



Tabaimo, public conVENIENCE (sic), 2006, video installation, Courtesy of Gallery Koyanagi

Tabaimo: Utsutsushi utsushi” and the future of the Seattle Asian Art Museum

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[|Susan Noyes Platt](#)

When I went to the wonderful Tabaimo exhibition at the Asian Art Museum, the head curator told me that the Museum would close at the end of it for two years! That is February 26, 2017. Mark your calendars.

Tabaimo is a world-renowned artist who represented Japan at the 2011 Venice Biennale! We are incredibly lucky to have a major exhibition of her work here in Seattle. Even more amazing is that half of the works are newly created for this exhibition. The artist herself curated the show, pairing her videos with famous works from the Asian Art Museum’s collection.

Tabaimo made up the word “Utsutsushi” to go with “utsushi” which means immersive copying and studying of a master artist’s work. At the beginning of the exhibition, Tabaimo honors her mother, a well-known ceramic artist and the Edo era artist that she studies (utsushis). “Utsusushi” seems to mean taking it further, to play with and innovate in response to historical art.

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First, Tabaimo pairs two 16th century Chinese wooden chests with her video *Two*, 2016. The video is projected on the back of a transparent wall behind the chests, so that their silhouette frames the video. Initially we see an animation of a chest full of bed covers, but then an arm reaches out from behind a pillow! Suddenly we realize that this artist creates fantastic stories. A sense of the unknown from mundane places erupts in many of the works.

One great example is *ConVENience*, which features a walk in installation with three walls on which the artist projects life size Japanese public toilets. Inside this space, one drama after another emerges such as a turtle coming out of a drain and a woman diving in and disappearing.

The artist cautioned us as we went through the exhibition to stay until the end of each work: it was true- there are always surprises that catch us off guard in these poetic narratives. They aren’t very long, so it is not difficult to watch to the end. I also encourage you to enjoy the well- known historical works juxtaposed to the videos. You will see them with new eyes.

The historical art collection features many extraordinary works many donated by museum founder, Richard Fuller. We have seen only a small part of it over the years. The museum wants to expand in order to increase its space for exhibitions, as well as accommodating more resources for teachers and schoolchildren. The expansion also adds temperature controls that will protect the works on exhibit, and expand what can be borrowed for special exhibitions.

That expansion is projected to be 50 feet high with a lot of glass windows. It will be added to the back of the museum, in an out of the way corner of Volunteer Park (the East side). At a recent community hearing (there have been five), elite board members and other art people defended the need for the expansion, while park users bemoaned the cutting of trees, the threat to copper beeches, the loss of part of the park, the idea that the museum goers would be looking down on people in the park through the windows, the excessive height (as tall as the Olmsted Tower), and the light that would be blazing from the museum. Some called for the museum to be built somewhere else, or to stay within its

footprint. Many people made a lot of good points. Many park users were upset they had not been asked about the plans earlier in the process.

I spoke in favor of the expansion because I know that Richard Fuller was a pioneering supporter of contemporary artists as well as a collector of Asian Art. He would certainly have been delighted with this plan for modernizing the 1930s building. (Let's face it: it is a little dreary, isn't it?) But, after listening to the many park users, I could also sympathize with the concerns for the park itself. While we are endowed with many beautiful parks in Seattle, Volunteer Park certainly is special. Small and centrally located, it embraces many different activities. I revel in the old growth trees as well as Shakespeare in the Park. (By the way, the theater is also going to be rebuilt next year.) People lie in the sun, but they also play games. Then there is the wonderful Conservatory. Will the new Asian Art Museum tower over us and inhibit our enjoyment? I don't think so given the location of the expansion. But for two years, the building of the new wing will disrupt us with a lot of construction noise.

Both Volunteer Park and the art deco Asian Art Museum are landmarked. The plans need to go before the Landmark Preservation committee and doubtless will be altered by other committees as well. Stay tuned. Here is a link to the current museum presentation on their website.  
[www.seattleartmuseum.org/inspire](http://www.seattleartmuseum.org/inspire).

But above all, don't miss the Tabaimo exhibition! Bring your children and grandchildren, they will love it and it will cheer you up as well. Not only amusing, but also thought-provoking, Tabaimo's work leads us into imaginative worlds in which anything can happen, certainly a good place to be for this particular historical moment.

"Kiss Fear" Bonfire Gallery, 603 S Main Street at the Panama Hotel to January 28, 2017 "Poet Daemond Arrindell with Artists Mary Coss and Holly Ballard Martz take an intimate look down the barrel - contemplating gun rights, the loss of life, and the search for healing in their touching, powerful and sometimes darkly humorous ruminations on America's weapon of choice. "

