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

Ten Japanese Artists on Slowness and the Act of Making
On View in Venice, May 9 – November 22, 2026



Takahiro Komuro Installation View. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Venice, Italy — NPO Syuto Kanazawa presents ***Ethnography of the Body and Material – Slowness and Depth in an Accelerated Society***, a major exhibition featuring around 100 works by 10 Japanese artists whose practices are rooted in material-driven, craft-based approaches. On view from May 9 to November 22, 2026 at Palazzo Pisani Santa Marina, concurrent with the 61st International Art Exhibition — La Biennale di Venezia, the exhibition is curated by Yuji Akimoto, former artistic director of Benesse Art Site Naoshima and current artistic director of Go for Kogei.

Spanning approximately 500 square meters across two floors of the historic Palazzo Pisani Santa Marina in central Venice, the exhibition adopts a craft-based approach as a critical lens through which contemporary art is reread and reinterpreted. Designed by architect **Kulapat Yantrasast**, the exhibition unfolds as a spatial and bodily experience, encouraging visitors to engage with the works through movement, proximity, and duration. The architecture itself becomes an active component of the presentation, foregrounding the relationship between space, material, and time.

Curator **Yuji Akimoto** says: “*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.* Ethnography of the

Body and Material considers the 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."

Japan has a long tradition of material-based practices, where deep knowledge of materials and techniques has been integral to artistic expression, historically without rigid distinctions between art and craft. ***Ethnography of the Body and Material – Slowness and Depth in an Accelerated Society*** seeks to recover an alternative sense of time and embodied perception inherent in the act of making, at a moment when systems of information, production, and consumption continue to accelerate. Rather than positioning craft as a discrete or secondary category, the exhibition advances a “craft-based approach” as a critical lens through which contemporary art can be reconsidered. In doing so, it foregrounds embodied knowledge, sustained engagement with materials, and the gradual accumulation of gestures over time.

Since modernity, contemporary art has often been shaped by values such as formal innovation, medium specificity, and artistic autonomy, while forms of knowledge rooted in the body, repetition, and duration have been marginalized. This exhibition challenges these frameworks from within, proposing a shift away from understanding artworks as fixed, resolved objects toward viewing them as ongoing processes in which the relationship between body and material continues to unfold.

The ten participating artists: **Shige Fujishiro, Kazuhito Kawai, Takahiro Komuro, Takuro Kuwata, Ritsue Mishima, Yoca Muta, Mayu Nakata, Junko Oki, Noritaka Tatehana, and Yui Wata**, engage a wide range of materials, including **clay, glass, textiles, urushi (Japanese lacquer), and wood**. Across their diverse practices, each artist approaches the question of how control is asserted or relinquished in the act of making. Some embrace contingency and the unpredictable behavior of materials, while others structure time through repetition, accumulation, and labor-intensive processes.

Central to the exhibition is the concept of “ethnography,” understood not as documentation alone but as a way of reading artistic practice within broader cultural, material, and temporal contexts. Here, making extends beyond individual expression to encompass techniques, rhythms, and forms of knowledge that emerge through bodily engagement with materials, as well as systems of transmission and collective memory. The works can be understood as records of these processes, inviting sustained attention and a more embodied mode of viewing.

By placing these practices in dialogue, the exhibition presents Japanese contemporary art and artists as a coherent whole within an international context, while also moving beyond conventional distinctions between art and craft. At the same time, it critically engages with the institutional structures that shape contemporary art, including systems of circulation, visibility, and immediate comprehension. The works presented here resist easy consumption, instead requiring time, attention, and physical presence.

Presented during the Venice Biennale, *Ethnography of the Body and Material* ultimately proposes an alternative set of values grounded in slowness, depth, and embodied experience. In doing so, it offers a framework for reconsidering how art is made, encountered, and understood within an accelerated contemporary world.

