

Kyohei Sakaguchi: *Zero Yen House*

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Walking past the houses on the road, no two of which are alike, I always feel that they overflow with creativity/practicality at the same time. A house built by its inhabitants moves and changes in endless repetition.

— Kyohei SAKAGUCHI

Kyohei Sakaguchi's show at the Vancouver Art Gallery is a part of the VAG's new and interesting concept of showcasing six emerging artists from the Pacific Rim. Sakaguchi is the last of these six artists, his show *Zero Yen House* a mixture of photography, drawing, sculpture and multi-media.

The entire show is focused around the concept of homeless shelters in Japan and how the quest for something as dear as privacy in such a crowded environment can lead to artistic fascination, originality, and perhaps even the architectural sublime. Sakaguchi became fascinated with homeless dwellings in Japan when he accidentally stumbled upon a neatly constructed home on the street built by a "homeless" person. *Zero Yen House* consists of Sakaguchi's photographs of the exterior of individually constructed homeless shelters, his artistic rendering of the inside complete with residents, as well as a panel by panel recreation of the said homeless shelter itself, smack in the middle of the room with solar panels, rolled mattress and radio.

Upon closely studying all the photographs, one feels immediate admiration for the cultural extent of Japanese cultural "tidiness" clearly extending to the very margins of society (all shelters are amazingly or predictably small, ingenious, tidy and discreet). We sheepishly are unable to help ourselves in comparing it to our North American counterpart (my friend and I moved to the third floor afterwards and viewed a Vancouver artist's photo installation that showcased Canadian streets, feeling almost residual and strange shame at the cluttered and derelict nature of our own culture in comparison).

Sakaguchi's homeless dwelling photographs involve North-American art-goers into an interesting life (the homeless) and a culture (Japanese) that is alien, non-threatening and fascinating. There is a forbidden quality to the photographs as they are all ostensibly of the exterior of each location. The blue tarps cover the skeleton of most of the houses, although a thick white matte shower curtain in one of them covers the outside with flowers. Sakaguchi has created no sense of invitation in the photographs, focusing primarily on each house as an architectural oddity. The



photographs remain remote, emphasizing a clear sense of quiet refusal to indulge our interest.

PRIVACY

In a universal culture of globalisation, privacy becomes the most cherished luxury, a sought after commodity that is only available to the very wealthy or fortunate. Sakaguchi's homeless dwellers live on the margins of Japanese close-knit society; the closed nature of their shelters is an attempt to garner this in the uniform tidiness and practicality of their blue tarp coverings and their lack of windows to discourage the peeping middle-class.

To encourage this sense of concealment, our only glimpse of the interior are a series of Sakaguchi's ink and pencil sketches of each of these houses, rendered in a humorous and playful setting. One such drawing has a man sitting cross-legged happily eating while another sketch has a man relaxing and making the peace sign at us as if posing. All dwellers are serene and contemplative, reaching their titled Zen state through the tidiness of their possessions. Sakaguchi's sketches are all imaginative renderings of an interior that does not reveal itself—their campy,

cartoon-like quality hides the true nature and lives of the occupants.

The installation ends off with two videos shown on a small television placed in the corner on the floor, complete with headphones. The first video segment features Sakaguchi living and sleeping in a giant water tank. His attempt to explore a strange and alien exterior is a clear referral to the homeless dwellings he has photographed. The second video is a strangely playful work of him riding a scooter to the tune of Steppenwolf's *Born to be Wild*. Both videos were created from Sakaguchi's cross-journey trips across Japan and India in which he travelled on a small discarded motorbike with limited funds.

Sakaguchi focuses as much on the architectural as he does on visual concepts, his fascination with both making for an extremely fascinating study on privacy. ←

Kyohei Sakaguchi: *Zero Yen House*
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Kyohei SAKAGUCHI, *A House of a Dog*, Osaka, 2002. Photo: Kyohei Sakaguchi.

Kyohei SAKAGUCHI, *A Japanese Restaurant?*, 2002. Photo: Kyohei Sakaguchi.

