

Three Australian Artists to Receive the “Asa Matsuoka Award”

The International Culture Appreciation and Interchange Society, Inc., will grant their first “Asa Matsuoka Award” to Australia’s Heidi Axelsen, Hugo Moline and Nathan Hawkes. The presentation of the award will take place on 7 August 2013 from 12pm at Art Front Gallery Co., Ltd. (Hillside A, 29-18 Sarugakucho Shibuya-ku Tokyo).

The “Asa Matsuoka Award”, named after the founder of the International Culture Appreciation and Interchange Society, Inc., is an award of 250,000 Japanese yen dedicated to fostering goodwill between Japan and the Oceania region. This award is given to encourage artists who have the potential of successfully promoting Oceania culture, especially in the art field. The intended recipients for this award are artists who come to work at the Australia House, which is deeply related to the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT: an international art festival held every three years) in Tokamachi, in the Echigo-Tsumari region of Niigata prefecture.

The selection was made jointly by internationally renowned art director Mr Fram Kitagawa who also produces the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, and Public Diplomacy First Secretary Mr, Ciaran Chestnutt from the Australian Embassy Tokyo.

Recipients:

Heidi Axelsen - Born March 1983 (Female)

Heidi trained in sculpture at the National Art School in Sydney and in arts management at Macquarie University. She also has a background in community cultural development projects in culturally diverse communities in Western Sydney. Together with her longtime collaborator and husband, Hugo Moline, they have explored ways of engaging communities through projects of site-specific art in Sydney, Bangkok, Manila & New York.

Hugo Moline – Born January 1981 (Male)

Hugo trained as an architect at Sydney University and since then has worked with a range of communities across Australia, in Fiji, Thailand, and The Philippines, working with people to design and construct the spaces that people need to live out their lives. To name a few, his projects have included numerous public art projects across Sydney, a people-made plan for city-wide upgrading in Lautoka, Fiji and the collaborative design of a new Housing Cooperative in Canley Vale, Australia.

Nathan Hawkes – Born November 1980 (Male)

Nathan maintains a studio practice that incorporates painting, drawing and sculpture. His work seeks to understand the ways in which different mediums can uniquely engage with ideas of temporality and spatiality. Nathan is the current recipient of the 2013/2014 Marten Bequest Travelling Scholarship, which will involve visits to Japan, Vienna, Iceland and New York.

The International Culture Appreciation and Interchange Society, Inc. was established in 1968 by the late Ms. Asa Matsuoka as a public-benefit corporation approved by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At that time, Japan was on the road to economic recovery, giving priority to economic matters. University disturbances occurred worldwide and young people globally were unable to find meaning in life. In turning to the importance of the “culture of the heart” as an alternative to the emerging materialistic world, the “International Culture Appreciation and Interchange Society, Inc.” was established with the objective of further spreading the circle of cultural exchange with people from around the world. Since then the

society has taken part in various activities such as introducing Japanese culture in the United States and Europe along with promoting art exchanges with Oceania countries.

Asa Matsuoka: Born in 1893, she studied abroad in the United States after finishing her first year at Tsuda Eigaku Juku in 1914. After studying at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Social Work in 1927, she received both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees from Columbia University. And then in 1932, she became the first Japanese female to receive a doctoral degree from Columbia.

As tensions with America increased, she became active as a goodwill Ambassador and lecturing about Japanese culture throughout the US. And then from 1939, responding to a request from the MOFA and the Japanese Army to initiate a peace overture with China, she became active there in cultural and social work for 8 years. During that time, Asa Matsuoka established and became the principal of Nanking Children's School for Chinese children. Matsuoka was always motivated by "the importance of people's kindness" and regarded "international goodwill" as her lifelong occupation. She passed away in 1980.

Why Oceania? During World War II, Japan had fought against Australia, a member of the Commonwealth. However in 1951, diplomatic relations were resumed, followed by the signing of the Australia-Japan Agreement on Commerce in 1957. Japan then became a vital importer of abundant resources from Australia, and in 1976, the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed to strengthen and expand relations between the two countries. Australia traditionally had a policy of restraining from signing comprehensive bilateral agreements, but changed this for furthering the strong bilateral economic ties with Japan.

In 1972, the International Culture Appreciation and Interchange Society, Inc. decided to "donate the best of contemporary Japanese-style *Nihonga* paintings as a concrete means of introducing Japanese culture and as a token of appreciation for all the resources provided by Australia, while providing a means for the Australian people to learn more about the Japanese culture and soul". For this purpose, the Society commissioned works by 25 Japanese artists who were recognized as the most prominent among contemporary *Nihonga* artists, including such eminent artists as Shoko Kawasaki, Togyu Okumura, Meiji Hashimoto, Hourin Fukuouji, Tamako Kataoka and Tatsuo Takayama. These paintings were donated in 1976 when the Basic Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed.

A few years later, 16 more contemporary *Nihonga* paintings were donated to New Zealand. As an ongoing expression of the significance given to this profound relationship, the International Culture Appreciation and Interchange Society, Inc. selected the Oceania region for this award.

What is the Australia House? Australia has been part of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT) since the initiative began in 2000, and has progressively deepened its relationship with the region. Australia House was established in 2009 as a symbol of this long-term relationship. Although the original Australia House was completely destroyed by the large quake that hit the region in March of 2011, a new facility was built after an international competition was held for the design and the new Australia House opened at the 2012 ETAT. The new Australia House provides a base for cultural exchanges, which can be used for residence programs and art exhibitions. It is a place full of new and exciting possibilities for the future which people look to with high expectations as a region directly connected to an overseas country.

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