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A SPIRIT OF GIFT, A PLACE OF SHARING:

Yusuke Asai, Pinaree Sanpitak, Kimsooja

The Shakers' appreciation of the importance of place, the sacredness of labor, and the spirit that inhabits our best work became a profound source of inspiration to the artists

Exhibition on view through November 14, 2022

Each year, Hancock Shaker Village invites artists to make new work that responds to this historic site as a means of seeing the Shakers through a new lens. *A Spirit of Gift, A Place of Sharing* features three artists—Yusuke Asai of Japan, Kimsooja of South Korea, and Pinaree Sanpitak of Thailand—who connect the forms rooted in various Asian sensibilities and aesthetics with the simplicity and spirituality emanating from everything the Shakers made. Like the Shakers, these contemporary artists share an intense concentration of minds, handcrafted intimacy, and unique use of space with their visual language.

Over the course of the past year, the artists were invited to respond to the natural and architectural setting of the village, the museum's collection of Shaker material culture, and the work of the people who diligently care for and activate our historic property, including the blacksmith, farmer, gardener, and chef. Considering key qualities of Shaker living, philosophy, and spiritualism, the artists then made site-specific or site-responsive works, with new commissions from each. Pinaree Sanpitak's beautifully shaped sculptures in varying scales are placed throughout the heart of Hancock's Shaker kitchen and surrounding gardens. Yusuke Asai's sprawling mural painting fills the Poultry House with mythical creatures born of his imagination, similar to the creative and mystical processes Shaker sisters expressed in the visual language of their "gift" drawings. Kimsooja's video work brings light into the cellar of the iconic Round Stone Barn, honoring the physical labor of human hands in a universal way. Her architectural intervention continues to the Laundry & Machine Shop where Shaker textiles are installed in an ethereal light, highlighting the sacredness of work to the Shakers, and the Meetinghouse where visitors are invited to interact with her installation of colorful yarns.

"The Shakers said that every force evolves a form," said Director Jennifer Trainer Thompson, "which seems to reflect an awareness that a 'function' can be more complex than the simple accomplishment of a task. The Shakers integrated the physical with the spiritual in profound ways, and this is where the crucial affinity lies between the Shakers and the works you see by Asai, Kimsooja, and Sanpitak."

Although the artists come from cultures that are distinct from each other and the Shakers, they all share an integration of the spiritual and physical in their work, as well as communal ideals. Their interpretations of the Shaker spirit encourage us to emerge with a new understanding of this utopian sect, and perhaps of

ourselves. A gift, to share. The exhibition is guest-curated by Dr. Miwako Tezuka, in collaboration with Hancock Shaker Village curator Dr. Linda Johnson.

With earth as his medium, **Yusuke Asai** grew up in the hyper-urbanized environment of Tokyo but found his way of intimately connecting with nature. As a child, he would explore a small, overlooked patch of moss growing in a man-made park and discover a microscopic world with tiny creatures roaming around like animals in a forest. From this playful scale-shifting perspective, all things in the world become harmonious parts of the grand design of the Earth. Asai pays respect to what makes this interconnectivity possible—the soil. The pigments used in this site-specific installation, titled *hands and dreams*, in the 1826 Poultry House are made by Asai, with soil collected from river beds, forest, and gardens of this Shaker land. He also found old bricks in a river that runs through the property, which may be Shaker bricks that were discarded long ago, and he crushed them into powder to use as one of his shades of pigment. The soil as a living “master” with a geological memory teaches us about the history of a place. In Japan, such a deferential feeling toward nature—whether sentient or non-sentient—may relate back to the ancient animistic tradition of Shinto. In the Poultry House, Asai’s painting conjures up fantastical creatures related to the history of the building. In this installation, they coexist harmoniously with the flora and fauna found in Shaker gift drawings, some of which are reproduced and incorporated here. Like the Shakers, the artist channels into material form his artistic experience—indeed, mystical fervor—of receiving and conveying images. (The gift drawings, unique to American folk and religious art, give us a bold and intimate insight into the Shakers’ spiritual lives. Thought to be divine gifts that individual Shakers received and interpreted through drawing or song, the drawings were not displayed, but kept privately by those to whom they were given, or by the spiritual leaders.) It is interesting to note that these gift drawings were reviewed as literal translations of transcendental experiences, similar to what Asai experienced when he spent three weeks in residence at Hancock Shaker Village, often sleeping in the Poultry House surrounded by his mystical creatures and visions.

