that power to see it from the outside.

Matsui: I see. And if you only go through the inside, then you can’t get the whole picture.

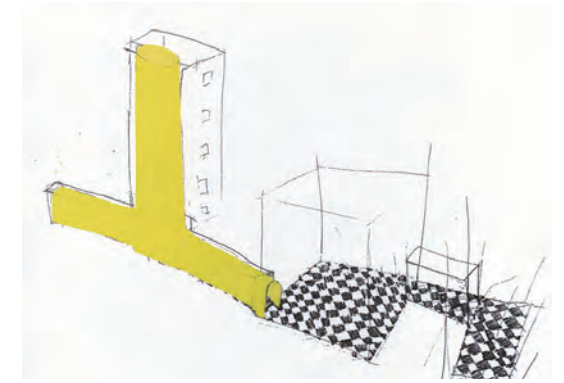
Worthen: Did you think about using silicone rubber?

Matsui: No. Just awning sheet (tent material).

Worthen: Aha, awning sheet.

Matsui: The problem was the fire hazard. If it catches fire, there’s no escape route because it’s so narrow. With the fire safety laws, I imagine that it would be impossible. However, it was realized in a different form at the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art [9]. It was entitled *The Way to the Artwork Is Through the Stomach*. The title came from the phrase, “The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach”. Like the previous work, you see it with X-ray eyes to see the whole project. I know the museum reopened just recently. Does it have a new layout?

Audience: No, it’s the same layout.



[8] Sketches for *Parascope Project* | 1997

*1 The Toronto project, *Sky fall*, introduced at the beginning (p.1) was supposed to be sponsored by a silicone implant business, however because of a lawsuit regarding its health hazards, the project was not realized.

Matsui: The same, is it? The exhibition *Future Recollection* (1997, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art) was a group exhibition with several artists, where the entrance for the show was purposely changed to the south side. As I showed you in the previous photo, I installed the work in two places in the museum; I used the entrance space and the main, large exhibition hall. The main work is similar to the passageway in München, with the end of the tunnel projecting out into the other room.

Worthen: It's lovely how it curves.

Matsui: Isn't it? After you go inside and through it all the way then look back, you realize that you went through a giant sculpture. Whether I can even call it a sculpture or not aside...

Worthen: Sure, we can call it a sculpture.

Matsui: Really? Okay then.

Worthen: Speaking of the word sculpture [*chokoku*], when I tell someone, "I make sculptures," they then ask me, "Like this?" while making a carving gesture. Carving is sculpture. Is the word "sculpture" in English better here, or *rittai* in Japanese? It's hard finding a good word in Japanese.

Matsui: Right. The word *rittai* is a word for any kind of three-dimensional object. But maybe with the word *chokoku*, it indicates more an object with which you can experience something connected to art.

Worthen: Yes. A statue of a king on horseback in the city would be called a "monument". And there's a stone sculpture outside of ARTCOURT Gallery, which I'd say is also a monument. Japan's city planning has always featured sculptures, but there is also the concept of the "unmonumental". There was an exhibition *Unmonumental* (2007, New Museum, New York), which was not particularly anti-monument, but just expressed how the age of monuments is ending. Like with Shiro's inflatable works made of ripstop, which we will show photos of later; they can be packed into a single suitcase. In this way it is very unmonumental. Depending on the site, it exists temporarily. For example, the architect Kengo

Kuma designed big, assertive architecture in the '80s, but at some point he realized he must create a building to match its environment, and thought of the concept of *makeru kenchiku* ["losing architecture"]. Shiro's work can be described as "contingent," like it happened by chance or coincidentally; as if the place determined the work, it shares the same attitude as "losing architecture."

——— **"THE ME HERE", AND "THE ME THAT WAS THERE":
INSTALLATION IN PUBLIC SPACES**

Matsui: This is the work *Moss Garden* [10], installed at the glass elevator of a shopping mall in Essen, Germany. The customers would arrive on the 3rd floor at the parking lot, to the elevator to go to the 2nd floor, then down to the 1st floor. I installed biomorphic, plant-like forms on the ground and part of its "shadow" was located right outside the elevator on the first floor. I installed the "missing" pieces of both the plant and the shadow within the elevator. Like the proposal said, "as the elevator makes its trips between the parking roof and the ground floor, the sculpture will continuously be completed and broken apart."

Worthen: The forming and un-forming of the work is the same as the *Sky fall* project from earlier. It changes from one moment to the next, but always remains there.

Matsui: Riders in the elevator always experienced those changes with surprise, but in the next moment, this surprise was then seen by someone from the outside who has already experienced it.

Worthen: It is a chain reaction of seeing and being seen.

Matsui: Yes, exactly. Also, there was a time lag between the "me" here and the "me" who was there. As the elevator moves, the perception of the viewer shifts from one place to another.

