

aM Project 2019:

Plans for TOKYO 2019

Guest Curator: Tomoko Yabumae (Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo)

vol.3 Urban Research Group

NEW ADDRESS



Narratives Both Large and Small – The Works of URG

Tomoko Yabumae

The city metabolizes. Emerging Japanese architects during the nation's period of high economic growth had envisioned the changing aspects of the city using a biological model, drawing inspiration from the way in which cells proliferate while simultaneously adapting to their environment and establishing a sense of order. 60 years later, we find ourselves questioning whether this beautiful fractal had indeed been realized in Tokyo that is about to host its second Olympic games, as what lies before our eyes is a distorted cityscape where ideals and reality are interwoven in a chimera-like manner. What served as a force of resistance against the growth of the city that should have developed in a measured and regulatory fashion?

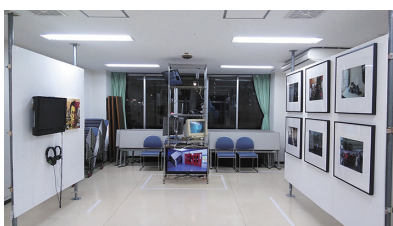
Plans for TOKYO 2019 vol. 3 introduces the Urban Research Group (URG), a collective by an unspecified number of artists that aims to contemplate and propose alternatives to existing urban discourses. Presented on this occasion are works produced collaboratively by three artists: Kenta Ishige and Goteki Tarumi who have respectively served curatorial roles within the group, and Yu Kurosaka who presides over Yotsuya Unconfirmed Studio. The activities of the group first gained attention in the fall of 2018, with their exhibition *Transforming Surroundings: Suburbs, Apartment Complex* that was held in Shinagawa Yashio Park Town where Ishige was born and raised. The apartment complexes that were the subject of the exhibition had originally been built upon reclaimed land across the Tokyo Bay in order to respond to the rapid population growth during Japan's period of high economic growth. Now, having since experienced the collapse of the economic bubble and the Great East Japan Earthquake, with shifts towards a highly advanced information society and globalization, how have they in fact changed? The exhibition served to visualize how the initial setting of this suburb-type apartment complex, which had been based on a resident model of a nuclear family commuting to and from school/work in the city, was by now no longer relevant. What was highlighted, were changes in resident structures and the emergence of new cultures that had been brought on as a result of the aging population and influx of people from other regions. Their research-based approach that enables them to intervene and introduce change to existing perceptions on various aspects of the city can be described as a new form of practice that takes place in its very streets.

The theme for this occasion devised by URG, who studies and documents the changes within the city from ground-level rather than from a commanding perspective like architects of the past, is "moving homes." Unlike the traffic and transportation networks outlined in "A Plan for Tokyo 1960," moving in real life is a cumbersome process that entails both gravity and friction. Why then, do people still move? What URG's question essentially reveals are motives that cannot be discerned through existing urban discourse, such as the various desires and unexpected turns of fate in each individual's life.

This exhibition centers on interviews that can be largely divided into two parts. The first are responses to the question "where would you like to live next?" which URG had asked while interviewing people in the various streets of Tokyo. Starting in Kichijoji, which often ranks among the "top most sought out towns to live in Tokyo," and then moving onto the next town the interviewees wished to live in and so forth, their research, while bringing to light expectations that are realistically within one's means as well as the presences of regional cast systems, had served to connect the city of Tokyo through an unstructured context that appears to slip through any means of one-sided analysis. The sculpted objects presented along with the interviews are made using large articles that had been discarded when people "moved homes," all of which URG had acquired on-site in the respective locations. Drawing from this concept, what is presented in a booth installed in the center of the exhibit are a series of narratives by Tarumi's family conveyed through cartoons and audio. The stories of "moving homes" told through three generations of women – Tarumi's grandmother, mother, and sister – are each guided by life events including work, relationships, natural disasters and so on, which despite all being diverse, are motives that anyone can experience. Most cases of "moving homes" is not only driven by an individual's intentions and desires, but occurs when multiple factors such as economy, society, and the natural environment intersect (it is for this reason that the frames of the cartoons have been partially cut out, enabling the viewer to edit the scenes by incorporating the narratives of others on the outside). Unearthed here are both the large and small narratives that exist in the gaps within cities – aspects of life that can only be described as the process before converging into abstract concepts such as "love," "marriage," "birth," "death;" also presenting the realm of human judgment that lies between activity and passivity. The members of URG have expressed their desire to use this as a starting point for seeking possibilities of affirming the status quo, or in other words, to find a means of "constructive resignation." By a curious coincidence, preparations for this exhibition had taken place during Japan's Upper House election. The relationship between the decline in the voting rate of youths and intergenerational equity had been a key issue in the past election, and likewise to voting, "moving homes" is also significant in terms of speculating the future while accepting one's current circumstances. What lies beyond this is perhaps the much larger question of what defines happiness, and what it is we can do to attain it. The activities of URG, who indeed can be considered as the "post-lost generation," have only just begun.

●Urban Research Group

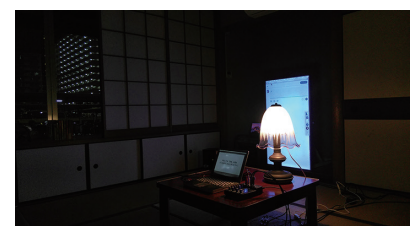
Urban Research Group (URG) is an art collective by Kenta Ishige, an artist and independent curator, and Goteki Tarumi, a web engineer and artist. In 2019, Yu Kurosaka, an artist presiding over Yotsuya Unconfirmed Studio joined as the third member. They have presented and curated attempts to capture the appearance of modern cities through various media based on the theme of "rethinking urban theory." Major curations include, *Transforming Surroundings: Suburbs, Apartment complex* (Yashio housing complex / Tokyo, 2018), *Scale Here* (BLOCK HOUSE / Tokyo, 2019).



"Transforming Surrounding Suburbs, Apartment complexes" 2018 Exhibition site view
(from the left) Haruya Nakajima a.k.a DOPE MEN / Scrap, Run & Build / N.T. State Of Mind, ryusei etou / Eye drops from the n floor, Keisuke Nakoshi / fammilia



"Transforming surrounding area, housing complex" 2018 Exhibition hall view
EVERYDAY HOLIDAY SQUAD / curry life



"Transforming surrounding area, housing complex" 2018
Yang02 / Automatic tweet system using voice input function for elderly people