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The Struggle for a Page in Art History

The Global and National Ambitions of Japanese Contemporary Artists from the 1990s

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COMMENTS WELCOME

Abstract

Although an undifferentiated notion of "global art" in the 1990s and 2000s became the dominant reference point for the evaluation of artists' careers (Stallabrass 2004, Thornton 2008), it is striking how much a national reference still matters to the generation who emerged as the first wave of properly globalised Japanese contemporary art in the late 80s/early 90s. Even the most globally successful of all, Takashi Murakami, in the end apparently only really cares about securing his page in the Japanese art history textbooks. It is also striking how as yet undecided this struggle is from the point of view of Japanese art history and art criticism. With mention of six key mid-career male artists now at the height of their powers and each with a claim to this prize -- Murakami (b.1962), Yoshitomo Nara (b.1959), Masato Nakamura (b.1963), Yukinori Yanagi (b.1959), Makoto Aida (b.1965) and Tsuyoshi Ozawa (b.1965) -- I will compare and contrast the different role that internationalisation has played in their careers. Each of them has "gone home" in one way another, and each is creating his own "school". Will there continue to be the need, as Murakami has repeatedly argued in his writings, for the classic strategy of international mobility plus *gaisen koen* ("triumphant return performance"), to etch their name in history? Or will this prove in fact to be Murakami's biggest liability? Will market evaluation, curatorial discourse, critical prestige, academic influence, museum popularity, or social/community impact decide the contest? And how much of this art historical struggle is still contained within the internal national art system, and how much of it is truly global (or regional) in its dynamics?

Into the global era

Granted that some aspects of "globalisation" in art may have been around for centuries, it is nevertheless true that an integrated single global system of "contemporary art" is a distinctive development of the last two to three decades: the advanced cultural logic of neo-liberal global capitalism, as it were.[1] The global era (circa 1980 - 2008) rudely changed the kinds of questions that were posed at the "Commensurable Distinctions" Japanese Art History panel at the College Art Association conference, where this paper was first presented. It has (putatively) made world or global art from anywhere on the planet accessible to all; lessened the emphasis on the need to analyse comparative distinctions and influences; reduced the effort needed to understood the contextual origins of art coming out of different locations; and offered the promise of an undifferentiated or flat playing field for evaluating artists and their work. World art, when it was "discovered" in the late 1980s, at first offered "difference" that challenged the unitary hegemony of Western modernism.[2] But once this had been assimilated, and the relativism of post-modernism overcome, the art world was left free to assume a borderless global form, driven by the unleashed mobilities of capital and creativity, and a ever expanding geography of new art fairs, biennale, and global shows framed in a single language: the language of global art.[3] It was a glorious "empire" of art, from Venice to Sao Paolo, Liverpool to Guangzhou, submitting all to a single, imperious discipline, that had -- miraculously -- even escaped the charges of colonialism and imperialism associated with previous versions of Western universalism, because the "multitudes" of the world were apparently now being included.[4] Whatever their origins, viewed from the point of view of a major biennale or the offices of leading New York art magazine, the "importance" of artists could now, it was thought, be truly considered in "global" terms -- whether they come from Saitama, Cape Town or Chicago.

In this world, free moving global curators and the constant babble of their discourse were the prime movers, their own transnational mobility being the key. A small exclusive network, trained and socialised expensively in special curatorial programmes, and feeding on a diet of elite media and museum shows, they brandished their frequent flyer airline cards and hopped from one "global" city to another, ever "on the move", imposing the new hegemonic discourse on the art world. The rise of this group -- personified most exquisitely by Hans-Ulrich Obrist -- was nothing short of transformative; from being the people who organised art show logistics and raised money, curators -- especially those that didn't know anything about actually hanging works of art on a wall -- were now perceived as the most important players in the art world, often ahead of or on a par with the artists themselves. We all know and recognise the language of this world: it permeates the catalogues of biennale, and fills the pages of *Art Forum* and art theory books; it runs through the lines of artist's interviews and conceptual statements, and could be heard in many of the rooms hosting sessions at the CAA conference. What these fora are all communicating is a "global" discourse, able to evaluate and institutionalise all art everywhere from the point of view of a single, unified global hierarchy.

From one point of view, it is not difficult to deconstruct the "global" pretentions of this system. Much scholarship at a conference such as CAA is still of the old school variety: all about differentiating national and regional traditions, restoring the particularities and resistances of small localities, underlining their mistreatment and

distortion at the hands of the global hegemon. In the Harris volume, for example, the two exemplary chapters by Ming Tiampo and Reiko Tomii on avant garde Japanese art of the 1950s and 60s, work to restore the historical truth about Japanese visionaries and pioneers misunderstood and mistreated by the onward march of Western narratives and categorisation; the power of Western institutions to dictate history and set the standards for modernity.[5] As a cursory look at any "art power" list will reveal, it remains dominated by US and German names; this world that may span effortlessly to Rio or Dubai, but it remains solidly centred in New York, and a small number of satellite hubs.[6] Despite this fact, the solution is not the romanticisation of the "minor" in the face of brute hegemony: a very easy "radical" move for academics both inside and outside the system.[7] Rather, I argue that, if there is a theoretical or methodological basis for challenging the idea of a single global evaluation, it needs to be established as an alternative set of grounded criteria, and shown to apply with the international (transnational?) re-evaluation of artists deemed too nationally specific by the global system.[8]

Speaking of Japan, then, this issue brings us inevitably to the reputation of Takashi Murakami, the one real superstar from Japan to have emerged during the global era. Like the top Chinese artist Ai Weiwei, and the top Indian artist Subodh Gupta, Murakami has a global identity grounded in distinctive national origins (Weiwei's identity even is as a *dissident* Chinese hero). But the art they all produce is a smooth, large scale, expensive and often bland approximation of exactly the kind of museum and auction friendly art which ruled the global era everywhere, albeit with an "ethnic" flavour. It was art with a clear pop art lineage: art as both ready made and branding tool, fitting the legacy of Andy Warhol, and most in debt to the seamless high production values plus simple pop content of the work of the high priest of the New York art scene, Jeff Koons. Takashi Murakami fitted here perfectly with his immaculate, expensively airbrushed versions of Japanese popular culture in plastic and poster colour paint -- the "Cool Japan" of this mythical exotic postmodern land of the East.

The starting point for my reflections here is something first put to me by Murakami's most important curator, Paul Schimmel, and which is now sharply evident in the majority of his activities and obsessions. Murakami is playing a global game, with considerable success, but what he cares about really, at the end of the day, is Japan. As Schimmel made clear, it is *all* about getting his page in Japanese national art history.[9] The global game, as it has with other major Japanese figures in the past, provided him with the *gaisen koen*: success abroad to return back to Japan with a triumphant return performance. Like Taro Okamoto and Tsuguharu (Leonard) Foujita à Paris, or On Kawara, Yoko Ono and Yayoi Kusama in New York, the artists had to first prove (or be perceived to prove) their quality and importance internationally -- take on board of the "capital" of the global art capitals of the day -- to come home (sooner or later) to triumphant national recognition.

No-one in Japan now questions the canonical importance of these forerunners, who also have a variable (first and second tier) level of global art historical recognition. Murakami has, though, been exceptional is his degree of articulacy and self-awareness about how the classic strategy works. In his Japanese writings he is full of anger and bitter spite about the Western art world he has tricked in order to put Japanese art, like his Brazilian hero Ayrton Senna, on the "front line of the starting

grid".[10] He is a loyal nationalist. But, there is a tragedy here for Murakami. His global success -- his son of Warhol stance and all it has done to secure his fame -- is also his greatest handicap in being taken seriously back home. Ironically, the fact we have been living through a global era has apparently rendered the *gaisen kouen* less effective. The brash globalism of Murakami's reputation -- grounded in art market performance, and international academic and curatorial discourse -- encounters other sources of evaluation more resistant to the unitary "global-is-best" logic: critical prestige, academic influence on new generations of artists, museum popularity, social /community impact, or (even) whether or not an artist is "cool". As it is, "Takashi" is a lonely and homeless figure:[11] a somewhat comical character they can see on the Beat Kitano show, wearing a tacky Louis Vuitton jacket, shouting at art students for their complacency. He is almost universally despised and discounted amongst his own peers in Tokyo. Faced with this, Murakami now devotes much of his energies and resources to combating this one failure: as I will outline, he is desperate now to subvert and smash aspects of the local national system resistant to his strengths, so that only the global criteria of success -- of being successful *his* way -- will matter.

As yet, he has not succeeded. A sizeable gap still exists between the Japanese art world discussion of the "global" (in which Murakami might in fact be proudly cited) and its own "local" or "internal" discourse about who or what is important for the Japanese national art tradition. In this, a number of other candidates who emerged during the 1990s are clearly thought to be as, if not more, important than Murakami. I cannot be exhaustive in this discussion, but the discussion will here focus on a brace of mid-career male artists, close in age and personal history, to Murakami, each of whom has a claim to the prize to be the most important or significant artist of their generation.[12] Alongside Murakami (b.1962), there is Yoshitomo Nara (b.1959), Yukinori Yanagi (b.1959), Masato Nakamura (b.1963), Makoto Aida (b.1965) and Tsuyoshi Ozawa (1965). They are Murakami's closest rivals and peers. Who exactly gets the page in art history -- or how it will be shared -- is as yet undecided from the point of view of the Japanese art world. It is a wide open game, in which the protagonists, who are now hitting their peak as mature, fully established artists around fifty, at the height of their powers, have each in their own way realised spectacular and ambitious projects over the last twenty years. My goal in this paper is thus to initiate a discussion on the question of how the art history of the 1990s in Japanese contemporary art can and should be told.

