

Im/Migrating Stories

Artwork Proposal



*One family
desiring
to move*

James Jack studio

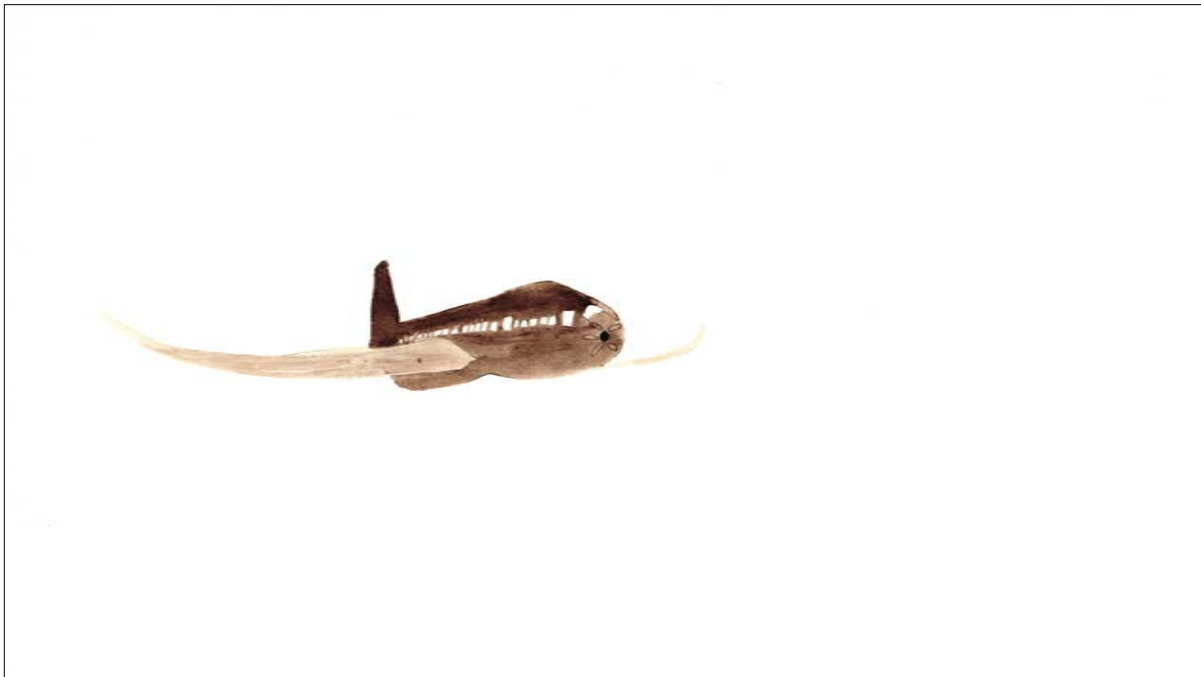
www.jamesjack.org

Context

Today migration is an urgent issue across the world. As products move cheaper and faster in containers, people are being restricted with fences, visas and increased security. So often migration issues are addressed through binary glasses with lenses such as developed/un-developed, first/third world and center/periphery. This essentialist approach only sees right/left and little in between or surrounding. However it is extremely difficult if not impossible to think about migration without attention to the underlying structures behind where, how and why people move.

In Japan the issue of human migration is closely related to domestic issues. Ageing population, declining birth rate and urbanization are three of the most commonly discussed now. How would the current debates over these issues shift if mobile populations were included in the premise of the conversation? Currently the position of foreign workers, residents and registered aliens in the Japanese society is often underestimated. Many of these people are born in Japan, contribute greatly to the labor economy and are invested in its future.

At the same time, there is a strong value placed on empathy for others in Japanese culture. Particularly among industrialized societies across the world, actions to help others are overwhelmingly positive after local problems, natural disasters, or personal friendships. Though it is slowly changing, crime and theft remain comparatively low among nations in Asia. This empathy holds tremendous potential for a new artwork, beginning with the question: what forms of intimate exchange could be fostered based on this empathy?



James Jack *Family Flying into an Uncertain Future* 2018 Handmade walnut ink on paper 21 x 29.5 cm



James Jack and Yến Nguyễn family on their first trip outside of Vietnam to Japan 2018

Concept

This artwork explores the complexity of empathy through the most intimate unit of society: the family. No matter where we were born, we were all born into some kind of family. It may have been a nuclear family, a broken one, a gay one or an adopted family; but we all have some sense of what our family is, and what it isn't. I grew up moving every four to five years as a child and as an adult I move nearly every year, even if it is within the same city. While moving, I realized family is not a bloodline, it is a social support network. It is where we started life and most likely those whom with our lives will end.

This artwork opens spaces to investigate the world through the point of view of one family moving from Indonesia to Japan. The voluntary migration of one family to Japan from a site of present hardship will open dialogue on the relationship of self and other, you and I, me and we. Cultures of Asia Pacific are often said to focus on the community over the individual. One poetic example of the relationship of "I" and "we" is reflected in a novel by Samoan novelist Figiel:

