

Coexisting with Nature. Ama Divers & Artists. Then & Now. Dive into Ijikacho and Jimbocho. Exhibition Report

▶Linda DENNIS

Abstract

This report examines the “Coexisting with Nature. Ama Divers & Artists. Then & Now. Dive into Ijikacho and Jimbocho.” exhibition in relation to curatorial considerations. Firstly, the results of an online questionnaire are documented, and considered in concern to themes important to the development of the exhibition structures. Secondly, the ways the creative theme of ‘Touch’ informed exhibition curation are detailed.

Keywords:

Ama divers, artists, art in community, international exchange, Japanese intangible cultural assets, Japan Heritage, Edo culture, ukiyoe, Ijika, Toba-Shima, Mie Prefecture, Tokyo, urban and regional cooperation, women-led culture, ecology, sustainable development, Japanese food culture.

Section 1

Introduction

In 2020–21, the “Coexisting with Nature. Ama Divers & Artists. Then & Now. Dive into Ijikacho and Jimbocho”. Exhibition was held in Tokyo and Mie Prefecture, Japan. The exhibition was able to be realized despite the COVID-19 pandemic influencing exhibition periods, artist research methods, promotion, and attendance. The exhibition was received favorably in the communities involved, and attracted domestic and international viewers. A website and SNS accounts (Facebook and Instagram) for the exhibition were created to share information online.



Figure 1. Exhibition Flyer

1. Exhibition Details

Artworks were of two categories.

1: Artworks inspired by contemporary ama divers living and diving in Ijikacho, Toba, Mie Prefecture. These artworks were exhibited outdoors in the Ijika Port area and in Ijikacho Japanese style hotels.

2: Artworks inspired by historical ukiyoe prints featuring depictions of ama divers. These artworks were exhibited in Toba Sea-Folk Museum and Jimbocho rare book stores. Documentation of the Ijikacho exhibition was presented in the exhibition spaces of Jimbocho, along with other ama diver and Toba related information.



Figure 2. Ijikacho Venue Map



Figure 3. Jimbocho Venue Map

Ijikacho (Toba City) Exhibition Venues and Periods:
 Ijikacho Ryokan Hotels: July 18, 2020–March 31, 2021.
 Ijika Port Area: January 23, 2021–March 31, 2021.
 Toba Sea-Folk Museum Gallery: January 23, 2021–March 31, 2021.

Jimbocho (Tokyo) Exhibition Venues and Periods:
 Gallery Somei-do, Ohya Shobo, Yamada Shoten, 50-gallery, Hara Shobo:
 March 16, 2021–March 31, 2021

Artists:

Zoe PORTER (Australia), Linda DENNIS (Australia & Japan), OGINO Yuna (Japan), INAGAKI Miyuki (Japan),

KITAMURA Meiko (Japan)

Curation: Linda DENNIS

Co-Directors: Linda DENNIS (Joshibi University Associate Professor), ISHIHARA Mai (Toba Sea-Folk Museum)

2. Exhibition Introduction Text

With a history of over 3,000 years, why have Ama divers been able to continue for such a long time?

Are there new insights to be gained of ways to live with nature, by viewing the charms of Ama diver culture through artworks inspired by Ama related culture and art?

Ama culture can be traced through history from tools and abalone shells discovered from the Jomon era (14,000–300 BCE), and mentions in poems of “Manyoshu” of the Nara period (710-784) and “The Pillow Book” of the Heian period (794 to 1185).

Ama divers were also depicted in ukiyoe prints of the Edo period (1603–1868), and original prints of Ama can be discovered lying hidden in the rare bookstores of Tokyo’s Jimbocho.

In this project, what will the artists’ response be when they meet Ama divers in Ijikacho living in tune with the seasons, and when they see Edo period Ukiyoe prints in Jimbocho inspired by Ama divers of the past?

3. Exhibition Questionnaire

A bilingual online questionnaire using Google Forms was made in early September 2021 and sent out to people who had seen the exhibition or had been involved with it in some way. People were also invited to respond via the exhibition Facebook page. 39 responses were recorded.

Please see Figure 4 for graphs of the responses.

