

July 10 – August 22, 2010

Seema Narula
Steve Newberry
Aleksandra Rdest
Reiko Shimizu

Myung-Sun Kim
Tom Ngo

Problem Forward

Daisuke Takeya

After a decade of operations, Gendai Gallery's mandate has evolved to reflect changes in contemporary Canadian culture. The new mandate cultivates dialogue through contemporary art from East Asian perspectives. Said perspectives are not easy to identify, and require ongoing research, reflection and action. Exemplifying this ethos, the New Creators Series is an active learning platform for process-based experimentation, of which A Collection of Foreign Objects (ACOF) is the subject of its third installment.

Founded in 2002 by a group of Canadian artists living in Japan at the time, ACOFO has generated several thematic exhibitions, featuring various artists and collaborators. This time with New Creators 03: *Bungalow Colony*, ACOFO's core members Seema Narula, Steve Newberry, Aleksandra Rdest, and Reiko Shimizu, have collaborated with guest artists Myung-Sun Kim and Tom Ngo, curated by myself and Siya Chen.

Together, we investigated meanings of "home," further explored by the artists' diverse visual languages. It is still questionable what "East Asian perspectives" really mean in Canadian culture. Perhaps the works delivered by the artists of *Bungalow Colony*, hint at the various inherited problems.

Long after the members of ACOFO have returned home, Japan has become a rather distant memory of a temporary relocation. Thus the exhibition subtitle, "settling and the portability of home," shares resonance with their present life, along similar lines to previous ACOFO exhibitions, *Generated Habitats* and *Island Hopping: Paradise in the City*, exploring similar themes, both of which I participated in as a guest artist.

"If we consciously change the places we live, can we change ourselves? ... Intentionally choosing the unique exhibition space of a vacant dwelling, *Generated Habitats* turns away from the blank, sterile cube of the traditional gallery, and towards an inspiring space in which traces of past inhabitants remain." ¹

"If stuck amidst the asphalt and concrete for too long, the average urban dweller will inevitably talk about

escaping the city for a little while. When Torontonians think of escaping, they think of exotic places." ²

If we are forced to change the places we live, do we change ourselves? With *Bungalow Colony*, ACOFO continues to reflect upon notions of place and habitat. "Settling and the portability of home" can be interpreted differently depending on where you are and where you come from. Does every site of past habitation inevitably become a distant memory, to be forgotten? There is no doubt how their experience of that bewildering time at Japanese Canadian internment camp during the Second World War influenced the art of Kazuo Nakamura and Shizuye Takashima, two Japanese Canadian artists, whose work have been previously exhibited at Gendai. ³

One of *Bungalow Colony*'s outreach programmes was a luncheon at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre where ACOFO member, Aleksandra Rdest, engaged in dialogue with members of Wynford Seniors' Club, some of whom had experienced life inside the internment camps. This dialogue with senior Canadians triggered the artist's meditations on her childhood memories, and

what home had meant to her. Richly layered with veils of paint, elements from different periods in her life are viewed aerially. Whether construed as large-scale land masses or microscopic sightings, they represent a departure from the recent horizontal perspectives in her paintings.

Reiko Shimizu also layers imagery in her distinctive screen-printing technique, on paper or fabric, and sometimes plastic. This time she constructed piles of Baltic birch plywood hexagons to different heights, connecting them randomly to create everyday Japanese phrases. Shimizu's work suggests communication among people with a shared sense of home, and promises a place you can always return to. For Seema Narula, it's in the early evening light of dusk and lamplights that home seems most warm and inviting. Following a recent trip to India, Narula was inspired by the shapes of homes found in nature like ant hills and termite hills. She integrates semi-transparent plastic food containers with organic form, and unifies them via hidden light sources.