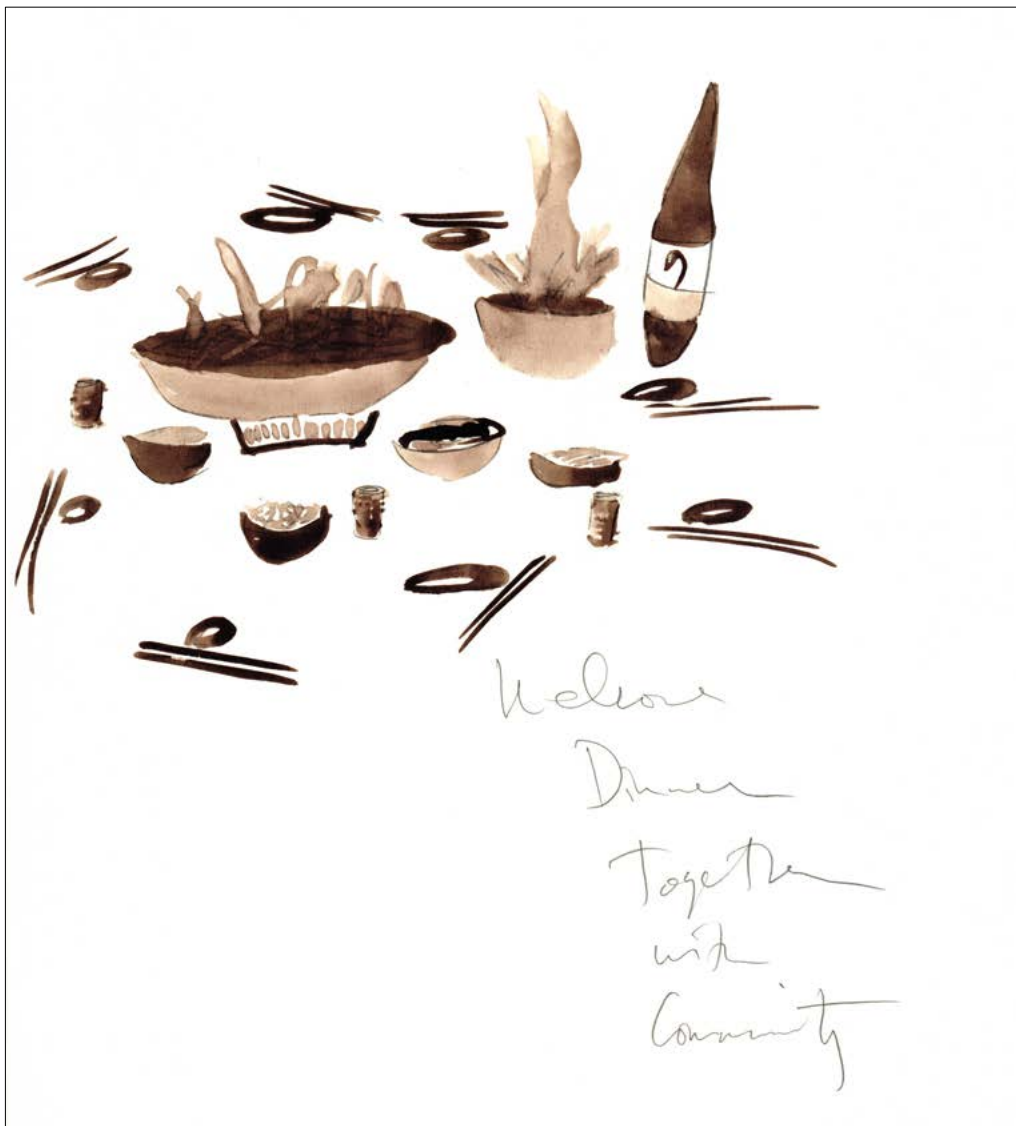
"I" does not exist.
 I am not.
 My self belongs not to me because "I" does not exist.
 "I" is always "we",
 is a part of the 'aiga [extended family],
 a part of the Au a teine [girls' group],
 a part of the Aufaipese [choir],
 a part of the Autalavou [young peoples' organization],
 a part of the Aoga a le Faifeau [pastor's school],
 a part of the Aoga Aso Sa [Sunday school],
 a part of the Church,

a part of the nu'u [village],
a part of Samoa.

—Sia Figiel, (1996) *Where We Once Belonged*, 135.

This is an idealized relationship of I to “we” in the mind of the artist. Yet we can see into the values placed in the community here. Fiction and art are the world of the imagination, nonetheless they are rooted in some form of reality.

This artwork rooted in real human relationships takes an imaginative leap, to fill an empty house in the Japanese countryside with a family who wants to live there. Sounds very simple but it requires a mental shift to see deeper beneath the surface. What is the difference between a Japanese family living abroad and a refugee family living in Japan? other is part of oneself. If others cannot be separated from oneself, then it makes sense to help others live, meet basic needs such as food, water and shelter; as well as spiritual needs such as believing, belonging and caring.



James Jack 2018 *Welcome Dinner Together with Community* Handmade walnut ink on paper 21 x 29.5 cm

Method

Economic factors are one of the most commonly assumed reasons for moving. As an artist I have lived wherever it is possible to make a livelihood off of my artworks for the past twenty years. However economic factors are not everything. The process of making this work will be sensitive to cultural, psychological, and emotional factors that influence movement in addition to economics. Here social relationships are explicitly put at the center as the primary basis for movement of a family. This work questions domestic political stances in Japan by taking away the “haves and have nots” mentality too often clouding immigration debates, thereby encountering people that cross borders in a more intimate and familiar manner.