Themes that were considered important in the development of the exhibition were listed in the

questionnaire, and people were asked to rate how strongly they felt they were related to what they had seen in the exhibition venues.

In the questionnaire, people were also asked to write comments about the exhibition.

A selection of these comments is included in Appendix 1–5, along with photographic documentation of the exhibition.

Comments and photos have been published with permission of those concerned.

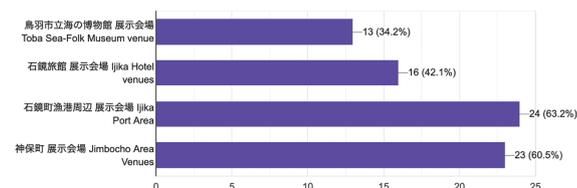
どのようにこの展覧会に関わりましたか？ How were you involved?

38 responses



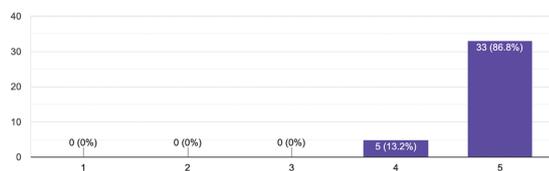
本展のどの会場をご覧になりましたか？ Which venues of the exhibition did you visit?

38 responses



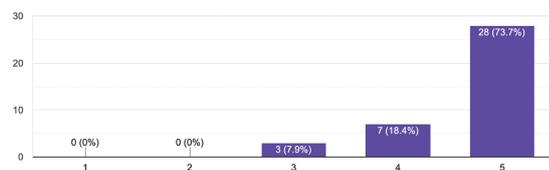
テーマ①: 海女文化 Ama diver culture

38 responses



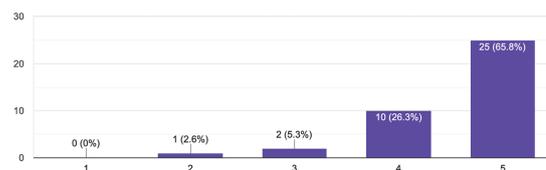
テーマ②: 美術観賞 Art appreciation

38 responses



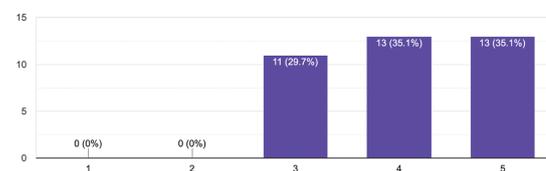
テーマ③: 女性の活躍 Women led activity

38 responses



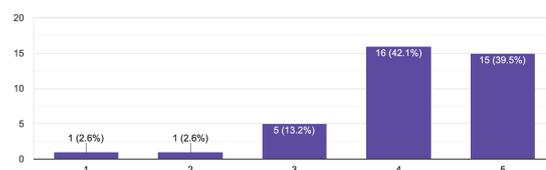
テーマ④: 持続可能な文化 Sustainable culture

37 responses



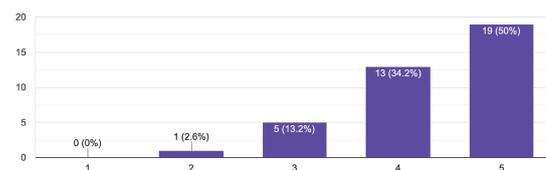
テーマ⑤: 自然環境への意識 Environmental awareness

38 responses



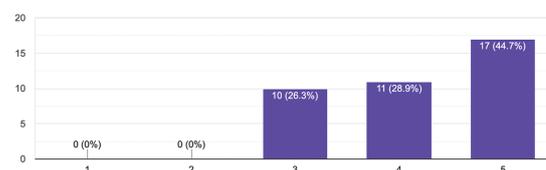
テーマ⑥: 国際文化交流 International cultural exchange