Inspired by the literature of Lewis Carroll, Tom Ngo works outside of

BIOGRAPHY

A COLLECTION OF FOREIGN OBJECTS



Seema Narula, *残り物には幸来たる (nokorimono ni wa sachi kitaru) Leftovers Will Bring You Happiness (detail)*, 2010. Mixed media, dimensions variable, approximately 8 x 8 x 3 feet.

SEEMA NARULA

is an artist whose previous work has experimented with diffusion of light and colour. She creates light sculpture installations by manipulating light through the use of various materials such as metal, wood, and plastic. After living in Japan and Toronto for the past 8 years, she has recently moved to Hamilton, Ontario. Intrigued by the post-industrial urban landscape of her new city, Seema is finding inspiration to experiment with new art forms reflective of her past and current history. Seema looks forward to exploring her abilities as an artist in creating and transposing her lofty dreams into colour, lights, shapes and sounds.

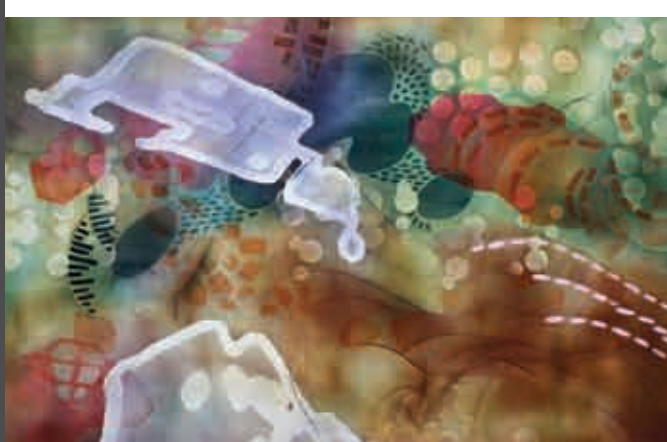
Seema Narula has been a member of A Collection of Foreign Objects since 2007.



Steve Newberry, *Island 1 & Island 2 (detail)*, 2010. Wood, rigid insulation, drywall, ABS pipes, copper pipes, wire, wire caps, screws, 12 x 4 x 8 feet.

STEVE NEWBERRY

is an artist based in Hamilton. He holds a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts) degree from the University of Guelph. He has traveled extensively and exhibited his work in Canada and Japan. Primarily an installation artist but comfortable working in a variety of media, his work often explores our connection to the natural world. He has been a member of A Collection of Foreign Objects since 2004.



Aleksandra Rdest, *Home is grown its full of you*, 2010. Acrylic on canvas, 46 x 66 inches.

ALEKSANDRA RDEST

uses a language drawn from weather patterns; inspired by sound waves, particles and cells on a microscopic level. Rdest's love affair with colour gives rise to her paintings, which are created by richly layering veils of paint to form a deep surface. Through painting Rdest is reaching for the sublime; the tragedy of yearning, the mockery of the unattainable just beyond her grasp.

Since graduating from the Ontario College of Art & Design in 2002, Rdest's work has been exhibited all across Canada in commercial and public galleries, as well as in the United States and Japan. She has been an active member of A Collection of Foreign Objects since 2004.



Reiko Shimizu, *I'm going and coming back (detail)*, 2010. Baltic birch plywood, 16 x 78 inches.

REIKO SHIMIZU

is a Toronto-based visual artist who works in printmaking and mixed media. She is concerned with materiality and particularly materials associated with fortification and nostalgia: fabric, stitching, and paper. Her work often refers to simple everyday objects combined with a decorative aesthetic. She celebrates these everyday things by beautifying them - challenging our notions of value and beauty.

Shimizu is one of the founding members of A Collection of Foreign Objects. She has exhibited in Toronto, Tokyo and Yokohama, Japan.

Fragments, Resonance, Cohesion

Siya Chen

Imagine your favourite song being performed, each artist playing a track on a different instrument, a fragment of the composition. Each track, listened to separately - be it drumbeats, violin, guitar, bass, piano, or even a vocal element - sounds independent from each other. Yet, when played together under the same theme, key and rhythm, a favourite music is heard.