Worthen: The grass as shadow of the work is two-dimensional, and the biomorphic plants are three-dimensional, while the movement gives it a fourth dimension.

Matsui: Yes, that's it.

This was part of the sculpture project in Ahlen in '98, where I opened up a hole in an old brick wall of a private home [11]. The copper tube connected one wall to another, so that public space traveled through a private garden space enclosed by a brick wall. It is the same idea as a copper tube installed in the glass cases, but realized on a life-size scale. There was an interesting meeting with the homeowner's family—a father, mother, and daughter—who were waiting to meet with the museum curator and I. I asked for their permission and started explaining about making a hole and installing a work in their garden.

Worthen: That's no joke, normally. As if you could come break our wall.

Matsui: Right. The father then translated my English and asked his daughter if she understood. She said, "Yes". "What do you think?" "It's cool." And I felt relieved. In the next moment, the owner said to me, "Please make the pipe very sturdy. So that my daughter can swing on it." They were happy to let me break a hole through their wall.

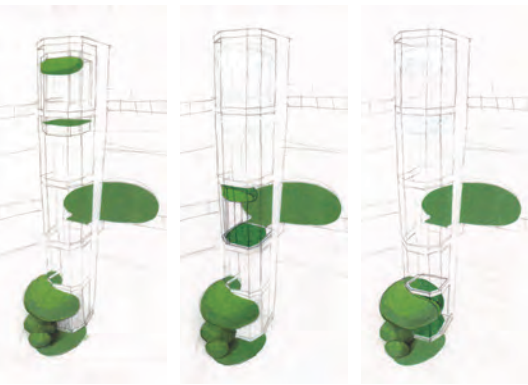
Worthen: And of course you fixed it after the exhibition?

Matsui: No. I believe it stayed that way.

Worthen: Really. Well, good.

Matsui: The point of this work was that, normally when you find a hole in the wall, you try to peek through, but here you can never see inside the walls. You're curious and you go check around the corner to the other side, and you find that the wall turns and the hole just continues to that side, too. You imagine that from a view from above, the public space would go through the tube and cut across that private space. It's impossible to see this work all at once, but it's interesting that you find yourself trying to see your own situation from a bird's eye view.

With this next work [12], I actually made a hole in a wall at the private gallery Hakutosha in Nagoya. The owner is a very orderly person, who always kept up maintenance of the walls and carefully fixed holes made by nails, kept the space clean. I came to him to say that I'd like to make a hole in your very important wall, and he said, "Yes, you can." I said "Really?" And he said, "Of course." He watched as I opened the hole, but the moment I started he couldn't bear watching and had to sit down. The pipe goes through to the other side and through a bookshelf at a 45 degree angle, into a private space where the gallery stocks their art books. The pipe penetrated artists' catalogues and books, such as those of Henry Moore, Rene Magritte, and others. I don't know whether if it is the same as *Sky exit*, where the blue color evoked an image of clouds and a blue sky, but I thought the work would be interesting if it could pull up the history evoked by the artists' books and words.



[10] *moss garden* exhibited at the Allee-Center, Essen, Germany | 2002



[11] *What's behind the wall in Südstraße?*, Ahlen | 1998



[12] Exhibition at Hakutosha, Aichi | 2001



[9] *The Way to the Artwork is Through the Stomach* exhibited at Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art | 1997 | Collection of the Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art

HINTING AT AN INVISIBLE FORM: CASTING SMOKE

Matsui: The next work is an intense one entitled *Mole Cast* [13]. I made it for the outdoor sculpture exhibition in Ube, 2001. I dug three holes on a sloping hill, then dug down and opened another hole at the bottom of the hill that was connected to all three holes above with an underground tunnel. Visitors could enter the work, go into the tunnel, and talk to the people standing by the holes above. You can only see it from the inside like the sculpture proposal in Munich. But with this work, when you burn firewood in it like a *noborigama* kiln, the smoke billows up as a positive form.

Worthen: The positive is made of smoke. But of course you cannot exactly make the form yourself, if it is smoke.

Matsui: Yes, since it's in constant motion.

Worthen: Has anyone here been to this sculpture park in Ube? Many of the works installed there are the very things we call "monuments". And there, Shiro ends up digging a hole. There's another work where the work is a hole, but this is an example of "unmonumental" sculpture. It asserts with confidence that the time for monuments is ending. On top of that, Shiro's father is a ceramicist, so from a young age he had connection to these kinds of kilns.

Matsui: I did. Burning things, smoke, flames. It was so interesting to me the way heat becomes light. I've been having that experience from an early age.

Worthen: Inside the kiln, it's lined with bricks, right? Did you remove these afterwards?

Matsui: Yes, I removed them. The opening starts three-dimensionally, but it was hard to make. Mr. Yo Akiyama actually helped me with this. Then people inside and outside the tunnel could play with each other. People and even dogs came over to see.

