

Tsubasa Kato Exhibition

(Drawing) Fractions of the Longest Distance: Vietnam ↔ United States

January 13 – February 24, 2018

On the flight back to the US from a project in Vietnam, I had an idea for my next work. It felt urgent – as soon as I got off of the plane and through customs, I made a call on Messenger while waiting for my baggage. A Vietnamese friend who had just seen me off in Hanoi after helping for the duration of my stay picked up. This contraction of distance between the site and the artist is a defining characteristic of contemporary art: even after a project's finished, you can stay in touch with the people who assisted, no matter where you are, or what time it is. In this way, the relationship between the site and the artist, including such friendships, is endlessly renewed – even if you call a “work” complete, perhaps the underlying project remains perpetually unfinished. On a larger scale, countless multi-national collectives are allowed to form through these relationships accrued and renewed in the process of creating work in a variety of contexts and locations. They offer an invaluable base to the artist, particularly for those who do collaborative projects like me.

During my stay in the US, starting in 2015, I unexpectedly experienced the whole of the last presidential election. As is well known, this year saw the rise of a president who pledges to build a wall on the Mexican-US border. Here are his 2015 words: “I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me,” (from “Here's Donald Trump's Presidential Announcement Speech” *Time*, Jun. 16. 2015.)

Xenophobia, anti-globalism, and protectionism informed his campaign rhetoric; all of these point to the strengthening of national consciousness and boundaries. In this sense, Trump's ascent marks a watershed moment in the anti-globalist reaction to globalism's advocating the free flow and exchange of products, money and people. Of course, this tension isn't limited to the US alone— it's present in the other sites of this exhibition's projects as well, that is Mexico, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Fear of the outside coming in (and the changes that accompany its arrival) affects everyone: those who are free to move or who must move, and those who won't or can't move. Or, if the outside's already entered, its effects are often painful. My point here isn't that globalism has gone too far, or that anti-globalism is ridiculous—rather, I created this exhibition with an eye on the ways in which the basic structures of community are being shaken and reshaped by movement.

Tsubasa Kato, 2017

*translated by Jeremy Woolsey

Woodstock 2017

2017, video



The model Karlie Kloss appeared as a geisha for the March 2017 “diversity” edition of *Vogue* and was criticized for cultural appropriation; she subsequently apologized on Twitter^{*1}. Activists rallied against an event at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts that allowed participants to have their pictures taken while wearing a kimono in front of Claude Monet’s “La Japonaise” (a portrait of white woman in kimono) the event was canceled as a result^{*2}. The white actor Ed Skrein resigned from his role in “Hellboy” when it was pointed out that it had originally been intended for a Japanese American character (i.e., whitewashing). Many people online praised his decision^{*3}. All these examples attest to the fact that “cultural appropriation” and “whitewashing” along with “political correctness (P.C.)” remain very sensitive issues in America. Trump, however, gained leverage by attacking the P.C. movement, and perhaps even won with the support of voters frustrated with it^{*4}.

In 1964, the pastor Martin Luther King Jr., as well as many other prominent black leaders, successfully saw through the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, in an attempt to end discrimination in the US based on race, color, sex, religion, and national origin. He was assassinated in 1968. The following year, Jimi Hendrix, of African American and Native American descent, played the national anthem (“The Star Spangled Banner”) at Woodstock on August 18th at around nine in the morning^{*5}. The historical performance, which closed the festival, is seen as a symbol of the hippie movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and the general counterculture of the era. In a time when it’s less clear who to unite with or what to accomplish, when social media provides the main forum for our debates, we look back to physicality of Woodstock with a kind of longing. Having spent two years in Hendrix’s hometown of Seattle, I decided to dedicate a reenactment to him. This is Woodstock 2017— everyone’s tied up.

