

EDUCATION NOTES

INVESTIGATING ARTWORKS IN THE GALLERY
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ART
GALLERY
NSW

40 YEARS KALDOR PUBLIC ART PROJECTS

2009 TATZU NISHI



2009 TATZU NISHI

PROJECT

War and peace and in between
2 October 2009 – 14 February 2010
Art Gallery Road
Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney

I'm not interested in art for experts. I want art to come to the people, to involve them in it, and this doesn't happen in the gallery space.

Tatzu Nishi quoted in Laura Allsop, 'Outside In: Nishi Tatzu', *Art Review*, no 13, p 30

TATZU NISHI

Internal view of Nishi's
War and peace and in between 2009

Photo Carley Wright

Courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales



TATZU NISHI

Internal view of Nishi's
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Photo Carley Wright

Courtesy of the Art Gallery of New South Wales



This manipulative recontextualisation quotes and ironises architectural realities, and in this way creates thoroughly typical spatial feelings divorced from their normal perceptual context.

Dr Renate Goldmann, *Köln Skulptur 5*, Stiftung Skulpturenpark, Cologne 2009

INTRODUCTION

Tatzu Nishi works in public places, often taking the monumental or symbolically overloaded objects that adorn these spaces – such as museum sculptures or embassy flags or weathercocks on church steeples – and constructing box-like domestic spaces around them. These simulated bedrooms and living rooms and authentic-looking hotel rooms are accessed by stairs, ladders or ramps, regardless of elevation. It's like being nine again, in a very different kind of tree-house in which a bronze statue of Queen Victoria, a stone statue of Christ or, in the case of his Kaldor project, a heroic figure on horseback dramatically re-emerges, from a bed or desk, to look you in the eye. This flipping of the context and scale – from public to domestic, impersonal to private – has the voltage of a joke, or those acts of perception when a tangle of twigs turns out to be a stick insect. It's a way of making things strange again, and though it rattles our cages, it's a healthy way of shifting our habitualised point of view.

ARTIST

Tatzu Nishi

born 1960 in Nagoya, Japan

lives and works in Cologne, Germany

Tatzu Nishi studied at Musashino Art University in Tokyo and later in Germany at Kunstakademie, Münster. When he first arrived in Europe, he was struck by the number of solemn monuments, and decided to try and do something to bring them much closer to the public.

In 2001, as part of the Skulptur Project Münster, he built a house around Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen's public sculpture, the giant concrete *Pool balls* 1977, and Nishi's public art installations do seem to have the audacity of Christo and Jeanne-Claude's 'wraps' crossed with the humour of Oldenburg. But rather than featuring very large replicas of everyday objects, Nishi seems to be doing the opposite: enclosing the monumental and forcing it into the reduced scale of a temporary domestic dwelling. In the same year, Nishi made *Tama*, giving a new home to a forgotten, graffiti-covered public sculpture: it looked like an oversized, floor-to-ceiling football in the space.

Other public projects include *Chéri in the sky*, at the Renzo Piano-designed Maison Hermès 8F Forum, in the Ginza district of Tokyo; a hotel room for the Christ statue on St Anne's Square in Ghent, Belgium titled *Gott erscheint* (God appears); a functioning hotel room, *Villa Victoria*, for the Liverpool Biennial; and the one-room apartment that surrounded the small angel-shaped weathercock right at the very top – 40 metres above ground – of the 14th-century cathedral in Basel, Switzerland.

Nishi's recent exhibitions include *MAM Project 006: Nishi Tatzu* at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo, where, unusually, he made his own monument rather than work with a readymade one.

Tatzu Nishi's projects involve the artist changing his name – from Tazro Niscino, to Tatsurou Bashi, to Tatzu Oozu, and now Tatzu Nishi.

PROJECT

Two enormous equestrian bronzes, *Offerings of peace* and *Offerings of war* created by the English sculptor Gilbert Bayes in 1923, stand like dignified sentinels beside the honey-coloured steps and the stately columns of the Art Gallery of NSW. For his Kaldor project, which he has titled *War and peace and in between*, Tatzu Nishi has constructed a temporary room around each of these figures. The public enter the elevated rooms via ramps constructed between the top step of the Gallery and Nishi's structures. After passing through a lobby, they find themselves in a domestic living room in the case of 'Peace' and a bedroom for 'War'. Everything seems completely normal except that parts of a giant horse and rider are wedged into the cabinet in the living room or seemingly wade through the snowdrift of sheets in the bedroom. A kind of Prince Charming arriving on his bronze charger? Or a warrior bringing his ambivalent spoils? Either way, a new eye-popping context equals a new meaning.

WORLD EVENTS: 2009

- _ Barack Obama inaugurated as the 44th, and first African-American, US President
- _ Icelandic banking system collapses, toppling the government
- _ Russian and US satellites collide over Siberia
- _ UNESCO launches the World Digital Library
- _ Pop icon Michael Jackson dies
- _ Bushfires in Victoria kill 173 people and leave 7500 homeless
- _ Swine flu becomes the world's first influenza pandemic in 40 years
- _ Tim Winton wins his fourth Miles Franklin Award for the novel *Breath*
- _ Guy Maestri wins the Archibald Prize for his portrait of Indigenous musician Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu
- _ **19th Kaldor project:** Tatzu Nishi transforms equestrian sculptures on Art Gallery Road, outside the Art Gallery of NSW, for his work *War and peace and in between*

THEME

Installation art

There is a psychological, even moral, quality to inhabited space that philosopher Gaston Bachelard detailed so eloquently in his book, *The poetics of space*. The space we inhabit is never geometric, but oneiric (related to dreams). Space, he wrote, is compressed time. Think of the daydream-soaked house of childhood; the heady intellectual space of the attic; or the basement into whose subconscious levels we descend with a metaphorical candle, even in the age of electricity. They each conjure a super-sensory, even sub-sensory, dimension: centres of boredom or reverie or silent beholding.

