

ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE BODY AND MATERIAL

9 MAY—22 NOV 2026
PALAZZO PISANI
SANTA MARINA

CURATED BY YUJI AKIMOTO
WITH SHIGE FUJISHIRO, KAZUHITO KAWAI,
TAKAHIRO KOMURO, TAKURO KUWATA,
RITSUE MISHIMA, YOCA MUTA,
MAYU NAKATA, JUNKO OKI,
NORITAKA TATEHANA, YUI WATA

SLOWNESS
AND
DEPTH IN AN
ACCELERATED
SOCIETY

CONCEPT

This exhibition, *Ethnography of the Body and Material—Slowness and Depth in an Accelerated Society*, aims to restore a different sense of time and physical perception inherent in the act of *making* back into today's world of ever-accelerating information and consumption. Here, "ethnography" refers to an approach to interpret the practice of artists—a slow process of creation involving commitment to materials and manual labor—in cultural and social contexts.

The world we live in is marked by a focus on immediacy and efficiency. It prizes "easy-to-understand" and "ready-to-use" qualities, while increasingly neglecting the "slow pace" and "silence" that nurture the depth of our senses and memories. The artists involved in this exhibition will present their "sensory fieldwork," taking place in the margins of such an accelerated society via different materials such as fire, water, earth, fiber, *urushi* (lacquer), and glass, as well as the body.

Takuro Kuwata sculpts the contingency of ceramics, Kazuhito Kawai breathes between clay and gravity, and Takahiro Komuro physically reshapes cities and subculture. Yoca Muta, Junko Oki, Yui Wata, and Mayu Nakata interweave layers of memory and emotion through handicrafts such as painting on ceramics, embroidery, fiber, and *urushi* (lacquer). Ritsue Mishima uses transparent glass to encapsulate the process of time, and Shige Fujishiro captures the memory of consumption in his work. Moreover, Noritaka Tatehana reconstructs the layers of time and rituals associated with the body and attire, shuttling between traditional decorative culture and urban senses.

Their works are not "instantly comprehensible," but instead invite viewers to spend time appreciating and developing a tactile relationship with the work. This exhibition considers this creation and appreciation process itself as a form of quiet resistance to challenge an accelerated society. It is an effort to reconstruct our senses and reconnect with the world. This micro-ethnography, woven at the intersection of body and material, excavates forgotten strata of sensitivity and reveals new meanings of *making* in the modern age.

Yuji Akimoto

CONCEPTUAL NOTE

I

THE ACT OF MAKING AS A FIELD

This exhibition adopts an ethnographic perspective to observe and describe the act of *making* that takes place between the body and material, set against the backdrop of today's fast-paced, information-saturated society. Ethnography here refers to a fieldwork-based approach that interprets the entire practice within its cultural context, including examining how artists use their hands, how materials transform and their production environment, as well as the viewers' senses. Each material carries its own inherent rhythm: the time it takes for clay to be fired, the humidity needed for lacquer to dry, and the pace at which glass cools. The very act of allowing the rhythm to lead you becomes a field note on the slowness—a different flow of time, generated in the margins of an accelerated society.

II

ARTISTS' NOTES ON BODY AND MATERIAL

EF Ethnographic Focus
MSD Manifestation of Slowness and Depth

Takahiro Komuro

EF Crossover of subculture-inspired figures and sculptural design.
MSD The immediacy of urban culture is slowed to the pace of handcrafting, transforming it into a memory.

Takuro Kuwata

EF "Kiln ritual" to observe the contingent interactions between ceramics and glaze.
MSD An unfinished process of creation is exhibited at the venue to share the "ongoing time flow" with viewers.

Yui Wata

EF Physical movements at the nodes where woven fabric gain a three-dimensional quality.
MSD The thread tension and spatial tension coalesce into a "preserved moment."

Yoca Muta

EF Tracing the brushstrokes running across a ceramic surface.
MSD The quiet stillness during the drying process is integrated as part of the experience of appreciating the artwork.

Kazuhito Kawai

EF Sculpting the traces of the body through repeated interactions between clay and gravity.
MSD The gradual transformation of clay is visually captured as it dries and cracks over the course of the exhibition.

