

Shimabuku

For Octopuses, Monkeys and People

Pour les pieuvres, les singes et les Hommes

Foreword

*The real world is not an object - it is a process.*¹

John Cage's thinking has profoundly influenced and moved a whole generation of artists and has participated in defining conceptual art. In the exhibition *tout le monde* in 2015, we presented a work by William Anastasi entitled *Sink* (1963-2010). This work, a square steel plate of 50 cm wide and 2 cm thick, was given by Anastasi to John Cage for his birthday, with the protocol of putting water on its surface every day until his death. Gradually, rust would alter and erode the steel plate.

Introducing living things into art is a way of anchoring creation in the real world, which is "not an object". Shimabuku's work began in the 1990s and followed the work of Joseph Beuys or Jannis Kounellis, who in Europe introduced live animals in art in the 1960s and 1970s, or Ágnes Dénes, on the American continent, who placed the protection of the environment at the centre of her actions, or Robert Smithson concerned about the idea of entropy and growing disorder.

"To discover the meaning that circulates among things, between what composes them and what they compose, in us, outside us, with or without us [...]"² This is the pro-

mise of Shimabuku's work, who, by choosing the unpredictable as to the final form that his work will take, defines the process as a priority over the formal result. Meticulously produced and documented, his sculptural works, writings and photographs, videos and performances, articulated together or separately, reveal the modalities of their design and the important part left to chance. The works produced by Shimabuku are based on a profound attention to his environment, to Japan where he lives and works, but also to the different contexts in which he is invited to exhibit.

Shimabuku's actions are positive. These are gestures of care, offering, and sometimes even reconstruction, which are not without evoking *kintsugi*, a traditional Japanese technique known since the 15th century, which consists in restoring ceramics or porcelains with gold or silver. These scars thus sublimate the accidents that have punctuated the life of objects. In the larger room, through an action he carried out on the Japanese coast, Shimabuku straightens up the landscape after it has been devastated. He creates a conversation between the film of this action, *Erect* and fragments of two houses destroyed in July in the Gagarin social housing estate in Ivry-sur-Seine. Where Robert Smithson's *Upside Down Tree* (1969) was a transcendental gesture (which consisted in replanting a tree in the

ground with the roots towards the sky), Shimabuku sets up the possibility of a second life. Concern about climate change and the need to become aware of our natural environment remind us of the fragility of ecosystems. Also the question of the living world and of animism is central today and regularly finds its place at the heart of the *Crédac* project. Mathieu Mercier had made in 2012 *Untitled* (couple of axolotls), a kind of diorama, at the crossroads of the vivarium and aquarium, which raised the question of the evolution of species; in 2015 we invited Michel Blazy to showcase his *Collection of avocado trees* (started in 1997) in the collective exhibition *tout le monde*. In 2017, Nina Canell introduced slugs into the heart of one of her installations made of "disarmed" electrical cabinets, for her solo show.

for more than twenty years, Shimabuku has been one of the most recognized among this generation of artists interested by the living and animism. For him as for Pierre Huyghe, Tomás Saraceno or Nina Canell, the exhibition space has been transformed into a refuge for a new ecosystem of organisms.

Claire Le Restif
Exhibition curator

The exhibition is produced with the support and complicity of Air de Paris, Paris.

1 John Cage, *Pour les Oiseaux (Entretiens avec Daniel Charles)*, L'Herne, Paris, 2002

2 Tristan Garcia, *Forme et Objet. Un traité des choses*, PUF, Paris, 2010..

Works

→ Gallery 1

○ Opening night

Flowers to Neighbors
Des fleurs pour les voisins
2018

Red dahlias

On the evening of the opening, Shimabuku offers a red dahlia to the inhabitants of the building opposite Crédac. He wanted them to be able to celebrate the event by displaying the flower at their windows, and warmly invited them to come and share the evening with him.

○ 1
Ivry Earth, Water and Sunlight
Terre d'Ivry, eau et lumière
2018

Ivry soil, wooden bases.

From left to right:

Construction site - avenue Maurice Thorez; La Manufacture des Œillets - 31 rue Raspail; La Fabrique aux Petits Pois, shared community garden - 24 rue Marat; Hôpital Charles Foix - 7 avenue de la République; Site of the former BHV warehouses, boulevard Paul Vaillant-Couturier; Eco-Tri, 12 rue Ernest Renan).

○ 2
Erect
Eriger
2017

Digital film, colour, sound.

5 min. 53 sec.; looped.

Reborn art festival, Oshika Peninsula, Ishinomaki, Japan.

