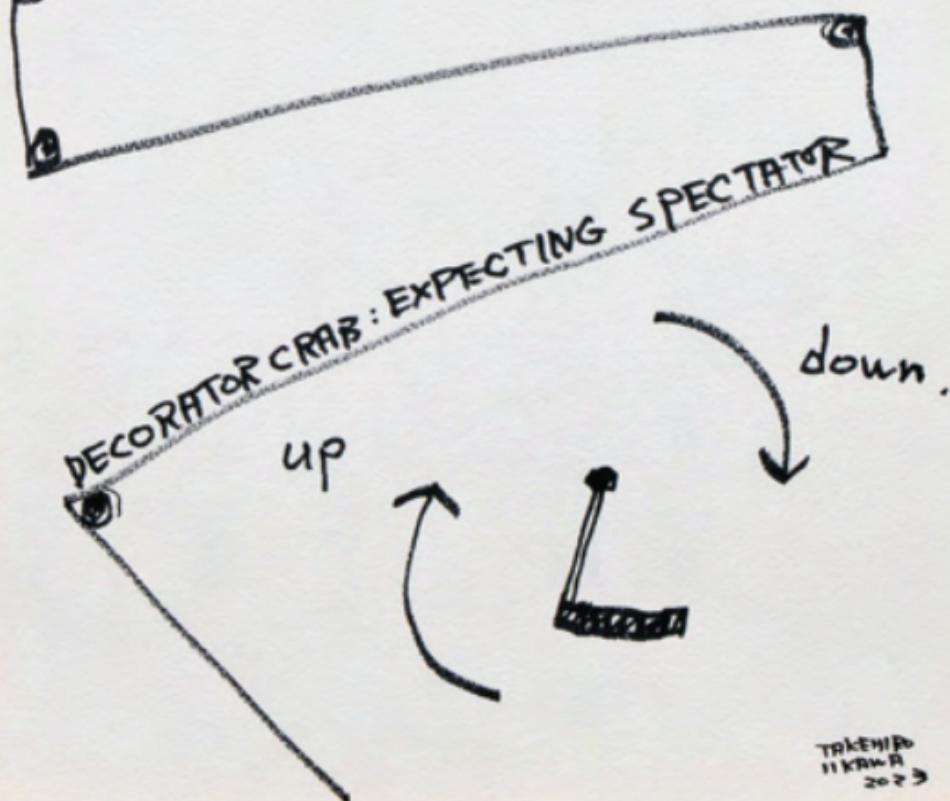


I wonder  
if you  
would be  
able to  
communicate  
about  
someone  
the “impulse”  
that you  
may feel  
when encountering  
when the decorator crab







# Evading Attempts at Capture: Cats by likawa Takehiro

Washida Meruro (Former director of Towada Art Center / Director of 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa)

This January (in 2020), a colossal, shocking-pink cat suddenly appeared at a public housing complex in Yokohama, peering over the tops of two-story buildings. The size of this outdoor sculpture by likawa Takehiro invariably astonished viewers, while the form of the cat evoked a comforting sense of familiarity.

Some local residents apparently expressed displeasure. This was not because it was an eyesore, but because it was partially obscured no matter what point it was viewed from. They felt that considering all the effort it took to construct, it should have been placed prominently in front of the buildings. Why was it hiding behind them?

When I spoke with likawa, he explained that the partial concealment of the figure is actually central to the work's concept. When people





Decorator Crab – Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat, 2020  
Namiki Clinic, Kanagawa, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

to take photos of it," he says, "but I hope to see situations where the bus drives away just as they try to capture it." Buses are indeed objects that tend to remain in motion. While site-specific works are usually tailored to particular locations, this work fully embraces the mobility of the bus. It could be described as a "moving site-specific" work.

likawa will also participate in Yokohama Triennale 2020, scheduled to begin in July. His plans involve placing massive objects that fill corridors and other spaces to their limits, which visitors can move by pushing. These large objects block normally accessible passages, but when pushed, rotate to allow entrance.

As a curator, I found myself concerned about safety. What if someone on the other side gets trapped by the moving mass? Looking at photos documenting a similar project by likawa in Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture, I noticed a backpack on the floor, dwarfed by the large objects. At first I assumed someone had forgotten to remove it before taking the photo, but it turns out the backpack contains weights



Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2020  
Yokohama Triennale 2020, PLOT 48, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2020  
Yokohama Triennale 2020, PLOT 48, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

and serves to stop the wall from moving past that point. This struck me as ingenious. Viewers who spot the backpack in the venue no doubt think another viewer must have left it there, but that person is not present and can only be imagined. As with imagining what lies on the other side of a wall, the backpack acts as a device to provoke thought about what is absent. It also subverts expectations about weight.

But why do such pranks qualify as art? Reflecting on this, I recalled the concept of “defamiliarization.” This is a strategy where, in the case of theater, the audience is deliberately made aware that what is happening on stage is fiction. likawa’s installation for Yokohama Triennale 2020, titled *DECORATOR CRAB: Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement*, takes this same approach by foregrounding the ways in which exhibition venues are intentionally constructed for viewing art. Typically, there is an entrance leading to galleries containing objects to be viewed. likawa’s works, however, are objects so large that they block the entrance, and viewers cannot enter without moving them. This makes people conscious of entrances they would normally pass



Bus Wrapping: Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat 2020-  
Towada Art Center, Aomori, Japan Photo: Hirano Haruna

through without noticing. Placing this “prank” in the context of defamiliarization reveals it to be continuation of major currents in 20th-century art.

Here, too, part of what makes the work compelling is that it can never be viewed all at once in its entirety. The objects are enormous, and when seen from either side, their opposite sides remain out of view. When one pushes from this side, one can only imagine what happens on the other. likawa sees this experience as analogous to online communication, such as taking photographs with smartphones and posting them on social media, in which essential aspects of what people want to convey are lost. But isn’t this true of all communication, offline as well as on, to some extent? Acknowledging this truth offers some small sense of relief.

# From the catalogue for solo exhibition “Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement” A-Lab, Hyogo, 2018

likawa Takehiro's long-running series *Decorator Crab* adopts the decorator crab, a creature with the ability to camouflage itself which lives in habitats worldwide, as a springboard for examination of misalignments and new meanings that emerge in processes of information and communication. Past works range from videos featuring people describing their experiences of seeing decorator crabs to huge cat sculptures that viewers cannot see in their entirety. likawa has recently gained recognition for works such as a video clock, which films familiar yet seldom documented scenes from daily life continuously for 24 hours, and a video focusing on a soccer goalkeeper's movements and facial expressions when far from the ball.

In his solo exhibition *Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement* at A-Lab, a

former community center, he sought to render visible the process of imagining a complete picture from fragments. The building was imbued with elements of movement, creating an array of perspectives within the space. This revealed hidden aspects of the building, enabling visitors to experience its overall mass and minor details. In this oddly photogenic venue, which produced striking images from every viewpoint, visitors gained new insights into the nature of visual perception and the ways we tend to “over-imagine” based on visual information.



Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2018  
A-Lab, Hyogo, Japan Photo: Mugyuda Hyogo

Artist Talk 01

# “Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement”

December 23, 2018 14:00-15:30

Guests:

Tsukihashi Osamu (Associate Professor, Kobe University, Teehouse Architects)

Hayashi Sumi (Director, Art Project KOBE 2019: TRANS-)

## Diver as Viewer, Crab as Work

**Tsukihashi:** I am an associate professor in the Department of Architecture at Kobe University, and the head of Architects Teehouse in Kobe. We are located in the KIITO Design and Creative Center Kobe, where likawa-san also has an office, and that led to us having this talk today.

**Hayashi:** While I had heard of likawa-san and his works before, this was my first time seeing one of his exhibitions, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. It was an experience that made me say “Hmm...?” I don’t fully understand the *DECORATOR CRAB* concept yet, though. Some parts of it make perfect sense to me, while others are still a bit

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mysterious.

**likawa:** Decorator crabs are marine creatures that use materials from their environment to camouflage themselves and remain unseen by predators. I first saw on TV, and there was a diver who described finding one on the ocean floor. While the crab attempted to camouflage itself and hide, the diver's experience was one of finding something enigmatic. Decorator crabs inhabit seas around the world, but they might go through their entire lives unseen by anyone. However, it seemed to me that when a diver finds one, a special relationship between the two is formed. I've been holding exhibitions and carrying art projects for about 15 years, and these are the kinds of special relationships and encounters I'm interested in. I wanted to create works that facilitate them, so I'm trying out various formats while taking the interaction between crab and diver as a point of departure.

**Hayashi:** In the romanized English of the Japanese title, crab becomes *kurabu*, which in Japan more often refers to "club," but here we're talking about the animal. So, rather than

changing like a chameleon wherever it goes, this crab assembles its own camouflage from things in its surroundings?

**likawa:** If you strip a decorator crab bare, it will start picking up nearby stones and such within minutes. They are described both as shy and as flashy fashionistas, but this is a question of how we perceive them. The reason the crab attaches nearby objects to its body is to conceal itself.

**Hayashi:** In your work, are you concerned with interactions between the work as crab and the viewer as diver? Or is that the wrong analogy?

**likawa:** I envision the diver as a viewer. At first, I thought it would be interesting to produce works with a unique atmosphere like that of the decorator crab, but as I tried out various things, it evolved into a project focusing on viewers' desire to share information with others when they find something intriguing, and on the actions and relationships that arise from this.

**Hayashi:** Tsukihashi-san, how did you feel about this work?





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Tsukihashi: I had two impressions. First, as an architect, I appreciated how this spatial installation felt architectural. Architecture is viewed and experienced in more varied ways than fine art, which people generally tend to stand in front of. I felt that the kinetic pieces delivered a pure spatial experience. When I first came up the stairs and asked where the entrance was, the receptionist grinned and told me about the moving part, which flabbergasted me. Having this piece at the entrance reshaped the balcony of this community center, which recedes deep into the building, and the sense of “movement” referenced in the exhibition title was very fresh. I’ve attended large contemporary art installations before, but this was particularly interactive, I was able to experience art from various angles in a participatory way. I thought: so, this is the *DECORATOR CRAB* experience. Second, I wondered how intentionally artistic the decorator crab’s behavior might be, on the extent to which the crab’s adorable quality is conveyed to the diver as viewer, and whether the uncertainty of this process itself might be a primary theme. In photos documenting previous works, *Mr.*

*Kobayashi the Blue Cat* is partially concealed behind trees so it cannot be seen in its entirety, and I think this sense of distance might be the theme this exhibition is exploring.

In the hallway, there was a large installation resembling a movie set, and your experience of it expanded as you explored it from various different angles. The exhibition encourages viewers to imagine the whole from the visible fragments. Unlike art meant solely for viewing, it is experiential as well as intellectually stimulating. That was really appealing to me.

**From the Perspective of Cognitive Dissonance**  
Iikawa: When people see the structure protruding from the entrance, they might first think, "Wow, he made a huge object," but as Tsukihashi-san mentioned, my goal is for viewers to walk through, think about, and physically experience the work. While from a technical standpoint there's a need to present works beautifully in large spaces and venues, creating pleasing intervals that establish a sense of distance between works and viewers, what I'm consciously exploring with *DECORATOR CRAB* is cognitive dissonance with regard to space. With museum

and gallery exhibitions, people often see visual data in flyers or online and predict how the works will be displayed. While this helps attract visitors, I feel like it's a waste to stage exhibitions in a way that viewers can fully imagine beforehand. Of course, I want lots of people to come and see my works, but with *DECORATOR CRAB*, I'm fine with fewer visitors as long as I can produce works that provoke thought about "transmission of impulses" and "information lost in the communication process." This is the first time I've deployed weirdly oversized structures that produce cognitive dissonance. Since graduating from university, I've had vague aspirations to place uncomfortably large things in spaces or rooms. At first, I didn't really understand what would be interesting about that, but at this point I can explore various possibilities from the perspective of cognitive dissonance. This exhibition's format is another endeavor to get people to engage with the *DECORATOR CRAB* concept.

**Hayashi:** My thought was that these large structures were like a self-camouflaging crab's efforts to mimic being part of the building. When you push them, you feel like you're becoming

camouflaged yourself, becoming one with the wall. All the walls are heavy, so you need to use your body weight to move them, and there's a sense of them coming toward you, there was an intense feeling of being swallowed up. You can't see ahead because there's a large object in front of you, you're pushing forward without knowing how far it goes or where you're heading, it felt like rolling those big balls around when we were children. The overall structure became clear to me when I saw the model in the last room.

Ikawa: The walls in this *DECORATOR CRAB* exhibition are meant to be architectural, as if I were building A-Lab itself. I made walls as solid as A-Lab's original walls. This is not directly connected to the decorator crab's camouflage or mimicry, but I hope it connects to some of the phenomena that emerge from mimicry.

Tsukihashi: From an architectural standpoint, this art experience involving pushing these wall-like boxes made the space's qualities, and its history as a community center, feel more tangibly real than it would when you normally enter it. It's not

so much that the boxes are a form of mimicry, more that the experience of pushing them resulted in awareness of the self between the boxes as artworks and the surrounding space. On another topic, I think the concept of your goalkeeper photo series is complex—what do people do when they think they're not being watched? The relationship between seeing and being seen is tangled. Your works differ from art in general in that the moment you try to view your works, a different relationship emerges, as with the bag that's too heavy to lift, almost like a practical joke. We expect communication to occur, but there are many cases of messages being scattered to the four winds. I wonder if such complexity of relationships can be seen in the connection between the decorator crab and the diver. I'd like to ask Hayashi-san whether there are works of contemporary art analogous to these in the complex world of today.

**Hayashi:** Contemporary art today encompasses everything under the sun. Iikawa-san's works seem to be saying "please look," but at the same time they seem not to be saying it. I understand that the heavy backpack plays a practical role as

a wall stop, but it's like he's asking us to look at it while also not asking us to look... it's a strange position to adopt. But you've placed bags even where they aren't needed as wall stops, haven't you?

**likawa:** The bags weigh 25 kilograms, and visitors are free to touch them, but we don't communicate that. Until viewers see the video documenting *Very Heavy Bag 10 kg* displayed in Room 2, they don't realize the bags are artworks, they assume they're wall stops or someone's belongings, so they don't immediately touch them. People who've seen the video start looking and touching the bags, but if they try to lift them, the weight is very different from what they expected. There's a purple backpack at the entrance, too, but there is intentionally nothing said about it.

**Hayashi:** Museums would probably want you to explain these things with captions, but you deliberately leave them unlabeled.

**likawa:** About 70 or 80 percent of viewers notice them. Some people only notice them after seeing the video. Other people don't even realize that



Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2018  
A-Lab, Hyogo, Japan Photo: Mugyuda Hyogo



Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2018  
A-Lab, Hyogo, Japan Photo: Mugyuda Hyogo

the walls move when they're pushed. There are visitors who turn back at the entrance, or try different approaches but can't enter. This was a challenge that I wanted to take on with this exhibition. However, I did ask the staff to stop people who decide to give up and leave without seeing the exhibition. I want to prioritize viewers' curiosity, whether it's about how to enter the venue or whether they can lift the bags. Honestly, I didn't really even want to include the video that explains the bags' weight.

### **Now, This Era, This Moment**

**Hayashi:** We're all probably conditioned to wait for instructions. When I pushed the blue wall, it felt rigid and immovable, but then I glanced to the side and noticed the instruction to "push" on the fire alarm. It struck me that people really need clear written instructions before they act.

**Tsukihashi:** I sensed elements of camouflage not only in the objects, but also in the communication. At the entrance, it was very clever that they say, "Welcome, the entrance is here," but you can't see it and think, "Where?" I've been to other exhibitions where viewers were

made to perform certain actions, but this one felt gentler somehow. The moment you push the wall, it's like you've entered the *DECORATOR CRAB* world, and that moment of transcendence is fantastic. When designing exhibition layouts and museum routes, sequence is essential. I thought this entrance was a brilliant introduction into this other world, and the installation style successfully conveyed your unique balance between wanting to show something and wanting to hold back.

**Hayashi:** To touch on some other examples of interactive art, for example there's Felix Gonzalez-Torres's installation with candy piled high in a room corner, where the concept is that art is created as visitors take candy home, spreading and sharing it among many people. However, since the artist's death, the work has become an expensive museum piece with guards standing by and telling people, "You can take a piece of candy." Visitors take it because they're told to. It seems that this exhibition, too, works because of its specific location. What do you think about museum guards addressing visitors?

**likawa:** I think it can be interesting when the

guards' speaking to viewers becomes part of the work. In the case of this work, imagination and thought are crucial, so it requires careful consideration. I felt that many aspects of this project were only possible because it was held at A-Lab. In our meetings, my proposals were just rough sketches, but they told me, "It's risky, but let's do it!" So we were able to realize the ideas with fewer rules and restrictions. I hope large numbers of people will attend.

**Tsukihashi:** After Marcel Duchamp's iconic *Fountain* (a urinal) was first displayed, it toured various venues, attracting attention in the art world. In the case of these works, I wonder if the degree of meaning they convey changes with each exhibition. With famous paintings and sculptures, even when they travel to different venues, their value is intrinsic and fixed. I'd like to ask Hayashi-san: how do you view the way some works of contemporary art evolve, while others remain constant?

**Hayashi:** I think people themselves are constantly evolving, and that includes both the viewers and the creators of art. In that sense, even Monet's

Water Lilies and Van Gogh's Sunflowers are evolving. When Monet's late-period Water Lilies were first shown, people probably questioned calling them "water lilies," since the brushwork was so abstract that flowers and petals were barely discernible. But as times changed, people drew closer to Monet's vision and began to see the images as water lilies. likawa-san, you mentioned this exhibition, this installation "was only possible because it was held at A-Lab," but that reflects the realities of society, including human beings. We're lucky to be able to experience this exhibition now, but I feel like it would be experienced very differently if it were 50 years from now.

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Tsukihashi: For example, if you were to have a solo exhibition at a major museum, I imagine you'd consider all sorts of possibilities. No doubt you'd want to add information to the works that relates to the communication between artist and viewer that the works facilitate. What do you think about *Mr. Kobayashi the Cat* eventually touring the world, like Monet's *Water Lilies*?

likawa: It would be great if it eventually tours, but

it is a work created for “now, this era, this moment.” *Mr. Kobayashi the Cat* reflects current cultural trends, in that when people come to see the exhibition, they encounter a giant cat that’s photogenic but impossible to photograph in its entirety, making it difficult to share on social media. I would like this work to be consumed in many different contexts and settings.

**Tsukihashi:** In art, there are works designed for quick consumption and others meant to endure. I don’t think *DECORATOR CRAB* is a theme to be consumed quickly.

**Ikawa:** I could simply explain it by saying that self-camouflaging crabs interest me. But the real issue is the difficulty of conveying the fascinating experience of discovering this crab, and the impulse to share such a special encounter with others. That experience of discovery can be shared with everyone from elementary school students to cognitive science researchers. I believe that *DECORATOR CRAB* could develop in many forms and across different countries.

**Tsukihashi:** Every artist has a different

background to their thematic concerns, but in your case, I think the concept has extraordinary depth and range. The themes are complex, but I think this exhibition is in part a strategy for spreading the *DECORATOR CRAB* message. Your worldview is especially clear in works like the goalkeeper piece, in that the meaning crystallizes when relationships between elements become apparent. It feels like an endeavor to prove that margins and overlooked, peripheral aspects of the world have their own unique beauty.

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Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2018  
A-Lab, Hyogo, Japan Photo: Mugyuda Hyogo

## Artist Talk 02

# “The DECORATOR CRAB”

January 26, 2019 14:00–15:30

Guest:

Reiko Tsubaki (Curator, Mori Art Museum)

### **Nobody can know the precise time**

**Tsubaki:** Let's start by talking about your earlier works. Your academic background is in design and video, isn't it? Among your early activities, you were in a group called COUMA with Kaneiji Teppei and Kimura Yuki. There was an exhibition where people played table tennis.

**Ikawa:** It was a team focused on transmuting sensations and realizations arising from serious table tennis play into art. I worked intensively with them from around 2004 to 2006.

**Tsubaki:** You must have practiced table tennis a lot.

**Ikawa:** We'd bring a table tennis table into the gallery, have discussions after practice each day,



Couma at the event "COUMA LIVE – Let's PlayPingPong!"  
Yokohama Triennale 2005, Yokohama, Japan Photo: Bob

and then collaborate on works. We even invited professional players for hardcore practice sessions, and recorded everything that emerged from those experiences. A video documenting our exhibition *Table Tennis Players* at ARTZONE in Kyoto, where we produced works in public, led to our participation in the 2005 Yokohama Triennale, where the theme was "Art Circus."

**Tsubaki:** I remember playing table tennis with you at the Yokohama Triennale.

**Iikawa:** I coached you pretty strictly (laughs). We turned everything into art, including thoughts that arose while playing table tennis, even seemingly trivial things. While the game on the tabletop was intense, there was quiet, unused dead space underneath, and we organized an exhibition called *Under the Table* that utilized that space. We even invited Itoh Shigeo, the 1969 world table tennis champion, to do an exhibition match in the gallery. We designed mechanisms where table tennis balls would suddenly fall from the ceiling, and ball-serving robots.

**Tsubaki:** That was the beginning of your career

as a contemporary artist. After that, how and when did you become active on an individual basis?

Ikawa: My first solo exhibition was at a gallery in Osaka in 2006. It featured a 24-hour-long video work, which took about three years to complete.

Tsubaki: *The Clock for Practice of Time*. Many people still remember this as one of your landmark works.

Ikawa: I started working on it for my university graduation exhibition. Most moving-image works, like commercials, movies, and music videos, have lengths timed to the second, but I wanted to make a video that people dip into and out of repeatedly over time. At the time, there weren't many opportunities to exhibit video works. Flat-screen monitors were expensive, and online platforms like YouTube were not yet stable or widely accessible. There was a strong sense of disconnect between the making of video works and the ability to present them to the public. I wondered whether I could incorporate video into everyday items, something everyone uses.

Tsubaki: It's 24 hours, so no one is expected to watch it straight through...

Ikawa: The idea is that if you look at the video the way you check the clock every day, you'd start to be able to tell the current time based on the movements of things in the frame. Watching the entire 24-hour video would be an ordeal, but I liked the idea that viewers might discover something new each time they watched. The clocks we generally use are designed objects meant to show the precise time, but *The Clock for Practice of Time* is different, it doesn't tell you the exact time at a glance. However, if you continue using it like a clock, you start to get a sense of the time, because the same footage plays at the same time every day. Sometimes nothing is happening, but in some scenes there are unexpected events, like dogs appear, insects fly by, people bump into things. The work's title is actually *The Clock for Practice of Time—Good Situation*, and I imagined viewers might encounter interesting situations through the screen as they watched various different scenes unfold.

Tsubaki: That's fascinating. There's a multi-channel video piece by Christian Marclay that lasts 24 hours, consisting of scenes from all sorts of movies and TV programs with clocks showing the actual time when it's being screened.

