

Final major project

Un/Masked

In collaboration with Priyanka Pattni, Reeve Hart,
and Lizziy Parker



Naoto Yoshida

University for the Creative Arts, Farnham
Master of Fine Art (MFA) Photography

Project statement

Disability is a social construct rather than a personal matter is the motto of the 'Social model of disability,' developed by disabled activists and academics, such as Michael Oliver, the author of *The Politics of Disablement*.

Un/Masked is a photographic project that celebrates the ordinary lives of neurodivergent individuals while addressing what constitutes disability in society.

Viewing human development as a spectrum, the term neurodivergent is preferred for individuals with developmental differences. However, it remains a fact that they often face challenges in specific circumstances due to their vulnerabilities to social stigma stemming from low public recognition. As such, they frequently hide their traits, such as self-regulating behaviours, to conform to social norms. This “masking” behaviour can result in chronic mental health issues caused by exhaustion and low self-esteem.

Referring to Socially engaged art, such as by Anthony Luvera or Wendy Ewald, the collaborative methodology consists of the depiction of three young neurodivergent participants' moments of repose with their re-enactments in their preferred spaces as well as Polaroid images on which they write comments, translating their sensory experiences in daily lives. And a series of still-life images of small everyday objects that provide sensory relaxation to the participants' nervous systems.

The impetus behind this approach arose from a sense of unease regarding my oversimplification of the neurodivergent individuals' lived experiences within a commercial journalistic framework when I reported on the challenges faced by young Japanese people with disabilities in their job searches in 2019. Subsequently, I have pursued a collaborative approach to convey the voices of those involved.

In light of the nebulous distinction between “disabled” and “non-disabled,” human beings are not as straightforward as dichotomies suggest. Within this context, the project attempts to transcend the othering paradigm by visualising an invisible human condition and, by extension, an attitudinal barrier in society.

Body of work – Portraits

Priyanka at home with their toy animals

Priyanka (she/they) gets relaxed at home. On their bed, there are some toy animals, usually being put side by side neatly.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Crawley, West Sussex



Priyanka with their beloved hamster

Priyanka had a female hamster. There was a small house in which she lived. She is no longer with Priyanka, and they greatly miss her.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Crawley, West Sussex



Priyanka with their best friend Kerry, playing with bubbles under a table

Priyanka often carries a small bottle of bubbles as a relaxing and playful everyday toys.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida
Location: Farnham, Surrey



Reeve in Clay trails

Reeve grew up in St Austell. Walking away from the town centre, he has some favourite places. One day in winter, he sat on top of piled rocks, looking out over the sea. Despite being a favourite spot, the solid, chilly wind moved his eyes around.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: St Austell, Cornwall



Reeve with his partner Daria

Reeve feels relaxed at home with his partner, Daria. Having been diagnosed with autism during childhood, Reeve frequently feels the isolating nature of autism. From the outset of their meeting, Daria has been consistently emotionally supportive of him.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida
Location: Farnham, Surrey



Lizziy at home, lying on a yoga mat

Lizziy (they/she) likes physical activities such as pole dance and rock climbing. Yoga is also one of them. Having laid a yoga mat, they lie on their back, looking at the ceiling meditatively.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida
Location: Farnham, Surrey



Lizziy sit on a ruined structure

Exploring nature is an occasional relaxation for Lizziy, even if it is in the backyard of their parents' house.

Year: 2024 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Cranleigh, Surrey



Lizziy at their parents' home, playing with a cat

Staying at their parents' house reminds Lizziy of nostalgic and bittersweet childhood memories before recognising themselves as neurodivergent.