***Ethnography of the Body and Material – Slowness and Depth in an Accelerated Society* is on view from May 9 - November 22 at Palazzo Pisani Santa Marina.**

NOTES TO EDITORS

Exhibition Title

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

Preview

May 6–8, 2026, 11:00 AM–7:00 PM

Opening Dates & Hours

May 9–November 22, 2026 (Closed Tuesdays)

May 9–September 30: 11:00 AM–7:00 PM

October 1–November 22: 10:00 AM–6:00 PM

Admission is free

Opening Reception

May 7, 2026, 5:00–7:00 PM **Venue**

Palazzo Pisani Santa Marina

Cannaregio 6104, 30121 Venice, Italy

Participating Artists (in alphabetical order)

Shige Fujishiro; Kazuhito Kawai; Takahiro Komuro; Takuro Kuwata; Ritsue Mishima; Yoca Muta; Mayu Nakata; Junko Oki; Noritaka Tatehana; Yui Wata

[Click here for more information](#) on the artists and their exhibited works

About The Curator

Akimoto is an art critic, professor emeritus at Tokyo University of the Arts, special director of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, and a distinguished professor at Tainan National University of the Arts. Born in 1955 in Tokyo, he holds a BA in fine art from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music (now Tokyo University of the Arts). Akimoto first became involved in the art projects at Benesse Art Site Naoshima in 1991, and later served as artistic director of Benesse Art Site Naoshima and director of the Chichu Art Museum (2004–2006). After serving as director of the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2007–2017), he taught as a professor at Tokyo University of the Arts while serving as director of the University Art Museum (2015–2021). From 2017 through 2023, he served as director of the Nerima Art Museum, and he is currently the artistic director of Go for Kogei.

His past projects and exhibitions include *The Standard* (Naoshima, 2001); *Naoshima Standard 2* (Naoshima, 2006–2007); the first three iterations of the *International Triennale of Kogei in Kanazawa* (Kanazawa and Caotun, Taiwan; 2010–2017); *Art Crafting Towards the Future* (Kanazawa, 2012); *Japanese Kogei: Future Forward* (New York, 2015); *Yu-ichi Inoue 1916–1985—La calligraphie libérée at Japonismes 2018* (Paris and Albi, France); and *Art as It Is: Expressions from the Obscure* (Tokyo, 2020). His publications include *Art thinking* (Aato shiko, Tokyo: PRESIDENT Inc., 2019).

About NPO Syuto Kanazawa

NPO Syuto Kanazawa is a citizen-led non-profit organization established in 2007, focused on community development in Kanazawa and its neighboring regions, drawing on its rich cultural heritage. In 2020, the organization launched Go for Kogei, a project dedicated to promoting new perspectives on craft, an important historical and cultural resource of the region. By organizing a wide range of cultural initiatives, the organization aims to strengthen regional and international collaboration while fostering new dialogues and enriching cultural value from a contemporary perspective.

About Go for Kogei

Go for Kogei is a project dedicated to promoting new perspectives on craft from Hokuriku, a region with a long history of craftsmanship. Since its inception in 2020, hosted by NPO Syuto Kanazawa, a citizen-led non-profit organization promoting community development in Kanazawa through its rich cultural heritage, the project has presented exhibitions and events at shrines, temples, and other sites that reflect the region's history and climate. It has also organized conferences to enrich the discourse on today's issues and possibilities surrounding craft. Since 2024, the project has broadened its scope internationally, launching with an exhibition in Paris and subsequently presenting its activities in cities including Seoul, London, and Tainan.

For more information, please visit <https://venice.goforkogei.com>. Follow us on Instagram at [@goforkogei](https://www.instagram.com/goforkogei).

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Supported by

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**GO FOR
KOGEI**



About the Participating Artists

In *Ethnography of the Body and Material — Slowness and Depth in an Accelerated Society*, several artists foreground contingency and transformation as central to their practice.

Takuro Kuwata exposes ceramics to unpredictable reactions between clay, glaze, and kiln, allowing chance to shape the final form. By exhibiting the unfinished process of creation, his work reveals the ongoing temporal flow to the viewers. **Kazuhito Kawai**, sculpts the traces of the body through repeated interactions between clay and gravity, visually capturing the gradual transformation of clay as it dries and cracks over the course of the exhibition.



Left: Takuro Kuwata, Installation view. Right: Kazuhito Kawai, Installation view. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Time is also embedded through repetition and manual labor. **Junko Oki** stitches directly onto antique fabrics (called *boro*) without underdrawings, entangling the histories of worn textiles with newly added threads. Her works accumulate meaning through countless gestures and cycles of washing and reworking. Similarly, **Yui Wata** constructs large-scale woven sculptures by manually plying threads and dyeing them with earth pigments, pursuing primal beauty that transcends time and culture.



