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DRAWING AS EXCAVATING

Hiraku Suzuki

I have been drawing since I was about three. There used to be a lot of blueprints at my home because my father was an architect, and I used to draw something like a moai on their reverse. I also spent a good chunk of my childhood excavating unknown things like earthenware fragments, minerals, and fossils in my neighborhood. When I was ten years old, I saw a small photo of the Rosetta Stone and read stories about deciphering the glyphs, which completely fascinated me. Then I wanted to become an archaeologist.

Now as an artist, my practice, including works on paper and on panel, mural, installation, frottage, video, sculpture, and live drawing performance, encompasses the new possibilities of drawing in the world today. The method I have in my mind through the act of drawing, however, is still closer to “excavating” things that are hidden in the here and now, than to “depicting” objects/scenery/ideas in a classical way.

It often happens that the thrill of something exciting right before my eyes inspires me more than some remotely exotic place that I explore. For example, it can be a moment in which I spot two branches of a tree that fell onto the asphalt in a way that they form what looks like a hieroglyphic character or some kind of signal. This triggers the sensation of a silent encounter with something new yet familiar, like a keyway to a different time and space that appears in the middle of the here and now.

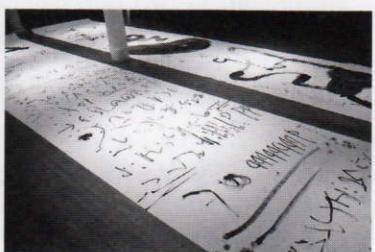
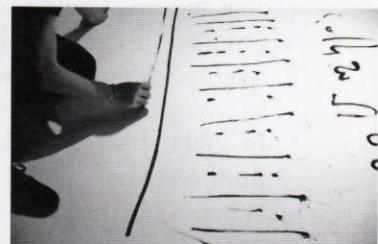
I want to capture—through drawing and looking at signs that have been drawn—the moments when the body’s internal memory and that of the outside world fall together on uncharted areas, like perfectly fitting pieces of an ever-transforming puzzle. Therefore, I’ve been focusing as much as possible on materials and places in my direct environment. The works that come out of this are again keyholes for people—including myself—who look at them, and I hope that they will make use of these holes to peep into the new sphere that is stretching on the other side.

In 2000, I gave my first live drawing performance with my bare hands, using earth as material that I dug up on the street near the venue. Since that time I’ve done it more than one hundred times in various places and situations. The most important point of my live drawing performance has always been a complete improvisational

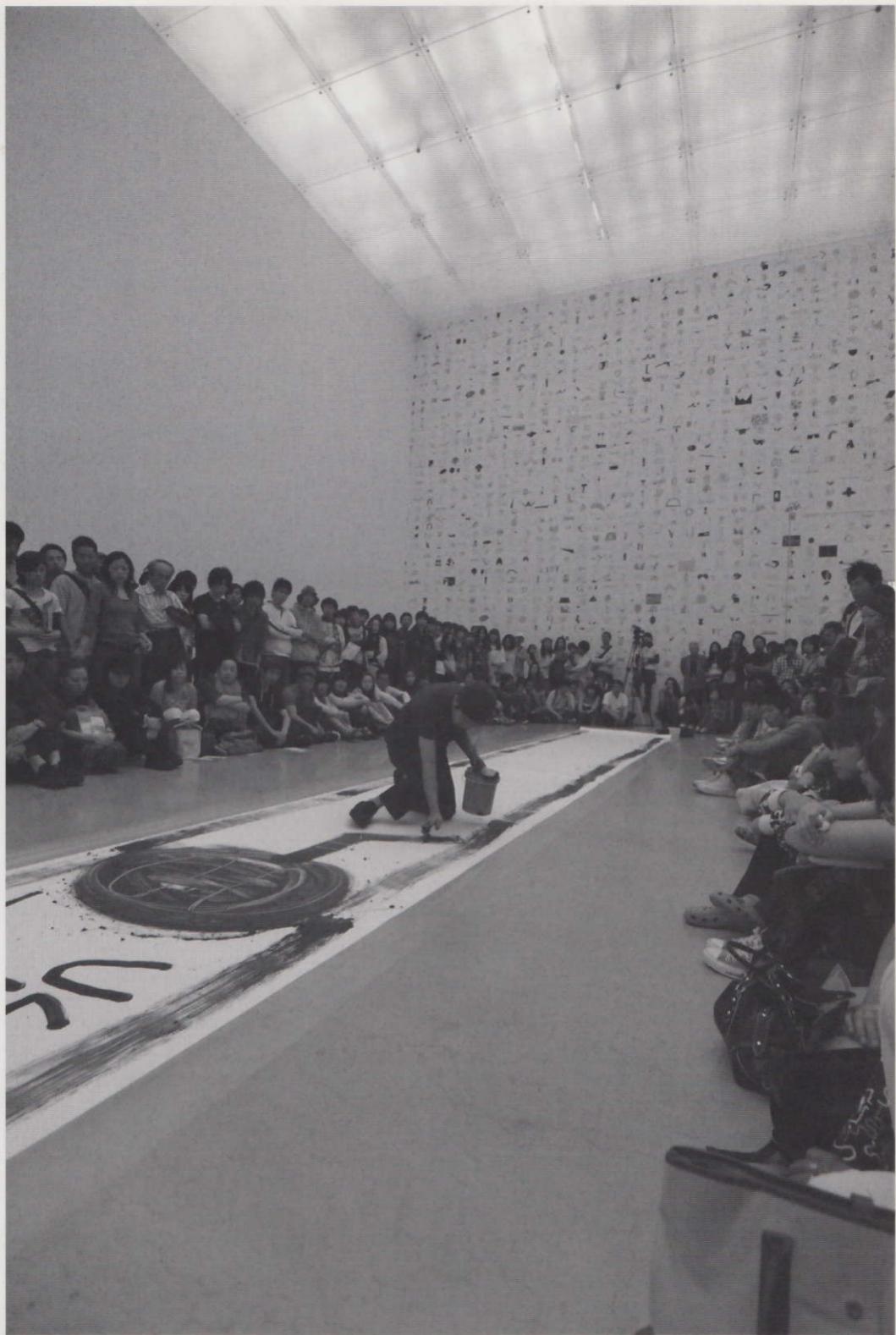
process of conversation with a particular circumstance. I put my body as just one element that is the same as the space, time, sound, and every subtle factor in the circumstance. These elements function as limitations, but at the same time as possible surfaces for discovering new things. In a way it is an action to transform a certain place into an imaginary excavation site where something unexpected invariably appears. I might be trying to recreate the moments that the first language was invented. It is always the process, at the same time like dance or music, so I don't leave anything after the performance.

