

Shortsighted Girl's Very Thick Wall

Motoko Kikkawa

31 January – 4 March 2017

Neither from itself nor from another
Nor from both,
Nor without a cause
Does anything, whatever, anywhere arise.¹

Motoko Kikkawa is prolific. She is inexhaustible. She is boundless and her practice seems to have no limits. Always working on something new, always contributing to next weekend's gig and sharing photographs of last week's, Kikkawa has spent the past decade quietly establishing herself as one of Dunedin's creative pillars. Observing her working on various projects over this time, I visualise each project as a new door opening onto a never-ending, ever-growing mega-structure that is her practice. While I'm not entirely sure what is behind each door, how many doors there are, or what this structure looks like as a whole, I know the doors and the passages toward and between them are all connected in a unique way.

Used to explain how the concept of 'infinity' originally comes from the East, the ancient Indian text *Anuyoga-vara sutra* can be translated most simply as 'doors of enquiry'. Written over two millennia ago, this text and the origin of infinity are rooted in three ancient Asian religions, philosophies and mythologies: Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism.² Perhaps behind Kikkawa's doors are simply more doors that represent infinite possibilities, directions and enquiries that we see manifesting in her different creative outputs.

In late 2016 when Blue Oyster commissioned Kikkawa to undertake an ambitious solo project to open the 2017 programme, the immediate challenge was how to present such a multifaceted practice as a solo exhibition to a local audience that knows and collaborates with Kikkawa regularly. With two spaces and a public programme dedicated to her current visual and sound based enquiries, it is my hope this exhibition will not simply scoop up and represent Kikkawa's different methods of enquiry but present her practice as infinitely current in process, philosophy and possibility.

Constantly moving, shifting and experimenting, Kikkawa has an infallible connection to the abstract paradigms of the infinity concept through the way she works and how this results in viewing something unique in idea, material and concept. Turning grains of rice into an Elizabethan ruffled neck collar; bundles of fresh seaweed into hanging wall works; an oily puddle into a generous photographic spectacle; a mistaken watercolour drip into a tiny animated galaxy; a melody recorded between rocks, birds and the wind; a leaky roof replicating a subtle electronic harmony. These works are delicate and considered, and Kikkawa's use of improvisation has a certain ease to it. What she produces has no order, no mathematical equation or logical explanation. Her work is connected to her life in the same way the concepts of time and space are described in *Anuyoga-vara sutra*: abstractly and materially.

Since she moved from Tokyo to Dunedin in 2004, Kikkawa's artistic processes have emerged partially from her many years experiencing the predominantly English-speaking world around her. Considering the importance that Dunedin's artistic community places on sound art, it is as though Kikkawa was made for Dunedin, being able to connect and communicate with her peers through sound and art. For twelve years she has immersed herself in and contributed to numerous events, exhibitions, performances and happenings around the city with her violin. No stranger to regular haunts such as None Gallery (her former home), The Anteroom, Allbell and Dowling Street Studios, Blue Oyster and other artist-run spaces such as Fresh and Fruity Gallery, Glue Gallery and Rice and Beans that have come and gone in recent years, Kikkawa has also organised, participated and documented in many sound and art events in churches, gardens, homes and historic buildings.

A public programme of two 'Blind Jams' pay direct tribute to this important facet of her practice through collaboration with a series of six local artists. A looping suite of short films in the second space will also reveal and extend on how she uses sound to collaborate not just with other people but her surroundings—birds, waves, rain, found material and so on. Some of these works are from an informal series titled 'see sound', and experiment with how to visually show sound to the viewer by playing 'with' her surroundings as though they are instruments in a larger band or symphony. As forms of experimentation, these short field recordings form the core of her creative output and directly influence the construction and approach of her static works in the gallery's front space.

Though this solo exhibition celebrates Kikkawa among her peers as a key proponent in the local scene and subsequently within Blue Oyster's long-running history of supporting emergent practices, it also attempts to define her experiences of making work with performance and collaboration.

Much of her work is about people talking to each other, and her remembrances of the flow of their ideas, associations and memories. "When I am making objects, I recall past conversations. When I am playing music, I play as if I am having a new conversation with the person I am performing with."³

What also distinguishes Kikkawa from other artists is her willingness to support young artists, not seeing age or inexperience as a barrier to creating new work and working together. Respectful of all practices and ideas, her indefatigable energy and her resolve to make new work every day forms a refreshing environment for emerging and experimental artists living and working in Dunedin.

While not attempting to provide an answer for what is behind any of Kikkawa's doors of enquiry, perhaps it is her collaborative methodology that is responsible for what is such an inimitable and unrestricted process. Critically, this collective approach to making work has meant Kikkawa has worked non-stop from one idea to another in the past decade. There is often a sense of urgency to her creative output that is sustained by her interest in improvisation and documentation. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish what is her own, and what has come from observation, documentation or collaboration as she moves from one project or event to another. This illogical approach provides her audience with a new way of seeing creative output, blurring the lines between artist and facilitator in today's increasingly fluid, process driven artistic community of practitioners.

In preparation for this exhibition, Kikkawa has been working from Blue Oyster's back studio space for several months to create four large works exhibited in the main gallery space. Designed to be ambitious semblances of her current small-scale drawing practice, these works act as façades or divisions throughout the space. Though they are much larger, they are equally meticulous and are perhaps literal references to doors, allowing the viewer to move close and far to gain a fleeting impression of Kikkawa's expansive and physically demanding but incredibly disciplined practice.

Recently while working in the studio, Kikkawa told me about an event that happens every autumn in the Hikone Castle gardens beside a large inland lake between Nagoya and Kyoto in Japan. It is called 'Meeting to hear the sound of insects at Genkyonen' and throughout the evening visiting members of the public can wander the historic gardens listening to the sounds of insects under the moonlight. It was while she was telling this story that everything I thought to be invisibly infinite and materially abstract about her practice began to take shape in my mind as something very well formed, residing between contemporary and traditional methods of form and approach. This is what a solo exhibition is all about; it offers a brief opportunity to explore what drives such a singularly prolific, unique and generous practitioner like Motoko Kikkawa to endlessly make work and be effortlessly present right here in Dunedin.

Chloe Geoghegan
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¹ Nagarjuna, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3.

² The Jains in particular had a deep understanding of infinity and in Hinduism there are many references to infinity: infinite time, infinite space, and so on. Amir D. Aczel, *Finding Zero: A Mathematician's Odyssey to Uncover the Origins of Numbers* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2016), 144-145.

³ Wendy Harrex in conversation with Motoko Kikkawa for the exhibition *Watching, Observing, Remembering*, Emma Chalmers, Ruth Cleland and Motoko Kikkawa at Inge Doesburg Gallery, 3–18 October 2014.