Born in Daegu, Korea, artist **Kimsooja** makes works that are connected through the theme of sewing or threading, these activities become a metaphor for connecting disparate places and transcending conflicts. While growing up in South Korea, her family moved often near the demilitarized zone as her father worked in the military. In her early installations using bottari (cloth bundles containing belongings when moving) made with traditional Korean bedcovers, the form and the structure of the material symbolized her nomadic existence as an artist working in both the East and West. In *A Spirit of Gift, A Place of Sharing*, Kimsooja responds to three significant architectural buildings creating works that follow the Shaker story of migration from Europe, settlement, and the building of their own lifestyle. Studying the play of natural light as well as the history of the Laundry & Machine Shop, which dates from 1780, Kimsooja chose 19th-century domestic textiles from the Shaker collection to hang from clotheslines in the washroom while her ethereal light installation in the ironing room highlights the spiritual importance of seemingly mundane work, offering an ode to Mother Ann Lee’s philosophy of “hands to work, hearts to God.” The Shakers’ appreciation of the importance of place, the sacredness of labor, and the spirit that inhabits our best work became a profound source of inspiration to the artist. In the cellar of the iconic 1826 Round Stone Barn are two videos: *Thread Routes—Chapter II* (2011) and *Thread Routes Chapter II—Lightwaves* (2011/2016). They are part of an ongoing pair of films, the former in color and the latter its monochromatic twin showing only the film’s changing light level as spectral waves. Together, they reveal the structural affinity among life, nature, and the world. The videos focus on European lacemaking, whose sophisticated weaving of threads produces as solid a structure and design as that of the Shaker engineering epitomized in the barn’s interlocking wooden rafters and masts. Lastly, honoring the labor-intensive process of weaving, building, and crafting, in the Meetinghouse visitors are invited to participate in the process of making through the site-specific installation *Geometria Relationum*, where they may walk with strands of yarn as if weaving the space with Shaker wall pegs as anchor points,

leaving a trace of their labor. This installation will continue to grow as more people participate. A large open space for the Shakers' Sunday worship, the Meetinghouse is central to their spiritual life where the entire community gathered and visitors from "the World" were also invited. In Kimsooja's installation, this space for sharing the Shaker spiritualism is activated through the symbolism of the yarn in Obangsaek, the traditional Korean color spectrum that is associated with the five cardinal elements and, as a united whole, the harmony resulting from the coexistence of the yin-yang duality.

"It is my pleasure to work on a site-specific project for Hancock Shaker Village," noted Kimsooja, "as I have been very interested in their unique culture, aesthetics, and lifestyle since long time."

