



**SHIMABUKU , *The 165-metre Mermaid and Other Stories***

**NMNM – Villa Paloma**

**19.02-03.10.2021**

**Curated by Célia Bernasconi**

Press Release

Biography of Shimabuku

Biography of Célia Bernasconi, Curator of the exhibition

List of works

Excerpts from the texts of the publication

- Rirkit Tiravanija, artist
- Claire Le Restif, Director of Crédac, Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry
- Nicolas Bourriaud, Director of MO.CO - Montpellier Contemporain and art historian

8 Flags

Public programme

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## SHIMABUKU, *The 165-metre Mermaid and Other Stories*

The exhibition *The 165-metre Mermaid and Other Stories* stems from a mediaeval Japanese legend and unfurls in the manner of an epic poem. It tells of the artist's adventures and encounters as he goes with the flow, roving between his native Japan and Monaco via Brazil, Australia and many other lands.

Freely combining performance, land art, music and cooking, Shimabuku's poetic actions are forever spinning new tales. His texts, which form the narrative thread of the exhibition, interweave installations, films, sculptures and photographs executed over the past thirty years.

Shimabuku was born in Kobe in 1969. He studied at the Osaka College of Art then at the San Francisco Art Institute before moving to Berlin in 2004 and living there for 12 years. Since 2016 he has lived in Naha on the Southern Japanese island Okinawa, where his family comes from.

From older works conceived in the Kobe region, which he happily compares topographically to the Riviera, to his latest installations produced in Monaco, Shimabuku develops a practice inspired by the profound attention he pays to his environment. On his travels, he makes elements of the landscape or popular culture into his own, leading experimental poetic actions that combine humour, performance, music or cooking.

On a visit to Fukuoka he discovered the legend and relics of a mermaid whose body was 165 metres long and decided to expand it, buying a rope also 165 metres long. Taken around the world, this rope brings him closer to the fish-woman and becomes a vector linking fiction to reality, past to present and Japan to the different countries where the work is presented. Acquired by the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco in 2018, the installation *I'm travelling with 165-metre Mermaid* (1998–ongoing) forms the starting point for the exhibition and is enriched by the presence of artefacts produced in Monaco by different craftspeople invited in turn to make this story into a work of their own.

Each of Shimabuku's works can be seen as a poetical-philosophical experience, questioning our relationship with otherness and engaging with an individual or collective action of care and attention. Initiated on Norihama beach following the tsunami in 2011, the installation *Erect* has led to a new specific production created in Monaco following the poem-protocol established by the artist.

*Placing things upright. Placing the lying things upright. Placing the trees and stones that lie on the beach upright.*

*With the collaboration of many people, we will place many things in an upright position. We will try to put our energy together to place huge trees as well in an upright position.*

*This should make something that lies in our hearts stand up in an upright position.* (Shimabuku)

The exhibition *The 165-metre Mermaid and Other Stories* will be accompanied by a catalogue published jointly by the NMNM and the Berlin publisher Manuel Raeder (Bom Dia Books). This major monograph of Shimabuku's work will feature previously unpublished texts by Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Le Restif and Rirkrit Tiravanija.

## Shimabuku

Shimabuku (né à Kobé, Japon en 1969) vit et travaille à Okinawa.

Selection of solo shows : The Contemporary Austin (2019); Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry – le Crédac, France (2018); Denver Art Museum (2018); Vancouver Contemporary Art Gallery (2014); Kunsthalle de Bern (2014) ; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2013). His work will be presented at Wiels in Brussels in 2021.

Selection of group shows: Creatures: When Species Meet, Contemporary Art Center, Cincinnati (2019); Viva Arte Viva, 57th Venice Biennial (2017) ; Floating Words, Biennale d'Art Contemporain de Lyon (2017); Okayama Art Summit (2016).

His works are kept in the collections of Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris ; Centre Pompidou, Paris ; Nouveau Musée National de Monaco, Monaco ; Tate Gallery, Londres and Kunstmuseum Bern.

Shimabuku is represented by Air de Paris, Romainville ; Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, London ; Barbara Wien Gallery, Berlin ; Nogueras Blanchard, Madrid, Barcelona ; Zero..., Milan

## Célia Bernasconi, Curator

Célia Bernasconi is Chief curator at the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco.

From 2005 to 2012, she directed the scientific and cultural program of Musée Jean Cocteau - Collection Séverin Wunderman in Menton focusing on Cocteau's paper and film works.

In 2013, she joined the team of the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco.

In charge of the museum's collections, she curated the exhibitions *Portraits d'Intérieurs* (2014), *Designing Dreams, A Celebration of Leon Bakst* in collaboration with the artist Nick Mauss and historian John E. Bowlt (2016), *Kasper Akhøj, Welcome (To The Teknival)* and *Saâdane Afif, The Fountain Archives*, an exhibition coproduced with the Centre Georges Pompidou (2017).

In 2018, she presented the exhibition *Latifa Echakhch le jardin mécanique*, an installation specifically designed for the spaces of the Villa Sauber and based on the museum's automata collection.

En 2020 she invited the artist João Maria Gusmão to reinterpret the technique of « Décors lumineux à transformations », a system of light projections designed for the stage invented in the 1900's by the painter Eugène Frey.

## List of works

All works presented are by Shimabuku

In blue: Texts by Shimabuku

*I'm Travelling with 165-metre mermaid*, 1998 - ongoing

Collection NMNM, n° 2019.4.1.13

In the spring of 1998, I found a 165-metre mermaid story at a temple in Fukuoka, Japan.