The architect Louis Kahn used to refer to the space within his buildings as variations on the ideal of "silence and light". If looked upon as a strictly musical factor, Kahn is dealing with the spaces in-between the notes, neutral, yet the unifying element of common linkage that defies personal tastes. The very concept of below works on a similar level:

"home"
community
this exhibit
contemporary art as reflection
of contemporary life.

The artists in this exhibit provide a few variations on the theme of "home". Granted, I, like you, biased by the "walls", structure or guidelines of personal or cultural experience, can only offer you my own interpretations.

The ideas of what conjure "home" can be diverse and subjective, yet a few basic needs pertinent to "home" seem to be universal basic regardless of differences in peoples' cultures, ethnicities, experiences and aspirations. Among them, the need for food perhaps is the number one.

Food plays an important part in Seema's "home", and her works explore how the warmth of home can be expressed through the portable containers to store food prepared at home. Having her parents cook her favourite meal when she comes home from a long trip, or remembering the smell of food she shared with close friends in Japan, the dedication of her parents through the preparation of food is a key element of home for Seema, something she can take it with her, be reminded of, and recreate anywhere, any time.

I recall when as a child, I would get scolded by my parents for thinking

that the food my friends' families prepared tasted better. Ungrateful me, indeed, but food seems to unite people of all backgrounds as a possible entry point to a new culture.

Is this a human desire for something exotic and different, or an inherited trait needed for social progression?

Reiko's exploration of her Japanese heritage answers this question. Through her works with everyday domestic Japanese phrases, I recall my teenaged self, always dreaming of leaving home for an exotic life in the Occident. I can certainly relate to how beautiful those daily practices of a yet-to-be fully comprehended Japanese culture must appeal to Reiko, and how the obscured ideals in everyday life have provided her the ultimate comfort of "home".

A "place" to settle or someone to settle with, temporary or long-term, be it a building, or a person, or group, is another natural human need - and also the foundation of society. For Steve, a natural born explorer, these societal and personal bonds are "found". Knowing that even most solid human relationships need constant maintenance, his creative dedication for "home" finds

itself in his sculptural works made from home renovation materials. In his *Island 1 & Island 2*, two self-contained proto-organisms connected to each other (on an evident growth spurt), he noticed something new and "weed-like" evolving from his works once more.

The bridging of man-made and natural often makes up the ideal "home" and this is no new concept to Aleksandra. Urban houses with plants, gardens, or planned suburban questionbelts - bring forward questions of balance, and the human longing for a simulation of the non-hierarchical structure found in nature, where everything flourishes by feeding off of each other. Aleksandra takes on a new view, evidenced in her paintings, where she has finally found herself *within* what she's been longing for. Amidst those layers of vision on canvas, Aleksandra reminisces on her childhood memories of the ever-evolving blending between society and nature.

Memories are never what they are made up to be despite having to look backward in order to move forward. With the inevitability of change, our

architectural conventions, leading the viewer down a rabbit hole of his imagining. Ngo's architectural drawings, in isometric projection, illuminate the absurd. The artist's impractical and playful world conflicts with and transgresses our sense of the real and the logical. In his new works, the basic unit of a vertical structure is multiplied to create tessellation-like patterns, where each unit differs, perhaps upgraded, by meticulously rendered details. This evolutionary process suggests alternative readings of mobility in contemporary culture.

In Myung-Sun Kim's installation, a TV monitor shows a collection of balloons undergoing various transformative processes. Some balloons are coated with different paint materials, acquiring complex wrinkles during deflation. The fate of each balloon evokes the dynamics of settlement, memory, and perhaps the lifespan of a person. The work-table that displays the deflated balloon sculptures is constructed out of a found floor panel, tilted at ninety degrees and facing the photographs of inflated balloons, as if to suggest that gravity has shifted. Weight, gravity and materiality become metaphors that call into question our sense of place and historical context.