On one level, my approach is simple and narrative. It is about putting Murakami back in an art history not of his own writing; to re-assess his role and significance in relation to the art historical importance of these five other major Japanese contemporary artists who emerged in the 1990s, net of the influence of the dominant frame established by Murakami internationally by his famous touring shows and catalogues *Superflat* and *Little Boy*.[13] Some of this is simply taking into account what these other artists have achieved as "Japanese" artists, which includes that which has been largely missed or ignored by the "global". But also invites reflection on what these issues tell us about the very possibility of a global point of view; to what extent, on the contrary, the evaluation must necessarily be grounded in very specific, even esoteric, knowledge about the Japanese art world; and how much broader contextualising in the history, culture, economy and/or social dynamics of Japan is needed -- sociological questions well beyond the normal range of art history or art theory.

My discussion also raises the more general question of what really counts as "impact" for an artist, and from where can this be judged. It is by no means clear that either a local *or* global view is pre-eminent, or that there is any obvious index to assess the scale or intensity of such impact. Ideally, we are all internationally (transnationally?) minded scholars, aware of the local (empirical) stakes, informed by specific comparative/historical knowledge, but also engaged in global (theoretical) discussion. But, as I will argue, there may still be no easy place to stand from which to judge the contest.

On global evaluation: art markets and art discourse

If the bottom line is money, the question is an easy one to answer. Money is an easily convertible global currency of evaluation that everyone can understand. By any criteria, Murakami is the star performer of his generation in the global art market, the only Japanese artist from the 1990s to stand toe to toe with the other big global art names in the auction halls. He has even become a New York character, conducting auctions at Christie's.[14] The $15 million record breaker, *My Lonesome Cowboy* (at the top of the global art bubble, May 2008) stands at the pinnacle of an inventory now littered with triumphant sales figures with long lines of noughts. He is the only artist of the six with works placed across all the major international collectors; the only one who became truly bankable in the global age.

His uniqueness in this respect is quite striking. Only Yoshitomo Nara has anything like such a presence in the global art market, but at much more modest prices. They are joined of course by Yayoi Kusama, a veteran of six decades on the international scene. Both Nara and Kusama succeed through the sheer quantity of work in their name.

Beyond this, the comparative failure of Japanese artists to even hitch a lift with the current global fascination for Asian contemporary art is striking. International auctions tell a clear story. The catalogue from Sotheby's New York "Contemporary Art Asia" sale from March 2008 at the height of the global art bubble was a good case in point. After the financial crash later that year, this became a fascinating historical document. Of the 290 or so lots listed in this fat and expensive catalogue, there were only four Japanese names: a couple of pieces by Kusama, one Kaikai Kiki girl, a Hiroshi Sugito – a Tomio Koyama artist close in style to Yoshitomo Nara – and one old piece by *avant garde* Gutai master from the 50s, Kazuo Shiraga. Apart from two Koreans, the rest were all Chinese, and much more expensive.

Japanese dealers, working at a different scale, see it differently. Dealer Shinichi Miyake defends Yukinori Yanagi's productions as museum-only collectibles, among the most expensive works on sale in Japan.[15] Sueo Mitsuma, the staunch advocate and sole representative of Makoto Aida, is clearly working to a long term strategy, with some of Aida's works held in investment schemes, and retained in the long run to be placed appropriately in a Japanese context where they will be properly understood and appreciated.[16] Viewed from the prism of the Asian market, there is some variation within the notion of a unitary market perspective. Murakami, here, is seen as gaudy product for the Western market, not necessarily as an authentic Asian artist. Nara, notably, does not suffer the same handicap. Aida's sales here are said to be strong.

Chinese buyers are sometimes motivated by a similar sense of affinity with what the artists are doing, rather than its overall global performance. Still, these are second order qualifications to an overwhelming dominant one way financial story.

Murakami has similarly dominated global discourse as his work. He has passed well beyond the stage of a respectable biennial artist waiting for the next curatorly selection. Major museum shows are lining up to show solo shows with proven public appeal; he has the curators and art market advisors working for him to engineer tours. The avalanche of critical and academic writing speaks for itself. Murakami succeeded admirably in satisfying the first criteria for establishing global fame: telling a story about yourself that can fit smoothly into existing academic and art world narratives.

The high end citations in academia anchor the popular reproduction of his work in numerous high quality coffee table versions. All reproductions are now tightly controlled and vetted by the Kaikai Kiki public relations machine, who seek to censor any negative mention of his work, via the mechanism of controlling access to his works, and imposing sharp user fees.[17] This has not hurt his global visibility, because Kaikai Kiki receive an avalanche of requests for his work. A crude measure might be Taschen-style *Global Art Now* coffee table books. Murakami is usually the only Japanese artist thought to be worth mentioning, and certainly the only one currently guaranteed a page. During the 2000s, the LA based Yutaka Sone (an artist who would have also merited discussing in the context of this paper) made it to one edition of the *Global Art Now* books, at the height of interest in his work after his Venice appearance in 2003. Around the turn of the century, Yoshitomo Nara and Mariko Mori were selected -- but both have since disappeared from top 100 lists. Or take a look at the canonical handbook of modern western art history, *Art Since 1900*, edited by the five ruling modern art historians of the East Coast Ivy League: Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh and David Joselit (Foster et al 2011, 2nd ed: 734-7). Only one Japanese contemporary artist since the 1960s is discussed. That artist is, of course, Takashi Murakami.

Murakami's positioning in the media reflects his successful public relations operations, and the tireless efforts of both his gallerists Blum and Poe and curator Paul Schimmel to create both serious and more frivolous discourse around him. His fame has a certain Haruki Murakami effect about it (a comparison with the famous Japanese novelist which flatters him): Murakami, the novelist, a product of smart American marketing and genuine Tokyo talent, utterly monopolises the international field of (translated) Japanese contemporary literature, largely because in a big wide world, the world -- and particularly the commercial marketing systems of given creative fields -- global audiences apparently only have space and time for one Japanese novelist, artist, rock musician, baseball player, etc.

Add together the global art coverage, curatorial discourse, the magazine features -- I don't have the data, but this would amounts to something like a "citation index" -- there is little doubt that, globally speaking, Murakami is way ahead in the race against his peers.[18] For sure, this is just the crudest form of empiricism. But, again, it was impossible to write about Japanese contemporary art in my book -- however critical one might be about Superflat and Kaikai Kiki -- without Murakami being the most important and discussed character: something which approximates, sociologically

speaking, to network centrality and could be an index of social power in the creative field.[19]

Here is not the place to go into great detail about *why* Murakami's strategy worked. There is already an enormous literature on this, to which I have now added a somewhat more demystificatory account. Briefly put, as an artist/curator, able and willing to exert extraordinary control on how his work was represented and framed internationally, he was able to select artists -- both known and frankly obscure -- that fitted his own narrative, and led every path to Murakami. Superflat was a spectactularly seductive mix of high academicism and saucy sex appeal; an eye popping selection for Western audiences completely ignorant of who or what they were looking at. It was not representative, but the most easy-to-consume Japanese contemporary art and (especially) graphic design, with a Murakami poster and his name on the front cover. By the time, it had been streamlined into *Little Boy*, a lavish Yale University Press volume which sits on every Asian art historian's shelf and many others, with expansive essays, meticulous documentation, and beautiful reproductions of Japanese pop cultural products, Murakami was making it impossible *not* to narrate contemporary Japanese art through him. *Little Boy* also co-opted every Japanese art name it could to its service in Tokyo and New York -- perhaps because, for better or worse, everyone thought it was the one chance in a generation for Japanese contemporary art to be seen and talked about in New York (as it indeed was).[20]

But the success of *Superflat*/*Little Boy* cannot be put down to content alone. A historical art legacy could not be built on what was doomed to be very transcient fascination with Japanese pop culture, however weird and wonderful it was, and however successful it proved as a way of opening doors. At some point salacious images of Akihabara and underage monster cartoon girls straddling commuter trains in mini skirts was going to wear thin. Behind this, then, the presentation strategy has been anchored in a logic of *neo-japonisme*: the pious and mystificatory association of contemporary and highly reflexive techniques with the one art form from Japan that has instant, universal, canonical appeal internationally: the floating world of Edo-era *ukiyo-e*. This plays well with both the public and scholars, and there have indeed been very serious attempts to take Murakami seriously in this terms: he is himself a *Nihonga* specialist, so knows exactly what to do to get the references right.[21] But the historical approximation is crude and stylised, eliding all the problematic and complicated aspects of Japanese modernisation and modernism in between the post- and the pre-modern.

The third dimension, then, is what Paul Schimmel advanced in his show ©*Murakami*, which positions Murakami as the revolutionary inheritor of Warhol, extending art practices into new corporate organisational forms, and the latest management theories of entrepreneurship, branding and commercial interdisciplinarity. This is the logic that placed Murakami at the end of the *Pop Life* show at Tate Modern in 2009, the *ne plus ultra* of a lineage that went Warhol, Haring, Koons, Hirst, Cattelan, Murakami -- perhaps his most flattering positioning of all. On the one hand, this association with the high finance driven art of the global era, now poses a dangerous dating. On the other, Murakami was unquestionably a consummate artist/businessman of the Web 2:0 moment, whose flat and reproducible digital images were able to exist and multiply in numerous commercial and popular media. (None of his competitors from

Japan can relate to this, except of course Yoshitomo Nara: who as we will see easily beats Murakami on all counts in this department.)

Yet on all these points: how original or groundbreaking was Murakami? Murakami's global success proves that he was good at writing the story of his own art, and getting these strategies established as dominant conceptual frames: he was absolutely brilliant at producing texts about his work and the selective, distorted vision of Japan it so successfully channelled for global audiences. Again, viewed globally, he is unquestionably the best art intellectual/writer of his generation in Japan: better and clearer even as a thinker than Sawaragi or Matsui. None of his rivals, meanwhile, appear to have anything much coherent to say about their art in global terms. Nara and Nakamura are artists who produce precious little discourse about their own work. Ozawa and Yanagi, both conceptualists, are shy personalities, spare and illusive in their commentaries. And Makoto Aida, who is a great raconteur and a fountain of ideas, is not much bothered with international communication.

