

The Ochiishi Plan : Rotting Copperplate Prints

Toshiya TAKAHAMA

Professor of Musashino Art University, Artist



Keywords Copperplate Rotting Process Japanese Tea Ceremony Room

Way of being of copperplate print works

Generally, copperplate work is printed on paper and framed, and then displayed on a wall in a museum, gallery, or house, in such a careful way as to be protected from any deterioration, such as yellowing, tearing, or molding. This is the ordinary way of being of copperplate prints. The copperplate print works shown in the present article have been made for being in the exact opposite way, in which the course of deterioration, or the process of weathering and rotting, as such consists of a part of being of the work. Each work has been exhibited as an

installation art work encompassing the phase of rotting. They have been printed not on paper, but on plaster cubes (10 cm on a side) through the plaster-printing technique, a special printing technique that does not use a pressing machine. The work is still in progress, and once completed, 5,000 plaster cubes with copperplate prints will constitute an installation art work. Before completion, some cubes have shown a sign of deterioration. On the cubes the pictures installed in an earlier period about 10 years ago, the pictures are partially wearing away and some portions are being eroded by water droplets. Some cubes are chipped on the edges or cracking. While accepting those deterioration effects as such, the artists pile up new plaster cubes upon those weathering cubes next summer. Just after being made, the cubes begin rotting, and repeat the same thing over and over again. No one knows when the installation work is completed. Perhaps, there may not be a process or phase of completion. Rotting urges the artists to further make up the cubes. That is the way of being of this copperplate print installation.

The authors of the rotting copperplate print works

Sotaro IDE & Toshiya TAKAHAMA, who produced the installation works described above, constitute an artist unit focusing on creation of copperplate print arts. Usually the two artists are working solo. Ide has instilled his imagery in buildings, for example ¹, by mounting his own copperplate print works onto sliding doors, “fusuma”, in traditional Japanese houses, such as those in Gokayama Ainokura colony, Toyama, for a limited-time exhibition. On the other hand, Takahama implements his architecture projects ², workshops, or installations in different localities or venues, and makes series of copperplate print works under the theme of own imaginary sceneries inspired by the communications or episodes he experienced there. Basically, as a solo artist of copperplate printing, both of the two artists usually use a pressing machine to make proofs of their works in their own print studios, and have them at exhibitions. Apart from their solo works, the two artists hold a number of site-specific art projects jointly. As an artist unit, they

have their activities not in neutral spaces reserved for exhibition of their art works, such as white cubes, but in site-specific fields in the midst of real-life communities. Most of such fields are such abandoned desolate places as to be totally alien to delicate way of being of an art work (for example, a framed painting). Activities of Artist Unit are originally triggered by the repair work at Ide's house site in Fujisawa-city ³, Kanagawa, about 15 years ago. Takahama, involved as a carpenter in the woodworking for repairing, and Ide, as the client, sought to jointly make an installation of copperplate prints. That was the first work, in which the artist unit linked an event of repair work taking place in a real-life community to its art work. This on-site joint working style led to development of the abandoned house project of the House in Koide ⁴, exhibited at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, and then to the Ochiishi Plan under way.

What is the Ochiishi Plan?

The Ochiishi Plan is a series of art projects in progress, under which Sotaro Ide & Toshiya Takahama have been working on the Japanese Tea Ceremony Room Using Copperplate Prints ⁵, an installation work of unique copperplate print works at Cape Ochiishi, Nemuro, Hokkaido, for more than 10 years. It is still at work. Its site is at the abandoned facilities under renovation of the former Ochiishi Radio Station ⁶, which stands in obscurity, like a fortress, in the grass of Cape Ochiishi, in the Pacific side of the Nemuro Peninsula.⁷ Launched as a radio telegraph station under the former Ministry of Communications in 1908, it was damaged by fire or war several times, and then reconstructed as what it is in 1925. To be clear, it was a kind of military facilities, which is deeply related to Charles A. Lindberg, who achieved the nonstop flight across the Pacific Ocean, and a German airship, Zeppelin. Since 2008, the artist unit of Sotaro Ide & Toshiya Takahama has been visiting the site every summer as part of the Ochiishi Plan, and working on the unique copperplate prints for the installation, or the Japanese Tea Ceremony Room Using Copperplate Prints. Both of them have no accomplishment or discipline of tea ceremony. For two Artists, the Tea Ceremony Room symbolizes an

