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A SPIRIT OF GIFT, A PLACE OF SHARING:

Yusuke Asai, Pinaree Sanpitak, Kimsooja

An exhibition at Hancock Shaker Village

May 30–November 14, 2022

In its first major exhibition on contemporary Asian art, *A Spirit of Gift, A Place of Sharing* is a campus-wide exhibition opening May 30 at Hancock Shaker Village. The exhibition features three artists—Yusuke Asai of Japan, Kimsooja of Korea, and Pinaree Sanpitak of Thailand—who explore links between 19th century Shaker art and contemporary Asian art. An immersive experience, *A Spirit of Gift, A Place of Sharing* connects the forms rooted in various Asian sensibilities and aesthetics as manifested in the contemporary visual language of these three artists, which share an intense concentration of minds, handcrafted intimacy, and unique use of space. Although worlds apart in origin and distance, these artists and the Shaker community are all dedicated to a place of sharing. This is the third time in the last 30 years that Hancock Shaker Village has explored a connection between Asian aesthetics and the very American religious utopian Shaker movement.

A Spirit of Gift, A Place of Sharing invites the three Asian artists—each with a distinctive artistic practice—to ‘collaborate’ with the natural and architectural setting of this 19th century historic village, its extensive collection of Shaker material culture, and the team who diligently care for and activate the historic property, including the blacksmith, the gardener, and chefs. Carefully considering the key qualities of Shaker living, philosophy, and spiritualism, all the works will be site-specific or site-responsive, with at least one new commission from each artist. The show is guest-curated by Dr. Miwako Tezuka in collaboration with Dr. Linda Johnson, curator at Hancock Shaker Village.

With earth as his medium, Japanese artist **Yusuke Asai** creates wild unrestrained paintings and installations of his own mystical motifs using mineral pigments he makes from soils collected from local sources—in this case, a Shaker farm in the Berkshires. Born in Tokyo in 1981, the self-taught artist will be working on site this spring to create a ‘mud painting’ that conjures up fantastical creatures and his own spirit world. For *A Spirit of Gift, A Place of Sharing*, the Village has commissioned Asai to create an all-encompassing mural painting in the 1878 Poultry House (the Shakers’ former chicken coop-turned-museum-gallery), made from pigments he will prepare

using soil from the Shakers' forest. The soil will be collected with the help of the Village's gardener, whose deep knowledge of the ground spanning 750 acres offers the artist a select type of soils to concoct his special pigments. Asai's artistic practice echoes the Shakers' lifestyle of making almost everything—from furniture to paints to hand-chiseled gravestones—with materials found on this land, which sprawls across Western Massachusetts in Pittsfield, Hancock, and Richmond. The naïve quality of Asai's images will also reveal a strong affinity to the Shakers' famed religious "gift" or "spirit" drawings; both are a testament to the endless power of human imagination. His mural painting—a stylized fantastical landscape inhabited by fantastical animals painted with local muddy soil—form a union of the material (soil) and the immaterial (imagination). Yusuka Asai comments, "I often paint responding to the actual site of my work and often the process transforms itself while I think in the space. I am very much looking forward to how this process happens at Hancock Shaker Village." To share this sense of union, the artist will conduct "Soil Searching," a workshop for visitors that offers the joy of image-making using the pigment of your own making.

Born in Daegu, Korea, in 1957, artist **Kimsooja** lives and works in-between Seoul, Paris, and New York. Many of her projects are connected through the theme of sewing or threading in which these activities become a metaphor for connecting disparate places and transcending conflicts. For Hancock Shaker Village, she will create a participatory installation that engages the Laundry & Machine Shop, which is the oldest building on the property dating from 1780. She will guide participants to transform the space with threads in the five symbolic colors of Korea, *Obangsaek*, connecting various points throughout the architecture, and will invite visitors to follow the lines as a simulated experience of the Shaker's communal labor and living. Also in this building will be a display of 19th century Shaker domestic textiles, such as kitchen towels and bedsheets, curated by the artist and hung from clotheslines.