Worthen: There's even something strange, or temporary, about that grass, too.

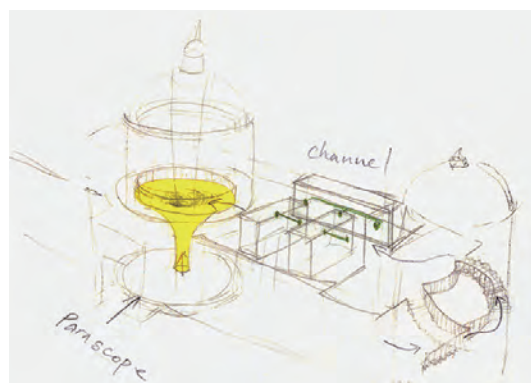
Matsui: Yes. From inside, you only see the interior, but the fire and smoke billow up and fill the "cast." I'm not sure if "casting smoke" is the best way simile, but the smoke seems to rise up like a massive entity. When people see the smoke, some people are angry that a fire is being started in the park; others don't know what's going on but get excited by the sight and come running over from afar. Some nursery school students came by and asked what I was doing. At first, it was just some smoke drifting up into the air. But by nightfall, the temperature of the flames had risen more and more, until the temperature at the chimneys was about 1000 degrees. So in the evening, this work became filled with light.

SCULPTURE AS A DEVICE FOR EXPANDING THE TANGIBLE WORLD

Matsui: This is *Parascope*, a work I installed at the Tokyo National Museum's Hyokeikan gallery in 2001 [14]. I believe it's the oldest dedicated art museum in Japan.



[13] *Mole Cast* exhibited at The 19th Contemporary Japanese Sculpture, Ube, Yamaguchi | 2001



[14] *Parascope* exhibited at the Hyokeikan | 2001

Worthen: It was made of awning material?

Matsui: No, spandex. It's an elastic material used for athletic wear or swim suits.

Worthen: So it was quite heavy?

Matsui: Yes. At the center of the building, there is an entrance with an atrium that has a cupola [dome], with a rose window at the top to gaze up at. The museum has two wings in the exhibition hall. My main work is a funnel hanging from the second floor of the atrium space, then the other work *Channel* is also in the second floor vitrine that's been used as a showcase for past exhibitions. The audience can see the funnel again when they come see *Channel*, and return to the work they saw from the first floor.

Worthen: In this kind of visual device, the work shows how you are naturally drawn to chemistry, the sciences. Shiro has always been interested in the intersection between art and science. The experience of his artwork is also an experiment, that often tries to expand our tangible world.

Matsui: The next work, *Glossy Dark* [15], looks like a refrigerator with two holes in its door that connect to two balls attached inside. Inside the refrigerator, the interior is brass-plated and totally polished. When you shut the door, the work becomes "complete" and whole, but at the same time, the glossy interior becomes completely dark. With the other works, you experience the sculpture by going around and examining it, but here you must open and close the work to understand the whole. Instead of a large-scale work like before, you can understand, or rather tangibly experience, the action of opening/closing and relationship between inside/outside.

Worthen: With these devices, you can calibrate the experience yourself, or the viewer can play with it. Normally, if it's a sculpture, all of that is fixed in one position of either open or closed. By adding an aspect of performance, in this case to open or to close, it is both a sculpture and some kind of interface.

HERE AND THERE – EXTENDING, DIVIDING, INVERTING AREAS: GIANT BALLOON SERIES

Matsui: This is the first time I used ripstop material for my ideas of here and there, inside and outside.

Worthen: So you developed it from copper, silicone, awning sheets to spandex, then ripstop.

Matsui: That's right. Gradually, my works grew into a form that people can go actually go inside. Before, the work was made complete in the imagination, but I now I let the audience enter the work to examine it themselves.

The *Outside's Inside* [16] was installed in 2004 at the Heidelberger Kunstverein. Since I threw out my back when I was there, Charlie helped me with installation that time. The space was about 8m wide and 30m deep. It splits the space through the center, between here and there.



[15] *Glossy Dark* | 2003



[16] *The Outside's Inside* exhibited at Heidelberger Kunstverein | 2004

When you turn on a fan, the wind pushes out a gourd-shape balloon on the other side. People can step into the balloon and through to the other side of the wall. However, you cannot actually enter the other side of the gallery. There is a frustration when you cannot go over there. Along the gallery space, there is a balcony from where you look down at what is actually going on.

The next work is *Jonah's Green* [17], from 2006. At a branch of the Kunstmuseen Krefeld called Haus Esters, originally a private villa designed by Mies van der Rohe sometime in the late 1920s. The architecture shows a typical Mies style. Through each doorway, you can see the next doorway, and the image repeats, going deeper and deeper. Reminds me of playing with a video camera to shoot a TV monitor.

