

When Carl Peter Thunberg, or Tsunberugu, author of *Flora Japonica* and an apostle of the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, stayed in the then firmly isolated Japan in *An'ei 4-5* (1775-76), he made friends with the Japanese doctors Hoshū Katsuragawa and Jun'an Nakagawa. After Thunberg's return to Sweden, the three became pen pals. Imagine their wrinkled brows when trying to understand shared botanical wonders and problems. Imagine the expectant smiles on their faces while writing and reading the letters (in Dutch!), not to mention the long wait for mail and the research related gifts carried over the seas by wooden ships.

During one of his visits to Sweden, some two hundred years later, Emperor Akihito – an expert on Carl Linnaeus – saw the historical letters exchanged between the 18th century scholars. They left a deep impression on him.

Sharing. Creativity. Curious open minds. These are the ingredients for respectful friendship that can bridge time, place, borders and cultures – and these have the power to both move and to set things in motion for fortunate human beings with the possibility to be passionate about something.

The exhibition project **Plenitude 萌芽 - Shibori ga musubu: Suweden to Nihon** is a result of prerequisites like these as well. Some years ago, the artist Kazuko Tamura met with her long-time friends and colleagues Eva Lagnert and Reiko Hara, in Sweden and Japan respectively, and shared her vision about a joint shibori exhibition. Together they drew the first important lines that now encircle all of us who, since then, have been engaged in the project.

It is our aim that this exhibition be experienced as a rich, complex and heterogeneous but still consistent collection of contemporary shibori, where adjectives like Swedish or Japanese play subordinate, if any, roles.

It might be interesting nevertheless, to sort out some important differences in regard to shibori and the diverse cultural contexts of Sweden and Japan.

In Sweden shibori is a relatively young textile artistic practice. The body of practitioners comprises sixty or so professional artists, textile and fashion designers, costume makers, architects and crafts persons who have enriched and challenged their ordinary palettes with the concept and techniques of shibori. Since the early 1990's, when shibori started to gain recognition in Swedish artistic communities as more potent and attractive than other related methods, such as plangi and tie-dye, it has been a catalyst for invigoration and has formed a link to the contemporary global scene, where Japan holds a key position. Though shibori at the moment is gaining more and more attention in Sweden, and a critical mass is slowly being formed – not least due to the efforts of Eva Lagnert and her recurrent university courses in shibori – it is nevertheless difficult to prophesy its future. It might become naturalized in the Swedish artscape, it might develop into something else – or it might diminish and disappear.

Japan on the other hand – historically, today, or in the future – is almost impossible to envision *without* shibori. Shibori of all sorts plays a significant role in the many traditional and contemporary aesthetics of Japan, and is thus securely embedded in the cultural codes. This is as much the case today as it was when Carl Peter Thunberg travelled along the Tōkaidō, and through the village of Narumi with its fully developed shibori production and commerce in *An'ei 5*, almost 240 years ago.

Contemporary shibori in Japan, in no matter what guise, is always experienced with a pre-understanding coloured by historical, traditional shibori.

In an international perspective shibori is understood today as a broad umbrella term covering an array of closely and distantly related techniques, expressions and aims that stem from diverse origins. The practices can be concrete and consumer oriented as well as driven by conceptual, philosophical quests or the pure joy of innovation. The latter strands having being pushed forward by international pioneers like Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada and Junichi Arai. The exhibition **Plenitude** 萌芽 is but a moment in this arc.

Synonyms for plenitude are abundance, profusion, quantity, myriad. To experience this kind of shibori is to experience *plenitude*, both in the sense that it is visually and tactile rich, and also in the sense that the work is often the result of combinations of techniques and steps, and *many* repeated movements. It seems that the artists share a disposition for plenitude, or that plenitude is an acquired *attitude* – a driving force, maybe for good and bad. So what connects the artists that make up this exhibition? When selecting the participants and examining their work, the concept of **Plenitude** [*myckenhet*] emerged out of the material and called for attention. Plenitude, as we propose it here, is neither neutral nor still. There is oscillation between the quiet and the demanding. There is pulse and vibration, and the expression is often ambiguous but simultaneous: pure *and* stained, calm *and* nervy, sweet *and* rough, controlled *and* abandoned. Maybe these qualities can be traced to the complex coming into being, the creation of shibori, characterized by intensities, flows, forces – literally as well as metaphorically. Shibori textiles are born of fluids, chemicals, pigments, temperature extremes, pulling and pressing, steam and perspiration – transformation and elaboration of matter always at the core.

萌芽 [*houga > sprout*] was combined with **Plenitude** in order to give a sense of direction and movement – a sense of growing – making us aware of the quality, seeking its winding ways through a variety of soils, media, and temperaments. 萌芽 was also added for all of us to keep in mind that our work originates from existing seeds and stems, but that sprouts and buds are crucial for the continuation of everything living.

I would like to end by returning to the famous 18th century botanist Carl Peter Thunberg, which leads me to the activity of creating taxonomies. Although my attempt is a very spontaneous and tentative one, it is not entirely farfetched, since a large number of the works in the exhibition seem to interpret or express experiences of nature related phenomena.

In my draft of an *aesthetic* taxonomy, where visual and tactile powers are organizing factors, I place this kind of shibori in-between two other families. On the left side there is the family of what is sometimes referred to as *outsider art*. On the right side there is the family of *the same and the plenty*: efforts of repeating and adding similar actions and modules. Or – come to think of it – do they maybe all belong to the same single motley family?

Now, please let us lower our analytical guards – and let the art work!

Thomas Laurien

Curator