

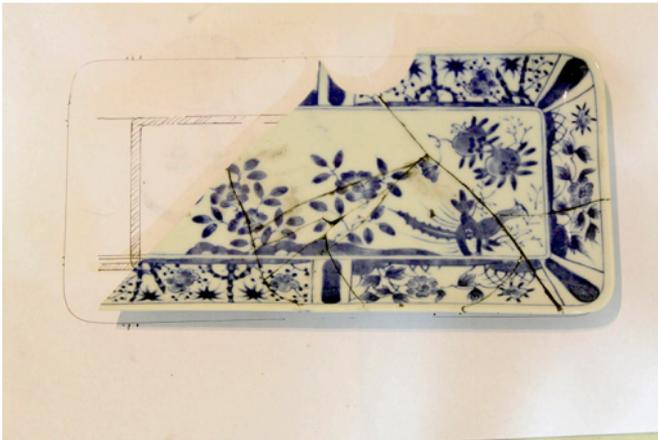
Repairing Earthquake Project

Stories from the Objects

Object #2011_04

Fish plate

In September 2011, about six months after the disaster, these crockery shards were found in the neighbourhood of the old Touna railway station in Miyagi, Japan. For a long time, this area was mainly inhabited by fishermen. This kind of traditional hand-painted plate was typically found in old homes. Its rectangular shape suggests it was used for plating fish. Initially, it seemed impossible to completely restore the plate and took a lot of work to match up the pieces to get the curvature right. In 2012, while working on this project in connection with a group exhibition in Mito, sculptor Tomohiko Ogawa helped to finish it. The missing parts were filled with a kind of plaster used by dentists.



Object #2011_07

Cooking knife

In September 2011, this fish knife was found in Miyagi Prefecture. The metal was covered with an incredibly thick layer of rust. All sorts of attempts were made to try and remove the rust as the metal of the blade was heavily damaged by the salty seawater. While staying at Mito in 2012, the rust was successfully removed using a Dremel tool. The fissures in the wooden handle were filled as well as the holes in the hollow plastic connector. The ultimate goal will be to file down the blade even further so it can be used again for cutting.



House in Gamo

16 September 2011 / 22 October 2012 / 15 June 2018

These are all photos of the same house during different time periods. The top photo was taken some time in 2011. Discovered by sheer coincidence, the exact same location was photographed again in 2012 in the city of Sendai, the capital of the Miyagi Prefecture. In this 2012 photo, the entire left wing of the house was torn down. A widespread rumour in this region was that the homeowners razed many houses that could still be restored- in order to become eligible for government redevelopment funding. The bottom photograph shows the situation in 2018, after the house got a new left wing.



Object #2011_19

Hydrant

This aluminium object was found in 2011 in Watari, Touna or Sendai – it's unclear where exactly. For years, the purpose of this object remained a mystery, until a friend discovered it was part of a so-called 'field bulb'- a kind of swivelling sprinkler head used in paddy fields. Since it's made out of aluminium, it was relatively easy to bend back into its original shape. It was the first metal object to be restored in connection with the Repairing Earthquake Project.



The starting spot

12 September 2011 / 17 October 2012 / 6 June 2018

Harumi Shimura, an acquaintance who lived nearby and occasionally helped with the Repairing Earthquake Project, pointed to this site on the map prior to the first visit to the disaster area in 2011. This location is where all the trips to tsunami-hit areas started from. The photo on top dates from 2011, and is the first photo taken in the context of this project.

The tsunami hit the peninsula from the left and the entire area was flooded. On the left, you can make out the remains of a rice paddy, and on the right is the sea. In the background, there's an eerie abandoned nursing home for senior citizens that was evacuated before the tsunami hit. Homes are not allowed to be built in this location any longer. Depending on the water level, the outlines of this area are constantly changing when viewed on Google Maps. The bottom photograph was made in 2018, and currently people are busy preparing this site for farming. The road has since been repaired and now leads to an oyster farm on the peninsula which opened as early as 2015. On the right, you can see one of the new concrete levees that is intended to protect the coastline. Most people aren't happy with these massive embankments which obstruct their view of the sea.



Graveyard

13 September 2011 / 17 October 2012 / 6 June 2018

These are photos of a cemetery in Touna taken in 2011, 2012 and 2018 with a large retirement home in the background. A year after the disaster, they restored the graves to their previous state. Today, the cemetery has a monument commemorating the tsunami. Many of the graves belong to people who perished in the disaster and the tsunami is often named as the cause of death on individual gravestones. On the far right of the most recent photo, they erected a post which marked the local water level at the time of the tsunami- around 3.5 metres.