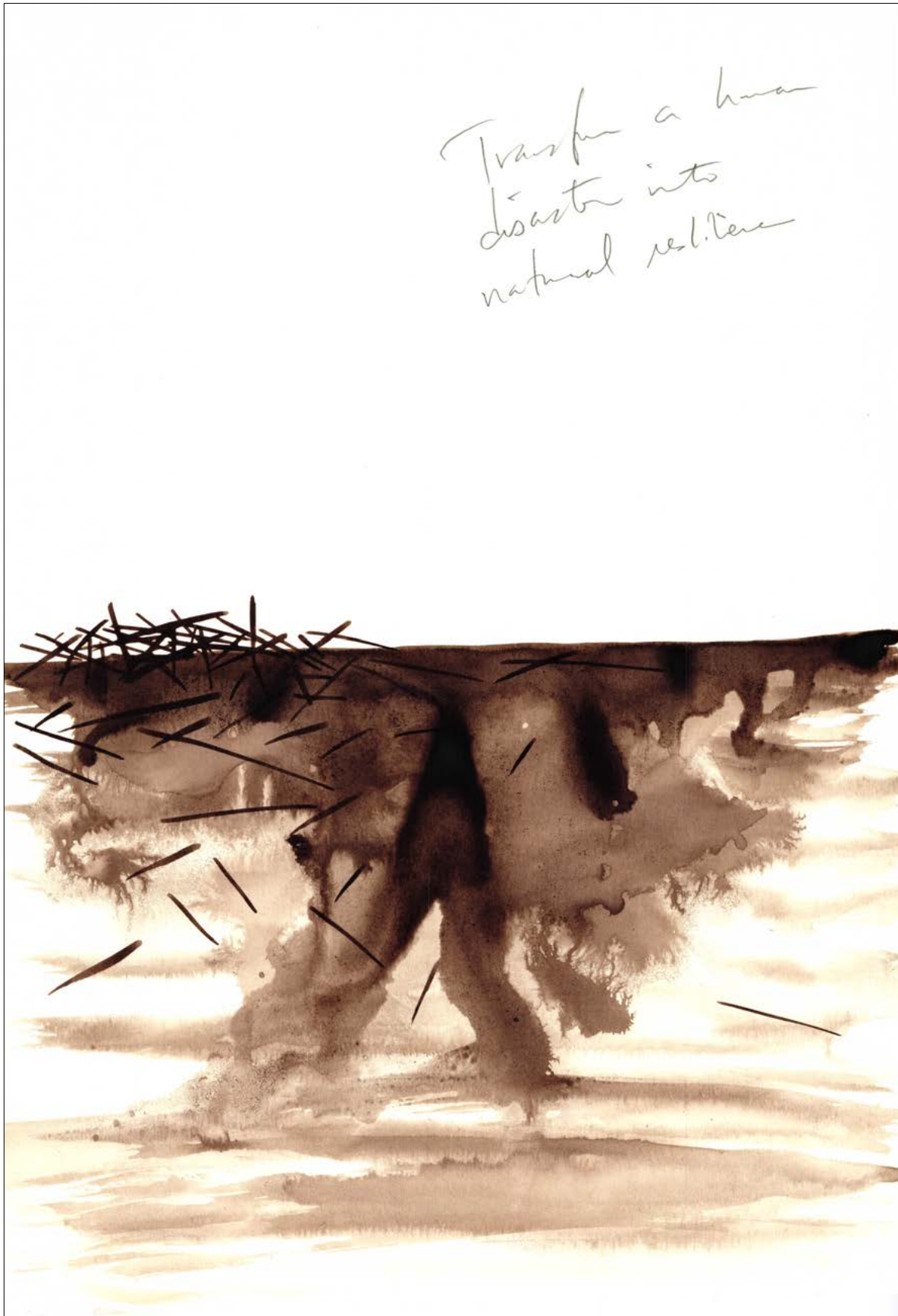


James Jack *Talk Story about Dirt* 2017
Open workshop, Molokai Island Hawai'i

Initial preparation for this work is being conducted in Lombok/Sumatra and Yame, Fukuoka. This involves setting up personal relationships and exchanging gifts. The future of this artwork will include face to face meetings, sharing meals together and side by side learning experiences. The site for this future activity is open to options discovered in the process. A local site that nourishes the human relationships is critical. Current global issues are mediated directly through the complex web local relationships. The following methodology will guide the creative production of this work:

- 1) Dialogue with family, organizers and reflection on relationships
- 2) Gather stories of human migration between Indonesia and Japan
- 3) Re-contextualize political issues in the personal sphere
- 4) Community engagement in Japan and Indonesia for preparation
- 5) Initial gifts exchanged in both directions during hand on workshops
- 6) Travel of artist family to Indonesia for one-month residency
- 7) Travel of family from Indonesia to Japan three-month residency
- 8) Alternative forms of documentation in tune with migration found
- 9) Editing, selecting and refining materials for exhibition
- 10) Support the future residence of family based on their desires
- 11) Social awakening of local impact on global affairs

Some elements of the work remain open: will the family stay permanently in Japan, return home or move to another country? These questions remain intentionally open ended, to be determined by the above method. As the philosopher Gadamer has said, we deceive ourselves if we ask questions that we already know the answer to. The goal of this work is to pose questions to contemplate together. Dialogue that emerges from this work will aid the reconsideration of the hierarchy between self/other, us/them are replaced by a new language of I/we, Y/our and other terms informed by alternative world views.



James Jack 2018 Transform a human disaster into natural resilience. Handmade walnut ink on paper 21 x 29.5 cm

Timeline

2002

- Organic farming cooperative forms Sansonjuku NPO in Yame (Fukuoka)

2016

- Oral interviews with eight woman recorded in Yame community
- Presentation of audio recordings in cottages (Social Art Lab)
- Reflection on social engagement of activities
- Meaningful engagement in public forums and private workshops
- Magnitude 6.4 earthquake in Aceh (Indonesia) near area hit by tsunami in 2004

2017

- International artists' workshops with community in Yame
- Relationships with key community members in Indonesia & Japan growing
- Initial concept for this work *One Family Migration* is born
- Exchanges between Indonesia-Japan increase in depth and breadth

2018

January

- Artist studio moves to Singapore

February-March

- Creative concept development and dialogue regarding site histories

April

- Volcano eruption and earthquakes on Hawai'i Island

May

- Research conducted through continued dialogue between Japan-Indonesia

June

- Artwork proposal presented to various exhibition organizing committees

July

- Dialogue with the organizers regarding artwork plan

August

- Communication with community continues, video message recorded

September

- Artist preparatory workshop held in Japan
- Prepare local food and send to family in Indonesia

October

- Site visit to discuss venue and content
- Personal connections with local community
- Preparation of living place for Indonesian family

November

- Return visit to Indonesia to show living place images

December

- Dialogue with the organizers regarding family selection

2019

January

- Preparation for exhibition with community partners
- Working with personal relationships that have developed trust

February

- Visit to Indonesia to meet volunteer family
- Maintain culturally sensitive methods throughout

March

- Visa preparations for family to enter Japan
- Housing options investigated
- Residential cost-analysis conducted

April-May

- Preparation of private programming for family
- Including language training, work and education

June

- Artist family live in Indonesia for one month
- Video, audio and alternative documentation

July

- Final editing of video, drawings and other materials
- Final preparation for exhibition