Year: 2024 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Cranleigh, Surrey



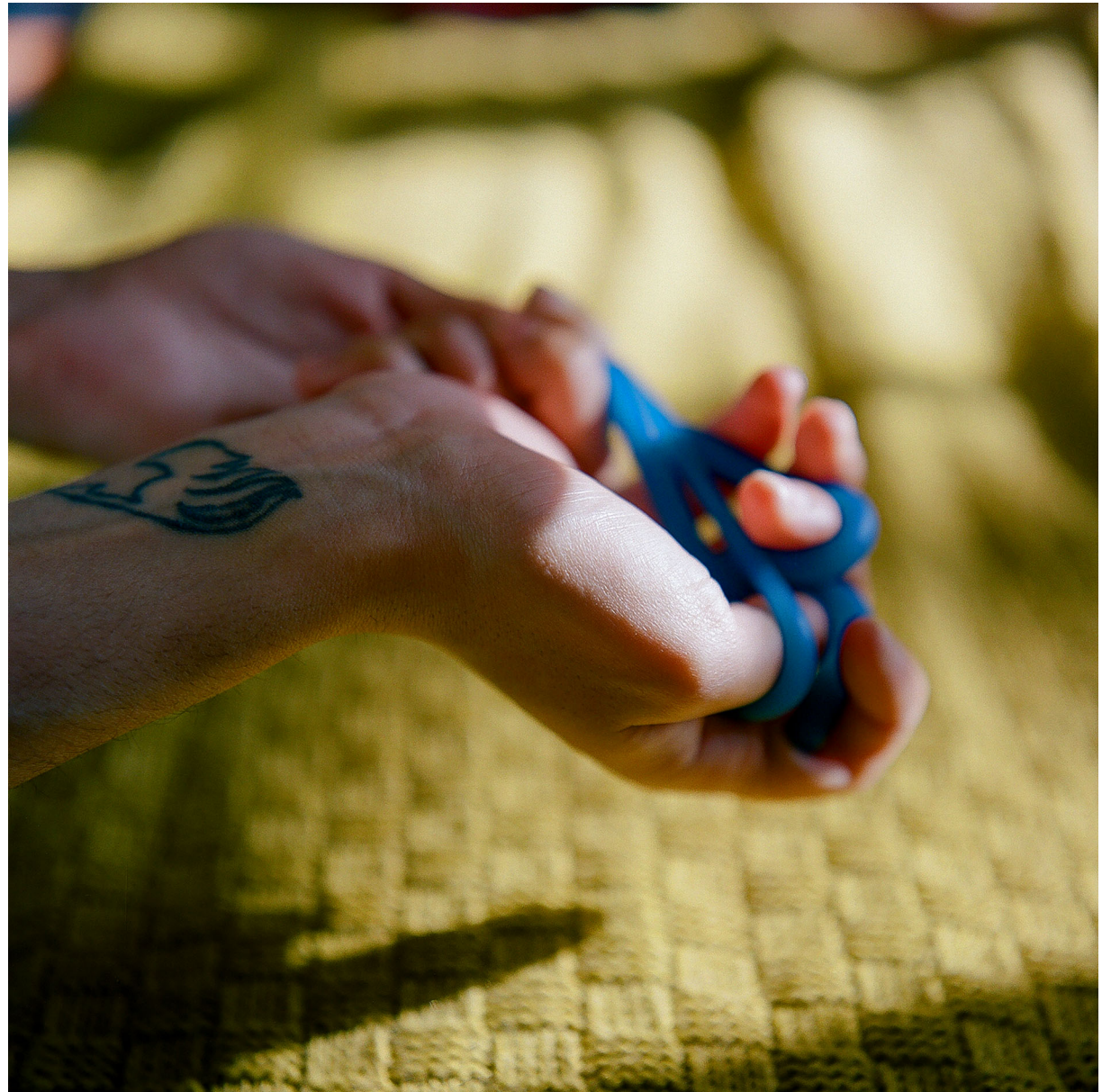
Body of work – Gestures and surroundings

Priyanka at home playing with their stim toy

Priyanka plays with their stim toys when they feel sensory overload. Stim toys or fidget toys provide sensory stimulation or relaxation to facilitate neurodivergent individuals' nervous systems. Priyanka always carries some of their collection of these toys.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Crawley, West Sussex





Priyanka's notes

Priyanka used to take some notes about their autism traits for their assessment.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Crawley, West Sussex

Reeve's vinyl collection

Reeve has collected lots of vinyls and CDs of his favourite bands. They are irreplaceable things in his life.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida
Location: Farnham, Surrey



Crossing arms

A bond between Reeve and Daria has been their shared affinity for music. Reeve has a tattoo of “blink-182,” his favourite band, on his arm.