Steve Newberry's work reconstructs home within the gallery space. Materials used in the renovation of his own house are transformed into a sculpture. Dry wall, screws, electric cables, drain pipes, copper tubes, and pink insulation foam have been stripped of their original roles and functions. Newberry suggests that home is no longer shared familial shelter, once elements and components have been removed from their traditional context. He continues to appropriate nature with the use of synthetic/non-biological materials in his work, representing his belief that humans have an innate desire to be connected with nature.

Perhaps home is where you are accepted no matter what error or disagreements may occur. Last night I happened to see South Korea's national soccer team returning home after their brave battles and traumatic defeat at this year's World Cup. They were welcomed as national heroes, with warm acceptance and full respect, despite the fact that they lost in the game. Can a "welcome home" be found anywhere in the world, depending on your perspective? I looked forward to my flight back to Toronto the next day, and wondered if I was going home, relocating myself

once more from East Asia, or a bit of both.

Seoul, June, 2010

- 1 Exhibition Catalogue: *Generated Habitat*, 2006
- 2 Curatorial Statement: *Island Hopping: Paradise in the City*, 2006
- 3 *Tashme2: Early Works of Kazuo Nakamura*, April 2 – 30, 2001, and *Learning to See: Shizuye Takashima in Retrospect*, September 8 – November 17, 2008, both held at Gendai Gallery at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre

ABOUT A COLLECTION OF FOREIGN OBJECTS

A Collection of Foreign Objects (ACOF) was founded in Japan in 2002 by a group of Canadian artists living there at the time. These artists saw important connections between the artwork they were producing and the work produced by their Japanese contemporaries. Currently based in Toronto and Hamilton, the collective has gathered regularly to collaborate on thematically based exhibitions and events that deal with their common experiences. With each endeavor, the group's members and artwork have shifted and evolved.

As a collective, ACOFO's goals are to facilitate connections, communication, and collaboration between emerging artists, and to challenge each other to work beyond each own established artistic practices. By thematically exploring their playful and humorous side, the collective hopes to appeal to broad audiences by utilizing their individual talents to create artistic experiences that are more engaging than the sum of their parts.

Gendai Gallery New Creators Series 03

BUNGALOW COLONY

Settling and the Portability of Home

July 10 – August 22, 2010

Opening Reception:
Saturday, July 17, 2 – 5pm

A COLLECTION OF FOREIGN OBJECTS

Seema Narula
Steve Newberry
Aleksandra Rdest
Reiko Shimizu

GUEST ARTISTS

Myung-Sun Kim
Tom Ngo

CURATED BY

Siya Chen
Daisuke Takeya

GUEST ARTISTS



Myung-Sun Kim, 'black small' from *Weight of Air* series, 2010. Installation Detail. Dimensions variable.

MYUNG-SUN KIM

is a Korean-born, Toronto-based artist, primarily working in the field of sculpture and installation. Her work playfully explores everyday objects and spaces, dealing with issues of aesthetics, functionality, nomadism, mobility, intervention, and architecture. She has completed BFA in Sculpture/ Installation at the Ontario College of Art & Design in 2005, and MFA in Visual Arts Program at York University in 2009. She has received several awards and scholarships, including Dr. Eugene A. Poggetto Award, MST Bronze Sculpture Award, Sculpture Installation Faculty Award, and Graduate Entrance Scholarship to York University Graduate Program in Visual Arts. She has exhibited and presented her work in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and North Carolina.

Currently, Myung-Sun Kim is a part of KS3, a four member collaborative that brings architecture, new media, sculpture, graphics, and painting methodologies to the investigation of interactivity, movement, visual gravity, parametric structures, and domestic engineering. Myung-Sun Kim's upcoming residencies in 2010 include Winnipeg, Singapore, and Fukuoka.