The 90s "likely lads": Yanagi, Nakamura and Murakami

Let's turn the clock back to the early 1990s. Contemporary art in Japan is dominated by Kansai artists, with Kyoto unquestionably the centre of the art world. Geidai, the national Tokyo University of the Arts, is somnolent in its conservatism, and the opportunities for showing or seeing art in Tokyo that might be considered related to "global" contemporary art are minimal. A gang of students at Geidai, however, are sparking new excitement.[22] This young group is full of people who will go on to become the art leaders and big names of the next generation: among them are artist/organiser Masato Nakamura, curators Yuko Hasegawa and Shin Kurosawa, gallerist Tomio Koyama, writer Min Nishihara, and (a little younger) artists Tsuyoshi Ozawa and Makoto Aida. They join forces with a young editor at *Bijutsu Techo*, Noi Sawaragi, and a mercurial gallerist/entrepreneur Tsutomu Ikeuchi, and a slightly older writer/conceptualist Hideki Nakazawa provides more ideas. At the centre of the group is Takashi Murakami, clearly a big brain, and also a big voice, the consummate network "connector" at the centre of a brilliant emerging scene. The art that gets them talking and which they seek to produce is a kind of "neo-pop"-- a reverential spin on American pop art, seeking to mimic its immaculate, commercial aura and hints of trash culture, by referencing the world of Japanese toys and consumer products. Above all, there is huge admiration for the huge, empty, postmodern "simulationism" of Jeff Koons, who is everyone's hero. Interestingly, despite the direct parallels and overlaps at the time, there is little or no awareness of British YBA scene.

So far, though, the work of the group is only reflecting or following other established trends. In the 1980s a series of older graphic design influenced artists, including notably Shinro Ohtake and Katsuhiko Hibino, had started making a kind of pop art out of popular culture. Other much discussed "neo-pop" artists at the time, such as Taro Chiezo and Kyoichi Majima were making art that referenced bizarre sub-cultures, and Chiezo had shown that this could be taken to and sold in New York with success. There was also considerable buzz around a brilliant sculptor called Kodai Nakahara who was making installations out of toys; and an *otaku* style Osaka artist called Kenji Yanobe who was obsessed with the idea of apocalypse and making strange futuristic survival suits and machines. Within a couple of years, Mariko Mori and a new wave of "girly photographers" (*onna no ko shashin*) had also basically

done everything that might be done with robot or cartoon-like representations of Japanese girls and gender in Japan, particularly those that play on salacious Western fantasies -- something that Murakami will mine endlessly during the next decade in the West, with his "drop dead cute" Kaikai Kiki girls, hand picked out of nowhere art and design schools or talent competitions. In 1996, most of the "neo-pop" art -- including some of Murakami's early work -- is collected together in a widely discussed show called *Tokyo Pop* at the Hiratsuka Museum, Kanagawa, which is a direct and obvious precursor of *Superflat*. This, and Ikeuchi's last show, *Bye Bye Otaku*, at the old Röntgen at the close of 1995, summarised a phase in Japanese art that is moving on to other things after the disasters of 1995.[23]

The key name in "neo-pop", though, is Yukinori Yanagi. From the south, and educated at Musashino, Yanagi was not part of the gang, but rather a reference point for everyone, since he had already made it with some of his early work, both nationally and internationally, and both in market and curatorial terms. Yanagi made colourful, pop-like installations out of heavy themes -- broaching historical memory, national identity, Japan's problematic post-war constitution, Hiroshima -- and often with complex architectural or site-specific ambitions. He used toys and icons of Japanese nationalism, and in his famous *World Ant Farm* (1990, although conceived in 1985), live ants gnawing through boxed coloured flags of the world made of sand. Yanagi remarks that the work was initially a commentary of his desperate need to gnaw his way "out of the ghettos of Japanese art education, Japanese modern art, and the Japanese art system". Eventually the work becomes a metaphor on nationalism everywhere.[24] At his first show after graduation, in Tokyo 1985, he burnt all his work from art school, and piled it as ash in boxes in the gallery. He was intense, intellectual, unquestionably Japanese *and* global. Associated early on with Fram Kitagawa (the man behind Echigo Tsumari), he was also represented by the highly commercial Fuji Gallery with links to Masami Shiraishi and Fumio Nanjo. He was, in short, the most "likely" of the "likely lads" of that era: the one expected to go on to greatness.[25]

What happens to Yanagi is a key element in understanding the problematic trajectory of Japanese contemporary art on the global stage.[26] From 1988 to 1995, Yanagi is based in the US. He absorbs the hard lessons of Yale University art school, then begins to clock up commercial triumphs in New York City. About the time that Murakami is having his crucial sojourn in the global art capital -- the period when he really works out his world beating formula for turning *otaku* culture into a global art sensation -- Yanagi decides to quit commercial art and return definitively to Japan. It is no accident that 1995, for him as for so many people, is the turning point: after the disasters in Japan early that year -- the Kobe earthquake and the Aum gas attack -- it is a moment for all kinds of re-assessment by this generation who grew up as the unbeatable "shinjinrui" of the boom years. Murakami, who is in New York at the time and misses the disasters, unlike all his peers, subsequently shows little interest in exploring the shattering of Japan in 1995 (although one might interpret the way he runs his authoritarian and revolutionary art practice as a version of a pre-1995 *otaku* cult).

For Yanagi, now 36, it was time to go home: to turn away from the frivolity of the global art market -- and the flattening evaluation it sanctions -- and look for a meaningful "life work project". He settles in an apparently quiet academic position at

Hiroshima University, in close contact with his native Fukuoka; although there are no strong connections to Kyushu-ha in Yanagi's work, his regional identity is significant.[27] He has found his palette: the inland sea, a beautiful volcanic environment of small islands, partly destroyed by industrial development and abused by intensive shipping routes through its waters. He has found his benefactor: Soichiro Fukutake, a millionaire seeking to develop an art complex on the island of Naoshima. Fukutake has not shown much interest in contemporary art up to this point, but he has been impressed and convinced by Yanagi: indeed the first major contemporary show at Naoshima is *Wandering Position*, which is a kind of retrospective of his work up to 1992.[28] In the period after his return Yanagi tours the islands between Hiroshima and Shikoku, and sketches plans for an extraordinary industrial conversion of an abandoned copper factory on the island of Inujima ("Dog-island"), one of the worst symptoms of post-industrial decay in the region.

Over a decade later, when *Sereinsho* ("Refinery") is finally opened, it can lay claim to being the single most impressive work of art of the post 1990 era in Japan. The architect, Hiroshi Sambuichi, gets much of the international attention, because the conversion of the building as an entirely naturally sustainable construction is a stunning work. But the origins of the conception of the work, which was Yanagi's, is a point of great tension that eventually leads to a legal dispute between the two creators -- Fukutake eventually steps in and silences the issue by claiming it was *his* idea. The reception reflects the hierarchy of architecture and art in the global imagination: contemporary art as handmaiden to a more powerful creative field. Whatever the technical specifications of the complex, the aesthetic experience of the passage Yanagi takes visitors on is astonishing. At the heart of the sequences of corridors and spaces, there is a complex set of installations based on memorabilia of the novelist Yukio Mishima from Fukutake's collection, a challenging and provocative aestheticisation of his memory in which Yanagi contrasts at once the failed linear modernism of the dead factory development, the non-changing timeless or eternal synchronism of local community and culture of the islands, and Mishima's aggressive anti-Western discourse/intervention. There are no clear answers or messages. *Sereinsho* and Inujima become emblematic of the way Fukutake's Naoshima project have moved from being a kind of millionaire's art resort to an environmental commentary on the wreckage and troubled future of post-industrial Japan, a message more clearly underlined in the subsequent Setouchi island festivals, that become a massive public success.

Along with this yearly urban art projects in Hiroshima -- which also involve spectacular organisational feats to bring art and artists to run down industrial parts of the city -- further collaborations with the architect Kazuyo Sejima on Inujima, and his next plans are for an island memorial to Hiroshima, Yanagi's "life work" has the makings of a permanent imprint on the region. It is hard to think of many comparable works in world art, although it can be related to land art and also the work of the Naoshima favourite, James Turrell. Yet Yanagi's work is not principally for the art market, and for some time he opted out of international networking projects. There has been some modest coverage globally for the *Sereinsho* project, and everyone still remembers Yanagi as an important figure; close advocates such as Reiko Tomii argue that he is a ripe for a return to prominence. But the question is: how his now very intensive, site-specific and locally focused production might be evaluated on a global scale? The contrast with Murakami is instructive. Is it just a question of fashion, or of

media attention span? Do we simply wait for the art market and curatorial discourse to catch up? It is a question that *Sereinsho* poses very clearly: What counts as significant artistic impact in the "real" world, both in the short and long run? And how long is the long run?

These points might also be applied to the impact and legacy of Masato Nakamura. Of the six 90s figures discussed here, he is certainly the least well known internationally, and yet probably now the most important and powerful of all these artists from a public art point of view in Tokyo. Rewind to 1992, and Nakamura and Murakami are in fact an art unit, *Nakamura to Murakami* doing brilliant work together, the two minds behind the Geidai gang. Nakamura is one year junior: Murakami is the first to have breakthrough solo gallery shows. Some evaluations see him, unkindly, as a clone: the same unhealthy obsession with the immaculate empty work of Koons, the same American affectations, baseball caps and sports gear.[29] Nakamura is also a naturally quieter personality. On the other hand, his organisational abilities are phenomenal.

Evaluating him as an artist is difficult because although his early work involved physical products, his work as an artist has been more about the art of persuasion in order to make art possible: art as art intervention. Over the years, this has included major corporations, university colleagues, city governments, local residents, and the police. Nakamura early on rejected Murakami's nihilistic belief in meaninglessness, which later became a revolutionary ethos of destruction: the purpose of art for Nakamura has always been to "burrow inside" existing institutions to affect change; the end goal is communal and social.