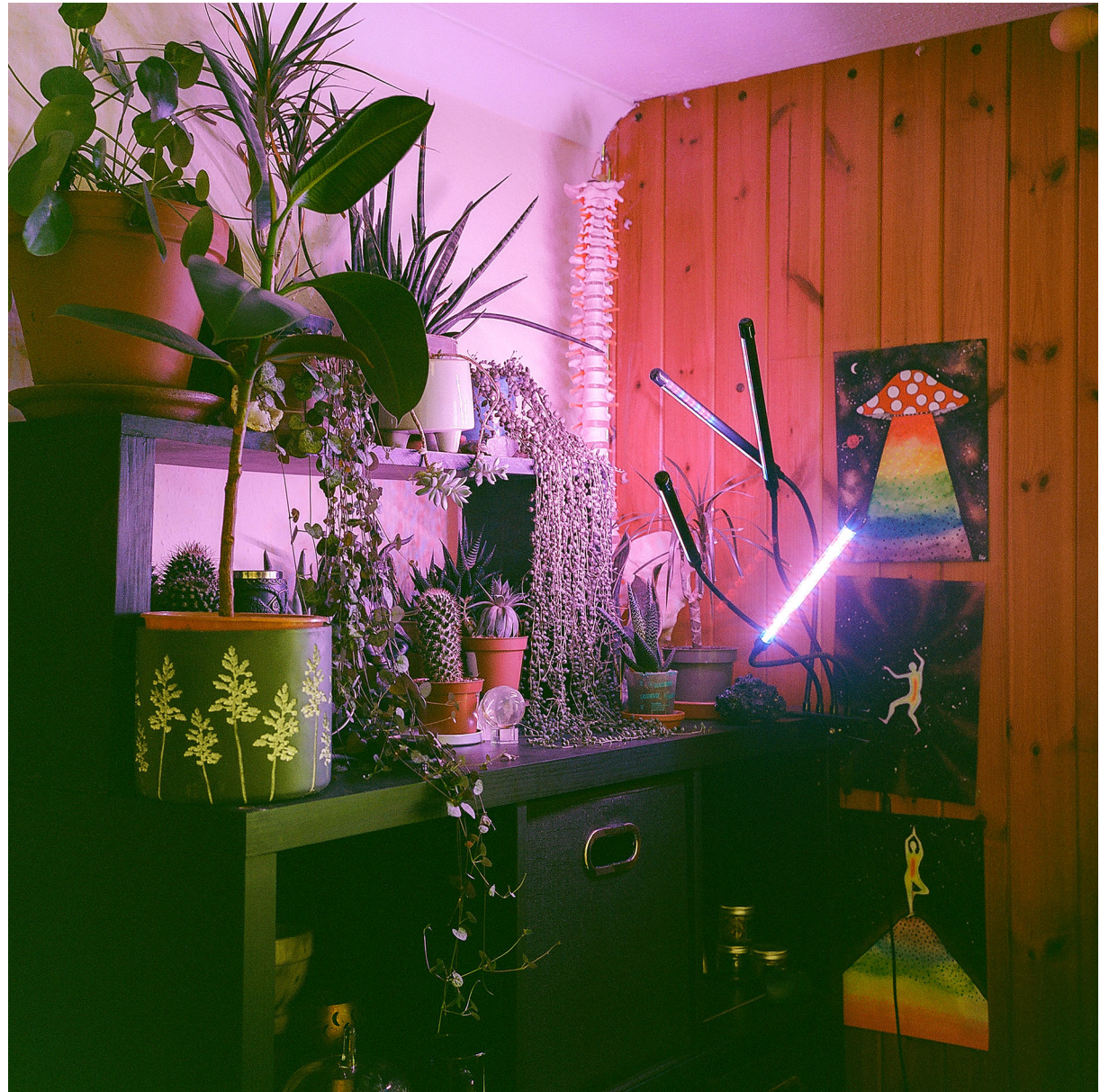
Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida
Location: Farnham, Surrey