While responding to the function of the site as a laundry, a place where men and women worked separately but together, this work also relates to Kimsooja's installation series *Bottari*, a Korean term for "bundles". Tied bundles of ordinary cloth, like a bed linen, are used as the simplest of means to carry the most elementary household goods in Korea when moving to a new place, and as such, in Kimsooja's installation, they come to symbolize movement and, in her own words, "a self-contained world." The simplicity and efficiency of this world finds kin in the Shakers' philosophy. Another highlight of her work in the exhibition are video projections of her magnum opus *Thread Routes* (2010–) and its companion series *Thread Routes—Lightwaves* (2010–) in the Round Stone Barn. The second of this six-episode-series film, which focuses on European lacemaking, will illuminate inside this iconic building, stitching together the light and the dark. As a whole, Kimsooja's works in the exhibition follow the Shaker story of migration from Europe, settlement, and the building of their own lifestyle. "It is my pleasure to work on a site-specific project for Hancock Shaker Village," noted Kimsooja, "as I have been very interested in their unique culture, aesthetics, and lifestyle since long time."

Born in Bangkok in 1961, Thai artist **Pinaree Sanpitak**, whose work is in this year's Venice Biennale, is often interpreted as feminist in approach, and her artistic vision finds its ideal in the utopian society of the Shakers, where women have held equal social standing for more than two centuries. Many of her works are also understood in extension to Buddhist spiritual traditions,

informed by deep contemplation on the life-affirming power of the body. Particularly important to her creative inspiration is the female body, symbolized by the form of breasts interpreted artistically to resemble a *stupa*, a type of sacred dome or tower originally intended to preserve the Buddha's relics within. Appreciation of life itself is found in Sanpitak's artistic practice and the Shakers' way of living. For this exhibition, she will install a series of paper sculptures titled *The Affairs of Breast Stupas*, all carefully hand-made and positioned to mingle with everyday Shaker utensils displayed in various spaces, including the kitchen, of the Brick Dwelling—the Shakers' communal residence. She will also work with a local blacksmith to create *Breast Stupa Topiary*, an outdoor immersive sculpture installation that merges with the bucolic landscape and serves to grow both Berkshire and Thai herbs and vegetables. Continuing the theme of nourishment, she will also create several special events, *Breast Stupa Cookery*, part of an ongoing project begun in 2005 (presented in nine countries to date). Working together with regional Berkshire chefs and the Village's gardener, Sanpitak will take advantage of produce grown on the Village's working farm—the oldest one in the Berkshires. With addition of some key Thai herbs, menus developed by the artist and the chefs in collaboration will unify the two cultures, served to the public using the artist's stupa-shaped cooking molds to nourish both the body and the soul. Dining together is the most fundamental communal activity in all cultures, and through her farm-to-table project, food becomes the art medium and the bridge between art and the everyday. "I am very honored to be part of such a historic and meaningful institution," says Pinaree Sanpitak about her work being exhibited in Hancock Shaker Village.

Biographies

While he learned pottery in high school, Yusuke Asai is essentially a self-taught artist from Japan. An extremely imaginative and resourceful artist, his motifs range from pure abstraction to forms based on elements found in nature such as plants, flowers, and animals, as well as other organic shapes, real and imagined. Asai's solo exhibitions in Japan include "Yusuke ASAI: Seeds of Imagination, Journey of Soil", The Hakone Open-Air Museum, Kanagawa (2015). He has participated in major group exhibitions in his home country, such as: the 2nd Setouchi Triennale, Inujima (2013); "All Living Things," Vangi Sculpture Garden Museum, Shizuoka (2016); and "Echigo-Tsumari Art Field", Tokamachi City, Niigata (2015). He has also participated in art projects outside of Japan such as "yamatané", Rice University Art Gallery, Houston (2014), and "Wulong Lanba Art Festival", Chongqing, China (2019). His work is in many public and private collections in Japan, including: the Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamoto; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; the Museum of Modern Art, Gunma; Ohara Museum, Okayama; Takamatsu City Museum of Art, Kagawa; Takahashi Collection, Tokyo; among others.

Kimsooja is a South Korean multi-disciplinary conceptual artist based in-between New York, Paris, and Seoul. She represented Korea for the 24th São Paulo Biennale in 1998 and the 55th Venice Biennale Korean Pavilion in 2013, and has been in more than thirty international biennials and triennials. She has had solo exhibitions at MoMA PS1, New York; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria; Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Liechtenstein; Baltic Center for Contemporary Art, UK; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan; Musée d'Art Contemporain Lyon, France; The Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf; Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Saint-Étienne, France; the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; Daegu Art Museum, South Korea;

NTT InterCommunication Center, Tokyo; the Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu, Fukuoka, Japan; PLATEAU, Samsung Museum, Seoul; Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain; and Centre Pompidou Metz, France.