*1 “The Internet Is Sounding Off About Karlie Kloss’s Japan-Themed Vogue Shoot” by Cady Lang, Time, Feb.15, 2017
<http://time.com/4671287/karlie-kloss-vogue-backlash/>

*2 “Boston kimono exhibit in race row” BBC Trending, Jul. 8, 2015 <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-33450391>

*3 “Deadpool star Ed Skrein quits Bellboy reboot after whitewashing controversy” the guardian, Aug. 28, 2017
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/aug/28/deadpool-star-ed-skrein-quits-hellboy-reboot>

*4 President Trump said “everybody wants to be politically correct and that’s part of the problems we have with our country” “So many “politically correct” fools in our country. We have to all get back to work and stop wasting time and energy on nonsense! (he tweeted on August 8. It was retweeted 12,205 times.)” “Donald Trump says we’re all too politically correct. But is that also a way to limit speech?” The Washington Post, Dec.9, 2015
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2015/12/09/donald-trump-says-were-all-too-politically-correct-but-is-that-al-so-a-way-to-limit-speech/?utm_term=.29cd050da55e

*5 “Jimi Hendrix The Star Spangled Banner American Anthem Live at Woodstock 1969” by EDUARDO DYABLO, YouTube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TKAwPA14Ni4>

Guerrilla Waves

2017, video



I was invited to stay in the old capital of Vietnam, Hue^{*1}, by an artist about the same age as me. Upon landing, I shook hands with his family and was shocked to see that his dad and grandfather didn't have index fingers on their right hands. They had experienced two generations of war—the Vietnam (American) War (1955-1975), the Cambodian War (1975-1989) and the Sino-Vietnamese War (1979). To avoid being drafted, they had cut off their fingers so they couldn't pull the trigger on a gun. Instead, both grabbed boat paddles and tried to gain asylum abroad every time war broke out, but they were never successful^{*2}. What they arrived at instead was the prison camps known euphemistically as "reeducation camps." There hasn't been a war in Vietnam since the end of the Cold War, but the government continues to effectively limit the freedom of assembly as well as free speech^{*3}. The end of the Vietnam War marked the gradual decline of the Cold War system and the beginning of a new global system^{*4}. Capital flows into the country from all over the world but the laws don't change. And if they aren't going to change, the meaning of the boat has to instead: it was once for fleeing, now its for trying to make a statement.

*1 Hue, located about 100 miles below the DMZ during the Vietnam War, was one site of the fierce fighting that characterized the Tet Offensive. In the center of the city lies the palace of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1945, colonized by the French after 1887); A flag of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam is raised there.

*2 Around the time of the Fall of Saigon in April, 1975, refugees began fleeing the country in large numbers— those who couldn't make it out in time before the city was overtaken (called the boat people) left on small fishing boats and vessels and attempted to escape to surrounding countries. Refugees from Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) numbered roughly one million and three hundred thousand people; the majority of these were relocated to the US, Australia, China and Japan.

*3 SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, Law No. 100/2015/QH13 dated November 27, 2015, criminal code <http://hethongphapluatvietnam.com/law-no-100-2015-gh13-dated-november-27-2015-criminal-code.html>

Article 331. Abusing democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights and interests of organizations and/or citizens

Any person who abuses the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of association, and other democratic freedoms to infringe upon the interests of the State, lawful rights and interests of organizations and/or citizens shall receive a warning or face a penalty of up to 03 years' community sentence or 06 - 36 months' imprisonment.

SOCIALIST REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM, THE GOVERNMENT'S DECREE No. 38/2005 / ND-CP OF MARCH 18, 2005, PROMULGATING A NUMBER OF MEASURES TO GUARANTEE THE PUBLIC ORDER

Chapter 2, Article 7. Concentration of people in public places

Concentration of people in public places must be registered in advance with the competent People's Committees of the localities where such activities take place and must strictly comply with the registered contents. This provision shall not apply to activities carried out by the Party and State agencies and the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations."

*4 "the Vietnam War might be seen as the final moment of the imperialist tendency and thus a point of passage to a new regime of the Constitution." Michael Hardt / Antonio Negri, EMPIRE, p178-179