His defining work is *The Gimburart* "art terrorist" interventions of 1993: in which Nakamura, the director, invited eight leading young artists to make street interventions in each of central districts of Ginza to disrupt the smooth daily functioning of the neighbourhood.[30] It was largely the Geidai gang. They were nobodies, shut out of the art system, frustrated by a commercial Ginza gallery system in a city with no space or time for contemporary art. This historical event is, with *Anomaly* (the show which launched Murakami's career), the founding moment of the new Tokyo centred Japanese contemporary art scene, which seizes the day back from Kansai. It is easy to see the inspiration: East Village art movements in New York, as well as an older Japanese *avant garde* tradition. But the galvanising and mythologising impact on the scene makes it remarkable: it showed everyone that the new generation could do something to change the city and art system around them; even to make art out of the lack of space and resources. It is Nakamura's show, and it largely steals Murakami's thunder. Nakamura shows first before Murakami at SCAI the Bathhouse in early 1994, developing provocative art on Japanese-Korean relations (Nakamura himself having married a Korean artist). When Nakamura plans an even bigger follow up, the *Shinjuku Shonen Art* in 1994, Murakami declines to show. He is planning a year away in New York, and his relation with his old, and closest, friend sours.

Nakamura's talent for persuasion also lay behind his big branding installations of the late 1990s, in which corporations were implausibly persuaded to lead their heavily copywrited iconography for gallery installations, that subversively neutralised their meaning while underlining their corrosive power. In TRAUMATRAUMA he

persuaded all of the four major *combini* companies, with their nervous and byzantian Japanese bureaucracies, to lend the neon lights of their shop fronts for a single gallery show (at SCAI in 1997): arguably the single most brilliant *coup de grace* of Japanese contemporary art in the 1990s. The influence of Koons is still there: this is an immaculately produced work, with an almost blank, impenetrable message. Nakamura had somehow put what are arguably the visible urban icons of all Japanese cities -- indeed all cities across Asia -- inside the white cube.

Later in the decade at SCAI (1999), and also at Venice in the Japanese Pavilion in 2001, Nakamura pulls off the same trick with the biggest corporation of them all: putting McDonald's golden arches in a space that proudly represents Japanese national heritage and creative future. Together with a catalogue that consists of nothing more than more golden arches (and no written discourse at all), Nakamura apparently doesn't have much to say. Except, perhaps: this today is our national identity. When asked why McDonald's, Nakamura said it was "M" for Masato and yellow was his favourite colour (it is his signature colour). We might compare what was going on here, with the later, much debated, "Warholian" branding deals by Murakami with the Mori Building Co. (Murakami branded Roppongi Hills when it opened) and Louis Vuitton (Murakami made a best selling Vuitton bag design for Marc Jacobs, Paul Schimmel put their shop inside Murakami's show). To achieve this Murakami signed away his work -- one year in the case of Vuitton -- and put his own brand at the commercial service of a mega-corporation (his re-designed "Takashi-style" Vuitton bag was a smash hit, globally). What was Murakami commenting on, and who was branding who? At best it was an auto-referential commentary on the vacuity of the global art market; a worst, straightforwardly, a "sell out" (*Sold Out* was the title the curators had wanted to give to *Pop Life* until the artists vetoed it).[31] At Venice, no one much noticed Nakamura's work. What could be the interest in putting McDonald's in a gallery, when you see these arches everywhere anyway? Of course, Nakamura's big M wasn't really for the global viewers. It was a message about Japan.

At the glitzy canal side reception in Venice, Nakamura had an epiphany.[32] He was disgusted by the art world glitterati and tacky Italian celebrities quaffing prosecco. He realised his art literally had no meaning in the place; that he was a token "Asian artist" in the crowd. It was time to go home: find new ways of making art in the city happen, of finding "cracks" in the urban fabric, small pockets of space and time in between the lives of its ever busy residents. From this point on, as a global art story, Nakamura disappeared right off the radar. Yet since the late 1990s he had a base with his group Command N in Kanda, and in 1999 he had already organised Akihabara TV, where he persuaded all the electronics shops to show artist videos on the TV monitors in their windows. Becoming a professor at Geidai he founded the sustainable art group in 2005 to find and use abandoned spaces around Ueno, a run down *shitamachi* part of Tokyo. Building on this, he then set in motion the ambitious plans that would persuade Chiyoda ku to convert an abandoned middle high school near Akihabara -- a potent symbol of a crisis strewn Japan no longer producing children to sustain its cities -- into a major new art centre: 3331 Arts Chiyoda.

3331 is a community arts centre, in which young unemployed artists are given comprehensive training in art management, soaking up creative talents wasted by the city: but it is also, in a very real sense, a work of art in the city: Nakamura's intervention and reshaping of a run down part of the North East Tokyo neglected as

all the global capital shifted to the glamorous South East of the city. The art world in general has followed, finding spaces in the low rent, struggling business properties in Asakusabashi and Koto-ku. And so, eventually did global capital: the counterpoint to Nakamura's renovation being the huge new Tokyo Sky Tree construction that wiped out a whole popular neighbourhood in Mukojima, just as the Mori Tower had done in Roppongi. The artists protested; but no-one expect artists' voices to count for much. Still, 3331 was at the forefront of organising responses -- activities, charity drives, artistic interventions -- in the aftermath of the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami.

Nakamura's activities echo Yanagi's in Hiroshima and the Inland Sea, as well as the extraordinary work as curator of Echigo-Tsumari and Setouchi of Fram Kitagawa in the economically troubled rural region of Niigata. Is it art? Is it just logistics? The impact is undeniable, the consistent, subversive yet constructive form of urban intervention insistent. Artists are not architects: they do not, very often, work with great resources; outside of those that play the finance-driven art market world, they can rarely can tap into flows of global capital or realise huge scale projects. When they manage to turn cities, islands or regions into their palette, their work takes on heroic proportions. Murakami turned Akihabara and Roppongi Hills into cartoons, and the drifting creators of the "lost generation" into his followers. Nakamura's work plays out in real bricks and mortar, as well as in the CVs of the young artists his education and management touches. The question of "impact" is surely qualitative as well as quantitative.

The critics' choice: Aida and Murakami

Neither Murakami or Nakamura, however, can claim to be as influential on the actual art that younger generations of artists in Japan make as Makoto Aida.[33] For sure, Murakami has his GEISAI -- a "school" (*iemoto*) for unrecognised amateurs and hundreds of rank outsiders willing to follow the master; Nakamura is a respected and innovative Geidai professor, providing enormous opportunities in art careers in Tokyo for students lost for their next move after art school. But Aida is the real guru in Tokyo -- the artist with the most significant influence over his "children", the one everyone is watching for his next move. Of course, these things are difficult to measure. Spend any time in the Tokyo art world, though, and it clear that Aida is a ubiquitous presence: at talks, openings, shows, cram school classes, late night drinks. A blog I posted after one of his small gallery shows opened in 2010 netted 2000 hits in under a week (I normally average about 150 for a new blog).[34] Only Yoshitomo Nara has this kind of cult appeal, and Aida is above all the artists' and art world's artist of choice in Tokyo.

Since his first stunning appearance, Aida has also clearly always been the critics' choice. No-one in Japan doubts the significance of his work, or his phenomenal raw talent. *Anomaly* in the autumn of 1992 at the new Röntgen Institute in Omori was a great event. Everyone in the Tokyo art world, even those implausibly young at the time, claim to have been there; and Murakami, the consummate impresario, certainly stole the show with his stunning *Sea Breeze* stadium lights on wheels: unveiled with opera music and a naked dancer. But when Min Nishihara introduced the 27 year old Makoto Aida at the next Röntgen show in January 1993, with the enormous 12 metres square *ero-manga*/Hokusai-revisited canvas of *The Giant Member Fuji Versus King Gidora,* everyone knew Tokyo had found a new Japanese master. Over the years,

Aida's restless abilities have proven able to unerringly pastiche almost anything in Japanese traditional and modern art, as well reference and subvert the canons of global conceptual art -- a strength that is a much a weakness. I have been lucky to be able to put another masterpiece, *Azemichi (A Path Through Rice Fields)*, executed by the young Geidai student in 1991, on the cover of my book. It can easily be seen as the founding painting of post 1990s Japanese contemporary. It is neo-pop, superflat, *otaku*, *lolikon*, *owarai*, *Nihon* returns, the *satoyama* of Echigo-Tsumari, even the modest scale of post-90s "after the gold rush" art, as well as a backward looking old school masterpiece of Japanese traditionalism (it is a parody of a famous 1950 *nihonga* work by Kaii Higashiyama) -- all wrapped up in one.

Murakami recognised Aida in *Superflat*, and nodded to him in *Little Boy*, but it is an airbrushed story pushed to the margins. It has been difficult to absorb in Murakami's story because Aida was always so much more convincingly hardwired into *manga*, *otaku* and *lolikon*, as well as certain ribald urban and sub-cultures certainly not for easy Western consumption; it makes everything Murakami and his Kaikai Kiki associates do just look like "Aida-lite". In 1994, Aida made a painting of a sarin bottle and put it outside his suburban home in one of Ozawa's *Nasubi* Galleries; in 1996, he painted a picture of a vengeful air raid on New York City (*Little Boy* was the name of the bomb that flattened Hiroshima); in 2001, he imagined a line of Japanese culinary delicacies based on edible artificial girls (*Mi-Mi chan*, later plagiarised as plastic sushi by Murakami and Midori Matsui's Kaikai Kiki prodigy, Mahomi Kunikata). His *Monument for Nothing* series present Japanese pop culture not as "Cool Japan" for high end hipster tourists, but what it actually looks like in downtown Ueno or Kita Senju: an irrepressible splurge of Tokyo trash -- tacky, tasteless, and irremediably dodgy. Despite the extravagant attention lavished on them internationally because of the KKK PR team, and the skills of Blum and Poe, there seems little doubt that the best of the Kaikai Kiki girls -- Chiho Aoshima (who is also one of Murakami's most important operatives) and Aya Takano -- are little more than commercial fluff for people who think that *manga*, *anime*, graphic design, vinyl toys and contemporary art are all the same thing: no more or less important as "artists" than, say, Junko Mizuno, or Gothic Lolita heroine Mitsukazu Mihara. Murakami's children are the faceless masses who pack his GEISAI shows as hopeless hopefuls: they are all there to serve his brand name as followers. For the moment, Aida's most famous children are the talk of the art world in Japan, the best new artists on the scene: notably Chim ↑ Pom and Ichiro Endo.

