

SHIGA Lieko, Merzbow, Balázs PÁNDI (Hungary), and Richard PINHAS (France)

“Merzbow, Balázs Pándi & Richard Pinhas with Lieko Shiga: ‘Bipolar’” First Report: Launch of Project

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This project was planned as part of the “Shows” program of Kyoto Experiment (Kyoto International Performing Arts Festival; “KEX”), and its character as an “international exchange project” is based on that premise. Not only the specific work by the participating artists but also the concept proposed as a launchpad on the planning side had important implications for the process as a whole.

Accordingly, my report will start by focusing on the above two aspects.

Aims of the Planners

On July 22, 2022, I conducted an online interview with KEX co-directors TSUKAHARA Yuya, KAWASAKI Yoko, and Juliet Reiko KNAPP.

- (1) The seeds of the project were born around the summer of 2019, when the three festival co-directors were confirmed as the successors to their predecessor HASHIMOTO Yusuke. Considering that past programming had included (1) performing arts and “music” and (2) presentation of historic artists, they apparently thought immediately of the combination of Merzbow and SHIGA Lieko.
- (2) Since meeting Shiga for the first time in 2010, Tsukahara had cultivated their relationship in various ways. Shiga had been devoted to ballet as a child and became familiar with avant-garde performing arts while studying in the UK. Her photographic works reveal an ability to involve others and an interest in physicality. The three co-directors discussed Tsukahara’s proposal and decided to bring her on board.
- (3) Merzbow had frequently collaborated with overseas musicians in the past. Although various overseas musicians were proposed as candidates for the project, changes had to be made due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the finalized members, Richard PINHAS was proposed by AKITA Masami himself. Upon further research, it was found that Pinhas had a very interesting background, having majored in philosophy in the 1970s and studied directly under Gilles DELEUZE and Jean-François LYOTARD. Balázs PÁNDI had already established a reputation as a musician, despite his young age.



Online interview with the KEX direction team

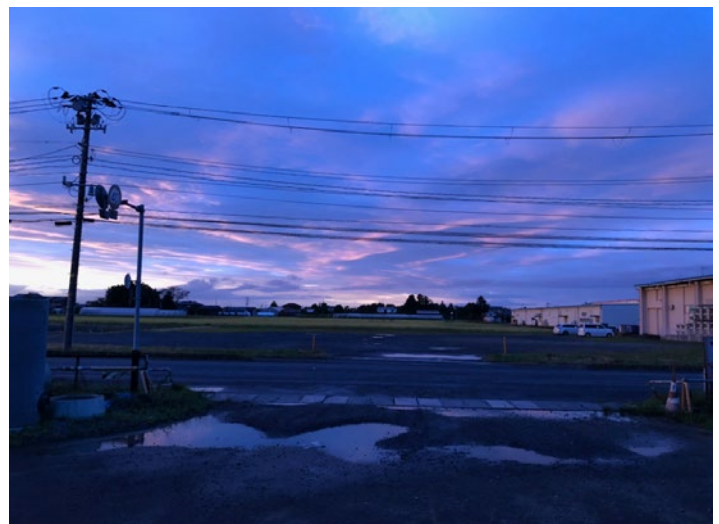


Inside Shiga’s studio (video work in progress was projected onto the white wall in front)

Work of the Artists

A defining feature of the project is the fact that all of the participating musicians are at their best when improvising. Thus, the international coproduction is not of the type in which all of the participants complete a single package over a long period. What should be shared in advance and how, and what should not be shared in order to produce the richest improvisation during the actual performances? As of July 22, a basic profile of Shiga and samples of her work had been sent to the musicians and received a good response, but the participants had (intentionally) not engaged in further interactions.

The format of a “visual concert” meant that Shiga’s video footage would be a key element of the jam sessions, so producing it preceded other tasks. To learn more, I visited Shiga’s studio in Miyagi Prefecture on September 20. Her studio is a large space that was formerly a pachinko parlor, allowing her to project video on almost the same scale as the screen to be used for the actual performances (22 by 7 meters). The video footage to be used in the actual performances was nearly complete. Shiga explained the structure, which consisted of 16 sequences (each one looped) with 11 layers along a single timeline, using a diagram. She said that she planned to improvise with this basic structure in response to the live music during the actual performances, like a DJ. I was fortunate to have the chance to see a roughly 50-minute video clip using the basic layers—



Scenery surrounding the studio

already shared with the musicians in data form on September 2—on the large screen. It was incredibly impressive.

Nearly all of Shiga's past photographic works have been still images. She said that when Tsukahara first approached her about the project, she felt it would be a good time to take on the new challenge of "video," as she had actually been continually working on various experiments with filming for three years. She described her photographic works as "images that hit you in one breath." Previously, she had focused on "how to receive the moment when the unexpected occurs or something crosses over," which she believed without fail to occur. Thus, whether in photo collections or exhibitions, a leap forward or gap between moments (breaths) exists between one photograph and another, which triggers the audience's imagination. However, with video, the time gap must be given concrete form. That was her challenge in this project. She felt that actively representing the "in-between" time (narrativity) that she had previously only expressed as invisible gaps would give her a unique opportunity to review the temporality of the 11 years that have passed since the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami, as well as her own photography. This is a somewhat rough summary of what she explained to me.

Like Tsukahara, Shiga said that she had "idolized" Merzbow since her teens. On the day of my visit, she was projecting videos while blasting Pinhas' music. She said she was "also imagining the entry of Balázs' drums" as she edited the video. In this large studio space that would have been impossible to maintain in a major Japanese city, as I immersed myself fully in the overwhelming footage with a gritty feel with which Shiga must have repeatedly experimented, I could sense that an "image" of the actual performances was steadily building up within her.



Full view of Shiga's studio