August

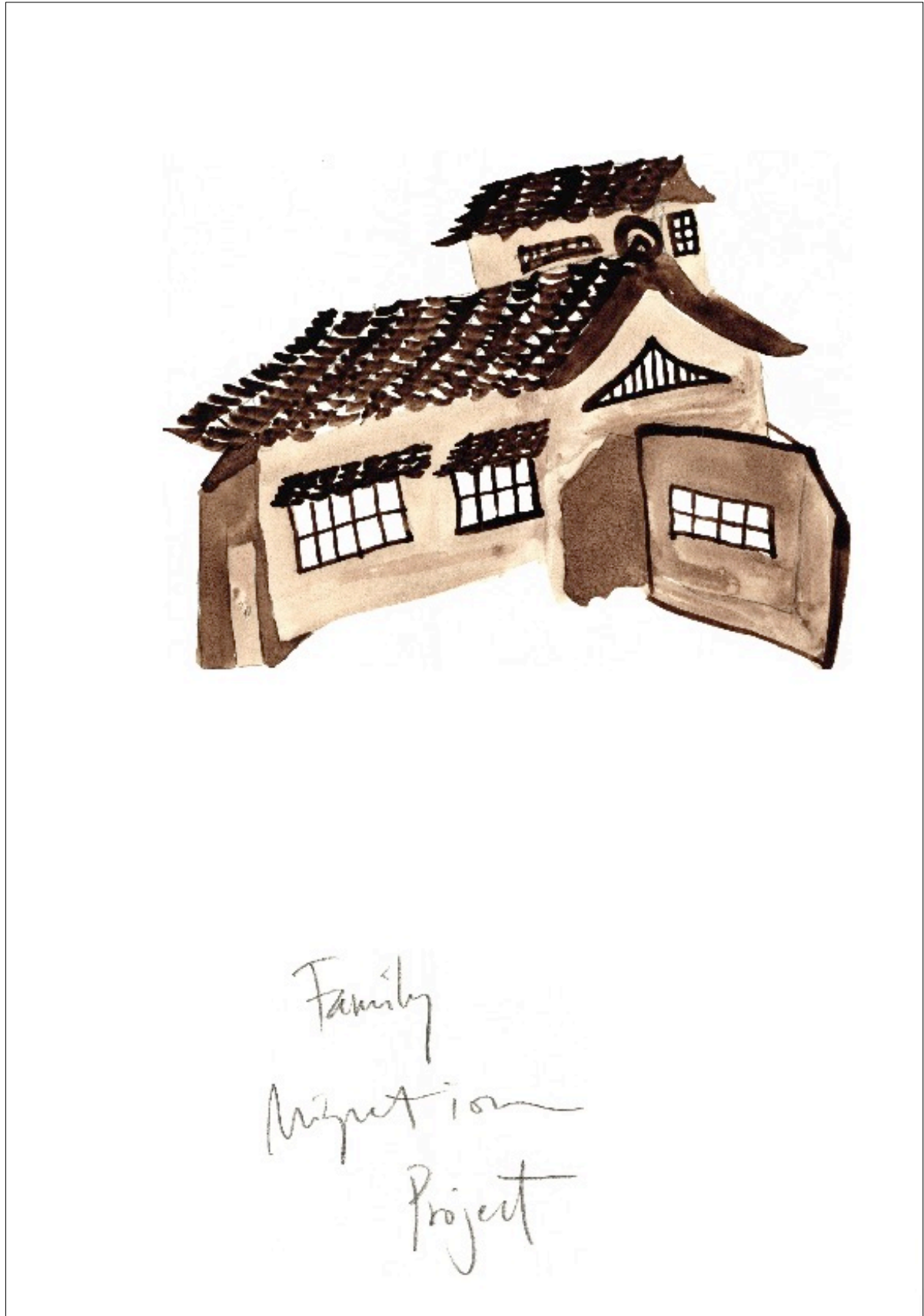
- Exhibit opens to the public
- Family moves to reside in Japan

September

- Family visits for local onsite workshop
- Held together with local host family

October

- Family selects site for future residence
- Japan, Indonesia or another country



James Jack 2018 *Family Migration Project* Handmade walnut ink on paper 21 x 29.5 cm

Exhibition

The goal of this work is to question borders in contemporary society. What is inside of our definition of “Japanese society” and what is outside of it? The exhibition will reflect this idea of questioning borders by inverting interior and exterior found in the home. Portions of a domestic interior will be inverted to the outside, such as blinds, bookshelves, drawers, and a closet filled with clothes. Selected elements ordinarily on domestic exterior will be on the inside including clapboards, roofing and doors. Along with parts of the re-constructed family home will be alternative forms of documentation including carefully edited video and select text. Language will be drawn from both countries including local dialects for nuance of exchange.

Local contacts will impact the collection of items for the installation. Select items will be shipped in bulk from Indonesia together from the family home. The organic evolution of the project based on human relationships will be emphasized in the presentation of the work. Human interconnection revealed through dialogue will be exhibited in diverse ways, such as maps that trace conversations, not only literal but also poetic in drawing meaning of I/we. The wishes of the exhibition organizers will be an integral part of the venue for the installation as well as the content, as only a tight selection of ephemera from the exchanges will be included in the exhibition.

In this installation the personal is political. In the small details of daily life an alternative world view becomes clear. Viewers will rethink the gray zones between “us” and “them” in an intimate manner. The exhibition gives deep meaning and potential impact for the action of one family setting up residence in Japan. This work is an artistic action towards social justice, as this artwork gives the microphone to groups that have been marginalized in previous histories to speak for themselves in front of new audiences. However, this is not to be confused with social welfare. Immigrant labor rights, health care and livable wages are important tasks that require long-term efforts. This work opens perspectives beyond the binary tendencies that dominate political dialogue. Starting with one family; stimulating the world we inhabit.

Biography

James Jack (b. 1979) is an artist based in Singapore. He has developed socially engaged art works for exhibitions including Honolulu Museum of Art, Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore, Setouchi International Art Festival, Busan Biennale Sea Art Festival, Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore. Solo exhibitions of his work have been held at TMT Art Projects (Fukuoka), TAMA Gallery (New York), Beppu-Wiarda Gallery (Portland), Satoshi Koyama Gallery (Tokyo) and the Portland Art Center. His writings have been published in Shima, Art Asia Pacific, The Japan Times, Modern Art Asia and catalogs published by Blum & Poe Gallery, LASALLE College of the Arts Singapore, Satoshi Koyama Gallery and The Contemporary Museum of Hawai'i. As a recipient of the Crown Prince Akihito Fellowship he moved to Japan in 2008. He holds a PhD from Tokyo University of the Arts and currently teaches art at Yale-NUS College in Singapore.