There was a picture of the mermaid and six fragments of her bones.

I started to travel with her story.

We went to Marseille, France and Sydney, Australia and then came back to Fukuoka, Japan again.

During the travel, I asked other people to make works about her, to expand her story and make it richer.

I bought a 165-meter rope to feel closer to her.

- Enamelled plaque, produced in Sydney, Australia, 1998
- PVC print, produced in Marseille, France, 1999
- 3 C-prints on cardboard, 1999
- 12 video still photographs and 2 printed texts on paper, 1999
- Marquetry, artisan: Catot Olivier, atelier La Sève, Marseille, France, 1998
- Monogram (monotype print), artisan: Marta, La Vie d'Artiste, Marseille, France, 1998
- Embroidery, artisan: Claire, Les filles d'Hortensia, Marseille, France, 1998
- Calligraphy on paper, Marseille, 1998
- Watercolour on paper, drawing by Shimabuku, Kindergarten in Sydney, Australia, 1998
- Chocolate egg, produced in Marseille, France after a drawing by Shimabuku, 1999
- *Sleeping with 165-metre Mermaid*, 1999, video from the performance in Marseille, France, 1999, 7 min. 50 sec.
- 165-metre rope on a rope drum, Sydney, Australia, 1998
  
- Engraved stone, artisan : SCS ERIS Charles Flaujac, Monaco, 2021, translation: Dominique Salvo

The text for the installation *I'm Travelling with 165-metre Mermaid* was printed on an enamel plate for the Sydney Biennale in 1998. It was then translated into French and printed on a cardboard street sign during Shimabuku's residency in Marseilles in 1999.

For the exhibition in Monaco, the mermaid's legend was translated by Mrs. Dominique Salvo, a teacher of the Monegasque language and member of the National Committee of Monegasque Traditions. It has been engraved and painted in red letters on travertine stone, in the same manner as the historical plaques that can be seen on certain national heritage monuments. This type of limestone was used to build several monuments in Ancient Rome, including the Coliseum. Today, Monaco's street plaques still come from deposits in the Latium region in Italy. They are engraved in La Turbie.

- Monegasque fougasse, artisan: SAM Costa, Monaco, 2021

In Provence, fougasse is one of the 13 desserts of Christmas.

In Monaco this sweet specialty is a round biscuit flavoured with aniseed and orange-flower water and decorated in the colours of the Monaco flag. We use red and white candied anise seeds, "fenuglieti" in Monégasque, to make these decorations.

Fougasse is traditionally eaten on November 19, Monaco's national holiday, and at Christmas. It is customary to break it with your fist before sharing it.

For the installation *I'm Travelling with 165-metre Mermaid*, the Maison Costa, a Monegasque patisserie founded in 1964 on rue des Roses, made a traditional fougasse in the shape of a mermaid on a 1:100 scale. The mermaid-fougasse has entered the collections of the NMNM and will be conserved for as long as possible in its sarcophagus.

### ***The Mermaid Museum, 2021***

Production with a CM2 class from Saint-Charles school, Monaco

Mixed media, variable dimensions

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

In February 2021, Shimabuku visited the Year 6 pupils at Saint-Charles school. He showed them the work entitled *I'm Travelling with 165-metre Mermaid* and asked them to think of a way to represent this extraordinarily oversized mermaid. After a four-day workshop with the artist and the museum's pedagogical team, the children collected their productions together in a "Mermaid Museum", which they made themselves in one of the rooms in the NMNM.

### ***Tallest Woman in Monaco, 2021***

Print on light-sensitive paper

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

To echo the story of the 165-metre mermaid, Shimabuku wished to invite the tallest woman in Monaco to the exhibition. In September 2020, the NMNM published the following advertisement:

"For the exhibition *The 165-metre Mermaid and Other Stories* to be presented at the Villa Paloma from November 21, the Nouveau Musée National de Monaco and the artist Shimabuku are looking for the tallest woman in Monaco for an imprint on light-sensitive paper. If you are over 1.85 metres tall and would like to take part in this artistic project, please send an e-mail to [contact@nmnm.mc](mailto:contact@nmnm.mc), indicating your height."

The tallest person to answer the ad is 1.90 metres. She works at Monaco town hall. Shimabuku was able to make an imprint of her body on light-sensitive paper a few days before the exhibition opened.

## ***With Octopus, 1990 - 2010***

10 framed texts

Collection FRAC Franche-Comté, Besançon, n02019-1-13 (1 à 10)

### ***Exhibition in a Refrigerator, 1990***

In 1990 I was living in San Francisco. My roommate was from Kentucky, and just after he moved in, he begged me, "Please don't put fish in the refrigerator. And whatever you do, don't put any octopus in there!"

At the time, I said, "OK," but the more I thought about it the stranger it seemed. "Why can't I put what I like in the refrigerator? It partly belongs to my roommate but it also belongs to me."

One day I bought some smelt at a supermarket in Japan Town. I also bought an octopus leg wrapped in plastic. I put it in the refrigerator while my roommate was away.

Shortly after he came home, he noticed the smelt and octopus in the refrigerator. As soon as he found it, he yelled, "Ugh!" I wondered if he would get mad, but all he did was call a friend on the telephone.

The friend, who lived in the neighborhood, came over immediately, and both of them took turns opening the refrigerator door over and over, saying, "Ugh!" each time. They seemed to be having fun. This was an exhibition in a refrigerator. From that time on, I have had a special relationship with the octopus.

