

THE AGE OF DISAPPEARANCE

SATORU AOYAMA & KEN IKEDA

FROM AGE OF EMPIRE TO AGE OF DISAPPEARANCE

By Adrian Favell

Satoru Aoyama's series "Map of the World (Dedicated to unknown Embroiderers)", which was first seen at Mizuma Art Gallery in Tokyo in 2015 then at White Rainbow gallery in London in 2016, evokes the now classic *Mappa* embroidered world maps by Arte Povera pioneer Alighiero Boetti (first made in 1971). Yet with a twist: in Aoyama's globe the nations of the planet appear only when fluorescent in the dark, underlining how the light of recognition for the anonymous women craftworkers who made the original work is always fleeting and partial. In London, the exhibition included a performance by Aoyama (b.1973) to the music of experimental ambient artist Ken Ikeda (b.1964). In the darkened gallery, Aoyama passed over the lands of the globe with a torch light as if to further underline the instability and inequities of the world political order, anchored as it is in the territorial division of the planet and colonial hierarchy (itself implicit in Boetti's relation to his anonymous workforce).

Ikeda, a prolific composer for film and art works, is well known for his collaborations with leading figures in the world of experimental music, including composing and recording for David Lynch, Hiroshi Sugimoto and for Mariko Mori. In contrast to other composers or performers, Ikeda can be said to shape sound. In his series entitled "Instrumental Drawing", music is produced by hitting several nails into a wooden block and playing like

strings the primitive instrument made by hooking rubber bands over them. The record and traces of that sound then become the artwork. This time, Ikeda will present a new version of the work in which the traces have been made to glow in the dark with luminous paint.

In Singapore, the *Map of the World* series with a new score by Ikeda, is being shown under the title "The Age of Disappearance". The immediate point of Aoyama's homage to the unknown embroiderers is of course that this reproduction is his own, laborious, work. He makes his works on a vintage Singer sewing machine, often recreating forgotten or discarded photographic images, posing his own overlaid embroideries as a commentary on evolving forms of representation, and as a kind of digitisation in archaic form. Labouring manually, and with an inefficient intensity that has long been eclipsed by faster modes of production technology, the practice also underlines the need for sustainability in production; it reinvents possibilities for art and representation discarded by the forward-looking, wasteful rush of new technology. These were ideas that Aoyama first formulated studying among mainly female students at textiles classes in Goldsmiths College, South London in the 1990s, shortly after the heyday of Young British Art.

Amidst the growing political and economic crises of recent years, though, the context of Aoyama's work has changed. Aoyama's constant emphasis in his work on questions about the fine line between



Satoru Aoyama

from left to right:

Map of the World (Dedicated to Unknown Embroiderers), 2014
Map of the World (Dedicated to Unknown Embroiderers), 2015
Map of the World (Dedicated to Unknown Embroiderers), 2016
embroidery (polyester and luminous thread) on polyester
77 x 96 x 7 cm

authorship and unacknowledged labour, and between skilled craft and high art, was a critical concern very characteristic of the era of rampant, expansive globalisation that characterised the 1990s and 2000s. It was the new age of "empire", to borrow the term from activist philosophers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, an eerie parallel to the all conquering late 19th century "age of empire", as documented by historians such as Eric Hobsbawm—the era of European industrial expansion and colonial domination across the planet. "Globalisation" was the master narrative of the planet then, as it has been in the very recent past.

Notably, the global era of those recent decades was perfect for a commercial flowering of pop culture driven art transcending lines between high and low taste. In the case of Japanese contemporary art—notably in the hands of superstars Takashi Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara—it promoted a branded image of "Cool Japan", like the place had become a cartoon nation. Aoyama, in reaction to this, along with other artists of the so-called *zero nen dai* (zero zero generation)—a younger

generation who grew up "lost" after the bursting of the Japanese economic bubble in the early 1990s—always sought another path. In his case, he linked the struggle of young artists to continue producing vernacular and technically intricate works in an all-flattening global (pop) art world, with the ideas and vision of the late Victorian philosopher, artisan, activist and atavist, William Morris.

Morris, a hero also of the key British contemporary artist Jeremy Deller, remains a key reference point in Aoyama's practice. William Morris was a philanthropic industrialist, concerned with preserving the quality of traditional arts and crafts in a new era of mass production. He was also a vocal socialist critic of the inequities of the Victorian era, and its destructive effects on the urban fabric and on social relations. His classic text *News from Nowhere* (1890), which has enjoyed a sharp revival in readership in recent years, is a utopian socialist work, imagining a pastoral world of sustainable de-growth, equality and human relations after a revolution.