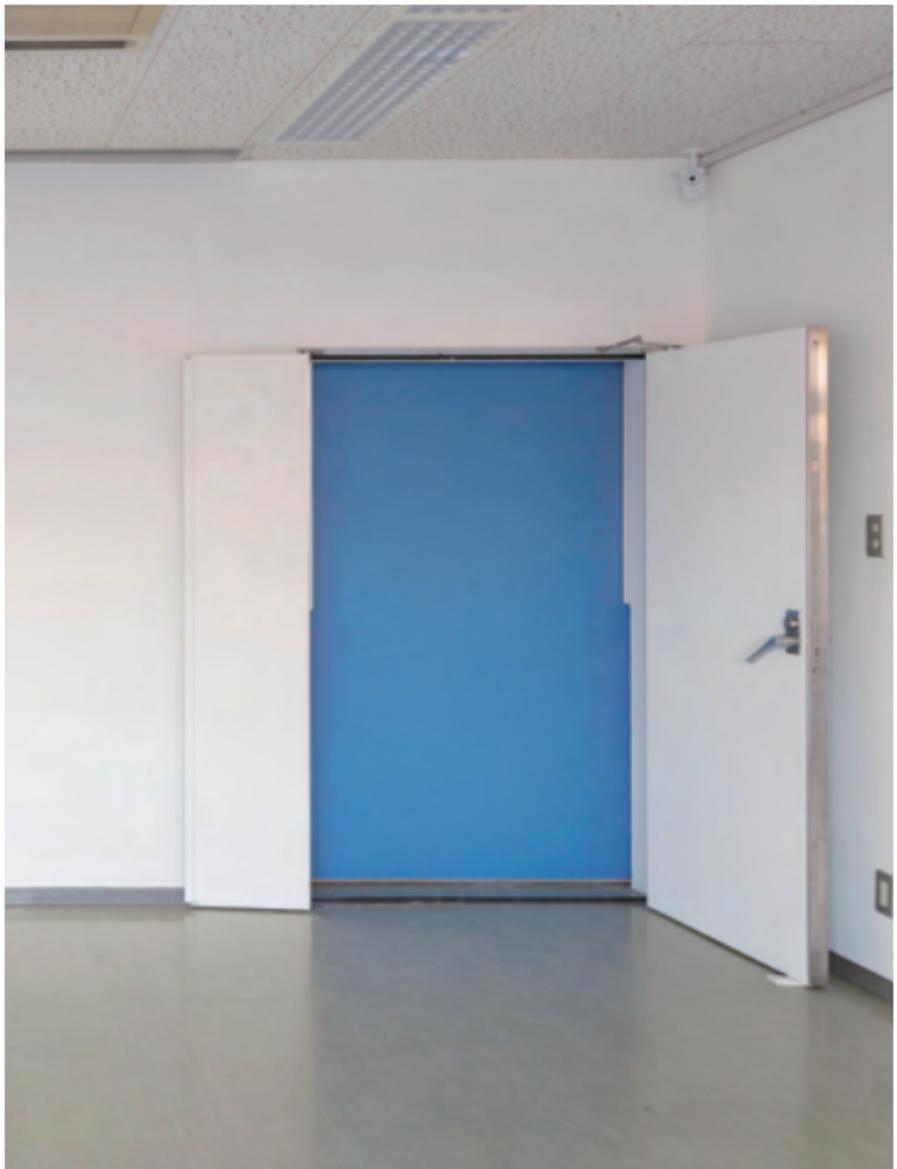
likawa: Marclay's work bowled me over. I thought, what an amazing approach. I should say, though, that I came up with my 24-hour video clock concept before that. I started working on *The Clock for Practice of Time* series in 2006, and showed it in my solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Shiga in 2013. That installation had 13 channels of 24-hour video, each shot from a fixed point. People might ask how these differ from today's webcams you can see online, but if you watch for 24 hours, the scenes become familiar and you start being able to use it as a clock. A lot of companies including Uniqlo and various designers are working on clocks with new concepts, all of which I find fascinating. In my work, there are no minute or second hands or digital numerals, just continuous imagery. The daylight gradually fades and the scene darkens as night falls. But when it's dark, lights that

weren't visible during the day switch on, and new subjects appear in the illuminated areas.

Tsubaki: Things that you couldn't even see before become the main point of focus.

Ikawa: That's right. The composition stays the same, but elements that were in the background become clearer, or something like a large rock in the foreground comes into view. At the exhibition, some visitors told me it was wonderful, but it required time to experience fully, and it was a difficult work to present. Actually, the staff at the venue experienced the installation most deeply, because they were living with it for hours and hours every day.

Tsubaki: Right, it seems to me that your works require careful observation to be fully understood, and require people to focus on things that are usually overlooked. Besides *The Clock for Practice of Time*, another major early work was *Stealing Time – Half Time Project*. This is another fascinating work, and the phrase "stealing time" is interesting.



Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2018  
A-Lab, Hyogo, Japan Photo: Mugyuda Hyogo



Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement, 2018  
A-Lab, Hyogo, Japan Photo: Mugyuda Hyogo

## Players Whose Time Was Stolen

**likawa: Stealing Time – Half Time Project**

originated with pranks we used to play in junior high and high school. The idea is that when you have a sports game with a time limit, you halve the play time, and you don't tell just one of the players. It's like one of those hidden-camera pranks on TV. The typical prank ends at halftime, when they tell that player the time was shortened and shoot their reaction, but my work kept following the player whose time was stolen without ever telling them. I experimented with soccer, basketball, and boxing matches.

**Tsubaki: Didn't they get angry when they found out?**

**likawa:** There were cases where they weren't too happy about it. For example, we worked with a boxing gym run by the former world champion Ioka Hiroki. The boxer appearing in the work is a licensed professional who trains for days before matches. I was told that if we shortened the rounds from the standard four rounds of three minutes each (12 minutes in total) to one and a half minutes per round (six minutes in total), a

boxer would immediately notice because the three-minute duration is ingrained into their bodies through constant practice and experience. However, with cooperation from the audience and the people in the boxer's corner, we shortened each round to 90 seconds, and the boxer didn't notice. It made me realize how fluid our sense of time is, how strongly it's affected by the situation, such as intense game play or a conversation with someone we dislike. I was interested in how time works in sports, and in the effect of misalignments of time.

**Tsubaki:** You can see the amazement on people's faces. It shows how vague our sense of time is, doesn't it?

**Ikawa:** In the case of soccer, we reduced both 40-minute halves to 20 minutes each. The player we filmed, who was unaware of this, still said, "I really ran a lot today." And we didn't shorten the halftime break, we kept it at the full 15 minutes. We also had a secret briefing with the entire team to make sure the deception worked. I rented a stadium with real grass, which met the standards of international "A" matches, and found two

teams willing to cooperate. Everyone was happy to do it because playing on such premium grass was such a rare opportunity.

**Tsubaki:** So, only one person was kept in the dark. How did you choose that player?

**Ikawa:** He was a former player on the Vissel Kobe youth team. After consulting the team captain, we selected the player whose jersey number was 23. We never told him, even after the filming and public screening of the work.

**Tsubaki:** Time has clearly been an important theme in your work thus far. Both of your major early works deal with it, but why time in particular?

**Ikawa:** The idea of “stealing time” also comes directly from pranks we played in junior high school, which messed with people’s sense of time. We would play recordings of late-night TV in the morning, reset times on people’s cell phones, pagers, and VCRs, and change the time on clocks at home and at school. On cloudy days, when sunlight is diffused and it’s harder to tell

time from the light, we'd stay together for a day or two, shifting someone's sense of time by a total of about 12 hours. We even had a friend's parents call them up and tell them to come home. It was actually 5 AM, but the friend said, "It's getting late, I should head home." At the front door they ran into their father leaving for work, and I heard you could hear them scream from inside the house. The thing about time is that when you slow it down the reaction is negative, but speeding it up makes the target of the prank happy, they feel as if they've gained something. I think pranks have a universal, irresistible appeal, and those experiences strongly influence my work to this day. Our perception of time is so surprisingly ambiguous, and I wanted to address that through art. I'm interested in many different themes, but I chose to start with time because I was confident the results would be intriguing.

**Tsubaki:** This is the first time I've heard about the pranks. Finally it all makes sense.

**Ikawa:** I haven't talked about them much, since they're unethical (laughs). Another work in this show, *Very Heavy Bag*, also came out of those old

pranks. Back in junior high and high school, we'd sneak something like several fire extinguishers into a friend's bag that they use for extracurricular activities. They'd walk two or three kilometers to the train station all hunched over, obviously heavily burdened but not realizing what was happening. Every day someone's bag would be heavier, so an atmosphere of paranoia set in. We took it too far, and people started getting anxious before they picked anything up. This inspired my series of bag works, which explore three sensations: the physical feeling of lifting the bag, the imagined feeling of what it *should* weigh, and the neutral feeling when you aren't thinking about the bag at all. To get back to the current exhibition, there are three sensations being explored here as well. There's the sensation when a space is hidden behind a wall, the realization that the walls move when pushed or touched, and the experience of discovering hidden floors, ceilings, rooms, or hallway walls after pushing the moving walls. It all revolves around imagining the overall structure of the building and envisioning that there *might* be spaces concealed behind visible elements. The brown structure in Room 1 is extremely well-

made, but I don't see it as an artwork. It's a moving wall, a mobile partition. It's designed to rotate, and I think it's interesting how your mental image of the space changes as you push it.

**Tsubaki:** It's great that the exhibition requires participation, or having these various physical experiences. It's art, but it's art that makes you think, "What *is* this?"

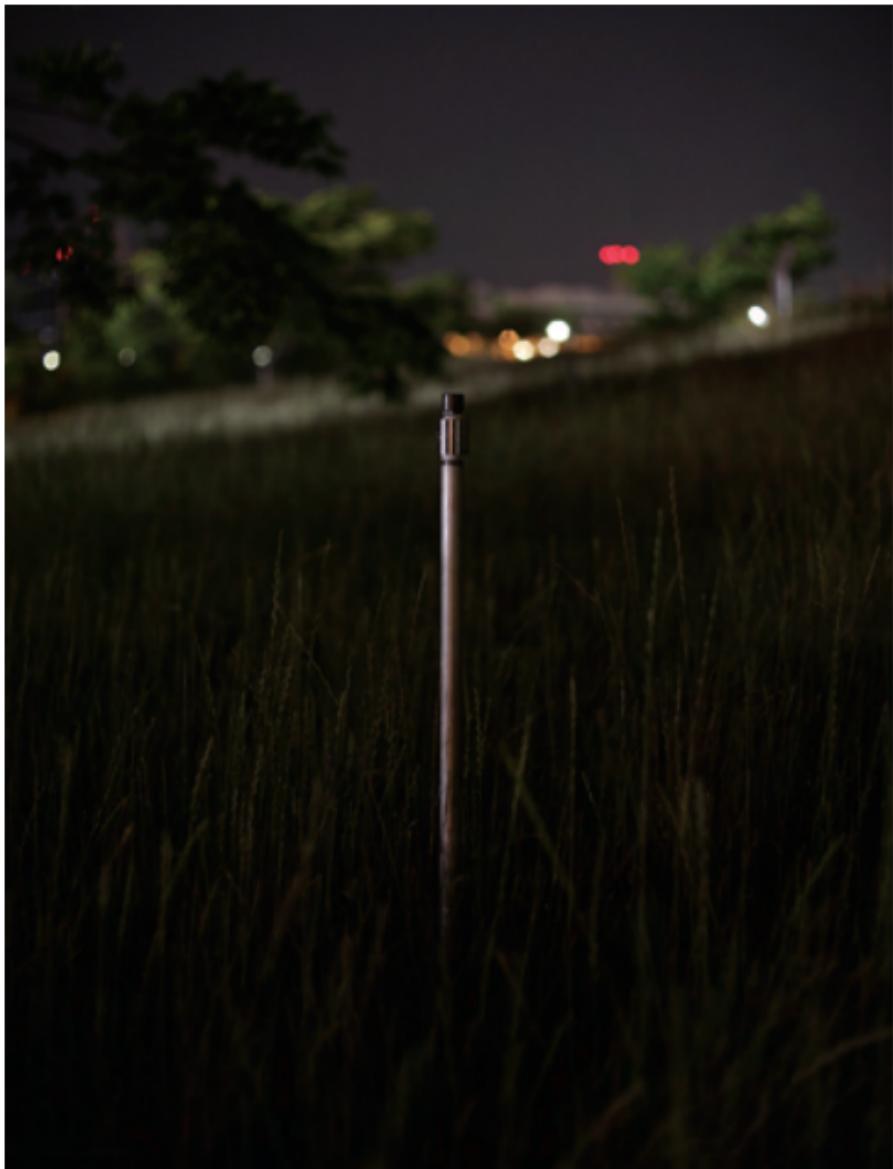
### **That Sense of Surprise and Wonder Didn't Come Across at All**

**Tsubaki:** I'd like to ask about *DECORATOR CRAB*. There's a pink cat sculpture, and while people can take photos of it, they can't capture it in its entirety. They try to gather as much visual information as possible, but they can never get the whole thing in the frame. This began as a photo series, right?

**Ikawa:** I was watching a TV program about fascinating life forms, and one of them was the self-camouflaging decorator crab. The diver who found it exclaimed "Oh my gosh!" "Wow, what is this!?" and so on, but that sense of surprise and wonder didn't come across to me at all through

the TV screen. When you find a camouflaged crab, you often can't even tell it's a crab, you can only see the debris, rocks and so forth that it has attached to itself. I found the relationship between the diver who discovered the crab and the crab itself fascinating, and I wanted to make art that embodied that unique situation. I liked the idea that if we think of the crab as the work and the diver as the viewer, the crab (work) might never be found, and also that when the diver (viewer) discovers it, the space they share could become something special and irreplaceable. With these photos *Guidebook*, I envision the grit and grime that decorator crabs carry around, and rather than discovering something interesting (analogous to the crab) and photographing it, the photos show the surrounding grass, stones, and objects (the crab's camouflage). The idea is that viewers might make contact with *DECORATOR CRAB* through peripheral information in the photos.

**Tsubaki:** There's a photo series I really love called *Fade out, Fade up*, and it seems to be connected to that same idea. You have a gift for isolating and highlighting things that people don't usually



Fade out, Fade up – Sprinkler, 2012  
lambda print, 560 x 420 mm

notice, in terms of time but also in other ways as well. Same series, *Discover House!*, features intense light shining on objects very far away in darkness.

likawa: There's a type of very powerful light used for helicopter rescues of hikers lost in the mountains. I asked a friend to shine it toward a completely dark mountain. My hypothesis was that even if nothing could be seen at night, there might be something there if we lit it up. The scenes I photographed were ones you couldn't ordinarily see, whether it was day or night.

Tsubaki: The pink cat Mr. Kobayashi is also arranged in such a way that you can never see the entire figure at once.

likawa: Well, think of when someone photographs a decorator crab. In the picture it's just a crab, and the real-life sense of wonder, the impulse that drove you to shoot it, doesn't translate in the image. With the cat, when viewers can't get a picture of the whole thing, they try all kinds of things, like shooting diagonally or climbing to a higher vantage point. At a show in Fukuoka, I

overheard someone say, “Hey, I can’t document this!” That was exactly the response I was aiming for.

**Tsubaki:** So much data is accessible online now, but emotional reactions like that can't be conveyed through screens. It seems to me that *Mr. Kobayashi The Pink Cat?* is a counterpart to *Fade out, Fade up* in exploring this theme.

### **Subverting Experience and Information to Spark Imagination**

**Iikawa:** When I receive offers to hold exhibitions, the venues usually fall into one of three categories: ruins, historic buildings, or pristine galleries. A-Lab doesn't really fit into any of these, though, being neither extremely stylish nor very old, and I was unable to immediately construct a narrative from the building itself. With a lively nursery school located on the floor below, I wondered what kind of special exhibition could work here. There are community centers like this all over Japan, so even people who have never been here might have a sense of familiarity or *déjà vu*, like, “Ah, so the show is in *that* kind of building.” It's not a difficult space to imagine. For

those who *have been here before*, the space will have changed since that time, but it is still one where they can use memory and physical experience to feel their way around the overall structure and architecture. These works are the result of my idea that if people view the works based on what you know about community centers, which exist all over and which they may well have visited multiple times since childhood, they could imagine structures more fully as they encounter hidden elements or recognize things by moving further into the space and accumulating new data points.

**Tsubaki:** What does *Arrangement*, *Adjustment*, *Movement* mean in this context?

**Ikawa:** *Arrangement* refers to the initial positioning of the installations. *Adjustment* and *Movement* describe how viewers explore the space using trial and error, pushing and pulling walls as they go. I didn't have any demands about colors that couldn't be compromised, but I chose them based on impressions I had during site visits and the installation process. For example, Room 1 originally had a white walls, but when we removed

it, a brown wall appeared behind it.

**Tsubaki:** That's an exciting kind of development! So, what's capturing your interest now?

**likawa:** I'm more focused on producing experiences that spark viewers' imaginations than on producing objects or paintings. And I want to make elements that betray the expectations people form after seeing flyers or promotional images. It may seem a bit cold of me, but there you are.

**Tsubaki:** "Sparking people's imaginations" has an abstract ring to it, but viewers naturally process, interpret, and adapt to what they see, don't they?

**likawa:** Well, for example, when you see construction work next to the train station with scaffolding, temporary enclosures, cranes, and a sign saying "Completion scheduled for XXXX year," you imagine what kind of building will be built based on your past experiences and available information. I'm thinking about projects that trigger this same imaginative process, but subvert viewers' past experiences and

information. It's in the viewer's mind that the work is completed.

**Tsubaki:** I can see how that would be an underlying theme in today's world, where data is easily manipulated and we have to question what's real.

# Mr. Ogawa! What are we going to do now!

February 2, 2019 14:00-15:30

Guest:

Nozomu Ogawa (Director, Art Center Ongoing)

## If the Person is Interesting, the Work Must Be Interesting Too

Ogawa: Art Center Ongoing [referred to below as "Ongoing"] is a renovated house in Kichijoji with a café on the first floor and a gallery on the second, which includes a library where visitors can look at artists' portfolios and art books. We also run a residency program where artists stay and work for a certain period of time. When we had just launched the residency in 2013, you were working part-time at Koganecho Area Management Center. I hadn't seen any of your work at the time, but we met and had an interesting conversation. To me, the artist as a person and their work are inseparable. In his case, I encountered the person

first, and I thought, "If the person is interesting, the work must be interesting too." That's why I invited you to take part in the residency program. Our criterion for selecting participants is that they should be ideally artists whose work could not easily be shown elsewhere. The focus is on those doing performance, installation, or video, works that are difficult to buy or sell as objects. We try to choose artists working on unique projects who haven't yet gained much recognition but seem like they might become famous someday. After 11 years, no one has gotten famous, though...

likawa: I think about three alumni have become famous!

Ogawa: The artists affiliated with Ongoing are interested in redefining ideas about art itself, exploring what makes a work compelling or innovative. The idea is to "focus more closely on art itself," if you want the soundbite version. Ongoing basically derives its revenue from the café, and we run an annual deficit of about two million yen. I fill this hole by working as an art project director and teaching art classes at

university or for the general public, and put all the money back into the space. So there's no profit motive here, but I think that's precisely why artists keep on visiting. The place is essentially supported by hundreds of Tokyo-based artists ordering one beer each.

**likawa:** Art centers are typically intended for community engagement and public exhibitions, but Ongoing is literally an “art center” in the sense of a hub for artists. You rarely see a member of the general public, but it's a magnet for artists. At the time, I didn't fully understand how precious and important that was. Back then, I was struggling with how to develop the *DECORATOR CRAB* project, and I asked for your advice about it.

**Ogawa:** You were so serious, you prepared presentation materials that explained the work, and slides as well. But even after carefully reading through everything, I couldn't understand a thing (laughs).

**Can't Take a “Cute” Photo, or Can't Capture as Much As Expected**



Decorator Crab – Impulses and Things Around Them, 2013  
Art Center Ongoing, Tokyo, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

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Ogawa: These are documents from when you exhibited at Ongoing. They look appealing at first glance, but they also make you think, "What is this?"

likawa: This is an early work, *DECORATOR CRAB*, which is also the title of the current exhibition. It's a photo series where, when I encountered something compelling or emotionally affecting, instead of shooting that subject per se, or making it the main theme, I intentionally photograph surrounding elements like the ground, grass, and trees. The decorator crab camouflages itself by attaching various objects to its body, so it's carrying around an aggregation of information about its surroundings. Similarly, my photos don't directly show the "crab," that is, the central subject. Instead, they show a mass of information on that place or terrain. These photos were taken at a landscaper's storage yard near Ongoing in Kichijoji. *DECORATOR CRAB* began in 2007 with photos, printed materials, and a website designed to guide viewers toward interesting subjects through a large volume of peripheral images. Photos are dense with information, and even

simple ones convey things like location, color, and shape that might lead viewers to the subject. To me, photos are like indicators or addresses.

However, I realized that this concept could evolve in various ways beyond photography, and I began using *DECORATOR CRAB* as an exhibition title. Even if the idea didn't come across immediately, I hoped it would sink in gradually through repeated encounters, and I'm still using it.

Ogawa: You never made it clear where the landscaper's storage yard was. Anyway, the photos showed elements from the surroundings of the thing that inspired you.

Ikawa: That's similar to *The Clock for Practice of Time*, a video piece I started working on during my university graduation project. It involved filming mundane places, or places where it seemed like something might happen, for 24 hours, producing videos as clocks that marked time without digital displays or second hands. Back then, video as a medium had strict formats and limited exhibition venues, and I was in a frustrating situation where I could create the works but couldn't present them to the public.

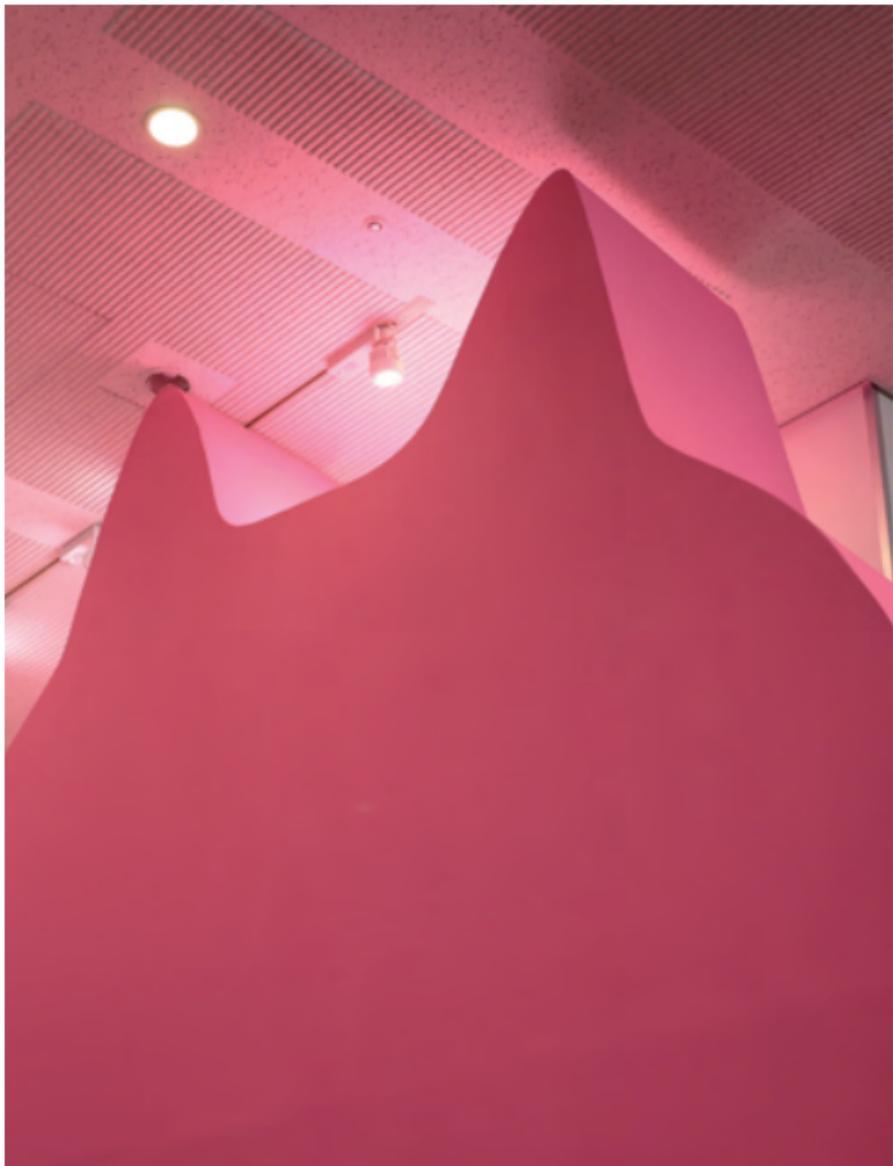
Rather than having them confined to three-hour or five-hour time slots at film festivals and so forth, I sought a way for people in my life – my father and mother, partner, friends – to view my videos at any time, and to have them be never-ending streams of images that always plays at different times for different people. I connected the clock, an everyday product, to my work through the theme of time. While works of art get warehoused after exhibitions and can't be seen, I thought a clock could continue approaching a range of people day after day until it breaks.