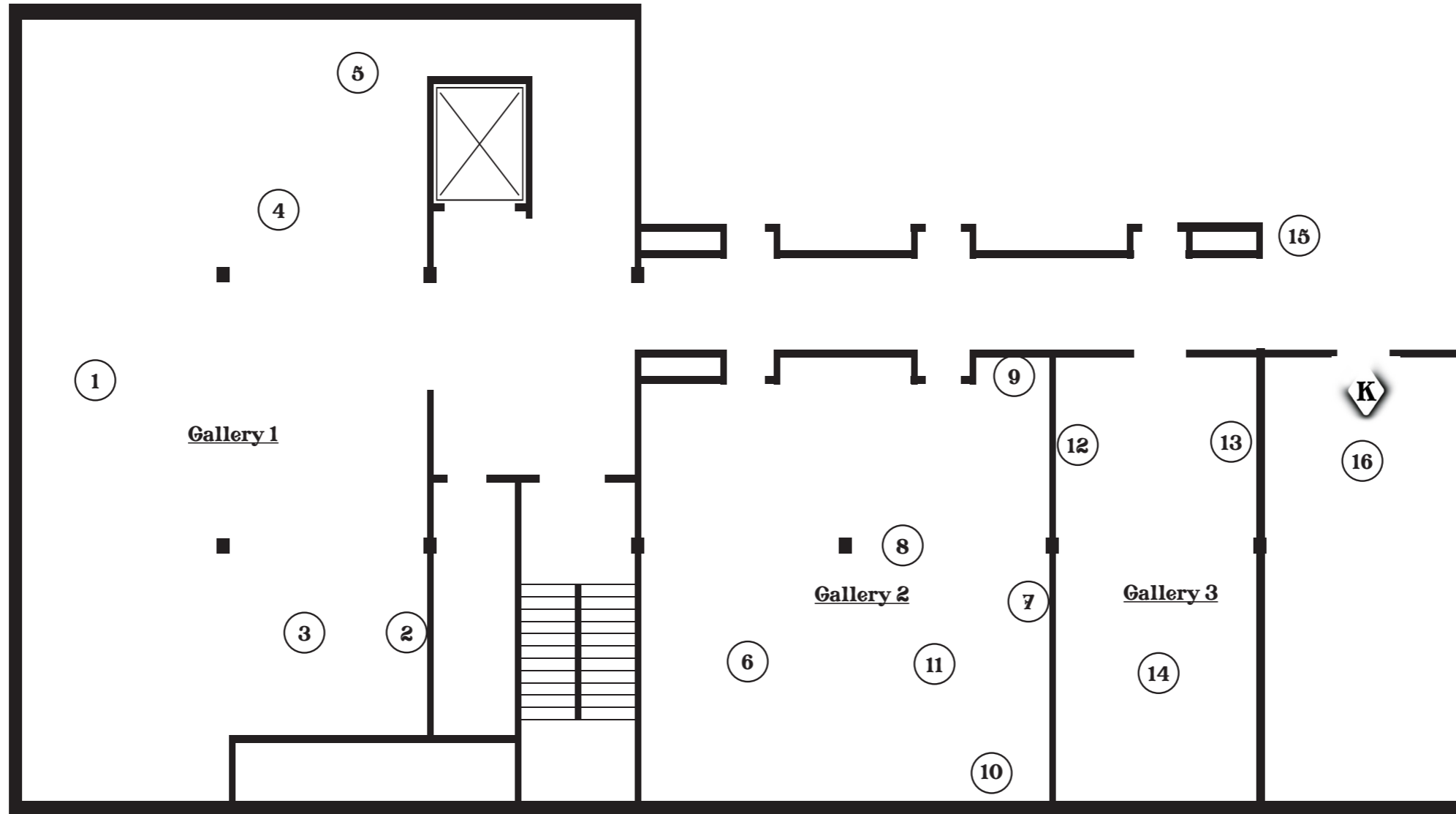
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On this shore of the Oshika Peninsula, devastated by the 2011 tsunami, Shimabuku "straightens" the landscape by erecting stranded trunks and branches in the sand. His gesture anticipates the resilience of an ecosystem swept away by a natural disaster.

○ 3
Erect (Ivry)
Eriger (Ivry)
2017

Bricks (construction site, Gagarin housing estate, Ivry), various materials.

During his wanderings in Ivry, Shimabuku spotted various construction sites, including the demolition of two houses located in front of the Gagarin



social housing estate. It is to these tiles, bricks, construction debris characteristic of the working class city that he decides to give a second life, erecting them as sculptures, facing the Japanese shoreline.