38 responses



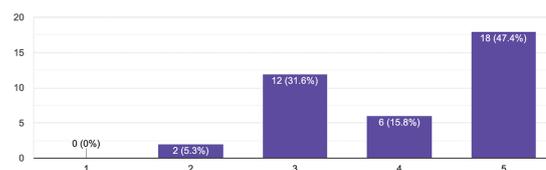
テーマ⑦: 多様なつながり Diverse Connections

38 responses



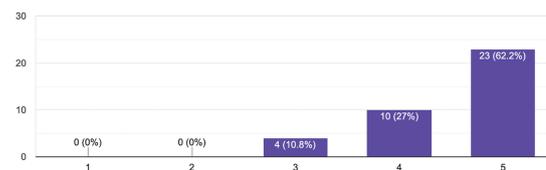
テーマ⑧: 都市と地方交流 Urban & Regional exchanges

38 responses



テーマ⑨: 日本の伝統芸術（浮世絵） Japanese traditional arts (ukiyo-e)

37 responses



テーマ⑩: アートを通じたまちおこし Art for town revitalization

38 responses

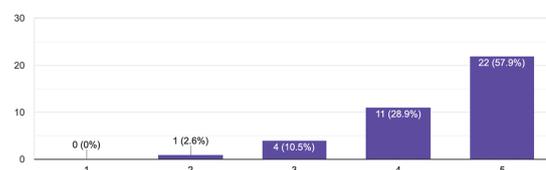


Figure 4: Exhibition Questionnaire Results

Considerations

All themes were regarded by the majority of respondents as having a positive relationship to the exhibition. In particular, the key themes of ‘ama diver culture’ (86.8%) and ‘art appreciation’ (73%) received the highest number of ‘level 5’ rankings of being strongly related. The themes Japanese traditional arts: ukiyoe (62.2%) ‘women-led activity’ (65.8%), ‘Art for town revitalization’ (57.9%), ‘international exchange’ (50%), ‘diverse connections’(44%), ‘urban & regional exchange’ (47.4%) were also viewed to be positively related. However, the themes of ‘sustainable culture’ (35.1%) and ‘environmental awareness’ (39.5%) were viewed to be less strongly related.

Comments received from respondents expressed disappointment about the influence of COVID-19 on the exhibition, as well as many other positive feelings about the exhibition.

Section 2

Relationship to ‘Touch’ Theme

The exhibition themes of ‘diverse connections’, ‘international exchange’, and ‘urban & regional exchange’ are all related to the long-term theme of ‘touch’ of which Linda Dennis has been basing her creative activities on since 2000. These considerations influenced the structure of the exhibition and the process involved in its making, rather than being the primary subject of attention. This may be the reason exhibition viewers expressed moderate levels of awareness in regard to the above themes.

Curatorial concerns in regard to the ‘touch’ theme included placing priority to provide as much direct contact between the artists and ama divers as possible. Artists spent time in Ijicho doing research and making artworks. They also had direct contact with original ukiyoe prints in the venues of Jimbocho. One of the artists was also a skilled ama diver of Ijicho, and her interactions with other artists enhanced their knowledge of ama culture.

The exhibition was co-directed by two women with

diverse backgrounds and nationalities. There was also diversity in the nationalities of the artists.

The exhibition venue locations in Tokyo and Mie Prefecture connected urban and regional areas. The influence of COVID-19 made it difficult for viewers to travel to the isolated community of Ijicho, and so the more easily accessible venues in Jimbocho, Tokyo functioned as valuable connection points where viewers could gain knowledge of the exhibition as a whole.

Since the conclusion of the exhibition, international and cultural exchanges have continued on in the form of a collaborative exhibition between two artists to be held in Brisbane Australia in December 2021. Co-directors and artists were also invited to participate in a talk session as part of Ama Summit 2021 in Toba held in November 2021.

Conclusion

The results of the questionnaire indicated the majority of exhibition themes were viewed by respondents as being related to the exhibition. However viewer awareness was highest in relation to the central themes of the exhibition, such as ama diver culture and art appreciation. Viewers seemed less aware of other associated themes, such as those that had been instrumental to the making of the exhibition, or other environmentally related topics.