Lizziy's collection

Lizziy lives surrounded by their favourites, such as plants, toys and arts. When Lizziy looks for things, they pull everything out and get distracted by other activities, making them unable to tidy up. They would spend once a week deep clean.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida
Location: Farnham, Surrey



Crystal lamp at Lizziy's room

Lizziy's crystal lamp has a warm tone, which makes them calm.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Farnham, Surrey



Body of work – Landscapes

Brighton beach

One of Priyanka's favourite sites to be relaxed is Brighton beach, the nearest seaside from their home in Crawley. They has a sea glass collection, mostly picked there. The majority of sea glass is green or brown. However, if luck is there, another colour could be seen, such as blue.

Year: 2024 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Brighton and Hove



Clay Trails

One of Reeve's favourite sites is the Clay Trails. This old clay mining site in the Cornish town of St Austell comprises gentle trails, an iconic mortar-shaped mountain and piled rocks. When Reeve is back home, he usually visits there to escape from everyday panic.

Year: 2023 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: St Austell



400 years old tree

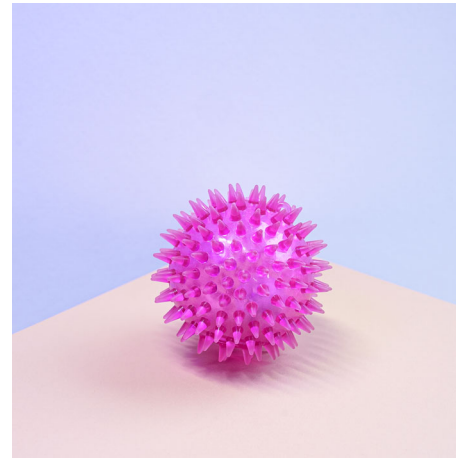
There is a gigantic old tree in the back yard of Lizziy's parents' home where used to be a farm. When Lizziy go there, they lean against its trunk, sometimes touching small plant or moss, which grow around.

Year: 2024 ©Naoto Yoshida

Location: Cranleigh

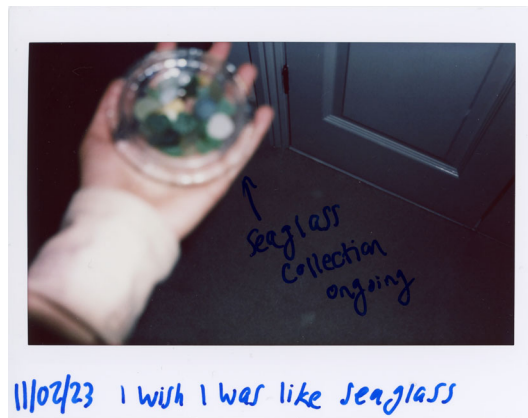
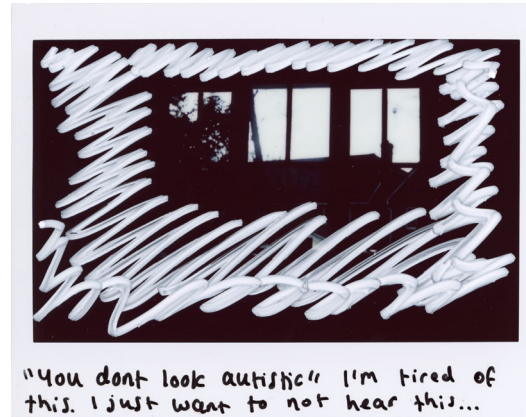


Body of work – Still-life images of “Fidgets”



Stim toys / Fidgets: Small everyday objects provide sensory stimulation and visual or physical relaxation with neurodivergent participants when they experience sensory overload. They can be found objects (e.g. Priyanka's sea glasses = top right) and toys (e.g. Lizziy's stress ball = top middle, Reeve's small metal cogwheel = bottom middle). They should not necessarily be designed for mainly those who are neurodivergent but can be relaxing for all of us by playing with them. This universality tells ambiguous boundaries between "neurodivergent" and "neuro-typical" to destabilise people's bias towards neurodivergent individuals.