Object #2011_33

Dress shirt

This shirt was discovered in an abandoned and completely devastated house, as the owner never returned after the tsunami. One of his family members took over the house. The shirt was found dirty and full of stains and was taken to the dry cleaners. After the shirt was cleaned, it came back with a label saying it was impossible to remove some of the stains. The shirt was kept folded and packed in plastic, exactly the way it was picked up at the cleaners.



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Object #2011_42

Vase

This was the scene in 2011 in the area around the old Nobiru station – an old residential neighbourhood that was more or less destroyed by the tsunami. It was completely deserted and quite spooky. Apparently, someone had put this damaged hand-painted vase (which used to be valuable) out on the street so the owner could find it. After taking the vase, there were some feelings of guilt, but at the same time it was realistic to assume that the vase had probably been carried by the flood from a completely different area. Nowadays, soy is grown here and there's no building or street to be found.

This was the first object to be publicly restored in 2012 alongside a group exhibition in Mito. The inside of the vase was sealed with clay and the outside with plaster. The bottom photograph shows the recently restored object as it was presented in the exhibition. Since the vase is so distinctive looking and given its approximate known location, there's a good chance to hear from the owner someday.



House near old Nobiru station

24 October 2011 / 17 October 2012 / 10 June 2018

Before the tsunami, this was a busy residential neighbourhood. The photo on top dates from 2011; the bottom from 2018. When first visiting this area near the old Nobiru station in 2011, almost every house apart from this one had been destroyed. The inside was completely gutted and the water level must have been very high. The house was sandwiched between the sea and a nearby canal, so when the tsunami struck, the water came from two sides. Building is forbidden in this area, but right now it's being used for large-scale agriculture and the locals have no idea which corporations are responsible. Looking around, there's no reminder that this used to be a densely populated residential neighbourhood.



Object #2012_15
Kutani ware teacup

The shards of this old, hand-painted teacup were found in Touna in 2012. As usual, the object was repaired using black glue and plaster. With its striking colour and decoration, it's one of the rarer items in the project that stands out. If the rightful owner ever comes across the teacup, would they recognize it and ask to have it back?



Object #2012_23
Old small plate (watermill)

In 2015 in Maastricht, The Netherlands, there was a group exhibition hosted by people in their homes. Together with Joanna van Oppen, this reconstructed plate bearing a picture of a watermill was installed on her mantelpiece. Mrs. van Oppen didn't like the little box which was made for the plate and asked whether it could be presented on a wooden stand instead. At her request, the artist's name was written on a plaque so she could remember it.



Object #2012_25

Bamboo plate

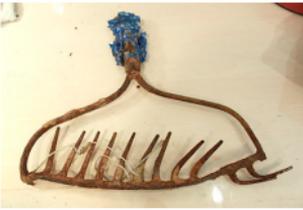
The fragments of this fish plate were found in 2012 in the area around Touna. The plate was hand-painted with a bamboo motif. It's a relatively old object – one that many Japanese will remember seeing in their grandparents' house. A yellow resin-based plaster was used to repair the object (which was ordered by accident) and became rock hard after setting. This time around, it was easier to reconstruct the missing parts than with the other fish plate shown earlier. The technical skills needed for repairing objects improved over the course of the project – particularly after working with sculptor Tomohiko Ogawa in Mito in 2012. The bottom photograph was shot by someone else – artist Myung Feyen, who took responsibility for keeping the object. The selected image shows part of the interior as well as her shoes and comes from a series of photos she took.



Object #2012_28

Rake

This irregularly shaped metal object was found as flat as a pancake in Touna in 2012. At first, nobody knew what it was. The sculptor, Tomohiko Ogawa, eventually identified it as a rake - an American style rake - to be precise. A number of methods were used to try and remove the rust, including glue and cola, but nothing worked. Eventually, it was ground off with a machine. The sculptor returned the rake's tines to their original positions by heating them with a gas burner. He also helped track down the exact model online, and it turned out to have a handle length of exactly 157 cm. For the reconstruction, a rectangular wooden beam was sanded until it was the right shape and the bar and handle were fixed using the original tape. The rake was shipped to the Netherlands from Japan for an exhibition in The Hague in 2018, after being stored at the museum in Mito for a long time.



