

FY2021 Socially Engaged Art Support Grant Comments from the juries

Yasuyo Kudo (Administrative Director, ART & SOCIETY RESEACH CENTER)



Socially Engaged Art (SEA) is not a symbolic practice, but a practice with actuality. Therefore, it is more than a representation of ideas about social issues. It is important to build platforms and networks to encourage the participation of others, and social interaction becomes an essential keystone of the acts and projects.

While applications were more diverse than ever this year, Eri Honda's "Thus, the human race will die out." was an attempt to reexamine the post-corona society through a year-long dialogue with a diverse group of women. I hope that the participants in this project will go beyond the role of passive recipients and create a dialogue that would encourage critical self-reflection. In addition, I hope that the nine projects supported this time will present a new way of thinking about SEA in Japan.

Kenji Kubota (Independent Curator)



In response to the unusual situation of the global spread of the new coronavirus, this year's grant program, now in its fourth year, changed some of its application rules and invited project ideas under the theme of "Socially Engaged Art Projects Under the Coronavirus Epidemic," resulting in the selection of nine projects.

Many of the adopted projects, such as " Thus, the human race will die out." by Eri Homma (Kyunchome), who will collect "The End of Humanity/Destruction of Humanity" with women and compile them into a book of prophecy, and "Project F (tentative)" by Bontaro Dokuyama, who will reconsider the new coronavirus and the nuclear power plant accident in Fukushima with the common theme of "separation from others," are worth implementing now. I hope that each selected project can be realized.

Kenichi Kondo (Senior Curator, Mori Art Museum)



Photo: Mikuriya Shinichiro

This year has been tossed around by the coronavirus. This grant too solicited SEA proposals related to the coronavirus circumstances, however, we were disappointed to receive many applications that did not meet this objective. We excluded from the grant those projects that did not involve the coronavirus circumstances, even if they were excellent as projects, but we hope that they will be applied again next year. We received a large number of applications from Japan that could lead to social change, but also maintain the quality of art, and we decided to provide assistance to as many projects as possible although the amount was small. There were only a few outstanding projects from overseas, on the other hand, and only Jennifer Clarke's project to record the "voices" and "stories" of women in Tohoku in the coronavirus

epidemic was selected. I felt that this project, which aims to visualize and empower women's daily lives that have been somewhat obscured by the double adversity of the tsunami disaster and the coronavirus, was very meaningful. The project was also highly evaluated for its feasibility, as they not only had a track record of collaboration projects in Japan but also plans of venues to present the work in Tohoku.

Chiaki Soma (Representative Director, Arts Commons Tokyo / Art Producer)



Photo: Yurika Kawano

As we announced in advance that it would be around ten projects that would be funded under the coronavirus circumstances this year, and as we also allowed applications for prototype projects, the number of applications from Japan doubled this year, and as a result, a wide range of attractive proposals was submitted. I particularly would like to mention that several proposals were submitted from mid-career artists in their 30s and 40s, whose projects were both creative and feasible. The nine projects selected for this year's grant each uniquely addressed social issues such as gender, education, community, reconstruction, and care, while also taking into account the limitations caused by the coronavirus pandemic. They uniquely formulated questions that were not impositions of righty logics, and each had interesting artistic methodologies that increased the feasibility of the projects. Several proposals tackled gender issues that had emerged in various forms in recent years. Among them, Haruka Kudo's "If five women gather, the plate will break" was a proposal that clearly outlined the details of research, dialogue, creation, and outputting as an exhibition. As the artist had already been implementing ongoing collective activities for several years, there also was an impression that the project would expand beyond a one-time event. Several projects proposed new perspectives and activities in the "disaster area" ten years after the earthquake. Among them, Kiyono Kobayashi's "The voices from Bootes" was an ambitious project to create "new myths" and "mechanisms of the birth of myths" from the perspective of celestial navigation and research towards the radiation-exposed land, human, and animals, which would be held in the astronomical observatory and rangelands in Fukushima. By involving people from various perspectives in the process of observation tours and ritual workshops, the project stirs high hopes for developing a new model of socially-engaged art that is only possible 10 years after the earthquake.

Tadasu Takamine (Artist / Professor of Tama Art University)



This time, we did not choose a "grand prize" type of project, so the amount of grant for each applicant would be smaller, but we are to support them wholeheartedly. Of the two applicants I would like to mention, Marga Sari's approach continues working in one area, while Kyunchome's project interviews and collects a variety of voices. There were impressive phrases in both proposals that I would like to extract below.

Eri Homma (Kyunchome): "Women who have not been allowed to talk

about the future and their fears." "A new feminism in which many people, regardless of ideology or gender, can have a stake." "Social problems are not talked about as they are, but as the future of if."

Makoto Nakagawa (Marga Sari): "In gamelan music, there is no composer and the performance is always carried out by communal agreement on the spot." "Social cooperation based on non-authorship." "Protecting the community through art activities."

Yoshitaka Mori (Professor of Tokyo University of the Arts, Graduate School of Global Arts)



The spread of the new coronavirus had a serious impact on socially-engaged art, as it demands a social “distance distance” from the social “engagement” of art. This situation fragmented social relationships and further isolated people, especially those on the margins of society.

In this difficult situation, there were proposals to maintain existing relationships and to create new ones. In particular, there was Atsushi Watanabe's "I hate free hugs" which tries to build new relationships with people based on the theme of "hikikomori (shut-ins)," Kanayo Ueda's "Kamagasaki-o! Pera," and Joy Kawakubo's "Corona online meeting" which aims to build a network of artists through online lectures for their own survival, which should be commended as valuable attempts.