One of the leading and most respected feminist artists in Southeast Asia, Thai artist **Pinaree Sanpitak** finds her ideal in the utopian society of the Shakers, where women held equal social standing to men more than two centuries ago. Her works are also often understood in relation to Buddhist spiritual traditions, informed by deep contemplation of the unity between the mind and body. Particularly important to her creative inspiration is the female body and its life-affirming power, symbolized by the form of breasts, which she interprets artistically to resemble a stupa, a sacred hemispherical structure originally intended to contain the Buddha's relics and to be used as a place of meditation. The concept of sacred femininity and connection to the earth finds a natural home in a rural communal setting of a movement founded by a woman in the 1770s. The Brick Dwelling—the Shakers' residence—and the land surrounding it are the primary impetus for Sanpitak's spatial interventions, both indoors and outdoors. Her series of handmade paper sculptures are positioned to mingle with everyday Shaker utensils displayed in various areas, especially the kitchen. Her sculptures are a symbol of nourishment propagating throughout this intimate space of sensory engagement where for centuries women prepared the meals that fed their communities. Just outside one finds *Breast Stupa Topiary*, a group of three steel sculptures made in collaboration with a local blacksmith and Hancock Shaker Village's farmer and gardener. These artworks merge with the bucolic landscape, and serve to grow both Berkshire and Thai herbs and vegetables on the trellis-like structures. Admiring the spirit of the Shakers—simple, joyous, nurturing, sustaining one another through land, work, and community, Sanpitak's artistic practice is a contemporary model of sustenance that extends naturally to the land. Continuing the theme of nourishment, Sanpitak has introduced *Hancock Breast Stupa Cookery*, a culinary project that engages the Village's chef Josh Kelly to create dishes at the cafe and special dinners that use produce grown on our farm and on Sanpitak's three topiaries. Begun in 2005, this ongoing collaborative art-and-food project explores how chefs interpret Sanpitak's stupa-shaped cooking molds and crockery, and creatively incorporate the home-grown vegetables of each project location. It has thus far taken place in 12 countries and 20 cities—21 with the Berkshires—around the world. Dining together is the most fundamental communal activity in all cultures, and through her farm-to-table project, food becomes the art medium and the bridge between art and the everyday.

Biographies

While he learned pottery in high school, Yusuke Asai is essentially a self-taught artist from Japan. An extremely imaginative and resourceful artist, his motifs range from pure abstraction to forms based on elements found in nature such as plants, flowers, and animals, as well as other organic shapes, real and imagined. Asai's solo exhibitions in Japan include "Yusuke ASAI: Seeds of Imagination, Journey of Soil", The Hakone Open-Air Museum, Kanagawa (2015). He has participated in major group exhibitions in his home country, such as: the 2nd Setouchi Triennale, Inujima (2013); "All Living Things," Vangi Sculpture Garden Museum, Shizuoka (2016); and "Echigo-Tsumari Art Field", Tokamachi City, Niigata (2015). He has also participated in art projects outside of Japan such as "yamatane", Rice University Art

Gallery, Houston (2014), and “Wulong Lanba Art Festival”, Chongqing, China (2019). His work is in many public and private collections in Japan, including: the Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamoto; Fukuoka Asian Art Museum, Fukuoka; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; the Museum of Modern Art, Gunma; Ohara Museum, Okayama; Takamatsu City Museum of Art, Kagawa; Takahashi Collection, Tokyo; among others.

Kimsooja is a South Korean multi-disciplinary conceptual artist based in-between New York, Paris, and Seoul. She represented Korea for the 24th São Paulo Biennale in 1998 and the 55th Venice Biennale Korean Pavilion in 2013, and has been in more than thirty international biennials and triennials. She has had solo exhibitions at MoMA PS1, New York; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid; Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada; Kunsthalle Wien, Vienna, Austria; Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Liechtenstein; Baltic Center for Contemporary Art, UK; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea, Milan; Musée d'Art Contemporain Lyon, France; The Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf; Musée d'art moderne et contemporain, Saint-Étienne, France; the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; Daegu Art Museum, South Korea; NTT InterCommunication Center, Tokyo; the Center for Contemporary Art Kitakyushu, Fukuoka, Japan; PLATEAU, Samsung Museum, Seoul; Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain; and Centre Pompidou Metz, France.

Pinaree Sanpitak is one of Thailand's most internationally recognized artists. Her primary inspiration has been the female body, distilled to its most basic forms and imbued with an ethereal spirituality. Her rigorous focus on the female form, explored through a variety of media—painting, drawing, sculpture, textiles, ceramics, performance, and culinary arts, to name but a few—has resulted in a varied and innovative body of work. Sanpitak's work has been featured in numerous museum exhibitions internationally during the past twenty years, including: at the Chrysler Museum in Norfolk, Virginia (2012); The Contemporary Austin, Texas (2013); the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California (2013); the Museum Arnhem, The Netherlands (2013); MAIIAM Contemporary Art Museum, Thailand (2016); and many more. She has also participated in major biennials in Australia, Italy, Japan, and Korea, such as the 3rd Asia-Pacific Triennial in Australia (1999); the 2nd Fukuoka Asian Art Triennial (2002); the 18th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2012); Setouchi Triennale, Japan (2019); among others. In 2022 Pinaree Sanpitak will have works in the main exhibition at the 59th Venice Biennale.