In 2004, I started drawing some types of symbols inspired by residual images from everyday scenery in the city with a marker onto an A4 paper folded in half. Wherever I traveled the world I could easily get paper and marker so I kept drawing the same way, besides the other things I was working on at the time. When it exceeded six hundred sheets, I realized how thick the whole bunch of papers had become, and I suddenly thought of compiling them as a book in paperback format. I thought this book would become like a dictionary that we have never seen. The title *GENGA* means "original drawing" in Japanese, and as a title I came up with "(something) between GENGO (language) and GINGA (galaxy)" = *GENGA*. It's a bit of a wordplay; it's like a title from rap music. Both language and galaxy are the changing archive. Within this archive you try to write down the fictional words or to find the imaginary signs in the sky. I thought that what I am doing is something close to such activities.

Drawing has always been the intersection of direct human circumstance and the long cosmic time since its beginning, and it will continue to be. It is a signal, not just a meaning itself, but is the state from which meanings are generated, reflecting and echoing like light. I hope my drawing work will be a creative mediator, linking subtle memories of "signs" and "phenomena" with the future.



Hiraku Suzuki Live Drawing Performance with Live Music by Raz Mesinai, December 10, 2011, at Location One, The American Academy of New York, in SoHo. Earth, acrylic, and marker on paper. Photos: Chito Yoshida. Courtesy Location One. © Hiraku Suzuki



Hiraku Suzuki Live Drawing Performance with Poetry Reading by Shing02, May 5, 2009, at 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. Earth, acrylic, and marker on paper. Photo: Hiraku Ikeda. Courtesy 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. © Hiraku Suzuki



GENGA #001–#1000 (2004–2009). Marker on Xerox paper. 21 × 29.7 cm. Installation view at 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. Photo: Kazuo Fukunaga. Courtesy 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa. © Hiraku Suzuki

HIRAKU SUZUKI received an MFA from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. His work centers around an expanded notion of drawing, and on the vast library of signs and glyphs he has developed by focusing on the shapes, forms, rhythms, and materials of his immediate environment. His recent solo exhibitions include WIMBLEDON space, London (2011), Galerie du Jour Agnès B., Paris (2010) and Tokyo Wonder Site Shibuya, Tokyo (2008). Group exhibitions include *Roppongi Crossing*, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2010); *Hundred Stories of Love*, The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2009); *Between Site and Space*, ARTSPACE, Sydney (2009); Redbull House of Art, Hotel Central, Sao Paulo (2009) and *The Vision of Contemporary Art*, The Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo (2009). His early works are held in the collection of The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art. Publications include *GENGA* and *Looking for Minerals*. He lives and works in Japan. Hiraku Suzuki spent 2011–2012 as part of the international residency program of Location One, in New York's SoHo district.

Other *PAJ* features in the ongoing series “Performance Drawings”—

1. “The Line Is Fine,” by Joe Diebes, *PAJ* 99 (September 2011).
2. “Visible Music,” by William Hellerman, *PAJ* 97 (January 2011).
3. “Ear Bodies, Ear Lines,” by Fabrizio Manco, *PAJ* 94 (January 2010).
4. “*Ryoanji: Solos for Oboe, Flute, Contrabass, Voice, Trombone with Percussion or Orchestral Obbligato*,” by John Cage, *PAJ* 93 (September 2009).
5. “Fluxus Long Weekend,” by Alison Knowles, *PAJ* 91 (January 2009).
6. “*Deep Trance Behavior in Potatoland* and *Maria Del Bosco*,” by Richard Foreman, *PAJ* 90 (September 2008).
7. “*Geneva, Handfall*,” by Trisha Brown, *PAJ* 89 (May 2008).
8. “*The Threepenny Opera*,” by Robert Wilson, *PAJ* 88 (January 2008).
9. “Research Events,” by Ralph Lemon, *PAJ* 81 (September 2005).
10. “Studio as Study,” by Melinda Barlow, *PAJ* 71 (May 2002).