

What would an artist-conceived “city” look like?

Obayashi Foundation Research Program

Press Release - April 6, 2021

“Visions of the City - Obayashi Foundation Research Program”

The third grant recipient is exonemo



Photo: Niko

The Obayashi Foundation has selected the New York-based art duo exonemo as the third recipient of the “Visions of the City - Obayashi Foundation Research Program” grant.

The first grant recipient was Makoto Aida; the second was Theaster Gates. In the 2021 fiscal year grant program period, the two members of exonemo will carry out investigation and research. Detailed information will be announced when it is confirmed.

About “Visions of the City - Obayashi Foundation Research Program”

This creative grant program is carried out every two years by Obayashi Foundation with the aim of supporting artists’ research and investigation activities on the theme of “cities.” Launched in 2017, the program is being held this year for the third time.

Based on recommendations of a five-member selection committee, the program awards grants to artists with an abundance of creative ideas and a strong interest in the life of cities. Selected artists carry out research and investigations on issues facing urban areas, from original perspectives that differ from conventional approaches to urban planning, and present ideas and proposals for approaches to a city in which they would like to live or to an innovative or ideal type of urban environment.

<https://www.obayashifoundation.org/english/urbanvision/>

| Selection committee

Chairperson

Fumihiko Sumitomo

Professor, Graduate School of Global Arts, Department of Arts Studies and Curatorial Practices, Tokyo University of Arts

Vice Chairperson

Shihoko Iida

Curator

Committee

Shinobu Nomura

Senior Curator, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery

Kenjiro Hosaka

Director, The Museum of Modern Art, Shiga

Tomoko Yabumae

Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

| Comments from the committee chair

In the history of art, what sort of turning point will the year 2020 be? Since the first coronavirus state of emergency was declared in Japan, a distinction has been made between what is “necessary” and what is “unnecessary” in social life, and in this context the approach to support for the arts has been questioned. Various cultural programs were unavoidably postponed or canceled. But just before the WHO declared Covid-19 a pandemic in March 2020, a lecture performance by the second grant recipient, Theaster Gates, was held successfully, and promptly thereafter a number of meetings took place to select the third recipient. I feel it’s extremely fortunate that we were able to continue this grant program without interruption, in order to reaffirm the role of art as an important part of life rather than see it categorized hastily as either “necessary” or “unnecessary.”

Naturally, the selection process this time largely reflected recent discussions around economic, gender and racial inequality, and provided an opportunity to discuss anew the direction that this grant work should take. This resulted in the selection of exonemo, a male-female art duo that has been engaged in radical activities since the dawn of the internet. In the time of Covid-19, people’s lives have become even more dependent on digital technology. Rather than simply explore new internet-driven possibilities in areas such as industry, these artists have expressed a critical perspective, crossing freely between digital and analog, on such topics as the mutual influence of material technology and human desires. They received a high evaluation for this activity, the importance of which will continue to increase in the years to come. After moving to New York in 2015, exonemo has had the opportunity to delve further into these issues. It seemed to us that these artists were well suited to the challenge of proposing ideas on the future role of art in cities.

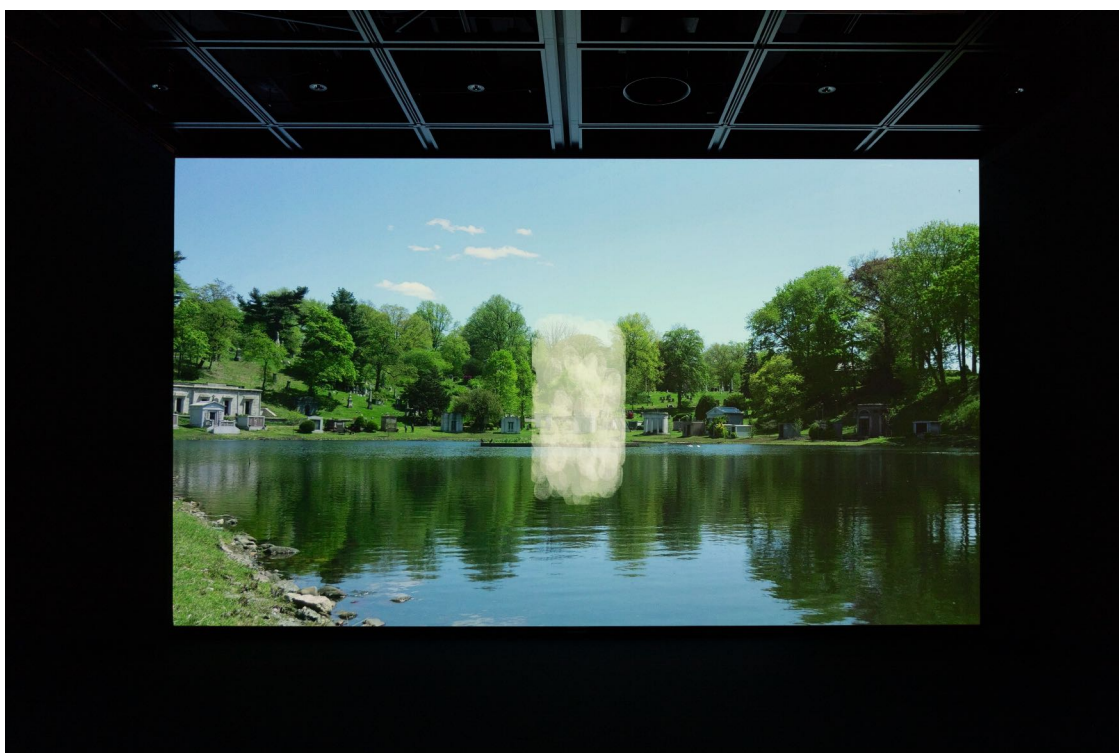
In the selection process we also considered candidate artists from countries in Asia and other regions; however, with the uncertain outlook for travel between Japan and other countries, we decided this time to select artists with Japanese nationality, partly to ensure that the grant recipients would have numerous opportunities to share their investigation and creation process widely with people involved in the program and with the public. In this time of great change, we expect their project to offer suggestions for the path that we should embark upon together.

