

**THING**  
**RO!**

*Curator:*  
Martijn Verhoeven

*Adresa:*  
DUPLEX/10m2  
Stakleni Grad Ferhadija 15  
71000

*Otvaranje:*  
15. maj 2010 19.00h

Sarajevo Bosna I Hercegovina

Rumiko Hagiwara

*15. maj – 6. juni*

2010





Marble and brick - 2009, 135x96cm, photo, inkjet print



Earthquake M7.0 - 2008, video, 2min 33sec



Exercise ball - 2009, 70x105cm, photo, inkjet print on cloth



Spotlight - 2009, 1355x916cm, light box photo, inkjet print



In shadow - 2008, installation, graphite, lamp, door, shadow



L - 2010, 145x110cm, photo, inkjet print



# ALMOST NOTHING STUFF IN AN ORDINARY SITUATION

Rumiko Hagiwara  
*in conversation with*  
Martijn Verhoeven

**MV:** Dear Rumiko, today I was sitting in the train, reading your small booklet. Of course it is no coincidence that you start your booklet with that small Japanese story about a stone.<sup>1</sup> I was wondering if this is what you are aiming for in your work, to allow people to look differently at the world?

**RH:** Yes, I try making suggestions in order to help people change their way of perceiving the world. If you change the position you take while looking at a subject, the subject itself remains the same while your perception changes. I think changing your perception in this way is very important when confronting the present world. I use this Japanese story to convey the essence of my works, in addition to giving a description of Japanese sense.

*About that Japanese sense: is there such a thing as Japanese sense? Could you elaborate a bit more?*

Japanese people prefer describing things subtly, through the sense of an atmosphere. They imply hidden meanings in the background, and don't like expressing themselves in a direct manner. How to approach a subject is more important than the actual subject itself. You will find that the Japanese use many careful gestures in their way of communicating.

For example, if they work with a stone, where they put the stone will be more important than the stone itself. In this sense, the surrounding situation of the subject is the most important factor. In other words, the process of reaching the subject is more important than the subject itself.

There are several senses specific to Japan, which can sometimes make for big misunderstandings in intercultural communication. I like this Japanese particularity, and am keen to show this sense to other people, as I find it to be a rich perception of life. This is why I include it in my concept.

*The way you describe your thinking reminds me of Merleau Ponty, the philosopher of Phenomenology (I really can recommend his book Phenomenology of Perception?). He attempts to describe the real meaning of facts of everyday life, and therefore he needs a critical distance. At the start of one of Ponty's famous radiolectures, he describes it as the act of forgetting for a while, from the familiar feeling we have with the things. Only when we forget this familiarity with the things we can understand what this familiarity actually is.<sup>2</sup>*

*Can we compare this with what you do? Is it possible that you were inspired by Ponty?*

Your remark about Merleau Ponty is quite accurate. When I look at art, I always feel the need to refer to his theory. Although to be honest, I am only just starting to read him. My idea of perception is derived mainly from Japan. I must add that this is a very interesting coincidence, as this specific sense of observation is a recent characteristic of their tradition.

I believe the effect of art should be long-lasting; it shouldn't be quickly consumed in a moment. I suppose that this is why I try to create almost nothing stuff in an ordinary situation. Many things have already been done in the art world. Direct and violent effects will easily bore. One thing you can do is to alter the point of view of a phenomenon, to be different each time. The effect of this could be long lasting, as it could resonate within your daily life.

To keep this attitude, I think you need to keep a distance from objects to avoid familiar feelings and references from your own knowledge. I find this to be a very beautiful way to confront the world.

*Is this attitude you are talking about also a sort of criticism towards the society of the spectacle, the world full of images that we live in? Or is this not the case?*

Japan is economically a very successful country. However, in the process of becoming successful, something became twisted. I grew up in the Japanese countryside, which is a very conservative area. I saw many complex mixtures of conservatism and post-war liberalism. After the Second World War, Japanese society found a very large discrepancy with the post war democratic ideal laid down by the United States and the original Japanese tradition. In other words, the system became out of balance.

The Japanese tradition includes very nice ways of perceiving, but nowadays people prefer to consume superficialities that are readily forgotten. One could call it criticism, but I haven't thoroughly studied critical theory like Guy Debord, for example. For me it was a natural happening, I needed to be aware, and I needed to take this position.

*Okay, I understand. Can you tell a bit more about your working methods? Do you spend a long time preparing a work, or do you improvise a lot, and work quickly? Some of your works look very simple, while in reality you may have put many hours of work into it?*

I always get my ideas by chance. I don't know what it is that triggers them. It's difficult to control. Half of my ideas don't even end up working in the end. Sometimes, something is just impossible to make practically, and other times the works are simply not ideally completed.

In my case, it often happens that an idea that initially doesn't work may reappear a year or more later, but in a different way that works far better with the situation at the time. It's always about timing and situation. Quite often, my presentations are improvised according to the space at hand, but the concept of each of the works always remains on the same line of thought.

For the exhibition, I use all of my skill to eliminate each unnecessary element in order to simplify the work, therefore intensifying its effect. Physically, I don't spend very much time building the works. However, preparing the exhibition takes an enormous amount of time and is actually very stressful.

*Is it possible to explain what you would like to do in the DUPLEX exhibition space? Or is this only possible when you're actually there on the spot, in Sarajevo?*

As of yet, I still haven't been able to formulate the right idea. There are big windows at the side of the space. I may do something with these windows and relate it to the outside view. But still, my idea for the space isn't clear yet. Could you tell me what the view was like from the window of the Duplex? You were there last year. If I get an idea, I'll still need to take many attempts in the space itself to ensure it works. Often I use very fragile, unclear materials like shadows, reflections on glass surfaces, etcetera, so I really do need to check the space before I can be sure of anything. All I can say for now is that it is very exciting.

*Well, the view is not spectacular, really urban surroundings. But the windows themselves are really beautiful, and the sunlight coming in can be fantastic. Do you think you could elaborate a bit more on these big misunderstandings you were speaking of earlier? I, myself, can really like misunderstandings. Often a misunderstanding is the beginning of something beautiful, don't you think?*

In communicating with others, I've experienced many strange reactions to my Japanese gestures, as people often don't have the references to understand them. But yes, I do agree with you that misunderstandings can be the start of beautiful communication. Misunderstandings can force you to step out of your own particular way of thinking, in order to communicate with another person. It is sometimes possible to approach these misunderstandings in a lighthearted way, it depends on the attitude you take. I hope to be a person who accepts these differences with an open mind. Thank you for the interview!

1. One day, a person was walking on the road that he walked every day. He noticed there was a stone on the ground. His mind opened up suddenly by noticing this trivial thing. He felt that he stood in another world. He saw that his daily view had changed.  
2. Merleau-Ponty, M., *Phénoménologie de la perception*, Paris, 1945.  
3. Radiolecture for the programme *Heure de culture française*, November 1948.