Objects #2012_33, #2012_34, #2012_62
Golf ball, Baseball, Softball

Apart from filling in holes and tears, there wasn't much to repair on this golf ball, baseball and softball. These small items were found in 2012 at different sites, because by that time most of the washed up larger objects had been cleared away. The softball comes from Watari, but some other objects in the inventory of the Repairing Earthquake Project couldn't be traced. The softball had been floating in the water for a year and a half, so the waterline left a mark on its surface. (When presenting the balls, the softball should be positioned so that it once again horizontally aligns with this waterline.) The little boxes were made from scraps of plywood, as there was no access to a professional woodworking machine at the time.



Object #2012_42

Two white and blue flower plates

In 2012, the base of operations for the disaster area was moved from Sendai to Watari. The lack of finds that year was disappointing because many of the larger objects had been removed during the frenzy of cleaning and rebuilding after the tsunami. Finding useful materials was very difficult. After a shallow hole was made for a test dig in a field, these shards were immediately discovered. A bit deeper – around 15 cm under the soil – the shovel hit the layer of asphalt that used to cover the surface before the tsunami. After reassembling the shards one by one in the studio, it became clear that they didn't come from one object, but two- a pair of small, hand-painted sashimi plates. It's amazing to think that the shards actually matched up to form two plates. They've been put together in a little case, where they will hopefully remain together for the rest of their existence. The plates have since found a foster home.

Object #2012_67

Telephone

This telephone, which was probably used for decades, was found in 2012 while walking through a rice paddy in Watari. Finding a telephone there was amazing enough – let alone an old device with a rotary dial rather than push-buttons. It was very heavy, particularly the receiver, which turned out to be completely full of sand. At Mito, the inside of the telephone was cleaned up using a toothbrush. The sunlight had discolored the receiver, as the pieces were two different colours. The body must have been protected under a cover for a long time.

There was no point in trying to get the telephone back in working order, but the telephone's most basic function (its rotary mechanism) was restored. Finally, having tried all sorts of things to get it working, the dial was moving again after rubbing petroleum jelly into the mechanism for a week.

Before repair:



<https://youtu.be/8l6hKqoBB9I>

After repair:



<https://youtu.be/BqDXKQg7ECc>



Ishinomaki

13 September 2011 / 21 June 2018

These photos show the view from Hiyoriyama Park in Ishinomaki. Hiyoriyama Park is situated fairly high up on a hilltop (a small mountain by Japanese standards) while its surroundings are relatively flat. This 'safe' altitude means that the city has a special appeal for people in the surrounding region. The top photo shows several of the original buildings that have remained as well as two old cemeteries. Today, the temple and cemetery which can be seen in the top left-hand corner of the top photo are hidden from view by a gigantic block of flats. Most likely, they'll be adding numerous ones over the next few years. The entire area will be scheduled for redevelopment except for the two cemeteries.



Pile of debris

13 September 2011 / 21 June 2018

These are another two views from Hiyoriyama Park in Ishinomaki, photographed in 2011 and 2018. In the middle of the picture on the top, there's a huge mass of tsunami debris, including the remains of destroyed homes. It consists exclusively of combustible residual waste that remained after two previous separation rounds. The other waste was collected and moved to specialised land tips. In the most recent photo, all the waste has disappeared. The industrial area is being rebuilt at an extremely high pace, and on the right of the photo they are building a new bridge.



Objects #2018_1...1249
Washed ashore (Canada pieces)

Here are some impressions of the 1249 pieces of microplastic that were found on the beach of the Canadian town of Tofino in spring 2018. They were subsequently archived and numbered in the studio in The Hague. Over the course of the Repairing Earthquake Project, a fascination with microplastics grew more and more – and the fact that years after the tsunami, there were still remains washing up from the afflicted area’s material culture on the opposite side of the Pacific.

Pete Clarkson, a local artist and beachcomber of Tofino, observed that the tsunami debris which had been carried to Canada by the ocean currents (which included a lot of plastic) was steadily disintegrating into minute particles due to the harsh conditions out on the water. This made it increasingly difficult to determine where the plastic originally came from. To Pete’s surprise, a relatively large volume of Japanese plastic was collected during a visit in spring 2018. Among other things, childhood memories played an important role when it came to identifying these plastic particles as Japanese.