Ogawa: Watching you work on this project, I felt you were an artist with a uniquely relativistic perspective, and you were rendering visible the fact that there are many simultaneously coexisting timelines rather than a single continuous one. In your photo series portraying only soccer goalkeepers or players on the bench, you capture the passage of time on the periphery of the game, where the ball is absent, and foreground perspectives that are usually disregarded. This is like *DECORATOR CRAB*, where you direct attention to things other than the main subject.

likawa: In 2016, I made my first large cat sculpture for the Rokko Meets Art festival in Kobe. The following year, I was selected for the public open-call exhibition Genbi Dokodemo Kikaku Kobo 2017 at the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, and won the Takamine Tadasu Award. The colossal cat appearing in various locations is designed to make viewers want to photograph it, but it's intentionally made impossible to shoot in its entirety. You might want to post it on social media, but you can't take a "cute" photo, or can't capture as much of it as you expected, or the fluorescent pink that ought to be charming comes out looking weird in pictures (laughs). The sense of awe you feel when seeing it in person doesn't translate to photos, and it makes you question whether there's any point in photographing it. Over the next two or three years I displayed the work in Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Takamatsu, and last year in Taipei and Taichung.

Ogawa: Is the cat part of *DECORATOR CRAB* too?

likawa: Yes, it's another iteration of it. Some



Decorator Crab – Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat, 2017  
Hiroshima MOCA, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

friends joked that I'd finally made it as a "cat artist" (laughs). This was the project where things really clicked for me, or I was able to clarify the *DECORATOR CRAB* concept, and I got tons of positive feedback. Some people who came to see it complained about not being able to photograph the whole thing, or about its being in an incomprehensible location despite being so cute. That was exactly the response I hoped for. The sheer presence of this huge pink cat is powerful, it's very effective at stopping people in their tracks and drawing them in.

Ogawa: So, please talk a bit about how the success of this large cat sculpture connects to the works in your current exhibition.

### **The Frustration of Inability to Document It**

Ilikawa: I could introduce the decorator crab and tell people, "This is a self-camouflaging crab." I could take and show photos of a special situation in which I encounter a crab appearing out of nowhere. But almost nothing is conveyed by such photos, and what I hope is that when viewers encounter the work, they sense there's something here that can't be documented and conveyed.

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Ogawa: And you've been succeeding in that... so this time, too, the theme is *DECORATOR CRAB*.

Iikawa: In this exhibition, there are walls blocking the entrance or the hallways. When viewers encounter them, their first reaction is visual: "What? A wall!" Then comes the realization: "I can't enter, I can't move forward, what should I do?" After they've faced the wall and thought about it for a bit, I've asked the staff to approach them with help. The point of these works is having people see only partial information at first, then through their own pushing and moving they see a bit of floor or ceiling lights, and they synthesize the information that emerges through action with what they initially saw to imagine the whole. This relates to *DECORATOR CRAB* because decorator crabs are always carrying around information derived from the ocean on their backs, and you can see color and texture but can't tell what's underneath. The crab covers itself with so much that its true form inside, or on the other side, is obscured. Similarly, viewers in the exhibition imagine the entire structure based on fragments they can see. I'm interested in how

much of the whole people can mentally construct from limited parts. The brown structure in Room 1 is like something a decorator crab would carry, a thing that sparks the imagination.

Ogawa: Something a decorator crab would carry?

Ikawa: The point is imagining the whole decorator crab from its components. Visitors see only cross-sections or fragments, and form an idea of overall structures or the entire building. That's where it connects to my vision of *DECORATOR CRAB*. This exhibition also ties back to the pink cat project, where you can't photograph the entire cat, just as here you can't shoot the green wall up close, nor can you find a vantage point to capture the whole thing. It's made to fit the space, and the space makes it impossible to take such a photo. The same mechanism deployed with the cat is embedded in this exhibition's overall design. Matsunaga-san at A-Lab once remarked that the work is like a combination of the cat and my earlier photographs of peripheral scenes, and recently that observation has helped me better articulate

what I'm doing. The inability to shoot the space in its entirety is what makes it interesting. It's the lack of closure, the frustration of being unable to document it. Some visitors have said, "This is an interesting exhibition that I want to share with others, but I can't capture it in photos or videos!" That's exactly what I aimed for.

**Ogawa:** What do you think about the way interacting with and moving the work leaves such a powerful and lasting impression on visitors?

**Ikawa:** Viewers become able to imagine the whole space as they gather more information through stages--first not realizing that the wall moves, then discovering it does, and finally pushing it and seeing new things appear. Through these stages, what they initially thought was static emerges as a dynamic phenomenon.

**Ogawa:** So they come to understand the space by pushing the walls?

**Ikawa:** Exactly. Among my previous works, the bags have a similar principle.

Ogawa: The bags full of rocks, which you only find out about by lifting them.

likawa: Before lifting it, people think, "Why did one of the staff leave their bag here?" Then after seeing the video, they realize, "Oh, this is an artwork? It must be heavy."

Ogawa: Yes, everyone, the bag is an artwork! Some people might still see it as just an ordinary bag, but it's filled with nearly 30 kilograms of sand.

likawa: There's a disconnect between the imagined weight before lifting it and the actual sensation when you lift it. In terms of physical sensation, the weight acts on the body, but in the case of this box, there are multiple points of weight and visual information that enable you to imagine a space. It's similar to how we perceive time. If someone asks, "How many minutes have passed?" but you don't know "since when," because you didn't see or hear the point in time they're referencing, then you have no concept of how many minutes have passed. Time, weight, and visual distance are all concepts that our



Decorator Crab – Very Heavy Bag, 2018  
A-Lab, Hyogo Photo: likawa Takehiro

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imaginings grasp through comparison.

**Ogawa:** I see, I'm starting to understand much better now (laughs).

### **The Work Itself Can Also Be Relativized**

**likawa:** In this exhibition, I want people to use their bodies to sense weight, distance, and space, walking around to see what's behind the walls, deriving sense-data points from firsthand experience.

**Ogawa:** My feeling about this work is that it creates a sense of the defamiliarization. The walls, or structures, transform thoroughly ordinary spaces into something extraordinary. That might be the point, but the way people feel or interpret the work isn't all about what the artist says, and of course what I say isn't the "correct answer" either. I dislike when people nail down art with a fixed explanation like, "This work's concept is blah-blah-blah." Museums and other venues might be required to provide people with clear explanations, but the beauty of your work is that it allows for multiple viewpoints and interpretations, and can't be tied up neatly with a bow.

likawa: Mounting an exhibition involves dealing with various situations, and there are all kinds of things that can't move forward without some logical framework. To be a working artist, sometimes you have to deliver explanations forcefully.

Ogawa: But a major point of your work is shifting perspectives and enabling people to see things differently, right? I think part of the appeal is that you present things in a relative way, revealing a world of relative relationships, and through this process the work itself can be relativized. Well, we're coming to the end here, but can you tell us something about your future plans? I think people here today understood *DECORATOR CRAB* clearly. Honestly, I think we can call this exhibition a success. It really is extraordinary.

likawa: If I have further opportunities for solo exhibitions, or projects involving architecture, I'd like to take on new challenges.

Ogawa: If I have one minor complaint, it's that the model of the venue isn't necessary.

likawa: The model isn't a work in and of itself. Once viewers have experienced everything – encountering the dead-end walls, trying to push them, discovering hidden spaces, thinking about how the entire building functions – that's the end of the work, but they're leaving the exhibition with some lingering uncertainty, which is also part of the work. However, seeing the model after this, organizing your thoughts, and connecting all the experiences adds one more layer to the work, another perspective to consider.

Ogawa: About the staff in the hallway, I understand they were there for safety reasons, but I felt like they were also coming out into the hallway because they wanted to say, "Hey, isn't this neat?"

likawa: How the staff operate affects how people experience the exhibition. Ideally, it would be completely unstaffed. Viewers would wander in without expectations, find a wall, push it, and go, "Wow!?" The entire experience, including the building, community center, and the staff, is all part of the work.

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Ogawa: I see. For example, there are staff telling people, "You can push here."

Iikawa: Some people got mad when they couldn't find the entrance, or even tried to leave. In those cases, staff would gauge the situation and step in as needed.

Ogawa: How do you plan to develop this further in the future? You'll continue in this direction for a while, right?

Iikawa: Yes, but I'm searching for new locations. The structures, architectural elements, early photo and video works, and the cat project, are all interconnected, and if people take an interest in even one of these elements, they can grasp the overall concept of *DECORATOR CRAB*. There's so much I want to explore. When I did the residency at Ongoing in 2013, you told me, "Try this in lots of different places. Share your ideas with people. The real challenge starts once people understand the *DECORATOR CRAB* concept!"

Ogawa: Did I say that? (laughs)



Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2019  
Art Center Ongoing, Tokyo, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

The installation is developed further at A-Lab, where actions taken through trial and error by viewers encountering the gallery space and structures trigger new phenomena in another space. It could be said that those who witness these phenomena become new viewers themselves.

# MAKE SPACE, USE SPACE: A New Spectator- likawa Takehiro

Hashimoto Kozue (Curator, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art)

When I was attending a soccer class in Kobe to improve my skills, my coach, Nelson Matsubara, taught me a phrase: "Make space! Use space!" This advice emphasized creating open spaces by moving proactively before play stops due to the lack of passing options or running lanes—and then utilizing those spaces. I believe this philosophy also applies to artistic practice. There are countless artists and so many interesting things already out there. Whether or not there are opportunities to showcase one's work, I think it's essential to create spaces and timing oneself, setting up encounters with the audience anytime and anywhere. This mindset inspired the *Decorator Crab* (2007–present) series, which I have been presenting recently. The series' playful name comes from decorator crabs, marine creatures found across the world's oceans that camouflage themselves using materials like seaweed and shells. At first glance, it's unclear

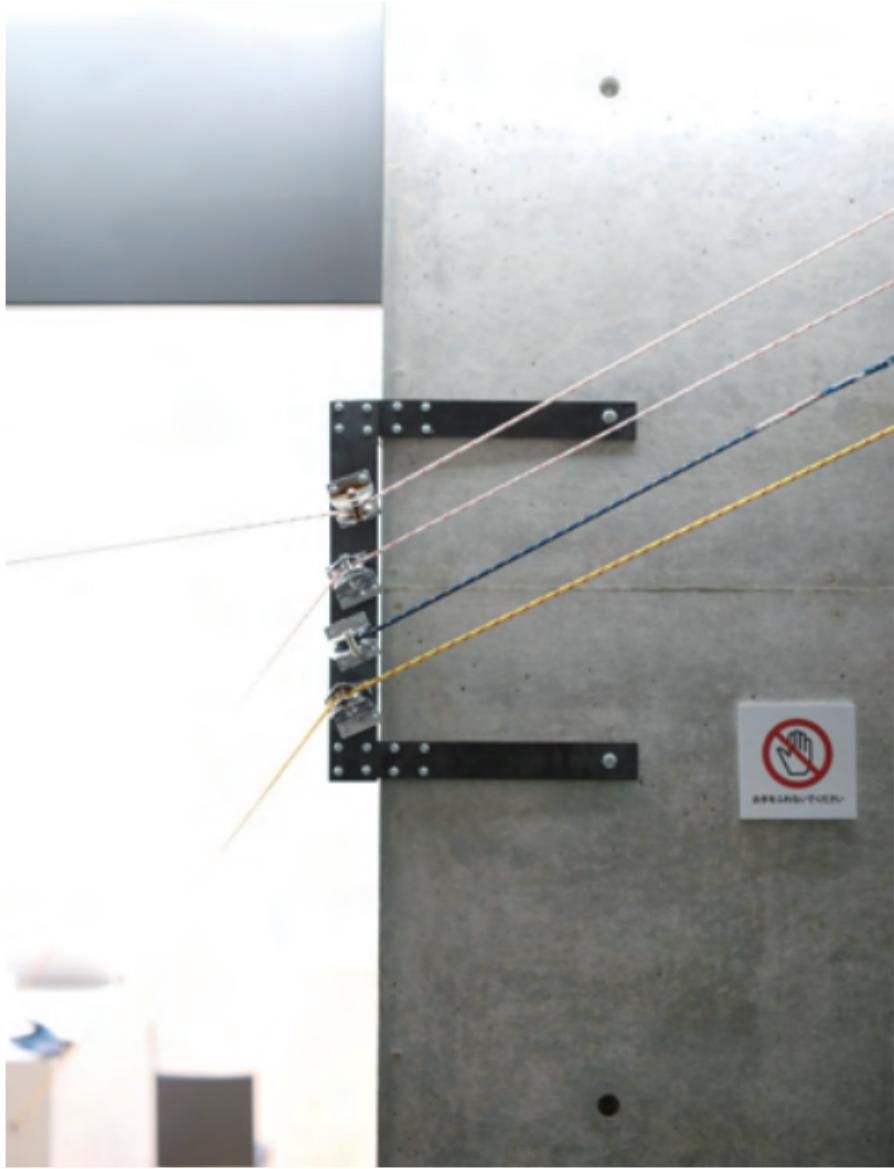
whether these decorator crabs are trying to hide or stand out. No one has seen a naked decorator crab, nor is anyone interested in what a bare decorator crab looks like. With *Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space*, I sought to create a new type of audience using the framework of museums and exhibitions, even if no one noticed or saw it—whether for zero or more than one spectator.

## likawa Takehiro Interview

Interviewer: Hashimoto Kozue (Curator)

—First, could you tell us about the “Decorator Crab” mentioned in the exhibition title?

When I started my artistic practice, I wanted to become an artist who could create works anywhere in the world. To do that, I realized it was essential to take on a long-term project with a universal theme—something that could adapt to different environments rather than be limited by them. At the time, I didn't have many opportunities to exhibit my work, and I couldn't



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: Iikawa Takehiro

imagine the day I'd hold an exhibition at a gallery, art center, or museum. I thought, "I'd better get started on my own."

Around that time, I learned about decorator crabs from a TV program. These crabs, which live in all of the world's oceans, camouflage themselves by attaching whatever seaweed, rocks, or other objects they find nearby to their bodies, creating shapes that are truly one-of-a-kind.

—How did this idea develop into your work?

The program explained the crabs' behaviors and camouflaging traits, but it didn't convey the surprise or awe the divers must have felt when they discovered the crabs. That was the first time I realized some things can't be communicated through even the most carefully edited videos or photographs. It struck me that this universal challenge—wanting to share something that moved or fascinated you but being unable to express it effectively—is something both adults and children experience. I thought that creating works based on this feeling, which resonates universally, could serve as a meaningful theme anywhere in the world.

I was also fascinated by the fact that decorator crabs exist in oceans worldwide, that no two are alike, and that they incorporate materials from their surroundings into their camouflage. You never know if you'll find a decorator crab, but if you do, it's said to be incredibly fascinating and deeply awe-inspiring—a truly compelling situation. The idea of stumbling upon something by chance and wondering, "What is this?" inspired me to explore whether it was possible to recreate in my works or exhibitions the kind of serendipitous encounter a diver has with a decorator crab in the sea.

—How did you first express this idea in your work?

Initially, around 2007, I created a website called *Decoratorcrab.info* and started uploading photographs. My plan was to form a "Decorator Crab" team with photographers worldwide, but in the end, I ended up doing it alone. I placed small drawings and sculptures I made in forests or other settings, then uploaded photos of the surroundings or simple clues leading to the location—but I deliberately excluded the artworks



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Decorator Crab – “Near the Weed 6” on PortIsland, 2012  
lambda print, 560 x 420 mm

themselves. Those who view the images might unconsciously absorb the clues and maybe even find the location. It was a photographic work accessible globally on a website.

However, since the clues were just simple photographs of natural objects like grass, stones, or debris, they were so difficult to follow that no one managed to visit. The work is still on Awaji Island in Hyogo Prefecture—or at least it should be.

—So the goal wasn't necessarily for people to see the work itself? 8

Of course, I definitely want people to see the work. However, my greater aim was to change the way audiences engage by encouraging them to take action in the process of discovery. Early on, I presented photo exhibitions of these wayfinding images and published booklets and catalogues, but the response was underwhelming. People reacted to the photos in the exhibitions and even purchased them, but it felt different from what I was trying to do.

I realized that people are primarily interested in the surface aspects of the work—the debris or

trash that the crabs carry, so to speak—and less so in the crabs themselves. Rather than just hoping people would find the decorator crabs, I began to focus on creating works that made viewers wonder, “What is this?” and even ask themselves, “How can I convey this to others?” I wanted to emphasize the discovery process over the work itself and create multiple points that compel viewers to think and engage with the work in unexpected ways.

—Does this shift connect to *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat* (2016–), which debuted in 2016?

Absolutely. I realized that creating opportunities to captivate viewers and make them pause to think strengthened the work’s impact. *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*, is adorable in its pink color, and its massive size surprises people into taking pictures. Yet the work is too large to fit in a photo, leaving its full impact underrepresented. I feel the work succeeds if even one person among thousands experiences that impact firsthand. It’s almost as if this cat doesn’t want to be photographed!

Originally, I had been drawing and illustrating characters and four-panel comics featuring

people around me for nearly 20 years, starting as a university student. The name “Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat” was inspired by my mentor and esteemed video artist, Professor Kobayashi Hakudo<sup>1</sup>. I always felt that illustrations and comics gradually resonate with people over time as they are shared and experienced.

Combining the positive reception of my cute illustrations with my intent to captivate audiences through *Decorator Crab* ultimately gave rise to *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat* as an artwork. I believe my original character, this cat, is cuter than any other character I’ve seen. I thought, why not make it big and flashy to grab people’s attention? Pink Cat keychains have also sold well! (laughs)

—What kind of reactions did you get from visitors?

The reactions to the cat artwork were just as I had hoped—very positive. Some visitors standing in front of the work with their cameras would say things like, “I can’t capture it in the frame at all!” or “It’s so cute—why didn’t you place it somewhere more prominent?” The cat is



Decorator Crab – Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat, 2025  
Acrylic paint on canvas, 180 × 145 mm

deliberately positioned in a way that makes it difficult to photograph, and visitors directly respond to that intent. It makes me happy when the placement sparks questions like, "Why was it placed like this?" among the audience. It creates a "Why?" moment for them, which I find rewarding. By making them stop, I feel like I'm taking a bit of their time, drawing them into the experience.

—The works exhibited at A-Lab<sup>2</sup> and the Yokohama Triennale 2020<sup>3</sup> were strikingly different from *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*. In those, the wall blocking the entrance to the exhibition space moved in response to visitors' actions.

Visitors usually don't think about or even notice the walls of an exhibition space. Once they realize it's okay to touch the wall and do so, they sense that "something might move." Then, as the wall shifts, previously hidden parts of the building come into view. Some feel intrigued and walk around to the other side, while others leave without exploring further. However, by touching or pushing the wall, they can physically

experience its weight, texture, the width of the passage, and changes in light. I believe it's essential that all these pieces of information are gradually transmitted from the artwork to the visitors. The key point, though, is that initially, there was absolutely no information at all.

—At the venue with the moving wall, at first, it looked like there was no artwork at all.

It's the same with decorator crabs in the ocean—you don't notice them at first. They might look like sand or seaweed. Some people might stumble upon them by chance, while others might miss them entirely. I wanted to preserve that elusive nature in the artwork. There's a process where you see something unfamiliar move like a crab, then you start wondering what the other side looks like, and eventually, you realize, "Oh, this is a camouflaging crab." That journey of discovery is fascinating—it makes you think and feel something.

If someone at the entrance were to tell visitors, "If you push this wall, it moves, and you'll see various things," it would rob them of the opportunity to think and explore for themselves. The mechanism



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

of the moving wall is connected to how decorator crabs camouflage themselves—you don't know what they are until you peel away what they're carrying.

It can also be likened to childhood games or play. In games, you receive items gradually as you progress; that sense of discovery is part of the fun. That physical experience from childhood stayed with me, and I thought it could be used in an installation as well.

—Speaking of games, you previously worked in game development. Has that experience influenced your artwork?

Yes, I couldn't make a name for myself in the game industry, but it was an extremely fun experience. I thought designing games required working backward—figuring out where players would look, what would excite them, and what would motivate them to move forward. For example, in the famous Mario series, the player might fall into a hole, hear an unpleasant sound, and lose a life. But there's a clear goal: if they make it to the end, they receive something as a reward. It's not about giving players many

instructions like “Jump here” or “Collect the mushroom.” The fun comes from players figuring it out themselves after a few attempts without relying on explanations. Even if there’s a lot to think about initially, they eventually understand through experience. That method of designing games—anticipating the audience’s thoughts and actions—has influenced my approach to creating artwork. It was the time I most deeply thought about how others might think, always asking questions like “Why?” and “How does this work?”

—As for your new work, it seems to continue the series following *Expecting Spectator*, which was presented at the Chiba City Museum of Art. This time, your well-known work *Very Heavy Bag* (2010–present), which, as its name suggests, is simply a very heavy bag. This unique artwork will travel between our museum and The National Museum of Art, Osaka, which also participates in the group exhibition<sup>4</sup>. Can you tell us about this work?

This time, I was fortunate to present works simultaneously in Hyogo and Osaka, so I wanted to create something that would encourage

visitors to travel between the two museums. The concept is the moment that visitors take the *Very Heavy Bag* out of one museum, it becomes an ordinary bag. But when they bring it into another museum, it turns back into an artwork.

Like the moving wall, the experience starts with people not realizing the bag is an artwork. As they come to understand that it's a work of art, or when they lift it and feel its actual weight, the information gradually dawns on them. It's a work that invites people to imagine what might be inside the bag and think about various possibilities.

The person moving the bag also becomes a spectator. When they're carrying the heavy bag, they might feel a bit annoyed or frustrated, or they might tell someone, "This is an artwork called *Very Heavy Bag*," or even pass it on to someone else. I want to subtly integrate the work into the urban landscapes between the two museums. It only becomes an artwork when someone notices it and engages with it.

—It seems that once someone becomes aware of a work like this, they might find themselves wondering, "Could this heavy bag be a work of

art?" when they come across a similar scene in their daily life.

Actually, that happened during the exhibition at the Chiba City Museum of Art. Someone from the museum's facility management team asked me, "Mr. Iikawa! You haven't placed one of your heavy bag objects outside on the street without permission, have you?" Apparently, a bag had been abandoned on a nearby street, and they thought it might be my art. It wasn't mine, of course, but I found it fascinating how the person who discovered the bag began to interpret its meaning and decide for themselves whether it was a work of art or simply a bag. This ambiguity opens up intriguing possibilities. It's a work of art that observes and uses shared, unconscious rules and conventions around how we view art in museums, prompting entirely new ways of thinking.

—In your previous projects, you've also consciously incorporated rules into the creative process.