### ***Octopus Road Project, 1991***

While driving from San Francisco to New York, from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean, I started wondering, "Has an octopus from Akashi, a city on the Seto Inland Sea, ever traveled to the Japan Sea?"

After returning to Japan, I took an octopus from Akashi to the Japan Sea. I imagined that this would be a major endeavor for an octopus, something like traveling in outer space for a human, so I thought I should do something difficult along with it. So I decided to walk from the Seto Inland Sea to the Japan Sea.

I mentioned my plan to various people, and someone I barely knew, Takamine Tadasu, asked to go with me. We started the walk from the beach in Kobe. Though it was almost the end of summer, it was still a very hot day. I thought that the octopus would also be hot, so I put some ice in a cooler filled with seawater. Later, after studying octopus life, I realized that this was the wrong thing to do. Because of changes in the water condition, the octopus turned belly up and died.

I wondered what to do and discussed it with Takamine, but we decided to go ahead and take the dead octopus to the Japan Sea.

We continued walking all day for four days, crossing mountains and rivers. One night we slept in the bushes on a traffic island on a road where a bike gang was racing up and down. On another night, a typhoon blew in and we had to take refuge in a campground storage room. The octopus in the cooler eventually began to decompose because of the heat, and changed to a pink blob that gave off a terrible smell.

Both of us had blisters on our feet and our bodies were sore all over when we finally arrived in Maizuru on the Japan Sea coast. We put the octopus that had turned into a pink blob into the Japan Sea. The pink goo spread out for a moment on the surface of the water and then quickly sank to the bottom.

## *Studying About Octopi, 1991*

I felt bad about making the octopus die in the Octopus Road Project. So I decided to learn more about these creatures so that next time I could make a journey with a living octopus. I talked to experts working in aquariums and read books, and I discovered some amazing things.

The octopus likes clean seawater and is very sensitive to changes in water conditions, especially changes in water temperature. Therefore, to keep an octopus in an aquarium, you have to have an oxygen supply and lots of filters and maintain the right temperature. It is difficult to keep an octopus alive, and even in public aquariums they often die. However, an octopus seller in the Akashi fish market told me, "If you put them in sea water they should be all right for at least three days."

The lower the temperature of the water in the tank, the less oxygen the octopus consumes, thus easier to look after. However, even in the ocean, when the temperature drops below 0 degrees, octopus can die. At Akashi, every few decades or so, the water drops below 0 degree and all octopus dies out.

The part of the octopus that looks like the head is actually the body. So it is put together in a different order than other animals: body, head, and legs. And the reproductive organ of the male octopus is found on the end of one of the eight legs.

There are stories about the octopus coming up on land, and in coastal villages in Japan, people say things like "an octopus stole the sweet potatoes from the field" or "an octopus carried away the chicken's eggs." I have heard that people on the coast of Italy say similar things, for example, "An octopus stole the tomatoes from the garden." Does this mean that an octopus likes little round things?

"During evolution, the octopus once tried living on land, but the squid has never come out of the water. That is why the octopus can move along a surface without water, but the squid cannot." After discussions with friends, we were convinced that it must be true. The octopus is full of possibilities.

## *Encounter Between an Octopus and a Pigeon*

*If gravity disappeared from the earth, an octopus and a pigeon could meet on equal terms.*  
*Fighting with gravity, 1993*

This project started when I met a girl who was a Korean national resident in Japan sitting next to me on a plane from London. She was wearing a pretty pink coat. Although we had met accidentally, we began talking about various things, and eventually we began talking about our ideas of marriage.

She said, "I couldn't even think of marrying someone unless we had the same culture and interests, so I will probably marry another resident Korean." I said, "I don't know who I will meet in the future or who I might fall in love with. It is possible that I will marry someone who is not Japanese."

In spite of our different opinions, we kept talking about this after all the other passengers around us had fallen asleep. Still disagreeing, we arrived in Seoul.

I changed planes to go to Osaka and she changed to a flight for Tokyo. It seemed strange that the person who had just been sitting next to me was now flying toward Japan just as I was but in a different part of the sky. It occurred to me that if the power of gravity suddenly disappeared, an octopus and a pigeon could meet on a more equal basis.

I had an opportunity to do an exhibition at the Nagoya City Art Museum. There were many pigeons in the park around the museum, so I decided to arrange a meeting between an octopus and a pigeon. I brought the octopus from Akashi.

I placed an aquarium in an open atrium-like space on the basement level of the museum. I put the octopus into the aquarium with proper attention to water temperature, water quality, and oxygen level. There was a stairway from this open space up to the ground level and the park. Since the octopus had come from as far as Akashi, I thought that it was not too much to ask the pigeon to come down these stairs. So I took some bread and set out to get a pigeon.

I tore up the bread and made a trail of bread pieces from the park to the stairs. I got pigeons to come halfway down the stairs, but they would not go all the way to where the octopus was. I tried many times, but it just didn't work. As I was walking around the park with the bread in my hand, a pair of dogs followed me.

They ate up all the bread on the stairs, came down to the water tank, and put both paws on the edge of the tank. Thus, there an encounter took place between some dogs and the octopus. The brown dog seemed very interested in the octopus but the white dog seemed frightened and pulled back. I don't know what the octopus thought or felt. It just kept moving around at the same slow pace.

