



A church might seem an unusual location for an art installation, however recently St. Michael's Church in Kontula was the site for Toshie Takeuchi's two day installation piece "Study" (6.11 – 7.11.2008). Toshie previously attended school for photography in England, and this year came to Helsinki to study as a fine arts masters' student at the University of Art and Design Helsinki to further explore her ideas using new mediums.

Fall brings leaves changing colours on the trees, descending eventually to blanket the ground, where they will decompose and fertilise the cycle anew. Toshie intervened in this process by collecting many bags full of leaves, choosing and drying them carefully, with the aim of creating a 'bed'. Although in working at this specific location in her own neighbourhood, she adapted this original idea to suit the space: filling the central aisle with the selected material, from the entrance all the way down, and circling the altar.

Upon entering the space where the piece was set up I was struck immediately. There was a visual power to such a large quantity of autumn leaves, all carefully laid out. A singer was practicing off out of sight, adding to the mix of atmosphere. The smells of outdoors were subtle, just enough to recognise. Filled with an overwhelming curiosity, my impulse was to walk onto the carpet of leaves... so as soon as I noticed Toshie's sign inviting the public to enter, I proceeded to remove my shoes and socks. After being unaware of my feet all day, warm and protected, it felt good to liberate them and even better to step into such an unordinary experience. I cautiously crept down the aisle, overjoyed by the crisp sounds underfoot. Was this how walking though the leaves outside barefoot might feel and sound? I realised it had never occurred to me to try. Somehow within this carefully composed setting my relationship to the leaves was transformed.

Originally Toshie had imagined using a library space, where the stillness and peaceful quiet permeates. However as an artistic action in a church it sparked altogether unexpected connections in my mind. Somehow removing this one element - a single type of organic object, seemingly copious and taken for granted at this time of year (even a bother for some perhaps in having to remove them) - and placing it in this unusual context was the most novel wonder to me in that moment. Was it this combination with a spiritual setting that set a trigger? Each viewer would certainly have had their own interpretation.

For example, Toshie mentioned a recount given to her of a visit by a daycare group that had been by earlier that day. Apparently their interaction involved some joyful tossing and 'redistribution' of the work, true to their uninhibited nature.

One interaction inspired a dialogue that took place on a more profound level. This exhibition also happened to coincide with All Saints' Day, in memory of people who have passed. Marking this

occasion there was a woman who came to the church, remaining in the chapel for quite some time, remembering a loved one whose name was included in a separate display on the wall. This visitor later told Toshie how poignant she found the piece, in how the leaves reference death and rebirth as part of “the cycle”, also relating it to her interests in Buddhism. This comment connected with Toshie’s wish, expressed in her artists’ statement, to offer viewers a chance for personal meditation, and self reflection brought through physical and mental awareness, as a metaphorical mirror.

Toshie says she will to continue working with these leaves, realising a piece with them in an alternative form at a different location.

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