Related Resources:

Exhibition Website: <https://touch-base-create.net/amadivers-and-artists/>

I-Brain Co., Ltd, 2021, *Commemorative Book of the Toba Umi Art Project 2020-2021*, Toba City Tourism Division

Umi to ningen & SOS, VOL.31, 2020.12.25, Toba Sea-Folk Museum, p.8

Umi to ningen & SOS, VOL.32, 2020.2.25, Toba Sea-Folk Museum, p.5&6

Koho TOBA No. 1485, 2021 Jan, pp4&5

<https://www.city.toba.mie.jp/koho/koho/index/documents/koho20210101.pdf>

Exhibition Reviews:

Shindo Utako, *Ama Divers and Artists*, Review, Tokyo Art Beat Website

<https://www.tokyoartbeat.com/tablog/entries.en/2021/03/ama-divers-and-artists.html>

Isono Rena, *Toba Travelogue from Jimbocho "Ama Divers & Artists. Then & Now. Dive into Ijikacho and Jimbocho!"*
Bilingual Review, note.com https://note.com/isono_rena

「自然とともに生きる海女とアーティスト。昔と今。石鏡町と神保町にダイブ！」展覧会報告

リンダ・デニス

本報告では、「自然とともに生きる海女とアーティスト。昔と今。石鏡町と神保町にダイブ！」展を、キュレーションの観点から考察します。第一に、オンラインアンケートの結果を記録し、展覧会の構成を考える上で重要なテーマについて考察します。第二に、「Touch」という創造的なテーマが展覧会のキュレーションにどのように影響したかを詳しく説明します。

Appendix 1: Documentation of the Making of the Exhibition
Research and exhibition preparation in Ijikacho and Jimbocho



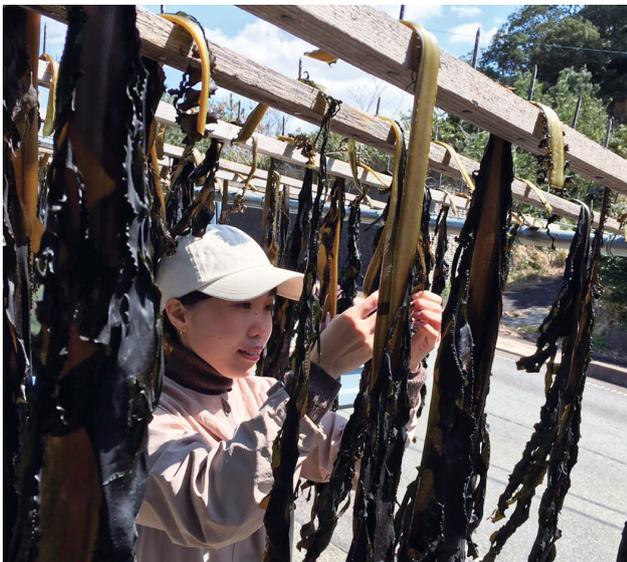
View of Zoe PORTER in Ijika Port area



View of artwork by KITAMURA Meiko



View of artwork by Linda DENNIS



View of INAGAKI Miyuki work in progress



View of artwork by ONO Aiko



View of OGINO Yuna work in progress



View of INAGAKI Miyuki and Linda DENNIS work in progress

Appendix 2: Toba Sea-Folk Museum Gallery

Works on paper inspired by ama ukiyoe

It was a shame that there were not many tourists in Ijika town because of the Corona disaster. I wish more people would have gone to see it.

Prof. YOU, Dong-eui University (Korea)

コロナ禍で石鏡町で観光客が少なかったのが残念でした。多くの人々が見に行き行って欲しかったです ^^

劉 亨淑

It was a very attractive exhibition. I was impressed by the splendor of the village of Ijika. I understand that it must have been very difficult to prepare for the exhibition in the midst of the Corona disaster. Thank you very much for holding this wonderful exhibition.

If I could make a small request, I would like to ask the artists to explain their works in written form, even if only a little. There were some paintings, especially abstract ones, that I couldn't understand the thoughts and ideas that went into them. People in the field of art tend to be reluctant to show their work in writing, as if they want the viewer to "feel it through the work," but I think the viewers would have a different perspective if there were even a few captions to accompany the work.

In this regard, it was a shame that the fifth lecture on ama studies, which featured this project, was cancelled due to COVID-19. I also wish that the ama divers could have seen the work and given us their feedback. I would like to connect artists and ama divers.

