

Shimabuku *Sea and Flowers*

« *We have to meet tortoise before alien life forms.* » (1)

Japanese artist Shimabuku often adds short texts written by himself to his artworks. He uses a concise language, of a rare simplicity in the context of presenting contemporary art. The commentaries of the Berlin based artist are nonetheless precise and efficient, and they never fall into the caveat of attempting to justify the apparent absurdity of the piece. A profound wonder, a passing emotion, a gnawing question or even a singular encounter which led him to keep a tortoise in the space of the Wilkinson gallery in London (2), to film an aquatic ballet between a potato and a fish (3), to buy the entire stock of a street vendor on the streets of Moscow (4), or yet again to marinate pickles for two weeks inside a barge on a canal taking him from London to Birmingham. (5).

This strange collection of objects, of facts, of situations and beings began when Shimabuku was a student at the San Francisco Art Institute. One day, he put a squid inside the fridge of the apartment he was sharing with another student. To the young Japanese student, it was just food ready to be cooked, whereas his roommate saw the lifeless animal as a hilarious, yet repulsive, curiosity. The same day, his roommate invited friends over to observe and take pictures of the dead squid. Without him fully realizing it, this "show" was Shimabuku's first exhibit: "Exhibition in the refrigerator."

Following this first "piece", which was the result of a confusion due to two different cultural perspectives, Shimabuku didn't stop reiterating these types of displacement: the artist himself, or objects and situations producing strange and poetic combinations. The context of art, and more particularly the space of representation, allow him to formally reveal elements of an everyday nature that are proper to him, yet still surrounded with a halo of "mystery." Let's consider the fruits and vegetables floating inside two aluminum basins filled with water, a piece present in the Wien Lukatsch gallery. The work reconstitutes an absolutely banal experience for most of us. Yet, Shimabuku noticed that when he was washing the vegetables before cooking them, some tomatoes floated and others sank. Without looking for a scientific explanation, the artists simply offers to share his wonder (6).

The trivial experience which is offered to us, like many initiatives by the artist, creates a new "encounter" with our everyday life. Beyond simply revealing its banal aspects, it brings up a form of beauty, a poetry of displacement which doesn't work with the usual esthetical tricks. Many of Shimabuku's works are a recreation of situations he encountered in the past, to which he barely adds anything. He is, in a sense, a real "appropriationist". In *Sea and Flowers* (2013), the documentation of a performance shot on super 8 film, which displays a usage of poetry maybe more evident than in the floating tomatoes, Shimabuku, on a boat at sea, places several flowers petals on the waves. His production can thus be compared to a multitude of photographs, simply capturing sparks of the real, like the compilation of a permanent tourist: « With photography, you can take a mystery as a mystery ». (7).

The apparent simplicity of the artist's works could have him pass for an eccentric (8), and yet it is, to who can appreciate it, the expression of a stupefying lucidity on his environment. It is a rare hindsight, decontaminated of our daily practice, which he seizes, silently reinterpreting an absurd reality. Similarly to his collected stone garden (*Octopus Stone*, 2013), Shimabuku's exhibitions take on the vast shape of an ongoing wonder-room, with multiple locations.

"There are places to which you can only travel slowly, and there are things that can only be made slowly." (9)

Gauthier Lesturgie

English translation: Sarah Pearce

- 1- "Have you ever seen a tortoise yawn? conversation between Shimabuku and Chiara Parisi", Centre international d'art et du paysage de l'Île de Vassivière, 2011.
- 2- *My Teacher Tortoise*, 2011.
- 3- *Fish and Chips*, 2006.
- 4- *A Great Day*, 2011.
- 5- *Cucumber Journey*, 2000.
- 6- *Something that Floats / Something that Sinks*, 2010.
- 7- Shimabuku, Chiara Parisi, op. cit.
- 8- During the *Swansea Jack Memorial Dog Swimming Competition* (2003), where the artist organized a swimming competition for dogs in Swansea, Wales, one of the residents questioned him on the purpose of organizing such an event and considering it art? The artist replied that he did not have a choice; it had to be "art", since they lived in sad times, and these kinds of things could only happen in the context of "art".
- 9- Shimabuku's text for *Cucumber Journey*, 2000.

Wien Lukatsch Gallery, Berlin, September 3 – October 31, 2014.

