PART 1
Disasters can not be understood. With indescribable forces set into motion, the fragile humans shrink and take refuge behind closed eyes. Everything built with much effort could be wiped out in a blink of a second. A disaster fathomless and spectacular enough, could be inscribed into the hall of fame of disasters. Thus, it is turned into a macabre record.

When nature calls, the poor creatures called humans take cover, shoulder to shoulder and stare straight into the inconceivable. Then, the survivors of a disaster look for an explanation of the incomprehensible. When words are lacking, they turn to the realm of figures.

Numbers representing lost lives and casualties are put into neat columns. Material losses are transcribed into economical hard facts. Forces of nature get quantified. White-coated technicians feed computers with figures. Machines spit out yard-long slips of paper with the results in perfect order. This was exactly what could have been foreseen in this particular case!

Everything is in accordance with scientific theories and calculations. The figures, emphasized with strong colours, reveal the obvious: some colours are a larger threat than others. The evident is confirmed: disasters cause major changes in human life.

The explanation is as simple as it is brutal: undisputable figures are hard facts of no importance to the survivors. They tumble around in a void, seventy thousand fathoms deep. There, in the darkness of sorrow, it is revealed: life is lived in the realms of emotions.

Disasters shake the foundations of life. Deep emotions make way through layers of tears. In a state of shock, the survivors realise what matters in life. It is not the material goods, it is those gone forever. Neither questions nor answers can turn a disaster into something that never occurred. Hard truths leave deep wrinkles on the victims’ foreheads.
Still, life goes on. Nobody is irreplaceable. What once was, will not be again. What is, is what needs to be done. Emotions and endless loss become vital parts in the life of the living.

It might sound like a paradox, but disasters could change worldviews. Bitter enemies might in the eye of the disaster, realise the importance of helping instead of hating each other. The incomprehensible releases a mutual effort to help the survivors to carry on with their lives. Narrow-minded rhetorical truths about them and us, explode into a striking revelation: they are humans, just like us. A helpful hand reached out to the enemy in need, is the sign of human kindness.

PART 2

At Galleri Artlab in Stockholm, Sweden, Svensk-slovenska vänskapsföreningen (the Swedish-Slovene association) with Jože Stražar Kiyohara as curator, present the exhibition Prayer for tsunami victims. During the autumn of 2011, the exhibition was shown on Skeppsholmen, as part of the twentieth anniversary of Slovenia as an independent state.

On the initiative of Jože Stražar Kiyohara, Japanese artists were invited to participate. The co-operation was successful. During the winter, the exhibition evolved into a commemoration exhibition for the victims of the tsunami disaster in Fukushima, occurring in March 2011. To commemorate is a chance to keep the lost ones alive in the form of a fragile memory.

The exhibition, Prayer for tsunami victims, reveals something of vital importance: a disaster is soon forgotten. At first, media produce endless hours of audiovisual or just audio reports from the scene. In newspapers, page after page is filled with textual and pictorial stories about the disaster.

With the speed of light, a new story moves up as the incident of the day. Disasters shown on the front page are reduced to something only of interest to the survivors and their loved ones. Not even a nuclear problem with possible effects on the global economy has the power to keep media interested any longer.

The constant search for something new, reduces a global threat to yesterday’s news. The human memory seems only capable of concentrating on one incident at a time. But, it must not be more than a few minutes old. Then the global threat turns into something only of importance for competitors in flashy quiz shows on prime time.

An exhibition could in itself be a manifestation to remember or commemorate an event. With such a starting point, the exhibition becomes more important than the displayed works.

On the other hand, an exhibition might
be a coherent body of works, created for the special occasion.

Prayer for tsunami victims is to be understood as an exhibition of the first kind. The co-operation between Slovene and Japanese artists under the curatorship of Jože Stražar Kiyohara, proves how constructive unexpected collaborations might be. Being a Slovene, married to Sumiko Kiyohara from Japan, both of them living and working in Sweden, Jože Stražar Kiyohara is himself a great example of a world citizen.

A transition from anniversary to commemorative exhibition, does affect the displayed art works. Different kinds of exhibitions, crave different stories. That is the law of context. While some works do not gain anything from a transition, other works are enriched and take on new meanings in the different context.

PART 3

If you want to do it the easy way, you could depict a disaster in hellish, sulphurous colours. Toshiko Watanabe is the only artist who has consciously painted with the tsunami disaster on her mind. She has not chosen the easy way out. Her five works, Der Himmel, Das Wasser a-e, are all in light blue, white, yellow and silver. The subject is the motion of a tsunami wave as projected on technical graphs. Nature’s devastating forces are reduced to colourful flows of paint. The waves are turned into something very abstract, something frozen, resembling psychedelic patterns.