○ 4
Something that Floats /
Something that Sinks
*Quelque chose qui flotte /
Quelque chose qui coule*
2010

Aluminium, water, electrical system, fruit and vegetables, wooden bases.
Collection agnès b.

"There are tomatoes and limes floating and others sinking. Some vegetables float and others sink. It's something I've always noticed when cooking and always found mysterious. So I decided to work on this mysterious thing, leave it mysterious and just let people experience it like that. (Later, I discovered that beyond the tomatoes and limes that float and those that sink, there was yet another kind, those that swim.)"

○ 5
Leaves Swim
Les feuilles nagent
2011

MiniDV transferred on digital file, color, silent; 2 min. 30 sec.; looped.

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→ Gallery 2

○ 6
Asking the Repentistas -
Peneira & Sonhador - to remix my
octopus works
*Demander aux Repentistas -
Peneira & Sonhador - de remixer
mes travaux sur les pieuvres*
2011

Video installation, two projections.
Mini DV transferred to digital files,
colour, sound, 16 min. 43 sec.; looped
© Shimabuku. Air de Paris, Paris.

On the occasion of his participation in the 27th Biennial of Sao Paulo, where he

was invited to produce a new piece and present older ones, Shimabuku asked two Brazilian street singers to "remix" his works with octopuses. From the films of his actions (shown on the left channel) he presented to the Repentistas, they reinterpret the stories into a rhythmic and epic ballad, where Shimabuku becomes Japan's greatest fisherman, a kind fisherman who returns his catch to the sea. In Brazil, the work is thus understood without subtitles, facilitating the interaction between different cultures and interpretations.

○ 7
With Octopus
Avec la pieuvre
1990-2000

Ten framed texts.
© Shimabuku. Air de Paris, Paris

1.
Exhibition in a Refrigerator
Exposition dans un réfrigérateur

2.
Octopus Road Project
Projet de la route de la pieuvre
1991

3.
Studying About Octopi
J'étudie les pieuvres

4.
Encounter Between an Octopus
and a Pigeon
If gravity disappeared from the earth,
an octopus and a pigeon could meet on
equal terms. Fighting with gravity.
*Rencontre de la pieuvre avec un pigeon
Si la force de gravité disparaissait de la Terre,
alors une pieuvre et un pigeon pourraient se
rencontrer sur un pied d'égalité.
La lutte contre la pesanteur.*
Nagoya City Art Museum
1993

5.
An Octopus Becomes a Star
Une pieuvre devient une étoile
1993

6.
On the beach in Zurich
Sur la plage à Zurich
1993

7.
Then, I Decided to Give a Tour of Tokyo to
the Octopus from Akashi
*Alors, je décidai de faire une visite
guidée de Tokyo à la pieuvre
d'Akashi*
2000

8.
Catching octopus with self-made ceramic
pots
*Attraper des pieuvres avec des poteries
faites-main*
Biennale of Ceramics in Contemporary Art 2nd
edition, Albisola,
Côte Ligurienne, Italie
2003

9.
Octopus Stone
Pierre de pieuvre
2013

10.
Sculpture for Octopuses: Exploring for
Their Favorite Colors
*Sculpture pour pieuvres : à la
recherche de leurs couleurs favorites*
1998

○ 8
On the Beach in Zurich
Sur la plage à Zurich
1998

Plastic octopus and donkey.
Private collection, Geneva.

"I visited a toy shop along the stone pavement in Zurich. Looking around the shop for some time, I found a cardboard box in the corner. In it were plastic animals and creatures of different kinds. Soon I found myself playing on the floor of the shop. First I grasped an octopus to make it crawl on the floor. It looked alive. Side by side with the octopus, I placed a gorilla, a tiger, a shark, and then, a dolphin, a giraffe, a rhinoceros, and a dinosaur. A donkey in the bottom of the box looked at me, so I put it in front of the octopus. Their eyes met, and appeared to have been looking at each other since long time ago. It seemed that all happened on the beach. I felt as if I looked at the happenings on the beach from a distance."

○ 9
Octopus waiting for someone with
a dog and a bear
*Pieuvre attendant quelqu'un
avec un chien et un ours*
1999-2001

Screen printing.

© Shimabuku. Air de Paris, Paris

Invited to the Printemps de Cahors (France) in 1999, Shimabuku planted an animal decor in front of the Valentré bridge. He was sitting on the grassy slope facing the river with a stuffed grizzly bear. Nearby, a porcelain Dalmatian dog, bought at the flea market, was staring at the river Lot. A stone's throw away, under a parasol, Shimabuku had set up his two friends Pandi and Panda, two octopuses from Bali, in an aquarium filled with seawater.