### ***An Octopus Becomes a Star, 1993***

I took the octopus that had met the two dogs in Nagoya back to Akashi. I took it to the edge of the water to return it to the sea. It seemed reluctant to go back and just moved its legs nervously. It was night. I picked up the octopus and threw it out over the ocean in the night sky. A friend who was with me took a picture. The flash went off. When the picture was developed, the octopus looked like a star.

### ***On the beach in Zurich, 1993***

I visited a toy shop along the stone pavement in Zurich.

Looking around the shop for some time, I found a cardboard box in the corner. In it were plastic animals and creatures of different kinds. Soon I found myself playing on the floor of the shop.

First I grasped an octopus to make it crawl on the floor. It looked alive. Side by side with the octopus, I placed a gorilla, a tiger, a shark, and then, a dolphin, a giraffe, a rhinoceros, and a dinosaur.

A donkey in the bottom of the box looked at me, so I put it in front of the octopus. Their eyes met, and appeared to have been looking at each other since long time ago.

It seemed that all happened on the beach. I felt as if I looked at the happenings on the beach from a distance.

### ***Then, I Decided to Give a Tour of Tokyo to the Octopus from Akashi, 2000***

This was my own Apollo Project. I took a living octopus that I caught myself to Tokyo. Then I brought it back, still alive, and put it into the sea.

Would the octopus be pleased to receive the gift of a trip to Tokyo? Or would it be annoyed?

Most people act as if they are glad to receive a present, but are they really? I never know.

I don't know if the octopus I took to Tokyo was happy to go or not. It is certain that he escaped the fate of being caught in the fisherman's octopus pot, sold to the fish market, and eaten.

Also, he was probably the first octopus in history to go to Tsukiji, the big fish market in Tokyo, and come back alive. The octopus returned to the ocean at Akashi in good health.

What does the octopus remember about this event? Is he talking to his fellow octopuses at the



bottom of the ocean about his trip to Tokyo? Or has he gotten inside an octopus trap with the idea that he might be able to go to Tokyo again?  
In any case, I am not going to stop giving gifts.

### ***Catching octopus with self-made ceramic pots, 2003***

I was invited to the biennial of ceramic in Albisola, Italy. When I went there the first time, I saw some octopus dishes in the hotel restaurant. I started to wonder how people in Albisola catch the octopus. In my hometown, people catch octopuses using ceramic pots. They simply string many pots on a long rope and let them sink to the bottom of the sea. No bait is used. When the trap is retrieved 24 to 48 hours later, the octopuses are found inside the pots. This method takes advantage of the fact that octopuses like narrow spaces. Danilo, my ceramics craftsman, told me that Italian people used to use a similar method a long, long time ago.

Danilo and I decided to do things the ancient Italian, and my hometown's, way and catch octopus in present-day Albisola using self-made ceramic pots.

### ***Octopus Stone, 2003***

Octopuses have a habit of picking up stones and shells from the bottom of the sea. When you pull up an octopus pot, sometimes you will find octopuses holding them. Sometimes the pot is full of them. Some octopuses like stones, and others prefer shells. Some are holding pieces of broken glass, or holding red colored stones. I collect these things and admire them.

### ***Sculpture for Octopuses: Exploring for Their Favorite Colors, 2010 / 2019***

Octopuses often pick up stones and seashells on the ocean floor. I decided to make some pieces of sculpture for them.

When an octopus encounters one of these different colored glass pieces on the seabed, would he gaze into it with his catlike eyes? Would he grab it with one of his eight tentacles? Would he carry it along into an octopus pot? And what would be his favorite color? On the wide reaches of the ocean floor, can a small glass piece connect a man and an octopus?

### ***Octopus Stone, 2003***

Stones and shells on pedestal with text on card  
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

### ***Sculpture for Octopuses: Exploring for Their Favorite Colors, 2010***

12 glass balls, digital print, text on card, wooden pedestal and Plexiglass top  
Collection FRAC Franche-Comté, Besançon, n° 2019-1-14 (1 à 14)

### ***Catching octopus with self-made ceramic pots, 2003***

14 ceramic pots, paper, rope, vinyl text, wood  
Collection Centre Pompidou, Paris; Musée national d'art moderne / Centre de création industrielle,  
n° M 2014-348  
Purchased in 2014 thanks to the Society of the Japanese Friends of Centre Pompidou, 2013

***Asking the Repentistas - Peneira & Sonhador - to remix my octopus works, 2006***

Video installation, two projections

Mini-DV transferred to digital file, colour, sound

16 min. 43 sec.

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

This song is for our great friend Shimabuku a fisherman from Japan. He catches octopuses to show people, that's what he does. He brings them, shows them and frees them again in the sea. Let us sing about him!

Come on buddy, let's sing about a fisherman who lives out at sea.  
He goes octopus fishing all year long and brings them back to show everyone.  
Cheers to this fisherman, even octopuses are happy to be caught by him!

Octopuses reach the land, then go back to the sea to tell others the tales of the land.  
On land, everyone is talking about the octopuses, ladies come out to greet them. Dogs come and sniff them too, but no one touches them.  
When Shimabuku releases octopuses back in the ocean, storms always come through.

***Christmas in the Southern Hemisphere, 1994***

Wallpaper, silkscreen print

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

One day, I thought that if I became Santa Claus in the warm season, I had to feel that I was in some southern hemisphere country that had Christmas in the warm season.

It was spring, and I became Santa Claus in the vacant lot near the ocean, through which the train passed. I was the Santa Claus whom you could glimpse at from the train window, but could not look back and gaze at. The glimpse of me was the event that would linger in your mind, because of its momentary impression.