Ritsue Mishima

EF A device to visualize the process from glass blowing to cooling.
MSD Time strata accumulate within the transparent glass, delaying the act of seeing.

Junko Oki

EF Endless loop of repetitive embroidery.
MSD The process of multiplying stitches is presented as an "unfinished ethnography."

Shige Fujishiro

EF Re-ritualization via the vitrification of waste packages.
MSD Traces of consumption are manually encapsulated to foster a slower, deliberate perspective.

Noritaka Tatehana

EF Co-creation of accessories and festive bodies.
MSD Accumulating urban speed in accessories and layering time strata.

Mayu Nakata

EF Layers of time for the application, polishing, and drying of *urushi* (lacquer).
MSD Fine craftsmanship, hidden emotions and memories settle on the lacquer surface and mature until viewers "read" them.

III

THE ETHICS DESCRIBING "SLOWNESS"

The practice engaged by artists functions like a "multi-layered clock," overlaying the material's physical time onto the artist's bodily time. As viewers approach and move away from the work, perceiving shifting angles of light and changes in temperature, their sensory organs transmute into timekeeping devices. Through an ethnographic interpretation of this process, this exhibition highlights the critical and ethical significance of "slowness," going beyond the mere presentation of aesthetic beauty.

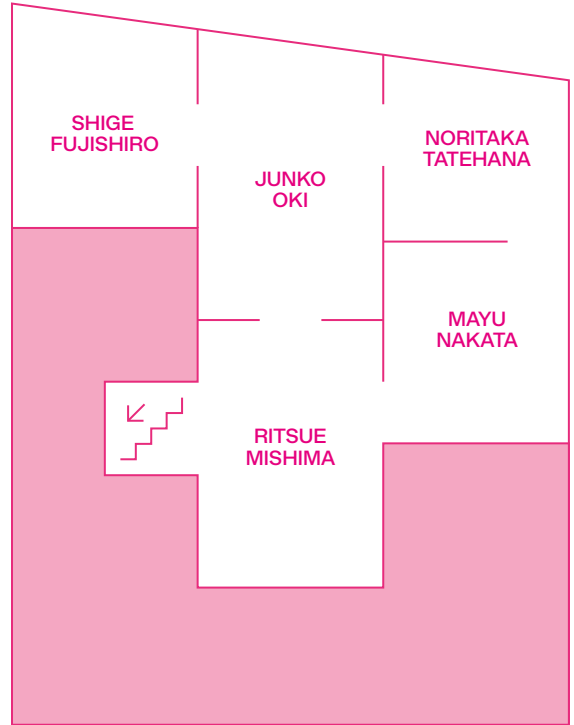
IV
EXHIBIT AS REFLEXIVE ETHNOGRAPHY

The exhibition space becomes a place for reflexive ethnography, embracing the cycle of the artist as observer, the artwork as field notes, and the viewer as a fellow investigator. The result is an accumulated database of physical sensations, oscillating between creation and appreciation, which in itself serves as an “alternative methodology for describing an accelerated society.”

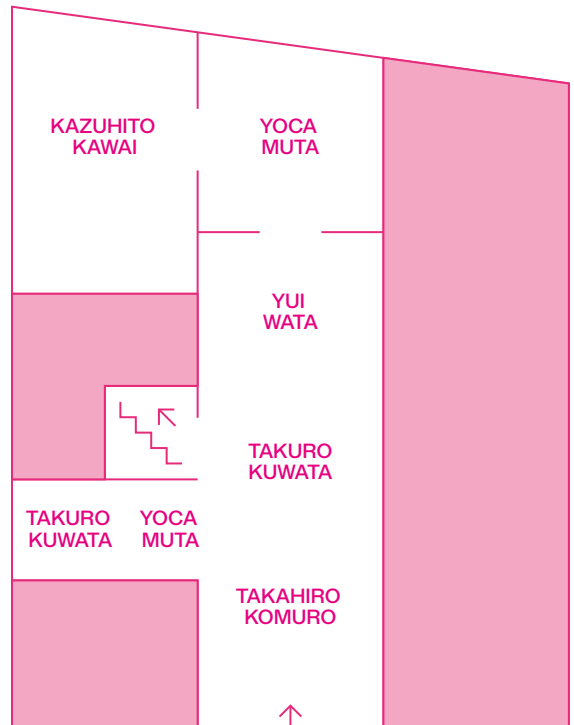
V
CONCLUSION: FIELDWORK IN
AN ACCELERATED AGE