THE AGE OF DISAPPEARANCE

1 July - 6 August 2017

Satoru Aoyama and Ken Ikeda

Executive Director : MIZUMA Sueo
Writer : Adrian Favell
Printer : Print Ideas

Project Manager : Fredy Chandra
Gallery Manager : Theresa Irma
Gallery Liaison : Marsha Tan

Special Thanks : Anthony "ANTZ" Chong
With Assistance : MIKAWA Makiko

Text © Mizuma Gallery and Adrian Favell
Images © AOYAMA Satoru, IKEDA Ken,
courtesy of Mizuma Art Gallery and the artists.

© 2017 Mizuma Gallery, writers and artists. All rights reserved under International copyright conventions. No part of this leaflet may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system without prior permission from the publisher.

Cover : Ken Ikeda, "Instrumental Drawing" (detail), 2017, © IKEDA Ken.

22 LOCK ROAD
#01-34
GILLMAN BARRACKS
SINGAPORE 108939
T. +65 6570 2505
F. +65 6570 2506

WWW.MIZUMA.SG
INFO@MIZUMA.SG
FACEBOOK.COM/MIZUMAGALLERY
INSTAGRAM @MIZUMAGALLERY
TWITTER @MIZUMAGALLERYSG

TUE-SAT 11AM-7PM
SUN 11AM-6PM



GILLMAN BARRACKS

Mizuma Gallery is a part of Gillman Barracks (GB) is Asia's up-and-coming destination for contemporary art. It is distinguished as a vibrant centre in Asia for the creation, exhibition and discussion of contemporary art. Named after the late British General Sir Webb Gillman, GB is now home to 11 international art galleries, three restaurants, as well as the NTU Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA) Singapore. For more information, please visit www.gillmanbarracks.com



Mizuma Gallery was established in Singapore's new art cluster Gillman Barracks in September 2012 by director Sueo Mizuma. The gallery was established in 1994 in Tokyo, and since its opening in Singapore aims for the promotion of Japanese artists in the region as well as the introduction of new and promising young talents from South East Asia to the international art scene. The gallery creates a new vector of dialogue within Asia, by exchanging art projects between East Asia and South East Asia.

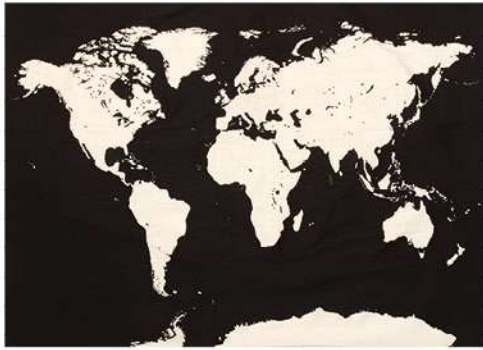
Mizuma Gallery has featured the works of Japanese artists including Aida Makoto, Amano Yoshitaka, Tenmyouya Hisashi, Ikeda Manabu, Aiko Miyanaga, and Yamaguchi Akira. Moreover, it has showcased the work of renown East Asian artists such as Ken and Julia Yonetani, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Susan Philipsz, Ai Weiwei, and Du Kun. The gallery also organises exhibitions featuring the creations of Indonesia's forerunner artists including Heri Dono, Nasirun, Made Wianta, indiguerillas, Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Agung Prabowo, and Angki Purbandono. Mizuma Gallery also participates yearly in Art Stage Singapore and Art Basel Hong Kong.

THE AGE OF DISAPPEARANCE

SATORU AOYAMA & KEN IKEDA

1 JULY - 6 AUGUST 2017

MIZUMA GALLERY



Satoru Aoyama

Map of the World (Dedicated to Unknown Embroiderers)

2013, embroidery (polyester and luminous thread) on polyester, 63 x 78 cm

Satoru Aoyama
Sinking / This is the end
2012
embroidery on polyester
25.5 x 19.5 cm



Satoru Aoyama
Imagine / No More Nukes
2012
embroidery on polyester
18.5 x 25 cm



The green and pleasant post-revolution idyll of Morris' twenty-first century London and the South East England lies in sharp contrast to the post-industrial steel and glass Londinium of the contemporary global city, ruled over by Conservative lords and ladies, in a land wishing to exit Europe and return to its colonial grandeur, but ruled now more than anything by its new found fear of the global.