Every afternoon, he was installing this eclectic little world and waited. He had discovered that the history of the city of Cahors would come from the encounter of a dog (chien from the Latin canis) and a bear (ours thus Ca-ours / Cahors). The dog and the bear were there, frozen but very present, and to add mystery, Shimabuku had enriched its composition with octopuses. The artist did nothing more. He waited, under the sun, for the unknown, the unexpected, the unpredictable.

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**Sculpture for Octopuses:
Exploring for Their Favorite Colors**
*Sculpture pour pieuvres :
à la recherche de leurs couleurs
favorites*
2010

Handcrafted glass beads.

© Shimabuku. Air de Paris, Paris

"Octopuses often pick up stones and seashells on the ocean floor. I decided to make some pieces of sculpture for them. When an octopus encounters one of these different colored glass pieces on the seabed, would he gaze into it with his callike eyes? Would he grab it with one of his eight tentacles? Would he carry it along into an octopus pot? And what would be his favorite color? On the wide reaches of the ocean floor, can a small glass piece connect a man and an octopus? "

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Octopus Stone
Pierre de pieuvre
2013

Octopus stones (9 stones, 2 shells), wooden base, Plexiglas cover.
Collection Yann Sérandour, Rennes.

"Octopuses have a habit of picking up stones and shells from the bottom of the sea. When you pull up an octopus pot, sometimes you will find octopuses

holding them. Sometimes the pot is full of them. Some octopuses like stones, and others prefer shells. Some are holding pieces of broken glass, or holding red colored stones. I collect these things and admire them."

→ Gallery 3

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**Gift : Exhibition for the Monkeys,
Iwatayama, Kyoto**
*Le cadeau : Exposition pour les
singes, Iwatayama, Kyoto*
1992

Photography, text.

Nicoletta Fiorucci Collection, London.
Courtesy Freedman Fitzpatrick galleries,
Los Angeles / Paris; Air de Paris, Paris.

In 1992, Shimabuku organized what he considered to be his first exhibition, an exhibition for monkeys on a hill in Kyoto. As a young graduate, he moved away from the commercial gallery trail (where it is common for young artists to pay to be exhibited and thus start their careers) to exhibit in public spaces. Since he was told that monkeys like bright things, one of them having been seen staring at a piece of glass, he collected from his friends potential gifts for monkeys, including a mirror, Christmas ornaments, a bouquet of roses. He arranged these different elements in the monkeys park and observed their reactions.

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**The Snow Monkeys of Texas -
Snow Monkey Stance**
*Les singes des neiges du Texas -
La posture du singe des neiges*
2016

Digital printing on Hahnemühle paper laminated on aluminium, wooden frame
© Shimabuku

Courtesy Freedman Fitzpatrick gallery,
Los Angeles / Paris; Air de Paris, Paris.

First meeting between Shimabuku and snow monkeys exiled in Texas. This female of the group seems amazed in front of Shimabuku: is this face from Asia familiar to her?

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**The Snow Monkeys of Texas - Do
snow monkeys remember snow
mountains?**
*Les singes des neiges du Texas -
Les singes des neiges se
rappellent-ils des montagnes
enneigées ?*
2016

HD colour film, sound, 20 minutes,

looped; cactus; adhesive lettering.
Courtesy Freedman Fitzpatrick Gallery,
Los Angeles / Paris.

After three days of mutual observation, Shimabuku wondered, "Do these monkeys from Japan remember the snow?" Without the possibility of finding real snow in this arid region, it is at a soda dispenser that he finds crushed ice and fills the back of a pickup truck with it. He makes a mound out of the ice and, alone with the monkeys, they react spontaneously. "For them, I had become a tree."

*With the kind assistance of
the Louis Vuitton Foundation, Paris.*

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Born as Box
Né boîte
2018

Cardboard box, voice recording
© Shimabuku. Air de Paris, Paris

→ Crédakino

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Sea and Flowers
La mer et les fleurs
2013

Digitalized super 8 film, colour, silent
2 min. 19 sec., looped
© Shimabuku. Air de Paris, Paris

"One day I saw a red flower floating in the waves along the coast. Was it drifting towards a distant horizon? I then thought of the day when these flowers, a long time ago, were brought by the waves from the continent. Where will the flowers I threw into the sea go? Will they finally wash up on another shore?"

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Open from Monday to Friday, from 2 to 6 PM,
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Free admission

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