The *Ethnography of the Body and Material* exhibition employs a cultural anthropological perspective in interpreting the experience of “slowness and depth,” regained through the act of creation. The field notes presented here visualize the delicate rhythms breathing in the margins of an accelerated society and aim to catalyze a rewiring of the relationship between our senses and society.

FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



List of Works

TAKAHIRO KOMURO

Born in Tokyo in 1985, Komuro earned his Master of Fine Arts in Sculpture from the Tokyo University of the Arts in 2011. Drawing inspiration from his childhood favorites, including American comics, action figures, and science fiction films from the 1980s and 1990s, he creates wood sculptures integrating the unique texture and design of soft vinyl toys. His sculptural language was developed through his work producing small-lot soft vinyl figures in the U.S., which began as a commission from an LA-based company. His artistic expression currently revolves around wooden sculptures that mimic these industrial products, along with mass-produced soft vinyl figures.

All of his works feature highly flexible designs made possible through meticulous 3DCG simulations, free from physical limitations. Despite their pop and kitschy appearance, Komuro sees sculpting itself as a sacred practice. When a plaything (the Japanese term for “toy” is written as an “item to play with”) is presented at a larger-than-life scale, it evokes a supernatural power that resembles Buddhist statues or figures from Greek mythology. Komuro’s sculptures seamlessly bridge the gap between idols of worship and icons of consumer society, capturing the essence of his work.



Dog dragon, 2023. Photo: Takashi Ito (ito-kobo inc.)

TAKURO KUWATA

Born in Hiroshima Prefecture in 1981, Kuwata graduated from the Kyoto Saga University of Arts Junior College (now Kyoto Saga University of Arts) in 2001, and from Tajimi City Pottery Design and Technical Center in 2007. He pursues artistic expression outside the conventional framework of ceramic art. His unique visual language combines pop colors and a colorful palette with excessive application of traditional ceramic techniques such as *kairagi* (a textured surface that resembles the granular texture of shark skin caused by glaze shrinkage), *ishihaze* (lit. “stone bursts,” referring to the irregularities or cracks on a ceramic surface caused by the expansion of small stones in the clay during firing), and *tenteki* (application of glaze in a dotted pattern). At the same time, his practice seamlessly incorporates Japanese traditions, such as tea culture, as evident in the title of his large-scale sculptural work, *Chawan* (Tea Bowl). In recent years, his focus has included producing interior décor by extending the elements within his studio, as well as returning to the origins of ceramics — the concept of “food.” His newly launched *Ku* craft collection integrates mass-production techniques fostered in Tajimi, a city in Gifu Prefecture known as Japan’s ceramic capital. His work spans from vessels for everyday use to extraordinary sculptural pieces. Oscillating between these extremes, he brings new perspectives and creativity to each realm.



Cup, 2025. Photo: Suzuki Shimpei

YUI WATA

Born in Shizuoka Prefecture in 2000, Wata earned a master's degree in craft at Kanazawa College of Art in 2025. All fabrics are created through the repetitive patterns of weaving, yet Wata finds her creative playground in the narrow spaces between threads. Even seemingly flat fabrics have a semi-three-dimensional structure formed by intertwined threads, and she explores this by creating sculptural works that rise taller than herself. Her creative process always begins with manually plying threads. She also undertakes the labor-intensive process of dyeing threads with earth. For Wata, who says, "I just spontaneously sought a primitive process of creation," these choices were an inevitable fate. Although she considers her sculptural approach — which uses the weight of the fabric itself — as primitive, it echoes her artistry of emphasizing materials and techniques, such as shifting qualities of plying and weaving from the top to the bottom. Through this process, Wata pursues a primal beauty created by humans. However, this pursuit is not about going back to the past, but rather a search for a synchronous beauty that transcends time and culture.