I intend to think of various ways to promote the ama culture. Thank you for your continued support.

Prof. TSUKAMOTO Akira, Mie University

とても魅力的な展覧会でした。石鏡の集落が華やいたのが、印象的でした。コロナ禍のなかでの御準備は、色々大変だったこととお察しします。素敵な展覧会を開催頂き、ありがとうございます。

少し注文を申せば、アーティストの皆さんに、自らの作品への説明を、少しでも文章の形で表現して頂きたかったと思います。特に抽象絵画など、どのような思いや発想で描かれたのか、分からないものもありました。美術分野の方は、とすれば「作品で感じてくれ」として文章で示すことを嫌いますが、作品に添えてキャプションが少しでもあれば、鑑賞者の見方も変わると思います。

その点でも、この企画を取り上げた海女学講座の第5回目が中止となったのは、残念至極でした。また、海女さんたちに見て頂き、感想を聞きたかったとも思います。アーティストと海女さんを結びつけてみたいものです。

海女文化の振興のため、私も色々と考えていくつもりです。今後ともどうぞよろしく願い致します。

塚本 明 三重大学



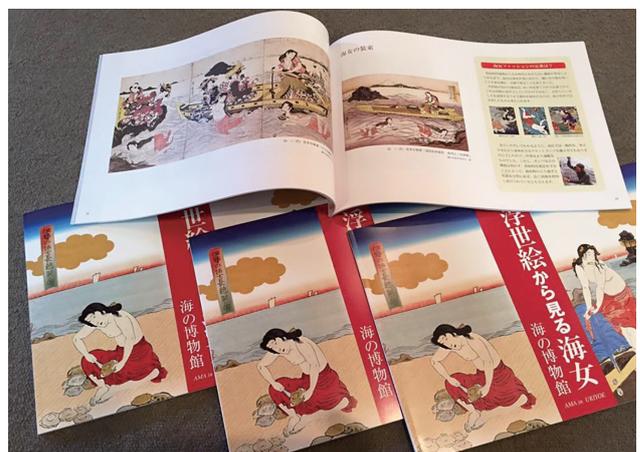
Toba Sea-Folk Museum, Mie Prefecture, Japan



ISHIHARA Mai & Linda DENNIS, Toba Sea-Folk Museum Gallery



Exhibition View: Artworks by ONO Aiko



Toba Sea-Folk Museum Publication: Ama in Ukiyoe

Appendix 3: Ijika Ryokan Hotels

Works on paper inspired by ama divers of Ijika

I felt that an area of Toba City has enough potential as a field for an art exhibition. However, more than the budget, I think it is essential to have the understanding and support of the villagers, and the desire to create together with them.

I was surprised when I dived into Jimbocho.

I feel like my knowledge of Toba City has been greatly expanded.

NAKAMURA Kinichiro Toba City Mayor

鳥羽市の一地域が、アート展示をするフィールドとして十分可能性があると感じた。但し、予算よりも何よりも集落の人の理解と応援したい、一緒に創り上げていくという気持ちが不可欠だと思う。

神保町へダイブしたのは驚いた。
鳥羽市の引き出しがうんと広がった気がする。

中村欣一郎 鳥羽市長

Art has brightened up the town.

Most of the young people now live in other more convenient places, but in the past, children used to run around our small town, playing energetically after school, and their voices always echoed.

I think our town has its own charm. The local people who were involved with the artists seemed to be very lively and happy with their works, which cheered me up.