Yes, whether it's explicit rules, common sense,

fixed ideas, or unspoken agreements, I've always been aware of these elements, though the direction varies with each work. For instance, *Highlight Scene* (2014) focuses on the landscape of soccer, one of the world's most popular sports, capturing goalkeepers who appear idle during moments of victory or scoring. Similarly, *Next Fire* (2016) portrays substitute players waiting for their turn, not knowing when or if it will come. These works deliberately exclude the typical soccer highlights—decisive moments like scoring goals or winning tackles that often define the game. They question the phrase usually associated with team sports like soccer: "One for all, all for one." The inspiration for these works partly comes from my own experiences. There are many rules not only in sports but also in daily life, and these rules can be seen as information that is collectively acknowledged or agreed upon. What I aim to do is shake up that understanding and challenge those shared conventions.

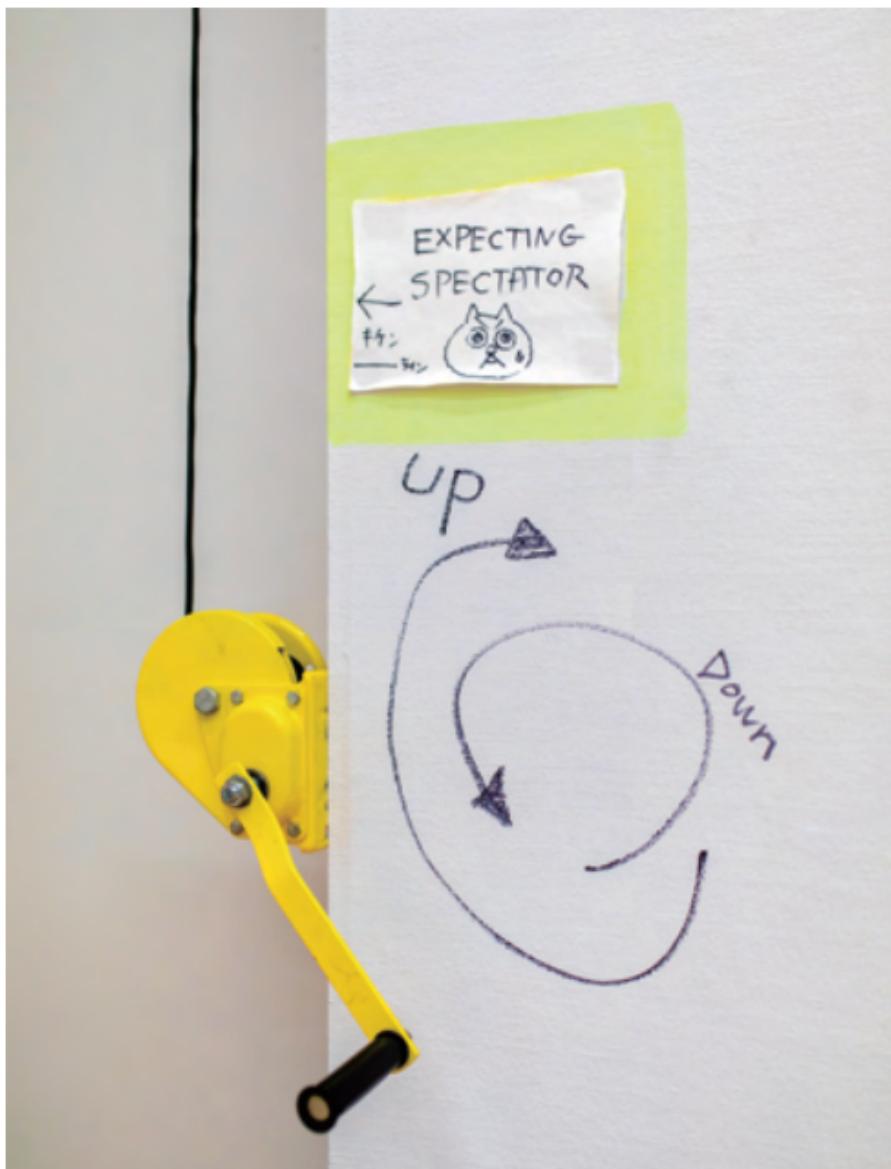
—In this exhibition, I'm sure that people passing by the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art and those coming to see the exhibition will each have

a different viewing experience. Clearly, your work creates open viewing experiences, both inside and outside the museum. Thank you for sharing your insights.

Note:

This interview was conducted on January 13, 2022, at Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art.

1. A video artist who taught at the Department of Information Design, Faculty of Art, Seian University of Art and Design.
2. *A-Lab Exhibition Vol. 16: ikawa Takehiro “DECORATOR CRAB - Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement,”* A-Lab (Hyogo), 2018.
3. Yokohama Triennale 2020 “AFTERGLOW,” PLOT48 (Kanagawa), 2020.
4. *“Range of the Senses: What It Means to “Experience” Today,”* The National Museum of Art, Osaka, February 8 to May 22, 2022.



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

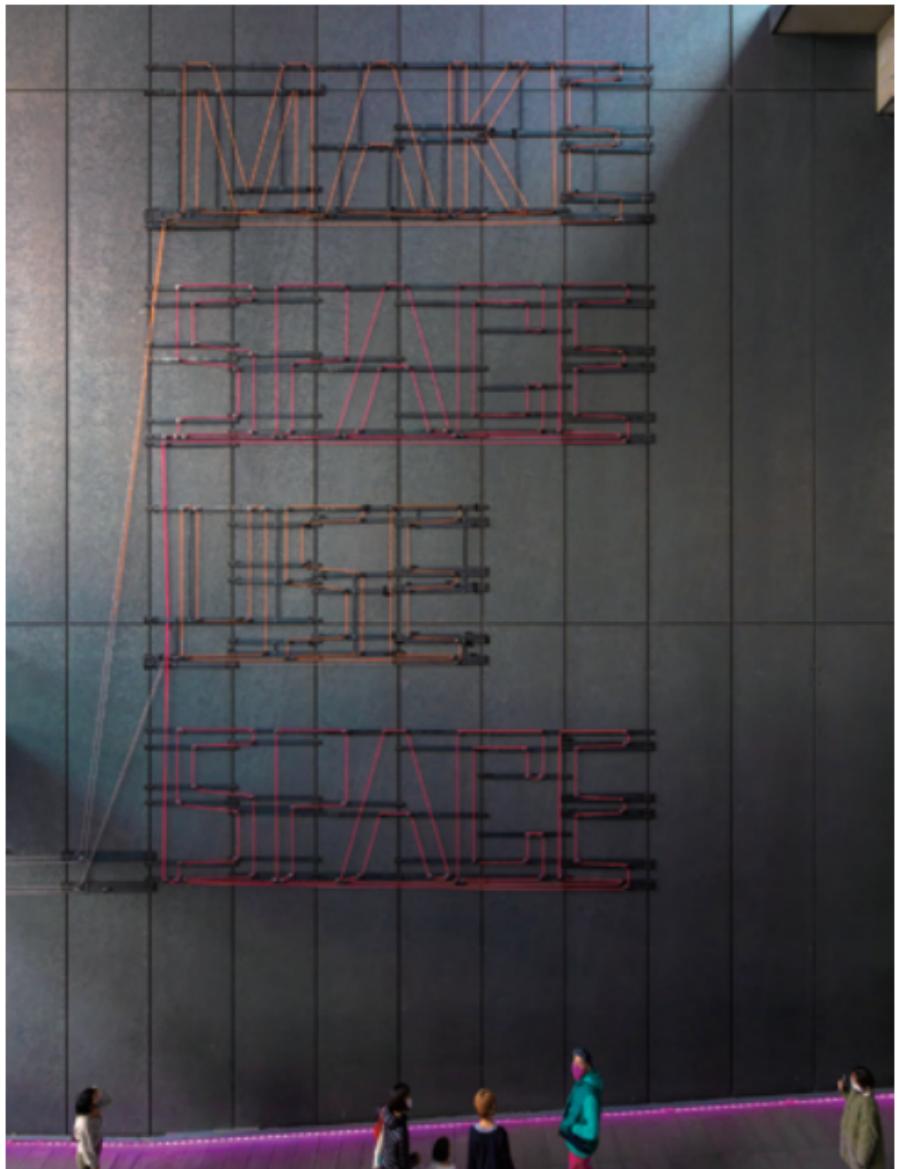
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

## Reflections on the Interview by Hashimoto Kozue

likawa Takehiro uses the encounter between decorator crabs and divers as a metaphor to explore universal themes such as human perception. His work goes beyond the confines of the gallery's white cube. During his solo exhibition at the Chiba City Museum of Art in 2021, he lived on-site for four months, presenting his art both inside and outside the museum. In preparation for this exhibition, likawa made countless visits to the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, located close to his home, carefully observing the space from various perspectives. As likawa mentioned during the interview, museum visitors typically come with prior knowledge about what is on display and visit to see those specific works. A museum's primary role is to provide opportunities to view "original" artwork that is already familiar. However, it is equally important for museums to create spaces for encountering unknown possibilities and experiences—works by artists or works that visitors have never heard of before.

Museums are governed by numerous rules: no eating or drinking, no loud conversations, and no touching of the artwork on display. The rules likawa incorporates into his projects are not limited to those established for preservation; they also include shared understandings and social conventions. Like paint, wood, stone, video, or photography, likawa actively incorporates the thoughts and actions of viewers as materials in his works.

True to the title *Make Space, Use Space*, likawa persistently seeks spaces for free and deliberate play. His artwork will reveal that museums' potential is far more significant than we perceive, encouraging us to reconsider our understanding of them.



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

# Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art [Hyogo Prefecture]

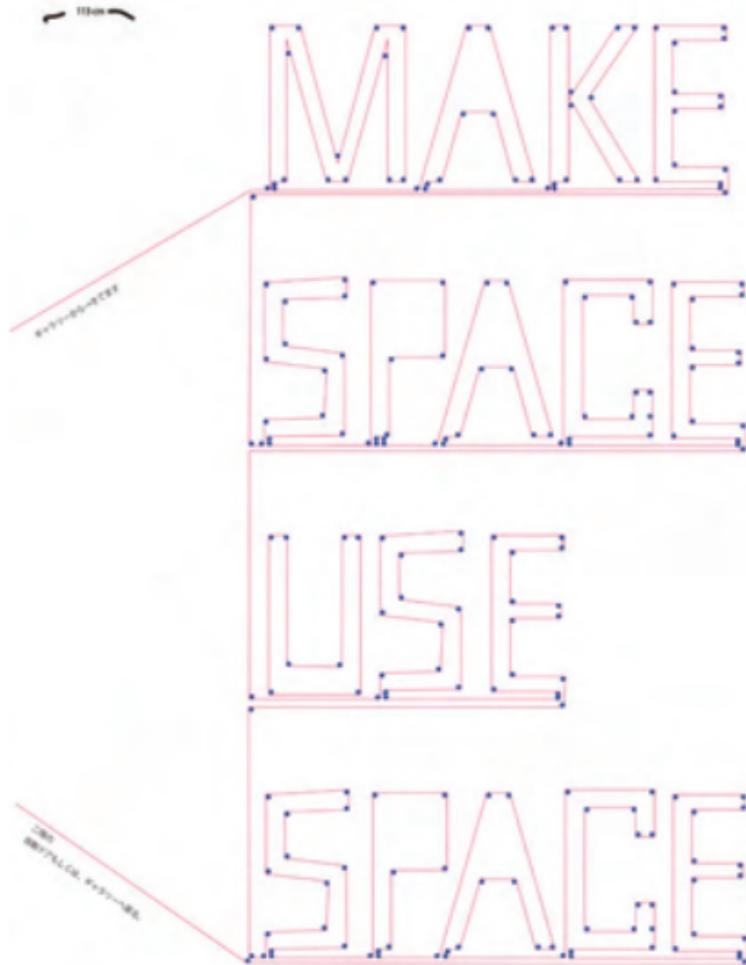
Megumu Takashima (Critic of fine and performing arts.  
Researcher at Kyoto City University of Arts, Art Resource  
Research Center)

Modeled as a fluorescent pink cat character, *Decorator Crab – Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat* is an eye-catching sculptural work. It has a perfect look for social media posts but is too massive to fit entirely within a camera frame. In *Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, and Movement*, the seemingly empty exhibition space invites the audience to push the walls (sometimes collaboratively) to set the artwork in motion. It literally interrupts the stability of the white cube or the institutional space. In *Decorator Crab – Very Heavy Bag*, colorful sports bags are strangely put on the gallery floor as if left by someone. Viewers try to pick them up, but the bags are too heavy to be lifted. *Decorator Crab* is a series of works that likawa Takehiro has been creating since 2007. It playfully creates a gap between perceptions and experiences while

inviting viewers' active engagement with the work. The series has consistently questioned the almighty given to visual perception.

The series' title, *Decorator Crab*, refers to the crabs that mimic the environment by adorning their shells with algae, seashells, or other materials from their surroundings. It captures the essence of likawa's work, which blends in with the space for viewing art by pretending to be a wall or a forgotten object. At the same time, it is a name given to the effect that reveals the presence of the viewers, who are blended into the exhibition as "transparent eyes."

When entering this exhibition, the visitors are first greeted by the large Japanese Kanji characters drawn on a wall that reads *atarashii kankyaku* (NEW AUDIENCE.) The characters are rendered by colorful ropes attached to pulleys and extending throughout the exhibition space. When visitors turn the four crank handles, the pulleys begin to rotate, and the ropes slowly move, gradually changing the colors of the characters.



Plan Drawing: Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan





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Plan Drawing: Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022  
Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: Sakanaka Takafumi



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Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

The ropes extend beyond the exhibition space. Following them through the museum corridor to outside, visitors encounter massive characters drawn by ropes on the exterior wall: "MAKE SPACE USE SPACE." During the author's visit, the characters "NEW AUDIENCE" drawn on the interior wall were made up of blue, white, and orange colors. In contrast, the characters on the exterior walls were in vibrant fluorescent pink, white, and yellow. When the audience turns the crank handles inside the exhibition space, ropes on the exterior wall gradually change their colors. Eventually the colors of the characters get entirely replaced by other colors.

This work invites the audience to imagine the entire view that a single perspective cannot grasp. It lets them imagine how an action in one place might affect situations elsewhere, which can also be interpreted as a positive message about societal structures. An individual's engagement causes gradual shifts and changes in colors. Societal structures can be transformed. However, it is almost impossible for a single individual to change the colors entirely; transforming the whole structure requires

multiple people's joint efforts.

In another work, the audience carried the *Very Heavy Bag* placed on casters from the museum in Kobe to The National Museum of Art, Osaka, where likawa was participating in the exhibition entitled, *Range of Senses What it Means to "Experience" Today*. This work also evoked layers of imagination to connect the two locations.

What if the viewers become exhausted and intentionally or unintentionally leave the heavy bags somewhere? What if the bags get damaged in an accident? How about if they're stolen? Or, what if someone tries to sell the bags as a work of art? These scenarios literally impose responsibility on the audience to realize an artwork, not through interpretation but through physically transporting it. Or the work disguises the audience as travelers carrying bags on casters. That is also a gesture of resistance through imagination against the conditions of restricted mobility. Pushing one's imagination further, disguising as "refugees" forcibly transposes what's happening elsewhere to here and now. The exhibition effectively "moved" the audience through both physical actions and

imaginative interventions. It was a brilliant exhibition.



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# Impulse and Imagination: Exploring the Relationship Between Work and Viewer in likawa Takehiro's *Decorator Crab*

Tachibana Miki (Takamatsu City Curator)

It was in 2017 that I first met the artist likawa Takehiro<sup>1</sup>. At a venue where two large cat sculptures were on display, I recall hearing what would later become the core concept of likawa's work:

*Although technological advancements have made it increasingly easier to take photographs and share image data, the exact scenes and sensations experienced by an individual cannot be fully conveyed to others.*

During my tenure at the Takamatsu Art Museum, I had the opportunity to engage with his works and exhibitions, including the 2020 show *Decorator Crab – Intercepting Perception*, the museum's acquisitions and installations of his pieces last year<sup>2</sup>, and *Decorator Crab – Shop* held this

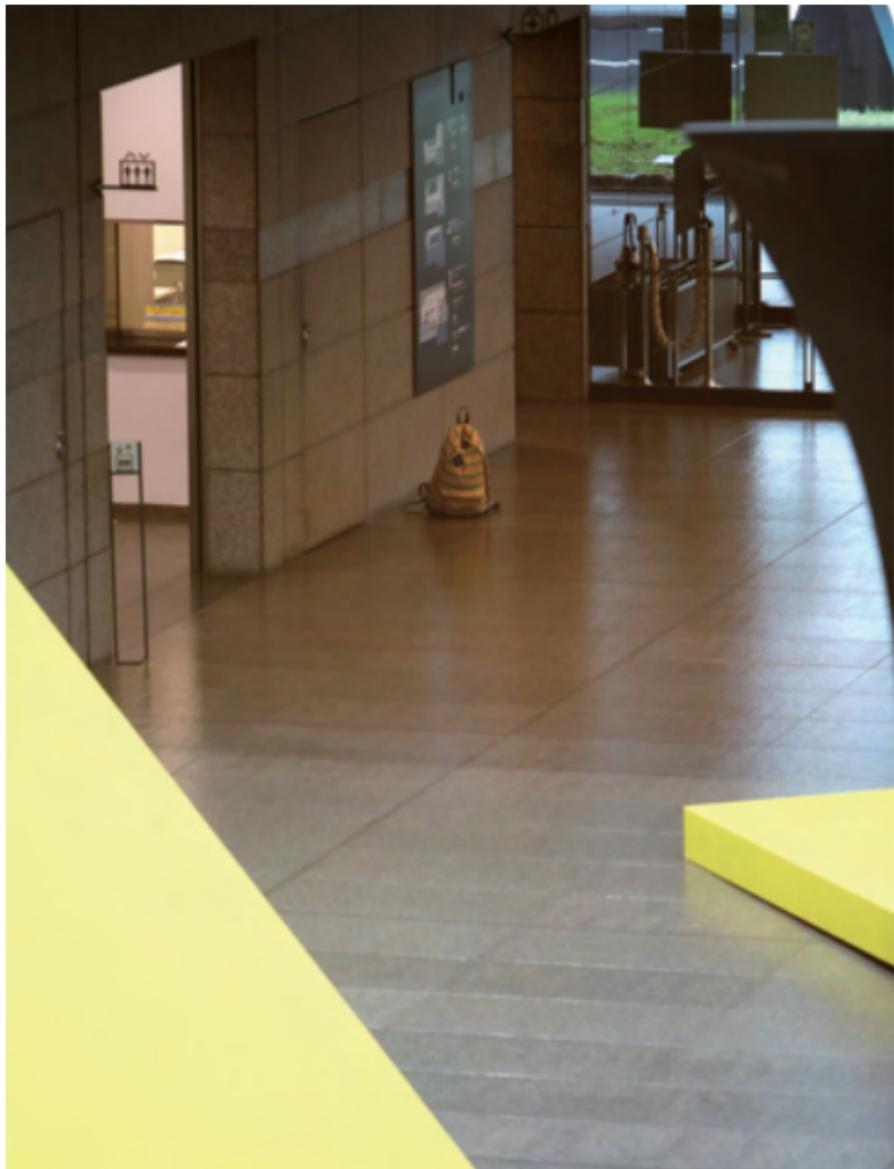
summer. Through these experiences, I have repeatedly observed that likawa pays careful consideration to how his works are perceived by their audience.

While many artists naturally pay attention to how their works appear, for likawa Takehiro, this consideration is even more critical. That's because his central themes revolve around the impulses generated between the artwork and the viewer, as well as the surrounding environment and the mental dynamics involved. In this essay, I will highlight a few pieces from the "Decorator Crab" series, focusing on the relationship between the work and its audience. In doing so, we will see that his pieces extend beyond direct viewers and that changes in likawa's areas of interest broaden the scope of his work.

That said, this essay contains major spoilers, so if you have not yet seen them, I recommend that you go view them first. As noted above, likawa's focus lies on the environments and thought processes in which impulses arise, and these elements are highly sensitive. I encourage you to first encounter the works without prior information, observing what you notice and how you feel.



Decorator Crab – Intercepting Perception, 2020  
Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Intercepting Perception, 2020  
Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

## The *Decorator Crab* series

The *Decorator Crab* series is a body of work that likawa Takehiro has been developing since around 2007. The term *Decorator Crab* refers collectively to creatures like the Japanese moss crab (*Camposcia retusa*) and various swimming crabs, which camouflage themselves by attaching items gathered from the seafloor to their bodies. likawa once watched a TV program in which a diver excitedly described these camouflaging crabs, yet he found himself unable to empathize with that excitement. In today's world, where communication technologies have advanced and become widespread, it is now possible to effortlessly convey all kinds of information to a large audience (through text, images, and video). However, no matter how much one tries, the impact and emotions, that is, the impulses felt by the person who directly experienced something, can never be fully transmitted to others. For likawa Takehiro, who studied video design at university, realizing this was of great significance. Since then, likawa has developed his works around the theme of the environment and the thought processes that arise when impulses form within a person. According to likawa, the crucial

element is not the crab itself but the impulse that occurs when one discovers a crab in a place they initially thought to be empty. And no matter how much one talks about finding the crab, another person will never be able to recreate the same feeling.

The term “impulse” refers to concepts such as “stirring a person’s mind or senses” or “acting without reflection or restraint, as well as the mental state accompanying such actions.”<sup>3</sup> The excitement of the diver who discovered the crab represents the first type of impulse in the *Decorator Crab* series, while the desire to share that discovery with someone represents the second type of impulse. When considering the *Decorator Crab* series, these two types of impulses play a role.

### Evoke Impulses

So, how are impulses treated in each of these works? Seventeen years have passed since the release of the series’ initial statement, and the number of pieces has grown, so I will focus on only a few works in this essay.

The illustrated work *Decorator Crab* (2006) and

the single-channel video work *Decorator Crab* (2016)<sup>4</sup> evoke the previously mentioned episode that likawa Takehiro experienced.

In the video, the performers recount their stories of having discovered a *Decorator Crab* and of past episodes in which they were unable to share their impulses with others. However, in reality, they have never actually seen a *Decorator Crab*, and their accounts blend truth and fiction.

Regardless of whether their stories are real or not, the viewer cannot relate to or experience either of these impulses.

While the series evokes impulses in various ways, many of the works also spark impulses within the viewers themselves. One such example that has been present since the early stages of the series is *Decorator Crab – Very Heavy Bag* (2007-, hereafter referred to as *Very Heavy Bag*). This piece involves a slightly puffed-up sports bag placed both inside and outside the exhibition space, as though it were a forgotten item. At first glance, what appears to be an ordinary object is, in fact, an artwork. However, in reality, it is extremely heavy. When a viewer attempts to lift the bag, they become aware of its unexpected weight. In this work, impulses emerge through

the reciprocal interaction between the viewer who tries to pick it up and the piece itself, which communicates an unforeseen heaviness.

Also exuding an overwhelming presence is *Decorator Crab – Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat* (2016–, hereafter referred to as *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*), a work that enlarges the character “*Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*,” known for its round eyes and slightly open mouth. Although this piece is highly impactful, it is disproportionately large for the venue, making it impossible to capture the entire figure in a single photograph.

This work not only elicits an emotional reaction through the surprise of encountering something unexpected, thereby generating an impulse, but also makes the viewer feel the frustration of being unable to record or convey that impulse to others.