Left: Junko Oki, Installation view. Right: Yui Wata, Installation view. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Other artists slow perception itself. **Ritsue Mishima** collaborates closely with Murano glass artisans, guiding molten glass through improvisation rather than predetermined form. Her

transparent sculptures capture layers of light and time, requiring viewers to move slowly around them to perceive subtle shifts in reflection and refraction. **Mayu Nakata** applies more than forty layers of lacquer (or *urushi*) over months of labor, producing surfaces that reveal different expressions depending on the viewer's position, suggesting memory as fluid and ever-changing rather than fixed.



Left: Ritsue Mishima, Installation view. Right: Mayu Nakata, Installation view. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Shige Fujishiro and **Takahiro Komuro** approach slowness through accumulation and deceleration. Fujishiro embeds time through the repetitive hand-threading of thousands of glass beads, creating a new paradise within our familiar everyday scene. Komuro slows the visual language of urban culture by translating pop and kitschy 3DCG imagery into hand-carved wooden sculptures, revealing the devotion and duration concealed behind forms associated with speed and mass production.



Left: Shige Fujishiro. Installation view. Right: Takahiro Komuro. Installation view. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Slowness also emerges through layered process and ritual in the practices of **Yoca Muta** and **Noritaka Tatehana**. For Muta, who pursues a unique style of expression based on Japanese traditional ceramic painting, the quiet stillness during the drying process is integrated as part of the experience of appreciating the artwork. Tatehana explores contemporary values through traditional Japanese culture and craftsmanship. His signature work, *Heel-less Shoes*, popularized as a global fashion icon by Lady Gaga, was inspired by the elevated wooden clogs worn by oiran (elite courtesans) during the Edo period.



Left: Yoka Muta. Installation view. Right: Noritaka Tatehana. Installation view. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Ethnography of the Body and Material 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, proposing slowness and depth as critical tools for rethinking how we create, perceive, and live within an accelerated world.

About the Exhibited works

Shige Fujishiro

Fujishiro transforms familiar, everyday scenery into imaginary paradises through accumulated, painstaking manual labor using glass beads, which have long been treasured as accessories and ancient commodities, along with safety pins. His works are on display in the former living quarters on the second floor of the *palazzo*, arranged to resonate with the natural light coming through the windows facing the canal, the chandelier on the ceiling, and the preserved furniture. With the absence of scaffolding on this floor, viewers can experience the delicate shimmer of the beads and the density of time through their bodies amid the original scale and intimacy of the building.

In the context of Venice, the City of Water, a motif reminiscent of a basketball court is interpreted as a “waterfall” with the falling and flowing water resembling court lines. Venice’s canal system, which encompasses the clean and wastewater cycles, is overlaid as an icon of the space between labor and dreams, as well as freedom and constraint. Beneath its decorative aesthetics, his work embraces the contrasting elements of the city and the human body, as well as purification and stagnation. It encourages a gentle rethinking of the relationship between seeing and imagining in conjunction with architecture.



Shige Fujishiro, *Where is my paradise? (Basketballgoal / Waterfall)*, 2015-2026. Glass beads, safety pins, wire, basket ball goal (iron). Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Kazuhiro Kawai

Rather than using clay as a mere material, Kawai harnesses it as a medium for projecting desire, fiction, and fluctuating identity, creating voluminous sculptural pieces with extreme colors. His work is heavily influenced by the 1990s Harajuku culture, street fashion, and mass-media-constructed realities. A sense of dissonance and instability is ever-present in his work, arising from the gap between a consumerist, saccharine exterior and the reality beneath. For this exhibition, his works are displayed in the plain space of a former storeroom in the *palazzo*, which was purposefully chosen from among the numerous more ornate rooms. In this unadorned space, his works are arranged directly against the substantial-feeling walls and floors. The oozy, dripping appearance of his ceramic works imbues the solid material with fluidity and moisture, visualizing the process of desire surfacing and circulating. The stark contrast with this space stripped of ornamentation highlights the works' extreme coloring and massive presence, inviting viewers to oscillate between sweet and unsettling feelings.