Platonic Dancer, 2026. Photo: Yoshio Daisuke

YOCA MUTA

Born in Tokyo in 1981, Muta graduated from Goldsmiths, University of London, with a BA in Fine Arts in 2008, and from Ishikawa Prefectural Kutani Ware Technical Training Institute in 2012. She pursues a unique style of expression based on the ceramic painting technique she learned from the traditional Kutani ware in the Kaga region of Ishikawa Prefecture. For Muta, painting means depicting a scene through the accumulation of production processes, from shaping the clay to underdrawings, glazing, and overglaze painting. Although shaping clay is regarded as the "background" realm, she seeks to incorporate the tactile qualities achieved through hand-building into the "image" to create a unified beauty with integrity. Her artistic expression embraces the evolution of the "view of nature," based on her in-depth study of existing ceramic painting designs. Rather than viewing the designs as mere depictions of nature, she focuses on the emotions toward nature that are captured by the craftspeople of their time, such as admiration, desire, reverence, and fear. Like an icon of such an imperfect human mind, Muta's color paintings emerge as a harmonious blend of reality and illusion, real existence and fiction, motion and stillness.



The pot of pulses, 2026. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

KAZUHITO KAWAI

Born in Ibaraki Prefecture in 1984, Kawai received a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors in Fine Arts from Chelsea College of Art and Design in 2007. In 2018, he graduated from Kasama College of Ceramic Art in Ibaraki Prefecture. Following a hiatus from artistic production after returning from London, he began exploring creative expression through ceramics, prompted by an encounter with the medium in his hometown of Kasama. Stepping away from the conventional approach of pursuing materials and styles, he sees clay as a medium for projecting fiction, contradiction, and desire. The result is an excessive yet fragile form that intertwines his identity and the cultural residues behind it.

Kawai's artistic expression cannot be discussed without considering the Shibuya and Harajuku culture of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which he admired as a teenager and is often incorporated into his installation works. However, the views conveyed by magazines, TV, and other mass media invariably contain a gap with reality. His work captures this gap within a chaotic mass coated with glazes of extreme colors reminiscent of bodily fluids. It presents layers of candy-like sweetness and an awkward feel as if entering forbidden territory.



Sunflowers, 2025. © Kazuhito Kawai

RITSUE MISHIMA

Mishima was born in Kyoto Prefecture in 1962. She moved to Venice in 1989, where she began working with glass in 1996. In 2011, she established a residence in Kyoto, and is now based in two locations.

Throughout her three-decade artistic journey, she has consistently worked with glass artisans on Murano Island. She acts as a conductor, closely observing the state of the glass and guiding the artisans by communicating her vision through improvisation. As she describes her work as the “fruit of the fire” — a creation born from the fusion of material and craftsmanship in blazing flames — its organic forms are filled with vitality. These pieces are spontaneous, inevitable outcomes of the production process rather than something consciously fabricated for their form.

Mishima, as an explorer of light, is uncompromising about the use of colorless, highly transparent glass. Its “reservoir of light” generates subtle refractions, reflections, transmissions, and shadows, which allow a sculpture to blend into its surroundings, morphing into a device that captures the surrounding light. Each piece shines as a standalone work, yet together in the exhibition space, they begin to create a polyphony.



ASCENSION, 2023. Photo: Francesco Barasciutti

JUNKO OKI

Born in Saitama Prefecture in 1963, Oki graduated from the Setso Mode Seminar in 1991. Inspired by her late mother's sewing tools, she began teaching herself embroidery in 2002. She has developed her creative activities while embracing the idea of stitching as a way to engrave the traces of life on fabric.

Her embroidery style is characterized by direct stitching onto the fabric without underdrawings. It resonates with her approach toward patched antique fabrics (called *boro*). Her unique designs, crafted with this simple technique, casually cast aside the preconceived notion of embroidery. The time and stories behind antique fabrics and tools are intertwined with Oki's own, breathing a new life imbued with contingency. Her creation process also involves hand-washing the embroidered fabric to entangle the fibers of the antique fabric with the newly applied embroidery. This allows the dyes to bleed into each other, mingling the memories and time within them. Through this layered manual approach, she attempts to embody the aesthetics nurtured in plain lifestyles from premodern times through contemporary expression.



time machine, 2017. Photo: Keizo Kioku
©Junko Oki. Courtesy of KOSAKU KANECHIKA

SHIGE FUJISHIRO

Born in Hiroshima Prefecture in 1976, Fujishiro received a doctoral degree in Fine Arts from Hiroshima City University in 2005. He has remained based in Hanover since participating in an exchange program at Hochschule Hannover - University of Applied Sciences and Arts.