In the case of the larger plastic items, it was highly probable that they were of Japanese origin because of their recognisable shapes and/or inscriptions. The smaller fragments of plastic were selected based on a combination of reasoned intuition and experience. According to Pete for example, blue plastic has always been quite rare in Canada. It only started washing up on the country's shores after the tsunami in 2011. In contrast, fragments of thin plastic were rejected as potential debris from Japan because during the time of the Tofino visit (seven years after the tsunami), this kind of material had long since disintegrated in the sea water. Back at the studio in The Hague, the objects were arranged according to colour; partly in preparation for the upcoming exhibition.



Object #2018_1254

Old neighbourhood (drawing)

This drawing (like the other works on paper developed in collaboration with Aki Namba) is based on the experiences of the station manager of Nobiru station, whose father also worked in the same profession. He is an exceptionally committed individual, who loves this district and actively works on behalf of his community. After the tsunami, the station master became disillusioned when nearly all the original residents chose to move to higher sites or left the neighbourhood altogether. He suddenly realised that very few people truly cared for the area itself. This drawing is a tribute to the area before the tsunami – in all its beauty. The images are partially based on the situation before the disaster as shown on Google Maps. Along the bottom, you can see the old station hall and the platforms, which have since been designated as monuments.



Repairing Earthquake Project, object# 2018.1254, interviewed in Nobiru, Miyagi, 2018

Gym hall

24 October 2011 / 17 October 2012 / 6 June 2018

This space is one of the sites of the disaster. It's the gym of a former primary school in the vicinity of Nobiru station and is close to a canal that was dug nearly 150 years ago by the Dutch. The gym was often used for school ceremonies and meetings. The photo on top shows the situation some six months after the disaster. The hands of the clock in the gym are frozen at 2:46 p.m. – the time of the earthquake on 11 March 2011. As is often the case after a major earthquake, the government advised local residents to evacuate to sites that were deemed safe, including this school gym. The sea was miles away so no one imagined the tsunami would reach this far. Nevertheless, a tidal wave reached the gym hall at 3:52 that afternoon. The wave was almost three metres high – it went nearly all the way to the ceiling of the room on the ground floor. Some 150 evacuees, most of them young people, saw the wave coming and were able to reach the second story of the building on time. At least 18 people – mainly senior citizens who were unable to move to the second floor in time – perished. The gym was torn down between 2015 and 2018. Nothing remained to remind visitors of the disaster. The school building was restored. It was surprising to see



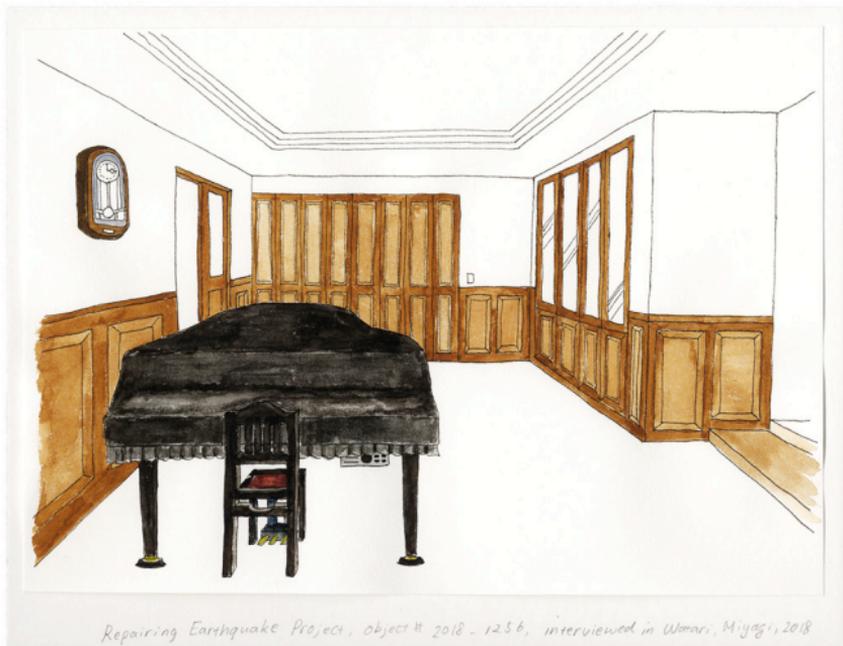
that the gym hall, with its historical significance, had been demolished. The surviving families of the casualties brought a lawsuit against the local administrators, who had advised the senior citizens to evacuate to this gym. The administrators won the case and were not held liable for the victims' deaths. This case was concluded at the beginning of 2018, when the Supreme Court dismissed the survivors' appeal.