After his first appearance, from 1994 to 1996, Aida went into a kind of overdrive that left his *War Picture Returns* series: massive *nihonga* screen paintings that ploughed up all kinds of buried, psychoanalytic themes associated with Japanese sexuality, national identity, and wartime experiences. Noi Sawaragi formulated this critically in the post-disaster period after 1995 as pointing towards Japan's need to really dig in the dirt and start dealing with its past, particularly its unhealthy relations with the rest of Asia and the US.[35] It became the heart of his group show *Ground Zero Japan* at Mito in 1999, a sampling of the most significant works of Japanese art of the post-war period (including Okamoto, Yokoo, Ohtake, Murakami and Yanobe) leading up to Aida. Aida was also featured in the *BT* special of the time, as the artist of the decade, in a round up of Japanese contemporary art at the turn of the millenium; space was also given to some of Murakami's new 3-D toy prototypes. Somehow, though, despite discussions with Alexandra Munroe, the show never made it to New York as planned.

Sawaragi's presentation was too difficult, too wrapped up in "Japanese" concerns. Murakami's *Superflat* became the alternative, eventually re-mixed and re-sampled as *Little Boy*: a much cosier story and arrangement all round.[36]

The making of Murakami in the US was largely a revenge of the Los Angeles art world on New York, and a mirror of the way most Japanese popular culture (such as *manga*, horror movies, J-pop bands, sushi, Nobu) has arrived first in Southern California before taking off across the US.[37] Tim Blum was an old friend of Murakami from the early 1990s, and Murakami became the making of Blum and Poe, the first LA contemporary gallery in the new strip of Culver City to go seriously global in its impact and influence.[38] Paul Schimmel also seized on Murakami as a way of bolstering the art power of MOCA, and reinforcing Southern California's deep Japanese links in arts and finance. *Superflat* at the MOCA annexe in 2001 was the big statement of intent, followed by the serious art historical groundings of *Public Offerings* (which featured early works by Murakami, Nara, Ozawa and Sone).[39] Four years later *Little Boy* was a smash for the Japan Society in New York (2005), surfing a fad for "Cool Japan" that by then had taken off worldwide. But a faint air of embarrassment about this show hung over this traditional and conservative institution for years: Alexandra Munroe left soon after under cloudy circumstances, moving on to the Guggenheim. Murakami's legacy was left standing until it was challenged with David Elliott's *Bye Bye Kitty!!!* revisionist show, which opened March 2011 to good reviews but small audiences, and which some saw as Japan Society's new director Joe Earle's way of putting the monster it had helped create back in the box.[40] Elliott was determined to tell a different story to the one set in stone by Murakami, and opened the show with viewers walking between the gates of heaven and hell: a juxtaposition of Japan's two most significant artists of the era -- as he saw it -- Makoto Aida and Miwa Yanagi.

What this part of the story shows is that global flows of culture are slow; they are selective; and they are cruelly reductive. We might indeed want to question the assumption that Japan itself can decide what is most significant, and noteworthy internationally, for global consumption. Global interactions and judgements surely should affect these choices. But when systematically the evidence is that ignorant, or at least partial views are what emerge from the selection process, the evaluation criteria of global success surely has to be questioned.

As yet the plaintive question about Mizuma's star artist -- "When will Aida be famous?" -- remains, globally speaking, unanswered. There is hope yet. Notably, although Japan's most important global curator, Yuko Hasegawa, has shown little interest in him (her favourite of the 90s group is Yutaka Sone, and she also has worked with Yukinori Yanagi), most of the major curators there have lined up behind him. Mami Kataoka -- now clearly emerging as the most important curator of the next generation in Tokyo -- certainly has plans for him, with a huge Mori Art Museum retrospective now in the planning for the autumn of 2012. It will be the watershed moment. But it is not clear that Japan even has the power to choose its own heroes.

The relational artist: Ozawa and Murakami

Like Murakami, Aida had a quieter partner: Tsuyoshi Ozawa. And, as with Masato Nakamura, it is again not clear who has the greater claim as an artist.[41] Ozawa was at

Geidai, the same age as Aida (born 1965), but an old friend of Murakami from their swimming club in Saitama. Not exceptionally skilled technically, Ozawa from the start was something different: a conceptual, relational and action artist. Art in Ozawa's warm, ironic and charming world has always blurred into life and his social relations: his art is all about making things and finding forms of communication for people not normally interested in "art". Clearly commensurable with some of the cutting edge currents in global art theory during these decades, Ozawa has quietly amassed a respectable global CV in terms of biennale and curatorly interest.[42]

He was always a traveller, all over Asia, to the Middle East and Europe, and to many trouble spots in the world. From the late 1980s he took photos, taking care to place a small totem Buddha figure somewhere in the frame: the start of his Jizo-ing series. Min Nishihara introduced him alongside Aida at *Four-tune* at Roentgen in Jan 2004. The small *Jizo-ing* photos were shown high in the corner of the room: you had to clamber up a pile of *tatami* mats, like children on a play mountain, to see them. Already the other key element of Ozawa's work was clear: a nostalgia for a disappearing Japan of the 1960s and 70s -- the everyday world of the *Showa* period being swallowed up by the anonymous global march of capital in Tokyo that was destroying old *sento*, *kissaten*, *nomiya* and *shokudo*, and putting *combini* on every street corner, McDonalds and *pachinko* in every poor neighbourhood, and designer hair boutiques and fashion stores in every rich one -- but not until the space of the old building had turned into a 2 car parking lot at 200 yen an hour. It is a nostalgia reflected in the mythical art unit *Showa 40 nen kai* Ozawa founded with Aida, Hiroyuki Matsukage, Oscar Oiwa, Parco Kinoshita and Yutaka Sone, all born in the clearly fortuitous 40th year of the now deceased emperor: 1965.

Nakamura gave Ozawa the honour of #1 *chome* at *The Gimburart*, and the work he produced was the most famous: the *Nasubi* Gallery. He hung, in the streets, a tiny gallery white cube, made out of a milk box, named after one of Ginza's famous commercial galleries, *Nabisu*: a sharp and funny commentary on the circumstances of Japanese contemporary art in the early 1990s. He placed eggplants in the tiny white cube, as in the Obon festival tradition of Shoryo-uma. There is a by now notorious story about how the conception of the *Nasubi* gallery -- a parody of the Ginza *kashi garo* system -- was completed by the "collaboration" of Masato Nakamura and Takashi Murakami.[43] Murakami was meant to do something in his own *chome*, but his half-baked idea -- a "masochistic" tour of all the galleries with his portfolio -- was doomed to fail: it was a Sunday and the galleries were, of course, closed. Nakamura, irritated at Murakami's disruption of the plans, told him he had to something. Murakami asked if any gallery would do? Yes, he was told. So he offered his work to the *Nasubi* Gallery, with the name *Takashi Murakami's Large Retrospective Show*, putting one of his signature toy soldiers inside. Scheduled two weeks after *The Gimburart*, this show became the first *Nasubi* Gallery collaboration, with the theme of collaboration itself becoming a signature of Ozawa's work. Murakami however has always fought Ozawa over the ownership of "their" *Nasubi*: it is never shown when Ozawa does retrospectives. But Ozawa has gone on to show many Japanese and international artists in his gallery over the years.

With collaboration itself the art work, Ozawa went on to systematise this idea (with curator Shin Kurosawa) at a residency at Mito in 1995 called *The University of Sodan Art*. Here, a flexible roster of passing writers, artists, students and the general public,

during a two month residency period, were allowed to suggest things for him to do or make as art.[44] The roots of his reputation as a relational artist lay in this period, well before critic Nicolas Bourriaud identified the movement in global art.[45]

Similar "confusions" over Ozawa's use of the soy sauce metaphor, that Murakami has frequently borrowed to describe his strategy in the West. Ozawa created an entire *Museum of Soy Sauce Art* (1999), with art works executed in soy sauce that copy the entire canon of Japanese art from Heian via Momoyama and Edo periods to On Kawara and Yayoi Kusama in one small wooden DIY gallery.[46] Shown in the West, viewers are often surprised to learn of the ancient tradition of painting with soy sauce. In the winter of 2011, he installed a new DIY gallery at Asakusa Senso-ji where he and a group of Geidai students (called "The Committee of the Reproduction of the Tea House Oil Painting Gallery") imaginatively made new copies of the very first showings on the site in 1874 of Western style oil paintings (said to have been shown in circus-like "sideshows" in teahouses), that were themselves copies (or translations) of traditional Japanese works -- another kind of fake Japanese art history turned inside out, and the root of modern art in Japan, according to Ozawa.[47]

Although Ozawa often comments on the idea of a gallery, his work generally does not show up so well in them. What are we to make of Ozawa's *World Cup Football* (1998), when the end product of the ball passing hands -- each of the 11 Japanese or Korean artists had to do something artistic to the ball -- is a gaudy mess? We have the documentation as a DVD. Ozawa has also contributed to pan-Asian peace and understanding, through his co-founding with a Chinese and Korean colleague of the art unit *Xi-Jing Men*, who have imagined national invented national icons, currency, history and constitution of a fictitious multicultural Asian state centred on the non-existent "Western Capital". He keeps looking for an answer to the questions: What use is art? How can an artist make a difference? In April 2011, during Hanami, he went to a town in the north of Japan, famous for its vegetables. Most people there were living in refuges, after they had to abandon their houses because of a terrible fire that was burning. Nobody was able to buy or sell the vegetables the town produced, but Ozawa wanted to make there one of his famous *Vegetable Weapons* (a series he began in 2001), then cook it in a pot and eat it at a party. Ozawa is not a great speaker. He is a man of action. But with the story he produced of the new relations and event that day had already produced the most important art work reflecting on the aftermath of the Tohoku earthquake: *Happy Island* (the literal translation in English for Fuku-Shima).[48]

The Little Prince: Nara and Murakami

Some space should also be given, of course, to the claims of Yoshitomo Nara.[49] Nara is Murakami's only real peer in terms of international connections and exposure; he is one of the few people in the Tokyo art scene Murakami with whom is still on speaking terms. Although they were both associated with Tomio Koyama, they didn't really know each other well until they were thrown together (literally -- they were given an apartment to share) as visiting professors at UCLA in 1998. At first suspicious, they became friends, and forged a kind of alliance that was later christened "The New Pop Revolution".