Tom Ngo, *Illuminations* (detail), 2010. Gouache, ink and graphite on paper, mounted on board, 16 x 20 inches each panel, multiple panels.

TOM NGO

is a practicing mixed-media artist in Toronto. Over the past two years, Ngo has exhibited in solo and group shows throughout the city and is represented by LE Gallery in Toronto. Through his work, Ngo explores the translation of absurdity into art and architecture. The purpose of his search is to identify and scrutinize the logic of everyday convention through the act of drawing, collage and sculpture.

In addition, Tom Ngo is employed at the renowned architectural firm of Moriyama + Teshima Architects in Toronto, developing concepts and designs for a range of buildings and projects. Ngo has actively been a part of the design group for the Queenston Toll Building in Niagara Falls and the winning team for the Jabal Omar International Design Competition. Keeping current with his professional practice informs his subject and artistic medium. Melding these with the concepts and principles of architectural theory help Ngo shape a unique and critical outlook on contemporary art and architecture.

CURATORS

SIYA CHEN

is a Chinese-born, Toronto-based artist, curator and cultural administrator working in the fields of films & video, journalism and contemporary arts. Her works and practices contemplate the tensions between the possessed and the perceived identities of the individual in society. She curated "No Pandas - Sex, Passion, Love, China", the first-ever contemporary art show in Toronto, which showcased the works of the 80's "new-new" generation from Mainland China; co-founded TANSO, a non-profit organization that facilitates and produces cultural exchange programs between China and Canada; and was the associate editor for Too Magazine, an independent fashion/arts/lifestyle magazine based in China. With degrees in film, business and creative media, Chen remains as a regular contributor of articles and photographs for various arts/culture publications in China and Canada. She is also a freelance filmmaker and producer, has been awarded by National Film Board Canada and appeared in Toronto's NXNE film festival, and Alberta's Global Vision Film Festival. Chen currently works as the Industry Series Coordinator at Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival.

DAISUKE TAKEYA

is a Toronto-based contemporary artist whose practice is comprised of the exploration of nature and plausibility in contemporary society. He has a BFA from School of Visual Arts and received an MFA from the New York Academy of Art, and is a recent recipient of mid career grant from the Ontario Arts Council in 2009. He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions internationally, including Christopher Cutts Gallery, Seoul Auction, Showcase/ Megumi Ogita Gallery, Shibunkaku Gallery, The Japan Foundation, Toronto, Galeria Begoña Malone, Nuit Blanche, Wagner College Gallery, Kyoto Art Center, and the Prince Takamado Gallery at the Embassy of Canada in Japan. He is represented by Christopher Cutts Gallery in Canada. Currently Daisuke is a member of programming committee of Gendai Gallery where he has curated two previous New Creators Series in 2007 and 2009.

ACOF EXHIBITION LIST

- 2007 'Stand-In' the Place Where You Live, Zone C Hub, Nuit Blanche, Toronto
- 2006 *Island Hopping: Paradise in the City*, My Secret City, Nuit Blanche, Toronto
- 2006 *Generated Habitats*, 2-1022 Queen Street West (Vacant Apartment), Toronto
- 2004 *transTOKYO*, Propeller Centre for the Visual Arts, Toronto
- 2004 *Trans-*, Studio BIG ART, Yokohama, Japan
- 2003 *In[side]Out[side]Up[side]Down*, Design Festa Gallery, Harajuku Tokyo, Japan
- 2003 *Design Festa vol. 17*, Tokyo, Japan

ABOUT GENDAI GALLERY

Gendai Gallery is a not-for-profit art space located at the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre. Gendai's mandate is to cultivate dialogue through contemporary art, focusing on experimental collaborations with contemporary artists and organizations for the production and dissemination of artwork from East Asian perspectives.