KIMURA Ryo Ijika Ryokan Association

アートで街が明るくなった。

今は、若い人がほとんど便利なところへ住んでしまいましたが、昔は子供たちが狭い町を、学校が終わると元気に遊んで走り回って、いつも声が響いていました。

自分たちの町は、魅力あると思います。アーティストに関わった地元の人々もいきいきとしていて、作品みても嬉しそうで、元気をもらいました。

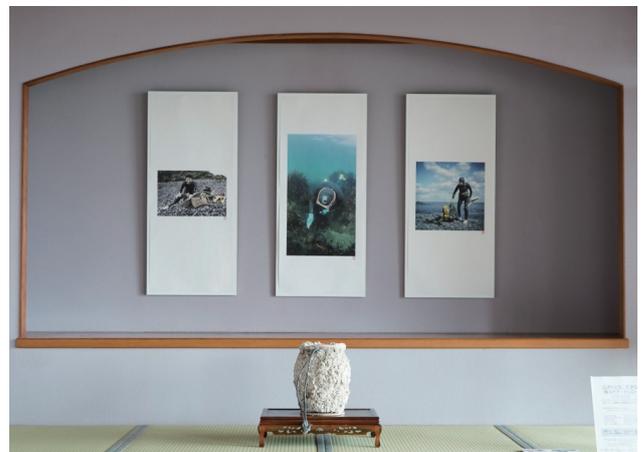
木村 良 石鏡旅館組合



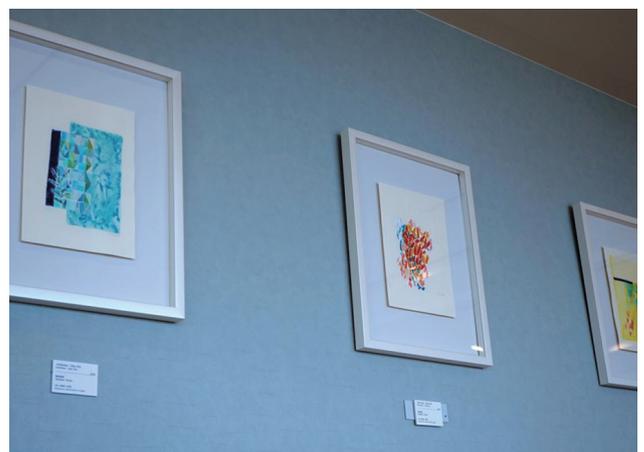
Ijika Daiichi Hotel Kagura



Ijika Daiichi Hotel Kagura exhibition view



Hidemaru Hotel exhibition view



Hotel Ijikaso exhibition view

Appendix 4: Ijika Port Area Exhibition

Works inspired by ama divers of Ijika

I was impressed by the diverse connections that were created, such as the connection between Ijikacho, Toba City and Jimbocho, Japan and Australia, using the theme of divers and art as a horizontal axis. I was filled with gratitude for the six artists. I feel that the art around the fishing port in Ijika Town blends in with the townscape without destroying the atmosphere of the fishing port. When the artists were working at the fishing port, it was wonderful to see the ama divers who were passing by chatting happily with the artists. The exhibition in Jimbocho was interesting because of the variety of exhibits in each bookstore, and I thought the collaboration between Ukiyoe and the artists' works was very meaningful.

MURATA Sunao, Toba City Hall Tourism Division

海女やアートをテーマ・横軸にして鳥羽市石鏡町と神保町、日本とオーストラリアがつながるなど多様なつながりが生まれたことに感銘を受けました。アートで海女を表現することで、鳥羽のまちの新たな可能性を感じました。6名のアーティストに感謝の気持ちでいっぱいです。石鏡町漁港周辺のアートは漁港の雰囲気気を崩すことなく、まちなみに溶け込んでいると感じています。アーティストが漁港で作品制作していた時は通りかかった海女がアーティストと楽しげに談笑するシーンは素晴らしかったです。神保町の展示は各書店ごとに展示が様々で面白く、浮世絵とアーティスト作品のコラボレーションも大変有意義だと思いました。

村田 直 鳥羽市役所観光課

As the exhibition was held during the COVID-19 pandemic, I felt it was difficult to attract visitors. There are some artworks left in Ijika, so we hope to utilize them in the future. I also felt that one of the benefits of this project was that the local people were willing to accept it. I hope that the project will be continued.

YAMAZAKI Masafumi, Toba City Tourism Association

コロナ禍での開催となり、集客等の難しさを感じました。石鏡町にの残された作品もあるので、今後の活用に期待したい。また、今回の取組みを地域の方が快く受け入れてくれた事は収穫の一つと感じました。事業を継続していただく事を希望します。

山崎正文 鳥羽市観光協会

The streets of Ijika, the people of Ijika. This town has as much power as these artworks. It is a powerful town.

The synergistic effect left a deep impression on me.