opportunity of communication between persons, and the motivation of two Artists is to create a space for copperplate print works of two Artists to exist continuously.⁸ Naturally, the relationship of two Artists with Ryoji Ikeda, a copperplate print artist from Nemuro who owns the building at the site also was a catalyst to start the project. Now in their 10th year of launching, the project is still under way. Every August, they stay with a number of younger artists at Cape Ochiishi for some 10 days, to work jointly on the project. In addition, they organize workshops or gallery talks, in cooperation with the local people, on the themes along the lines of the Ochiishi Plan and on the initiative of those young artists. These on-site activities that have been going for more than 10 years are called "Ochiishi Plan".

Rotting copperplate prints : the Japanese Tea Ceremony Room Using Copperplate

The core component of the Ochiishi Plan is the installation work that the two artists are jointly working on⁹, the Rotting Copperplate Prints --- the Japanese Tea Ceremony Room Using Copperplate Prints. The whole installation as the Japanese tea ceremony room with copperplate prints forms a cube 3 meters on a side. Its fabric is built with wood panels, and the cubes 10 cm on a side, decorated with the copperplate prints made by the plaster-printing technique, are built up along the exterior wall surfaces. The copperplate prints were taken from the original copperplates made by each of the two artists. On each wall surfaces, the pictures made by the two artists are intertangled and involved with each other in mosaic patterns, creating a novel image of installation by an artist unit. So far, nearly 3,000 pieces of plaster cube have been built up, and the finished work will comprise nearly 5,000 pieces. Not sure how long period it will take to be completed, perhaps a couple years? That's not certain. On the other hand, the surfaces of interior wall, ceiling, and floor are decorated with the original plates of the abandoned copperplate prints (the fusuma pictures) made by Ide. The interior surfaces with copperplates provides the visitors with the function of tea ceremony room where

they stay and communicate with each other.

The exterior is copperplate prints and the interior the copperplates. The principle of printing, negative vs. positive, gives a foundation of the design of the installation. Taking in the light thrown into the darkish building of the former Ochiishi Radio Station, the installation is continually reflecting dull red-colored lights peculiar to copper with slight alternations every minute. As well as appreciating it as an art work, the audience can actually step in the work off the shoes to experience and enjoy the universe of the art. You look into your own silhouette under the dull red colored light. You can feel the cold texture and smell of copper, listen to the sea roar from a long distance and the voice of noise in the moist air. You can enjoy copperplate prints with your five senses.

Why do we work there?

The venue of the Ochiishi Plan, the former Ochiishi Radio Station, is located in the midst of the Cape facing the sea, where the weather conditions are quite different from the urban area in Nemuro. The weather is very changeable, and often severe to people.¹⁰ Dull gray-colored clouds come to hang just a couple of minutes after clear weather. In particular, you can never get away from the dense fog with the moist air rising from the sea. The artists are seeking to expose the copperplate prints to the environment of Ochiishi, including such severe weather conditions, show the process of rotting the print works naturally, and further build up more pieces of plaster cube on the rotting cubes. They are willing to visit the venue continually to work on copperplate prints as they can for years to come. This is the heart of the Ochiishi Plan.

Everything will be rotting away. Exposed to the severe weather conditions at Cape Ochiishi, those copperplate print works (plaster cubes) begin rotting and weathering just after being made. Just after being made, the cubes begin rotting, and repeat the same thing over and over again. Just like the process of making

copperplate prints, in which a copperplate is forced to decay in a short time through immersion in the strongly acidic etching solution, everything will be rotting quickly here in the dense fog with salt content. The essence of working on copperplate print is to decay copper material, at the rate of rotting or weathering far more accelerated than the rate under the conditions of our usual daily living. This unusual pace of weathering gives a feeling similar to the feeling of etching on copperplate. Based on that feeling, the artists have a desire to make the way of being of a copperplate print as such be a part of art work. In other words, they chose the place of Ochiishi, to intentionally have their own copperplate print works rot.