I thought it would be wonderful if someone from Latin America or Australia was on the train, and, catching a glimpse of me as Santa Claus, recalled Christmas at home in the warm season. I picked up the garbage in the vacant lot. This Santa Claus in the spring held the bags that were blue and filled with discarded things.

Sometimes, I think about Columbus. He tried to reach India, then he discovered America.

Where can my "Christmas in the Southern Hemisphere" reach?

***Sitting on the Wave, 1998***

C-print mounted on aluminium

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

### ***The Chance to Recover Our Humanity, 1995***

C-print mounted on aluminium and framed text

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

There was a major earthquake in Kobe, where I lived. Many homes were destroyed and many people injured and killed.

It was a tragic and terrible situation, but immediately after the earthquake there was goodness and beauty as well. Complete strangers calling out to and helping one another. People acting truly human. But with the passage of time, as the city settled down again, those instances of goodness quickly began to disappear.

People returning to their old companies and schools. People abandoning the earthquake-stricken town. Others coming for the first time to help. And, along the tracks of a railway used by all those people commuting to and for, a sign on the roof of a friend's ruined home reading "The Chance to Recover Our Humanity."

### ***Cucumber Journey, 2000***

Installation, mixed media:

- 2 framed C-prints
- Flag
- 9 watercolours on paper
- Vinyl tekst
- Video 9 min. 41 sec.

Framed C-print (apart)

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

The train from London to Birmingham takes two hours, but I made the trip by boat on a canal built in the eighteenth century, taking two weeks.

During this trip, I made pickled vegetables.

The vegetables and cucumbers that I bought fresh in London were pickled by the time I reached Birmingham. When I conceived of this project, I didn't know how to make pickles, but by the end of my trip I had learned something about it and my pickled tomatoes were quite good.

While traveling from London to Birmingham, I got recipes for pickles from other people, and I watched the sheep and water birds and leaves floating in the water.

And I watched the cucumbers slowly turning into pickles.

There was an English couple, Geoff and Jean, who were traveling with me and taught me about the operation of the boat. I learned quite a bit about England while talking to them almost every day. Geoff and Jean began by saying, "Why is making pickles while traveling on a boat art?"

But they ended up saying, "Maybe it is art. Why not call it art?"

Geoff and Jean encouraged me to eat English cooking every day, making things like sausages and roast beef morning, noon, and night.

Gobbling down this food, I got fatter than I had ever been before.

A boat trip and pickles: a slow trip and a slow food. There are places to which you can only travel slowly, and there are things that can only be made slowly.

Arriving in Birmingham, I gave the pickles to friends in Birmingham to eat. The pickles will begin a new journey in people's bodies.

***Photograph wearing rain boots, 2011***

C-print, wood, clips, rain boots  
Private collection, Monaco

***Leaves Swim, 2011***

3 C-prints  
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

***Sea and Flowers, 2013***

Super 8 film transferred to digital file, colour, silent  
2 min. 19 sec.  
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

One day, I saw a red flower floating on the waves at the sea coast. Was this flower drifting away from here to some far place? And I thought of the day when these flowers, long ago, drifted here from the continent across the sea. Where will they go, the flowers I cast into the sea? Will they eventually arrive somewhere?

***Symbiosis – Goldfish and Hyacinth, 1992***

Cibachrome print mounted on aluminium  
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

***Shimabuku's Fish & Chips, 2006***

Neon sign  
8mm film and mini-DV transferred to DVD, colour, music by Kassin, 6 min. 45 sec.  
Collection NMNM, n° 2012.10.1  
Gift of the Association des Amis du Nouveau Musée National de Monaco

Fish and Potatoes, a meeting of the sea and the land. Fish & Chips signs are all over the place in English towns. To me, it's like the towns are brimming with simple and beautiful poetry.  
One day I wanted to make my own version of Fish & Chips. So in Liverpool, I made a film about a potato swimming to go meet a fish.

***Oldest and Newest Tools of Human Beings, 2016***

4 prehistoric stone axes, 4 smartphones, glasscase  
Collection NMNM, n° 2017.2.1

***Erect, 2017***

Digital film, colour, sound  
5 min. 53 sec.  
Reborn art festival, Oshika peninsula, Ishinomaki, Japon.  
Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

Placing things upright. Placing the lying things upright. Placing the trees and stones that lie on the beach upright.  
With the collaboration of many people, we will place many things in an upright position. We will try to put our energy together to place huge trees as well in an upright position.  
This should make something that lies in our hearts stand up in an upright position.

### ***Erect, 2017-201***

Installation, various materials and potted plants

Production realized with the support of SAM J.B. Pastor & Fils, Monaco

In collaboration with Jardin Exotique de Monaco

In 2017, Shimabuku created a land art performance on Norihama beach on the Oshika peninsula in Japan, one of the coastlines that was hit hardest by the tsunami in 2011. He asked a group of people to go there to set the tree trunks and branches that were stranded on the sand upright and erect a monument.

He renewed this performance the next year in Ivry-sur-Seine, using rubble from the last two worker's houses, demolished in summer 2018, which had been part of the first housing estate in Ivry.

In Monaco, Shimabuku turned his attentions to a symbolic part of the Principality's history by taking fragments of the Villa Ida, a bourgeois residence located at 5 boulevard Rainier III built between 1880 and 1900 in one of the oldest neighbourhoods in the city. Pre-empted by the state, then demolished in December 2019, it made way for a major property development, Grand Ida.