Nara's success in Japan can be seen as a kind of *gaisen kouen* -- he was the consummate slacker "global freeter", a role model for literally thousands of young Japanese who pick up sticks and follow their creative dreams in the cities of Europe, North America or Japan. But really his success was always grounded in his early, incredible cult success in Japan that began with his book publications from 1997 onwards. Moreover, when the always ingenuous narrative about Nara as an instinctive, expressivist, adolescent-style, fan-boy artist is unmasked, he can be given true credit as the consummate artist of the Web 2:0 moment. His is, ahead of Murakami, the Japanese artist who best understood the power of flat, simple, branded imagery, reproducible in all forms and media, and particularly as commercial products that are, distinctively, irrevocably, his own. While Murakami runs his corporation as a Fordist top down hierarchy, with the artist as all-controlling CEO, and has tied himself up in legal knots trying to sue people who "copy" his images (leaving aside that copying Disney or Tamiya was the whole point of his work at the beginning), Nara became powerful by letting go, inviting his fans and followers to copy him as much as they want, and organising his business as a series of loose, out-sourced franchises with companies that churn out Nara products: a seemingly endless line of catalogues, books, children's stories, postcards, bags, toys, badges, jewelry, DVDs, LP covers, T-shirts and vinyl toys. Unlike Murakami, whose work is trapped in elite financial and art world circles, Nara produces work with real mass public appeal: one can often "own" a work of Nara, without realising it. At many of his shows, he has simply asked his fans to make the work for him.

Nara, too, went home. After he was kicked out of Germany, he decided he had enough of cold Western places, where he didn't understand the language. He embraced "rice-eating peoples" and went back to his native Aomori to start planning a series of massive community art projects, funded by the city and region, that would create a new kind of "populist" work, attracting of thousands of volunteers, alongside loyal collaborators, to create the installations in the Nara style. The cult of Nara in Japan in phenomenal. He is without question the most commercially successful artist in Japan in terms of collectible products -- particularly books, which still fill the Tokyo artbook stores -- as well as easily the most bankable big museum name. Internationally, his *A to Z*, was a rolling world tour delighting publics in dozens of countries, for years. In other Asian countries, particularly Korea, he is a superstar.

The global art world is still suspicious of what's really there: the reaction to the big *Asia Society* retrospective in New York in autumn 2011 was muted. Paul Schimmel, for example, discounts his importance: he thinks he is stuck making models of little doggies and pictures of little girls.[50] But in a sense, that is the whole point. Nara is instantly recognisable and memorable, and the weight of his legacy is reflected in the recent massive two volume *catalogue raisonné*, that documents the existence and whereabouts of his thousands of works, many of which are nothing more than doodles on bits of paper -- but which all sell for significant sums and, more than that, are adored universally by their owners.[51] Less tainted than Murakami by the fall out of the collapse of the financial market, and the end of the Warholian pop-life paradigm, a true people's and community artist, yet with a solid brand of his own, Nara's chances of emerging as the bigger name of the two in Japanese art history are still good.

The revenge of GEISAI

Takashi Murakami has always been a brilliant strategist. He is perfectly well aware of the strengths and claims of all his rivals. The roots of their power lie variously "back home" in Japan: in the verdict of the Japanese art system; the authenticity and resonance of their work in this battered post-Bubble, post-Disaster society; their engagement with real urban and regional change, or community relations. They may not have the Google search hits he has, but they all have a base of ardent followers, and rising national reputations. In comparison, Murakami's huge corporation and massive international reputation can easily seem brittle and empty: nothing more than a big and foolish operation fronted by a "typical" Japanese girl with huge breasts, unveiled to the applause of foreigners, who might have once been to Shibuya or Akihabara, or seen something once about Japan on TV. There are maybe one too many photos of a laughing Takashi Murakami with his arm around Larry Gagosian. Unquestionably these images have an impact in Japan; deference to the West means the *gaisen kouen* still impresses, and it counts in the struggle. But it doesn't touch any of the claims of the other artists grounded in different dynamics.

Takashi Murakami of course went home himself along time ago. He never really left Japan, despite the myth of having "made it" in New York. He lives and works in Tokyo, his base is in Saitama, and the bases in New York and LA are remote satellite organisations. What he has, for sure, is resources and a parallel art organisation: Kaikai Kiki and GEISAI. It is becoming clear that all the money and global art reputation in the world will not bring him the respect he feels is his due in Japan. So once he had cracked the global art market, it was clear that he is now dedicating all his resources to the struggle for the page back home. What this has become is Murakami's revolutionary project to erase the Japanese art history that made him, and smash the Japanese art system that snubs him.

In the writing of the *Superflat* movement, one by one all of his rivals have been dropped by the wayside. Yanagi is never mentioned; Aida airbrushed into a marginal place; Nara trivialised as graphic art alongside Enlightenment and Chappies; and certainly no place for old friends such as Nakamura and Ozawa. It worked. The global art world, stricken by permanent attention deficit disorder towards "minor" outposts of world art like Japan, needs no further convincing. It has made its choice; it has given Murakami the page -- the catalogues are canonical citations, and the only books you will ever find in the art section of bookstores in New York, London or Paris are lavish Collections by Rizzoli and Ivan Vartanian full of Murakami and Kaikai Kiki artists.

In Japan, though the story is lot different for all the reasons I've outlined above. To control the text books, he has to do more than write the international history. He has to destroy the national system.

Clearly, in this respect, Kaikai Kiki is a new kind of art corporation.[52] The artists it represents, on whom some of the reputation of Superflat is built -- the Kaikai Kiki girls as well as his right hand man Mr. -- also work as key employees of the corporation. Other young artists, who come and go on short terms contracts, are more conventionally just working for the studio. Yet employment at KKK is offered as an alternative to the traditional Japanese art career. The GEISAI art festival usually held at Tokyo Big Sight, which was first launched as part of his breakthrough MOT show

in 2001, is a kind of recruitment competition -- like a reality TV talent show -- to pick young, usually pretty, female artists doing cute commercial work who can be brainwashed to paint flowers by numbers. Over time, the rhetoric of working for GEISAI has increased. Showing there offers the possibility of discovery, through the Japanese or international art world figures brought in as talent spotters. Thousands of young impoverished artists pay rental for tiny booths comparable to the costs per day of a Ginza rental gallery (on average between $150 and $250 for a tiny booth with walls, and a 3 x 3 metre blank space costing about $80); chairs, passes for parents to help with unloading, or access to an electricity power point all cost considerably extra. There are also fee paying commercial talk shows offered in which creative gurus tell these lost young people how to be successful without going to art school or university.

At the beginning of GEISAI, before it opens to the public, Murakami comes on stage (in front of a TV screen at GEISAI #11 that cost more than $1 million to install) to scream his enthusiasm for his followers, calling them to follow his oath "to swear to make art till the day I die". Essentially, the whole operation is a way of sucking up media attention, particularly monopolising international press attention for Japanese art in Tokyo, and thereby sustaining Murakami's name in Japan, where he has no other foothold or representation. Kaikai Kiki created its own gallery, Murakami got involved in TV shows with Beat Kitano, and he has increasingly simply paid to use the once venerable *Bijutsu Techo* as a vehicle for his organisation, often paying for the cover advertising and inside supplements.

So this is Murakami's school, a traditional *iemoto* in the *tenno* style. Yet the population GEISAI draws on is basically a population of failed artists: the ones who didn't get into the good art schools, or who did, but now have nowhere to go and are still hoping to be discovered. It is the same population that goes to similar large scale pop culture festivals like Design Festa and Comiket, which GEISAI organisationally copied. Genuine talent that has succeeded through these channels is very rare, and those that that have been noticed as serious artists, such as Erina Matsui, a winner in 2005, took care to turn down Murakami's offers of working for the corporation.[53] But Murakami has a huge base population of young creatives to draw on: they are the definitive product of the lost decades of the 1990s and 2000s, attracted to the image of Murakami (and Nara) as self-made independent spirits, but caught in hopeless world of dead end part time jobs, living off their parents, and dedicating everything to being *kuriieita*.

Better educated young artists in Japan have almost all ignored Murakami's example, particularly the 60s grounded *otaku* obsessions he had; although they have sometimes shown interest in his organisational methods.[54] Noi Sawaragi is prepared to defend GEISAI as having created opportunities: those with talent that did emerge were picked up mainly by his wife Yuko Yamamoto's gallery, Yamamoto Gendai. But many others in the Tokyo art world speak of GEISAI with barely concealed disgust: at the lies and illusions it is propagating; at the way it distracts international attention from mainstream serious art in Japan; at its brazen attempt to short circuit and thereby destroy the slow, accumulating process of art education, gallery shows, curator selection and museum appearances that lie behind a traditional career. And, in the end, how any talent that emerges just becomes fuel for the Murakami brand and corporation.

Murakami's determination to go outside and smash the system, has gone so far as to lay plans for his own museum in his own name: the GEISAI museum, following his hero Taro Okamoto. When GEISAI faltered financially in 2009, after overstretching itself to Florida and Hong Kong, Murakami was quick to jump on and support another band of self-educated artists, called Choas Lounge, who emerged from *otaku* circles in Tokyo. Again, it was a media stunt that worked. His rivals and observers in the Tokyo art world were stunned at how well Murakami could overnight marshall all the media attention on art in Tokyo on his operations.

Superflat, Kaikai Kiki, and GEISAI is, then, altogether intended as an all encompassing revolutionary movement. Sociologically speaking it is indeed a fascinating development in art practice; the most radical response of a postmodern global artist to the resistance of the national and local sphere to the self-evident claims of an otherwise all-triumphant crushing global success. It is a breathtaking operation. It was George Orwell (another favourite of Murakami) who said that he who controls the past, controls the future. If the operation succeeds we will never need to look further than *Superflat*, *Little Boy* and *©Murakami* to read the history of 1990s Japanese contemporary art.