Pinaree Sanpitak is one of Thailand's most internationally recognized artists. Her primary inspiration has been the female body, distilled to its most basic forms and imbued with an ethereal spirituality. Her rigorous focus on the female form, explored through a variety of media—painting, drawing, sculpture, textiles, ceramics, performance, and culinary arts, to name but a few—has resulted in a varied and innovative body of work. Sanpitak's work has been featured in numerous museum exhibitions internationally during the past twenty years, including: at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia (2012); The Contemporary Austin, Texas (2013); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California (2013); the Museum Arnhem, The Netherlands (2013); MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Thailand (2016); and many more. She has also participated in major biennials in Australia, Italy, Japan, and Korea, such as the 3rd Asia-Pacific Triennial in Australia (1999); the 2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial (2002); the 18th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2012); Setouchi Triennale, Japan (2019); among others. In 2022 Pinaree Sanpitak will have works in the main exhibition at the 59th Venice Biennale.

GUEST CURATOR: Dr. Miwako Tezuka is Associate Director of the Reversible Destiny Foundation in New York, established by the artist Arakawa and the poet Madeline Gins. Currently, she also serves as Associate Curator of the Hawai'i Triennial 2022. Previously, she was Gallery Director of Japan Society and Curator of Contemporary Art at Asia Society Museum, both in New York. Tezuka has curated numerous exhibitions; on Maya Lin (Hudson River Museum, New York, 2018), Robert Indiana (Asia Society, Hong Kong, 2018), Ikeda Manabu, Tenmyouya Hisashi, and teamLab (Japan Society, New York, 2014), Mariko Mori (Japan Society, New York, 2013), and Yoshitomo Nara (Asia Society Museum, New York, 2010). Tezuka holds a doctorate in post-1945 Japanese art history from Columbia University, and is Co-Director of PoNJA-GenKon, a global online network of post-1945 Japanese art scholars and curators.

HANCOCK SHAKER VILLAGE CURATOR: Prior to becoming curator at Hancock Shaker Village, Dr. Linda Johnson's research and teaching focus has been in American and European Art History at the University of Michigan-Flint, and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. She is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Animal Ethics, Oxford, England. Publications include "Increase Mather: A Pre-Millennial Portrait During the Revocation of the Massachusetts Charter" in *American Literature and the New Puritan Studies* (CUP 2018), and "Beholding Ruskin's Birds" in *Animal Theologians* (OUP 2021). Her most recent book, *Art, Ethics and the Human-Animal Relationship*, was published by Palgrave-Macmillan (2021)

PUBLICATION: A full-color catalog of the exhibition will be published with essays by Director Jennifer Trainer Thompson, Miwako Tezuka, and Linda Johnson.

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IMAGE WITH CAPTIONS:



Pinaree Sanpitak (b. 1961, Bangkok, Thailand; lives and works in Bangkok)
Breast Stupa Topiary Jim Thompson Farm, 2018
Steel and plants; size variable

ABOUT HANCOCK SHAKER VILLAGE: Home to the Shakers for almost 200 years, Hancock Shaker Village is the preeminent Shaker living history museum in the United States. A cultural icon in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts with 20 historic buildings on 750 bucolic acres, Hancock Shaker Village brings the Shaker story to life and preserves it for future generations. Through Shaker architecture, design, a 22,000-piece collection, and engaging programming, we promote appreciation of the aesthetics, beliefs, achievement, and controversies that have defined the Shaker experience in America. Located at 1843 West Housatonic Street in Pittsfield Massachusetts, Hancock Shaker Village regularly presents exhibitions that focus on the Shakers, while also inviting contemporary artists to reinterpret Shaker themes. Recent artists include James Turrell and Nicholas Mosse's *Lapsed Quaker Ware*, and *Climbing the Holy Hill*, an immersive outdoor exhibition featuring the works of Brad Wells and Roomful of Teeth, Our Native Daughters, and Allison Smith. For more information about Hancock Shaker Village, please contact Carolyn McDaniel at cmcdaniel@hancockshakervillage.org or visit HancockShakerVillage.org.

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