

Personal Account on UNITED BROTHERS by Ei Arakawa

After the earthquake and nuclear disaster happened in my hometown Fukushima, Japan, my reality in New York art world became too distant from the reality of my hometown. I needed to create mediations between those two realities.

My brother Tomoo Arakawa is not at all an artist, but he has been interested in the newly visible contemporary art in Japan and beyond via my activities. He's also interested in being a film maker. He runs three tanning salons in Fukushima and near Fukushima. That was his regular business for living. After his business is temporary disrupted by the disaster, he got compensated some money by TEPCO electric company. He spent the money to equip himself video cameras and editing software to make art. Around that time, we started to work as UNITED BROTHERS.

Since Oct 2011, we invited fellow contemporary artists to the city of Iwaki, Fukushima, Japan. Iwaki is the largest city directly south of Fukushima Power Plant. (Fukushima is the prefecture) For instance, DAS INSTITUT participated a local dance festival with their glass art works dancing as props. Tomoo's tanning machines became the symbolic material for us to deal with the abstraction of disaster. Sometimes the projects we created are flamboyant and fun. Yet at the same time they consisted uncertain anxiety and fragility beneath.

Within Japan, there is a trend of socially engaging art that deals with the issue of nuclear disaster in an emotional manner. What makes UNITED BROTHERS different from the makers of this social art is that we collaborate with the artists from outside Japan. With their outsider perspectives, we avoid that the work became mere social work nor charity. We want to produce an art that bypasses the abstraction of the entire event, and reinvent them with the aesthetic awareness.

For Frieze Live, we do a performance that provides soup which includes the ingredient from Fukushima. The safety of food seemingly is secured by the farmer association in Fukushima, and this is the food people in Fukushima eats everyday. We wanted to materialize this choice to eat, or not to eat for the audience at the art fair. Thus a question, "Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?" became the title of the work.