Guest curator Dr. Miwako Tezuka is Associate Director of the Reversible Destiny Foundation in New York, established by the artist Arakawa and the poet Madeline Gins. Currently, she also serves as Associate Curator of the Hawai'i Triennial 2022. Previously, she was Gallery Director of Japan Society and Curator of Contemporary Art at Asia Society Museum, both in New York. Tezuka has curated numerous exhibitions; on Maya Lin (Hudson River Museum, New York, 2018), Robert Indiana (Asia Society, Hong Kong, 2018), Ikeda Manabu, Tenmyouya Hisashi, and teamLab (Japan Society, New York, 2014), Mariko Mori (Japan Society, New York, 2013), and Yoshitomo Nara (Asia Society Museum, New York, 2010). Tezuka holds a doctorate in post-1945 Japanese art history from Columbia University, and is Co-Director of PoNJA-GenKon, a global online network of post-1945 Japanese art scholars and curators.

Hancock Shaker Village curator Dr. Linda Johnson previous research and teaching focus has been in American and European Art History at the University of Michigan-Flint, and the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. She is a Senior Fellow at the Centre for Animal Ethics, Oxford, England. Publications include “Increase Mather: A Pre-Millennial Portrait During the Revocation of the Massachusetts Charter” in *American Literature and the New Puritan Studies* (CUP 2018), and “Beholding Ruskin's Birds” in *Animal Theologians* (OUP 2021). Her most

recent book, *Art, Ethics and the Human-Animal Relationship*, was published by Palgrave-Macmillan (2021)

PUBLICATION: A full-color catalog of the exhibition will be published with essays by Director Jennifer Trainer Thompson, Miwako Tezuka, and Linda Johnson.

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IMAGES WITH CAPTIONS:



KIMSOOJA (B. 1957)
TO BREATHE, 2022
Site-specific diffraction film installation
Courtesy of Kimsooja Studio
Photo credit: Miwako Tezuka



PINAREE SANPITAK (B. 1961)

BREAST STUPA TOPIARY

HANCOCK SHAKER VILLAGE

2022

Steel rods and plants

Fabrication: Edward Martin

Farm and Garden: Bill Mangiardi and Rebecca Wolfe

Courtesy of the artist

Photo credit: Marc Freedman



YUSUKE ASAI (B. 1981)

HANDS AND DREAMS, 2022

Site-specific installation; local soil and rocks, water, glue, sheets, pillow, ceramics, Shaker furniture from Hancock Shaker Village's collection (bed, rocking chair, three-legged table, chairs, side table, pegs), reproductions of Shaker "gift" drawings, stones, plants, wood, feathers, fallen bird's nest.

Production assistants: Noah Savage and Kyohei Fujio

Courtesy of the artist

ABOUT HANCOCK SHAKER VILLAGE: Home to the Shakers for almost 200 years, Hancock Shaker Village is the preeminent Shaker living history museum in the United States. A cultural icon in the Berkshires of Western Massachusetts with 20 historic buildings on 750 bucolic acres, Hancock Shaker Village brings the Shaker story to life and preserves it for future generations. Through Shaker architecture, design, a 22,000-piece collection, and engaging programming, we promote appreciation of the aesthetics, beliefs, achievement, and controversies that have defined the Shaker experience in America. Located at 1843 West Housatonic Street in Pittsfield Massachusetts, Hancock Shaker Village regularly presents exhibitions that focus on the Shakers, while also inviting contemporary artists to reinterpret Shaker themes. Also on view currently is *James Turrell & Nicholas Mosse: Lapsed Quaker Ware*. For a full schedule of summer and fall concerts and other programming, see hancockshakervillage.org/calendar. For more information about Hancock Shaker Village, please visit HancockShakerVillage.org.