The open optimism of the 1990s and 2000s is all gone, replaced by the anxiety and crisis written all over the face of its ice-cold queen Theresa May. A city in which tourists and locals alike—one of the most cosmopolitan urban populations on the planet—are at the constant mercy of crazed terrorism and security crackdowns. Is this then our "age of disappearance" evoked in the title of the show?

Certainly, the nauseous political realities of recent years are very much on the minds of the artists, to listen to their discussion of the themes and hopes of the present show. Ikeda speaks of drinking alone, when faced with watching the latest atrocities on television. There is a tendency in contemporary media to banalise the violence and horror, and to forget quickly as we move on serially to the next set of disasters. Yet what we are witnessing is the freedom and everyday ease of life in the privileged developed world—the world of global cities—that is disappearing. Aoyama speaks of wanting to light up this world again, to emphasise the loss—the threat of its disappearance.

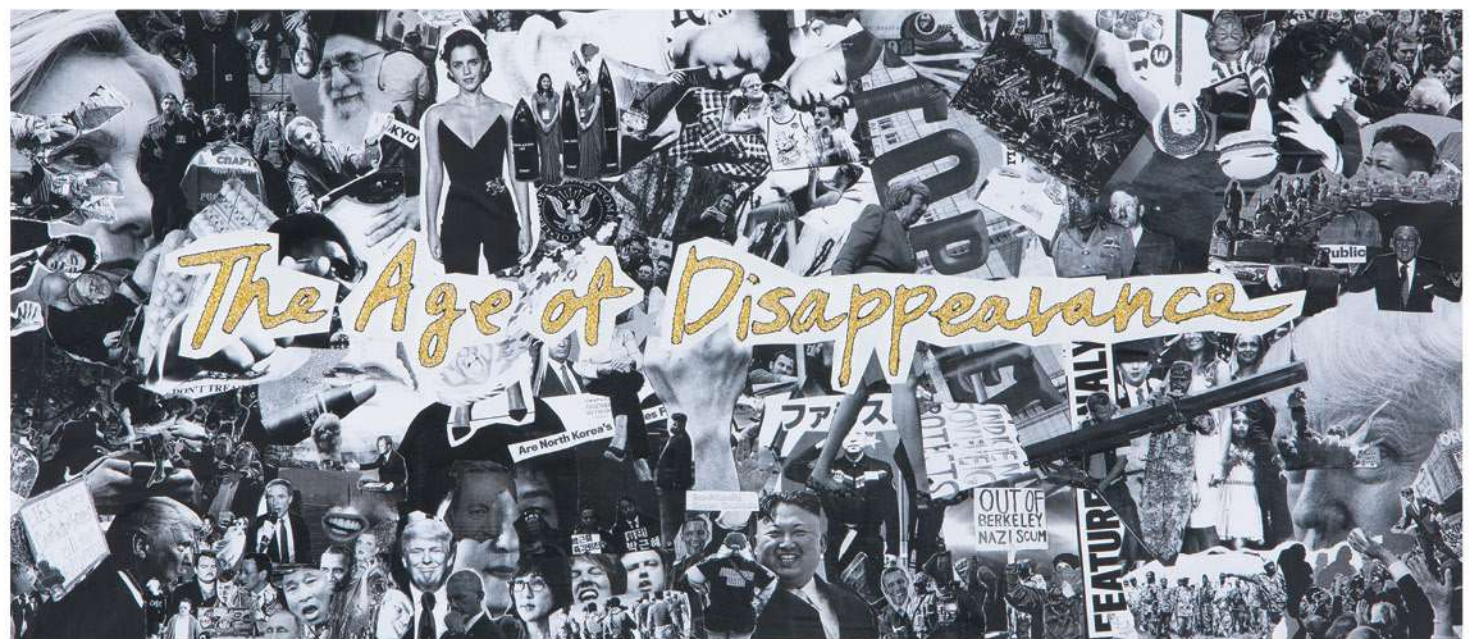
William Morris sought solace in a return to local idylls. In *News from Nowhere*, he sails upstream to a bucolic paradise in which wage slavery has been abolished, men and women live as equals beyond the constraints of contractual marriage, and labour can rediscover its creativity and fulfilment through arts and crafts. With an internet connection, and an occasional ticket to travel somewhere, it is perfectly possible nowadays to take refuge in the country. Such as in rural Japan, where the generations since the first "lost generation" of the 1990s, have learned to find happiness and fulfilment by finding their own *furusato*, renovating semi-abandoned houses or opening creative businesses in the Japanese hinterland. I myself choose to live amidst the overgrown industrial ruins of the Yorkshire hills and valleys, in a small village populated by green hippies, artists and alcoholic socialists. But refuge is in the end truly impossible. The clamouring urgency of the global, cosmopolitan world, the real world of capital flows, of terrorism, but also of post-ethnic diversity and planetary solidarity, cannot be ignored or left behind. Perhaps soon we will no longer be able to so freely fly and fast-track around on our online economy tickets; that world of rampant mobility, just as the world of unfettered global capital—in short, the global freedom of the 1990s and 2000s—was impossibly unsustainable.