The future of the Ochiishi Plan

While accepting a variety of realities, the artists will go on patiently building up the plater cubes. The reality that everything will be eventually rotting away. Copperplate print artists, realize such a matter of course with feeling. Hundreds of years after, probably, our own installation work, “the Japanese Tea Ceremony Room Using Copperplate Prints”, will be rotting away into almost nothing. The only thing we are sure is that no one of still-living persons will exist at that time; maybe just some fractions of copper will survive. I know our works will amount to nothing. But yet the unit of two artists will be urged by rotting of our own art work to go on building up new copperplate prints every summer. The period of time for which they are alive, and during which the copperplate prints are rotting away. During the course of living our lives, each one’s time, like nesting itself, goes by along a loop

About Ochiishi Radio Station (Ochiishi Telegraph Office)

Former Ochiishi Radio Station 244-4, Ochiishinishi, Nemuro, Hokkaido

On the Pacific Ocean side of the Southern Nemuro Peninsula in Hokkaido, this

thick reinforced-concrete structure stands, appearing like a fortress in the fields where wild azalea grows. Originally opened in 1908 as the Ochiishi Radio Station, the building was part of the now-defunct Communication Department of Japanese Government. It was later rebuilt in 1925, after several fires and war-damages. Today, the Ochiishi building is an important living witness to many historical events, having served a strategic function in presiding over the North American Ocean Route in Nemuro, Hokkaido. A few of the Telegraph Office's notable moments include successful air telecommunication with German-made Zeppelin NT airship in 1929, as well as supporting the achievement of Charles Lindbergh's legendary nonstop flight across the Atlantic in 1939 as a 'behind the scenes' telecommunication guide.

Beginning in 1985, printmaking Professor Ryoji Ikeda (Musashino Art University, b.1947 in Nemuro) started a project to renovate the Ochiishi building in order to transform it into a printmaking studio. The renovation still continues today as the building is slowly and carefully transitioned from its abandoned condition.

Ochiishi has been a point of communication for millions of ships, aircrafts, and physical places over its long history— a history which speaks well to the building's continued significance in being reborn as a practice-specific public open space for creating inner dialogue with outer world.

History of Ochiishi Radio Station (Ochiishi Telegraph Office)

- 1908, 26 Dec— Ochiishi Radio Station (Ochiishi Telegraph Office) is opened at Ochiishi cape in Wada village, Nemuro, Hokkaido
- 1915, 15 Jun — First Japanese international telecommunication with Petropavlovsk telegraph office at southern edge of Kamchatka peninsula
- 1916, 10 Jan — Successful test telecommunication with Kahuku telegraph office in Hawaii by use of 30kW transmitter and crystal receiver

- 1923, 1 Sep — The Great Kanto Earthquake strikes Tokyo (M7.9-8.2)
- 1923, 21 Dec — Dual Telecommunication System begins operation with the opening of transmitting office in Wada village and receiving office at Katsuragi in Nemuro town
- 1925, 16 Aug — Transmitting office burned down by fire
- 1929, 17 Aug — Successful air telecommunication with German-made Zeppelin NT airship
- 1930, 1 Nov — First In-country telecommunication with Shana telegraph office in Etorofu island
- 1931, 16 Aug — Telecommunication support is provided for an American pilot Charles Lindbergh's nonstop flight across the Atlantic
- 1939, 31 Aug — Successful support of the Nippon-Go, trans Atlantic aircraft from Tokyo University Aeronautical Laboratory, for telecommunication during its trip from Sabishiro to Anchorage
- 1946, 5 May — Restoration of transmitting office building from its destruction in war
- 1952, 4 Mar — Support for the rescue operation for Off-Tokachi Earthquake at Kiritappu hamlet, Hamanaka village, Akkeshi, Hokkaido
- 1959, 13 Jun — Relocation of transmitting office and receiving office to a single campus and removal of long wave system