By random chance – two fundamental notions in Shimabuku's work – Villa Ida happened to be the home of the NMNM's production manager, who had lived there from her childhood to the age of 30. On January 2, 2020, she supervised collection of fragments from the demolished villa. In February 2021, Shimabuku erected the architectural and vegetal fragments in the exhibition space, giving the debris a second life in the form of sculptures. This gesture evokes *kintsugi*, a traditional technique applied to restoring ceramics or porcelain with gold or silver. In this philosophy, as in Shimabuku's art, the past and the history of each object are taken into account, as are any accidents that may have happened to it. Demolition leads not to the scrap heap, but to renewal.

### ***Sakepirinha, 2008***

Neon sign

Framed poster

Courtesy of the artist and Air de Paris, Romainville

## Excerpts from the texts of the publication

### Excerpt from the text by Rirkrit Tiravanija, artist

A good story should have ego. But in the work of Shimabuku, I found the opposite; he makes work that seemingly is not overwhelmed by his gentle self. For Shimabuku, there are stories to be told about everything. He pays attention to the unfathomable overlooked details of life. He harvests his ideas from rich material that has been neglected and misunderstood, finding these resources in the banalities of daily life. I don't say banality to suggest that life is banal. Banality is the luxury of an unresourceful mind; a mind without attention to details considers things banal. Shima (as the artist's friends address him) dedicates his mind and time to the details most of us see as unnecessary. Shima spends his days chipping away at the facade of "interest." When someone says, "That's interesting!", they display the ego of Kurosawa's protagonists, embellishing the truth for the sake of their ego. Shima doesn't give a damn about that. When Shimabuku is interested, he can find all the answers to the mysteries of the universe in the slime of a crawling snail

[...]

I remember an image I saw in one of Shimabuku's catalogs. It was a frame of medium width, and towards the center-left of the frame, there was a man dressed in a Santa Claus costume, taken from an oblique rear angle. I remember that he was holding something up in his left hand and his arm was slightly lifted as if to wave at a train that was passing in the background. It was an awkward image, I thought to myself. I remember the large stone construction holding the train track. It was a local train, not the famous Japanese high-speed Shinkansen (bullet train). I don't remember the picture being very colorful; I just remember the red of Santa's outfit and the silvery corrugated siding of the local commuter train. I think that further in the background there were some hills which, as I often saw in my own experiences of traveling through Japan, were covered in pine trees grown to produce disposable chopsticks and the shoji screens used in traditional Japanese houses. But I have a terrible memory. As my friend Ann the journalist would put it "the RAM is full"; there is no more memory space. [...]

I liked looking at the picture *Christmas in the Southern Hemisphere* 1994 because there was just enough information in that image to provide me with questions. I would start to imagine being on that train, on the way to the market, or returning home from school, looking out the train window, which I often do, and getting a glimpse of Santa Claus standing next to the track as the train sprinted by. I would have tried to crane my neck back, keeping my eyes fixed on Santa, to decipher the reason behind what I had just witnessed. It would be like being a protagonist in that Kurosawa film. Only four or five people were actually looking out of the windows on the left side of the train at that very moment. Later that evening in a local eatery, some people would discuss a rumor about a Santa Claus standing next to the rail track. Then the four people would in turn describe what they thought they had seen, and each would offer their own speculations, none of which would come close to the truth. They each thought that they had each seen an epiphany: a miracle, a crazy man, or saint performing a special blessing. But in fact, this was far from the truth. The truth of the matter was in Shima's mind.

## Excerpt of the text by Claire Le Restif, Director of Crédac, Centre d'art contemporain d'Ivry

In certain respects, [Shimabuku's gestures] evoke the Japanese traditional craft of *kintsugi*, which has been described as the "art of resilience." Dating back to the 15th century, this Japanese traditional craft consists of repairing broken ceramics and porcelain with gold or silver. Fused with precious metals, scars from accidents objects have undergone become features that enhance their beauty. Like the philosophy of *kintsugi*, Shimabuku's art incorporates objects' histories, including the accidents they have experienced. A breakage does not mean an object should be disposed of. Instead, it means it can be renewed, passing into a new cycle in continuity with its past.

When Shimabuku sets a devastated landscape upright again, he is performing an operation similar to *kintsugi*. Working with other people, he replants trees and branches, treating the beach like a blank page in a book. Working together, Shimabuku and his companions pick up rocks as birds sing and the sun rises on a new morning.

[...]

Given Shimabuku's upbringing in Japan, it is also worth considering the influence of Shinto thought on the artist. This set of beliefs dating back to ancient Japan is sometimes described as a religion mixing polytheistic and animistic elements. Viewed as the oldest recorded religion in Japan, Shinto is connected to Japanese mythology. Its practice involves the veneration of natural forces. While acknowledging the influence of Shinto thought, Shimabuku describes himself as more closely aligned with animist beliefs. His father is from southern Okinawa, where animist philosophy is widespread. Animism is the belief that there is a soul or vital force present in living creatures, objects, and natural elements like rocks and the wind. To Shimabuku, rocks, branches, and red bricks from Ivry have a vital force. He treats the elements he brings together like portraits: objects with a distinct soul or memory that must be attended to. In Shimabuku's work, there is value in simple gestures like creating sculptures by erecting stones or branches.

