

4A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART PRESENTS

WHAT THE BIRDS KNEW KEN + JULIA YONETANI 3 AUGUST - 22 SEPTEMBER OPENING EVENT 6PM THUR 9 AUGUST 2012

Ken and Julia Yonetani
What the Birds Knew (2012)
Uranium glass beads, aluminium wire, and UV lights
Courtesy of the artists, Arterreal Gallery, Sydney
and GV Art, London

4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art is proud to present ***What the Birds Knew***, an exhibition featuring new large scale works by internationally renowned Australian artists Ken + Julia Yonetani.

What the Birds Knew includes new sculptural works made from radioactive uranium glass*. A 6-metre long green ant will threateningly loom over visitors to the gallery, and a large scale chandelier will be visible 24 hours a day. The use of UV lights will make the uranium glow green, giving the works an ominous energy.

These new visually stunning and highly provocative works arise out of the artists' concerns over the recent nuclear tragedy in Fukushima. The title of the exhibition refers to the alternative title for Akira Kurosawa's 1955 post-war film *I Live in Fear*, in which the central character declares that the birds would flee if they knew of the impending environmental threats. Uranium glass has been used by the artists' as a means of exploring the fear of radiation that Japan has been living with daily. This fear is emphasised through the presence of glowing warning signs, which further hint at universal anxieties about our environmental future.

Yet despite the perceived danger present in contemporary society, uranium glass was widely used in late 19th and early 20th centuries to make drinking glasses, sugar bowls, cake stands and other decorative objects. The artists' reference this decadent history by sourcing vintage chandeliers, and replacing the traditional crystals with thousands of uranium glass beads.

4A Director Aaron Seeto says, "The particular focus of this exhibition is on shared cultural expressions of environmental anxieties within Indigenous Australian and Japanese culture, and whether these function as either warnings or premonitions. Ken Yonetani is now based in Australia but was born in Tokyo and grew up there. However, both artists have spent considerable time in Japan so the issue holds particular emotional significance for them."

The dominating presence of the giant green ant traces the relationship between recent nuclear events in Japan to uranium mining in Australia. In 1970, a large deposit of Uranium was discovered in Nabarlek in the Northern Territory, only metres from a sacred Aboriginal site known as Gabo Djang (the Dreaming Place of the Green Ants). The Kuwinjku people made a land claim to preserve the area. According to traditional story, if the ants' eggs were disturbed, dire misfortune would result. Despite this, Uranium mining began in 1978 and was subsequently sold to several countries including Japan.

Ken and Julia Yonetani have exhibited widely in Australia and internationally. Ken Yonetani represented Australia at the *53rd Venice Biennale* in 2009, and *Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art (SA)* in 2008. Together they have exhibited at GV Art (London), Kone Foundation (Finland), NKV (Germany), Arterreal Gallery (NSW), Art Gallery of New South Wales (NSW), Campbelltown Arts Centre (NSW), La Trobe University Museum of Art (VIC), Object Gallery (NSW), Gold Coast City Gallery (QLD), Jan Manton Art (QLD), and Rio Vista, Mildura (VIC).

The artists are based in Sydney and available for interview in the lead up to this exhibition. For all media inquiries, please contact Hannah Skrzynski at hannah@4a.com.au or 0412 825 586.



Left: Ken and Julia Yonetani, *What the Birds Knew* (2012), Uranium glass beads, aluminium wire, and UV lights. Courtesy of the artists, Arterreal Gallery, Sydney and GV Art, London.

Middle: Ken + Julia Yonetani, *Crystal Palace: The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nuclear Nations (Japan)* (2012), metal, UV lighting, Uranium Glass. Courtesy of the artists, Arterreal Gallery, Sydney and GV Art, London.

Right: Ken + Julia Yonetani, *Meltdown* (from *Electric Dreams* series) (2012), Uranium Glass, UV light. Courtesy of the artists, Arterreal Gallery, Sydney and GV Art, London.

*Uranium Glass Health and Safety

Modern uranium, or "Vaseline" glass is typically only up to maximum 2% uranium by weight. This is not sufficiently radioactive to pose a health hazard to those viewing the glass.

What the Birds Knew is supported by the NSW Government through Arts NSW.



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