Worthen: Like Yayoi Kusama's "infinity mirrors".

Matsui: Exactly. Deeper and deeper... That is his typical style of architecture. There is a lengthy depth of rooms. In contrast with that, each room has a wide, horizontal view of the garden. As you can see in the concept of the drawing, I tried to decode the architecture by installing a tube-like balloon structure made of ripstop that stretches from one entrance to the other, like human organs. You can enter normally using the entrance to the museum, but this massive balloon occupies the museum space, and you don't have much space to walk around. Then you are directed to go outside and all the way around the museum to the back door to experience the inside of the balloon.

Worthen: With the Heidelberg work, air was being blown into the work with a fan to inflate it, but here, the work had ventilation in the edges of the space, sucking the air out instead.

Matsui: Yes, it was applying negative pressure.

Worthen: Even that is passive. Instead of taking shape by pushing, the work is formed through suction. In the exhibition catalog, the director Dr. Martin Hentschel writes, "This interim space between fabric and architecture...was probably the decisive factor in this work", which I thought was interesting.

Matsui: To explain further about the function of the work, the inner space of the tube is the same as the outside of the building. Here, the air is getting sucked out of "the interim space", so the pressure around the balloon drops, and so that difference makes it inflate.

Worthen: Is this the first artwork where you used this suction technique?

Matsui: I think so. But later, I found out that Rauschenberg's artist group EAT (Experiments in Art & Technology) in New York tried to create a space using this technique at the 1970 Osaka World Expo in one of the pavilions. The rectangular space by Mies transforms into a cave structure.

Worthen: You could say it's very contemporary. Ripstop was a relatively new material, and the technique was also new, so it couldn't have been made 50 years ago. Takahiro Iwasaki, Japan's representative artist at the last Venice Biennale who makes miniature landscapes using wood and quick-drying super glue, also could not have realized his work without both this material and technique, although that might be a bit extreme. This is especially relatable for artists who work in sculpture. In Shiro's case, the silicone is heavy and lays flat, and it's difficult to fill a large space by stretching spandex. But then you found ripstop. What about CAD? We haven't spoken about how you designed these forms yet.

Matsui: There is a CAD application specifically for making boat and car seats. For making something three-dimensional from a flat material. Based on cylinders and spheres and their

extending or expanding, you can also unfold the object into many even flat parts to realize that form.

Worthen: You bought it and learned it yourself?

Matsui: No, I learned by watching demonstration videos. Besides the main work, *Channel I*, I installed another work, *Channel II*, outside of the museum. It is about a 60cm diameter glass cylinder and pond. As kids, we used to play in the bathtub, and found that if you submerge a bucket in the water, turn it upside down, and lift it until the edges reach the water's surface, the water stays inside of the bucket. This is actually the same thing as Pascal's law. The goldfish can swim up to the top the glass cylinder, which you can see from the window in the middle of the building. I imagined that when viewers inside Haus Esters look at the work through the windows, they see these fish saying to them, "Look! You think you're in an art museum, but we're both in the same boat, aren't we?" By moving around their tank, from the bottom of the pool to up in the glass cylinder, the goldfish become much like the humans on a different scale, which demonstrates what our own situation looks like.

Worthen: The goldfish are a metaphor for the humans. The people who go into Shiro's works become like bacteria entering the vessels of someone's body, tiny and insignificant.

Matsui: *Channel I* is the same as the Heidelberg work, a balloon extended in the horizontal direction, a structure where you can go inside, but cannot go to the other side, while in *Channel II*, it extends in the vertical direction. In one the works I showed at ARTCOURT Gallery in 2013, *ENTERING* [18], goldfish can travel from their home-base vessel, through a circuit that goes around in a loop, like an astronaut conducting extra-vehicular activity at the International Space Station.

The next work is *Waterfall of Narcissus* [19] from 2007, at my second Ube Open Air Sculpture exhibition. This time, far from making a sculpture, I opened up a hole in the middle of the lake.

Worthen: A hole, again? [Laughing] Did you receive a prize for this one?

Matsui: Yes, thank you. Both times. I had made a sort of symbolic pier that encourages you to look at it closer. In the movie I showed you just now, a Canadian tourist was interested in this unusual phenomenon in the lake, and made a video that he uploaded to YouTube, adding strange sounds. Then, many people found this video and wanted to see it themselves.

Worthen: I'm sure some people will go searching for it.

Matsui: Yup. Of course, it's odd.*2 There were many paddleboards at the lake, and people were curious to see what was happening. I already mentioned artist Koyamada's description about this "border". The hole there is a gap that makes people curious about the connection between here and there.

Worthen: Like what could lie beyond that hole.

