

# Two Screens, Fourth Dimension, No Commandment

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The video installation work "Toyohira River Girl," made in Sapporo by foreigner Marjan Laaper, is an exquisite production from two different aspects: as an example of video artwork that blends time and motion, and as a residency project in which a foreign artist explores cross-cultural differences between Japan and their native country.

Two large images are projected simultaneously onto two screens on a wall at the Contemporary Art Institute (CAI). The image of a river floating from right to left -- shown from two different projectors -- can be seen on each screen. The left screen also shows a woman with her back toward us, throwing stones into the river. The color shades in these images are reversed, that is, projected negatively. Defined by conventional elements of modern architecture, the exhibit space in CAI is generally considered a "box of concrete." But this video work, projected in two parts, endows the area with a spiritual and mysterious atmosphere evocative of a shrine.

Forming a panoramic landscape of the river, the two images are almost perfectly symmetrical, reverse images of each other, and resemble a Rorschach test inkblot image. Essentially, the river flows from the center border to the edge in each image. However, the interesting feature of these images is that the river seems to be flowing from right to left in both -- in contrast to how the landscape would actually appear. At first, the video work seems to be a synthetic image or a computer graphic, but after looking at it more carefully, you realize that the right image has been reversed. In other words, the river shown on the right screen is flowing in the opposite direction.

In this way, the piece has made a clear commentary: what forms (or breaks) symmetry in moving images is not only the "image" (the

figure itself) but also "time," which is the 4th dimension paintings don't have. In the video masterpiece by William Eggman titled "Milk/Floor," the artist drips milk from his mouth, and a dog licks and cleans the floor from the opposite side. This new video work by Laaper presents a contemporary perspective on Eggman's original concept.

With a pose that reminds us of the female subject in Andrew Wyeth "Christina's World," the woman by the riverside is throwing stones somewhat haphazardly into the river. It's as if she is saying that the flow of the river cannot be easily changed. But in fact, the river flowing in front of her is time-symmetrical, and Laaper's videowork shows how the river can be split in two -- just as the Red Sea is parted by Moses, as played by Charlton Heston in Cecil B. De Mille's classic film, "The Ten Commandments." Not revealing whether she knows the story of Moses, the woman confronts the river with a passive attitude, though it's possible the divided river may have already inspired her passive state. Unlike Moses in the Old Testament story, the woman in Laaper's work will never have the chance to find or bring back any stone tablets with ten commandments written on them. In stark contrast to the society of ancient Israel, the woman's modern society is guided by no God-given commandments. All she can do, therefore, is throw meaningless stones into a seemingly illogical river.

The concrete/video-art shrine that temporarily appears in front of us, designed by foreign visitor Marjan Laaper, very easily becomes a wall painting of nihilistic, postwar democracy in Japan -- neither right nor left is relative, and there are no myths or history to be handed down to the next generation.