



Hampden Gallery
15 Curry Hicks Building
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts 01003



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Hirokazu Fukawa

I want to feel

I want to feel the way you do, all the time...

an installation by Hirokazu Fukawa

28 September – 28 October 1999

Opening Reception 28 September 1999 4:00pm – 6:00pm

Gallery Talk 28 September 5:00pm

Gallery Hours Monday – Thursday Noon – 6:00pm

Sunday 2:00pm – 5:00pm

The Hampden Gallery is located in the Southwest Residential Area off University Drive.
For information call 413.545.0680

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The title of this surprising installation by Hirokazu Fukawa compels us to face the existential condition of human isolation. It is a cry for empathy across a physical void of natural difference, manifest to us as a field of fish. The real, personal, and human experience of the artist as a Japanese immigrant, separated by language, culture, and tradition from the American environment in which he has chosen to stay, resonates in this field. The two hundred fish that are the strangely anonymous protagonists of his drama are perpetual “fish out of water.” There may well be some irony in all of this. They seem to dream of the distant, watery home beamed before them on two rows of video monitors that join to divide them by species. The monitors blockade the fishes’ progress, turning them into spectators of an environment that they cannot physically occupy. We wonder why they’re there. We feel sorry for them.

What do these flying fish, caught in the air on 18” metal stakes, have to look forward to? A hundred mullets (saltwater fish) view images of the ocean’s horizon. A hundred trout (fresh water fish) look toward horizons of flowing rivers. They see from a distance what they cannot feel. We see but cannot feel their predicament. Like them, we long for a return to nature. Yet we catch wind of the fact that something in their (and our) eternalized, externalized, and visualized desire is, in the end, really fishy.

This silent, empathetic dream, so carefully constructed, is dramatically ruptured by the live broadcast of CNN Headline News from one of the monitors in each of the rows. The intrusion of the “new,” the ephemeral and simultaneous “now,” in the midst of the natural and eternal order of fish, denies the possibility of our nostalgic immersion into nature’s past and frustrates our desire for romantic escape into the peace that rests below the surface of the water. The fish, like us, have to cope with the news of the day.

As spectators, we walk through this installation, metaphorically “getting our feet wet.” We invade waters that clearly belong to others. We enter as individuals into a school of fish, in which we begin to feel the strangeness of our individuality, and the root of our isolation. All fish are alike—their rounded and patterned scales mark their universal kinship. A fish acts out its species. In contrast, a human being, especially one raised in the western world, strives to act out the self. But let’s look again at these fish—at their heads, their fins, their tails. As soon as we try to “feel the way [they] do,” we make them into human beings. We see their differences, their individual personalities. They are both one and many, a fact about fish noted by many artists before. Can we be that way as well?

We could be talking about the difference between Japanese and American culture, about the stereotypes of east and west. Modernity in the west was and is driven by glorification of the individual, nowhere more so than in America. Japanese modernity, characterized by its technological and economic success, has retained its long Confucian tradition of

Arts in Alberta, Canada. He reverses the “orientalizing” tradition. As he is now living on a farm in Connecticut, nature for him has become the west.

Traditional Japanese culture has strong respect for hierarchy, requiring silence from those ranking below. This is, in part, the silence we see as we look down upon Fukawa’s speechless, dried, and salted fish. Feudalism, destroyed in Japan only with World War II, could not tolerate individual voices. Old traditions die hard. In this installation, on the other hand, we, the western spectators, must submit (if we are to endure this work of art) to no end of words, constant “news,” from American broadcast television. Which situation gives greater freedom? Which a more oppressive subjection? We are silenced in the face of the fish and in the face of the media, in an orientalized east and the modern west. We are left with disconcerting thoughts in this problematic state of being both in and out of water. We, like Fukawa, are still in search of the elusive voice that gives us the status of individuals, and the elusive quiet of nature’s ways.

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