Matsui: Right. It's similar to the *Channel* [20] shown at Aichi Triennale in 2010. This balloon work connects a rooftop garden outside a building in Nagoya to the huge atrium



[18] *ENTERING – Kingyo Table Station* exhibited at ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka | 2013

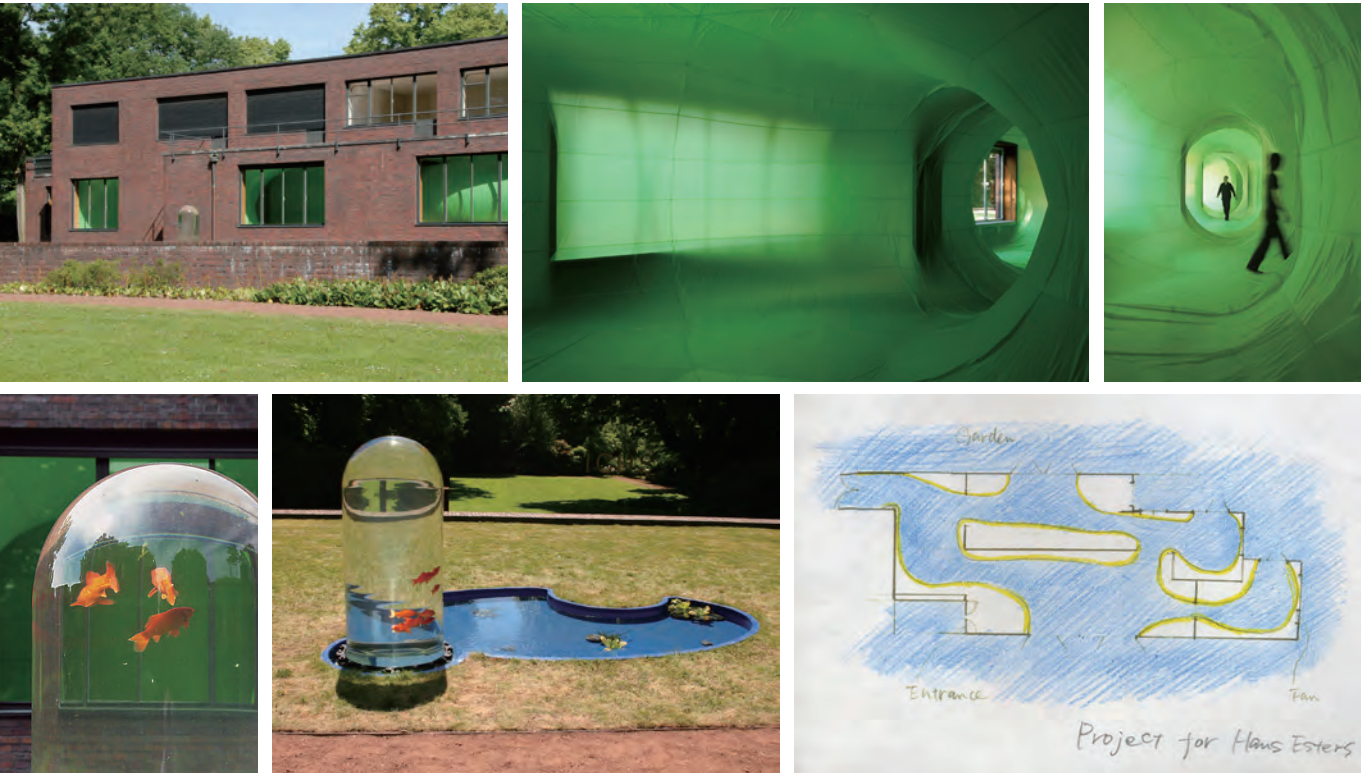


[19] *Waterfall of Narcissus* exhibited at The 22nd Contemporary Japanese Sculpture, Ube, Yamaguchi | 2007



[20] *Channel* exhibited at the Aichi Arts Center | 2010

*2
Awarded the 40th Anniversary of Ube Municipal Organization Prize for *Mole Cast*, 2001.
Awarded Ube City Open-Air Sculpture Museum Prize / Citizen Prize for *Waterfall of Narcissus*, 2007.



[17] *Channel I* (above) and *Channel II* (below) for the exhibition "Jonah's Green" at Museum Haus Esters, Krefeld, Germany | 2006

inside, and in the garden, people can walk around inside the balloon and explore the connections of the spaces.

Worthen: Where are the fans?

Matsui: The fan was placed somewhere else to inflate the balloon. I understood bit-by-bit that what makes my own works interesting are these holes, and the idea of extending here to there, connecting there and here. Like how I conceptualized that first work “Sky fall”, space shifts into time, image, or vice versa, by unfolding this idea gradually, not all at once, you come back to the question, What exactly do my own circumstances look like? Or, through an endless progression, you get an image of your own existence within a bigger picture.