Object #2018_1256

Piano (drawing)

The story behind this drawing is about a woman who barely survived the disaster and lost her grand piano. The interior of her home was reconstructed using photos and descriptions from before the disaster. When she saw the drawing, she noted that the piano was actually in the wrong place. However, the owner actually liked its 'new' location, and asked to leave the drawing the way it was. Later, she requested to add her mother's favourite clock in the drawing too.



Repairing Earthquake Project, object # 2018-1256, interviewed in Uemari, Miyagi, 2018

Object #2018_1252

Wooden bear statue (drawing)

About three decades ago, nearly every member the elderly generation used to own a wooden statue like this. It's a kind of promotional item – a famous souvenir of the northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. During the right season, one could visit and see the bears hunting salmon there. This person was on a holiday when the tsunami struck. The house that she lived in with her parents and grandparents was destroyed. She lost everything she owned apart from the luggage she had with her. She was unable to reach her family over the phone and for 10 days she was uncertain of their fate. Miraculously, they all survived. The younger generations tend to see the disaster with a different perspective; often resigning themselves to the situation and attaching relatively little importance to the loss of everyday objects like this souvenir.



Repairing Earthquake Project, object # 2018-1252, interviewed in Ishinomaki, Miyagi, 2018

Public toilet

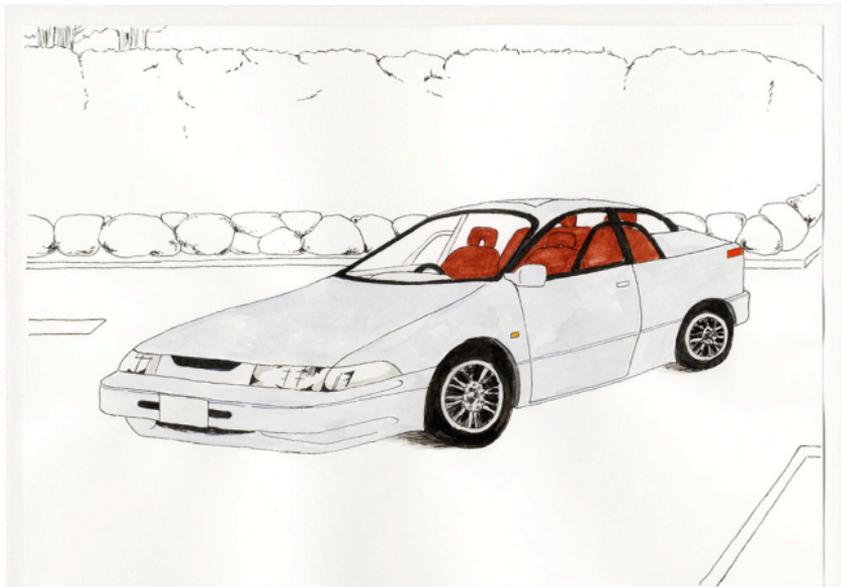
24 October 2011 / 7 June 2018

This is the area around the old Nobiru station in 2011 and 2018. In the first few years after the tsunami, it was more or less impossible to find a decent public toilet and people had to make do with temporary sanitary facilities. Nowadays, these emergency toilets are no longer needed. The photo on top shows the old Nobiru station and platforms in the background. The former station building currently houses a museum dedicated to the tsunami. The presentation uses a variety of means- such as news footage and eyewitness accounts- to tell the story of what happened. The old station platforms commemorate the disaster with a memorial and a stone monument.



Object #2018_1258
Alsione (drawing)

For a long time, this Subaru Alsione was owned by a charismatic monk and his wife. It's a model that was produced in the first half of the 1990's. By 2011, you could hardly call it a modern vehicle. The two had lengthy discussions on whether or not to keep the shabby car. Just before the tsunami, they decided to redo its interior in bright red and spared no expense. They lost the car during the tsunami together with its brand new upholstery. While the couple and their family survived, they were forced to spend the night out on the street. The parking space in front of the temple – the background for the drawing of the car – is based on photos found online.



Repairing Earthquake Project, Object # 2018-1258, interviewed in Wasar, Miyagi, 2018

Colophon

Repairing Earthquake Project
Stories from the Objects
Nishiko

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