

There's something fishy about jars - you're down on your luck, things haven't been going well lately, but with this pot, you'll be perfectly alright, a bit pricey though...<sup>1</sup> Nakashima relates their thought that the moment they discovered Goryeo marble jars sold on the Net at extremely low prices, presumably way lower than when first palmed off by some religious organization, they got seized with the notion that *they must be destroyed* at all costs.

Nakashima likes to quote a Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, generally known as a book of publicity. "In acting and speaking, men show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world." "The human condition" is to elaborate one's thoughts to communicate democratically with others in public space. Jars, however, never reveal the contents inside; they are against the public.

On the other hand, jars' image of closure, associated with religiosity, has a positive value for Nakashima as well; it secures the private sphere. Jars conceal what is inside. In so doing, they create a private space of peace and tranquility for individuals in which no one can bother them. A prayer offered to God/gods alone. Arendt too, not simply emphasizing the need for public space, is careful enough to point out the necessity "to understand the danger to human existence from the elimination of the private realm." Regarding such a private sphere, she continued: "*the four walls* of one's private property offer the only reliable hiding place from the common public world."<sup>2</sup> A space surrounded by *four walls* - this is the □ from the exhibition title.

Enclosed spaces against the public that is "the human condition," but nonetheless essential to human life. In order to consider □'s ambivalence, Nakashima, for this exhibition, collected materials from the Kakure-Kirishitan culture in Nagasaki. Kakure-Kirishitans are Japanese crypto-Christians in the Edo period under the suppression of Christianity. Ostensibly Buddhists, they had no choice but to hold funerals in the Buddhist manner. Comes here the rite called "Kyo-Keshi."

During the Buddhist funeral ceremony, the Christians chanted the "Kyo-Keshi oration" to nullify the sutra effect to send the dead to the Buddhist netherworld, and when the Buddhist funeral was over, they held a new Christian-style funeral ceremony.<sup>3</sup>

Nakashima focuses on the jars utilized in this ceremony. The Kakure-Kirishitans would fill the jar with water and let them absorb the sutra. By reciting an oration into the water, then, they purified the sutra. The sound installation □-Keshi borrows this "Kyo-Keshi" format.

Note that the "Kyo-Keshi," literally a "sutra-eraser," does not erase the Buddhist sutra in the literal sense; its power is never up to that level. It was a time of the edict banning Christianity, a time of brutal persecutions performed no sooner than they were known to have any faith other than the official religion. The "Kyo-Keshi" barely kept Christianity from being converted to Buddhism, and the private from being subsumed to the public. It is nothing but prayer; a modest form of defense.

The □ motifs, including jars, can be detected throughout the exhibition. Those enclosed spaces, more often than not, also imply their imperfection; shattered, distorted, or translucent through which to see the other side: for example, the architectural space of the gallery itself: or the grids of fences at a construction site: a white box-like chair on which for spectators to sit: a subterranean space seen through a hole in the gallery floor.

At the deepest point of the installation lies one of the most important among the □ images: a green cross on the altar cloth - a cube cut open as if to reveal the inside. For the artist who has consistently

pursued the concept of site-specificity to place this symbol in a white cube gallery - a symbol adopted *peculiarly* in Japan as a safety-first sign in construction sites - may correspond to the *peculiar* way Western-derived contemporary art has developed in Japan. Furthermore, we may also find a connection to the *peculiar* attitude of the Kakure-Kirishitans who attached hidden Christian meanings to everyday figures in which we could hardly tell Christianity at the first glance. Following the Kakure-Kirishitans, still, Nakashima attempts to vision the sacred which dwell, they believe, in banal images like jars and green crosses. In urban spaces, God/gods reveal itself, epiphanically, by chance.

Introduction to Rika Nakashima's Solo Exhibition *Keep Out of* □  
Yuki Nagao (Queer Theory, Art Criticism)

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<sup>1</sup> This is a recreation of common sales pitches for Japanese cult religious organizations to sell expensive jars to believers; widely held in Japan is this sort of subtle relationship of religions and jars.

<sup>2</sup> Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 179, 70, 71, italics mine.

<sup>3</sup> Kentaro Miyazaki. *A True Picture of Kakure-Kirishitan: the Understanding and Acceptance of Christianity in Japan* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kobun Kan, 2013), 143, my translation (=宮崎賢太郎『カクレキリシタンの実像——日本人のキリスト教理解と受容』、吉川弘文館、2013年、143頁。).