TO A BROADER SPATIAL SCALE AND TIME SPAN: MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE PROJECT

Worthen: Now Shiro, looking all around for the next location to work in, looks up, and oh! The next stop is outer space.

Matsui: Right now, I’m working on a project called *Message in a Bottle* [21]. Like this picture, space surrounds our earth, spreading outwards for hundreds of thousands of light years. One day while I was looking up and observing space from the surface of the Earth, like *Waterfall of Narcissus*, I found a hole in the sky where space was coming down towards me like a drooping tail. I reached out and grasped the tip of the tail, which came free. Whilst I stared at what was left in my hands, I imagined myself from above, standing there and looking out into space from the surface of the round Earth. The concept was to examine ourselves on a broader spatial scale and time span.

Worthen: In a way, Shiro’s works are extremely conceptual, but they are visually very approachable. I think they always exude humor, a child-like curiosity, bright colors, and a search for sense of wonder, which never dry out; wet, you could say. Especially with this *Message in a Bottle* project.

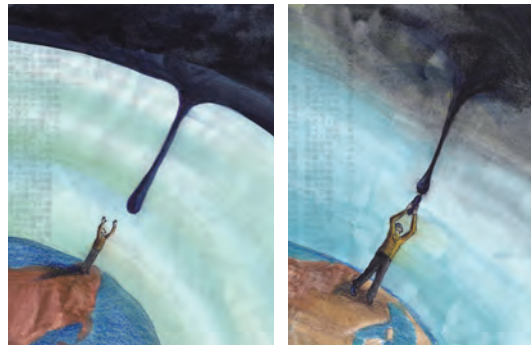
Matsui: Of course, as an artist’s imaginary story, space cannot reach down to us like a tail, so I decided to ask an astronaut to capture a piece of space, and to bring it back to Earth. Here is the American astronaut Shannon Walker making a statement about the project, saying fill this bottle with outer space.

“I Shannon Walker, on the fourteenth of September in the year 2010, hereby announce that on behalf of the people of planet earth, we will perform an E.V.A (extra vehicular activity) to fill this bottle with a bit of outer space. We will then take this bottle back home where it will serve as a memento of our endeavors, and as a message of wonder for all people”.

Charlie was the one who thought up this statement.

Worthen: It was my honor. Truly.

Matsui: But I was pleasantly surprised that the astronaut read exactly what we proposed.



[21] *Message in a Bottle* drawing



[22] A photograph of the top of Space Shuttle Discovery behind the International Space Station and the Kounotori. ©Shiro Matsui/JAXA



[23] An astronaut gathering “space” in a tube. ©Shiro Matsui/JAXA

*3 The collaborative research by the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA), who explored the possibilities of the Utilization of International Space Station (ISS) for Culture/Humanities and Social Sciences—beginning in the late 1990s and continued throughout the reshaping of the organization—and the multiple arts universities and research organizations, formed the basis for this project. The research group at the Kyoto City University of Arts took part in this project as the “artistic approaches to space” led by Noriyasu Fukushima, which gave no small influence on activities of the artists and researchers who had joined in that project. In 2006 after these preparations, JAXA held an open call for artistic experiments to be realized on The Japanese Experiment module, *Kibo*. “Message in a Bottle” and “Space Garden/Dewey’s Forest”, proposed by Matsui and two other members, were a part of the experiments selected for the 1st Phase of the Pilot Missions of Utilization for Culture/Humanities and Social Sciences, and were respectively realized between 2011 and 2013, 2009 and 2010.

Worthen: Yeah. They did an amazing job. That they went out into space and worked on this art project is such a wonderful thing.

Matsui: Yes. This was the first time in American space exploration history they conducted an EVA for an artwork, where the value of the mission was uncertain. As you may know, EVAs are normally only used for space station maintenance.

Worthen: I feel like Shiro’s interest in science and its intersection with art really crystallized here.

Matsui: This is footage taken in February 2011, I think. The mission for capturing space was carried out by two American astronauts, for the final mission of space shuttle Discovery. The mission started with the astronauts playing the hit song by the 1980s rock group Police, *Message in a Bottle*, which was a great surprise.

Worthen: There was a series of projects with JAXA space and artists, right? Where several artists created artworks with the help of astronauts.*3

Matsui: Yes, but JAXA found it hard to ask NASA astronauts, who risk their lives for humankind, to carry out my project. So I asked them to just talk to the astronauts once, no matter what happens. And the astronauts answered with, “Cool!” They would be happy to do it. So the project began.

Worthen: I don’t know whether I should mention this, but when the bottle returned all the way from space, and you opened it the first time...?