Body of work – Polaroid images with handwritten texts by the participants



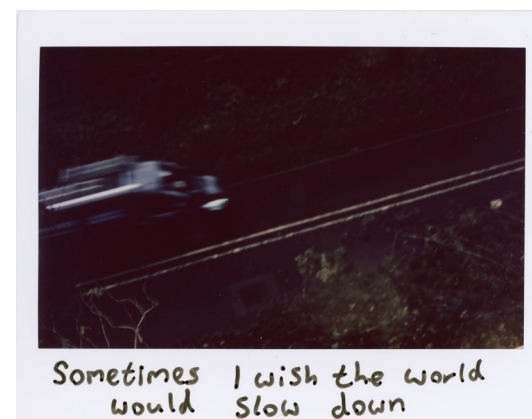
Top left: Untitled | Written texts: I love receiving gify of my special interests

Top middle: Untitled | Written texts: “you don’t look autistic“ I’m tired of this. I just want to not hear this...

Top right: Untitled | Written texts: 23/2/23 animals don’t judge, sometimes she feels like the only one who gets me

Bottom left: Untitled | Written texts: 11/02/23 I wish I was like seaglass

Bottom right: Untitled | Written texts: It’s hard making & keeping friends. There are some I love having in my life



Top left: Untitled | Written texts: Contrasting emotions, rapid mood swings

Top middle: Untitled | Written texts: Autism can be very lonely

Top right: Untitled | Written texts: Sometimes I wish the world would slow down

Bottom left: Untitled | Written texts: I feel more alien when I'm around humans

Bottom right: Untitled | Written texts: I become a silent observer

Year: 2023 ©Reeve Hart / Naoto Yoshida



Top left: Untitled | Written texts: Looking after my plants helps me remember to look after myself

Top middle: Untitled | Written texts: Embraced by all this green I start to feel like a person again.

Top right: Untitled | Written texts: I love my attention to detail Every inch of my room is carefully considered...

Bottom left: Untitled | Written texts: Am I too Loud?

Right: Untitled | Written texts: going to my parents house can be hard Lots of memories Being undiagnosed as a kid was tough. I felt like I was never good enough

Installation views

*** The link to an introduction video of the solo exhibition is attached separately**



Solo exhibition: Un/Masked

Date: March 8 - May 4, 2024

Venue: Aperture Gallery (London, UK)

Address: 17a&b Riding House St London W1W 7DT

Medium: Photographs printed on matt coated paper mounted on Dibond, printable vinyl sheet or framed with tray mount, Polaroid fixed with magnets between two acrylic plates

Objects: Stim toys as touchable installation to feel them physically (top right)

Publication – Set of zines

*** The link to a video is attached separately**



Place of making: University for the Creative Arts (Farnham, UK)

Year: 2024

Dimension: 148 x 210

Pages: Reeve Hart 20 pp, Priyanka Pattni 24 pp, Lizziy Parker 24 pp

Editions: 20 (3 zines as one set + 3 scanned hand-written texts by the participants and 1 double sided insertions)

Type of printing: Duplex laser on matt paper (170gsm)

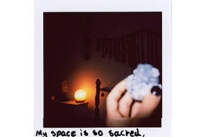
Self-published (printed at the UCA and saddle-stitched with flipping cover)



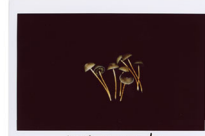
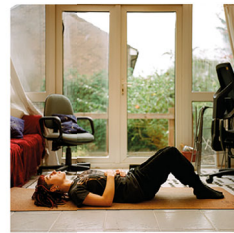
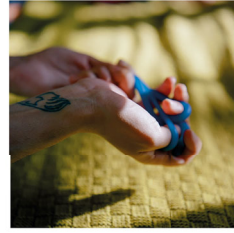
It's easier for me to know what animals are thinking than people



"You don't look autistic" I'm tired of this I just want to not hear this...



