

Hiroki Urabe Solo Exhibition “Vacant Space”

Dates: Friday, June 28 – Sunday, July 21, 2024

Hours: Tuesday - Friday 12:00 - 19:00, Saturday and Sunday 12:00 - 18:00

Closed: Mondays

Venue: Communication Gallery Fugensha

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We are pleased to announce the solo exhibition of Hiroki Urabe, “Vacant Space” in commemoration of winning the 3rd Fugensha Photo Award at Communication Gallery Fugensha from June 28 to July 21, 2024. This exhibition commemorates the publication of his new photo book of the same title, published by Fugensha.

The solo exhibition of Chizuko Nakamura “Winter Sketches,” winner of the runner-up prize of the 3rd Fugensha Photo Award, will also be held simultaneously on the second floor of the gallery.

Hiroki Urabe was born in Tokyo in 1985 and completed his master's degree in architecture at the Graduate School of Creative Science and Engineering, Waseda University in 2010. He first encountered photography while in graduate school and has since pursued his own photographic expression while working part-time, and was selected as a finalist for the 11th (2014) and 13th (2015) Photography “1_WALL”. Since the first “Fugensha Photo Award” held in 2021, he was nominated for this award every year, and in 2023 he finally won the Grand Prix of the third “Fugensha Photo Award”.

This work, “Vacant Space,” was inspired by the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011. Urabe, who suffered from the disaster in Tokyo, felt a strong sense of discomfort in a society that, after that day, had been showing shocking images in the media day after day, eagerly calling for “solidarity,” and then forgetting about it.

As the pandemic swept the world in 2020 and words like “self-restraint” and “stay-home” became commonplace, Urabe suddenly began to think about the seawalls that were built for the “safety and security” of the affected areas, and actually visited them multiple times. What emerged was an overly monotonous landscape of huge structures inorganically separating sea and land, and windbreaks that looked like they had been copied and pasted over and over again. The difference between the reality of the shocking images that he, who could do nothing at that time, saw through the monitor, and the overly artificial landscape that I saw when he actually went to the disaster area. As if to fix these images one by one, he photographed the shadows of people standing alone in vacant lots along the coastline from Miyako City, Iwate Prefecture to Tokai Village, Ibaraki Prefecture, a model of the Earthquake Lore Museum, and the endless seawalls, and

then he took long-exposure photographs of the tsunami that emerged in his mind like mist by pointing a shift lens at a monitor in my home in Tokyo.

Since his childhood, Urabe has been vaguely repulsed by society's scheduled harmony and overly correct ethics, but has lived with a sense of helplessness toward them. This is the first time he has confronted his sense of discomfort toward society, which began after the “earthquake,” without running away from it, including his own position as a non “party” to it.

For those of us living in Japan, major earthquakes are bound to occur in the future, and there will always be affected and unaffected areas, parties and non-parties. We hope you will think about how you will behave, what feelings you will have, and what you will do at that time.

Biography

Hiroki Urabe

- 1985 Born in Tokyo, JAPAN
- 2010 Completed master's degree program in the Department of Architecture, the Graduate School of Creative Science and Engineering, Waseda University
- 2014 Nominated for 11th “1_WALL” Photography
- 2015 Nominated for 13th “1_WALL” Photography
- 2021 Nominated for 1st FUGENSHA Photo Award
- 2022 Nominated for 2nd FUGENSHA Photo Award
- 2023 Grand Prix, 3rd FUGENSHA Photo Award

Artist Statement

An unchanging, monotonous scenery. The sound of waves, or silence. And, the numb memory that I had long left behind. Since when did these come back to me and start swirling inside me? I am no longer able to remember the shock very vividly, which almost turned everything upside down. It lasted ever since March 11, 2011, the day of the Great East Japan Earthquake. I get irritated for my forgetfulness. I am in open, well-ventilated space, but a distinct sense of confinement weighs heavily on me. I continued to walk, being unable to take any photograph, which made me to feel as if I had gotten lost. It triggered something inside me at times and it began fermenting in my mind. It was the “memory of visual images” that once surged over me like a flood. They would now only offer me the images as vague as mist. Those images however left something like sludge at the bottom of my mind, which is now tinged with certain heat.

It was after 2020 that I began remembering those days that I had forgotten. Our society suddenly becomes

unified then by words pleasant to ears and by correct slogans. Focused only on safety and security, a regimented future is coming our way. We see more and more divisions here and there and it becomes increasingly difficult to see the complexity in living a life. Such sentiments however began to evoke vague past memories, when I was then lethargically spending monotonous days.

When I “remember,” though, I am only led to realize how much I cannot remember. The past is far away as it could be. It does not help even if I reach the original source of that memory. Every time when I see the dull scenes of the past disaster, I would feel angry. But immediately coming back to me is the question: Do I really quality to feel that way, having forgotten them all? Amid all my angers diffusing around in my mind, I knew one thing for sure. I no longer wanted to keep bowing my head to the helpless impossibilities. I was very sure about it, more definitely than ever. I would give all my power and spirit to the possibility that something could be born only out of such helplessness. I so continued to photograph objects related to those days of the past, no matter where I was, with the heat that had stayed within me.

I would like to thrive and live well. But, it is not allowed. I do not want to forget, yet I would forget. I don't want to settle with ethics and morals that are too correct. But, but... Having lived with such a cyclical feeling of helplessness for a long time, I finally reached the point of no return. Now I wanted to see what I could do from here on. If I can't get anything done, I am done.

I still could only watch the videos. It remained unchanged even on New Year's Day of 2024. However, forgotten memories —repeatedly getting linked to sensations and interlocked with one another—come back to life, regaining the warmth, over time. They may disappear soon. But they still drive me to move ahead to somewhere. I do not need to know where it is. I will keep the fire, even if it may be faint. It will remain hot, even when it should turn into ashes. It is nothing but a reason for me to live.