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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Japan Society  
Presents**

***9000 Paper Balloons***  
**A Contemporary Puppet Theater Piece**  
**Co-created by**  
**Maiko Kikuchi & Spencer Lott**

**Directed by**  
**Aya Ogawa**

**Three Performances Only:**  
**Friday, October 28 – Sunday, October 30**

**Japan Society**  
**(333 East 47<sup>th</sup> Street)**

New York, NY, September 28, 2022 – **Japan Society** presents the U.S. premiere of ***9000 Paper Balloons***, co-created by **Maiko Kikuchi** and **Spencer Lott**, and directed by Brooklyn-based theater-maker **Aya Ogawa**. Inspired by Imperial Japan's stranger-than-fiction secret weapons that floated over America during World War II, *9000 Paper Balloons* is a poetic and eerie puppet theater performance that examines distance — the distance between two friends, between two enemies, two cultures and two generations. New York-based Japanese artist **Maiko Kikuchi** and American puppeteer **Spencer Lott** blend puppetry, animation, diorama and masks as they weave their own family histories into a surreal and visually stunning collage that speaks to the past and the future. ***9000 Paper Balloons*** will have three performances only, **Friday, October 28 – Sunday October 30** at **Japan Society** (333 East 47<sup>th</sup> Street).

Inspired by seldom known and rarely discussed real-life events, this performance aims to collapse the distance between four characters. In this autobiographical bilingual play, Japanese visual artist **Maiko Kikuchi** and American puppeteer **Spencer Lott** each portray themselves as well as their grandfathers. Accompanied by highly stylized visuals, the personal histories of two families, one Japanese and one

American, frame the trajectory of one paper balloon bomb. In this play, audiences witness the fabrication of the balloon in Japan, and its journey across the Pacific Ocean. The balloon survives violent storms and sails over trees along the pacific coast only to crash in the forest outside of a small Oregon town, where an American boy discovers it, to tragic consequences. Kikuchi and Lott create a magical space to reconcile a complicated past and together look to the future. A live in-person Q&A with Kikuchi and Lott takes place following the performance on October 29.

“Distance is definitely a central theme to the play, the distance between our generation and our grandfathers, the difference between America and Japan, the distance between a fighter jet and a paper balloon,” reflects co-creator Spencer Lott. “We know that war capitalizes on that distance, both real and perceived. War is a throughline in our play, but our central question is *how can we collapse the distance between us?* We are witnessing moments in 2022 that remind us that the distance between our generation and the WWII generation may not be all that distant after all.”

Japan Society is excited to present the U.S. live performance premiere, following the successful, extended online run of *9000 Paper Balloons* in fall 2021, presented by HERE, as part of the HERE Artist Residency Program (HARP), which commissions and develops new hybrid works over a two-to-three year period.

### **Tickets & Information:**

**Friday, October 28 at 7:30pm—Followed by a MetLife Meet-the-Artists Reception**

**Saturday, October 29 at 7:30pm—Followed by an artist Q&A**

**Sunday, October 30 at 3:00pm**

Tickets are \$30 / \$24 Japan Society members.

Tickets can be purchased online at [www.japansociety.org/events/9000-paper-balloons](http://www.japansociety.org/events/9000-paper-balloons) or by calling the Box Office at 212-715-1258 (M-F 11:00am – 6:00pm). Japan Society is located at 333 East 47th Street, between First and Second Avenues (accessible by the 4/5/6 at 42nd Street-Grand Central Station or the E at Lexington Avenue and 53rd Street). For more information, call 212-832-1155 or visit <http://www.japansociety.org>

**Maiko Kikuchi** (Co-creator/Performer/Animator, pronouns: she/her/hers) received her MFA in Sculpture from Pratt Institute in 2012. She is a multidisciplinary artist working in illustration, painting, drawing, collage, sculpture, animation and puppetry/ performance. Her object theatre pieces include *Daydream Tutorial* (Work in Progress) as part of Under The Radar Festival 2020 (INCOMING! Program) at The Public Theatre, La MaMa and FiveMyles Gallery, *Pink Bunny* at Japan Society and St. Ann’s Warehouse, *On the Other Side of the Fence* at Dixon Place, *No Need for a Night Light on a Light Night like Tonight* at La MaMa, *Daydream Anthology* at St. Ann’s Warehouse. She co-curates the Object Movement Festival at The Center at West Park in NYC, with Rowan Magee and Justin Perkins and is currently in the HARP program at HERE collaborating with Spencer Lott.

