

Awakening Poetic Sentiment from the Minutiae of Life

By Yoko Nose

(Excerpt text from the catalogue “Blooming: Brazil-Japan where you are”, Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, 2008).

From the perspective of Laura Belém, there are cute flowers and trees to be found in the faint scratch on a chair arm, the litter on a street, or grime on a wall. Her ***Living Nature (2006-07)*** series, a play on the title “*Still Life*,” discovers life even within artificial or discarded things.

In this exhibition, in addition to her photographic works she has installed sound works in two locations. One is the museum’s main staircase, where we also find *Taxonomy (Applied) # 3*, a wall that Joseph Kosuth has covered entirely with the names of philosophers, thinkers, and religious leaders. Upon our entering the staircase, a number of the people whose names are inscribed on Kosuth’s wall begin to speak about nature. Above the spoken words, we hear the clattering sound of a *garabo*, spinning machine – spinning having been the main industry in Toyota before the arrival of automobile manufacturing. The spoken words of the philosophers transform Kosuth’s terse conceptualism into something fresh and alive, while the industrial sound of the spinning machine, out of place in its museum context, faintly revives memory of this region’s forgotten history.

Then in the *machiai* (waiting place) of the teahouse, voices reciting haiku in Japanese, English, and Portuguese are enhanced by the refreshing cool sounds of the *suikinkutsu* (‘water-harp-hollow’: a sunken basin into which droplets of water fall) in the garden. Subsequent to the transmission of haiku to Brazil by Japanese immigrants, a Brazilian form of haiku has developed that, even if somewhat different in form from Japanese haiku with its fixed number of syllables and seasonal reference, attains a rich quality, all its own. To these sound works, Belém has given the title ***Pocket Garden (2008)***, taken from the Chinese proverb, “A book is like a garden carried in the pocket.” Just as this title implies, when a faint sound is heard in a quiet space, it richly stimulates our imagination and magically transforms that space.