### **Witnessing as Viewer**

In *Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement* (2018–, hereafter referred to as *Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement*), what initially appears to be just a section of wall can be moved by the viewer, revealing previously unimaginable spaces that they can then move



Decorator Crab – Very Heavy Bag, 2024

Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

further into. Each time you move something you never expected to move, your perception is transformed, and it's exciting to discover the dramatically changing scenery<sup>5</sup>. However, while the discoveries and perceptions gained by moving the wall are certainly an important element of this work, they are only one part of the whole. The piece is designed so that someone else might witness the wall's movement from a place outside the mover's perception—such as the opposite side of the moving wall—and neither the person performing the action nor the observer can be aware of each other's existence.

*Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators* (2020–, hereafter referred to as *Expecting Spectators*) is another piece in which turning a handle causes something to change in an unseen location. The nature of the change varies depending on the piece: a bag might rise and fall beyond the participant's awareness, or the color of letters made of rope might change. Even when a bag that moves up and down can be seen right in front of you, it is, like the act of moving a wall, just one component of the larger work. A witness who happens upon or comes across

the unnatural movement of a wall or a bag can become a viewer of the work, regardless of their will or intention. In terms of the reciprocal relationship between the piece and its audience, this is similar to *Very Heavy Bag*, but in these two particular works, the scope of who qualifies as a viewer is extended to include those who simply observe the event.

### Imagining Unseen Sceneries

likawa Takehiro is deeply focused on how viewers perceive his works when conceptualizing them, yet the relationship between the artwork and its audience can shift depending on the context. Already, by redefining how *Very Heavy Bag* is presented, likawa has established a different kind of relationship with viewers than what originally existed.

*A New Audience* (2022–) is a project in which participants remove *Very Heavy Bag* from the exhibition venue and carry it to other locations. Inside the venue, the piece is monitored by staff, but once it is taken outside, it appears as nothing more than an ordinary bag. In the city, it can function as a work of art to those who recognize

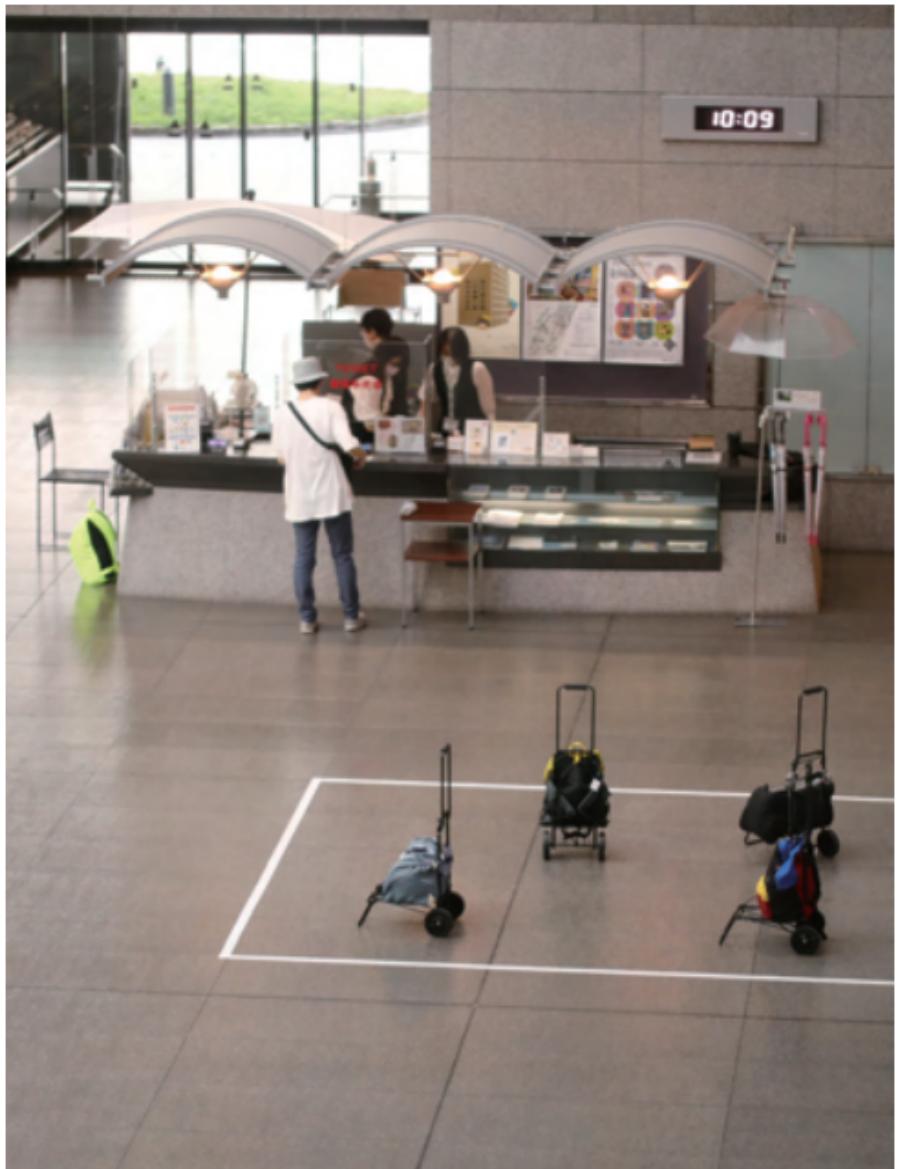
it as such, or to anyone who experiences a sense of dissonance or peculiarity. Much like *Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement*, this relocated *Very Heavy Bag* maintains a two-way interaction between the work and its viewers, opening up the possibility that a mere witness might become a viewer.

Currently, *A New Audience* is being presented at CAPSULE (Tokyo), Shibuya Koen-dori Gallery (Tokyo), Takamatsu Art Museum (Kagawa), the Tottori Prefectural Museum, and LAG (LIVE ART GALLERY, Tokyo). By extending the distance between venues compared to previous projects,<sup>6</sup> it aims to expand the viewer's capacity for imagination. Even those who feel they cannot or do not wish to carry a heavy bag over a long distance might have reflected on the locations and distances between these venues. Perhaps they even imagined another place, other than their current location, or envisioned themselves carrying the heavy bag over a long distance.

Many of likawa Takehiro's works function when viewers engage in hands-on actions—such as carrying, photographing, or moving objects—but



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2024  
Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2024  
Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

recently he has also shown interest in encouraging viewers to explore the possibilities his works present.

Furthermore, in the exhibition *Decorator Crab – Shop, Very Heavy Bag* was placed inside a display window, accompanied by a written explanation indicating that the bag was significantly heavier than one might typically expect.

Viewers who read the text might have speculated about the weight of the bag. The two-way relationship, in which the viewer directly engages with the work, experiencing impulses that stir their senses and emotions, has here been reduced to a simpler one-way interaction: the viewer observes the work and ponders its implications.

Imagination has always been a defining aspect of likawa Takehiro's works. As noted earlier, most of the stories told in *Decorator Crab* are the performers' personal interpretations, and in *Expecting Spectators*, the participant turns the handle while imagining the outcomes their action might generate.

Moreover, while not discussed in detail here, *Decorator Carb – The Ruler for Cats of the Future* (2023) was created not only intended for viewers but also for likawa Takehiro himself as a foundation for materializing the worlds he imagines. This growing interest in imagination, which developed alongside the creation of these works, has led not only to the creation of new works but also to shifts in the dynamics of the relationship between viewers and existing works, such as *Very Heavy Bag*.

### **The Transformation of the Everyday into Art, and Art into the Everyday**

The more familiar one becomes with likawa Takehiro's works, the more one begins to imagine that anything encountered in daily life might have been carefully orchestrated by the artist. Looking back at art history, there are numerous examples, such as Happenings, where art was integrated into the everyday, turning observers into participants. In today's world, where artworks are exhibited in various unexpected locations, it is not uncommon to perceive something unusual in the city as if it were a piece of art. Within this context, *Very Heavy Bag* transforms a bag from

everyday life into an artwork, only to restore it to the context of the everyday. This process creates a sense of doubt, leading one to wonder if even an ordinary sports bag left by the roadside could itself be an artwork.

Examples of the transformation of everyday activities into art, and their subsequent reintegration into daily life, include works like Hi-Red Center's *Campaign to Promote Cleanliness and Order in the Metropolitan Area* (1964), which turned the act of cleaning itself into art. For this campaign, Akasegawa Genpei created signage with hand-lettering intended to evoke government offices. Akasegawa imagined the confusion of witnesses, such as police officers faced with this unusual scene, thinking, "It's definitely cleaning, but something feels off. They're doing it meticulously, yet it's strange. Because it feels strange, I want to stop and take another look, but then I think about it, and yes, it's just cleaning—proper and polite."

As an example of a work that completely avoids evoking any confusion, there is the contemporary art team [mé]'s *Scaper* project.

The *Scaper* project, directed by [mé] for the Saitama Triennale 2023, was set up daily

throughout the city during the event. It remains vivid in memory how a large number of reports about the Scaper's sightings were submitted to the "Scaper Lab." It is likely that the information received by the laboratory included not only genuine reports about the Scaper but also accounts of unrelated individuals and random scenes unconnected to the art festival<sup>9</sup>.

The subtler the artist's intervention in integrating something into art or everyday life, the harder it becomes for witnesses to judge what they are seeing, leading them to question even ordinary situations. If we were to encounter a bag in the city that resembles *Very Heavy Bag*, we might find ourselves questioning whether it's just an ordinary bag belonging to someone or an artwork, scanning our surroundings and expanding our imagination. Its appearance alone provides no definitive answers, and we can't simply pick up someone else's belongings to confirm.

Even likawa Takehiro himself has recalled how, in the early days of the *A New Audience* project, he found himself imagining that the many people in the Osaka Station underground carrying luggage



Decorator Crab – Make Space, Use Space, 2022  
Osaka - Hyogo, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

on trolleys might have been deliberately planted as part of the artwork<sup>10</sup>. In reality, even in places where the artist is not directly involved, witnesses often imagine whether something they see might have been orchestrated by the artist.

### Embracing a Playful Spirit

likawa Takehiro has used various methods to craft experiences with the unexpected and provoke impulses through unforeseen perceptions in viewers and witnesses. At times, he constrains their desire to share these impulses with others, thereby shedding light on the contexts and emotional dynamics involved. More recently, he has expanded the scope of his works by inviting and empowering viewers to use their imagination. As a final note, I would like to explore the playful spirit at the core of likawa Takehiro's works. Very Heavy Bag has evolved through numerous iterations since its inception, but it traces its origins back to an episode from likawa's middle school days. He secretly placed blocks, stones, and eventually even a fire extinguisher into the bag of a close friend. Unaware, the friend carried the unexpectedly heavy bag all the way home.<sup>11</sup> At the core of likawa's other works as well is his

sense of playfulness, which continues to captivate us. What's more, when turning the handle in *Expecting Spectators* or pulling a heavy bag through the streets in *A New Audience*, there is a moment of anticipation—the possibility that your actions could transform someone into a viewer. In that instant, you feel as though you have become a participant in likawa's playful scheme.

The delighted expression that appears when inspiration strikes, paired with the exclamation "That's hilarious!", marks the start of a new creation. Moving forward, likawa Takehiro will undoubtedly continue to embrace his sense of playfulness, crafting works that evoke impulses and continuously challenge and expand our perceptions.

Note:

1. In 2017, likawa Takehiro participated in the Takamatsu Artist-in-Residence program hosted by the city of Takamatsu.
2. In 2023, the Takamatsu Art Museum added *Decorator Carb – Expecting Spectators* and *Decorator Carb – Very Heavy Bag* to its collection. The background of these acquisitions is being drafted alongside this essay and is planned for inclusion in an upcoming volume of likawa Takehiro's works.

3. Edited by Shinmura Izuru, *Kojien*, 4th Edition (Iwanami Shoten, 1991)

4. After this work was first presented in 2006, *Decorator Club - Impulses and Things Around Them*, with one more performer, was presented in 2019.

5. With respect to this work, Kimura Eriko notes that the structure in which one viewer's actions become the artwork for another viewer is a common tendency observed in relational art. However, in this case, she observes that "it is rooted in an indirect causal relationship, where highly individualistic actions are coincidentally observed by another person. In this sense as well, one can see in the work a framework that reflects the pseudo-communication characteristic of the social media sharing era" (*likawa Takehiro: Decorator Crab*, Akaaka Art Publishing + Sendai Mediatheque, 2024, p.117).

6. *A New Audience* was first introduced in 2022 at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, and the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art. In 2023, it was exhibited at the Hakone Open-Air Museum and ACAO RESORT, both in Kanagawa.

7. Genpei Akasegawa, *Tokyo Mixer Plan* (Chikuma Shobo, 1994), p.260

8. At the opening talk for the solo exhibition *likawa Takehiro: Decorator Crab - New Display* at CAPSULE (Tokyo) on June 1, 2024, writer Sugihara Tamaki noted that likawa, [mé], and Umeda Tetsuya, who are contemporaries, have broadened the spatial dimensions of their works by utilizing even backroom spaces for

exhibitions—rooms that are so off-limits even facility staff may never have set foot in them.

9. Furthermore, *Life Scaper* (2021–) is a work in which one can acquire ownership of a Scaper through a contract with [m  ], enabling the possibility that a Scaper might manifest at some point in the owner's life and perform some action. However, it is also possible that the Scaper could take place unbeknownst to the owner, or that it might never occur at all (*Bijutsu Techo*, January 2024 issue, Bijutsu Shuppan-sha, 2024, p.111).

10. *Iikawa Takehiro: Decorator Crab* (Akakasha + Sendai Mediatheque, 2024), p.104

11. *Iikawa Takehiro: Decorator Crab* (Akakasha + Sendai Mediatheque, 2024), p.29

# The Story of *Expecting Spectators*

Tachibana Miki (Takamatsu City Curator)

A museumgoer, walking down a hallway, noticed a handle protruding from the wall. When they turned it, a rope emerged from the wall then retracted with a crunching sound. However, even after looking around, they couldn't figure out what else was happening.

Meanwhile, at the entrance to the museum, another person glimpsed something in their peripheral vision: a bag suspended in midair was slowly shifting. What caused it to move? Was it motorized? Was someone controlling it? Though mystified, they proceeded to the exhibition they had some to see.

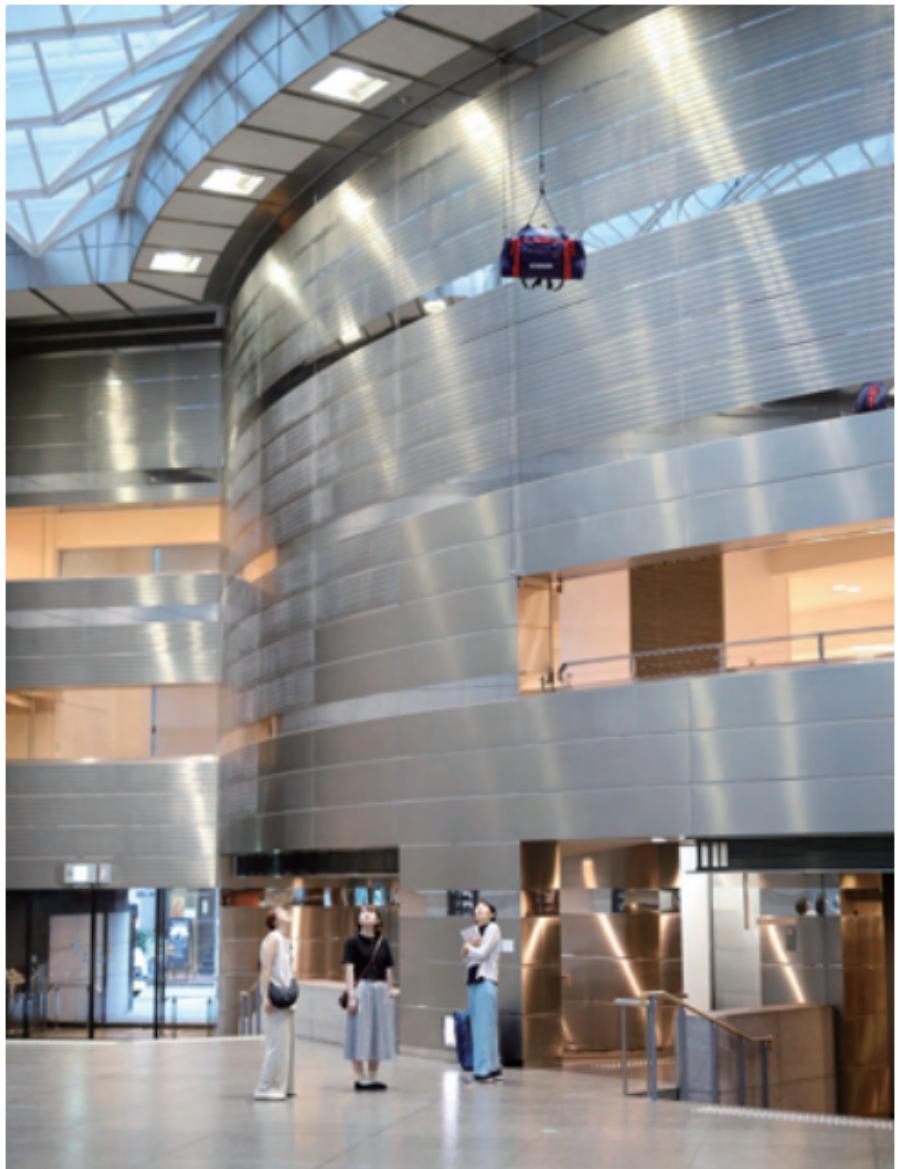
In this moment, two individuals unknowingly became both participants in and spectators of the same artwork, *Expecting Spectators* (2019)<sup>1</sup>, but they left the museum without realizing the connection between what they respectively observed. Each was a simple yet profoundly mysterious and serendipitous event. This text tells

the story of this artwork, from its inception and first exhibition to its museum acquisition and future potential.

### The Birth of the Artwork

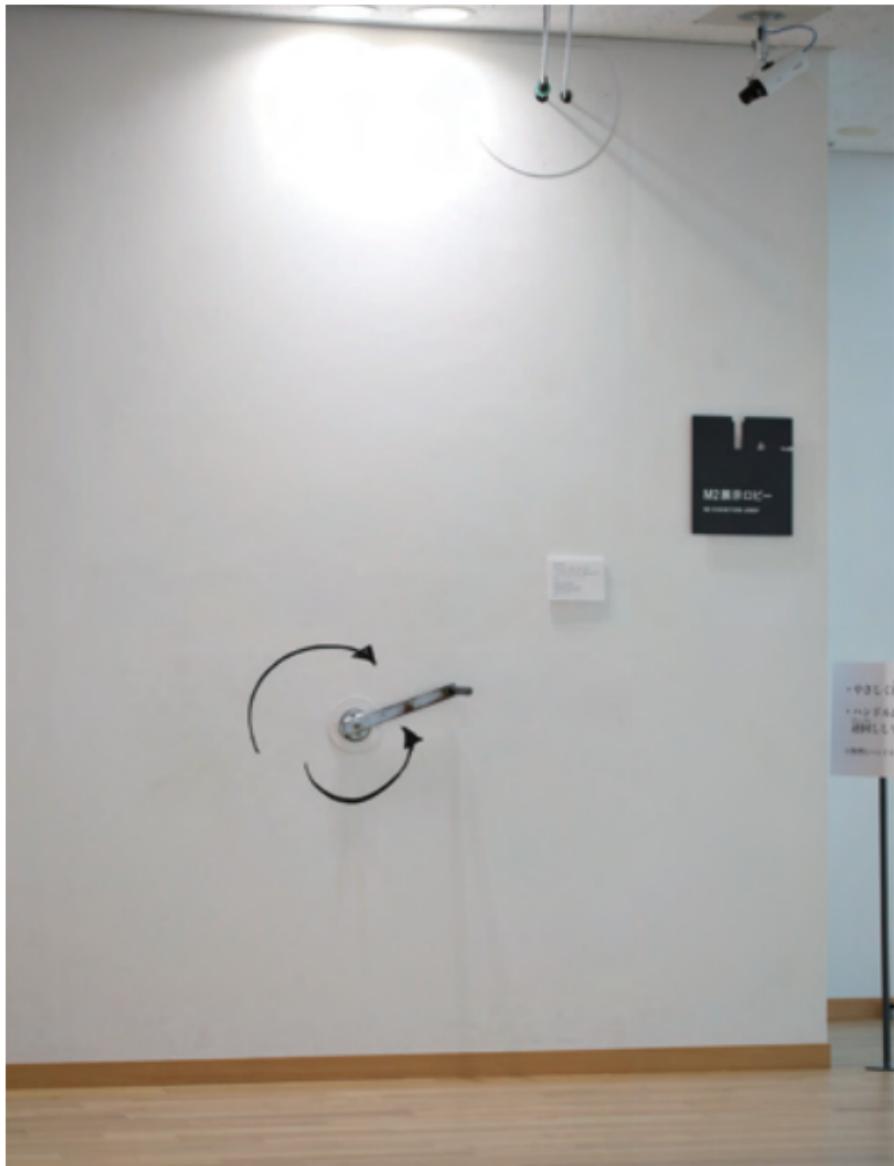
likawa Takehiro's *Expecting Spectators* originated from something that happened while experimenting with the installation of *Probable Perspective* in 2020 at the Takamatsu Art Museum. First presented in 2019 at three middle schools in Ibaraki Prefecture, *Probable Perspective* used vividly colored straps about ten centimeters wide to create lines inside and between the school buildings that resembled a drawing in space. During after-hours sessions with staff at Takamatsu, likawa tested the possibilities for how his artwork could be adapted to the museum. One night, he noticed a curator winding a strap in the civic gallery on the ground floor.

As she reeled in one end of the strap, the other, a few dozen meters away, began to slowly move. Slight in build, the curator struggled as the roll of strap got bigger and heavier—oblivious to the phenomenon her action was causing. Only likawa, from his vantage point on the mezzanine, could



Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2024

Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2024  
Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

see it.

This moment planted the seed for *Expecting Spectators*, but it took time to blossom into a work of art. The exhibition at Takamatsu, entitled *Decorator Crab – Intercepting Perception*, centered on a reimagining of an eponymous artwork previously shown at the Sapporo Cultural Arts Community Center SCARTS. The video works *Impulses and Things Around Them* (2019) and *Very Heavy Bag* (2018) were also on display, and *Expecting Spectators* was added halfway through the exhibition.

### **Viewers Becoming Actors, Witnesses Becoming Viewers**

There's a recurring dynamic in likawa's works like *Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement* (2018) and *PULLING TIME* (2023): between viewers who become agents, and agents whose actions turn others into witnesses—often without either party being aware of the other's role. To appreciate how *Expecting Spectators* came into being, it's important to explore the links to these earlier works.

*Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement* was first presented in 2018 at A-LAB in Amagasaki, Hyogo

Prefecture. The public could push what appeared to be a solid wall along a path, potentially enabling a witness, on its opposite side, to believe the wall is moving of its own volition. Another version of this work, created the following year at Art Center Ongoing, featured a structure that could move in and out of windows, thus becoming visible from the street. Passersby who encountered the work transformed into witnesses and inadvertent participants. In this, *Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement* shares something with *Expecting Spectators*, though it focuses on the unexpected fact that the wall can move. Lending a hand to its movement—and possibly being observed while doing so—can fill participants with a sense of accomplishment and surprise. For participants of *Expecting Spectators*, the experience may provide less practical satisfaction, given that the outcomes of their actions are unclear. Instead, they are left to inquire: “What is happening as a result of what I’m doing?” In a world where answers are often readily available, this uncertainty might be frustrating, yet it also compels participants to explore and expand their imagination. Some iterations of *Expecting Spectators*

incorporate a bag suspended near the handle. This bag is integral to the structure of the work, serving as both a representation of the handle's movement and a functional stopper. Much like the moving wall in *Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement*, the presence or absence of the bag can significantly affect how participants interact with the work.