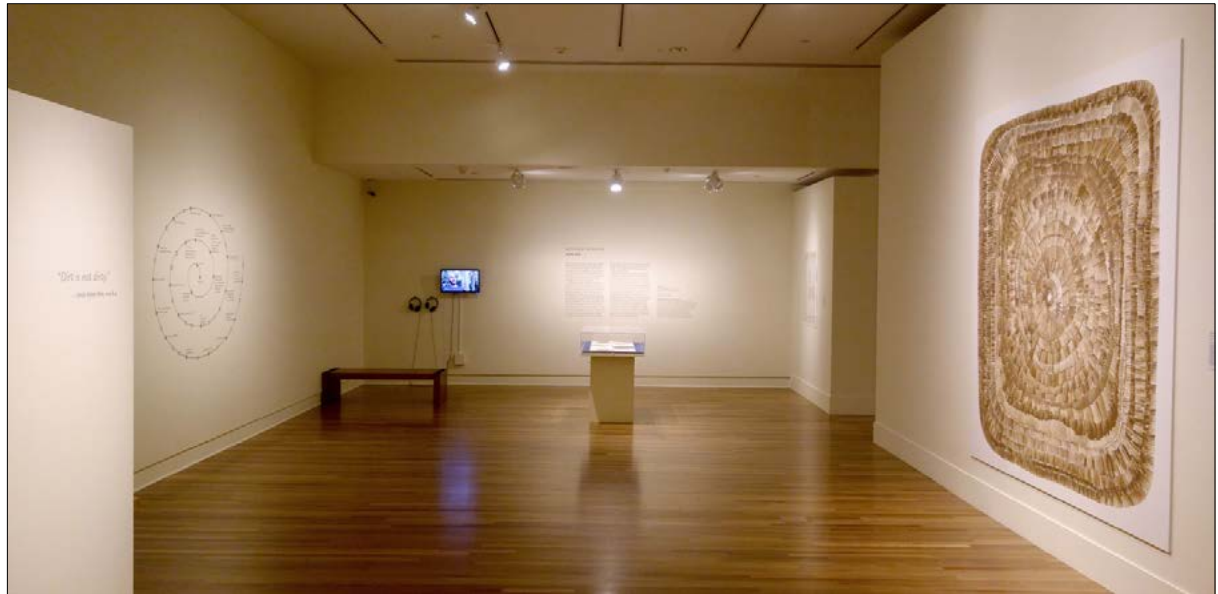


On the Artist

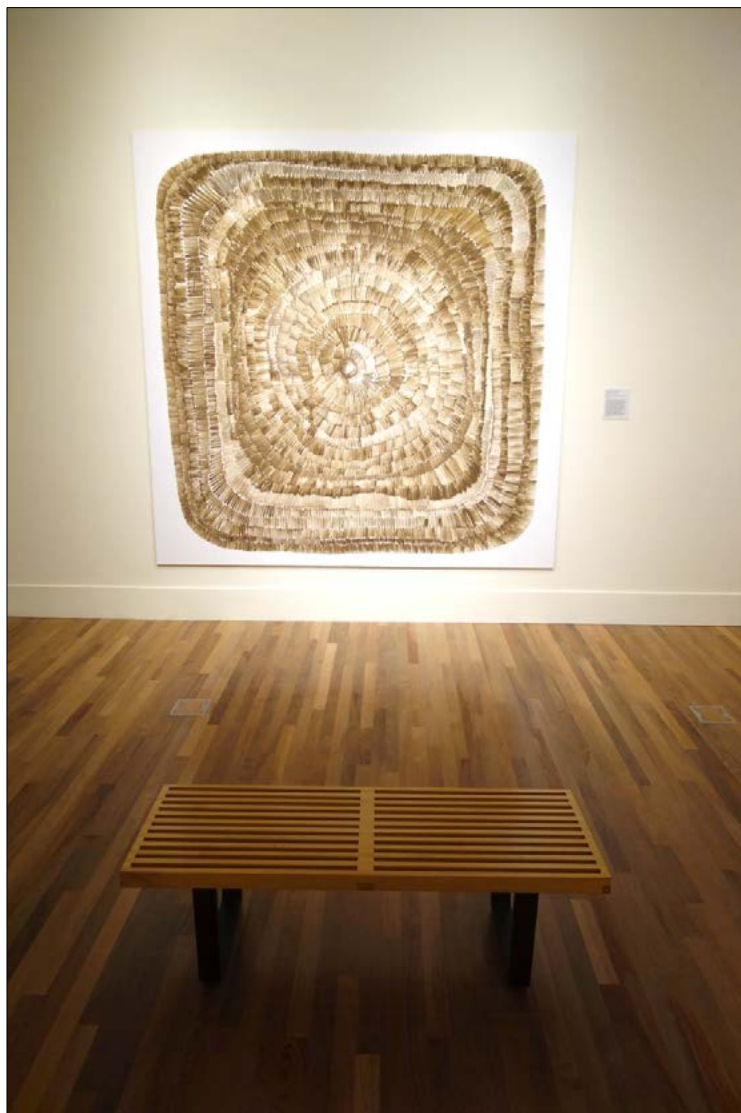
The works by social practice artists often engage the everyday experience through object-less and sometimes participatory expressions of socio-political civic engagement. James Jack is such an artist who engages layered histories tied to place as a way to concentrate on instances of positive change achieved through community-led initiatives. In this case, Molokai Window centers on Molokai peoples' shared stories and the dirt of the island. What emerged from the Molokai oral histories was a perceptible focus on ideas of abundance in dirt and resilience in the people of Molokai who prioritize the dirt as a life source. To emphasize the inseparable link between Molokai's social history and the physical manifestations of the 'āina (land), Jack sketched dirt drawings while in face-to-face conversation with community members. These conversations began by the artist first asking if he may touch his hand to the soil as people spoke. Once permission was granted, Jack created drawings by touching his hand to the dirt, and then rubbing the dirt onto a sheet of sketch-paper as people shared stories about the land upon which they stood. An approach that literally comes "from the ground up."