I regret that I could not go to the exhibition at the Toba Sea-Folk Museum, but I hope that art exhibitions will continue to be a part of the city as a matter of course.

OZAKI Kana, Ijika Port Area Exhibition Viewer

圧倒されるようなアート作品の数々……
魅了されましたが……石鏡町の街並み・石鏡町の人々～
この街にはこれらのアート作品にも負けない位のパワーがあります。力強い街です。

それが相乗効果で印象深く残っています。

海の博物館の展示に行けなかった事が心残りですが、アート展示とかが特別なものでなく、今後とも当たり前のように混在し続けるように望んでいます。

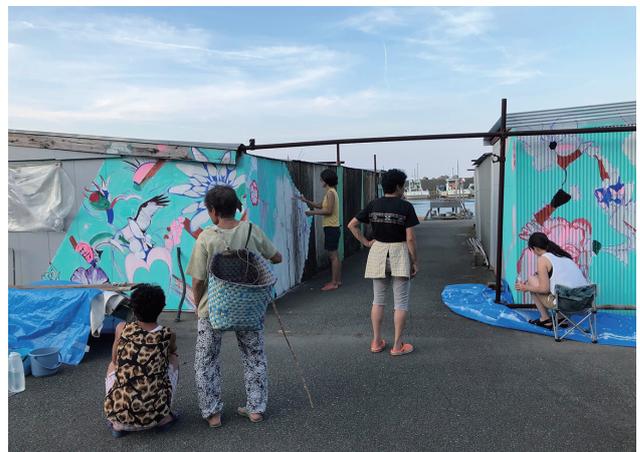
尾崎可奈 石鏡町漁港周辺 展示会場



View of Ijika Port area



View of artwork by KITAMURA Meiko



View of OGINO Yuna work in progress



View of INAGAKI Miyuki work in progress

Appendix 5: Jimbocho Venues

Ama ukiyoe and works on paper

I loved how the exhibitions were spread throughout Jimbocho. Each of the venues were very welcoming and I felt I wouldn't have been able to access these stores if I didn't have the opportunity to visit through the exhibition. I had heard about the divers in the past but this exhibition prompted me to learn more about the tradition. I hope to get to Toba once the COVID situation calms down.

Tom WILSON, Australian Embassy

神保町全体に展示が広がっているのがとても良かったです。どの会場もとても居心地がよく、展覧会で訪れる機会がなければ、これらのお店には行けなかつたらうと感じました。海女さんの話は以前から聞いていましたが、今回の展覧会をきっかけに、もっと海女さんのことを知りたいと思いました。COVIDの状況が落ち着いたら、鳥羽にも行ってみたいと思います。

トム・ウィルソン オーストラリア大使館

It was an exhibition that made me feel the interaction with the people of Toba that the artists have cultivated over the years. It was a project that reminded us of the power of art, where different places and generations, art and livelihood, tradition and modernity, and various other elements coexist. I think that the exhibition in Jimbocho further deepened the significance of the works.

Toku Hitomi, Australian Embassy

作家の方々が長年培われてきた鳥羽の方々との交流を感じさせる展覧会でした。異なる場所や世代、芸術と生業、伝統と現代、様々な要素が共存する、アートの力を感じさせる企画だったと思います。神保町という場所での展示もさらに作品の意義を深めてくれていたと思います。

徳 仁美 オーストラリア大使館

I am amazed and respectful of the fact that people from different regions and standpoints were able to work together to create an exhibition of this scale. I think it is very meaningful.

If the Corona disaster continues, I think this kind of attempt will be a meaningful extension of the tourist attraction, and if it can be continued, it will be a strength for the region.

NAKASAWA Shohei, Jimbocho Exhibition Viewer

いろいろな地域、立場の方々が連携してこれ程の規模の展覧会を成し得たことに驚くとともに敬意を表します。とても意義があることだと思います。

コロナ禍が続くとすれば、こうした試みは観光地を拡張する意味もあり、継続できれば地域の力になるのではないかと思います。

中澤庄平 神保町展示会来場者



Jimbocho rare bookshops and galleries



Gallery Soumei-do exhibition view



Hara Shobo exhibition view



Ohya Shobo exhibition view