But as we lose these freedoms, we must not lose our planetary consciousness. We must still see the interconnections, the interdependencies, the exploitations and the emancipations, that link us all together: both the high art consumer at a global art fair, and the local artisan at work in their atelier.

Singapore—perhaps the most axiomatic of the new, global, megacities of the first decade of the twenty first century—is a fitting location for a show which shines a light in the darkness of our contemporary anguish.

Adrian Favell
Chair in Sociology and Social Theory,
University of Leeds

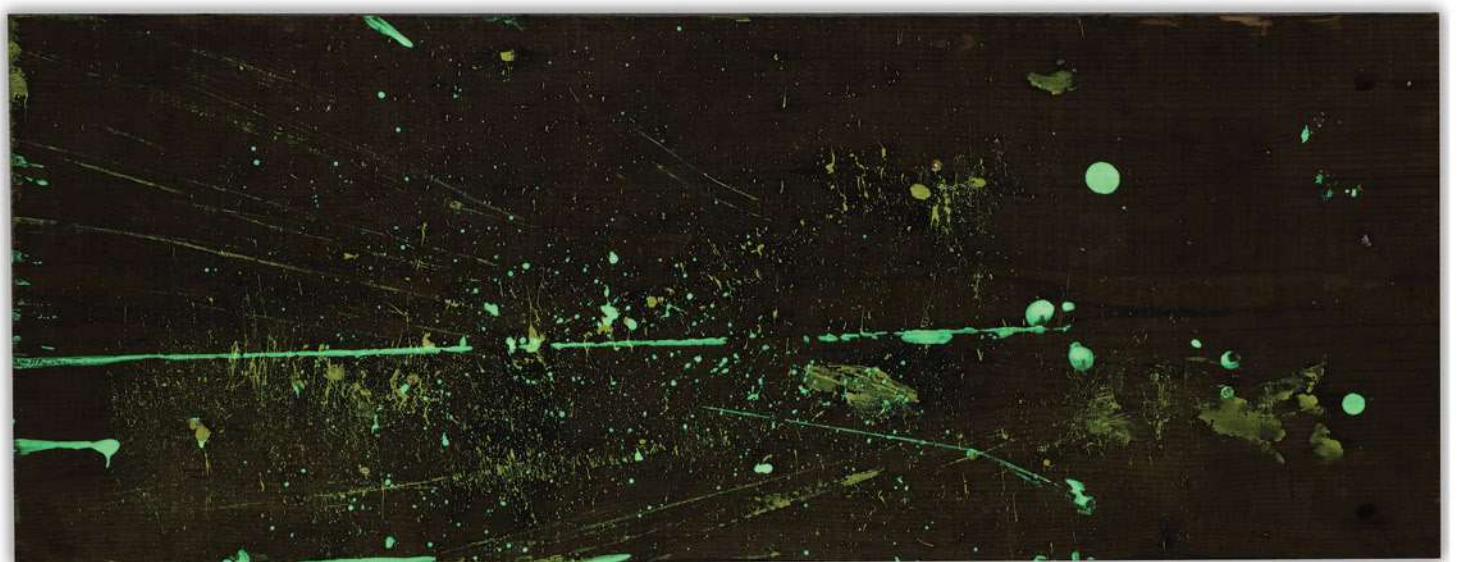
Adrian Favell is the author of *Before and After Superflat: A Short History of Japanese Contemporary Art 1990-2011* (Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher).



Satoru Aoyama

The Age of Disappearance

2017, embroidery and collage on paper, 30.7 x 69.5 cm



Ken Ikeda

Instrumental Drawing

2017, oil and luminous paint on wood board, dimensions variable

