

A Walk through the ARAKAWA/GINS Exhibition

KISARAGI Koharu

The City as the Art Form of the Next Millennium
 ARAKAWA/GINS
 January 24 - March 29
 ICC Gallery A

Where did you first go in that space? Did you climb the slope extending from left and right walls? Or where the urban model was, in the center? Or perhaps when you first entered, on your immediate left hand side, did you read the comments by the creators? Or maybe....?

Maybe you haven't even come to see the show yet. Well, if that's the case, then by all means come with me! You can walk the path I followed. As though riding in a taxi, ride in my body, and see the show!

Once I'd seen the show, I decided to write in as clear a language as possible about the experience. It seems only fitting.

Standing at the entrance, and looking inside, being terribly dark inside, at first I couldn't tell what was what. There seemed to be a model of some sort in the center, and it sloped at the sides, and over the entire wall was what appeared to be computer graphic illustrations, design images, all extended.

From somewhere came sounds of *gagaku* [traditional Japanese court music]. A *sho* flute resonated. It was a shrill long tone, that played with my sense of time.

The lighting shifted slowly. "Oh I see." It must be night. (Or so I imagined) Then, I approached the model in the center, and awaited the coming of dawn.

It was just like an insect's nest, or maybe a specimen of



a human brain, or maybe the veins of a leaf? It was a model that was at once orderly yet alive, making me not a little dizzy.

The light slowly increased, and I began to make out the finer details. I walked around it, gazing down inside. In the center was a green open space, that seemed like a gentle little hill. Surrounding this was a throng of buildings consisting of what seemed an accumulation of endless slopes. I noticed that there were roof gardens, small creeks flowing, and paths cutting through. The illumination depicted the clouds passing overhead, slowly changing the color of the light, slipping from afternoon into evening's fall.

Taking my time to take all of this in, I began imagining. "If I lived in this city, where would I be? At this time, when evening moves into night, where would I want to be?" I'd probably stop somewhere in the middle of that slope, looking down on the panorama as the night blankets the city. Then, I'd probably slowly begin walking, passing through that crazy maze of buildings (reminding me of Hong Kong's old Kowloon City), down into that man-made park, where I'd frequently crouch, watch, relax, and then, set off walking again. Headed not so purposefully to wherever it was in all of this that I lived, probably up that slope, slowly, ever so slowly .

Just then, I felt eyes upon me. Turning around, I was

surprised to see that there were people, standing in the middle of the slope (just like that in the model) which extended from the wall, gazing down in my direction.

A moment of giddiness. I, the watcher, am the watched! At that moment I became uneasy. But why? Was it because the usual power structure, common to the museums, the defined point of gaze for the works *on display* had been broken? Was it because, involved in looking at the work, in the defenseless state of being immersed in my imaginations, I had been being watched? Just like this, the audience—still "in their seats"—were in the same moment made actors on the stage.

And if that is so, I thought, and headed up the slope away from the model. "Up there, I can be just one of the audience." I aimed for what I had decided was the safety zone. Yet, as I headed up the green slope which so resembled the hill, step by step, up the soft surface which so resembled the earth, I was overtaken again by an uneasy sensation. I was struck by ambivalence. One sensation was like a *déjà vu*. "I've been up this hill before...." And it is true. Moments before, while looking at the model, I had imagined this very experience. I still had the image of slowly climbing that slope. The feeling of my feet sinking into the turf. I was precisely in the very footsteps of my own imagined

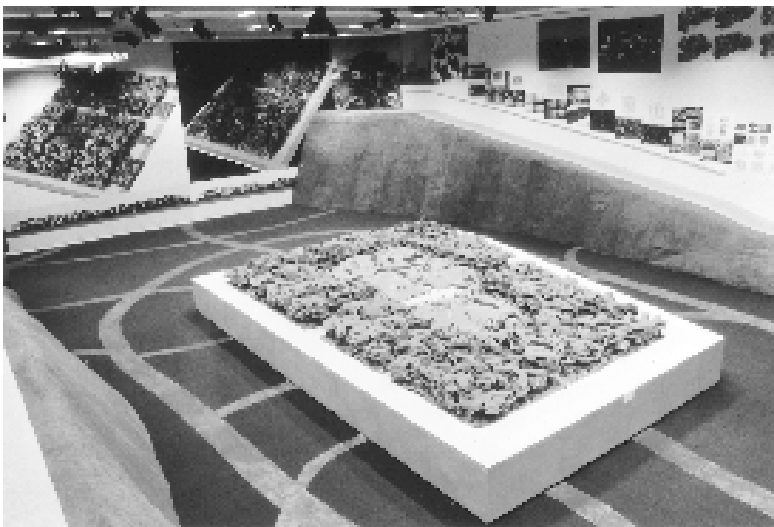


photo: NAKAMURA Keiji

experience. Or maybe no, perhaps my walking here now was the more *virtual* experience. The physical sense of myself walking up that slope was that of being suspended between the worlds of image and actuality. Everything else was like arbitrary cloud cover enveloping my senses.

Another thing I noticed was that even though I had climbed this hill in order to stand among the spectators at the scene, my sense of being observed had not diminished a whit. This, too, was a feeling of my nerves frothing over at the nakedness of my subconsciousness, liberated, yet defenseless and so plainly in view. But who is it that is looking at me walk up this hill? The one so lasciviously, unabashedly oogling the scene? Why, that's me, of course. Here again, it is I (imagining the stroll while looking at the model) gazing (from the top of the slope) back down on myself.

A multilayered combination mutually inclusive structure. Inversion follows inversion. One sees one seeing oneself. And this down deep into the depths of the unconscious. It is as if this was a clever contraption for making my subjective self refocus a spotlight on myself through my consciousness.

And it was a strangely bright, nevertheless tense experience unlike anything I'd had before. This space was, from element to element, point to point, made of *me*. I

perceived, I imagined, and that very structure of I, overturned to the very extent that it was engaged, was the very I that I was staring at so absently.

As I thought of this, the unease that I had been feeling slipped away. And at the same time, my heart became light. "Here, I might as well live in a way that makes a play of *me*." A completely free, thrilling perceptual adventure. Here, a space that hadn't existed anywhere before had appeared. A "daily life space" which is a cohabitation as the city, as art, and as myself.

Feeling dynamic, I made my way out of that space.

[During the term of the exhibition, The ICC Theater featured showing of the films «Why Not (A Serenade of Eschatological Ecology)» (1969) and «For Example (A Critique of Never)» (1971) by the artists, ARAKAWA Shusaku and Madeline GINS.]

KISARAGI Koharu

Born in Tokyo. Graduated from Tokyo Women's Christian University, College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Philosophy. From 1983 has led the theater group NOISE. Advocating "The City as Theater," Ms. KISARAGI has debuted works such as «A.R.—A simple portrait of AKUTAGAWA Ryunosuke», «In the morning, with cold water» and others, while actively putting together theater workshops nationwide. In 1992, Ms. KISARAGI was the Chairperson of the First Conference for Asian Women and Theater, held in Tokyo and Kyoto. Her writings include *The Plays of KISARAGI Koharu* (Shinjuku Shobo), *Theater of The City Folk* (Chikuma Shobo), *Letters from MASAOKA Shiki* (Iwanami Shoten) and *The Children of August* (Bansei Shobo), among others.

