

Press release: 10 November 2021

VIDEO INSTALLATIONS LAUNCH IN OXFORD CITY CENTRE WINDOWS

Two exhibitions featuring video projections by artist Eiko Soga have just launched in the windows of empty units around Oxford city centre.

Artist Eiko Soga's work combines video, poetry and ethnography based on the value system of the Ainu, who are the indigenous people of the Japanese and Russian owned lands surrounding the Sea of Okhotsk. Soga's work focuses on women's affective gestures, and questions how art might engage with a sense of value that generates ecological and empathetic knowledge. Soga has spent time with Ainu communities in Samani, Hokkaido, Japan to connect and develop this work.

The work will be shown in three locations around Oxford between Monday 8th and Friday 19th November 2021, including two different window installations:

'My Neighbour's Meal' 95 Gloucester Green, Oxford, OX1 2BU

In this exhibition, Soga raises a question: Do you ever envision the kind of culture your neighbours grew up with and lived in? By focusing on the food and cooking practices of the Ainu people, she starts a conversation about this.

Between 2020 and 2021, Soga learnt traditional Ainu cooking from an Ainu elder, Ms Kane Kumagai in Samani in Hokkaido, Japan. Traditional Ainu cooking is considered to be ecological and community oriented. Soga looks at cooking as a space to exchange empathy, mutual effort and lived knowledges, in order to unpack the interrelationships among historical, cultural and natural landscapes. Attempting to unfold this complex social landscape has allowed her to learn stories of disvalued knowledge through a compassionate approach. As a result, she has gained a better sense of how our sensory knowledge-based engagement with both people and nature contributes to a diverse ecosystem.

In 2016, Soga also worked with an Ainu hunter called Mon-chan in Nibutani in Hokkaido. He took her to the mountain where he hunts and she tried to understand what hunting means to Mon-chan experientially. The result is a video work showing the process through which she unlearnt her social norms and tried to embody Mon-chan's values.

Through this installation, Soga hopes to encourage audiences to be interested in the culture of people who are close to us physically but who might be far away emotionally and culturally.

'More-Than-Human World' The #WindowGalleries, Friars Entry, Oxford, OX1 2BY

Soga has been working with the indigenous communities called Ainu in Hokkaido, Japan. Through her research-led art projects, she has been questioning how the practice of art can embody and share 'felt knowledge' of the more-than-human world.

Another of Soga's video installations will be on display at the Pitt Rivers Museum. [For full details of all three exhibitions, click here.](#)

Artist Biography

Eiko Soga lives and works in England and is currently reading for her DPhil at The Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford. Through ethnography-led art practices, Soga explores the interrelationships within historical, cultural, emotional, and natural landscapes, looking at how an art can embody felt knowledge of more than the human world. Her research uses storytelling as a way to observe and document how minor, ephemeral, and sensory aspects of everyday processes can lead to bigger phenomena such as collectiveness and the development of culture. In doing so, she moves away from the social and educational forms imposed by colonial and imperialistic norms. The heart of Soga's work is cultivating a conversation about rewilding and decolonisation in response to societies that have been shaped by urban-capitalism-centric developments. Her work often takes the form of videos, photography, and poetry.

Selected exhibitions include: Video Forms Digital Arts (France), Learning from the Folklorist Tsuneichi Miyamoto, Ichihara Lake Side Museum (Japan), Kuroko, Index Festival Hub, Yorkshire House (UK), Bamboo Tori, Sapporo CAI (Japan), Nemagaridake, Uymam Art Project (Japan). Conferences and artist talks include: Relabelling Project, the Pitt Rivers Museum (UK), Imagining Our Digital Futures: The View From Japan, The University of Sheffield, School of East Asian Studies (UK), Blue Seas Thinking: A Workshop on Interdisciplinary Marine Social Science (UK), 3rd Tanaka Symposium in Japanese Studies, Pembroke College, University of Oxford (UK), Ecologies of Knowledge and Practice: Japanese Studies and the Environmental Humanities, University of Oxford (UK). Workshops include: Artistic Practice - Working

With Displaced. Arts Catalyst (UK), THE ANIMUNCULUS, Oxford-UdK Berlin Partnership in Arts and Humanities (Germany and UK).

Soga is a graduate of MFA Sculpture at the Slade School of Fine Art and MSc Japanese Studies at University of Oxford. She is an associate lecturer at Chelsea College of Arts in London.

About the spaces

The #WindowGalleries, which are located along Friars Entry in Oxford, are an innovative collaboration between community organisation Fusion Arts and The Randolph Hotel by Graduate Hotels.

The project connects and supports Oxford's communities, creating a lively space for the public to experience inspiring work by local artists. Rejuvenating the area in this manner helps bring vibrance and intrigue to the otherwise empty windows that so many people pass by each day.

95 Gloucester Green is a multi-purpose temporary-use creative space managed by Fusion Arts with the support of New River REIT. The space is part of Fusion Arts' involvement with the Meanwhile in Oxfordshire project.

About Japan Season

This project is supported by TORCH as part of the Humanities Cultural Programme: Japan Season.

Japan encompasses many different contributions to the world - and this is reflected in the diverse ways in which it is studied and researched at Oxford. The arts and culture, alongside the rich histories, literatures and languages of Japan, feature as part of a wide-reaching cultural festival in October-November 2021, led by the University of Oxford as part of the Humanities Cultural Programme.

Bringing together artists and performers based both in the UK and in Japan, the events series will engage the wider public through public events, grounded in collaboration. This festival will both showcase the work of creative performers and artists and reach diverse large audiences in Oxford; it will also have a global reach where the material

goes online. We will connect with key organisations and artists as we bring together and celebrate the arts and culture of Japan.

Supporters

This exhibition is supported by TORCH as part of the Humanities Cultural Programme: Japan Season and by Fusion Arts.

Fusion Arts is supported by Oxford City Council and through the Culture Recovery Fund grants awarded to Fusion Arts from Arts Council England on behalf of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport.

About TORCH

TORCH (The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities) is a hub for intellectual collaboration and cross disciplinary research projects, based in the Humanities at the University of Oxford.

While their funding, training and networks develop research projects and careers, their engagement activity increases the social impact and understanding of humanities research amongst a wider public audience.

About Fusion Arts

Fusion Arts is a charity based in East Oxford that tackles social disadvantage through artistic practice. They seek to drive social change by connecting artists and communities, supporting people to express themselves creatively.

Fusion's work reaches across Oxfordshire and beyond, including high-profile public events such as Oxford's Light Festival, Cowley Road Carnival and Oxford Windrush Festival. Fusion also facilitates public artworks such as Oxford's Covid-19 Stay Safe Murals and the #WindowGalleries.

About Graduate Hotels®

Graduate Hotels is a hand-crafted collection of hotels that reside in dynamic university-anchored towns in the U.S. and U.K. Each hotel pays homage to the heritage of its unique town through cultural nods to the local community. Launched in 2014, there are currently 30 hotels across the U.S., two U.K. properties, and an additional four

hotels set to open by the end of 2023. Graduate Hotels is owned by Adventurous Journeys (AJ) Capital Partners, a Nashville-based vertically integrated real estate developer, owner and operator, founded by Ben Weprin in 2008. For more information on Graduate Hotels, please visit www.graduatehotels.com.

About New River REIT

NewRiver is a leading listed Real Estate Investment Trust specialising in buying, managing and developing retail and leisure assets across Oxford and the UK. Their shopping centres and retail parks provide essential goods and services to their local communities.