His work consists of glass beads, which have long been treasured as accessories and ancient commodities, and safety pins. His motifs include natural objects, such as flowers and animals, and other everyday objects, such as playground equipment and shopping bags. Through his painstaking and time-consuming process of manually threading tens of thousands of beads, he creates a new paradise within our familiar everyday scene. His representative work, *Where is my Paradise?* reflects his questioning of his own circumstances: being a studio-bound artist due to his creative process and the limitations of his non-native language – with his Japanese heritage. His resplendent work turns this inseparable life-labor-artwork link into questions for modern consumer society and materialism, which are posed to people who enjoy the freedom he could only glimpse through the window. Nevertheless, he intentionally avoids excessive criticism. This ambiguity is perhaps what constitutes Fujishiro's paradise, inspiring multiple interpretations.



Where is my paradise? (Basketballgoal / waterfall), 2015

NORITAKA TATEHANA

Born in Tokyo in 1985, Tatehana graduated from the Tokyo University of the Arts in 2010, majoring in textile art. As a contemporary artist, he explores contemporary values through traditional Japanese culture and craftsmanship, guided by his creative philosophy “Rethink.” This philosophy involves a pursuit of artistic expressions of Japanese traditions and culture with contemporary interpretations, instead of simply reproducing them in contemporary contexts. His signature work, *Heel-less Shoes*, was inspired by the elevated wooden clogs worn by *oiran* (elite courtesans) in the Edo period. The piece has become a globally iconic fashion item after being popularized by the American singer Lady Gaga. Tatehana has also actively collaborated with numerous traditional craftspeople (e.g., *Edo kiriko* glass, *kinkarakawashi* paper, and *kumihimo* braiding). Furthermore, the two signature motifs of Tatehana — lightning bolts and clouds — symbolize Japan’s religious landscape or its evolution that embraces the syncretism of Shintoism and Buddhism. These motifs serve as an essential language for him, as he seeks to transcend binary oppositions, such as heaven and earth, and life and death.



Heel-less Shoes, 2026. Photo: Osamu Sakamoto
© Noritaka Tatehana. Courtesy of KOSAKU KANECHIKA

MAYU NAKATA

Born in Hokkaido in 1982, Nakata studied lacquerware at the Kagawa Urushi Lacquerware Institute and graduated from the Kanazawa Utatsuyama Crafts Workshop in 2021. Nakata is an *urushi* (lacquer) artist who has uniquely developed the *Kinma* technique. This decorative lacquer art technique involves engraving a design on a multi-layered middle coating, which is later filled with colored lacquer. In Nakata’s approach, approximately forty layers of colored lacquer are applied to a total thickness of just 0.5 mm, and the surface is then polished to achieve a vibrant, organic pattern. The scale of her work is also noteworthy. The greatest allure of her work lies in the harmonious coexistence of dynamic forms and the elaborate techniques hidden within.

Her creations are inspired by “memories” of her real-life experiences. Scenes that captivate her (e.g., lightning, a cloud, or a flying bird) are depicted with layered colors. Since her production process takes a minimum of four months to sometimes a year, daily changes have a direct impact on the work. Consequently, even the pivotal memory itself settles with some “fluctuation.” Her work presents different expressions depending on the viewer’s perspective, as if indicating that memory is not self-evident and definitive, but rather an ever-changing phenomenon itself.



Mirage, 2026. Photo: Yu Kadowaki

**Ethnography of the Body
and Material**
– Slowness and Depth in
an Accelerated Society

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Closed on Tuesdays
9 May – 30 Sep / 11am – 7pm
1 Oct – 22 Nov / 10am – 6pm



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