*PULLING TIME*<sup>2</sup> explores a more physically engaging interaction: as participants pull one end of the ropes hanging from the walls and ceiling, the other end also moves, as do objects like suspended bags. The act of pulling is a simple, tactile way to create a direct connection between the rope and the body. Indeed, it would seem that the curator who inspired *Expecting Spectators* is also present in this work. Prototypes for *PULLING TIME* were made for likawa's exhibition in Takamatsu, but due to sanitization and social distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the work was not realized at the time. An artwork requiring the tactile engagement of many participants was impossible to realize with these protocols in place.

## First Exhibition

Building on connections to earlier works such as *Probable Perspective and Arrangement*, *Adjustment, Movement*—and taking inspiration from the unrealized *PULLING TIME—Expecting Spectators* was added to the Takamatsu exhibition in the autumn of 2020<sup>3</sup>. During preparations, likawa explored different pathways for the ropes, testing the limits of the museum's security and disaster prevention systems in the process. He ventured into previously unexplored spaces, opened neglected doors, and conducted rooftop visits of a frequency that had never occurred before and has not been repeated since. Ultimately, likawa installed a winch on the museum's mezzanine. From there, ropes stretched into nearby rooms, exited through a window, climbed the southern exterior wall, crossed the rooftop, and connected to a bag suspended above the museum's main entrance. Turning the handle caused the winch to make the aforementioned crunching sound, which echoed through the surrounding area, while wooden stoppers—decorated with an image of *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*—traveled back and forth along the ropes. Due to the nature of the work, visitors were not informed that the ropes were

connected to the bag; as a result, some failed to notice it even when suspended in a high-traffic zone of the museum.

Since its debut, *Expecting Spectators* has been exhibited at such venues as the Chiba City Museum of Art, the National Museum of Art, Osaka, the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, and the Hakone Open-Air Museum. It has evolved over the course of these installations. For instance, the makeshift wooden box housing the winch in Takamatsu has been replaced with a custom-built structure. Such developments have not only enhanced the durability and functionality of the work but have helped it become iconic among fans of likawa's works.

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## Toward Museum Acquisition

In 2023—a period sometimes called the “post-COVID era”—likawa was nominated as a candidate for new acquisitions by the Takamatsu Art Museum. His extensive achievements made him an obvious choice, from his solo exhibitions across Japan, to his participation in the 2017 Takamatsu Artist-in-Residence program, to the 2020 exhibition at the museum. Still, there was some question of which work to choose.



Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2024  
Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

For ease of storage and installation, photographs or videos were practical options. Alternatively, elements of a project like video documentation and drawings could be collected. After weighing these options, the museum decided to acquire *Expecting Spectators*. This work, which was conceived and first exhibited at the Takamatsu Art Museum and has since become one of likawa's representative pieces, was a fitting addition to the museum's collection. Acquiring *Expecting Spectators* posed some challenges. In the short term, there was the matter of where and how to install it; in the long term, the work would require ongoing maintenance and need to be preserved for future generations. Despite these issues, Takamatsu did not want to miss this opportunity, especially as museum budgets allocated for art acquisition are forever at risk of being reduced without notice. And so the decision to acquire the work was made, and discussions with likawa began shortly thereafter, focusing on the challenges at hand.

As *Expecting Spectators* would join the museum collection, the initial plan was to install the work

in the area surrounding the permanent collection galleries on the ground floor. However, due to the stringent security and disaster prevention systems in place in this area, the installation would be challenging, and even if feasible, would need to happen at a significantly reduced scale. It was thus decided to place the winch on the mezzanine—the same location as 2020. This floor had a storage area that could accommodate it. As for the ropes, this time around, it seemed unrealistic to run them through the roof due to the substantial management burden. Instead, the bag was suspended from the ceiling of the museum's entrance. Although the distance between the handle and the bag was shorter than in 2020, by adjusting the length of the rope, it was possible to retain two core conditions of the work: that a person turning the handle be unable to see the bag, and that a viewer in the second-floor hallway be able to see both the bag and the handle. It was from this very point of view, that likawa observed the curator reeling in the strap.

The museum initially requested that the installation be removable, but as this would reduce the scale and impact of the work, it

agreed to a permanent installation<sup>4</sup>. As a result, different aspects of *Expecting Spectators* can unfold over time. A museumgoer might make the connection between action and observation on their first visit, or it might happen years later. While likawa's previous works like *Arrangement*, *Adjustment*, *Movement* turned passersby into witnesses, the permanent installation of *Expecting Spectators* extends the experience of witnessing in time, thus amplifying the thoughts and feelings that might emerge in response to it.

Once the installation plan and implementation process were finalized, they had to be reviewed by the museum's acquisition committee, which is composed of external members and experts. At a meeting held in February 2024, the committee officially approved the acquisition of *Expecting Spectators* and the donation of *Very Heavy Bag*. The committee generally responded positively, though they raised a question about addressing editions in the context of a multi-faceted work. After this meeting, installation commenced. Despite prior site inspections, unforeseen issues arose which required multiple adjustments and refinements to the works. The museum also

requested further precautionary measures to prevent objects from falling. These were reasonable demands for a facility manager to make, and it was clear that *Very Heavy Bag* was in mind, given that an object of significant weight would be suspended from the ceiling. Ikawa thoughtfully addressed these concerns, implementing several safety measures and clarifying any misconceptions. A trial period began in mid-April 2024, during which the works were viewable at limited times under the supervision of volunteer staff. This allowed the museum to gauge the safety of the installation and make any needed adjustments. As the trial was a success, the works opened to the public in mid-June 2024.

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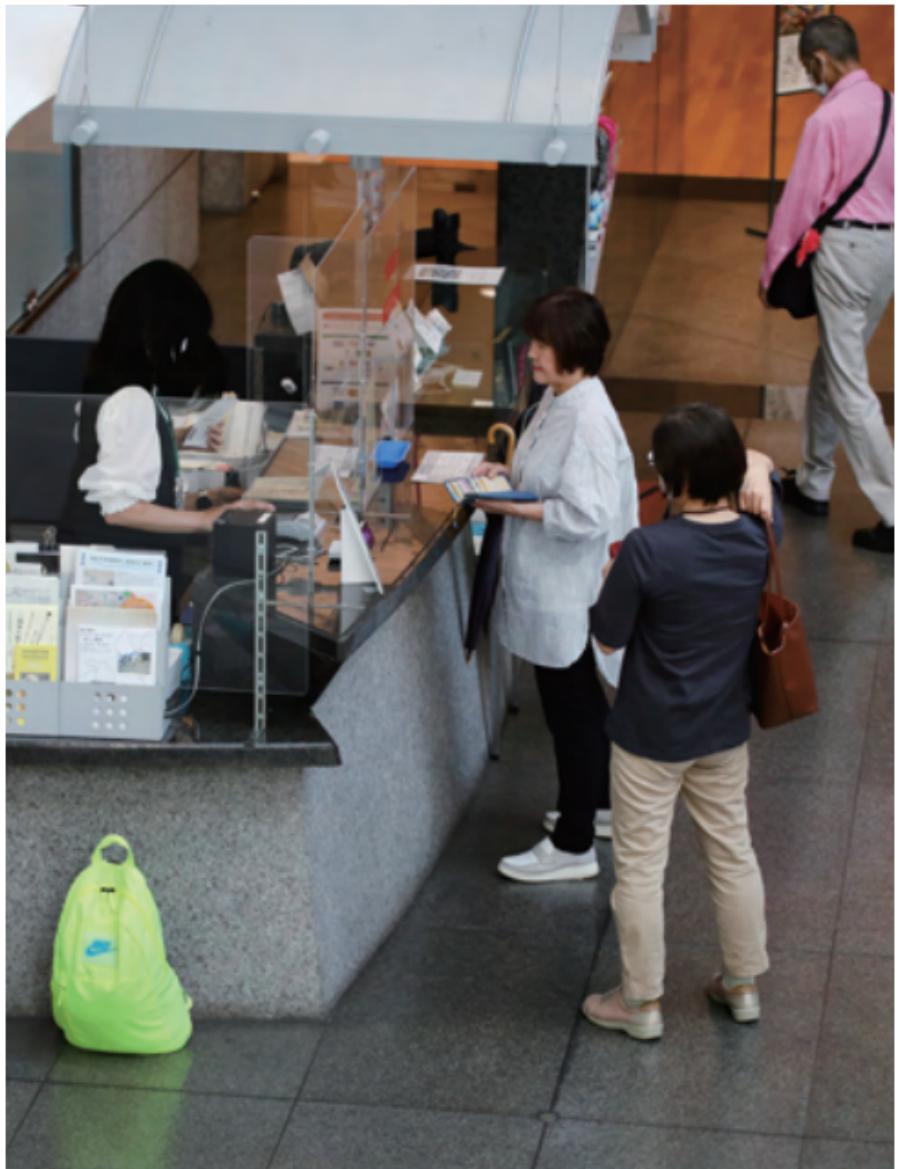
## Instruction Manual

Beyond the installation, it was critical to prepare an instruction manual for the collection of Ikawa's works. Typically, museums and galleries focus on measures to prevent the physical deterioration of artworks and artifacts, thus maintaining them for future generations. With *Expecting Spectators* and *Very Heavy Bag*, the emphasis shifts to preserving the concept of the



Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2020

Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Very Heavy Bag, 2024  
Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

work and its manner of engaging participants and viewers. likawa's instructions aim to transmit this information to future readers, including curators and museum staff who might not know the artist nor have been present for the works' previous installation. The documentation and transmission of information about artworks are fraught with challenges. No matter how thoroughly one tries to articulate the meaning of a given work, interpretations will vary among individuals, and the meaning and connotations of particular words may shift with time. In creating his instructions, likawa both recognizes and attempts to work through these challenges.

likawa's instruction manual includes details about the editions of each work, an issue raised during the acquisition committee discussions. In the case of *Very Heavy Bag*, the manual specifies that the Takamatsu Art Museum will acquire five bags/editions. It also states that if any of the bags are damaged, they may be replaced with others of the museum's choosing. In other words, no specific bag is attached to an individual edition number; what is important is that the museum possess no more than five of them. Consequently,

when the work is loaned to another institution, the bags in the collection can be lent, or the borrowing institution may provide a suitable bag. The conceptual significance of *Very Heavy Bag* lies in the fact that the bag, appearing as an item forgotten in the museum, is actually an artwork. Should trends in fashion and culture shift, and a given bag appear too outdated, it should be replaced with a contemporary equivalent. This will best preserve the intended experience of the work, though it's an open question as to who should have authority to decide when a bag needs to be replaced.

*Expecting Spectators*, as conceived for the entrance to the Takamatsu Art Museum, is a one-of-a-kind piece that's unique and specific to the site. If exhibited at other venues, likawa or those acting on his behalf would have to create a new iteration of the work. Moreover, the manual notes that if Takamatsu Art Museum undergoes renovation, relocation, or structural changes that prevent the continued exhibition of the work or compromise the public's experience, it may reinstall the work in line with likawa's original intent.

When the time comes to replace the bag or

reinstall either work, the museum's curators must consult the instruction manual alongside other materials. It is likely that their interpretations may deviate (at least to some degree), and in the best case, this may open avenues for new facets of the works to emerge.

### From Impulse to Imagination

The impulses people feel, the environments that shape them, and the reactions they provoke are central and subtle themes in likawa's work. Once the mechanics and intention behind *Expecting Spectators* are understood, it is no longer possible to turn the handle with a sense of imaginative possibility. The same could be said of the experience of any artwork—of the difference of having no prior knowledge versus understanding how it operates. When the initial, impulsive reaction dissipates, familiarity settles in. It could be said that, just as we consume a work of art, we consume the impulses it brings about in us.

This doesn't mean that the experience of the artwork is diminished. In recent years, likawa's works and exhibitions have increasingly encouraged the public to imagine phenomena

that might arise through certain actions—such as holding or moving objects—even without directly undertaking those actions. This dynamic has long been latent in his practice. For instance, *Very Heavy Bag* initially prompted viewers to learn its surprising weight by lifting it. Yet in the exhibition *Decorator Crab – Shop* (2024)<sup>5</sup>, it was displayed in a vitrine and thus unable to be touched, leaving viewers to imagine its weight. As museumgoers become familiar with the mechanics of *Expecting Spectators*, their appreciation shifts from initial, impulsive reactions to awareness of other dynamics: a participant may consider the possibility of being watched by a viewer, and a viewer may imagine the participation of an unseen actor. The experience of this artwork becomes an act of imagination, prompting us to navigate implicit connections and speculate on the dynamics of presence and absence.

While 'impulse' remains a motif in likawa's practice, the artist does not rigidly adhere to specific techniques, instead allowing his work to shift alongside his interests. In time, he may come to see *Expecting Spectators* from a different perspective; it may even suggest creative paths forward. This interpretive possibility is open to all,

not just the artist and the museum. Like an intricate tapestry, the story woven by the bag, the rope, and the handle will continue to branch, forming new narratives that invite ever-evolving engagement.

Note:

1. All of the works mentioned in this text are part of the Decorator Crab series (years). While their official titles begin with Decorator Crab, this prefix will be omitted here for sake of simplicity.
2. When PULLING TIME debuted in 2023 at the Kirishima Open-Air Museum in Kagoshima, it involved a mechanism whereby the turning of a handle indoors gradually altered the color of ropes spelling the phrase "PULLING TIME" on the outer wall of a separate building. A related work, in which the pulling of one end of a rope caused its other end to move, was exhibited under the title Expecting Spectators.
3. Earlier experiments with Expecting Spectators were conducted for Skip of the Gaze, a 2019 Sapporo Art Stage ART STREET exhibition held at the Sapporo Community Plaza.
4. While the work cannot be completely disassembled due its integrated parts, specific components such as the bag and handle can be removed.
5. In 2024, Expecting Spectators was prominently featured in an exhibition at the Takamatsu Art Museum, Branch Gallery.

Source: artscape website, July 19, 2024 (Published by Dai Nippon Printing Co., Ltd.) URL: <https://artscape.jp/article/17962/>

The “Tsukurikake Art Lab” is a participatory and experiential artist project that builds up a space through public art-making and workshops based on one of three themes: “Enjoying with the Senses,” “Engaging with Materials,” and “Sparking Communication.” In its fourth iteration, contemporary artist Takehirolikawa was invited to develop a large-scale installation throughout the entire museum building under the theme of “Enjoying with the Senses.” Drawing inspiration from the decorator crab, which alters its appearance by adorning itself with seaweed and pebbles, the project incorporated various interactive mechanisms to provoke visitors’ reactions and discoveries, allowing the space to transform through their engagement.

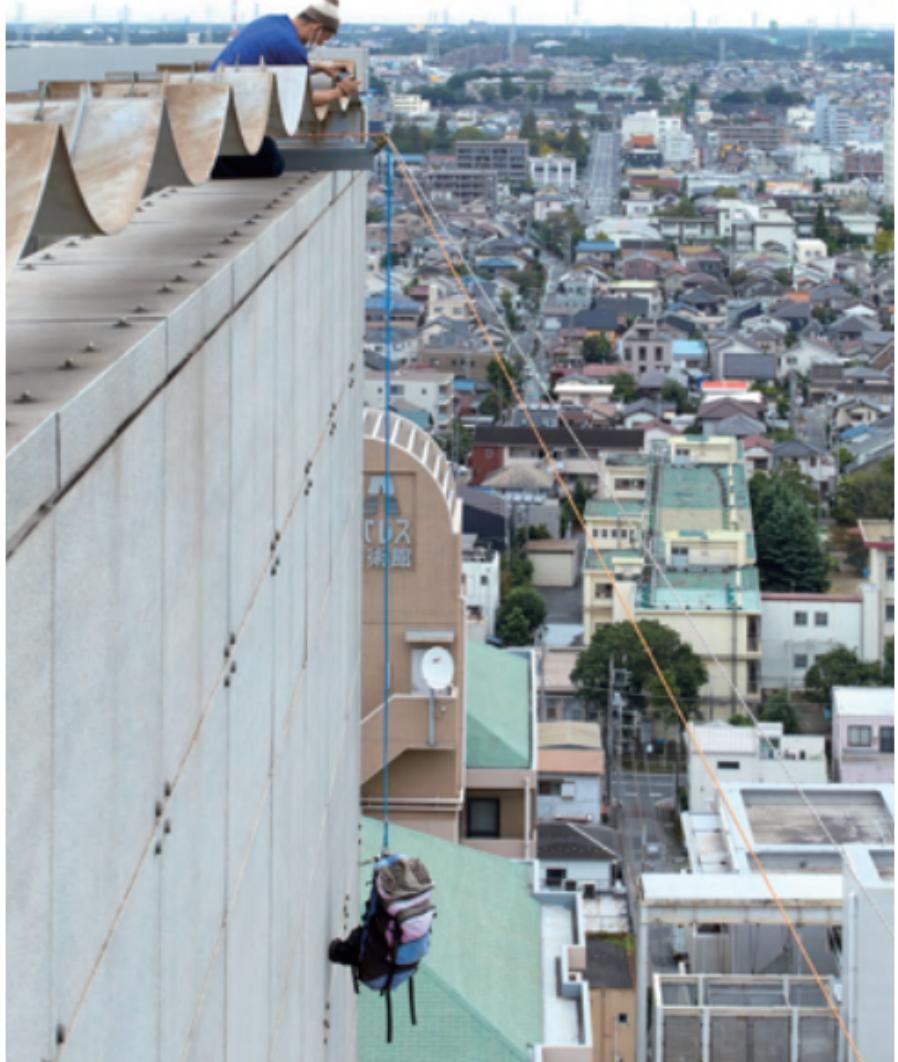
## A Project Expanding the Potential of Museums

Hattori Hiroyuki (Curator)

Tsukurikake Art Lab as an Attempt to Update the Museum

With two decades already passed in the 21st century, the modes of artistic expression and appreciation have become increasingly diverse and complex, and the relationships between artists, artworks, and audiences continue to undergo transformation. Today, it is common to encounter exhibitions featuring long-form video works akin to cinema, participatory projects that invite active engagement, archival works that collect and display materials or artifacts, performance-based works, process-focused projects emphasizing temporal and procedural aspects, or digital works utilizing VR and AR within the internet realm. Moreover, many of these artworks intricately combine multiple elements. Consequently, the act of experiencing art now often involves multiple sensory modalities beyond vision, including hearing and touch, as well as active participation that directly influences the work. These combined experiences form a multilayered interaction between the audience and the artwork.

The diversification and intertwining of art and its reception, along with the resulting changes in artist-audience dynamics, necessitate a



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: Sakanaka Takafumi



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

reevaluation of the role of museums. While museums are traditionally spaces for the careful preservation and management of invaluable collections, they also inherently manage and regulate visitor behavior. By integrating visible artworks with the invisible narratives and contexts behind them, museum exhibitions subtly guide and manage visitor thought and action. As Okada Atsushi has emphasized, the desire for comprehensive surveillance within a panopticon exists not only in prisons and hospitals but also in the institutional apparatus of museums.<sup>1</sup>

Museums strive to be open and clear while simultaneously monitoring and regulating visitor behavior under the guise of protecting artworks. In contrast, likawa Takehiro's *Decorator Crab* seeks to gently untangle these inherent tendencies of museums.

The "Tsukurikake Art Lab" (hereafter referred to as "Art Lab"), the framework within which *Decorator Crab* was realized, represents an attempt by the museum to respond to the evolving nature of art and its appreciation. *Art Lab* serves as an experimental platform that redefines and extends the museum's function,

reshaping the relationships between artists, audiences, and institutions while creating a space for shared dialogue and reflection. In doing so, it provides a chance to rethink how museums can update themselves in response to societal changes.

### Experiencing the *Decorator Crab*

To convey the essence of likawa Takehiro's *Decorator Crab*, I will recount my own experience in detail.

Upon stepping out of the elevator on the fourth floor, visitors are welcomed by *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*, a giant feline whose gaze marks the beginning of the experience. Moving toward what seems to be the exhibition space, visitors encounter a striking situation: the usual museum rules—"do not touch" and "do not move"—are immediately cast aside. Multiple visitors actively engage with the artwork by touching and moving objects, deepening their experience. Visitors push a large, brown, wall-like structure blocking the way. As the wall moves, a glass-walled room with a door on the left comes into view. Inside, a narrow space unfolds with a bright green floor and a towering yellow wall on the right. On the

floor lies a sports bag, while a daypack hangs from the front wall. Atop a side table near the wall, there is a handle. When visitors turn the handle, a rope mechanism creaks into motion, slightly lifting the daypack. Observing from behind the handle-turner, one notices the simultaneous movement of the sports bag. However, the person turning the handle remains unaware of this relation. The experience varies greatly depending on the role one assumes and who one shares the experience with, as well as the timing of that encounter. Each participant's presence and actions influence the artwork and the experience it creates.

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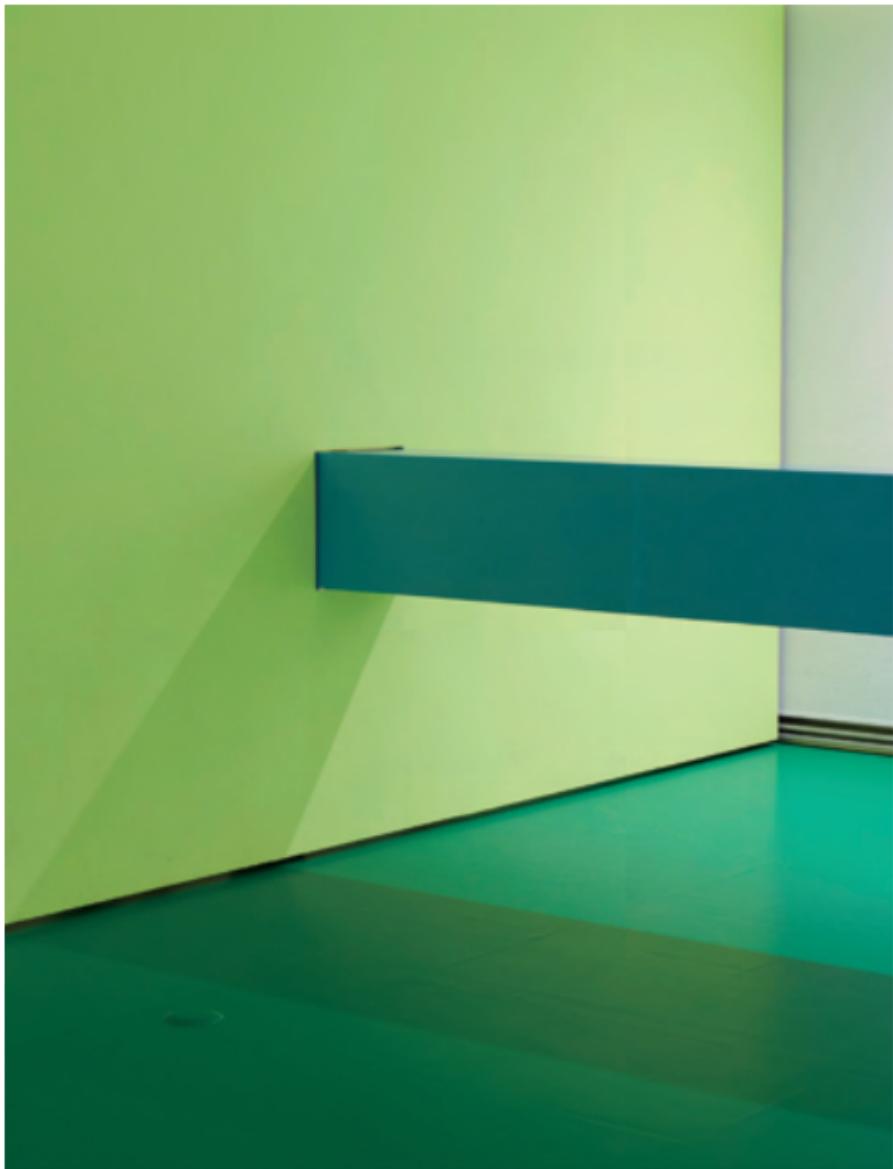
Visitors are then hinted that the massive yellow wall can move, prompting them to push it. As the wall gradually shifts, the previously narrow space expands into a larger room. When the wall reaches the end of its track, visitors realize that the room they were in is just a small part of a much larger space.