Kazuhiro Kawai, *I've Never Been to Hawaii.*, 2025. Ceramic. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Takahiro Komuro

Inspired by visual cultural mediums including soft-vinyl figurines, science fiction pictures, and American comics, Komuro has been exploring unique sculptural expression that traverses wood sculptures and mass-produced action figures. In this exhibition, Komuro's world unfolds across scaffolding of various heights placed in the entrance hall on the ground floor. Visitors experience his works through physical movements such as looking up, looking down, and going around.

The height and bird's-eye perspective gained from the scaffolding transform the works from mere "extensions of toys" to figures that evoke worship and mythology. The sudden appearance of the giant character sculptures in the historic *palazzo* blurs the boundary between idols of worship and icons of the consumer society, stimulating viewers' physical sensations and stirring up value perceptions. The head-on collision between the accumulated stratum of time in the *palazzo* and these pop-centric, artificial sculptures



prompts rethinking of the very acts of viewing and admiring such sculptural images, three-dimensionally exploring the structures of worship and desire in the modern era.

Takahiro Komuro, *Dog dragon*, 2023. Wood, acrylic. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Takuro Kuwata

Kuwata intentionally exaggerates traditional ceramic techniques and forms, blurring the boundaries between vessel and sculpture, and between the ordinary and the extraordinary. He creates forms in which completion and collapse coexist, actively integrating phenomena that are typically considered flaws or failures such as *kannyu* (fine surface cracking), *ishihaze* (lit. “stone bursts,” referring to irregularities and cracks on a ceramic surface caused by the expansion of small stones in the clay during firing), free-flow glaze, and ruptures. While his vessels serve practical purposes, they also function as sculptural pieces outside the institutionalized framework of ceramics.

In the exhibition space, which is segmented by scaffolding, his works directly engage in a dialogue with the stucco walls and stone floors of the *palazzo*. Cracks and free-flow glaze resonate with the old remnants and marks in the architectural surfaces, superimposing so-called accidents and failures inherent in the creative process onto the passage of time embraced by the aging building. These imbalances and distortions—qualities often overlooked in homogeneous exhibition spaces—are made highly visible here, with Kuwata’s works serving as devices to highlight the heterogeneous temporality inherent in the *palazzo* itself. Kuwata’s approach completely reexamines the significance and the nature of time from within the framework of ceramics.



Takuro Kuwata, *Untitled*, 2025. Porcelain, glaze, pigment. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Ritsue Mishima

Mishima creates sculptures using only colorless, transparent glass through collaboration with skilled glass artisans in Murano, the long-standing capital of the glass industry. In Venice, glass serves as a symbol of light, water, trade, and craftsmanship, and the artist’s work brings this historical context into the present. Her sculpture is shaped by closely observing the ever-changing state of the glass in the flames and is guided by improvisation—an inevitable result of the interplay between



intention and chance that she describes as “fruit of the fire.” This exhibition features 39 works on display in the first room on the second floor of the *palazzo*, and the custom-made display stand emits a soft glow, transforming the exhibit into an installation of light. The stand serves as a device to capture and diffuse light, while the glass embraces and releases light into the space in the forms of refraction, reflection, and shadow. Each work morphs into a presence that visualizes the cycle of light, transcending the realm of individual sculpture. Merging with the architecture, they quietly evoke the memory of light in Venice.

Ritsue Mishima, Installation view. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Yoca Muta

Based on the ceramic painting techniques of Kutani ware, Muta uses the medium of ceramics to reinterpret the marginalized female figure and interpretations of nature within Japanese culture. Her central focus in recent works is the *yamanba*, or “mountain hag,” of Japanese folklore—a character known for embodying contradictory qualities such as motherliness and violence, blessing and terror, and the sacred and the vulgar. Despite being an established part of Japanese traditional folklore, the *yamanba* is also a representation of femininity that deviates from established systems and order. The female figures depicted in Muta’s ceramic paintings are not externally objectified as “women to admire,” but instead constructed from the perspective existing within the female artist herself. Therein, nature transcends the role of mere background; it is depicted as an extension of the body and emotions, merging reality and fiction as well as real and imaginary presences. The uneven, hand-built forms and the painting process also express the fluctuating, multi-layered nature of female bodies and experiences into a visible form.

For this exhibition, her works are on display in a small space at the rear of the ground floor, facing the canal. Situated at the boundary between the city and the water, the interior and the exterior, this low-ceilinged space with its exposed rustic wood accentuates the marginality and ambiguity of her work. Here, the image of the *yamanba* does not represent oppression or fear. Rather, it is a silent yet powerful vision that reconnects the female body with nature, resonating with the time of Venice.



