

Introduction to *Making a Home: Japanese Contemporary Artists in New York* for Educators

In This Exhibition

What is “Japanese contemporary art?” The Japan Society Gallery exhibition *Making a Home* seeks to expand viewers’ concepts of this term by presenting 33 Japanese-born artists who are currently living and working in New York City. Beyond this very broad organizing principle, though, the artists included in this exhibition vary quite widely in terms of:

- self-identification
- how long they have lived in New York
- reasons for leaving Japan
- artistic medium
- artistic style and influences
- generation/stage in their career as an artist

To help the viewer navigate this diverse collection of talents, the exhibition has been divided into several sections, all related to various interpretations of the concept of “making a home,” defined through the experiences of these artists. Many of the works in *Making a Home* are **site-specific** pieces or installations, created by the artists to exist within Japan Society’s space. What follows is a brief description of each of the exhibition’s sections, along with suggested issues that may be explored correlating with each.

Brief Overview of Sections

Building Environments

Works included in this portion are installations; constructed environments within the Japan Society building that enclose, divide or otherwise mediate space.

Related Questions: What are the psychological implications of everyday versus fantastical spaces? How does the impulse to create space relate to the process of moving or immigrating?

Intimacy and Identity

Works in this section deal with constructing identities and raising questions about how we define who we are, as well as how others impose definitions upon us; particularly related to the immigrant experience.

Related Questions: How do our relationships define us? How do we define ourselves? How do these two concepts intersect/remain distinct?

Coping with Loss

Through these works, artists confront loss, both as a distressing event to come to terms with and as an impetus for productive contemplation. Among the specific events referenced are personal loss (for example, the experience of moving to a new place), as well as larger societal loss, recognized in events such as the tragedies of 9/11.

Related Questions: Are difficulties in life fair? Are they necessary?

Meditative Space

Meditation is explored in artwork in this area of the exhibition as both a popular tool as well as the more strictly-defined practice central to Zen Buddhism. These works represent the creation of meditative spaces for visitors, ranging from the surreal to the historical using techniques that alter or focus viewers' perceptions of space.

Related Questions: How does the meditative experience differ from person to person? What are some purposes of meditation?

The Process of Making

For all individuals, the sum of their life experiences informs their choices and actions. For artists, these experiences inform their work. In the case of the artwork contained in this section of the exhibition, pieces reflect their creators' interests in aspects of artistic process evident in the finished work, and, to varying degrees, the performance of creation itself; the act of painstakingly bringing an object into existence.

Related Questions: In what ways do different artists' works capture their processes of creation? What does it mean to create something?

Referencing the Landscape

The landscape of New York City includes its topography, the built environment, and the individuals and groups that populate these spaces. Artists may be inspired by or respond to their environment, but in many ways, the artists included in this section of the exhibition reconceptualize and remake the city landscape through their works.

Related Questions: How is artwork affected by its immediate environment? How are different artists affected by and how do they affect their immediate environment?

List of Artists Included in the Exhibition

ON megumi Akiyoshi
Noriko Ambe
Ei Arakawa
Satoru Eguchi
Ayakoh Furukawa
Tōru Hayashi
Noritoshi Hirakawa
Yoshiaki Kaihatsu
Takahiro Kaneyama
Emiko Kasahara
Misaki Kawai
Miwa Koizumi
Yumi Kōri
Nobuho Nagasawa
Hiroyuki Nakamura
Yoko Ono
Hiroki Ōtsuka
Katsuhiro Saiki
Kyōko Sera
Noriko Shinohara
Ushio Shinohara
Gō Sugimoto
Kunie Sugiura
Hiroshi Sunairi
Mayumi Terada
Yūken Teruya
Yasunao Tone
Momoyo Torimitsu
Aya Uekawa
United Bamboo
Junko Yoda
Toshihisa Yoda
Yōichirō Yoda

Resources for Educators/Older Students

Blohm, Judith M. & Lapinsky, Terri. *Kids Like Me: Voices of the Immigrant Experience*. Boston: Intercultural Press, 2006.

Essays by children and teens describe their experiences acclimating to life in America. Also includes accompanying questions and activities for educators; includes photos and illustrations.

Bode, Janet. *New Kids on the Block: Oral Histories of Immigrant Teens*. London: Franklin Watts, 1989.

In these narratives, teenagers from all over the world talk about their reactions to being immigrants to the United States, highlighting each individual's personal responses.

Danquah, Meri Nana-Ama. *Becoming American: Personal Essays by First Generation Immigrant Women*. New York: Hyperion, 2000.

Essays by women making a home after immigrating to the United States. Provides the perspectives of upper- and middle-class immigrant experiences.

Dublin, Thomas (ed.). *Becoming American, Becoming Ethnic: College Students Explore Their Roots*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996.

These essays were written by college students exploring their ethnic heritage; covering the historical immigrant experiences of their family members, to their reflections on their contemporary lives and efforts to define themselves/be defined.

Foner, Nancy (ed.). *New Immigrants in New York*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.

Essays related to current immigrant groups to New York and how these groups are shaping the city.

Resources for Younger Students

<http://www.wald.bham.wednet.edu/museum/museum1.htm>

A website maintained and written by students and faculty of a public elementary school in Bellingham, Washington. Of particular interest may be "Our Immigration Wing," in which students from the school relay their families' personal experiences as contemporary immigrants to America.

Rosenberg, Maxine. *Making a New Home in America*. New York: William Morrow & Co., 1986.

Young boys and girls talk about immigrating to the United States; a photo-essay.

Say, Allen. *Grandfather's Journey*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.

Caldecott Medal-winning account of the author's grandfather's life in Japan and the United States.

Say, Allen. *Tea with Milk*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999.

Elegantly-illustrated story of a young woman's search for "home."