

“Shita (Under)”

Yoshua Okón

20 October - 18 November, 2018

Curated by Asakusa as part of "Asakusa Entertainments"

Supported by Taito City Office, Arts Council Tokyo, The Asahi Shimbun Foundation, FONCA

Asakusa is pleased to announce the opening of “Shita (Under)”, **Yoshua Okón’s** second solo exhibition with the space. Taking the specificity of each geo-political event, Okón creates situations through which fiction and reality intersect. As a convergence of staged situations, documentation, and improvisation, his work is akin to sociological experiments executed for the camera, and explores issues of labor, authority and its legitimacy, referencing a universal social problem. Based on rigorous research and close intercession with the people in question, Okón’s work attempts to turn the spectator into an active agent, and makes uncensored commentary on our social realities today.

Shown for the first time in this exhibition is a project developed upon invitation by Asakusa Art Space. Spatially composed as an installation with multiple sculptures and a three channel video on 4K monitors, *Shita (Under)* (2018) projects an expansive green field of an ongoing landfill in Tokyo Bay, covering up a 55 million metric ton mass of industrial and household waste disposed by the city since 1977. The shoot location, “Outer Central Breakwater Reclamation Area No. 2”, is a 4-square-kilometer island segment of a landfill. It is currently in the process of “green development”, adding a 50-cm surface layer of soil and vegetation on top of a 30-meter-deep strata of waste. Wreaking with an intense rotten smell from adjacent areas, the site is monitored 24 hours a day for fire hazards, due to the highly ignitable methane gas exhumed from underground. Wild vegetation is there to detoxify the ground, preparing itself for future use and spurring “speculation” in Tokyo’s contested property market. Despite the premises of “green economy” which, based on intelligent technology, asserts sustainable GDP growth without degrading planetary environments, the scale of our material production and the waste it results is beyond control. How can this be sustainable with such an overwhelming level of natural resource depredation?

To portray a contextual analysis of this artificial island, Okón deploys the cinematic language of a nature documentary, which commodifies and aestheticises views of nature and wildlife. Pointing at “green policies” which promote both consumption and illusion of sustainable production, *Shita* (Japanese word for “under”) ironically creates a spectacle of green forests, and in doing so, suggests darkness under the blanket of seemingly efficient management of waste. Commercial products, now crushed and dumped, represent the accumulation of time workers from the world over have spent, as the global economy relocates factories of cheap labour. Buried in the landfill devoid of any market value, these products continue to decompose, only to help form a new land for further economic speculation. While prompting adaptive behaviors to ecological marketing and internalizing its root causes within the consciousness of the consumer, the market mechanism continues to fuel overproduction, with exacerbating collusion between the government and the private sector. The green field covering up the foul underneath signifies this neoliberal strategy, in which the most essential contradiction of the market economy is kept beneath the layers of media, building a false impression upon a visually seductive surface.

Disguised as ore minerals that contain metal and other tradable elements, the exhibited sculptures are made of “molten slag”. This toxic form is made from incinerated ashes of waste and sewage sludge processed above 1300 Celsius degrees, and used as a landfill material in Tokyo Bay.

Since the turn of the 19th century, modern landfill engineering has extended Central Tokyo an additional 6,000 hectares, or one tenth of the current area. Built upon the land are giant public infrastructure facilities such as container terminals, convention centers, and shopping malls—all of which advance the scale of economy for further consumption. Landfill issues continue to haunt us, with the mainspring of their effects left unaddressed.

Asakusa would like to express its gratitude to Taito City Office, Arts Council Tokyo (Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture), Fondo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes, and the Asahi Shimbun Foundation for the support provided for the realization of this project.



Yoshua Okón: *Shita (Under)*, 2018.

Artists:

Yoshua Okón (b.1970, Mexico City) is known for his near-sociological experiments executed for the camera, which blur the distinctions of staged situations, documentation, and improvisation. His practice explores communal and national boundaries, and questions the issues of labor, as well as authority and its legitimacy in an geo-political event. He received a MFA from University of California, Los Angeles in 2002. Okón's work has been shown internationally and his past exhibitions include "Mexico City: an exhibition about the exchange rates between bodies and values," curated by Klaus Biesenbach, PS1, MoMA, NY, and Kunstwerke, Berlin, 2002; "Adaptive Behavior," curated by Trevor Smith, Dan Cameron and Yukie Kamiya, New Museum, NY, 2004; "Laughing in a Foreign Language," curated by Simon Critchley and Mami Kataoka, Hayward Gallery, London, 2008; "Burning Down the House," the 10th Gwangju Biennale curated by Jessica Morgan, Gwangju, 2014. This year, Okón's is participating "What People Do For Money," Manifesta 11 curated by Christian Jankowski, Zurich. His work is placed in the permanent collection of Tate Modern, LACMA, Colección Jumex and MUAC, among others.

Curators:

Asakusa is a 40-square-meter exhibition venue for contemporary art programmes committed to advancing curatorial collaborations and practices.

Since its inauguration in October 2015, Asakusa has worked with international artists including Yoshua Okón, Thomas Hirschhorn, Santiago Sierra, Rikrit Tiravanija, Yoko Ono, Hito Steyerl, Anton Vidokle, while constantly negotiating with local contexts. The archival exhibition "1923" traced the footsteps of early Japanese avant-garde in the 1920s, with a particular focus on the influence of Dada in Tokyo. "Kino-Pravda: A Tribute to Prokino" combined screenings of news-reels by Prokino (Japan Prolet-Kino Unio: 1929-34) and today's documentaries that explore the notion of political "truth".

Asakusa Entertainments: The critical attitude challenges rationality, and formulates ethical virtues that articulate normative guidelines. Following Foucault's evolving enterprise of thoughts and "the critical attitude as virtue in general," the event considers the intertextuality of knowledge and power, and how art functions within this parameter. Drawing parallel narratives to the histories of local media, entertainment culture, political stagnation and government conservatism, the programme seeks to identify and foster artistic strategies of critique for cultural

production today.

The project with Yoshua Okón is made through an invitation by Asakusa art space, ****. The exhibition its 16th exhibition to date, since the exhibition "In The Land of Ownership" (2015), Asakusa, Tokyo.

Project Members

Director: Koichiro Osaka
Project Manager: Mariko Mikami
Production team: Junki Mine, Takashi Fujikawa,

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Exhibition Facts:

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Venue: Asakusa
Location: 1-6-16 Nishi-Asakusa, Taito, Tokyo
Opening hours:
Sat. Sun. Mon. Hol. 12:00 - 19:00

URL: www.asakusa-o.com
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