

EXPOSITIONS REVIEWS



De haut en bas /from top:

Ho Tsu Nyen. «Hotel Aporia». 2019

(Ph. Takeshi Hirabayashi)

Monica Mayer. «The Clothesline». 2019.

(Ph. Ito Tetsuo)

Ballooning on all social networks, the controversy is becoming a mirror-like illustration of the theme set for the triennial, the role of emotion in the reading of information. But though we can welcome a situation that turns a triennial of contemporary art into a subject of national debate, we must however regret an amplification effect that neglects the works presented in their singularity, their specificity and sometimes their great success: such as, for example, that of Tania Bruguera (where, reversing the relationship of cause and effect between the comprehension of information and the emotional reaction, tear gas makes us cry at the number of migrants perishing during their journey), and that of Dora Garcia (which subverts fiction and reality by introducing into the museum system Romeos intended to seduce viewers). Mixing research into current affairs and sensitivity to place, the absolutely astonishing work of Singapore artist Ho Tsu Nyen (*Hotel Aporia*) consists of a series of reworked sequences of Yasujiro Ozu's films, with blurred faces and floating movements, projected in the lodgings where suicide bombers spent their last night during the Second World War. In one of the rooms a disproportionately enlarged fan transforms into a monstrous reactor, dragging Ozu-an daily Japanese life into a nightmare of war. The spot-on approach of the Japanese artist

which extends over the region round the city of Nagoya (coupled with the city of Toyota), has gathered a team of curators led by journalist and media sociologist Tsuda Daisuke. The chosen theme, under the title *Taming Y/Our Passion*, presents itself as a reflection on the relationship between information flow and emotional positioning, and is hinged on the three dimensions of the Japanese concept of *jo*, which means emotion, information and empathy. The triennial has declared itself openly militant and, for the first time in Japan, has achieved perfect gender parity among the 80 selected artists as well as the curators. Moreover, the triennial has exhibited again in one of its sections a series of works censored or rejected in the exhibition entitled *After "Freedom of Expression?"*, including the *Statue of Peace* representing a young Korean "comfort woman", images featuring Emperor Hirohito by the artist Oura

Nobuyuki, and shouts of encouragement and support to the people of the area of Fukushima by the collective Chim Pom.

Two days after the opening, following the criticism of some authorities and under the pressure of terrorist threats, this section was closed, resulting in withdrawal, out of solidarity, of some works of artists scheduled in parallel. While some denounce a case of typical censorship, others insist on the mission of protecting the public and employees. The fact is, on the one hand, that the far-right has often used the threat to prohibit and de-programme works, on the other hand, these threats are real and have, in Japanese history, sometimes been put into effect. Faced with this, the artistic director of the triennial, Tsuda Daisuke, is stuck, accused of censorship at the very moment when he initiated his triennial in terms of freedom of expression.



Dokuyama Bontaro reveals that the most coercive and violent systems take possession of the individual by gently pulling at heart strings: as in his film on elderly Taiwanese people who sing with unconcealed emotion nationalistic Japanese songs of the time of the occupation, or on the cherry tree the flowers of which are the sweets that accompanied the economic boom linked to the arrival of the high-speed train Shinkansen to Nagoya, and the particular taste of which is dear to the hearts of the Japanese. Or the very "tense" work of Kato Tsubasa, who made a group of musicians tied together by rope and elastic play the American anthem, revealing both the power of the collective and its constraints – the double bind.

The triennial has presented the various dimensions of our perception of the current world, with an invitation to tame passions by putting them at a distance, whether through externalization as in *The Clothesline* by Monica Mayer (encouraging the public to write anonymously their experiences of sexual harassment, a subject still very taboo in Japan), by analysis (Taryn Simon); by repetition and fiction, as with Candice Breitz (*Love Story*, 2016), Anna Witt (*Sixty Minutes Smiling*, 2014) and Wada Yuina (with her *Baby Rental* system), by magic as with Alejandro Jodorowsky and his psychomagic; and by the power of visual arts and illustration (*The Center for Investigative Reporting*); and aesthetic beauty, as in masterpieces representing atomic explosions by Miriam Cahn and Fujiwara Aoi; and in the delicate installation of Iwasaki Takahiro, which represents a miniature urban landscape under ashes made up of layers of waste and rubble.

While all protocols work for us to decrypt information, the controversy around the section *After "Freedom of Expression?"* reveals the issues of point of view and appropriate distance. Like the piece by the militant Japanese artist Takamine Tadasu, who presents a documentary film about the protests in Okinawa through a telescope so the distance prevents from seeing, reactions are modified according to positions and though extremely strong and politically engaged pieces have been able to receive a very good reception in this triennial, this openness has failed to breach the barrier of national and domestic nervousness, as revealed by the closure of the section of the works criticizing Japanese history.