

"Yabuno-naka nihon sekigun"

Eric Baudelaire + Naeem Mohaiemen

9 February - 8 March, 2020

12:00 - 19:00 *Open on Fri. Sat. Sun.

Supported by Arts Council Tokyo

With support from Institut français du Japon - Tokyo

Asakusa is delighted to announce the opening of "Yabuno-naka nihon sekigun", the two-person exhibition by artists Eric Baudelaire and Naeem Mohaiemen, who share common interests in the concept of statelessness, the history of political utopia and its repercussions, as well as summoning images from past events, transcending the border of documentary footage and affective memory. Through different paths, each artist has come to focus on the impact of the Japanese revolutionary left during the 1970s. The exhibition references the film *Rashōmon* [1], and comprises two bodies of work that narrate and analyse this history at the convergence of distant political temporalities between Beirut, Tokyo and Dhaka—drawing upon multiple perspectives and testimonies without a unified truth.

In the early 1970s, extreme left members of the Red Army faction began to flee Japan, seeking to set up bases overseas, an action which they imagined to be a key geopolitical strategy for a "World Revolution". Among them, Japanese Red Army (JRA; 1971-2001) led by Fusako Shigenobu formed a base in Beirut, with support from The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). In their fierce and persistent attempt to paralyze state power and to rescue imprisoned comrades, JRA carried out a relentless series of armed operations, including hijacking civil aircrafts and attacking airports and embassies—continually acting in stealth and social clandestinity. Meanwhile, their solitary, nomadic, lifelong crusade meant life under imminent threat, and constant displacement and replacement of spatio-temporal political context, bearing the risk of their intentions falling into misappropriation and misreading.

The Anabasis of May and Fusako Shigenobu, Masao Adachi, and 27 Years without Images (2011) by **Eric Baudelaire** (b.1973) is an intricate tale of JRA members—Fusako Shigenobu, the group's leader, and her daughter May, as well as Masao Adachi, a filmmaker and an ex-member of JRA. Produced in the manner of Adachi's *fūkeiron* (landscape theory), the film continues with a series of landscapes that reveal the ubiquitous structures of power in society. The camera carefully pans along urban and suburban views as the monolog voice-over accounts for their exile in Beirut, until forced return to Tokyo. A recurring theme during these years of self-invention is the question of images: public media images produced in response to terrorist operations planned for the television era, and personal images that are lost or destroyed amid the chaos of struggles. Referencing Xenophon's famous tale of the Greek army's journey home [2], and with insertion of TV footage and Adachi's film excerpts, the film collects words, testimonies and memories (including false memories) as two intersecting accounts mix personal stories, political history, revolutionary propaganda and film theory.

For **Naeem Mohaiemen** (b.1969), the 1970s were a formative period of the artist's life, as well as his home country of Bangladesh. As an eight-year-old child, the artist watched his home television screen waiting for a favourite TV show to begin, yet instead found a static image of a control tower for hours on end. Based on JRA's 1977 hijacking of Japan Airlines Flight 472 [3], Mohaiemen's film *United Red Army* (2011) combines the original voice recordings of the hostage negotiations, with colored text on a black screen. The work, in the negation of imagery, underscores the event's political and interpersonal tensions with implicit meditation of its complex reverberations behind the veil of state television. JRA had aligned with the Palestinian cause, and through the allegiance, to an idea of global pan-Arabism. But the Bangladesh in which the aircraft landed in 1977 was not what they imagined. Instead of being the willing stage for ideas of "Third World Revolution," the actual Third World hit back unexpectedly, forming a coup d'etat which turned the hijacker into a helpless witness—saying in strained English; "I understand you have some internal problems."

The demise of international class solidarity strikes a possible chord of resonance in a dissonant community of social heterogeneities. Perhaps, only by risking being a threat to a dominating and homogenizing political discourse, can an ordered society think anew and imagine an armature of counter-thought to resist dominant positioning. How can this intelligence be challenged from the very basis that defines our reality? Is this mode of questioning still able to hold space within social and artistic discourses without risking justification? Or will this shift have to burrow space, to move only in a subterranean fashion, by creating alternative spaces? Should the reading of JRA be rejected due to its criminal implications? All these would be questions of unhindered creativity and idealistic will, as well as a question around the possibility of arts by risking itself and negotiating with the state authority, as critical resistance to any monolithic and totalising interpretation of the world.

"Yabuno-naka nihon sekigun" is realized with the support of Arts Council Tokyo, the Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture