SPECIAL REPORTS

Tatsuo Miyajima transforms Hong Kong's tallest tower into a metaphor for life

Japanese artist's large-scale light installation was commissioned by Art Basel

The Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima has a lot to live up to with his large-scale light installation Time Waterfall, which will illuminate the 118-storey International Commerce Centre (ICC) building in Hong Kong's harbour.

The annual light show, commissioned by Art Basel and the ICC, is a high point in the city’s art calendar. Last year, the Chinese multimedia artist Cao Fei stopped city dwellers in their tracks with her work Same Old, Brand New, which included icons from 1980s video games such as Pac-Man. But Miyajima is not fazed. Since the late 1980s, he has made ambitious and dazzling works, such as Mega Death (1999), a monumental wall studded with 2,400 LED counters, and Hoto (2008), a huge mirrored pagoda. “The ICC project is on a giant scale, but I’ve never been intimidated by the scale of a project. What I am always concerned with is quality, which has nothing to do with the scale,” he says.

The ICC installation furthers his use of LED as a source of light—his trademark medium. “I like the way LEDs are illuminated, and I like the quality of its light. I have no other way but to continue using it, as I have not encountered anything better,” he says. Miyajima, who lives and works in Ibaraki, Japan, is planning another “gigantic installation” in the north-eastern Tohoku region of Japan, entitled Sea of Time in Tohoku.
“I wish to make this work as a prayer and requiem for those who lost their life in the [Fukushima] earthquake and tsunami five years ago. This will be a participatory project with bereaved families. I wish to construct a building on a hill, looking over the sea and the deceased spirits,” he says.

In Hong Kong, the numbers one to nine run down the face of the ICC but never reach zero, and the digits, in varying sizes, fall at different speeds. For Miyajima, numerals constitute an abstract language that can be universally appreciated. “Numbers in my work are abstracted to a pure state, not indicating any quantity whatsoever, and have no comparative to the original. That’s how these numbers can represent life,” he says.

Crucially, the work is an elegiac metaphor for existence. “All people live until their death, and life is about this whole stream of time. Time is irreversible,” Miyajima says. Time Waterfall reflects his long-held theories derived from the teachings of Buddhism, which feed into his core artistic concepts: Keep Changing, Connect with Everything and Continue Forever.

His Connect with Everything thesis encompasses the following ideal: “Art has long been isolated from the real world, and spoiled within a framework of the ‘art world’.” But what does that mean? “For a long time, art has been described in a particular vocabulary and valued within the closed circle of the art world,” he says. “But today, it no longer solely belongs in the hands of top intellectuals. In this case, artists should go beyond boundaries, making connections to all possible fields and acting upon society. I believe that art should have the potential to inform and reform society.”
Tatsuo Miyajima: the lightness of being
Leo Lewis

The Japanese artist illuminating Hong Kong’s tallest skyscraper talks about technology and creativity

To most of us, the seven-segment display — the flat, ubiquitous format able to generate all numbers from parts of an “8”, and the basis of every digital timepiece produced since the 1970s — must rank among the dullest images of the electronic age.

To Tatsuo Miyajima, it’s a thrilling, powerful delivery mechanism: one of the few mediums, he rushes to inform me seconds into our interview, that allows an artist to express the universe-sized concepts of change, death, connection and eternity.
Sensing that he has startled, he settles back into an armchair, prods at a laptop and brings up pictures of his works over the past 30 years — a visually irresistible, often uncomfortable contribution to contemporary art that involves an awful lot of seven-segment displays.

Some are vast, illuminated and wall-sized, others small and cut into mundane items such as banknotes. Conspicuously absent from all of them is zero, a number Miyajima sees as representing death. By avoiding it, his works hint at the birth-to-death cycle of human life but, in accordance with Buddhist belief, he does not view death as an end.

Much of his work, with its fusions of electronics and nature, has the feel of futuristic art as imagined by the more optimistic science fiction writers of the 1970s. There are other typically Miyajima gimmicks, involving multiple beads of LED lighting or human heads being thrust into bowls of liquid, but often these, too, have enumeration somewhere at their heart.

It is not, Miyajima explains, that he is particularly obsessed with numbers. Nor that, at 59, he is in every sense part of the generation of Japanese who globalised the seven-segment display in the form of cheap Casio watches and Sharp calculators. The fact that so many of his works involve digital displays or verbal countdowns is merely testament to the ability of numbers to transcend cultures, he says. Although that does not, he admits, make his art automatically accessible.
“Art is something very free in its interpretation. So two people looking at the same thing but from different generations or cultural backgrounds will have totally different impressions [...] What is important is the existence of my hidden message, that people who see my work receive that message,” he says.

Miyajima’s gentleness is beguiling. His soft monologues are peppered with references to nature, fragility and the need to “connect with everything”. It makes his diatribes — abrupt, unexpected and harshly critical of Japan — all the more pungent. He mocks the state of Japanese education: when he was a student the great art academies placed no emphasis on contemporary art, and he feels that not much has changed. If Miyajima had not taken his own initiative to learn about it, “nobody else at the art academy would have taught me. It was all about very old art. They stuck me in the oil painting department.”

He is even more scathing about the country’s corporate fascination with *mono-zukuri*, or “the art of making things” — a word used to encapsulate the precision and beauty with which so many Japanese manufactured goods are supposedly infused. But to view it as an art form, says Miyajima, is wrong.

“To change the world, you need innovation and new ideas. Those are the only things that are highly valued in the world of contemporary art. Japanese society is good at making things, but in terms of new ideas, we are a backward nation [...] That is the biggest reason that Japanese artists do not become globally famous: they are not good at creativity,” he says.

He is especially proud of his early adoption of the blue LED, the invention that created low-energy white light and revolutionised the way the world and its gadgets are illuminated. Before all that happened, Miyajima spotted the technology’s potential for art and it has been central to most of his projects ever since.
“The moment I read about it in the paper, I ran out and got one because I knew I had to have it. The LED light is different from normal lightbulbs. It is a very pure light, as if it came from the universe itself. It was important to me. I adored the idea of an abstract world — the kind that artists like Yves Klein were trying to create. The LED seemed to let me touch that concept,” he says.

His latest work is on the grandest of scales: a permanently moving cascade of numbers in an LED lighting display that runs down the outer walls of Hong Kong’s tallest skyscraper. Other artists have attempted to use the ICC as their canvas, but Miyajima believes that his numbers will have more impact than any of their works.

“Both the numbers themselves, their size and the speed they fall is completely random. It is very chaotic, very fragile. The numbers and speeds will always be different so the image you see one moment will never be seen again. If you see a pattern in a display like this, you get bored after three minutes. But when you see randomness, it is like seeing a real waterfall.”

And what is the Miyajima message hidden on these 484-metre walls of steel and glass? “I think that human life and death are viewed as increasingly important as the world moves more quickly,” he says. “For me, the numbers are people’s lives. Birth to death is a countdown from nine to one. It is so very fragile. It must be cherished. That is why they fall straight down and never come back.”

He returns to the question of undertaking work on such a large and ostentatious scale, and the artistic channels that brought him there. Again, the rights and wrongs of monozukuri as national ideal bubble into his train of thought. His early years as an artist in the 1980s, he says, were set against the background of the global success of Sony, whose products were ambassadors for the Japanese belief that “small is beautiful”. To Miyajima, working on small-scale projects in a small-scale studio, it did not feel unnatural at the time.

“In that sense, I was very Japanese. But my idea was to connect with everything so if the space was small, the pieces of work must be small,” he says, noting how things have since changed. “My concept became one of expanding my art kaleidoscopically, connecting media, space and cultures. That means I can do it on a skyscraper in Hong Kong, or in a small Japanese teahouse.”

_Tatsuo Miyajima's light installation ‘Time Waterfall’ is on show at Art Basel Hong Kong, until March 26, intermittently between 7.20pm-10pm_

_Leo Lewis is the FT’s Tokyo correspondent_

_Photographs: Tatsuo Miyajima/Lisson Gallery; Jeremie Souteyrat_
As part of the 2016-2017 Sydney International Art Series, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) presents a major exhibition of the works of renowned Japanese practitioner, Tatsuo Miyajima. The artist is known for creating immersive, technology-driven sculptures and installations. This is his first large-scale solo exhibition in Australia, encompassing key sculptures and installations from the beginnings of his career to the present, as well as video and performance works which have expanded his object-based practice over time.

Central to Miyajima’s practice are numerical counters that count from one to nine using light emitting diodes (LEDs). Presented in vast groupings with contrasting speeds and colours, Miyajima’s counters symbolise both the multitude of humanity as well as the individual, with their varied tempos and flashing colours. They also reflect time’s central importance in our lives and draw inspiration from Buddhist philosophy, with its exploration of mortality and human cycles of life, death and renewal.

Miyajima represented Japan at the Venice Biennale in 1995 with the vast installation Mega-Death – which is a centrepiece of this Sydney survey – a room-scale installation of brilliant, blinking blue LEDs, each representative of human life or energy. A silent, twinkling memorial to the Holocaust, the lights are programed to switch off at intervals, plunging viewers into complete darkness momentarily, before lighting up and counting once more.
The exhibition is curated by MCA’s chief curator Rachel Kent, who worked closely with Miyajima on her own international exhibition *Marking Time*, which inaugurated the newly re-developed MCA’s opening season in 2012. Museum of Contemporary Art Australia Director, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, commented: “The reputation of our curatorial team for working closely with artists has enabled us to attract the likes of Anish Kapoor, Yoko Ono, Chuck Close, Grayson Perry and now Miyajima.”

Running alongside the Miyajima show as part of this year’s Sydney International Art Series, the Art Gallery of New South Wales will also showcase a selection of works by the likes of Picasso, Rodin and Bonnard in *Nude: Art from the Tate Collection*.

Tatsuo Miyajima, until 5 March, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), 140 George St, The Rocks NSW 2000.

For more, visit www.mca.com.au.

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Credits

Posted on 4 February 2016
LETTER FROM NAOSHIMA

Constitutional Change

On Sunday 24 June 2014, a man on a pedestrian bridge close to Tokyo’s busy Shinjuku station set himself on fire. This first of two separate self-immolation attempts in the city that year was an act of public protest against a proposed constitution change. Prime minister Shinzo Abe sought to switch Japan from a pacifist country, legally barred from entering into military combat unless attacked, to a nation able to launch first strikes and provide military support. The proposed legislation, which has since been passed, would fundamentally alter Japan’s peaceful national identity and for large swathes of the population this was an intolerable act of betrayal.

During my time in the country’s capital, thousands were taking to the streets to protest through marches, free concerts, public speeches and standing demonstrations outside parliament. Tokyo was a city abuzz with the energy of dissent. Hundreds of miles away, travelling to my destination across the Seto Inland Sea, things couldn’t have been more different. Naoshima is a small, picturesque, sparsely populated island town, home to site-specific installations, public sculpture, three contemporary art museums designed by Japanese minimalist architect Tadao Ando and a fourth, the ‘Ando museum’, dedicated to him. This fusion of island and art was the brainchild of Soichiro Fukutake, a billionaire businessman who consolidated his inherited personal fortune through Benesse Holdings. According to US business magazine Forbes, the company owns language schools and 275 nursing homes throughout Japan, profits from which, along with a reported $2.4bn of the Fukutake family fortune, are funnelled into the Fukutake Foundation, which supports art projects on the island. Fukutake purportedly composed the name Benesse from the Latin words for ‘well-being’. It corresponds with his vision of Naoshima as an idyllic island getaway that personifies the national identification with peace and harmony, features that many see prime minister Abe as bent on destroying.

With its mountainous topography, all difficult-to-scale inclines, sharp declines and roads baked by the intense August heat, summer makes Naoshima tricky to cover on foot. But for less than 1,000 Yen (around £9), island visitors can rent electric bikes. Pedalling up into the terrain, you first come to the Chichu Art Museum, a remarkable structure built deep into the island as opposed to rising terminally out of it. Visitors walk down into this gallery, which has no exterior, through a dark angular stairwell – crafted with Ando’s signature untreated concrete slabs – into corridors manned by deferential visitor...
assistants in white suits (part dental nurse, part lab technician) who seem to hover or else glide across gallery floors. Chichu displays work by only three artists—Walter De Maria, James Turrell and Claude Monet—and Ando has produced purpose-built spaces for each. Not a world-beating triumvirate on paper, but in situ quite astonishing. De Maria’s installation Time/Timeless/No Time, 2014, features a huge, granite orb that rests halfway up a ten-metre-wide bank of concrete stairs, surrounded by neat arrangements of three angular mahogany planks covered in gold leaf and positioned close to the walls. In lesser hands this could easily become pure camp spectacle but, at Chichu, art and architecture—the dizzying ceiling height, texturally rich materials and mathematically precise installation—create a deeply reverential and meditative space quite capable of inspiring a sense of awe. Turrell is an artist whose light works reach for numinous depth but can skirt dangerously close to producing kitsch, quasi-spiritual effects. Again, Chichu’s environment helps to push the work into the desired territory of a plausible ambient mysticism, specifically with Open Field, 2000, a glowing room that, once shoeless visitors step inside, feels an endless blue void.

Because Chichu mostly depends on natural light, the museum corridors are cool and dark, while the galleries are large and bright. This simple differentiation heightens the experience of entering rooms that wash viewers in visual stimulus and the clarity of diffuse radiance. At the entrance to Monet’s space, a brilliant white interior with rounded walls that create an edgeless impression of infinity, there were audible gasps from visitors. The vivid greens and blues in works like Water-Lily Pond, 1915-26, and Water-Lilies, Reflections of Weeping Willows, 1916-19, burst from canvases that seemed less like flat surfaces than portals to fecund preternatural scenes.

What became clear after exiting the gallery is that the dark exterior corridors and bright gallery interiors at Chichu exist in a state of interdependence. That is to say, darkness was as much a contributing factor to the display and reception of Monet’s work as the standard white of the cube, and each space was dependent on the other.

Darkness continued to be a parameter artfully utilised in the Art House Project, a multi-site series featuring six historic houses in which invited artists have created six permanent installations. In the classic essay In Praise of Shadows, an occasionally inspired but also short-sighted nationalism, racist and weirdly sexist 1933 text (English translation 1977), Junichiro Tanizaki writes of the historic importance and cultivation of darkness, shadow and the colour black in older Japanese domestic interiors. Rather than installing florescent bulbs (now prevalent everywhere else in the country), the artists have worked with this structural feature of the spaces they inhabit. Some fare better than others. At Kodoya house, Tsutsu Miyaizima’s trademark LED number counters are submerged in inky water in Sea of Time ‘98, 1998, but still feel as banal as watching a digital clock at night. At Minamidera, Turrell’s Backside of the Moon, 1999, a completely dark room in which a single form gradually takes shape as eyes adjust, is an absorbing exploration of black’s luster, affects (its ability to submerge spectators in a disembodied and unending nothingness) and possible gradations. Shinro Ohtake’s transformation of Haisha (the former home and office of a local dentist) into a single work of art is a Schwitteresque chaos of scrap, steel and the artist’s own paintings, while Hiroshi Senju’s stunning paintings inspired by the Seto Inland Sea cover interior panels of Ishibashi with powerful, abstract vistas that give the impression of waterfalls or waves breaking.

After the singular architectural and aesthetic highs of Chichu and parts of the Art House Project, the star begins to wane on the Naoshima art island venture. The Benesse house museum features work by Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman and Richard Long, and is, despite Ando’s packaging, essentially a star-studded yet depressingly staid private collection of top-tier contemporary art. The Lee Ufan museum is a space dedicated to the eponymous artist whose quiet works carry painterly gestures too scant to take control of their surroundings or hold a spectacular gaze previously treated to such unforgettable sights. Outside Ando’s museums, riding across the island to site-specific sculptures, I stopped at Yayoi Kusama’s giant spotted pumpkin, watched tourists of all nationalities pose for pictures in front of it and thought, ‘what is this island really for?’

There is always an air of hubristic narcissism about the multimillionaire’s passion for fantasy island building. Richard Branson has one, as does Anita Zabudowicz. In such cases one suspects the real spur for idyllic getaways is distaste for the metropolitan rattle. Still, when Fukutake’s art island project works, it can be an extraordinary and profoundly moving experience, transcendent even. In such moments, the exquisite sensorial trio of art, architecture and island tranquility throw the fraught atmosphere of Tokyo into sharp relief. In those moments, I understood why citizens might sacrifice their lives to preserve that sense of peace and harmony that is heightened in Naoshima, but diffuse across Japan.

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Artist makes every second count

By Liu Xiaolin I October 11, 2015, Sunday I PRINT EDITION

Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima unveils 39 LED number counters he made for a public art installation on top of Fosun Art Center.

FOR over three decades, Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima has been exploring the eternity of life and time with works that feature LED number counters as “a metaphor for life and death.”

All counters scroll in order from 9 to 1 and go out for a moment. Then the lights come back, and the countdown restarts from 9 to 1. The numeral 0 never appears.

“That moment of blackness embodies death, leaving viewers in awe,” Miyajima told Shanghai Daily. “Thus they will learn to cherish life.”

He said a personal close escape from death taught him to “respect life and make most use of every second.”
The 58-year-old artist appeared in Shanghai in September to unveil 39 LED counters he made for a public art project at the future Fosun Art Center on the southern Bund. Designed by British architect Thomas Heatherwick, the center is designed in the shape of an ancient Chinese emperor’s crown. According to the blueprint of the Bund Finance Center, it lies amid skyscrapers, luxury hotels and shopping malls. The venue is set to open in late 2016.

To follow his ideas of “getting connected with everything,” Miyajima will display his work “Counter Sky Garden” over the floor of the center’s rooftop garden.

“It will better blend the work with the architecture and surroundings,” he said. “The rooftop is closest to the sky dome and thus connected with the universe.”

Miyajima said he plans to invite 300 Shanghai residents to join him on the artwork project so that it “gets connected with viewers.” He added, “it is the artist’s responsibility to involve more people in art.”

When finished, the project will comprise 300 LED counters embedded in charcoal grey marble, each with an individual design.

“Every LED light represents a person, leaping to its own beat — some hectic, some slower,” he explained. “Everyone has his or her own beat. It differs among Shanghai people, and also differs among cities.”

The artist said Shanghai has a much faster pace than it did 20 years ago when he first visited the city, but it’s not as fast as his hometown Tokyo.

If represented in the leaps of LED lights, “the beat of Tokyo would be formed in a line,” he said.

Recruitment of public participants for the project has been published in the Bund Finance Center’s WeChat account. Anyone who lives or works in Shanghai can sign up. Miyajima said he wants his 300 “co-artists” to come from diverse ages, backgrounds, jobs and nationalities.

“The number 300 means all walks of life, the whole world, even the universe,” said Miyajima, an avowed Buddhist.
“In Buddhism, there are three worlds, three views and three lives. The number 100 often refers to totality or infinity, such as a hundred worlds, a hundred fortunes and the ‘Treatise in a Hundred Verses’ (or Sata sastra in Sanskrit) by Aryadeva.”

The LED lights will scroll in the order of green, blue, red, yellow and white, symbolizing the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and emptiness.

“Emptiness, or sunya in Sanskrit, has two meanings,” Miyajima said. “One is nothing; the other is infinity, implying mega power.”

The artist said he was “inspired by the skyline and architectural complexity of the Bund” when he stood on the art center’s rooftop.

“Shanghai is an international metropolis where East meets West and history and modernity juxtapose,” he said. “The diversified population leads to the beauty of co-existence, which becomes Shanghai’s unique charisma.”

Widely considered the frontrunner of Japan’s post-Mono-ha school of art, Miyajima rose to fame in 1988 at the Venice Biennale with his “Sea of Time,” a LED light installation. Learning after his masters, who were devoted to presenting the true nature and beauty of objects, Miyajima prefers to present works in modern media and Western art forms.

Wu Yang, CEO of the Bund Finance Center, said he was “deeply impressed” by Miyajima’s signature “Counter Void,” which he saw when he visited Tokyo about 10 years ago. Set atop the Mori Building at Roppongi Hills, with a 360-degree bird’s-eye view of the capital, the artwork comprises six LED counters, each measuring 3.2 meters in height.

The counters change by day and night. During daytime, they display digital counters in neon lights. When night falls, the background is lit up and the counters start scrolling in black digits against the white screen.

Miyajima immediately came into Wu’s mind when he was thinking about what to do with the rooftop of the art center.
“Digits are a universal language,” he said. “Despite our different languages and cultural backgrounds, we have a common understanding of numbers from zero to infinity. With digits, Miyajima manages to connect all kinds of people, which tallies with the character of the Bund — very inclusive.”
Tatsuo Miyajima

“I think the message I’m trying to deliver, or the concept I’m trying to deliver, is the same thing. It can never be old. It can never be obsolete. It’s all about life rather than death”

Interview by Mark Reepoite
Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima has been producing sculptures and installations that combine electronic technology and Buddhist philosophy since the late 1980s. During that time, his use of light-emitting diodes (LEDs) counting numbers from 1 to 0 (but never) has become the central (albeit not exclusive) formal component of his work. ArtReview Asia caught up with him in London at the opening of his exhibition in F-Model [2013] at Lisson Gallery to talk about art and technology, but ended up considering the meaning of life.

**A.R.A.** How did you first become attracted to make decisions to include your signature component?

**Tatsuo Miyajima** There are three main concepts that I want to express through my work. The first is 'keep changing'; the second is 'connect with everything' and the third is 'continue forever'. To use changing LED numbers was just the method for me.

**A.R.A.** Do you think people would normally expect from an artist?

**T.M.** The word 'technique' [meaning skill in Ancient Greek, and from which the word 'technology' evolved] covered both science and art originally.

**A.R.A.** And how much does the evolution of technology influence the development of the work?

**T.M.** Part of my work definitely has a wider spectrum of expression thanks to that. I use LEDs as my medium, and that obviously has a rather short history as a technology, but those changes that have happened have broadened my expression. Especially the colour blue, which was only introduced as an LED in 1995, is very recent — since then they developed lots more colours, and that really gave me a much broader way of expressing my art.

**A.R.A.** You use numbers as an expressive form, and your LEDs rely on a mathematical basis. Do you think your work is conditioned by mathematics?

**T.M.** The way I look at the world, my personal view of the world, is rather emotional. How I capture the world is rather emotional, and I try to keep the concept of human emotions, even the narrative one, within me. Then beauty is very important to express that concept in my work and then only for the method, to express my concept, do I use technology and maybe mathematics. It's the beauty of mathematical logic or technical logic as the media to express the concept of emotion, perhaps more the concept of humanity.

**A.R.A.** To most people, using mathematical logic is a way of expressing the emotional.

**T.M.** I think the arts, or the expression of the arts, has to be delivered in a very neutral way to the audience. It shouldn't impose my opinion or my ideas, but rather inspire in an audience the free will to think by themselves. So, how you accept, or how you receive, is completely under their control. So, yes, maybe you're right. It might be a kind of self-restriction on my side not to impose too much, but neutrality is very important. In order to express my art in a neutral way, I'm using the mathematical, or physical, or technical logic in my art.

**A.R.A.** But life has a relationship to death...

**T.M.** Obviously if you think about life, death cannot be separated from life, and death has to be on the same level as life. To live a life, a happy life, and enjoy it, you cannot avoid thinking about death, but then how you think about death determines how you live your life, and how you enjoy your life. So while you are still alive, you have to think about death, and that message is mentioned in all my artworks.

**A.R.A.** Do you see art as something that should have a function of helping people in society?

**T.M.** I think at least art has the power to do that. Unless it had the power to do that, I don't think art would have had this important position in society for thousands of years.

**A.R.A.** If it something you have to fight for, this position in society?

**T.M.** It's the effort made by artists and by all the supporters of art.

**A.R.A.** When I was looking at the work downstairs at Lisson Gallery (Tatsuo Miyajima: i-Model, 27 September - 2 November 2013) I was struck by a kind of balance between the control in the work, the programming, not having zero showing connections, but also the idea that the work exists independently. That once the program starts, it's way from the control.
of the artist, so some degree. Is that balance something that you're interested in exploring?

**TM** As for the artworks downtown, you mentioned, and about controlling and then being unable to control, actually being unable to control is a very big thing for the group of artworks downtown, and that is because of my experience, or our experience, of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011. We all thought about so many things, and then I came to the conclusion that nature is uncontrollable by human beings, and then we have to pay respect, or we have to be awed by the power of nature.

**ARA** Do you think there is a different reaction to the works when you show them in Japan, compared to when you show them in Europe or America?

**TM** I've never been in the audience to my artworks, so it's difficult to tell. I do often hear that there are a lot of reactions, a lot of responses to the concept or the message of my artworks. So perhaps it's the same type of response in the sense of diversity of response from here to America.

**ARA** I also wanted to ask about the context in which the work is shown. A show in a London gallery such as [Leslie] or the Hayward is one experience; when we met in Finland, in a natural setting, it was a very different experience. Do you have a preference for the kind of context in which it's shown?

**TM** Actually, I have no preference for the context. I don't exactly have a particular preference as to the context of my shows because I can adapt to the context, or the location. It's a challenge, of course, because I have to find a new way of delivering the message accordingly, but it can be in a gallery context like this one, or it can be in a desert, or surrounded by ice. Whatever the context or the location that was given to me, I enjoy adapting to the situation. That would be my strength, because I can find a new way of doing it.

**ARA** My last question is about the sound in the installations. It seems to be a slight hum; I guess it's a transformer, maybe. Is that something that you work with actively as part of the visual output or how soft it is, or is that just what it is?

**TM** There is actually no sound. It's strange because people are constantly talking about sound, but there is no sound. I talked with a neuroscientist and he said because the audience are staring at these numbers flickering and changing, then that visual stimulus is changed into a sound somewhere in your brain. So you think that you are hearing sound, but actually there is no sound.

Being unable to control is a very big thing for this group of artworks, and that is because of my experience, or our experience, of the Great East Japan Earthquake. We all thought about so many things, and then I came to the conclusion that nature is uncontrollable by human beings, and then we have to pay respect, or we have to be awed by the power of nature. Yes, maybe the layout is done by me, but I'm using more like a random system. I am, to a certain degree, designing it, but it's more of an organic phenomenon.

All images © the artist. Courtesy Lisson Gallery, London, Milan, New York & Singapore

35. Predict something totally unpredictable, such as disasters of any type