—Healoha Johnston, Curator Arts of Hawai'i, Honolulu Museum of Art

Previous Works



Molokai Window 2018 Natural pigment and gum arabic on wall panel, Aloha 'Āina Spiral & vinyl on wall by activist Walter Ritte, natural pigment and gum arabic on paper, ten sketchbooks, quotes in vinyl on wall by Malia Akutagawa, digital video by Matt Yamashita. Installation view Honolulu Museum of Art



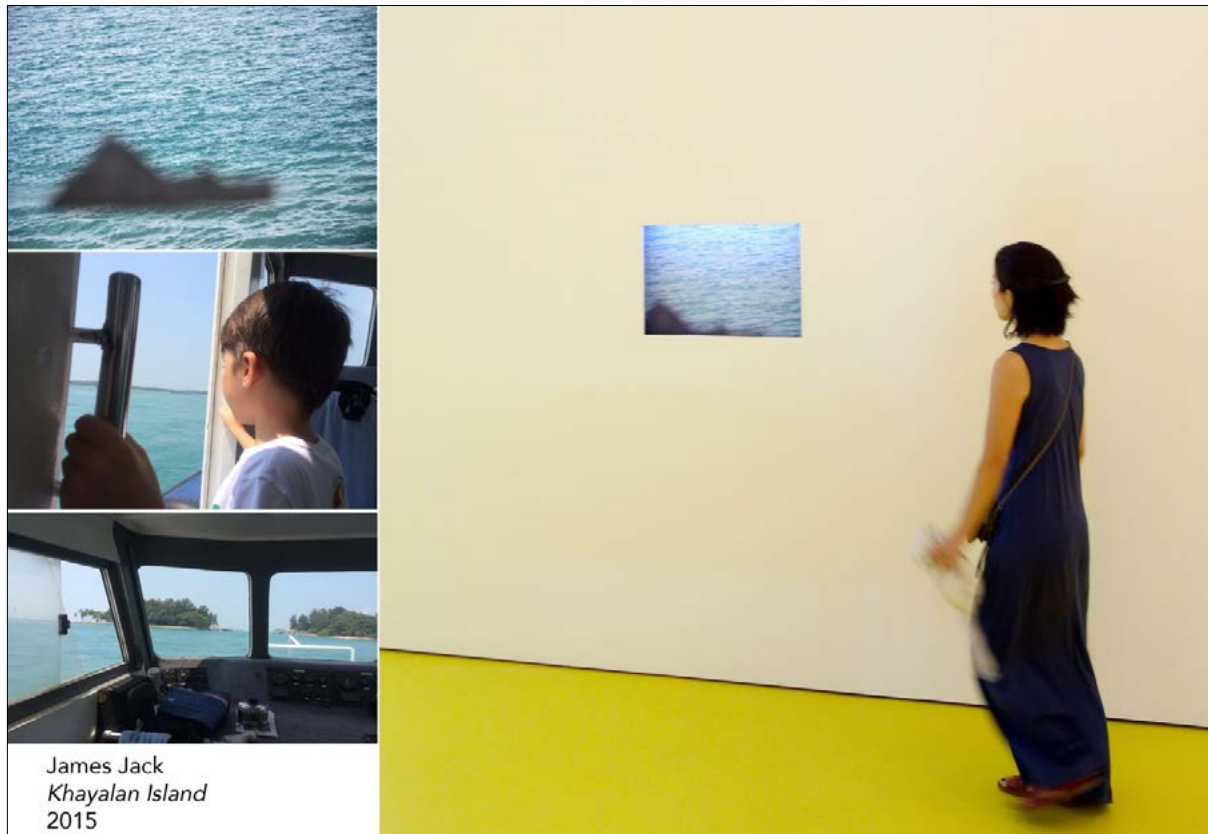


James Jack *Sea Birth*:
part one (above, left) &
part two (below, right)
2017 Digital 4K video
17'57" & 13'40", South
Ukibaru shipwreck
historical artifacts (1876),
Courtesy of Okinawa
Archaeological Culture
Center



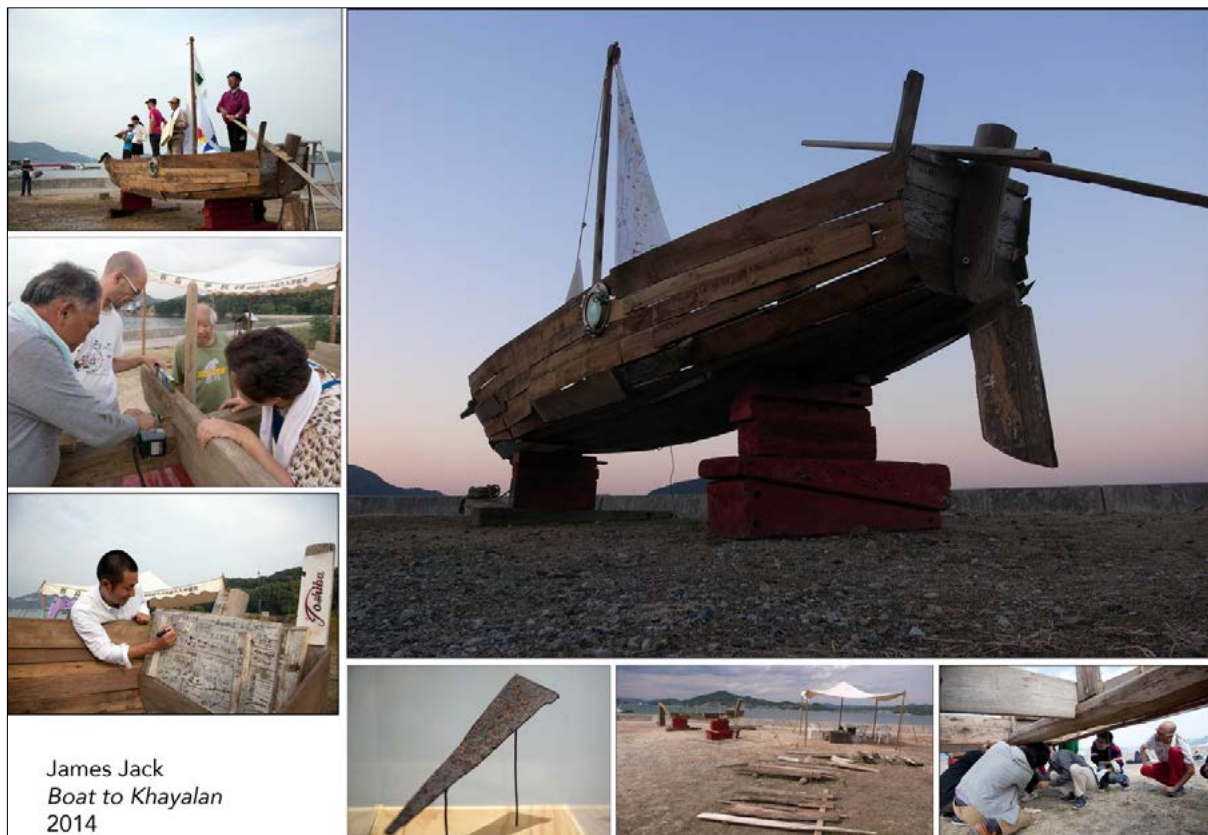


Natura Naturata: Light of Singapore 2017
Natural pigment and gum arabic on window
(above) natural pigment and gum arabic on paper
(below) Installation view at NTU ADM Gallery Singapore