Gendai Gallery
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www.gendaigallery.org

Gallery Hours: Wed – Sun, 12 – 5pm
(closed statutory holidays)

culturally determined identities are constantly in flux. Since a very young age, Myung-Sun, a "nomadic" person, has had diverse global cultural experiences. Her constant interplay between the past and the future, (or the set rules and the possibilities) can be seen as the fuel for her "home". She playfully repurposes mundane objects such as balloons, and her works deconstruct and explore the meaning of the familiar, the weight and the lightness, assimilating both our active pursuit for utopia, and the endless quest of understanding.

People give meanings to the world around them. Just like memories, our knowledge and experiences limit us to knowing what we already know and to understanding what we have comprehension of. This is the concept of the "absurd" as Tom informed me – the lack of hearing, or the lack of understanding the different rationale and method in approaching the same subject matter.

Globalization has contributed to the increasingly higher level of mobilization of human migration, knowledge and diversity in individual beliefs. Yet in architecture, our options for personalized "home" have become less viable.

Gentrification of neighborhoods generates template designs of big boxes for cost-efficiency, crammed condo and suburban developments cookie-cut and valued by built-in objects such as "NEW Appliances included". They are sites lacking in character, a humanistic element, a key to making architecture come alive is underplayed. This perhaps is Tom's "architectural absurdity" where meanings are given through objects. With his solid understanding of architectural rules and concepts, Tom, the artist, proactively challenges and explores the infinite possibilities of architecture with an infusion of humanized logic that no super computer can comprehend.

The notion of "home" is a *metaphor*, one for us to understand the relationship between individuals and society. It is both a critical concept for organizing and structuring society, and an individual utopia often unattainable in reality.

With the multiplicity of contemporary life, we all have an ideal of what "home" should (or could) be but in the end are restricted by the limitations of the ideal, if not the idea. Simple parameters apply but beyond that it becomes strictly personal. If

we can be united by the similarities for the universal longing for "home", I believe we are also capable of understanding and learning from our differences in each of our ideals, and create something new for the cohesive whole of all ideals.

The theme "home" for this exhibition is a reflection of the dynamic of Gendai and its "parent", the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, a place Gendai also calls "home". *Bungalow Colony* aims to explore the past, current and future relationship between both, and the communities they set out to serve.

Looking back at the historical concept of bungalow colony – originally a planned housing development as perfect summer escape from the city, a temporary community – there were inherited contradictions between Privacy/Individualism and Community/Collective. While contemplating the "6 degree of separation" with the hexagon shape of Reiko's works, I question if the equivalent of such utopia exist today.

If not, what can we take from our collective "listening" experience of those *spaces in-between* notes?

EVENTS

Free Admission to the public, all are welcome!

October 16, 2009 – ongoing:
The making of Bungalow Colony online at <http://acofo.blogspot.com>

Wednesday, June 2:
Lunchtime dialogue with Wynford Seniors' Club by Aleksandra Rdest. Documentation can be viewed at <http://acofo.blogspot.com>

**Saturday, July 10
3 – 6 pm:**
Artist workshops by Myung-Sun Kim, Seema Narula, Tom Ngo, and Reiko Shimizu during JCCC Natsu Matsuri Summer Festival at Gendai Gallery

4 – 5 pm:
Community story-telling by art educator/artist Katherine Yamashita, with her mother Jean Yaeko Fujimoto, and her daughter Danielle Yamashita at Gendai Gallery

**Sunday, July 11
1:30 – 2:30 pm:**
Gendai's guided tour at Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition

**Saturday, July 17
2:30 – 3:30 pm:**
Guided tour by the artists. Artists and Curators in attendance at Gendai Gallery

Gendai

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The Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, Tadaaki Hozumi, Ikebata Nursery School, Sonic Print, Dazzling Modern Restaurant and Bar, Nikkei Voice, Toronto Youth Shorts Film Festival, Wynford Seniors' Club, Shinsedai Cinema Festival, Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition, Katherine Yamashita, Jean Yaeko Fujimoto and Danielle Yamashita

All images are courtesy of the artists.
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