Fumihiko Sumitomo

| Third grant recipient

exonemo

Freely and flexibly using anger and laughter and text editors, the artist duo exonemo works in a variety of media with a “hacking” sensibility. Artists Kensuke Sembo and Yae Akaiwa launched the project on the internet in 1996. Since 2000 they have expanded their activity to installations, live performances, event production, community organizing and more. Moving freely between digital and analog, the world of computer networks and the real world, they reveal the relationship between technology and its users. Their many experimental projects include humorous approaches and fresh perspectives. "The Road Movie" won the Golden Nica in the Net Vision category of the Prix Ars Electronica 2006. Since 2012 exonemo has organized DIPW and “Internet Yami-ichi (Black Market).” The artists have lived and worked in New York since 2015.



Realm_

Commissioned by HeK (Haus der elektronischen Künste Basel) _Net Works Series

From the exhibition “exonemo UN-DEAD-LINK”

Photo: Ryuichi Maruo

Courtesy of Tokyo Photographic Art Museum



exonemo

Kensuke Sembo (left) and Yae Akaiwa

Photo: Niko

| About the grant program “Visions of the City - Obayashi Foundation Research Program”

This foundation was established in September 1998 under the name Obayashi Foundation to Promote Urban Studies. As the name suggests, we have worked to advance the development of urban research in Japan by supporting those engaged in research activity to help actualize urban planning that will enrich the lives of city residents. In September 2010 the foundation received accreditation from Japan’s Cabinet Office as a public interest incorporated foundation. In September 2011 we changed the name to our current name, Obayashi Foundation, while maintaining the same fundamental philosophy.

Following the postwar reconstruction period, Japan achieved remarkable economic growth and became a materially wealthy nation while at the same time creating highly efficient and convenient urban environments. But even though these cities had come to be viewed as rich, it would be difficult to say whether the inner lives of the people residing in them had truly become richer. Considering that, for some time after the war, Japan was engaged in frantic efforts to revive its battle-scorched land, as well as the fact that our country experiences an extraordinary number of natural disasters, it is not surprising that the nation’s top priority for many years was to build a durable infrastructure to protect the lives of its people.

On the other hand, there are many impoverished areas in the world where, for people who live there, the facilities in place are merely a means by which to go on living. The entire world, moreover, faces common problems including excessive population concentration in cities, air pollution caused by widespread automobile use and industrial agglomeration, depletion of the natural environment, and abnormal weather due to greenhouse gas emissions. In today’s Japan, where the decreasing birth rate and the aging of society have led to population decline, there has also been an emergence of various social problems such as the abandonment of vacant houses and the phenomenon of people dying alone in their homes.

Isn’t there some way to rethink urban development as a way to make people’s lives richer and more fulfilling, and contribute to the study of cities in terms of interaction among human beings? Cities and people co-exist, and our idea was to support research on the various relationships between them in a wide range of fields connected with cities and people, including the arts, the economy, the environment, and history.

Rather than call upon experts on cities or urban engineering, in this program we are asking artists from Japan and overseas who have an abundance of creative ideas and a strong interest in cities to consider various issues facing cities and conduct research on approaches to a city in which they would like to live or to an innovative or ideal type of urban environment.

Actually, I don’t think there has ever before been an organization that supports artists who research and think about the subject of cities. The grant program “Visions of the City - Obayashi Foundation Research Program” is meeting that need.

Takeo Obayashi
Chairman of the Board
The Obayashi Foundation

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| Previous recipients



Courtesy Mizuma Art Gallery

Grant Program No. 1 (2017)

Makoto Aida

Exhibition: “GROUND NO PLAN”

Special website (archive):

https://www.obayashifoundation.org/urbanvision/event/2017_aidamakoto/



Photo: Rankin

Grant Program No. 2 (2019)

Theaster Gates

Research Project: “To Be a Maker: Finding Afro-Mingei”
(production ongoing)

| Inquiries

[Concerning the grant project]

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