Matsui: Yeah, so as you see in the video, the case containing the bottle got knocked around during the mission on the first attempt. The original task was for the astronauts to capture space just near the airlock after their EVA work, and then take a commemorative photo. However, they started moving further from the airlock, and they actually tried to find a good place to take the photo, where you could see all of the capsules and Discovery in the background. This caused the damage to the glass bottle. It was a very surprising, exciting, and dramatic mission. I imagined that the photos would capture a really impressive scene in space, in front of our blue planet. I couldn’t wait for the photographs to arrive. There were so many things in the background, like the top of Discovery, the Kounotori docking [22]. In another photo, I zoomed in closer to the astronaut, and was very happy to find the blue planet was reflected in his visor [23]. But the bottle got damaged on this first mission, so we used a robotic arm to capture it a second time in 2013 with the Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide.

After the space mission was completed, we started the ground mission that travels the globe, giving many people the chance to hold in their hands this glass bottle. We prepared a special mobile balloon dome so people could gather inside for the experience. We asked visitors to express their thoughts, wishes, and concerns on paper, which were scanned to become a part of the growing digital archive.

Worthen: It really has a great symbolic power.

Matsui: Starting in Japan, we looked for special locations, which would raise people’s curiosity. What’s the nearest place in Japan to



A glass bottle containing “space.”



Message in a Bottle – Mission on the Ground | Todaiji, Nara | 2014



Message in a Bottle – Mission on the Ground | The summit of Mt. Fuji / The Mount Fuji Research Station | 2016



Message in a Bottle – Mission on the Ground | The summit of Mauna Kea | Subaru Telescope, Hawaii | 2018

space? The summit of Fuji mountain. This is Todaiji Temple in Nara, it's 1300 years old and home of the Great Buddha, which is the symbolic statue of space and nothingness. On the 30th November, we brought the project to Subaru observatory at the summit of Mt. Mauna Kea in Hawaii.

Worthen: The observatory building and telescope dome are both round. It's similar to the forms in Shiro's work. Some architecture, like mosques or gas tanks, are round like this, but not many. I think it might be the intersection between sculpture, science, and architecture.

Matsui: This is an 8m diamer telescope, and made to look into space from the age of the Big Bang. The bottle travels across the globe and has arrived here, to places like this observatory where we have the opportunity to see a billion years back in time vertically, then seeing time horizontally in the rotations of the round Earth. It was interesting to think in this way while holding the bottle, that we are all gathered at the intersection of different lines of time and space.

THE YEARNING FOR ENDLESSNESS

Matsui: In my case, the problem is that there is no fixed point. For example, there's no specific image, where I could say "This a sculpture of a person", or "a deer".

Worthen: Is that a problem?

Matsui: It is a problem. Someone can ask, what does this represent? What's interesting is all the different ways in which that answer can keep shifting like a slippery slope. Starting with the analysis of the material, for example, the more you get involved in it, the more you feel it is endless. It is really tough to explain. For me, anyways.

Worthen: Last week on the phone, though, when we were thinking of what to talk about, we mentioned the act of chasing after something as a point for discussion. Part of it is like the artwork is nothing more than a record of that chase. Even after making a work, always chasing after the next thing. Shiro's work is the chain reaction of "chasing". More than the work's "thing-ness", which can be visually fascinating, I do think it is more like a "document" of the search for something. Based in Shiro's curiosity, and that curiosity is childlike. Of course, now he's an adult who has money and must involve various people to produce a work, but I think, fundamentally, even this is an extension of his childhood world in which his father's various artist friends would visit his house and redesign not only the studio, but also his house including the garden.

Matsui: Maybe, I have this yearning for endlessness, or the feeling that no matter how far down you dig, something else will come out of it.

Worthen: Yes, that's why there is hope. You feel like you can keep going forever.

Matsui: It also sounds like Hell [Laughing]. Maybe, I keep trying my best to make objects that can give you that experience of this sensation.

Matsui: Okay, let's go for a tour of the gallery and experience it for ourselves.

Worthen: Yes, let's go around.

FAR TOO CLOSE GALLERY TOUR

Matsui: When you first enter the exhibition, you encounter this trumpet-shaped piece jutting out [24]. It's called *Capital T*, but I'll explain its meaning later. If you follow the tubes, you come to face the back of the courtyard and can see that inside and beyond the glass window, it branches off and extends to the left and right. When you see that each of the three ends opens up like a trumpet, they entice you actions like peeking through, speaking into, or holding your ear up and trying to hear something there. Apparently, kids who were passing by actually tried shouting out here, then ran into the gallery to see if their voices reached inside.

Now, let's go inside the gallery and continue the tour.