The works of Toshiko Watanabe remind us of two important aspects on how people react to danger. On the one hand, there is this thrilling fascination with an incomprehensible threat. If you’re not in the danger zone, you stare with open mouth while the human order collapses in front of your eyes. Quickly, worldly possessions and achievements are crushed by forces that can not be controlled by humans. Ruins and scrapyard gold remind us of how small and fragile humans are.
This thrilling fascination could be combined with the human urge to see something aesthetic even in the most horrific scenes. Even a tsunami wave might be considered beautiful, but only in a context where its wild waves do not caress your cheeks.

With pictorial means Toshiko Watanabe forces the gaze to shift perspectives. The distance is doubled. The one standing safe on the outside, turns an incident into an aesthetic experience, an incident out of which the victims can not find a word of comfort. Being on the outside is the salvation. The experience in itself triggers the questions of what went wrong and why it had to happen to me. The incomprehensible needs an answer.

Not being able to understand a specific sign, words melt into sheer utterance and whirlwinding particles. Signs dazzle into a state of word havoc. This state can only be cured in two ways. You could reach for any word that comes to mind and see where it might take you. Or, you could turn to someone and request an explanation. Then let go and tumble out into a story without ever looking back, which is not an option.

Mugen, the work of Susumu Horie, consists of twenty small paintings. They are
symmetrically ordered. Every one of the four rows consists of five paintings placed inside of slimline jewel cases. On the outside, Susumu Horie has painted signs in white. These thickly painted signs represent wood, fire, earth, metal and water. In Japanese and Chinese philosophy, these signs stand for the five elements of reality. The elements are thought of as being in circulation, one element might follow on the other or is absorbed into another element.

In Mugen, several instances of the signs representing wood, fire, earth, mountain, gold and water could be found. They are completed by the signs for the sun and the moon. Together, these signs represent the Japanese days. A metaphysical dimension is combined with an aspect of time. Brown and yellow nuances dominate. The rough surface brings the story straight to the face of the earth. It is as if an unknown person has been occupied collecting and ordering twenty samples of the earth.

The samples turn into fragments of a memory, possible to use to remember a place that once was but no longer exists. The significance of the samples is of a physical as well as of a metaphysical nature. The rain is given a specific significance when collected on a Wednesday.

The carefully collected and protected samples of the earth, are taken out of its context. Marked with signs, they are subjected to a kind a “gallery museum”-existence. They point out and confirm the human need and desire to seek and give structure to the incomprehensible. It reveals the artificiality in any attempt at collecting and keeping.

Life takes place in a two-dimensional world. The first of those consists of the ongoing human urge to use signs to bring order into the world. This disguising of the world works in the daily communication. At the same time, the signs put an end to any attempt to reach further than the sign itself. Humanity is tied up in this first dimension, locked out from the second, the reality. Shockwaves of a disaster make no exception. They only confirm the incomprehension of the incomprehensible.

By adding a number of asymmetrical lines in Mugen, Susumu Horie injects her work with a sense of uneasiness. The canvases have asymmetrical edges. In combination with the machine made geometrically perfect (?) slimline jewel cases, a story of the conflict between ordering human and incomprehensible nature is revealed.

Humanity is not able to re-create nature to fit into her world of machines and figures. When Mugen only consists of 20, not the expected 21 pictures, the stable rhythm of the week crumbles. One day is missing?
Why? Which one? When searching for survivors, every day is of vital importance. You could not afford to lose any single day. When the survivors give up their search for missing persons, the disaster has reached its most devastating phase: the loss of hope.

PART 4

Landscapes could take the story into the realm of the sublime, especially if they are painted in an abstract way and lack every trace of living creatures. Quietude as emptiness, a state occurring after the inconceivable, allows landscape paintings admittance to an exhibition with a disaster theme. The scene could show an untouched or an abandoned landscape, possibly even one never conquered. The level of abstraction might enhance landscape paintings with an esoteric or a spiritual dimension.

The connection becomes even more evident when an artist, like Jože Stražar Kiyohara, paints Blå skugga (Blue Shadow), Vind (Wind) and Berg (Mountain). These watercolours, as well as his Panorama I-IV, consist of open landscapes where the interplay between the colours is of more significance than the drawing of landscape details. The combination of colours and forms kept open, turns the motives into metaphysical landscapes, charged with emotions. Or, they could be understood as glimpses of something once experienced. Several years later, these memories have turned into nothing but vaguely remembered details and emotional states. Words used for remembering these landscapes must be about relations, whether they are burning red or icy blue.

In Återkomsten I-VI (The Return I-VI) Sumiko Kiyohara, depicts abstract landscapes in disintegration. The buildings are transformed into ruins. Bereft their geographical location, they manifest them-
selves as memories. To return somewhere is to realise and accept the loss of your self. Standing in front of what once was left behind, has an enormous impact on your self-image. The heart beats with sledgehammer strength. Previous stories about you, all with sharp edges, turn into fragments with no connection.