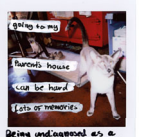
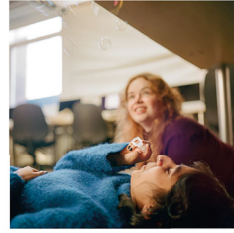
My space is so sacred, I need soft lights...



Autism can be very lonely



My best friends & closest friends, these are some I love many in my life



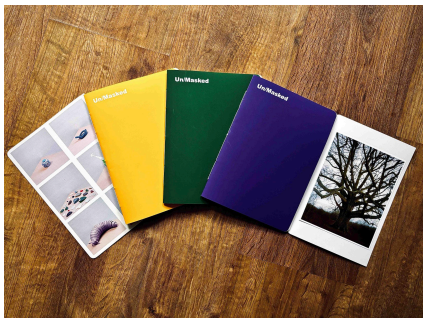
Being undiagnosed as a kid was tough, I felt like I was never good enough



【Supplemental video for solo exhibition introduction and publication】



- [Submission] Solo exhibition "Un/Masked" introduction video_Naoto Yoshida
https://youtu.be/L_typ49O5IQ



- [Submission] Zine flipping video_Naoto Yoshida
<https://youtu.be/-4ZmJCr-4WQ>

Artist biography

Naoto Yoshida, born in 1989, is a Japanese writer and documentary photographer based in the UK and Japan. He has focused on social issues related to disability, from cultural or sociological viewpoint, and para-sports over the past six years, publishing three co-written books. His subject matters stem from the question of what constitutes disability in our society, exploring collaborative and participatory approaches with people concerned to enable them to play an active role in the creation of a project. He won the Portrait of Britain vol. 6 (2023). His work has been shortlisted for the Taylor Wessing Photo Portrait Prize and Pitch Grant in 2023.

Contact

na.yoshida7010@gmail.com

2200830@students.ucreative.ac.uk

+44 073 1164 3794

The project has been supported by

University for the Creative Arts, Farnham

Metro Imaging Ltd

Rapid Eye

Aperture Gallery

The Japan Society

Michael Chan

Special thanks to Reeve Hart, Priyanka Pattni, and Lizziy Parker

Portrait of Britain Award – Winner

<Photobook>

Publisher: Bluecoat Press
(London, UK)

Year: Dec, 2023

322pp, 165 x 210



<Public Exhibition>

Venue: UK nationwide

*JCDecaux's digital screens

Year: Jan, 2024



Winning image: Priyanka Pattni at Home, Crawley West Sussex

Portrait of Britain Vol.6 (2023)

“Portrait of Britain was launched in June 2016 in the tumultuous months surrounding the Brexit vote, conceived as a site-specific public artwork through which the British public would encounter versions of themselves“ (British Journal of Photography)

Taylor Wessing Photo Portrait Prize 2023 (NPG) – Shortlisted



Left: Priyanka plays with their stim toys when they feel overwhelmed (C-type print 762mm x 762mm)

Top: Priyanka sometimes put a soft toy on the top of their head to get relaxed (C-type print 762mm x 762mm)

Bottom: Reeve feels happy being with his partner Daria in their home (C-type print 1016mm x 762mm)



Pitch Grant – Finalist



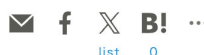
若手写真家を「みんなで応援」 手作り助成プロジェクトに込めた理想

有料記事 Re:Ron 発

写真家・岡原功祐=寄稿 2024年2月22日 17時00分



コメントプラス



佐藤美鈴さんのコメント



Photo: Asahi Shinbun Digital Re:Ron

https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASS2M7JNRS2MULLI00B.html?iref=reron_lplist

A small grant by an independent photojournalist Kosuke Okahara (Polka Gallery, France) to encourage young photographer or photographic artist to carry on their work-in-progress project. Through the first judge with digital submission, eight finalist were selected to give presentations in Kyoto, Japan on the 15th of May, 2023. The grant was featured in Asahi Shinbun, one of the biggest Japanese news paper.