Conclusion: Against "global art"?

Is all this unfair on the achievements of Takashi Murakami? There is a typical defence of the artist when these criticisms are raised. It is to make a virtue of the obvious "Lost in Translation" aspect of his work: that he gets the ironies of globalisation in art and culture *so* perfectly right; just as that ever-laughing nice Mr.Koons is so bang on the money with neo-liberal capitalism.

A good case in point is the glowing essay by Alison Gingeras, for the *Pop Life* exhibition and catalogue.[55] Let us be clear where this kind of pseudo-academic curatorial discourse comes from. It is all about protecting investments: the clearest symptom of the how the art world works today. Gingeras is the curatorial manager of the Pinault collection which bought *My Lonesome Cowboy*. She reads Murakami via, inevitably, Roland Barthes and Edward Said, as the Warholian master of orientalist trickery; Murakami knows the score, and following Koons and Hirst he is able to make art, coming out of Asia, that surfs on the ironies of globalisation and the global art market. So far, so clever. Where the argument starts to pall is in the naive account of GEISAI, as a kind of opportunity knocks for the youth of Japan, radically reshaping the lives and careers of young artists as they follow their master to glory. Missing any grounding in knowledge of the tragedies and pathos of Japanese society or the Japanese art system, the article in the end makes a virtue of ignorance about it: that a tourist's "Lost in Translation" is, in other words, the best we can expect from global art commentators as they pick out and put value on the best of local art from a growing list of exotic long-haul destinations. A respectable academic discourse can anchor this reading: it starts with French theory, cites some hip contemporary Japanese cultural studies, such as *Mechademia* or Hiroki Azuma, and plugs into the latest thoughts on cultural globalisation. *The Pop Life* show in London was literally rammed full of people: another smash hit. At the back end, via the catalogue and its patina of academic respectability, the citations keep growing. This paper is part of the

problem. Even writing critically about this whole magnificent rhetorical construction -- as this piece does -- is like putting out fire with gasoline.

What is the alternative? I think it has to be to admitted that there is not one single art world, but many, and that writing from and about somewhere is also necessary. Let us stand in Tokyo again and listen to the voices -- as social historians and sociologists of art. Obviously the Tokyo art world as a social field is saying something quite different from the voices of global curators, New York art magazines, and Western art theorists. The story will be a national and local one: about the Japanese economy and society since 1990; about the conditions of the production of culture in this context; about the struggles of a well organised art world, outside of the global system, yet affected by the insensitive and often rather ignorant way in which the global (mainly via American cultural power) impinges upon on it. This kind of reading inevitably will lead to a reduction in Murakami's importance in relation to other artists of the era, as well as a strong sense of the power and uniqueness of artistic creativity in Japan under its rather peculiar post-Bubble, post-disaster conditions. Its broader relevance lies in the fact that these social and economic conditions for culture have arguably been generalised to the Western world after, especially, September 2008.[56]

But this, of course, isn't yet an *art* history; the art history of the 1990s still needs to be written. In this, the question of evaluation is inescapable. The social historian and ethnographer can work without art theory. But as Harris reminds us, Art Theory today is all about the question of globalisation. There is a duty to engage with the theoretical questions of this panel about other eras, within the conditions of our own: all those (in)commensurable distinctions running through currents of global art theory as it wrestles with the legacy of colonialism, the still astonishing Western bias in constructions of the universal, the irrepressible emergence of other worlds. What is the art historian to do -- when distracted by the obvious theoretical appeal of Murakami's project -- which basically rings all the theoretical bells available in cutting edge contemporary art theory? To turn away from these questions, and take refuge in a Japanologist specialism, not only seems to reinforce the myth of the national in a putatively "transnational" age, but of reinforcing the sad and dispiriting *sakoku* that many observers have seen rising in Japan these last few years.

As you can tell, I do not have a clear answer to these difficult questions. All I can do is finish metaphorically. Of all the artists discussed, here, Makoto Aida is the most aware of the ironies of the compromises needed to become a global rather than local artist -- and what it costs. Even more so than Murakami, in that it is an essentially tragi-comic, rather than instrumental, view he has of the mis-communications involved. From the point of view of global curatorial discourse a lot of Aida's works can easily look like the mad cap ideas of an art school professor: bad and cheap jokes, a lot of self-referentialism about art, and wilful obscurity about Japan; not much to say to us. Scholars of Japanese history, of Japanese street and urban culture (such as its forms of humour or neighbourhood life), or scholars of the Japanese art system, however, can easily find fat dissertations of material in his exceptional clever and profound works.

The problem has sometimes been highlighted in his work. Most famous has been the intermittent refusal to communicate what he is doing in the global language of choice -- English. At some showings of *Mutant Hanako* (1997), his crudely drawn manga

fantasy of the 1940s Pacific war, he would hang a battered Japanese - English dictionary to assist bemused -- or shocked -- visitors. A foreign tourist might have seen a badly drawn pornographic manga. Ryutaro Takahashi, when he first saw it, saw a major work of Japanese art in the long historical tradition, which he thought would sit particularly well in the reception room of his psychiatric office. In Düsseldorf, May 2011, Aida revealed the latest in a series in which he reflects upon the legacy of Immanuel Kant's *The Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*. In a closed room, on three simultaneous video screens, Aida performed, in costume, a live painting on glass by three "typical" German, French and "English" artists. As they painted, a typical "national" style work appeared, while each of Aida's characters declaimed philosophical and theoretical statements in the appropriate language -- each with a terrible Japanese accent. The German artist, intense and erratic, seemed to be some kind of Anselm Kiefer figure filling the screen with heavy and lumpy brown paint. The French artist, romantic and fey, dabbed impressionistically at the screen, while smoking a Gauloise. At the end he despaired and committed suicide. The garbled anglo-American "English" artist, meanwhile, started out as an Oxbridge Gentleman quoting Wittgenstein and painting geometric abstractions, and passed via post-modernism to a foul mouthed Damien Hirst painting genitalia and four letter words. As always with Aida, it was crude, funny, ridiculous, philosophically pointed, and somehow a little angry. It was missing just one thing. From the ceiling, on a piece of string, he should have dangled a well-worn copy of Harrison and Wood's *Art in Theory* for confused viewers to peruse.

Notes

[1] Following, in particular, Julian Stallabrass's brilliant *Art Incorporated* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004). See also Jonathan Harris (ed.) *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell 2011) for a comprehensive introductory discussion. This paper is an art theoretical spin on my account of the problematic internationalisation of recent Japanese contemporary art: Adrian Favell, *Before and After Superflat: A Short History of Japanese Contemporary Art 1990 - 2011* (Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher/Timezone 8, April 2012).

[2] I refer here to the standard narrative about the impact of the show, *Magiciens de la Terre*, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at the Pompidou Centre in 1989, the year of Glasnost and the fall of the Berlin Wall (Stallabrass, op.cit.: 8).

[3] Written at the height of the global art bubble, and criss-crossing the planet as she goes, ethnographer Sarah Thornton captures this world in all its dimensions brilliantly in *Seven Days in the Art World* (London: Granta 2008).

[4] Alluding here, obviously, to the devastatingly fashionable Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001) and its follow up, *Multitude* (New York: Penguin 2005). In this, the "critical" and "radical" Foucauldian logic of their language is as much a part of the problem as the oppression it critiques, in that it provides a justificatory vocabulary for a system that embraces all.

[5] Ming Tiampo, 'Cultural mercantilism: modernism's means of production - the Gutai group as case study': 212-224; and Reiko Tomii, 'The discourse of (l)imitation: a case study with hole-digging in 1960s Japan': 344-356; both in Harris, op.cit.

[6] An analysis systematised by French sociologist Alain Quémin, 'The illusion of an international contemporary art scene without borders: the positions of different countries in the "age of globalization and mixing"', *International Sociology* 21 (4): 523-551.

[7] See Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shi, *Minor Transnationalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press); in writings on Japanese contemporary art, Midori Matsui, 'Micropop: The art of the late postmodern age', referring to French philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in *The Age of Micropop* (Tokyo: Isamu Ito 2007): 33-37.

