



Koki Tanaka: A Vulnerable Narrator
Deutsche Bank's 'Artist of the Year' 2015
26. March – 25. May 2015

The Japanese artist Koki Tanaka references the history of “art activism” and views his work as a gentle yet sustainable approach to this movement. His exhibition as Deutsche Bank’s “Artist of the Year”, titled “A Vulnerable Narrator,” at the Deutsche Bank KunstHalle in Berlin is a laboratory of sorts, one that ties together more than a decade’s worth of projects, ideas, and documents. It traces Tanaka’s path from early experiments with mass-produced goods and materials, to his collaborative actions and performances. Tanaka’s videos “Everything Is Everything” (2006) and “Walking Through” (2009) are reminders of tests he conducted with objects bought in supermarkets and building supply stores. The objects in the videos, for which he developed new uses or combinations, became like improvised minimalist sculptures. But above all, Tanaka is interested in the question of how sensitive and open we are to the everyday objects that surround us, and how we might develop new relationships to them. He expanded this line of questioning to include interpersonal relationships and activities in 2010, with the performance “A Haircut by 9 Hairdressers at Once.” In the work, nine hairdressers were given the task of executing a group haircut to meet the wishes of one customer, an almost hopeless challenge and one that simultaneously brings Joseph Beuys’ term “social sculpture” to mind.

Tanaka calls these collective activities, which he began in 2012, “Precarious Tasks.” In them, participants are given rather poetic instructions on how they, as a group, are to carry out a simple task. With these acts, Tanaka further investigates the possibilities and impossibilities of communal cooperation. However, in 2011 when the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe shook the world, these everyday activities took on a political dimension. In the following year, Tanaka’s “Communal tea drinking” task instructed participants to bring tea to a gallery, where the combination thereof would be infused and then consumed by all those present. This was like a leap of faith, as a large part of the Japanese tea harvest comes from an area 200 km southwest of Fukushima, and was thus radioactively contaminated in 2011.



The artist, who was born in Tochigi, Japan in 1975, often refers to the social situation in his homeland with his actions, yet at the same time reacts to situations at the locations where his actions are staged. This was the case in London, where he joined participants in tracing the paths that residents were forced to take to avoid burning neighborhoods in the city during the 2011 riots. Regardless of whether he encourages participants to swing their flashlights in the dark, or to spend 24 hours together in a gallery—his tasks always have a universal meaning. Tanaka questions how we act in emergency situations; when the situation is “precarious”; when technical and social systems break down and we have to solve problems with others. Therein lies the potential for utopias—not only to dream of alternative, more social forms of community, but to actually experience them.

Artist of the Year

After Wangechi Mutu (2010), Yto Barrada (2011), Roman Ondák (2012), Imran Qureshi (2013), and Victor Man (2014), Koki Tanaka is now Deutsche Bank’s sixth “Artist of the Year.” The award goes to contemporary artists who have created a substantial body of work, and in which works on paper and/or photography play a role. The award focuses on artistic positions that deal with social themes in an individual way and take new formal paths. At the same time, the award honors impetus emanating from the new art centers of Africa, Asia, South America and Eastern Europe. It is not a purely financial award, but firmly embedded in Deutsche Bank’s art program. It supports new positions and promotes the acquisition of works for the corporate collection. The highlight is the “Artist of the Year” solo exhibition at the Deutsche Bank KunstHalle, which is accompanied by a major catalogue. Subsequently, the show travels on to other international venues. The artist also invited to design a special edition for the KunstHalle. Artists are chosen within the framework of the Global Art Advisory Council, which is comprised of renown curators such as Okwui Enwezor, Hou Hanru, Udo Kittelmann and Victoria Noorthoorn.



SUPPORTING PROGRAM

Artist's Talk - Koki Tanaka & Hou Hanru/ 26.03.2015, 7 p.m.

Hou Hanru, Artistic Director, MAXXI, Rome, member of the Global Art Advisory Council of Deutsche Bank, talks with Koki Tanaka about his exhibition "A Vulnerable Narrator."

"Who wants yesterday's paper? Koki Tanaka and Japanese postwar art," lecture by Mika Kuraya/ 29.04.2015, 7 p.m.

Recently, Koki Tanaka has been known for his video works about collaboration. Five pianists cooperate to play a single piano, or five potters work together to make one piece of pottery, and so on. But Tanaka's collaboration theme is not limited to people working on one task; it also includes artists' collaborations with art works of the past. This lecture provides insight into Tanaka's complex relations to Japanese postwar art.

Mika Kuraya, Chief Curator of the collections, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. Curator of the Japan Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennial in 2013.

"Art of the Collective," lecture by Dr. Kai van Eikels/11.05.2015, 7 p.m.

In his work, Koki Tanaka investigates the complexity of "simple cooperation," which economic theory has always neglected in favor of work-sharing "complex cooperation." How is work on one task organized? According to which technical, ethical, and social principles do hands in action become one hand? And where does a collective dimension open up that makes work become a political act? Kai van Eikels will explore these issues in a lecture entitled "Art of the Collective." Van Eikels is a philosopher and drama expert who teaches at the Free University Berlin. In his research, van Eikels deals with performance, collectivity, the politics of participation, art, and work. His book "Die Kunst des Kollektiven" was published in 2013. Other texts by van Eikels can be found on his blog at kunstdeskollektiven.wordpress.com.