

Fall

Yoi Kawakubo, solo exhibition

2016.2. - 2016.2.26

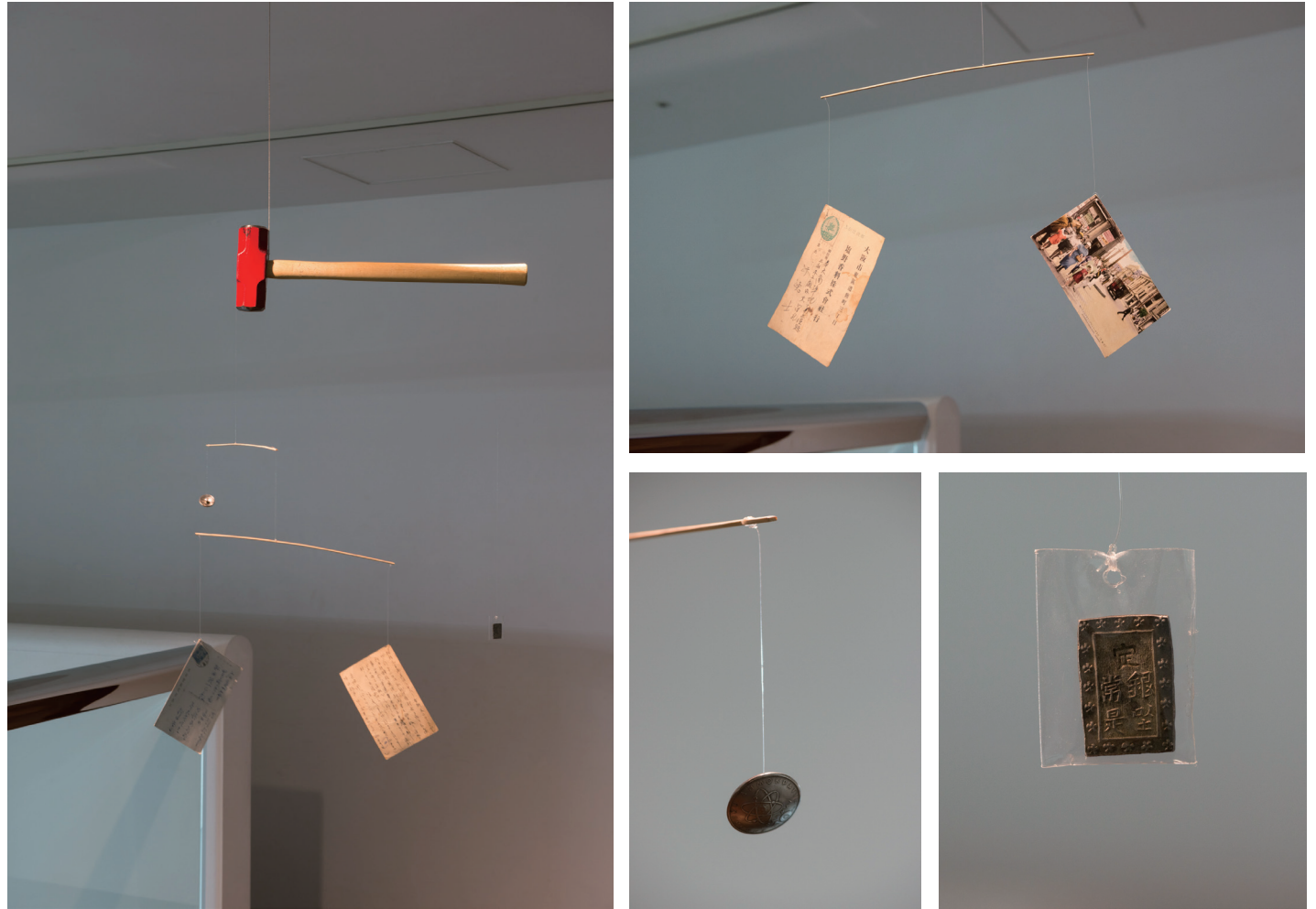
Shiseido Gallery, Tokyo.

Fall

This exhibit is comprised of many kinds of displays, from photos and graphs to videos and fragrances. All of the items on display have been drawn from history or literature, but they nonetheless have in common some kind of inquiry into contemporary society. Yoi Kawakubo himself spent some time working as a financial trader, and he says that he finds certain similarities between traders and artists. Namely, forecasting market movements and creating artistic works are both activities that require discovering one's own principles in the course of daily life and then testing the logic of these. Financial markets are, of course, more absolute in terms of winning or losing on any given transaction, and art criticism is more subjective, but they have in common the fact that they allow us to look at the day and the world from a variety of viewpoints. As we now spend a great deal of time exposed to information continuously updated on the internet, it is increasingly difficult to grasp what is real. Some works in this exhibit have been designed with the purpose of leaving a visible trace of things that are invisible but nevertheless very real—radioactivity, for example, and the movements of the financial markets—and that will certainly exert some influence on our future. Other works take up the theme of the fragrance of rose, which has captivated people around the world since antiquity, exploring how our associations with these have changed over the ages, and illuminating some things about our sense of smell, itself noticed less and less in an increasingly visually oriented modern world. Further, the exhibit considers “the smell of sweat,” noting how this odor, now usually deemed unpleasant, was once considered in a more positive way, thus illuminating something about the true variety of values surrounding the fragrances in our lives.

Yoi Kawakubo was born and raised in Spain, a fact which has made it impossible for him to separate his own personal identity from an interest in language. Inspired by the complexly nested, labyrinthine works of Argentinian novelist Jorge Luis Borges, he has created a science fiction novel-style work that uses sight and sound of multiple languages to depict a world after the fall of humanity.

At first glance this exhibition might seem to draw upon vastly disparate themes, but this in itself may well be symbolic of the complicated, chaotic world we live in today. In the unbroken stream of history, what kind of era is today? How will today be understood a hundred years from now? This exhibition hopes to provide opportunities to explore and consider these kinds of questions.



① Balance study mobile 2

Mixed media

This piece originates with the historical fact that during the Edo period there existed in "Ginza" a mint that produced silver coins. Serving as the starting point for the exhibition as a whole, it is a mobile comprised of "ichibu" silver coins in circulation during the Edo period and drachma from ancient Greece. The postcards are all 1930s pre-war ones sent from the Manchurian city of Mukden back to Japan. One of them refers to rose scent sent to a fragrance essence company in Osaka, in a way foreshadowing this very exhibition. There are numerous other loose connections, too, including the fact that in 1935 Shiseido established its first overseas sales office in Mukden, and the fact that during the war Yoi Kawakubo's grandfather worked on the Manchurian Railroad.



If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky I

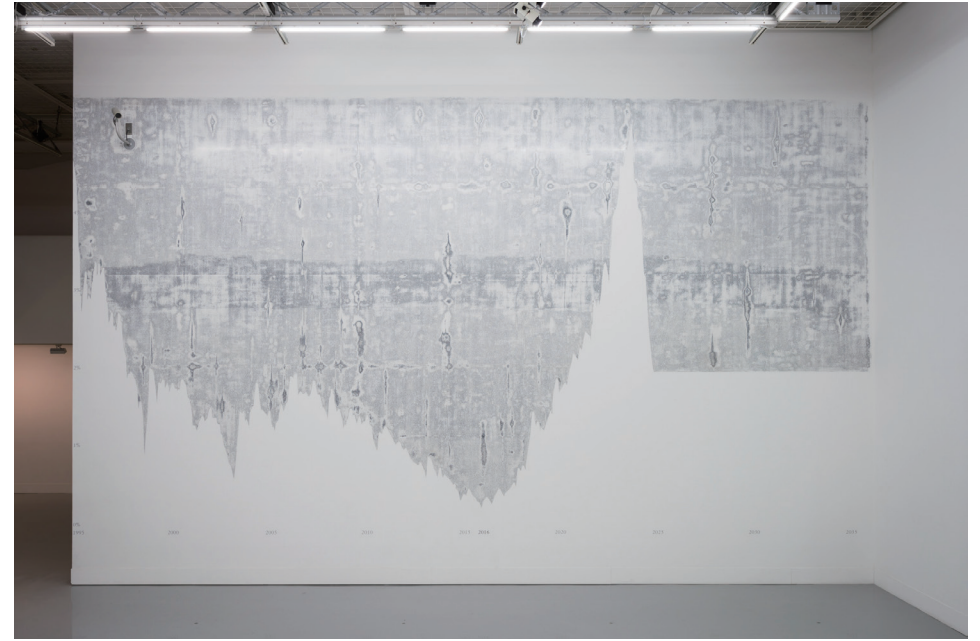
If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky II

If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst at once into the sky III

Pigmented print

190 x 150cm

In 2011, Kawakubo made regular trips to Fukushima in the wake of the Great Tohoku Earthquake. There he would bury 8x10 inch pieces of photographic film in the earth and leave them there for a period of months, then dig them up and print the photographic results in an enlarged format. The three pieces here are new works from this series, the colors clearly showing differences according to the site and duration of burial. The title comes from the words of the American physicist Robert Oppenheimer who led the project that produced the first atomic bomb during World War II. Upon witnessing the world's first atomic explosion, he quoted the Hindu holy text *Bhagavad Gita*: "If the radiance of a thousand suns were to burst in the sky, that would be like the splendor of the Mighty One...".



- ② Icarus falls
- ④ Daedalus falls

* Visitors are invited to touch and enjoy the polished sections of the wall.

This work features graphs showing forecasts for the Japanese economy made by a financial trader identified as "Y.H.," a friend of Kawakubo's from his own time working in the financial industry. "Daedalus falls" and "Icarus falls" show Japan's long-term interest rates (10-year JGB interest rate) and yen-dollar exchange rates plotted for the past twenty years and forecasted twenty years into the future. After a number of years the economy will improve globally, and taking cues from other countries, Japan, too, will raise its own interest rates; but, saddled with massive government credit and national debt interest, the national government will intervene in the market to avoid default and establish fixed interest rates. Dropping interest rates will then weaken the yen, sending the yen-dollar exchange rate back on par with what it was during the 1960s.

The names in the titles, "Daedalus" and "Icarus," refer to the father and son of Greek mythology, who constructed sets of wings to escape from a tower where they had been held captive. As the story goes, the father Daedalus warned his son not to fly too high, else the sunlight might melt the wax holding the wings together. Alas, in his youthful exuberance Icarus forgot the warning and flew too near the sun, the wings melted, and he plunged into the sea and perished.

Given the former currency mint once located in Ginza, this exhibit stimulates us to think about the future of Japan.



⑤ Four studies on odor

These pieces, done in collaboration with Shiseido Global Innovation Center perfumer Atsushi Joichi, center around the theme of fragrance. They trace three types of rose fragrance, showing changes in how these perennially fascinating blossoms and their odors have been appreciated across ancient, modern, and contemporary times. These are joined by another display featuring small bottles of perspiration collected from Kawakubo's brother, rounding out this exhibit's exploration of the values we hold toward odors.

* Please feel free to enjoy all of the fragrances on display, with the exception of BS-02.

WRN-R02

Here we have a fragrance that recreates the fragrance of the original White Rose Natural perfume, first released by Shiseido in 1936. Based on the formula of that time, with some slight ingredient changes, it well represents the modern image of rose as elegant and clean. The original White Rose Natural was one of the perfumes ordered in large quantities by the wartime Trade Corporation operated directly by the Japanese government. When after the war the remaining supplies were put on the auction block by the Allied GHQ, Shiseido gathered all the funds it could access (well in excess of its own capitalization at the time) and placed a successful bid to buy back its own product, with the aim of protecting the fragrance it had created. When he heard this story, it struck Kawakubo as an example of the desires of a people defeated in war existing behind the beauty of a rose-scented perfume. But it also showed him that beyond its commercial value as a product, the original White Rose Natural was also important as a cultural asset, and knowing this made him want to create a replica of it.

MWR-13

This is a fragrance created as a modern interpretation of the original White Rose Natural perfume. It takes the elegance and cleanliness associated with white rose and replaces some of the ingredients with modern ones to create a refined fragrance.

*While MWR-13 is a fragrance imaged by Kawakubo and perfumer Joichi for this exhibition, White Rose Natural itself has been on the market, its formula and packaging adjusted from time to time, for eighty years, from 1936 to the present.

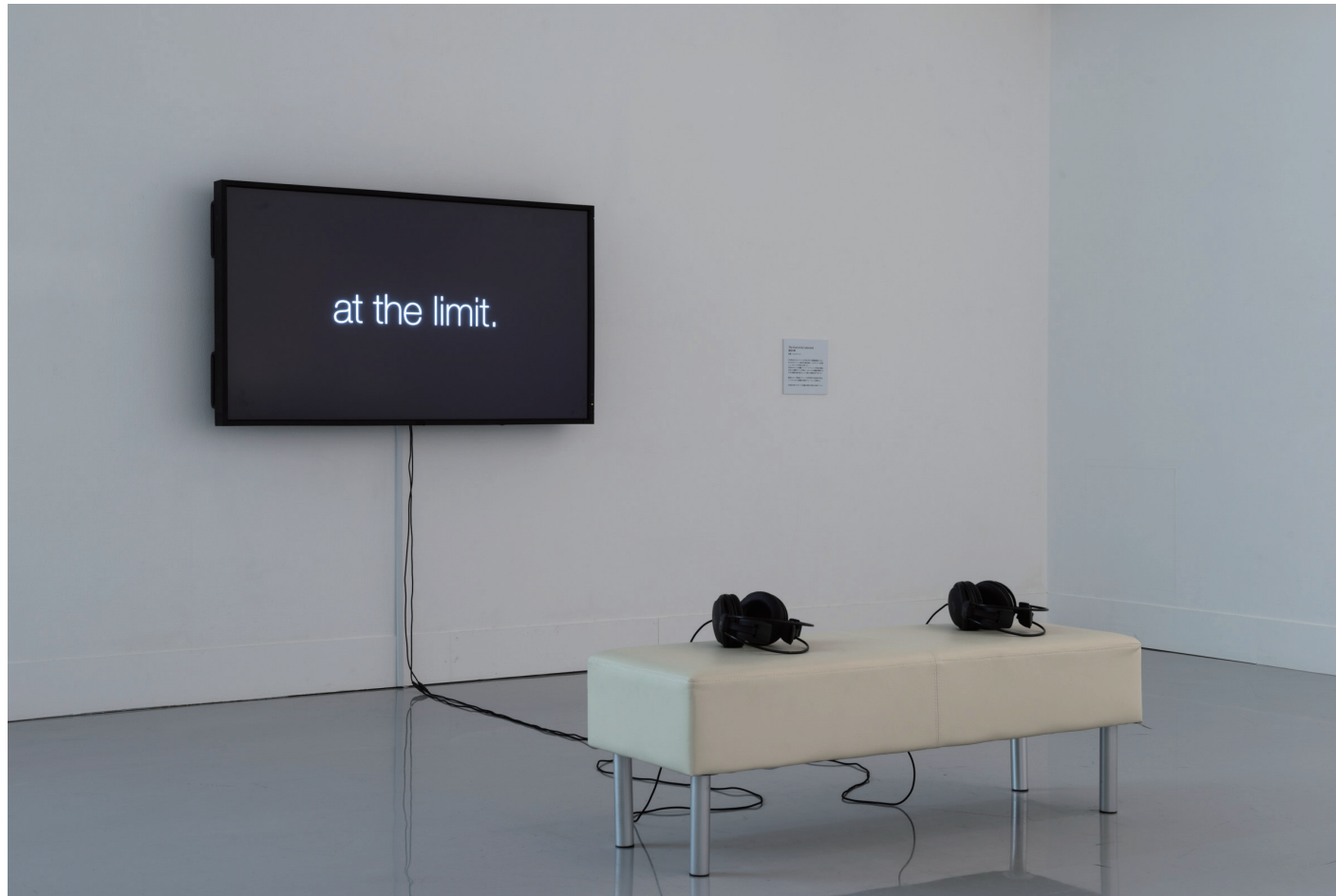
BRR-33

This fragrance was created in the image of the deep crimson roses of antiquity. According to Greek mythology, roses were originally white, created by the gods as a blessing to celebrate the birth of Aphrodite, the goddess who would eventually fall in love with the mortal Adonis. One story relates that Adonis was mortally wounded while hunting, and when Aphrodite was rushing to his aid she stepped on a thorn, and the blood from her injured foot then stained all of the white roses red. Another version of the story has it that it was Aphrodite's tears at the death of her beloved Adonis that stained the white roses red. These more impassioned, heavy, sometimes even lurid associations with roses are probably somewhat uncommon among modern people today.

BS-02

This piece includes perspiration that Yoi Kawakubo collected from his younger brother. He recalls how his younger brother, as a child, once collected the sweat he generated every day while running to the next neighborhood and presented this to their grandfather in a small bottle. In