[8] I hesitate to use the more fashionable word "transnational", given its inherently normative baggage, and how problematic it has become for anthropologists and sociologists who were the first to use the term.
[9] Interview with Paul Schimmel, 4 May 2009. I am also grateful to long discussions in Tokyo with fellow *ART-iT* blogger, the artist and art writer, Mario A, on these questions.
[10] see Takashi Murakami, *Geijutsu kigyo ron* [The Art Entrepreneurship Theory] (Tokyo: Gentosha 2005).
[11] In one of the recent *BT* specials bankrolled by special Kaikai Kiki advertisement features, Murakami in fact appears on the cover as a homeless tramp.
[12] The implied machismo of this selection is not accidental, to echo Murakami's more recent self-help book, *Art Theory Battle* (2011). My account is clearly skewed in time and gender. At least half of the post 90s story, as made clear in David Elliott's *Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2011), should be about women artists of the same period; although the four most significant ones -- Mariko Mori, Miwa Yanagi, Chiharu Shiota and Tabaimo -- were all born and emerged later than the early 1960s group of male artists I discuss here.
[13] Takashi Murakami, *Superflat*, Los Angeles MOCA (2001). The show then toured to Fondation Cartier, Paris as *Coloriage* (2002); and was resampled and remixed as *Little Boy: The Art of Japan's Exploding Sub Cultures*, Japan Society, New York, exhibition and catalogue (Yale University Press 2005).
[14] In a recent *BT* special on the 'Global Art Market Now', it reports on a charity auction sale of his own work presided by Murakami in early 2012. He was, unusually, also present in the room at Sotheby's for the sale of his *My Lonesome Cowboy* in 2008, and reported to have shouted "Banzai!" as the hammer came down on $13.8 million.
[15] Interview with Shinichi Miyake, 8 June 2011.
[16] Interview with Sueo Mitsuma, 8 June 2007. Information on background market strategies on Aida was provided to me by anonymous insider contacts in the Japanese art auction world.
[17] This point has been learned through hard experience as a researcher and author seeking to gain access to Murakami's organisation; publisher Stéphane Duval, who publishes Japanese art and manga books in France, describes KKK as a "nightmare" to work with.
[18] The numbers may or may not be meaningless, but check out Google searches: on one search I made, "Takashi Murakami" got over 2 *million* mentions (for sure, it's a common name but there is only one Takashi in sight for dozens and dozens of pages); "Makoto Aida" about 700,000; "Yoshitomo Nara" about 500,000; "Tsuyoshi Ozawa" about 260,000; "Yukinori Yanagi", 24,000; and the real "Masato Nakamura" very occasionally crops up amongst the 1.5 million mentions of other Japanese men with the same name.
[19] On the cultural importance of networks and how they work to amplify fashions, fame and product sales, see Malcolm Gladwell, *The Tipping Point* (New York: Back Bay Books 2002). Cultural sociologist Marion Fourcade pointed out to me the relevance here of Randall Collins's network analysis of how famous philosophers emerged historically in *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1998). In my book, *Before and After Superflat*, op.cit., which is a reasonably comprehensive history of the Japanese (mainly Tokyo) art world since 1990, the hierarchy of citations goes: Murakami (mentioned on 106 pages), Nara (56) Aida (37), Nakamura (32), Ozawa (22), Yanagi (8). Other major figures include: Minoru Mori (museum owner, 36), Tomio Koyama (gallerist, 28), Sueo Mitsuma (gallerist, 19), Noi Sawaragi (art writer, 17), Fumio Nanjo (curator, 17), Masami Shiraishi (gallerist, 17), Atsuko Koyanagi (gallerist, 16), David Elliott (curator, 15), Yuko Hasegawa (curator, 14), Fram Kitagawa (curator, 13), Hiroyuki Matsukage (artist/photographer, 12), Min Nishihara (art writer, 12), Midori Matsui (art writer, 11), Tsutomu Ikeuchi (gallerist, 11), Paul Schimmel (10).
[20] see Adrian Favell, 'Bye Bye Little Boy', *Art in America*, March 2011: 86-91. http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/features/bye-bye-kitty
[21] c.f. Mika Yoshitake's commentaries on ©*Murakami*, partly reflected in her essay 'The meaning of the nonsense of excess', in ©*Murakami* (Los Angeles, CA: MOCA 2009): 111-127. Interview, 20 July 2006.
[22] Interviews with Min Nishihara, 7 Nov 2009; Tsutomu Ikeuchi, 20 Oct 2007.
[23] *Tokyo Pop: Atarashi Bijutsu no Imeji*, Hiratsuka Museum, Kanagawa, 2006. The show included, amongst others, Murakami, Mori, Chiezo, Aida and Nara. I am also grateful for discussions with artist Peter Bellars, who covered these events for *Asahi Evening News* as an art writer during this period.
[24] Yukinori Yanagi, *Wandering Position* (Naoshima: Fukutake Publishing 1992): 4-5.

[25] He is identified as the key emerging artist in Alexandra Munroe's influential early article, 'Wandering position: conceptual art in the post-Hirohito era', *Flash Art* 25 (1992): 71-74, and was featured in her landmark *Scream Against The Sky* show (1994/5). Murakami and Chiezo are also briefly mentioned in the special *Flash Art* feature on *Japan Today*.
[26] Interviews with Shinichi Miyake, op.cit.; Yukinori Yanagi, 10 June 2011. For other sources on Yanagi, see: Janet Koplos (2008) 'Darkness illuminated', *Art in America*, Dec.; Reiko Tomii in *Yukinori Yanagi: Inujima Note* (2010).
[27] Interview with Raijee Kuroda, 9 June 2011. Yanagi is also related to the legendary 1960s Kyushu-ha artist Junnosake Miyazaki (with thanks to personal correspondence with Reiko Tomii for this point).
[28] Yanagi, op.cit. The show ran 5 Dec 1992 - 31 March 1993, almost parallel to the new young artists shows at Ikeuchi's Röntgen Institute in Tokyo, *Anomaly* (Nov 1992) and *Fourtune* (Jan 1993).
[29] Azby Brown, 'The Great Art Hoax', *Tokyo Journal* (Sept 1993), a scathing inside assessment of the "fakes" of the new young Japanese Tokyo art scene, which attacks especially Takashi Murakami, leader of "the brat pack", Noi Sawaragi for placing art in hip magazines, the business techniques of Masami Shiraishi, and the commercial "hoax" perpetuated in New York with Taro Chiezo by New York art dealer, Jeffrey Deitch, who will later take Mariko Mori to global fame.
[30] Interviews with Masato Nakamura, 2 April 2010; Hideki Nakazawa, 31 March 2010, Min Nishihara, op.cit., Peter Bellars (also one of the participating artists), 2 June 2007ff. Elements of the story also draw on Hideki Nakazawa, *Contemporary Art History: Japan* (Tokyo: Aloalo 2008); Midori Matsui, 'Conversation days: new Japanese art between 1991 and 1995', in Howard Singerman (ed.) *Public Offerings* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art 2001): 247-230.
[31] Adrian Searle, 'Pop Life's schlock horrors', *The Guardian*, 29 Sept 2009.
[32] Interview with Masato Nakamura, op.cit.
[33] Inside information on Makoto Aida is based on "ethnographic" participation in Mizuma and Bigakko events, as well as being given privileged access to all the *Showa 40 nen kai* entourage in the week of preparation before their show, 'We Are Boys!', Düsseldorf Kunsthalle, 21 May - 3 July 2011. See also notes on his work in his collected works, Makoto Aida, *Monument For Nothing* (Tokyo: 2007).
[34] see Adrian Favell, 'When will Aida be famous?', *ART-iT* blog, 7 Jan 2010: http://www.art-it.asia/u/rhqiun/2hUn7BNpGikugJfd1SWe
[35] Noi Sawaragi, *Bijutsu ni nani ga ottottaka 1992-2006* [What Happened to Art? 1992-2006] (Tokyo: ??), introduction.
[36] ibid., 'What was the superflat project?', Murakami x Sawaragi dialogue, ??.
[37] see Adrian Favell, 'Tokyo to LA story: How southern California became the gateway for a Japanese global pop art phenomenon', *Kontur: Tidsskrift for Kulturstudier*, no. 20 (2010): 54-68. http://kontur.au.dk/fileadmin/www.kontur.au.dk/Kontur_20/Microsoft_Word_-_VAM-FAVELL_MOD.pdf
[38] Interviews with Tim Blum, 30 Jan 2007; Jeff Poe, 24 Jan 2007.
[39] *Public Offerings*, curated by Paul Schimmel, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 1 April - 29 July 2001.
[40] *Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art*, curated by David Elliott, Japan Society, New York; Adrian Favell, in *Art in America* (2011), op.cit.
[41] Based on various meetings with Ozawa including a live discussion/interview with the artist at the Japan Foundation, 20 Sept 2011.
[42] Notably, for example, he was part of Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru's *Cities on the Move* exhibitions 1997-9, *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Era*, at Walker Centre, Minneapolis (2003), and *Thermocline of Art: New Asian* Waves, Karlsruhe (2007)
[43] Hideki Nakazawa, 'Before it's all forgotten!' in Tsuyoshi Ozawa, *Answer With Yes and No* (Tokyo: Mori Art Museum 2004): 54.
[44] Tsuyoshi Ozawa, *A Guidebook to Tsuyoshi Ozawa's World* (Tokyo: Isshi Press 2001): 50-64; see also Midori Matsui (2001), op.cit.
[45] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: Les Presses du Réel 2002)
[46] Tsuyoshi Ozawa (2001) op.cit.: 20-30.
[47] While wandering around this new gallery, I was surprised by a friendly tap on the shoulder: it was Ozawa. He was working as a guide in the gallery, and he explained the show to me.
[48] see Adrian Favell, 'Tsuyoshi Ozawa and relational art', *ART-iT* blog, 30 June 2011: http://www.art-it.asia/u/rhqiun/0NukOMi9jWBVv8pXLKRe
[49] My sources on Yoshitomo Nara include interviews with Tomio Koyama, 2 June 2007; Hidefumi Hatakeyama, the manager of Nara's NPO Harappa, Hirosaki, 24 Dec 2008; his business partner in LA, Yoshi Kawasaki, 26 Jan 2007; Asian society curator, Miwako Tezuka, 3 Nov 2009; as well as several

anonymous sources. See also especially the catalogue for *Nobody's Fool*, edited by Melissa Chiu and Miwako Tezuka, Asia Society, New York, 9 Sep - 2 Jan 2011, as well as numerous reviews and essays by Midori Matsui.

[50] Interview with Paul Schimmel, op.cit.

[51] Yoshitomo Nara, *Complete Works* (San Francisco: Chronicle 2011)

[52] Fascinating sources include: Arthur Lubow, 'The Murakami method', *New York Times*, 3 April 2005; Sarah Thornton, op.cit., 'The studio visit': 183-217; Sharon Kinsella, 'Whose that girl? The gender origins of Japanese contemporary art' (unpublished Aug 2007); as well as Murakami's own detailed presentation of the corporation in *Summon Monsters? Open the Door? Heal? Or Die?* (Tokyo: Museum of Contemporary Art 2001), and the historical documentation of the first years of GEISAI (Tokyo: 2005). I was an accredited press visitor to GEISAI #11, the biggest GEISAI of all, in September 2008.

[53] Interview with Erina Matsui, 8 June 2008ff.

[54] Interviews with Kohei Nawa, 12 April 2007ff; Kengo Kito, 20 Oct 2007.

[55] Alison M. Gingeras (2009) 'Lost in translation: the politics of identity in the work of Takashi Murakami', in Jack Bankowsky, Alison Gingeras and Catherine Wood(eds.) *Pop Life: Art in a Material World* (London: Tate Museum 2009): 76-91.

[56] This is effectively a summary of what I try to do in *Before and After Superflat*, op.cit.