Date of the presentation: May 15th, 2023

Venue: Sho-gun zuka Seiryu-Den, Yamashina, Kyoto Japan

Date of publication on Asahi Shinbun: February 22nd, 2024



『Awai』 吉田直人

『Awai』は発達障害の当事者への取材と、写真やテキストを用いたコラボレーションを通じ、当事者と観客との関係性を探るドキュメンタリープロジェクトです。

私は2017年からライターとして活動する中で、障害当事者の社会課題について執筆してきました。本プロジェクトのきっかけは、2019年に行った障害のある学生による企業インターンの取材です。本日は、障害により就職活動で不利になる場合があるという課題を伝えることでしたが、約1年の取材を経て記事が公開されたものの、心に伝わらないうまくありませんでした。理由は、参加の当事者たちが発達障害の当事者について、彼ら彼女らの生み出すに超える生活課題に言及できていたとは言いがたかったからです。『雇用機会の問題にフォーカスするあまり、当事者の語りを単純化してしまったのでは』という批判が降りました。

人間の発達には幅があり、障害の有無に二極化できないことから、英語圏で発達障害は“Neurodivergence”と表記され、日本でも“ニューロダイバーシティ”という言葉が徐々に聞かれるようになり、一方で、当事者が特定の領域や個人関係に困難を抱え、生きづらさを感じることもあるのは事実であり、外見的不可能性や見えや隠れが残り続け、理解されづらいことが 偏見の根拠に共通する課題と言われます。

上述の経験や発達障害、障害者のリサーチを進めるうち、既存の報道に則した姿勢を再考するようになり、発達障害、ひいては障害という概念が、身体と環境の複雑な交わりを内包しており、アウトサイダーとして障害について考え直すうえで、その問題の思考が投げ落ていると感じたためです。英国内には、発達障害者の生活経験に焦点を当て、偏見に留意しつつ当事者のコラボレーションを模索するようになりました。

現在、英国で2年間の修士課程に在籍し、本プロジェクトに取り組んでいます。『Awai』は漢字では「間、隙」となり、ふたつのものの間、ほのかな色味という意味を持ちます。当事者の環境との関わりやその曖昧さを意識してこの言葉を用いました。方法は、圧縮されたり心地よく感じる環境・人・物、成長に伴う記憶に関する当事者へのインタビューに基づき、道楽のカラオケとピンホールによるポートレートや風景、物の撮影を行っています。実行してポラロイドカメラとカラーマーカをまとめた期間直し、各々の環境との関わりを個々に撮影、出力された写真に種々の感情を記録してもらったことを試しています。

英国の社会学者Mike Oliverは「障害は社会の側面にある」と述べました。このプロジェクトには「障害とは何か」という根源的な問いが込められており、その問いは障害の非当事者、あるいは自身をそうみなしている人が向き合う必要のあるものではないかと考えています。

作業者 吉田直人
作品名 Awai
年度 2023年 PITCH GRANT

Share f t i n k

Photo: The Back Yard by Kosuke Okahara
https://thebackyard.jp/portfolio/naoto_yoshida/

Artist talks



Photo: Sonoko Nakanishi



Photo: Mayumi Morita



Photo: Mayumi Morita

As part of the artist's solo exhibition "Un/Masked," two artist talks and a Q&A session during the curator's tour were held at London Aperture Gallery. In these talks, Yoshida talked about his research topics around Disability or Neurodiversity, the concept-making process of his project, and his career background in Japan and the UK. During all three sessions, visitors asked specific and critical questions about my approach to the project and the situation around neurodivergent people both in the UK and Japan. On top of that, I encountered some potential collaborators or supporters for my project.

1. Exhibition "Un/Masked" Artist talk

Date: March 23

2. "Un/Masked" curator's tour with Q&A session

Date: Apr 10

3. Gallery talk co-organised by Aperture Gallery and The Japan Society

Date: Apr 25