They are then prompted to push the brown wall, which had initially served as the corridor's entrance, further inward. As they do, a hidden space emerges behind the left side of the yellow

wall, revealing a second entrance. The yellow wall divides the large room into two sections.

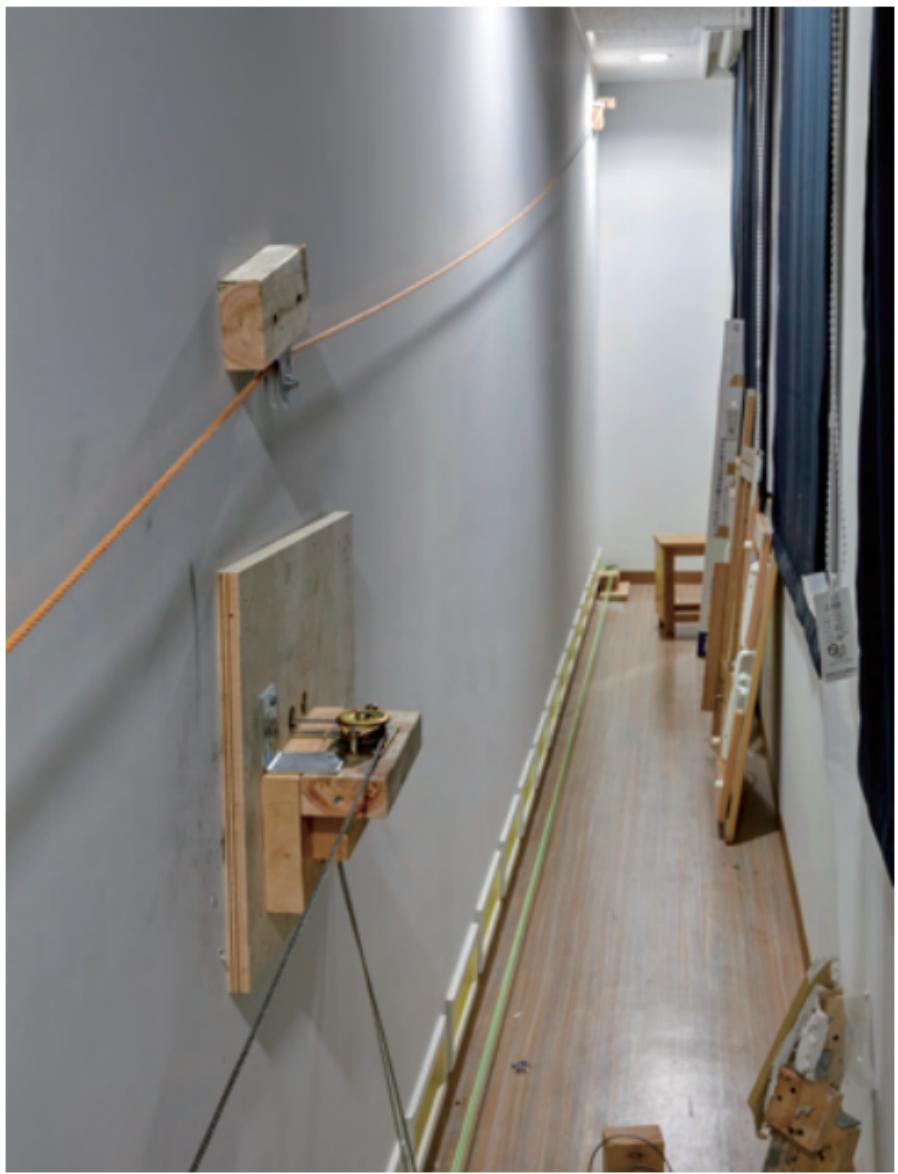
Exploring the now smaller room, visitors find a guidebook, which explains that the installation continues outdoors, revealing that what they have experienced so far is just a fraction of the expansive work.

Stepping outside the museum, few visitors may notice the backpacks and duffel bags hanging at various points on the building's façade—after all, not many people look up. Those who experienced likawa's work indoors, however, will immediately recognize these bags as part of the installation. As if solving a puzzle, the connections between various components gradually become clear. While observing the suspended bags, visitors notice that they begin to move up and down. These outdoor bags are connected to the handles inside the museum, and their movement is activated only when someone turns a handle indoors. In other words, unless a handle is being operated inside, the outdoor bags remain still. The person turning the handle cannot see the outdoor bags in motion, while passersby who happen to witness the moving bags outdoors may see them without realizing their connection to the



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Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: Iikawa Takehiro



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

museum or the indoor artwork.

The audience envisioned for likawa's work ranges from broad to highly specific. The phrase included in the project's title, "Expecting Spectators," signals that this installation does not solely define its audience as visitors who come to the museum to view the artwork<sup>2</sup>. Just as the decorator crab does not mimic humans specifically, this work acknowledges that its audience might include someone entirely unaware of the museum's activities who happens to notice the moving bags and unintentionally becomes a viewer.

likawa's perspective also extends to individuals such as parking lot attendants, cleaners, and building managers who engage with the museum daily in non-audience roles. Among them, someone might find unexpected joy in the artwork while going about their routine duties. At the same time, the work establishes a structure in which even the most dedicated viewer is incapable of fully experiencing it without the involvement of others. By actively creating a power dynamic where neither the audience, the artist, nor the museum can entirely control the

work, it establishes a condition in which no individual can dominate the artwork or its experience. In doing so, it challenges the biopolitical tendencies of museums to exert control and investigates the evolving power structures and balances between museums, artists, and audiences.

### Realizing the Project

This ambitious and bold project could only have been realized at a public museum in Japan thanks to the understanding and cooperation of many individuals and institutions. The fact that it was brought to fruition fills me with hope. Beyond the enthusiasm and effort of the artist and curatorial team, the project's success relied on the support of museum staff, security personnel, building maintenance teams, and cleaning crews—all of whom played essential roles in making it possible and likely found some enjoyment in the process. On social media, likawa frequently encouraged viewers with phrases like, "Don't give up on coming [to the exhibition]!" This work is, indeed, the culmination of countless acts of perseverance. Museums that house collections aim to maintain stable environments and, as much

as possible, isolate themselves physically from external influences. It must have been no small challenge to create a sense of continuity between the indoor and outdoor elements of this project. For the artist and curator to overcome resistance and gain support for the project, they needed to understand the museum's structure more deeply than anyone else and engage in extensive negotiations with all involved parties<sup>3</sup>. This process often demands more time than one might imagine.

Anyone who has experience organizing art projects, even outside the context of museums, can easily imagine the complexity and challenges involved—enough to make one seriously consider abandoning the effort at some point. Similar to how Christo and Jeanne-Claude's monumental wrapping works required exhaustive negotiations and cooperation, likawa and the curator persisted through a long and arduous journey without giving up.

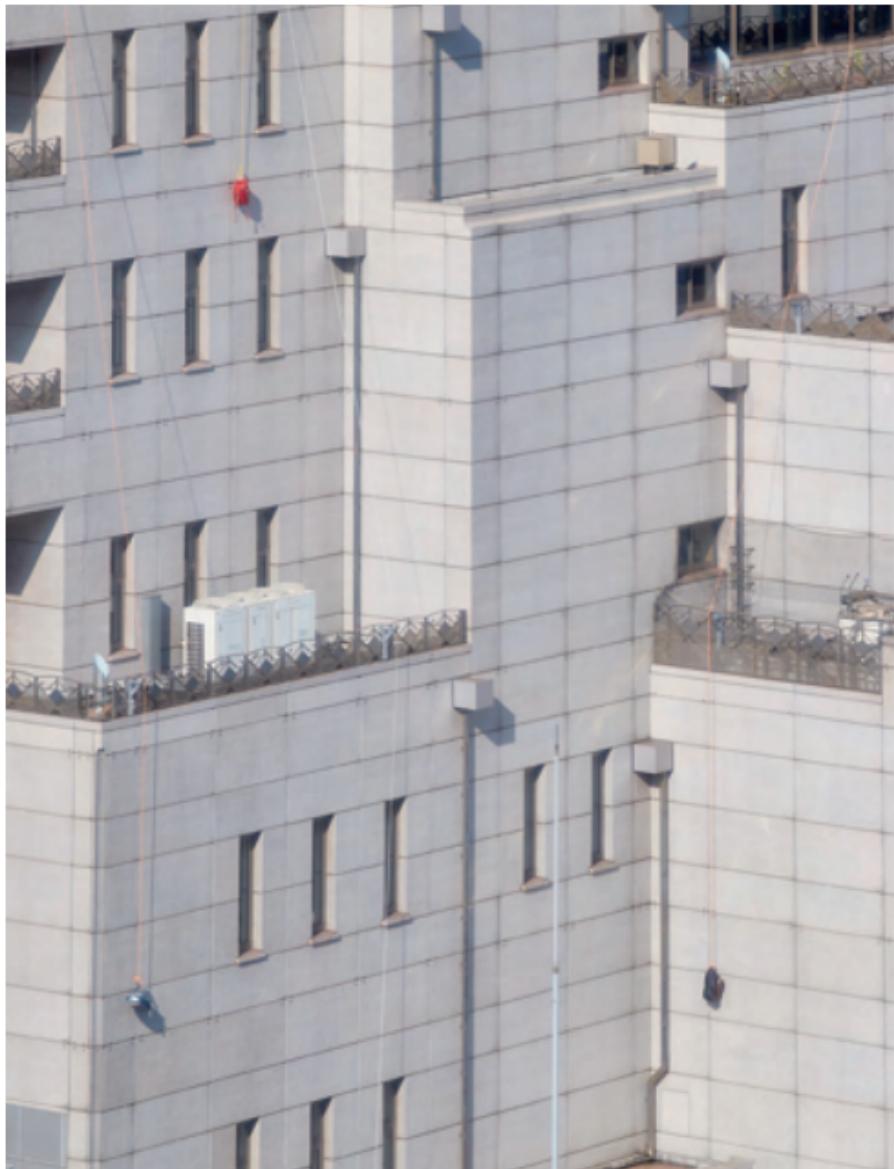
The *Decorator Crab* project exemplifies a process-oriented activity that defines the entirety of the work, including the act of making itself. In such a project framework, both the production process and the artist's expression, as well as the

audience's experience, hold equal importance. The people involved in production span a wide range and must engage in thoughtful and flexible decision-making tailored to the time and place. As Boris Groys notes regarding the multiplicity of authorship in contemporary art production, artists (and curators) function like film directors, orchestrating the entire production process and constructing a shared experiential space (whether it be installations, performances, or lecture performances) through extensive negotiations and collaborations with many participants.<sup>4</sup>

The name "Tsukurikake Art Lab" is well-suited to this project. True to its name, it actively embraces and affirms the concept of being "unfinished," serving as an experimental space that demonstrates and shares the act of "making" itself. It could be described as educational outreach (learning), participatory art, or even a "pro-ject," derived from "pro" (forward) and "ject" (to throw), in the sense of propelling something forward. It represents a collective body of activities that open up new experiences, serving as a platform for sharing these experimental endeavors with diverse audiences.

What is noteworthy about this project is that likawa “spent nearly all his time at the museum.” From late May to early October, he lived in Chiba and commuted to the museum for approximately four months. The *Art Lab* served as both an experimental space and a studio for him. While it is standard for artists to “be present” in artist-in-residence programs, it is rarely the case for exhibitions or workshops. Usually, the mere presence of an artist is not the goal of a museum program. However, in this iteration of the *Art Lab*, having the artist present was essential for the project’s progression<sup>5</sup>. Interactions with likawa, who was always present at the museum, offered opportunities for both visitors and museum staff to discover both value and beauty in the act of creation itself. Thus, likawa’s *Decorator Crab* is not a completed product but rather an ongoing activity that intentionally remains unfinished and invites contributions from others. Even during my visit, adjustments were being made to the installation.

Projects of this nature, where the process of creation itself is developed and shaped on-site, require constant care and maintenance. The artist’s presence itself becomes a form of care,



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

prompting daily attentiveness and contributions from museum staff and volunteers. Through this project, the museum seemed to transform into a space where diverse people mutually cared for and supported one another.<sup>6</sup>

### **Preservation and Reenactment of the Project**

Museums are sometimes likened to resting places<sup>7</sup>, serving as spaces for the eternal preservation of art—spaces where works are cared for and maintained. At the same time, they also function as contact zones that foster, inspire, and enable meaningful interactions between people and objects. Museums equipped with these dual roles bear the responsibility of preserving and actively engaging with site-specific projects rooted in local history, context, and the museum's unique environment.

In this light, the *Art Lab* could serve as a starting point for rethinking how project-based works are collected, preserved, and utilized.

The *Decorator Crab* is intrinsically dependent on the architecture and setting of the Chiba City Museum of Art, making it a site-specific project unique to this museum. How the museum chooses to embrace this project and preserve it

for the future raises fundamental questions about the core, classical functions of museums—preservation, collection, and utilization. This project should not simply fade into history as a transient event but should be preserved, handed down, and potentially reenacted in some form. Such projects might be easier to execute outside a museum. However, the fact that this project was realized within the constraints of a museum dedicated to preservation is profoundly significant. It requires the collective pooling of wisdom and efforts to determine how to document and transmit the experience of the work. If carefully preserved, this activity, born here and now, could be passed down and revived in forms like reenactments, ensuring that audiences 20, 50, or even more years from now experience expressions that respond to the spirit of their times.

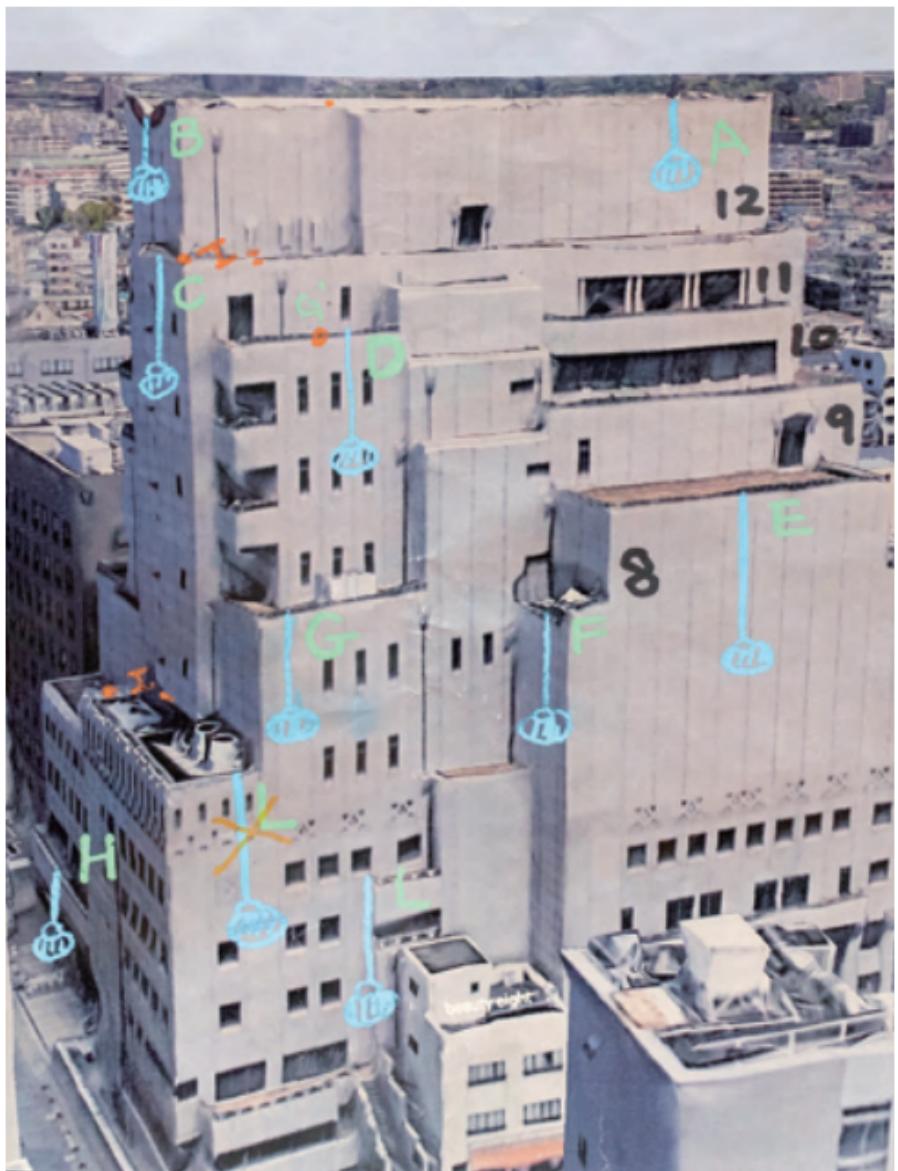
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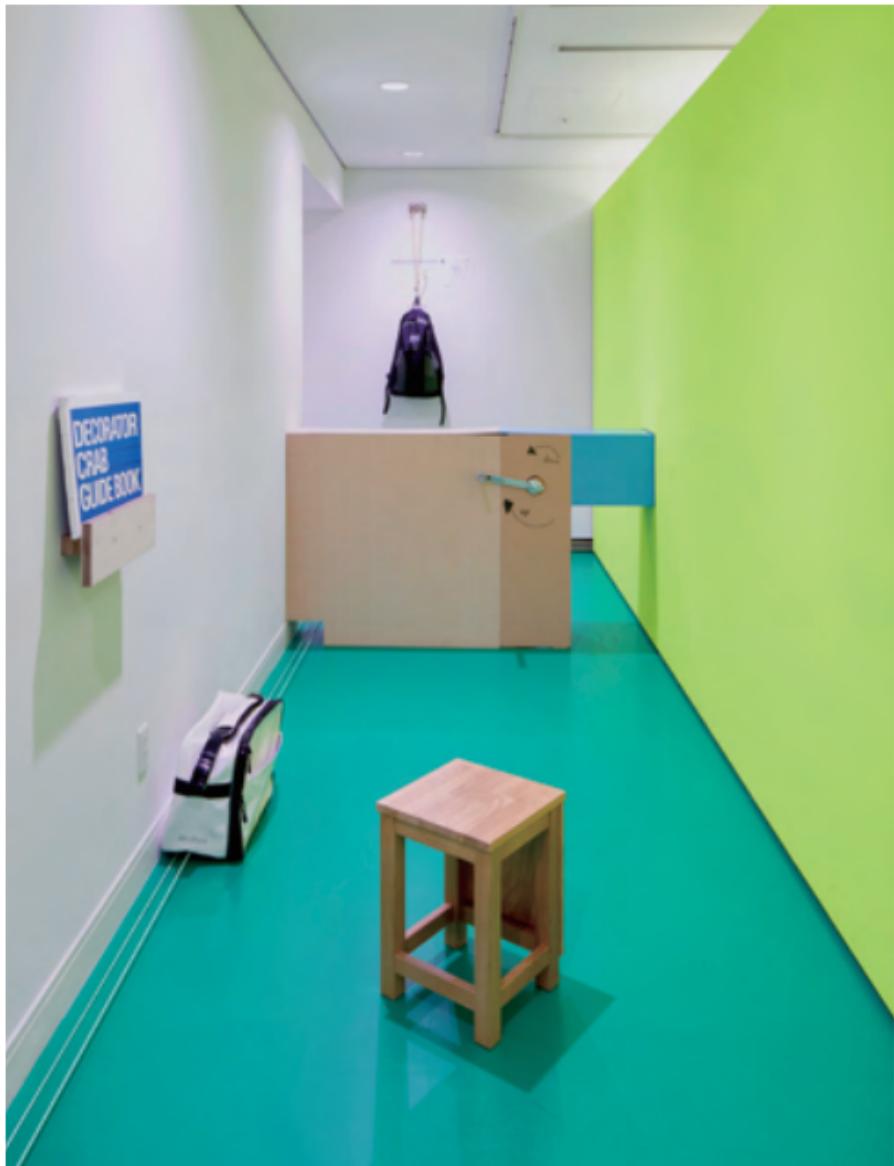
1. Okada Atsushi, "Museum and Bapticon", in "Ars and Bios", Heibonsha, 2006.
2. For the title and origin of *Decorator Crab*, which is also referenced in the exhibition title, see the exhibition overview.
3. Refer to the artist interview with likawa Takehiro and Hatai

Megumi published in this booklet.

4. Boris Groys, translated by Ishida Keiko, Saiki Katsuhiro, Sanbonmatsu Tomoyo, and Tsunoo Yoshinobu, "Multiple Authors", in "Art Power", Gendai Kikaku Shitsu, 2017.
5. Rather than emphasizing the artist's presence in all programs of Tsukurikake Art Lab, it can be said that in this case, likawa Takehiro himself chose a project format that was made possible by his physical presence.
6. The etymology of "curator" derives from the Latin word *curare* (to care).
7. Theodor W. Adorno referred to museums as the tombs of artworks, drawing on phonetic similarities between "museum" and "mausoleum". See Theodor W. Adorno, "Valéry-Proust Museum", in "Prismen - Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" translated by Otohira Miura et al., Chikuma Gakugei Bunko, 1996.
8. Hatai Megumi, the curator in charge of this project, previously organized a large-scale exhibition by the art collective [mé] titled "Obviously, no one can make heads nor tails" at the same museum in 2019. This project also awaits examination regarding how and what aspects of it will be preserved and handed down by the museum.



Plan Drawing: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro

# Artist Interview

As the exhibition approached its final stages, we conducted an interview with invited artist likawa Takehiro, reflecting on the evolving nature of the project, which continued to change even while on public display. Together with the museum's curatorial staff, we explored the role and potential of the Art Lab in shaping the future of the Chiba City Museum of Art.

Spanning over four months of residency and production, likawa developed a dynamic installation that utilized the unique architectural features of the museum. In this conversation, we revisited the journey of how this work came to life.

[Written and edited by Sugihara Tamaki]

## New Forms of “Change” Created with the Audience

likawa: When I first heard about Tsukurikake Art Lab from you during my solo exhibition *Decorator Crab – Arrangement, Adjustment, Movement* held in Amagasaki in 2018, I thought, “This project is

tailor-made for me!" I've always found the negotiations, exchanges, and trial-and-error processes during production just as interesting—if not more so—than the finished artwork itself. The way the Art Lab focuses on those aspects, while also allowing room for failure, really resonated with me.

**Hatai:** From the very beginning, you were one of the candidate artists for the project. In the Amagasaki solo exhibition, you presented an installation where the audience could actively engage with and alter the walls of the exhibition space, creating change. The idea that a work of art is only completed when the audience interacts with it aligned perfectly with what I wanted to explore through the Art Lab.

—The current Art Lab exhibition similarly unfolded as the audience moved objects and walls within the space, creating new situations.

**Ikawa:** This type of exhibition began with the Amagasaki solo show. Initially, I had planned to construct a structure as large as the exhibition room itself, making it completely inaccessible to

the audience. Inspired by comedic television skits where a small room is filled to bursting with balloons, I thought it would be fascinating to create a room the same size as another room, disrupting spatial perception and creating a sense of disorientation. However, when I visited the venue—a typical community center with a familiar and unremarkable atmosphere—I decided instead to create a space where the audience could actively engage, adding layers of information step by step. At that time, I was also feeling a bit disillusioned with conventional exhibitions.