The return is a state of mind, which is in conflict with those old stories once told. Facing this unexpected twist, the deepest felt feelings emerge with the power of volcano lava. The remains of the lost story could not be used anymore, except for lamentation. With a story like that, the abstract forms in Återkomsten I-VI, become visionary.

Fatal desolation reminds us of the victims, persons who once lived his or her life on this particular street. The ruins are built on memories. The large flower in Återkomsten I, becomes the sign for rebirth. The flying bird in Återkomsten VI signals the ebb of the flood, the opportunity for a new human order on earth. The dominating warm colours in Sumiko Kiyoharas watercolours, are the promise of hope. The recurrent blue streaks could be seen as fresh water or as fragments of a clear blue summer sky. These elevating signs of encouragement are badly needed when all the disaster seems to offer is hollow emptiness.

PART 5

Another landscape could be found in Kle- mentina Golijas Geografija spomina I-II and Uvid. She had no thoughts on the tsunami disaster when she painted her work. Yet, the motives could end in stories of a world surviving a disastrous incident. Single strokes and fields of colour create those archaic environments and figures often seen in cinematic after-the-disaster-landscapes.

Environments and figures linger on the brink of abstraction and naïvism. In Uvid, it is as if a new kind of being has hatched out of a stone egg. Floating, oval forms might be all-seeing eyes or mutated creatures. Not even in Götterdämmerung is all life extinct. That gives hope. In Geografija spomina I, a small
picture of a village is incorporated in the landscape. In combination with the light, warm colours, even the doomed could trace a silver lining. Unless the colours betray a devastating rise of temperature caused by a nuclear disaster.

The stick figures in this green foliage could also be viewed as a mirage. A disaster is powerful enough to fool the gaze into recreating the unknown as the well-known. All is done in accordance with the hope of a better day, not today but tomorrow. Emptiness fills the void, until it’s full of memory fragments that can not be ignored. Fantasy implodes, creating an experience of what should be, but is not. Someone has to be there to experience the mirage. That is how stubborn living creatures are. They do not give in easily.

Klavdij Tutta paints city-scapes in a style that leads all the way back to the turn of the last century. In a world of abstract painting where ordinary geometrical figures rule, the city is reduced to a desolate place. When the scientifically calculated re-organization of life has been carried out, not one single person seems able to inhabit the city. A closer look reveals the
existence of painted faces in Zuborenje barv, Pomoli II and 12 cikla pomoli. The faces dwell inside of mathematically and perfectly planned and built rectangular, monochromatic buildings. The buildings turn into fortifications where rebellious humans are held in captivity. There they stand, shoulder to shoulder, pushing their soft, unprotected faces against red walls of steel. The wall is not bulging one single millimetre. The city holds its citizens as hostage. Are they waiting for Judgement day while circle shaped machines measure their emotional turmoil on a scale ranging from indifference to panic?

Captivity and desolation characterize the gardens and cityscapes in Vesna Cadez’s paintings Vrtovi III and Sity abd nature. The trees in the foreground emphasize the verticality of the compositions. The rest of the details are arranged to bring out the difference between being on the inside or on the outside respectively. The few obser-

Vesna Cadez, Vrtovi III, oil, 50 x 60 cm

vable people in the gardens or in the city, might be imprisoned in their surroundings. With no signs of interaction between them, they turn invisible and live an alienated life. What will it take to bring them back to the rest of humanity after the incomprehensible incident?

**Part 6**

A dualistic worldview could be traced in Matjaž Stražars Slikam te kan. The woman in the painting is floating like the crucified Christ painted by Salvador Dali. Beneath her lies a man, occupied taking photographs. The relationship between the two is obscure, so is their whereabouts. The black room becomes a horrible void. Turned against each other, they do not mirror each other. It is more likely they belong to completely different worlds.

Perhaps there is no chance of creating a connection between the two worlds. The estranged floating woman belongs to a
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Matjaž Stražar, Slikam te, oil, bicycle tire, 65 x 65 cm

world to which the man has no admittance. He lacks the sufficient means of changing this fact. In his world, technical devices are used to create artefacts with the single, simple purpose of serving human memory. Special occasions must be transformed into material objects. If not, the fragile human mind combines incongruous memory fragments. Precious moments are turned into something better or worse.

Has the photographing man lost a dear friend or his beloved one? Is she only to be remembered with the help of perishable photographs? Under the disaster banner, Slikam te kan takes on a mellow, sorrowful tone. The form of the circle, even in the mundane form of a bicycle tire painted golden, gives rise to thoughts of eternity. This is a two-sided story. It feeds the chimera of hope, as well as calls for action even in the most miserable of situations.

By displaying artworks under the banner of the disaster, they do take on special meanings. In Prayer for tsunami victims they bring the gaze to the verge of the abyss, before turning it to promises of a better day. Moving between those extremes, life is felt very strongly. To be alive, is to be imprisoned inside an emotional turmoil. Art of importance is able to shake the foundations of life.
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