Bibliography References

- 1 Tatsuo Matsuyama, *Print as Art of Between*, Abe Publishing , 2017, 284.
- 2 Toshiya Takahama, " Landscape and Climate", Gallery Natsuka, 2014, 2-4.
- 3 Toshiya TAKAHAMA, " Migrating Project" , Gallery Natsuka, 2005, 8-10.
- 4 ECHIGO-TSUMARI ART TRIENNIAL Executive Committee, "ECHIGO-TSUMARI ART TRIENNIAL 2006 ", Gendaikikakushitsu Publishers, 2006, 130,200.
- 5 Hokkaido Prefecture Executive Committee of Art, "HOKKAIDO ART MAP", Hokkaido Prefecture, 2013.
- 6 Ryoji Ikeda, "Ryoji Ikeda-The Musing and the Breathing of Immanence", Museum of Musashino Art University, 2015 , 12-20.
- 7 Sotaro IDE Toshiya TAKAHAMA, "Catalog of the 6th Stage, Ochiishi Plan, -About a Boundary / Scenery and Climate", Ochiishi Plan Executive Committee , 2013, 5-6.
- 8 Ryoji IKEDA, " Ryoji IKEDA Works 1975-2000", ABE Publishing LTD, 2001, 15-25.
- 9 Sotaro IDE + Toshiya TAKAHAMA, "Catalog of the 3rd Stage, Ochiishi Plan - Print / Space of Dialogue ", Ochiishi Plan Executive Committee , 2011
- 10 Toshiya TAKAHAMA, " OCHIISHI PLAN - Why did it start?", Kushiro Shinbunsha, November 8-23, 2013



Figure 1 (Left)

Ochiishi plan / Japanese Tea Ceremony Room Using Copperplate Prints

Figure 2 (Right Above)

Plaster cube (decorated with the copperplate prints made by the plaster-printing technique)

Figure 3 (Right Below)

Plaster cube (decorated with the copperplate prints made by the plaster-printing technique)

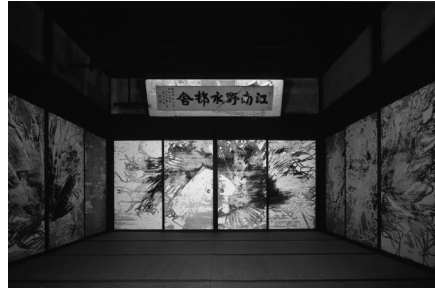


Figure 4 (Left)

Plaster cube (decorated with the copperplate prints made by the plaster-printing technique)

Figure 5 (Right Above)

Work of Sotaro IDE, Installation View of Watabe House, Matsuyama, Ehime

Figure 6 (Right Below)

Work of Toshiya TAKAHAMA, Installation View of Gallery Natsuka, Tokyo

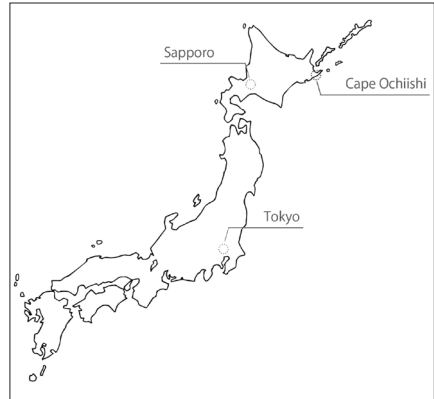


Figure 7 (Left Above)

Workshop with local children in 2013

Figure 8 (Left Below)

"Cape Ochiishi" Nemuro city, Hokkaido, Japan (Former Ochiishi Radio Station is located in the center of the cape.)

Figure 9 (Right)

Cape Ochiishi is located on the Pacific Ocean side of the Southern Nemuro Peninsula in Hokkaido.



Figure 10 - 15

Former Ochiishi Radio Station



Figure 16 - 19

The Japanese Tea Ceremony Room Using Copperplate Prints by Sotaro IDE & Toshiya TAKAHAMA



Figure 20 (Above)
putting an internal copperplate

Figure 21 (Below)
building up new copperplate prints (plaster cube) every summer