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—Disillusioned in what way?

Ikawa: I just felt, “These works could draw viewers in so much more.” There are plenty of artists creating excellent works in flat or video mediums, but I found myself craving a deeper level of immersion in art. For example, *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*, which also appeared in the Art Lab, was a work that fully embraced that direction. It’s huge, adorable, yet impossible to capture in a single photograph. It confuses the audience, compelling them to think more deeply.



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

Around that time, I became more interested in creating works with that kind of impact.

**Hatai:** Another reason I wanted likawa to participate in the Art Lab was that I felt he could explore new forms of “change.” When we present the concept of “spaces that change with audience participation” to artists, it often results in works where changes accumulate over the course of the exhibition.

—For example, pieces that start with a blank slate and gradually fill up through audience interaction?

**Hatai:** Exactly. Those kinds of works are fascinating in their own way, but with the Art Lab, I wanted to showcase different types of change as well. For instance, what if the artist responded to the audience’s comments or actions over time, altering the space in turn? That kind of dynamic unfolded repeatedly in your project.

**likawa:** The audience provided so much input. For example, there was a process where the staff used poles to reset the brown wall, which had

been moved by the audience, back to its original position. Surprisingly, many people found even that process interesting. Looking back, I realized it might have been better to leave that task entirely to the audience. I also received numerous suggestions that made me think, "That's what I should have done!" Honestly, during the four months I was in Chiba, from late May to October, it felt like I attempted three exhibitions and failed at two of them (laughs).

### **Expanding the Museum Staff's Capacity**

—How did you come up with the bold idea of connecting the fourth floor and the rooftop with ropes so that the audience could move suspended bags along the museum's outer walls by turning a winch?

likawa: The Art Lab space on the fourth floor is quite simple, but from the very beginning, I was struck by the museum's terraced façade—it seemed so "peculiar" to me. Such a design is rare for museums in Japan, so I thought, "Why not make use of it?" That led me to recall a workshop I held in Ibaraki, where I connected the outdoors and a school building using ropes to create a



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: Sakanaka Takafumi



Art Lab 04: Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectators, 2021  
Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: Sakanaka Takafumi

large architectural drawing.

That project remains one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had. It allowed me to engage with multiple spaces simultaneously, both physically and mentally—like sensing the music room from the gymnasium. It reminded me of the playful charm of a string-and-cup phone, physically connecting “here” and “there.” I realized this approach could also work with the museum's unique exterior.

—Weren't you worried about the risks involved in using the exterior walls, Hatai-san?

**Hatai:** Not at all—I thought it was absolutely brilliant (laughs).

**Iikawa:** I was relieved to hear such a positive reaction (laughs). Actually, I had previously experimented with a piece involving moving bags at Takamatsu Art Museum, where visitors could follow exposed ropes through the hallways.

**Hatai:** At Takamatsu, the ropes were visible, which made following them part of the fun. But at Chiba City Museum of Art, the ropes are hidden,

which makes imagining the connection even more intriguing. Plus, the height of the building made this project something that could only be done here. Instead of dismissing it as “too irregular to attempt,” we focused on figuring out how to overcome the challenges to make it happen.

—What were the main challenges in realizing the project?

**Hatai:** The biggest issue was safety. This included both legal considerations and psychological concerns related to its appearance. Physically, the structure was completely safe, but ensuring that people felt reassured on a psychological level required a lot of discussion.

**likawa:** For this project, I started my residency in late May to prepare for the exhibition opening in July. By the time I arrived, it felt like the museum staff already had a good sense of what to expect. There was this attitude of, “That guy’s coming in May to try something new,” which made it much easier for me to settle in and work.

**Hatai:** Naturally, there was some resistance from

staff regarding the additional risks and workload. I made a conscious effort to maintain clear and respectful communication with each department. However, just before the opening, a concerned party raised safety issues, which caused a delay in the project's unveiling. But when we invited them to see the installation in person, they were reassured after viewing it.

**likawa:** That exchange actually led to the incorporation of even safer features into the project.

**Hatai:** It was a challenging process, but these kinds of efforts are exactly what the Art Lab is all about.

—It seems like this project also worked to expand the psychological capacity of the museum staff.

**likawa:** At first, the facilities department was quite strict, but by the end, they greeted me with smiles (laughs). I think the fact that I arrived well in advance—about a month and a half before the exhibition—helped convey my commitment. It's not common for an artist to be present that early,

so they might have thought, “Wow, this guy really wants to make this happen” (laughs). The security and maintenance staff were also incredibly kind and cooperative.

—That's fascinating. Usually, artists primarily interact with curators, but this project required trust and cooperation from facilities and security staff, whose routines were directly affected.

**likawa and Hatai:** Exactly.

**likawa:** There was always a chance they could have outright refused to participate.

—You had to turn that refusal into a “let's try it” mentality.

**Hatai:** I believe that process is also what the Art Lab is all about. It's obvious, but there are many people supporting museums beyond just curators. Facilities staff, security teams, city officials, and foundation representatives—everyone involved contributes to the museum's vitality. I see the Art Lab as a kind of vaccine that

strengthens the collective energy of the museum.

—Connecting the exhibition room to the rooftop must have been a logistical challenge as well.

**likawa:** Yes, issues like security and airtightness meant we couldn't just leave windows open or create new openings. But for me, the physical sensation of resistance while turning the winch was an essential part of the experience, so I was determined to create a physical connection. While exploring possibilities, a facilities staff member pointed out the one workaround, and that's how we managed to make it happen.

**Hatai:** Most of us, myself included, had never even been on the museum's rooftop before, so we didn't really know what it was like. Through this project, I think the staff's understanding of the museum expanded, both physically and psychologically. Of course, fear and uncertainty naturally accompany unfamiliar experiences, but once the vision started to take shape, there was a clear moment when everyone shifted into a mode of cooperation.

likawa: Exactly. That shift was crucial. I think spending so much time at the museum helped me convey my understanding of its spaces better than anyone else, which in turn helped gain the trust of the staff. Since we were all stepping into the unknown, at the very least, I needed to fully understand the museum and be able to envision it clearly. That was the only way I could propose plans that people would genuinely want to support.

### Designing Information and Trusting the Audience's Perception

—Your works seem to consistently engage with the concept of “delayed information.” For example, in this project, participants only realize the floor’s color after moving the wall, or they learn that turning the winch connects to the outside later on. Is there a specific background to this approach to presenting information?

likawa: The biggest influence is probably my previous work in advertising. In advertising, the balance of how much information to reveal is crucial. Simply presenting everything at once isn’t always effective. Instead, gradually revealing



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Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro



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Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: ikawa Takehiro

information, as I'm doing here, can capture and sustain interest.

In museums, people tend to carefully observe the artworks but often gloss over the building's exterior or hallways. My approach counters this tendency by making participants realize later, "This experience actually started with the building's façade." In a way, I'm leveraging the preconception of museums as "places to view art" to provoke this delayed realization.

—You're essentially flipping the audience's expectation that "artworks" and "what should be viewed" are confined to the exhibition rooms.

likawa: Exactly. Also, I used to work on arcade game development teams, which might have influenced me. In an arcade, we had to design games that could stand out among countless competitors and keep players engaged.

Techniques like guiding players' attention or rewarding them for completing a task feel very similar to engaging audiences in art installations—drawing them in, directing their focus, and encouraging them to think.

Hatai: Some people might find staggered information “inconvenient.” However, I prefer this approach because overexplaining a work’s intent upfront risks reducing the relationship between the artist, museum, and audience to a fixed dynamic where one side gives, and the other passively receives. At the Art Lab, we aim to create experiences that encourage audiences to actively discover things for themselves.

—You often say that what you value most is the impulse sparked when someone discovers something—the “aha” moment of noticing something in daily life.

likawa: That’s right. It’s subtle, but I’m not simply trying to recreate the thing that people notice. For example, if someone realizes, “Oh, this is how the lights are arranged in this room,” my aim isn’t to present the arrangement itself. Instead, I want to convey the emotional impulse or mental movement that occurs in the moment of realization—that untranslatable, fleeting response itself.

—The audience’s interaction with *Mr. Kobayashi*

the *Pink Cat*, including the reactions it generated on social media, also fits into this context of sharing the joy of discovery.

**likawa:** The *Decorator Crab* series, including the pink cat, originated after I watched a video of people excitedly recounting their sighting of a decorator crab. Their enthusiasm was palpable, yet it didn't come across through the screen. I've always felt that photos and videos aren't well-suited for sharing the excitement of discovery. That's why I want to create works that capture and convey that excitement in real, lived experiences.

—Were there any memorable moments of communication with the audience during this project?

**likawa:** One surprising moment was when a middle school student told me, “The way you reveal information is so cool.” I couldn’t help but think, “Who are you?” (laughs), but I was genuinely thrilled to hear that. On the other hand, how to manage the flow of information for promotional purposes is always a challenge.

For this exhibition, the fact that it connects indoor and outdoor spaces is one of its major “selling points,” but revealing that detail in advance risks diluting the surprise and emotional impact. Describing the act of moving a bag with a winch might sound straightforward, but it doesn’t truly “work” as an experience unless it triggers an emotional reaction in the moment.

**Hatai:** That approach reflects your trust in the audience. It shows your belief that they will discover things for themselves and connect the dots in their minds. That trust in the audience is what makes you such a compelling artist.

#### **“Tsukurikake Art Lab” as Museum Longevity and Care**

—In an age where avoiding risks is prioritized, I think it’s remarkable that you were able to involve so many people at the museum to realize this exhibition.

**Ikawa:** I think I’m part of a generation that still holds high expectations for museums. When I was younger, I visited Otake Shinro’s legendary *Zen-kei* exhibition at the Museum of

Contemporary Art Tokyo in 2006. The sheer scale was overwhelming—enough to make you consider quitting as an artist. But at the same time, it showed what could be achieved when a curator collaborates with a true museum. That experience set a high standard for me, shaping my belief in museums as spaces where dreams can be fulfilled.

**Hatai:** I'm glad to hear that, but I always feel a sense of crisis about museums. Museums are part of society, and to survive, they need to adapt like amoebas to societal changes. I see the Art Lab as an experimental platform that is essential for museums to remain alive and relevant.

Many of the projects I plan include unprecedented elements or challenges. That's because I believe that the burdens these projects place on museums are precisely what allow museums to grow and evolve, helping them survive into the future.

—In a sense, it's a form of training.

**Hatai:** Exactly. I'm not sure if this is the best analogy, but there's a phenomenon in biology

called apoptosis, where certain cells actively die off to help the organism survive better. This “programmed cell death” is a form of renewal. Similarly, I feel that if museums don’t undergo their own renewal processes, they risk becoming obsolete.

Experimental projects undeniably place a burden on the museum and require a lot of careful consideration and preparation. But by embracing a little bit of “dying” in this way, we can ultimately help the museum live longer and thrive.

likawa: That’s a very producer-like way of thinking (laughs).

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Hatai: It comes from love—I love museums. But because of that love, I sometimes feel the need to “injure” them a bit and then help them recover stronger. The side effects might be tough, but they make the museum more resilient and enduring. That’s how I express my love for museums.

likawa: I think your approach is showing real results.



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Chiba City Museum of Art, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



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Hatai: The fact that you felt the museum was ready to accommodate you when you arrived at Chiba City Museum of Art is, I think, proof of that.

Ikawa: If I had been the first artist in the Art Lab, I doubt we could have achieved a project of this scale.

Hatai: Exactly. This is part of a cumulative strengthening process, and I believe the museum has become even more resilient as a result of this project. Today, a visitor told me, "We're rooting for you," and that was incredibly encouraging. It's not just about my personal ventures—Art Lab is an expression of care and love for the museum.

Ikawa: From an artist's perspective, this was one of the happiest periods of my life. It's rare to spend several months in one place, interacting closely with both visitors and museum staff. It was challenging, and there was a lot of work to do, but being able to focus entirely on creating new works was incredibly rewarding. I gained so much from this experience—both for myself and for the future projects I'll tackle.

# May You Encounter a Crab Someday, Somewhere —When Belief Takes Shape

Hatai Megumi (Curator, Chiba City Museum of Art)

As you step off the elevator, your eyes are immediately drawn to the vivid fluorescent pink of *Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*. Beyond its towering figure, with ears nearly brushing the ceiling, you finally spot the entrance to the exhibition tucked behind a brown wall. Inside, you're greeted by a large yellow wall, seemingly heavier than the brown one you just passed. You might find yourself considering whether to ask a nearby visitor to help you push it together. At the back of the room, turning a handle produces a rhythmic clicking sound as the winch spins, causing a bag suspended in front of you to move up and down. Perhaps some visitors wondered what might happen if they ignored the "Stop Here" markings and kept turning the handle.

This project, centered on the theme of “Enjoying with the Senses,” was not only a series of events and interactions but also a form of direct communication with the artist himself.

Throughout the exhibition, likawa continuously revised the space in response to real-time audience reactions. These ongoing adjustments transformed the venue and extended his residency to over four months.

While the space evolved, certain principles remained constant. For example, the dynamic mechanisms that made use of the museum’s architecture encouraged discovery and left much to the audience’s imagination. This approach reflected likawa’s commitment to entrusting the audience’s sense of curiosity and creativity.

It wasn’t a detached stance of “it’s fine if some don’t notice.” Rather, he sincerely hoped that no one would miss his work, even as he upheld the belief that visitors should have the opportunity to discover, imagine, and carry their impulses home with them. This ongoing act of “adjustment” was born from his hope. His balance between guiding and letting go represented both his message to the audience and his trust in them.

Tsukurikake Art Lab aspires to be a space where



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everyone who engages with it—whether by working, visiting, or participating—continues to reflect on the museum in their own way. It seeks to create a site where interactions foster unexpected transformations, respecting each individual's history while nurturing mutual connections.

In the process of rethinking and reconstructing existing frameworks, contradictions and conflicts inevitably arose. However, likawa's steadfast resolve to "never give up" remained consistent throughout. He has embraced his role as the "decorator crab," continuing to persist through challenges and struggles in his creative journey—and he will continue to do so moving forward. Artistic expressions always yearn to be noticed, quietly hiding in plain sight, holding their breath. If you ever encounter a "yellow wall" someday, somewhere, I hope you won't overlook the sense of oddity it brings. Instead, take a step forward, engage with it, and push or pull it with your own hands. I believe that when these moments of discovery seep through our senses, one by one, the world will begin to transform—gently, but profoundly.

**Exhibition Period: July 14–  
September 10, 2023**

**Venue: Kirishima Open-Air  
Museum [Kagoshima Prefecture]**

Takashima Megumu (Critic of fine and performing arts,  
Researcher at Kyoto City University of Arts, Art Resource  
Research Center)

How can one imagine “what is happening beyond the wall”? Or, even if no one notices, can actions be directed toward an uncertain “beyond”? How might one envision the operation of an alternative system that parasitically runs within an existing, rigid system and find ways to participate in its workings? Iikawa Takehiro’s work, while actively engaging the audience with its pop aesthetics and humor, constantly questions the omnipotence of vision, raising these suggestive inquiries.

This exhibition is a large-scale solo show by Iikawa, following previous presentations at the Chiba City Museum of Art (2021), Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (2022), and the Hakone Open-Air Museum (2022–2023). In

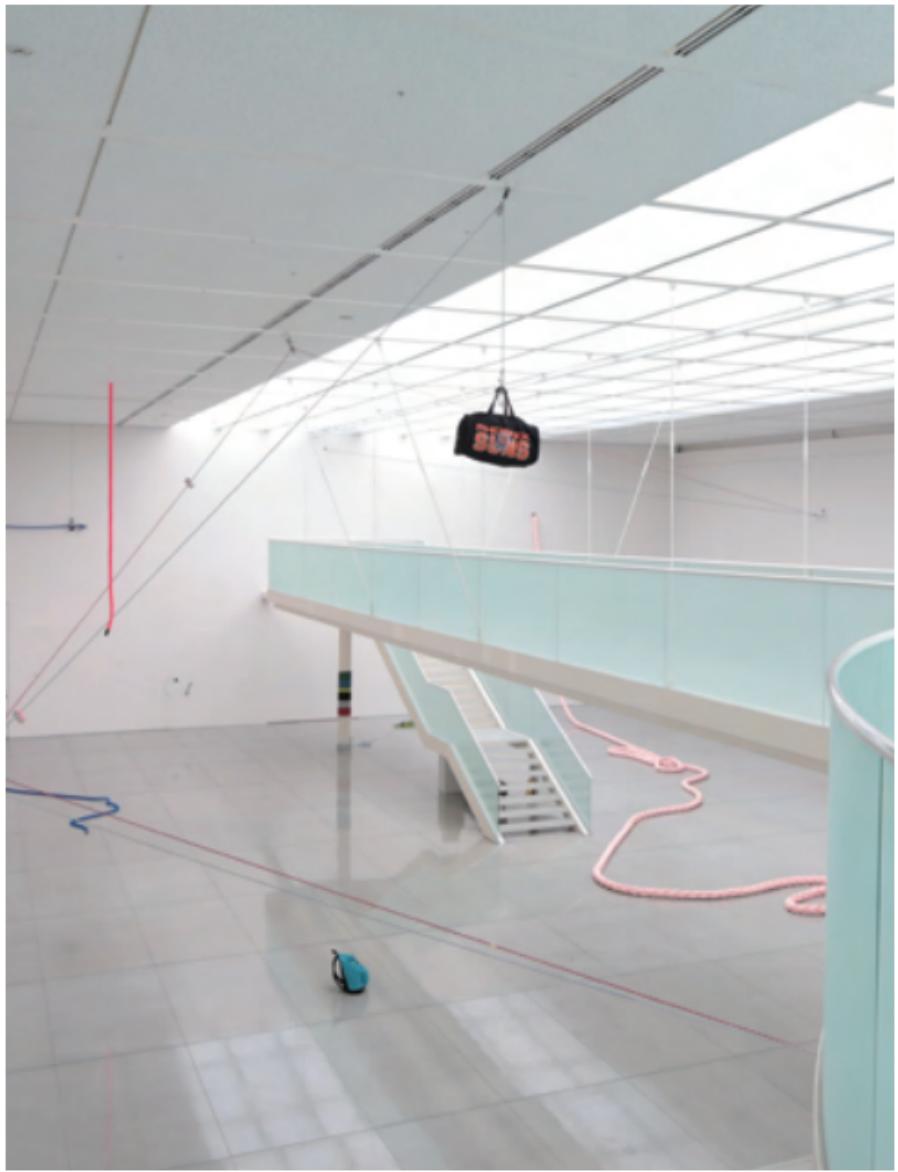
addition to the galleries, the exhibition extends into the expansive grounds dotted with outdoor sculptures. Highlights include the massive three-dimensional piece *Decorator Crab – Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat* (2007–present), partly obscured by buildings and trees; *Decorator Crab – Very Heavy Bag* (2010–present), which looks like a forgotten item but is too heavy to lift; and an updated version of *Decorator Crab – Expecting Spectator* (2019–present), where turning a handle causes ropes to move and triggers new phenomena somewhere in the exhibition space.

Before entering the museum, colorful, thick ropes stretch across the entrance lawn and lead up to the rooftop. Inside, another thick rope guides visitors into the exhibition space. At first glance, the gallery appears empty, but colorful ropes hang from walls and ceilings. Like a game of tug-of-war, pulling on these ropes makes them continuously emerge from holes in the walls. It's that simple. A single person cannot pull the thickest ropes, prompting organically spontaneous collaboration among visitors. When someone exclaims, "Wow, it's moving!" you turn to see a rope being drawn back into the hole on its



Decorator Crab – Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat, 2023

Kirishima Open-Air Museum, Kagoshima, Japan Photo: liikawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Pulling Time, 2023

Kirishima Open-Air Museum, Kagoshima, Japan Photo: likawa Takehiro



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Decorator Crab – Pulling Time, 2023

Kirishima Open-Air Museum, Kagoshima, Japan Photo: Iikawa Takehiro

own. Yet, it is unclear whether this is the rope you pulled or one being pulled by another person from elsewhere. Was the rope you moved witnessed by another “someone,” or did it move unnoticed?

Turning a handle mounted on the wall produces a grinding sound and a heavy sensation in your hand. Ropes are tautly strung across the walls and ceilings of the exhibition space, suspending sports bags, while backpacks dangle from the outer walls. However, which handle controls the up-and-down movement remains a mystery. On another outer wall, letters formed by a combination of pulleys and ropes subtly shift as the ropes are wound in, and their colors gradually change, driven by the audience turning a handle inside.

In the outdoor space, a fluorescent pink tube stretches across the vast grounds as if to bisect them. Titled *Decorator Crab – Ruler for Future Cats*, the work invites viewers to physically imagine the colossal scale of a theoretical “*Mr. Kobayashi the Pink Cat*,” measuring 400 meters in length, 270 meters in height, and 50 meters in depth.

Let's consider likawa's references and compare his work with artists like Umeda Tetsuya, Kaneiji Teppei, and Kato Tsubasa. In Umeda's installations, viewers also witness "something (unexpectedly) moving" within the exhibition space, but the "mechanism" is physical phenomena such as falling water, gravity, or the spinning of makeshift mirror balls and turntables. In contrast, in likawa's work, nothing happens without audience intervention. The "organic fluidity of boundaries between inside and outside created by the traffic of objects through holes" recalls Kaneiji's drawings and video work *tower (MOVIE)* (2009) as well as the derivative performance *tower (THEATER)* (2017). In Kaneiji's "tower" series, objects like tubes, ropes, smoke, balloons (gas), or water (liquid) emerge from the holes of cuboid structures. Still, the boundary of "performers moving things inside versus viewers observing from the outside" is rigidly maintained. On the other hand, in likawa's work, the entire museum becomes a performance apparatus: "When visitors manipulate ropes or handles inside the gallery, objects move outside the 'box.'" This engagement fluidizes the boundaries between inside/outside and viewer/



Decorator Crab – Pulling Time, 2023

Kirishima Open-Air Museum, Kagoshima, Japan Photo: Iikawa Takehiro



Decorator Crab – Measure for My Future Cat, 2023

Kirishima Open-Air Museum, Kagoshima, Japan Photo: liikawa Takehiro

performer. However, the “audience for the performance” remains uncertain; it might culminate in “no audience,” and the “timeline of the performance” is inherently unstable. The new works in this exhibition shift from “turning handles” to “directly pulling ropes.” With the elimination of the handle as an intermediary, the experience becomes more tactile and immersive, liberating viewers from “individual tasks with fixed handles” and encouraging collaborative efforts. The act of “pulling ropes together” evokes Kato Tsubasa’s participatory works. However, in Kato’s case, the act of pulling ropes to “topple structures (= nonsense)” or “raise structures (= post-disaster recovery)” carries explicit meaning. The moment of witnessing the “toppling/raising” together is the ultimate catharsis. Conversely, in likawa’s works, the purpose remains ambiguous or absent, and the audience themselves cannot witness “the moment something moves.” Instead, they may inadvertently cause an “observer” to emerge elsewhere.

Possibly, unable to serve as their own “witness,” participants generate “witnesses” elsewhere instead. likawa’s work, in a dual sense, strips the

audience of their “audiencehood.” Simultaneously, it evokes the imagination of an alternative system operating within the physical systems of a museum, such as air conditioning ducts, electrical networks, and visitor flow paths. The ropes serve as a medium to foster such imagination. While likawa’s work depends on “audiences actively engaging with it,” the ultimate goal is on “activating their imagination.”

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