Yoca Muta, *The pot of pulses*, 2026. Ceramic. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Mayu Nakata

Taking traditional *urushi* lacquer techniques as her starting point—particularly the *kinma* technique (in which patterns are created through the repeated process of engraving into a lacquered surface and filling the grooves with differently colored lacquer)—Nakata has redefined *urushi* as a contemporary medium that captures the fluctuations of time and memory, thus elevating it beyond mere decoration. Multi-layered colors are created by applying and polishing dozens of layers of

colored lacquer, and the resulting patterns on the surface are more of a visual representation of the accumulated passage of time within than they are iconographic depictions. The repeated process of engraving a design, applying lacquer, and polishing it can take a long time, ranging from several months to a year, which settles within the material.

Contrastingly, the design of Nakata's work is highly simplistic and geometric. By eliminating excessive design or narrative, her forms direct the viewer's attention toward subtle changes in color and depth rendered by the layers of lacquer rather than toward superficial ornamentation. Her works are on display in a room on the second floor of the *palazzo* which preserves the intimate vibes of the past. In this space filled with memories of life, the time accumulated in the lacquer layers and the time sunk into the architecture quietly overlap. These works gently saturate the viewer's physical senses as "objects with accumulated memories."



Mayu Nakata, *Mirage*, 2026. Lacquer. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Junko Oki

Oki employs the iterative process of hand embroidery to imbue fabric with the memories of daily life and the physical body. Her creativity quietly sheds light on time spent on women's labor, which has long been considered domestic and rarely visible, thus transforming it into art. Exhibited in a former living room on the second floor of a *palazzo*, her works resonate with natural light from the large windows, as well as with the mirror and chandelier.

Within this intimate, private space, the embroidered fabrics can be perceived as an accumulation of emotions and memories from everyday life rather than as mere decorations. The fabrics' shades and textures shift with the changing light and the viewer's position, evoking the inherent quiet time spent working in the home as physical sensations. Furthermore, the living room setting facilitates a re-examination through her work of the meaning behind the act of making, which involves care, repetition, and silence.



Junko Oki, Installation view. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Noritaka Tatehana

Tatehana reframes Japanese traditional culture with a contemporary flair by interpreting fashion not as mere external adornment, but as an act of inscribing social roles, rituals, and values onto the body. His signature work for this exhibition, *Heel-less Shoes*, is created using the exquisite craft of Edo kumihimo braiding, and displayed in the former living quarters on the second floor of the *palazzo*.

In this space with its highly ornate ceilings, walls, and interior design, the footwear appears as a sculptural piece that defines the body's posture, center of gravity, and gait, rather than as a fashion item or craft. The heel-less design requires both body balance and tension, visually demonstrating how fashion can affect physical sensations and behaviors. The amalgamation of Edo-period craftsmanship and contemporary design in this historic building transforms fashion into a device that mediates time and culture, thereby redefining the body as the site where connections to systems and rituals are formed.



Noritaka Tatehana, Center: *Heel-less Shoes*, 2026. Dyed cowhide, Japanese braided cord, plaster.
Right: *Baby Heel-less Shoes*, 2026. Dyed cowhide, Japanese braided cord, metal fastener. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda

Yui Wata

Wata's creative process begins with the primitive tasks of manually plying threads, then dyeing and weaving them. This produces a three-dimensional structure that embodies the fabric's internal structure and gravity itself. Her works are exhibited across the high-ceilinged space on the ground floor. Visitors can view the works from a distance at varying heights by traveling along the staircase, or from beneath by standing on the floor and looking up. The distant view reveals the fabrics' overall structure and volume, while the view from the floor makes gravity's presence physically evident through the overlapping threads, their tension, and hanging fabric. The fine spaces between the threads echo the voids and structures within the *palazzo*, blurring the border between the two-dimensional and the three-dimensional, as well as between supports and sculptures. By traversing the accumulated time in the historic architecture and the time spent on repetitive manual labor, Wata's work transforms the viewer's perspective and evokes different perceptions, providing an experience of the material-body relationship throughout the entire space.



Yui Wata, *Platonic Dancer*, 2026. Cotton, soil. Photo: Noriyuki Ikeda