[24] *Capital T* | 2019 | Copper | Dimensions variable



[25] *Long Transmission* | 2018 | Wood, copper | 88.5x137x42.5cm



[26] *Much Longer Transmission*
2019 | Wood, copper | 77.5x211x130cm

Long Transmission [25], and the much bigger work further in, *Much Longer Transmission* [26] are easier to understand with the experience of the previous work in mind, I think. They differ in scale, but these works also have both ends shaped like trumpets, and like *Capital T*, if you follow the tubes from one end, you move further back on the tabletop, the tube joins the ridge of the wood slab, while coming back to towards the other end. Both ends are positioned close together on this side, but they've traveled to and came back from a different area than here, so questions spring up like, Is this in the same time-space? a different one? I think it creates an interesting experience.

The height of this work, *Lag Behind/Lag Forward*, was adjusted to fit my own height [27]. One more person can stand on the other side, so two viewers stand back to back. If their gazes extend forward, it keeps going all the way around the world, and they are actually facing each other. I think it would be interesting if you could also experience a bird's eye view of this situation. It's rather difficult to get that perspective from above, so that's why I thought experiencing this work while holding the bottle from the Message in a Bottle project that we previously discussed, could let us get a better bird's eye view. So I brought the bottle from that first mission here. Instead of looking at the bottle as some beautiful object, I think what's really interesting are the new things you start to see when humans get involved with this object, and that experience itself. Gazing down at yourself beyond our current scale, from a different dimension, or sensing a different kind of time. While holding this bottle, I encourage you to try and actively experience those things. I think that the way you feel hearing me talk about it versus actually holding in your hand will be incredibly different.

Just Around The Corner is a work that you can experience by fitting your head completely inside it like this, while standing on a step that fits your height [28]. When you cover your head with this work, it blocks your vision, and your awareness extends above your head along the tube, as if becoming connected to the space over there. Turning the corner to move ahead feels like having hope when facing tomorrow or the future, doesn't it? The spaces are connected by this image of going somewhere that is different in time. The phrase "Just Around the Corner" means something like, "We've already come so close to the end, so let's go towards tomorrow." I thought it was interesting that this idea related to time in turning a corner that leads to a brighter tomorrow, and your bodily movements were intertwined, so I hoped the work could convey that.

We've come to the end of the tour, but now we look at *Capital T*, the very first work we saw from outside going into the gallery space [29]. This time, we see it from the inside and out to where we were all standing before by the entrance. We have observed had a few different experiences of observing a work while changing the scale and looking at it from above, shifting our angle of view, to then complete the work in our imagination. Now I want you to recall in this moment, if this place that you peeked into and imagined is the same as the place that you are actually standing in now. I thought it would be interesting if, like going through a time machine, we could see our past selves that were looking in from before. The title *Capital T* refers to the capital letter "T" that appears when looking at this work from above.

In this exhibition, time and space are connected, extended out, or shortened. This show reminded me that, through those actions, the experience of imagining the continuity of time and space, or the idea of forever is what's most interesting.



[27] *Lag Behind/Lag Forward* | 2019 | Wood (painted) | 28.5x107x114cm



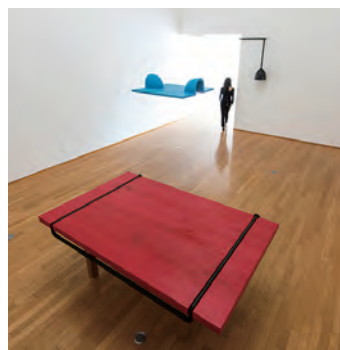
[28] *Just Around the Corner* | 2019 | Copper | 100x90x100cm



[29] *Capital T* | 2019 | Copper | Dimensions variable



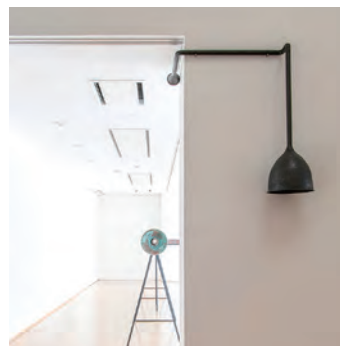
Shiro Matsui and Charles Worthen



01

Online Archive 松井紫朗個展 展覧会記録

Far Too Close (2019), *Forwards Backwards* (2013),
Hundreds of Gardens (2010)



02

Exhibited & Related works



03

「Far Too Close」対談

チャールズ・ウォーゼン（彫刻家・広島市立大学芸術学部教授）× 松井紫朗

Artist Talk

Charles Worthen (sculptor / professor, Hiroshima City University Faculty of Arts) & Shiro Matsui

Now Viewing

Outline

松井紫朗「Far Too Close」対談

2020年11月16日〔土〕17:00–18:30

チャールズ・ウォーゼン（彫刻家・広島市立大学芸術学部教授）× 松井紫朗

会場：アートコートギャラリー

Shiro Matsui: *Far Too Close* Artist Talk

November 16 (Sat), 2020 5:00pm–6:30pm

Charles Worthen (sculptor / professor, Hiroshima City University Faculty of Arts) & Shiro Matsui

Venue: ARTCOURT Gallery

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