## Excerpt of the text by Nicolas Bourriaud, Director of MO.CO - Montpellier Contemporain and art historian

Since his first exhibitions in the early 1990s, Shimabuku has examined the world around him by traveling to its most far-flung corners and engaging in conversation with many of the different beings that inhabit it. If asked to define Shimabuku's work, I would be hard-pressed to find a better answer than the response Guy Debord's gave when a friend asked him what he was working on. "On reification," Debord replied. He immediately assumed Debord must spend his days buried in books in libraries. "No, wander around. I mainly wander around."<sup>1</sup> Shimabuku's artistic approach could be described in similar terms. He creates poetic descriptions of the space of the Anthropocene, challenges the philosophical parameters that define the role of the artist, and practices an experimental form of totemism—all while wandering around. He speaks to octopuses, organizes interspecies encounters, and invites vegetables and macaques to share in his experiments.

### *Wandering*

Wandering is a central device in Shimabuku's work. By moving things from one point to another, setting beings in motion, instigating journeys, and traveling to encounter new persons or situations, the artist elaborates an "erratic" mental landscape. Roving is Shimabuku's artistic method. Where Marcel Duchamp performed institutional displacement by moving consumer objects into cultural spaces, Shimabuku initiates the displacement of living things. Shimabuku is a key member of the first generation of artists to move beyond the postmodern obsession with identity and culture and, in its place, derive their aesthetics from the geological era of the Anthropocene. Heralding the end of the Western cleavage between nature and culture, these artists' work is characterized by close interlinkages between different kinds of living beings. Objective and subjective divisions between animal, mineral, vegetable, atmospheric, and human disappear. Everything collapses into everything else. The human individual is just one of a multitude of elements within a larger network. Human beings are not the center of these networks. Instead only reality—the sum total of all of the relationships between all beings and things—can take a central position in these networks.

### *Metabolization*

In *Cucumber Journey* (2000), Shimabuku created an entire exhibition by contrasting two different speeds of locomotion. Instead of taking the two-hour train journey from London to Birmingham, he traveled by barge on a seventeenth-century canal, which gave him two weeks to produce his exhibition. During this relaxing journey, he prepared pickled cucumbers. This project explored the notion of conservation, "There are places to which you can only travel slowly, and there are things that can only be made slowly. Arriving in Birmingham, I gave the pickles to friends in Birmingham to eat. The pickles will begin a new journey in people's bodies." Patiently digesting the world is the principle important step in Shimabuku's method. The works presented in his exhibitions slowly metabolize. Rather than being displayed indefinitely in a separately demarcated "art world," the artist's pickled cucumbers make a detour through the art world before returning to the living world, where they are eaten. The same is true of his other pieces. Shimabuku's experiments briefly become artworks during his exhibitions when, as Pierre Huyghe puts it, the public is exhibited to them. The rest of the time, Shimabuku's works continue to exist in their natural state, elsewhere and in different

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<sup>1</sup> This anecdote comes from Michèle Bernstein's novel *Tous les chevaux du Roi* (Paris: Allia, 2004), 26.



forms. Metabolization means assimilating something into an organism through biochemical reactions. Shimabuku art is the metabolization of living beings by human culture; his exhibitions are processes of digesting the world.

### ***Address***

Shimabuku's project cannot be fully understood through the prism of the history of sculpture, or any other purely cultural account of artistic activity. His art seeks to go beyond the human and does not coincide with any established reading of artistic production. To borrow Gilles Deleuze's expression, his work is part of a broad process of "becoming-animal." Shimabuku's work does not primarily dialogue with gallery visitors, but with octopuses, monkeys, pigeons, cucumbers, and tomatoes. This change in "address" sets his work apart from postmodernism, which is characterized by a claustrophilic obsession with identity and belonging. Shimabuku's work, by contrast, is claustrophobic. It attempts to meet new interlocutors and address beings who are not the work's audience, but form an entire world. Consequently, his work is entirely non-referential. Shimabuku does not attempt to situate his practice within the history of art by alluding to other works. His works do not employ a set of references that is shared between the artist and viewer. Rather, he attempts to take viewers outside of themselves. In *Sea and Flowers* (2013), the artist throws baskets of flowers into the sea. These flowers are scattered in the waves then carried off to unknown destinations. We do not know if they will ever be seen again, or by whom. All we see is their colors being gradually dispersed throughout the surface of the water. Like a message in a bottle sent by a sailor stranded on a desert island, this artwork actively searches for a potential viewer.

Since the 1990s, a generation of artists has tried to move beyond the confines of the art world by looking to the sphere of inter-human relations. These artists have used the world of human connections as sources of material for their art, utilizing neighbors, communities, passers-by, and the public as motifs. Now, the relations employed in art have been extended beyond the human to include all living beings. While maintaining some of the features of relational aesthetics, Shimabuku has extended this practice to engage what I describe as *omni-interlocution*. This form of discourse does not privilege any particular perspective.