In 1976, Brian O'Doherty wrote three articles in the journal *Artforum* that later became the book *Inside the white cube: the ideology of the gallery space*. O'Doherty was looking at the modern gallery and what a very controlled context it is. Its whiteness bleaches out the past, giving the artwork a sense of being out of time, beyond time. This kind of eternity of display became so overbearing, we now tend to see the space first. According to O'Doherty, the modern museum space derives its sepulchral force from painted caves, Egyptian tomb chambers and medieval churches. The secular modern gallery has lost some power, but it still has a sanctity that mixes the formality of the courtroom and the mystique of the experimental lab.

Decades earlier, in the 1920s and '30s, Russian constructivist Vladimir Tatlin had broken away from the ideal sculptural space on the pedestal, as traditionally offered by a gallery. Working from his sailor's knowledge of physical things, he set up his sculptural works, like his 1917 *Corner relief*, made from vernacular materials, in the angles between the walls themselves. This shift to the use of real materials in real space – interior corridors, ceilings, walls or floors, or even outdoor sites – announced the emergence of installation art.

Installation transforms the foursquare, stable cube designed by architects into an existential or actualised space produced by a reader or viewer. It also dismantles the tidy groups of spatial experiences we associate with museums – those neat rows of eye-level art – by forcing us to enter other spaces and take in other information.

Installations vary enormously: they can be small and intimate, or massive and theatrical, while each artist's efforts in this area are as intimate and revealing as handwriting. Photography, video, painting, sculpture, all the mediums of installation, shed their autonomy; the object itself is not the work but the system of relationships. All the tangled arteries of 20th-century art seem to lead to installation.

Installation art releases ways of thinking and feeling that have previously been marginalised by the pictorial and illusionistic orders of space. It can tap into the empowering forces of indigenous cultures, or make us aware of crippling forms of absent power (like dharma), while at the same time plugging into current metaphors of techno-immersion (like ambient music or omnidirectional acoustic space, interactivity, virtual reality). Installation is art finding new ways to go on despite frightening historical discontinuities.

Examples of other influential installation artists include Joseph Beuys, Louise Bourgeois, Daniel Buren, Christian Boltanski and Giuseppe Penone. Among the Kaldor project artists, Ugo Rondinone, Gregor Schneider, Martin Boyce, Tatzu Nishi, Richard Long, Barry McGee and Miralda all fit under the umbrella of installation art.

COLLECTION CONNECTIONS

Relevant works in the Art Gallery of NSW collection

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection

For works that have a similar impact to Nishi's, combining heightened awareness and wonder, see:

- **Christo** (Bulgaria; USA, b1935)

- **Jeanne-Claude** (USA, b1935)

Wrapped Coast, Little Bay, Australia 1969 from the project *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet, Little Bay, Sydney, Australia* 1968–69

gelatin silver photograph; 62.3 x 77.5 x 3.4 cm (frame)

Gift of Chandler Coventry 1972 13.1972

- **Giulio Paolini** (Italy, b1940)

L'altra figura 1984

plaster; 183 x 250 x 190 cm

Mervyn Horton Bequest Fund 1987 349.1987.a-c

- **Ernesto Neto** (Brazil, b1964)

Just like drops in time, nothing 2002

textile, spices; dimensions variable

Purchased with assistance from Clayton Utz 2002 276.2002

SELECTED REFERENCES

– Sophie Forbat (ed), *40 years: Kaldor Public Art Projects*, Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney 2009

Websites

– Kaldor Public Art Projects

www.kaldorartprojects.org.au

– Kaldor Public Art Projects Explorer, Art Gallery of NSW

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/kaldor_projects

– Tazro Niscino/Tatsuro Bashi/Tatzu Oozu/Tatzu Nishi

www.tatzunishi.net

– Tatzu Nishi, Blum & Poe

www.blumandpoe.com/tatzunishi

ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION

Describe the role that scale usually plays in a work of art. What is meant by the observation that Tatzu Nishi flips context and scale in his work? What effect does this have on an audience? Explain what is meant by Nishi acting as a conduit between the symbolically overloaded objects that he incorporates into his installations and his audience.

Consider Nishi's statement: 'I want art to come to the people, to involve them in it, and this doesn't happen in the gallery space.' Do you believe it is an accurate observation regarding gallery spaces? Find an example of an artwork in a gallery where the opposite is true. Then make an argument supporting Nishi's statement, locating an example of where an artist's work in a gallery space does not permit an engagement with its audience.

Investigate Nishi's interaction with the works of Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen in the *Skulptur Project Münster*, 2001. How might Oldenburg and Van Bruggen perceive Nishi's interaction with their work?

In *MAM Project 006*, Nishi incorporated one of his own creations within the installation rather than a ready-made one. Examine how this conceptually alters Nishi's previous intentions in his art-making process. Consider if the impact on the audience is different when Nishi uses his own artwork rather than an existing historical monument.

Analyse the way in which Nishi has altered the perception of scale for his audience in *War and peace and in between* 2009. Explain why the site is significant in this work. Installation artists usually create an artwork for a specific site. Investigate how Nishi turns this art-making practice on its head.

Artists can be manipulate their audiences. Explain this statement using an example of a work by Tatzu Nishi and by Bill Viola. A modern shopping centre is full of installations of a different kind, which also manipulate audiences. What is the difference between artists' installations and those found in a shopping centre?

What roles do art galleries play in creating the final aesthetic value of an artwork? Should an artwork be able to exist on its own without the cultural and architectural support of the gallery environment?

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