

COMPLETION REPORT

Art the Seto Inland Sea: Examining the Impact of the Setouchi Triennale on Local Communities

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I first visited the Setouchi region in 2015 and made a couple more trips there before proposing this research project. The overarching objective of this research project has been to learn more about the formation and development of a cultural ecosystem that is the context for the growing presence of contemporary art on the Setouchi islands from 2010 to 2020. The background for this research includes the recent socio-political history of contemporary Japan and the trends/dynamics of the international contemporary art world since the early 1990s.

It has been three decades since contemporary art was introduced to the Setouchi islands with the opening of the Benesse House Museum in 1992. And over the past two decades, there has been a proliferation of art festivals and biennales around the world. In Asia, where countries and cities have been rapidly modernising, these large-scale exhibitions have become a key signifier of cultural and economic progress. Today, the Setouchi Triennale, also known as the Setouchi International Art Festival, is among the most influential long-running curatorial projects in Japan. Helmed by the artistic director Fram Kitagawa since its inception, the Triennale has manifested in four iterations: 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019. Even though the Setouchi Triennale has increased footfall on the Setouchi islands, the problem of ecological sustainability is looming large on the horizon. The success of cultural tourism in the Setouchi islands itself places new pressures on island resources. The islands themselves have changed over the past decade and the impact of contemporary art's presence includes changes in the physical landscape and the working of the local economies. The composition of the different island communities has also changed over this period, in terms of population size and demographics, leading to new goals and motivations. Since the early 1990s, new generations of islanders have come of age, and the socio-political, even historical contexts have given rise to new needs and wants. The triennale volunteers and the visitors make up a significant presence during the festival but they are a transitory population. The seasonality of visitors, even on the main art islands, is a concern for cultural tourism. On Naoshima, Shodoshima, Ojijima and Inujima, which have had success in attracting young families with children, education and healthcare needs will be of growing importance in the future. The urban-rural migration led more young people, including Koebi-Tai volunteers from other countries, to stay on. That means that more attention has to be given to needs beyond basic food and accommodation issues. In the run-up to the postponed Tokyo Olympics, the urbanscape is transforming; smaller art spaces in Tokyo have been pushed out of the city and some have closed for good. The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed the cracks in social structures, showing how the inequalities or injustices borne by the less fortunate are ultimately everyone's burden to share. I have started presenting my research and publishing aspects of it in international forums. I hope to continue working on this towards a book publication in the near future.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)
“Creative Placemaking Seminar on Contemporary Arts Managements for Creative Economy, Tourism,
and Sustainable Community Development: Co-Creation for Impact and Sustainability.”

<https://fb.me/e/GLc8h3zD>

Organized by:

The Japan Foundation, Bangkok
Prayoon for Art, in the Wild,
Berg Ka Ban Gallery,
and Loei Artist and Creators Club (LACC)

Presentation title:

“Impact of Setouchi Triennale on the Residents of Setouchi Community”
29 March, 2021 via Zoom

Other presenters: Fram Kitagawa, Fukutake Foundation

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

The Garage Journal,
12 April 2021
“Let’s forget about Oshima”
<https://thegaragejournal.org/en/article/44>

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)

Book proposal in progress