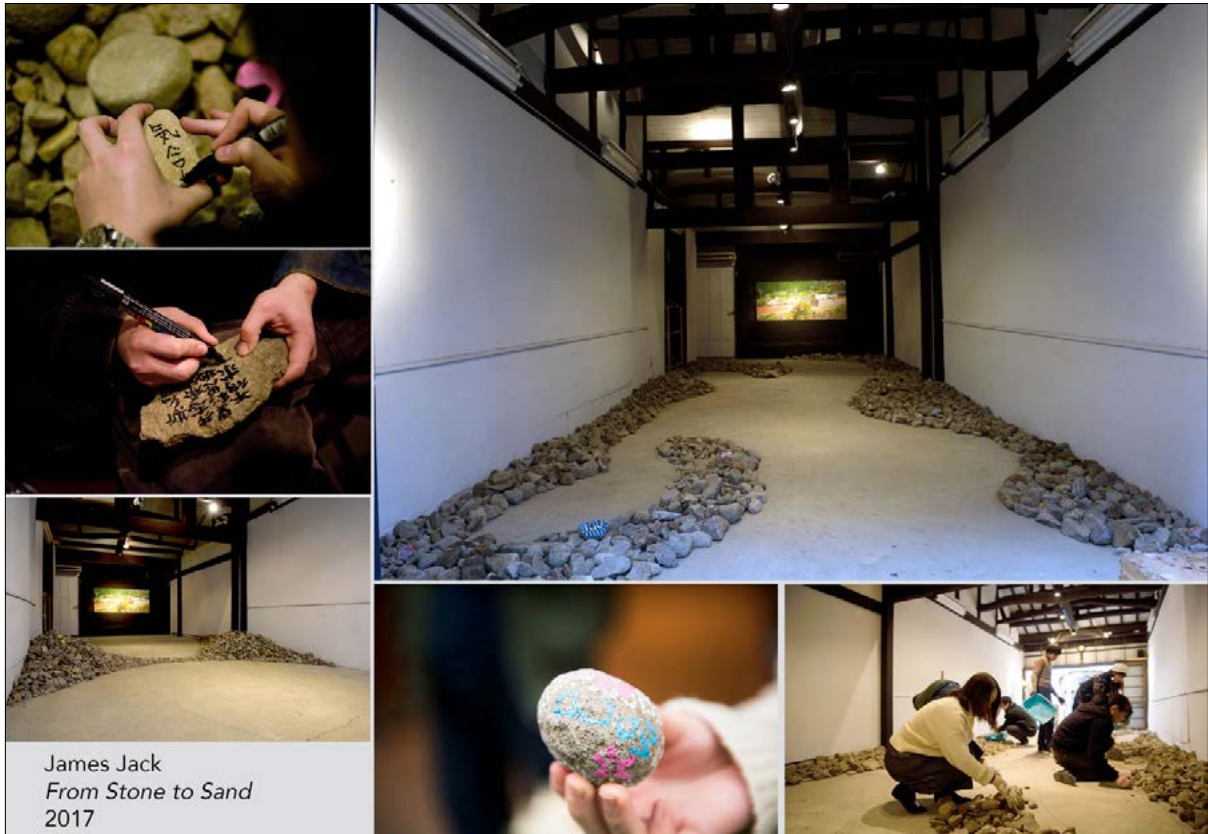
James Jack
Khayalan Island
2015

View of Khayalan Island from Pulau Balakan Mati 2015 Digital inkjet print on paper & two-channel audio of *Reparative Island* Installation view, *Place/Labor/Capital: Making an Institution* exhibition at Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore 2017