### ***Disalienation***

I believe that the fundamental principle of Shimabuku's art is resisting alienation. The original meaning of alienation is "to make something other." Hegel, and later Marx, extended this meaning to describe the relationships between human beings and objects. Marx observed that industrialization's destruction of traditional communities and elevation of abstract value-labor over tangible labor had made individuals strangers to themselves, other people, and the world. Global capitalism then generalized this sense of alienation by fixing a barrier between nature and culture and transforming the whole planet into a vast reservoir of products to be exploited. Shimabuku resists alienation by asking us to become inhabitants of our world once more. He suggests we begin by practicing an anthropology and zoology of proximity. When Shimabuku compares a smartphone with a prehistoric ax, he decenters our perspective, suggesting that technology is just an imitation of the growth living beings undergo. (...) Each of Shimabuku's works could be described in similar terms; they are created out of interference between two apparently separate wavelengths. Disalienation can mean arranging a meeting between two different entities. It can involve bringing something strange to encounter something familiar, like introducing an octopus to a dog or bringing a tortoise into an exhibition space. Shimabuku's work tells us that contemporary alienation is the result of our lack of

familiarity with the living world. It is a result of the Western nature/culture distinction that colonialism exported to the rest of the world. By interposing himself between kingdoms and worlds that are usually kept apart within our alienated modes of thought, he rebuilds links that have been severed and re-affirms the unity of the world we are evolving in. He demonstrates the need to rediscover things outside of ourselves.

## 8 Flags

In 2011, on the occasion of the exhibition *OCEANOMANIA, Souvenirs of Mysterious Seas* – a project by Mark Dion – David Brooks made a proposition for the flags on the roof of Villa Paloma, eight pareidolias, the familiar shapes one can find in clouds. Ten years later, Shimabuku has been invited to imagine new flags as part of his exhibition *The 165 metre Mermaid and Other Stories*.

### Shimabuku

#### *Moon and Potato, 2021*

8 prints on flags

“When I look at the moon, I think of a potato  
When I look at a potato, I think of the moon.” – Shimabuku

The exhibition in Monaco highlights Shimabuku’s inclination to reconnect the distant and rethink the notion of alterity. The poetical analogy the artist formulates in *Moon and Potato* is a perfect indicator of this process. An image taken from his film *Fish and Chips*, a potato floating in the sea (hypothetically waiting for a fish), is here associated with the moon, forming a comparison as formal as it is humorous. Is the potato floating in the sky, or the moon in the sea? The so-called relational aesthetic is hereby raised as a flagship.

## Public Programme

The NMNM seeks to encourage meetings between the public, artworks and creators. At Villa Paloma and Villa Sauber, *La Table des Matières* and *Le Salon de Lecture* offer visitors of all ages a special setting allowing them to extend their visit and quench their curiosity.

The NMNM also develops, in close collaboration with specialized associations in Monaco and its region, visits for people with disabilities. A program adapted for the visually impaired public is available on reservation and visits in sign language are also offered. Groups from the AMAPEI have also been welcomed regularly for several years, and still are today.

### Regardez Voir

Regardez Voir is an all public service offering an artistic vision for the duration of a conversation. If perceiving a work requires looking at it, seeing allows us to understand its meaning. This service can be activated every Tuesday between 12:30 p.m. and 2 p.m. and Sundays from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Activate the service with a person wearing the « Regardez Voir » badge. In just a few minutes, the meeting offers an experience of seeing, a new way of talking about art.

### Guided tours

Mediators are available every Tuesday, Saturday and Sunday to guide the public in its visit or answer any questions (French and English).

Group visits are possible every day of the week, upon reservation

### Midi au Musée

Every Tuesday between 12 and 2.30 pm the visitors can access the Villa for free.

Lunch break can be a moment to relax and spend time in the gardens, drink a coffee and then visit the museum.

### Ateliers en famille

Every Sunday at 3pm, come as a family and discover the museum through a family workshop.

Length of the workshop: 45 minutes – Age group: 7-12 years old with at least one adult - participation is free, upon reservation

### Ateliers jeune public

The NMNM organizes workshops for children during the holidays.

For more information and updated events, please go to the NMNM website and its Facebook page. Information and registration: [public@nmnm.mc](mailto:public@nmnm.mc)

## **SHIMABUKU, *The 165-metre Mermaid and Other Stories***

**Director of the NMNM:** Marie-Claude Beaud

**Curator :** Célia Bernasconi, Chief Curator of NMNM

**General coordination:** Maxime Porto, Hortense Hinsinger and the NMNM team

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## Practical Information

**Nouveau Musée National de Monaco**  
[www.nmnm.mc](http://www.nmnm.mc)

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### Opening hours

Every day from 10am to 6pm

Closed on January 1st, May 1st, 4 days of the Grand Prix, November 19th and December 25th

### Entrance Rates

NMNM ticket: 6€

Free for everyone under 26 years old

Combined ticket NMNM / Jardin Exotique / Musée Anthropologique de Monaco: 10€

**Free entrance from 12.30 to 2pm on Tuesdays for “Midi au Musée” and every Sunday**

### NMNM / VILLA PALOMA

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### By bus

Line 2, direction Jardin Exotique, stop “Villa Paloma”

Line 3, direction Hector Otto, stop Villa Paloma

Line 5, stop « Parc Princesse Antoinette », access through public lift

### By car

**NEW:** Parking « L’Engelin », Bd du Jardin Exotique

Parking “Jardin Exotique”, access through Bd. du Jardin Exotique et Bd. de Belgique

### From the train station

Bus Line 2, direction Jardin Exotique, stop “Villa Paloma”

Or Ligne 5, stop « Parc Princesse Antoinette », access through public lift

### From Villa Paloma to Villa Sauber

Bus line 5

For Villa Paloma, stop « Parc Princesse Antoinette », access through public lift

For Villa Sauber, stop Grimaldi Forum – Villa Sauber

The NMNM is a member of **BOTOX[S]** réseau d’art contemporain Alpes & Riviera and **Plein Sud** - le Réseau arts visuels du Sud