the ancient Greek Olympic games, the athletes apparently used to wipe the sweat of their efforts into an earthen pot, to be offered in tribute to the god Zeus. While this custom would probably meet with resistance today, the people of old seem to have regarded human sweat more positively, as representing the beauty of physical exertion. This valuation can be viewed in contrast to perfume which gives meaning to fragrance worn by the human body. Kawakubo reproduced his younger brother's gift that inherits this value as an artwork.





© **The God of the Labyrinth**

Video, 2-channel sound

Yoi Kawakubo grew up bilingual. Aware of the difficulties this entails, he revisited Spanish literature and encountered the works of Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. This work is a sound and video piece that uses Borges' short story "An Examination of the Work of Herbert Quain" as the creative material, rearranging the letters comprising the short story to create a new story. On the screen appear phrases from the story in English, and on the headphones these are narrated in Spanish and Japanese.

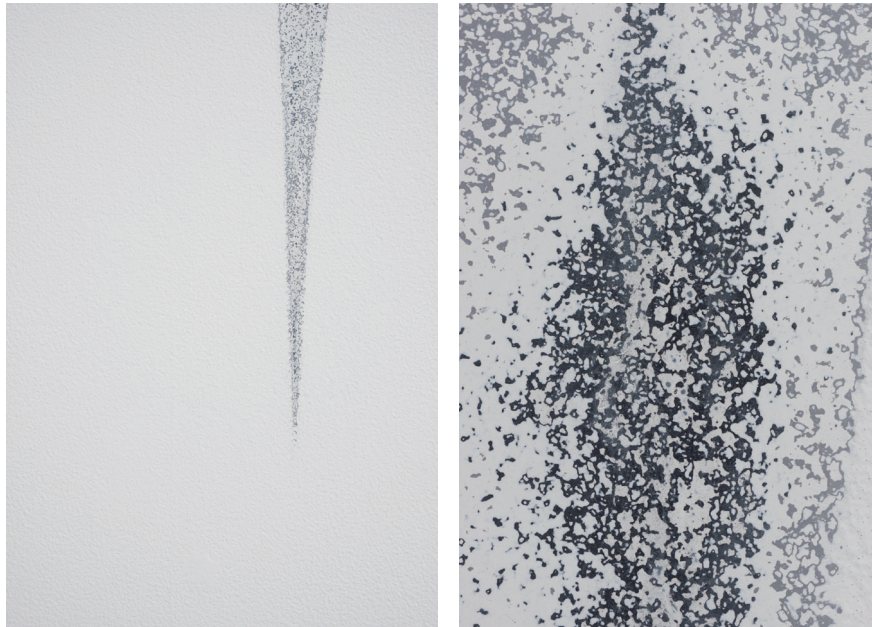
"The God of the Labyrinth" is the title of a fictitious novel written by the fictitious author, named Herbert Quain, who appears in Borges' short story. In contrast to this novel, referred to as a detective story, Kawakubo's new story is more of a science fiction take involving the investigation of a star colony in a time after the demise of the human race.



Installation views



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