James Jack
Boat to Khayalan
2014

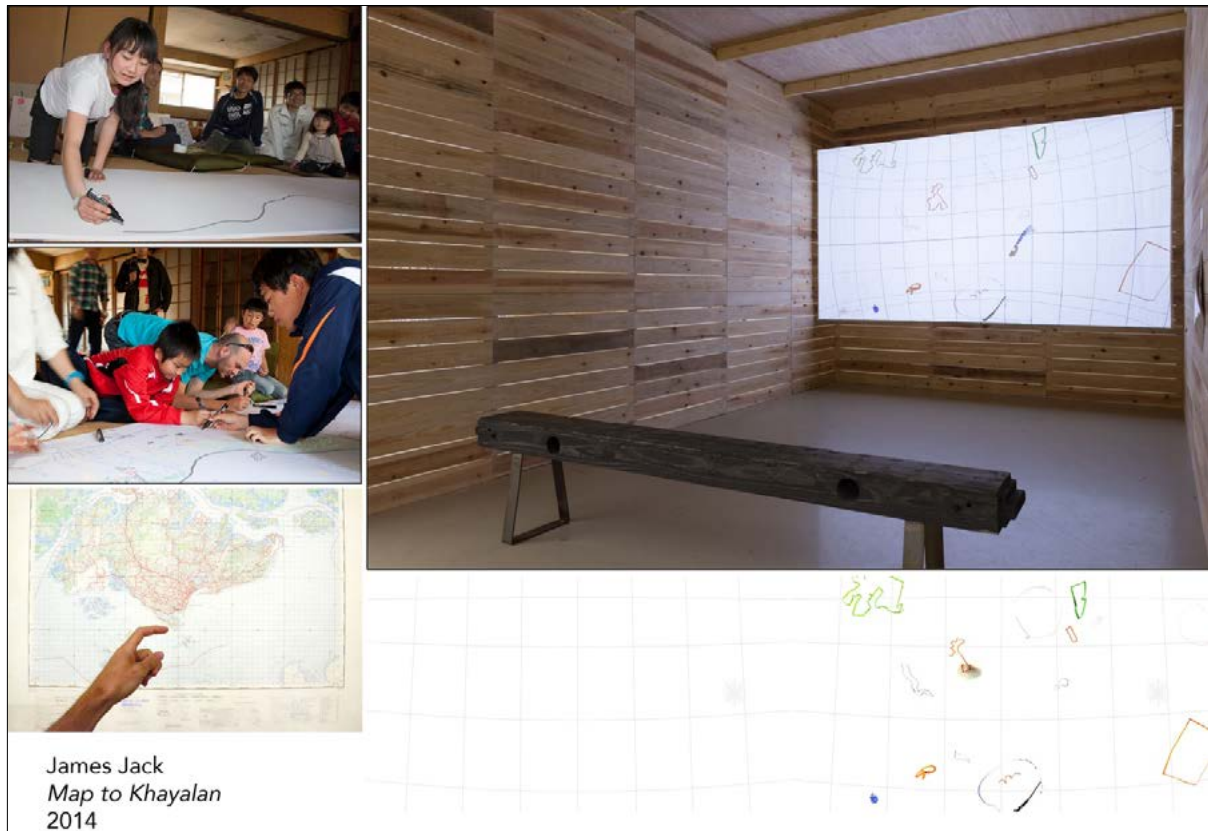
Boat to Khayalan 2014-2017 Recycled wood gathered from three abandoned homes to build a boat, Art Base Momoshima. *Khayalan Artifact #3* 2015 Iron and display case, Tokyo University of the Arts Museum



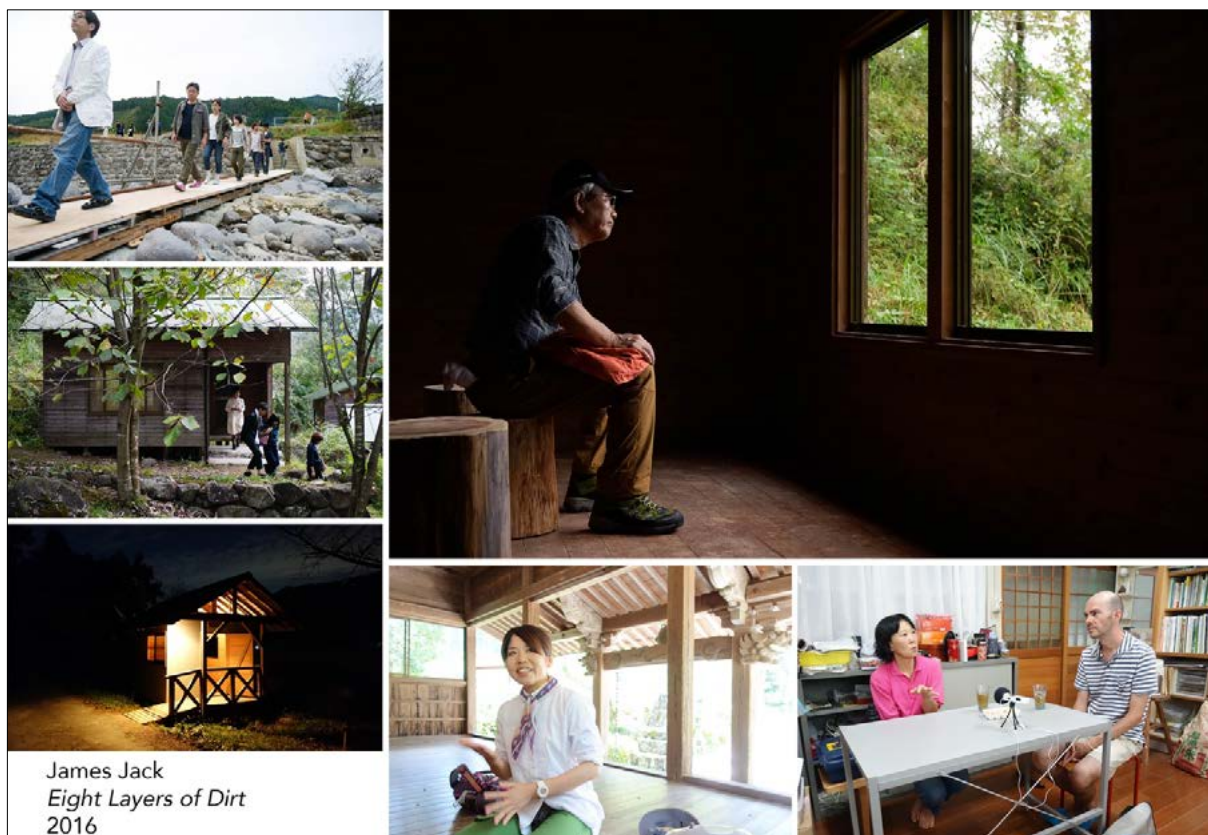
From Stone to Sand, 2017 Digital inkjet print on wall panel, stones from fallow agriculture field, handwriting by visitors, Installation view Enjoy Alternative Art Space, Fukuoka, Japan



Sunset House: The House as Language of Being 2010- Granite, basalt, yakita, ubamegashi tree, tatami, wishes, dreams, hopes and digital video, Setouchi Triennale 2013 & 2016



Map to Khayalan 2014 Digital video loop, imaginary island drawings by seven participants, handmade wood house and bench, Mizu no ki Museum, Kyoto



Eight Layers of Dirt 2016 Four-channel audio installation in four cottages damaged by river flood, recreated bridge across the river that destroyed the village and eight women's interviews, Installation view Kinokomura, Yame, Japan



Voyage from Takamatsu to Naha 2015 Digital inkjet print on floor. Installation view *Complex Topographies: The Garden*



Migration of a Pine Tree
2015
Handmade walnut ink on paper
76 x 56 cm
Private collection



Migration of a Cycad Tree
2015
Handmade walnut ink on paper
76 x 56 cm
Private collection