Black Snake
2017, video



The setting: the Standing Rock reservation in North Dakota, where I created the [Mitakuye Oyasin](#) project in 2013. During the 2016-2017 presidential election and through Trump's victory, this area became the subject of fierce debates and controversy nationwide over the subject of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL). In April 2016, the Sioux Tribe created a camp here to protest the harmful effects that such an oil pipeline could have on their water sources as well as its violating the US cultural heritage protection law and the Fort Laramie Treaty. Trump supported the pipeline the next month during his campaign, pledging it would create jobs; he also promised its completion. On the other hand, Senator Bernie Sanders publicly pledged his support for the protests in September of the same year^{*1}. From fall through winter, the topic blew up on social media under the label #NoDAPL, in part from the videos circulated widely of security guards for the construction company and the Department of Public Safety violently deploying water hoses, tear gas and dogs against the protesters. The department also mobilized more than 1,400 soldiers to fill a shortage in manpower. Despite the harsh winter environment and below freezing temperatures, several thousand supporters of the Sioux Tribe gathered there and the protest reached its peak^{*2}. On November 1st, Obama announced that the US Army Corps of Engineers would investigate the possibility of changing the pipe route. Then, the election began in August and Trump ended up clinching it. In December, the Department of the Army refused to allow the construction to continue and announced it would find an alternative route with the health of the environment in mind. With this, the construction effectively stopped^{*3}. On January 20th, 2017, however, Trump announced in a presidential order that construction would begin once more on the 24th and that several thousand would be employed as a result^{*4}. Responding to the president's orders, the Department of the Army announced that the oil company Energy Transfer Partners was allowed to continue construction on February 7th. On the same day, the Sioux Tribe announced they would fight the decision in court over the Department of the Army's failure to fully evaluate the environmental impact of the pipeline. A protest formed outside the White House on the following day. But, on the 9th, construction resumed—the Sioux Tribe petitioned the federal court to stop the excavation and construction but it threw out the tribe's case. Citing the possibility of water pollution from frozen trash and human excrement melting into the rivers, the governor called for the camp to be closed. In February, the Department of Public Safety issued an order for the camp to be cleared and the remaining protesters to be arrested. Since this battle began, over 700 people have been arrested. It took over 230 trucks to clear away the mountains of trash, tents and excrement left behind by the protesters—the ground is still littered with bits and pieces of trash that fell from the trucks as they left the site. Visiting the camp in March, we began our project by collecting this trash.

*1 "Sanders Protests Controversial Dakota Access Pipeline Outside White House" abc NEWS, Sep.13, 2016
<http://abcnews.go.com/US/sanders-protests-controversial-dakota-access-pipeline-white-house/story?id=42055322>

*2 "NoDAPL Drones Monitor North Dakota Police" by AJ+, YouTube, Dec.2, 2016
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uXWw0y44xaM>

*3 "Standing Rock: Obama suggests 'reroute' of Dakota pipeline being investigated" the guardian, Nov.2, 2016
<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/02/dakota-access-obama-suggests-ways-to-reroute-pipeline-being-investigated>

*4 "Trump seeks to revive Dakota Access, Keystone XL oil pipelines" The Washington Post, Jan.24, 2017
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/01/24/trump-gives-green-light-to-dakota-access-keystone-xl-oil-pipelines/?utm_term=.fd506605c0d0

Underground Orchestra

2017, video



It'd been four years since I'd come here last. The scenery had been tranquil, with the Missouri River flowing behind the hills. What happened in between? Answer: The area was slated for oil pipeline development. A massive protest movement to the pipeline's construction made it its base as well and the scenery changed drastically within a year. Thousands of workers hired by the company as well as a group of protesters clashed, separated by the river (see the explanation of "Black Snake"). As bull dozers, water hose cars and armored vehicles crowded along the river, prairie dogs fled into the hills in large numbers. Before long, they changed the smooth Prairie into holes, tunnels and homes. The oil company Energy Transfer Partners expected roughly one hundred and fifty six million dollars would be raised in tax revenue from the project and pledged that it would hire around ten thousand people. The protesters, however, asserted the risk of oil pollution that the pipeline posed and called themselves Water Protectors. From the perspective of the prairie dogs, however, there wasn't much difference between the two groups. I turned their movements, imperceptible from above the ground, into a music of motion for humans.

* "5 things to know about the Dakota Access Pipeline" CNN, Aug. 31, 2016

<http://edition.cnn.com/2016/08/31/us/dakota-access-pipeline-explainer/index.html>

Can You Hear Me?

2015, video



1. Gather people across the seas and continents.
2. Connect with them via cell phone or Skype (audio only).
3. Throw stones together.
4. Listen carefully.

To do this project simultaneously in many locations all over the world, Kato contacted different artists who had previously supported him and started the Gigarunt group. Gigarunt's members aren't fixed; they form a collective framework that easily transcends national borders. As more members join, maybe the colors of the skies that serve as a background for their footage will form a smooth gradient.