**Spencer Lott** (Co-creator/Puppet Designer/Performer, pronouns: he/him/his) is a puppeteer and director whose credits include *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood* (starring Tom Hanks), *Sesame Street* (HBO/PBS), *The Relationtrip* (Hulu) and *Melvin the Birder* (Amazon Prime). As a consultant, he’s recently worked with HBOMAX, Bleacher Report, Nickelodeon and the LaGuardia School of Performing Arts. Lott is a four-time recipient of the Jim Henson Foundation grants for his original theatrical work including the world premiere of *Blossom* (“vivid”, “lovely, aching scenes...” - *Village Voice*). Lott was the first recipient of the Jim Henson Foundation Puppetry Residency at the Eugene O’Neill Theater Center with collaborator Liz Hara. He has been a Works in Progress Artist at the Children’s Museum of the Arts, and a Guest Artist for Theater Development Fund’s Stage Door program. He is the Associate Artistic Director of Trusty Sidekick Theater Company.

**Aya Ogawa** (Director; pronouns: she/her/hers/they/them/theirs) is a Tokyo-born, Brooklyn-based playwright, director, performer and translator whose work reflects an international viewpoint and utilizes

the stage as a space for exploring cultural identity and the immigrant experience. Cumulatively, all aspects of their artistic practice synthesize their work as an artistic and cultural ambassador, building bridges across cultures to create meaningful exchange amongst artists, theaters and audiences both in the U.S. and in Asia. Their original plays include *The Nosebleed* (Incoming! Under the Radar, 2019, Japan Society, 2021, and Lincoln Center Theater, 2022), *Ludic Proxy* (PlayCo, 2015), *Ludic Proxy: Fukushima* (Japan Society online run, 2021), *Journey to the Ocean* (Foundry Theatre, 2010) and *oph3lia* (HERE, 2008). In 2019, they directed Haruna Lee's Obie Award-winning *Suicide Forest* at The Bushwick Starr and, in 2020, its Off-Broadway remount for Ma-Yi Theater. They have translated over a dozen plays by Toshiki Okada and numerous other contemporary Japanese playwrights into English that have been published and produced in the U.S. and U.K. Most recently, Ogawa finished a critically-acclaimed six-week run of *The Nosebleed* at Lincoln Center Theater. They are currently a resident playwright at New Dramatists, a Usual Suspect at NYTW, and recipient of the President's Award for Performing Arts from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

### **About Japan Society**

Since the inception of the Performing Arts Program in 1953, Japan Society has introduced nearly a 1,000 of Japan's finest performing arts to an extensive American audience. This season, programs span the disciplines of opera, theater, traditional noh, puppetry, dance and more. In Fall 2022, Japan Society kicks off the season with an exclusive artist conversation focused on the North American Premiere of Catapult Opera's reimagining of Yukio Mishima's modern noh play *Hanjo* (September 14). Next, with **9000 Paper Balloons** (October 28 – 30), local creative duo **Maiko Kikuchi** and **Spencer Lott** deploy their singular puppetry styles in a captivating look at a secret weapons program in Imperial Japan that floated across the Pacific during WWII. In November, Japan Society welcomes internationally-known and home-grown puppeteer **Basil Twist**, for a "behind the scenes" talk about his work on Joe Hisaishi and the Royal Shakespeare Company's staging of the beloved Studio Ghibli animated film *My Neighbour Totoro* (November 10). To conclude 2022, **Kita Noh School** returns to NYC with two rarely performed noh plays from their traditional repertoire, *Kotei* and *Makura Jido* (December 1 – 3).

Launching Winter/Spring 2023, Japan Society presents the World Premiere of its opera commission **note to a friend** (January 12 – 15, part of PROTOTYPE Festival 2023), composed by **David Lang** and directed by **Yoshi Oida**, based on some of the last writings of legendary author Ryunosuke Akutagawa, who is regarded as the "father of the Japanese short story." Next up, traditional puppetry master **Koryu Nishikawa V** and New York/Chicago-based puppet artist **Tom Lee** approach esteemed writer Ryunosuke Akutagawa's deteriorating psyche through some of his most famous tales in **AKUTAGAWA** (February 23 – 25). The season rounds out with the annual Play Reading Series, this year featuring feminism-focused *I'm Trying to Understand You, But...* (March 13), written by **Yuri Yamada** and directed by **NJ Agwuna** (March 13); and a work-in-progress dance piece titled **Extinction Rituals** by Brooklyn-based and butoh-inspired ensemble **LEIMAY** (June 9 – 10).

**Japan Society** is the premier organization connecting Japanese arts, culture, business, and society with audiences in NYC and around the world. In over 100 years of work, the Society has inspired generations by establishing itself as a pioneer in supporting international exchanges in arts and culture, business and policy, as well as education between Japan and the U.S. This year, Japan Society is celebrating its heritage through the 50th anniversary of its our landmark building, designed by the late architect Junzo Yoshimura, with the launch of a new distinct modern logo and visual identity.

Since the inception of Japan Society Performing Arts Program, the Program has brought 1000+ productions of and inspired by Japan to audiences in NYC and beyond through North American tours organized by Japan Society. Programs range from the traditional arts to contemporary theater, dance and music. Since the establishment of the Performing Arts Endowment in 2005, the Society also commissions non-Japanese artists to create Japan-related new works through fostering cross-cultural collaboration that has become part of its important mission.

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**Support for 2022-2023 Performing Arts Season**

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