

## **De-Colonizing Art Institutions**

Maria Thereza Alves  
Song-Ming Ang  
Priscila Arantes  
Stefan Baltensperger + David Siepert  
Fabiana de Barros  
Mabe Bethônico  
Flavio Cury  
Jimmie Durham  
Gabriel Flückiger and Vera Leisibach

## **Hikaru Fujii**

*The Educational System of an Empire*

Szuper Gallery  
Patrick Hamilton  
Ana Hupe  
Taloi Havini and Gabriella Hirst  
Balz Isler  
Daniel Jablonski  
San Keller  
Astrid S. Klein  
Michael Leung / Kai Fong Pai Dong  
Marinka Limat  
Nkule Mabaso  
Filippo Minelli  
Lisl Ponger  
Raghavendra Rao K.V.  
Roe Rosen  
Sally Schonfeldt  
Katrin Stroebel and Simo Laouli  
Túlio Tavares  
Navid Tschopp  
Lucie Tuma  
Maíra Vaz Valente  
Katie West  
Claire Wintle  
Casa da Xiclet  
Zou Zhao

# The Educational System of an Empire

Hikaru Fujii [artist / film director]

The political commitments in art occur not by dealing with current political issues as the subject of the work, but by examining the history and the space within which my work is placed. It appears as the form of the work, the environment of its production, the system of reception, and the critical succession to art history, to which I belong. I have been therefore constantly producing works that raise questions about domestic political affairs in the modernization in Japan and the educational and social systems constructed in Asia. Politics in the arts—namely art education, museums, and cultural policies, which are internalized in my artistic practices—should be questioned.



*The Educational System of an Empire* was initially a single video work, and it has a certain spatial structure in the exhibition; at the entrance, the visitor first faces a photograph taken in the beginning of the 20th century. The photograph depicted the class at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts, which was the first institution in Japan to train art teachers and artists. The art students were imitating a plaster replica of an ancient Greek statue. The visitor may see the trace of the *Hellenic Ideal*, in the words

of admiration and adoration for ancient Greece that was revived in Europe in the 18th century. The realistic techniques of Classicism, which were later admired by the Nazi regime, eventually traversed the ocean and institutionalized in the Empire of Japan, together with the Enlightenment with which art reformed society following *a right reason and strict moral*. On one hand, this form substantiated Japan as an *emancipator* from the European colonization in Asia, on the other hand, it reified the authority of an *oppressor*, in the place of Westerners, to rule Asian countries.

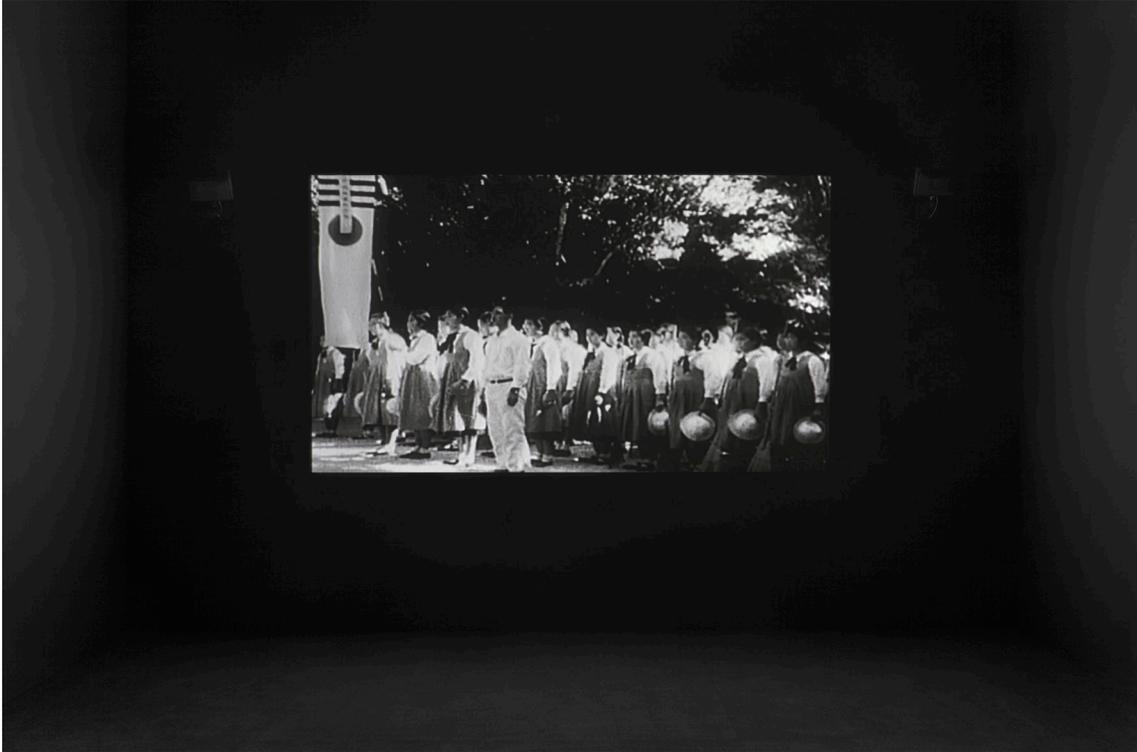


*The Educational System of an Empire* objectifies the composition of exploitations that arise within the creation of art as its reflected image of a colonial and geopolitical sphere. I, an artist who descends from the history of the oppressor, gathered 23 young South Koreans in the studio. Firstly, I ordered them to select several members among themselves and to watch the documentary videos about the Japanese colonial period. I then directed them to imitate and act out the past events shown in the videos, and to realistically show the rest of the group who hadn't watched the videos. Their bodily expressions, with some hesitation and yet earnestly trying to follow my orders, imply in a fragmentary way that those videos show the scenes of tortures and massacres. The logic of an Empire, the one that conquers its Lebensraum as the supplier of resources in Asia, recurs here by acting—a collective act that includes self-subordination, in which it is unclear who has the power to carry it out and how.



Furthermore, the classified video produced by the U.S. Army during World War II is inserted, merging with the images of young South Koreans. Analyzing the education system in Japan at the time, the military video shows and relates through the narration Japanese children who sacrifice themselves for a country. The educational system adopted from Western societies is applied as a means of strengthening the dictatorial authority and controlling the bodies of the children. What are the differences and the similarities between the bodies of those Japanese children and those of the South Koreans, which are *here at the moment* being filled with feelings of embarrassment and incoherence? At the end of the work, South Korean youths reenact the parade celebrating the

country's independence from Japan. Having a sense of unity, they finally become exalted. They encompass the ambivalence of youth which implies a hope; individuals are now unified as members of a nation-state, at the same time they think and act for themselves. Yet, it isn't certain whether their actions follow in each instance an independent decision or not.



*The Educational System of an Empire* questions anew the tension that occurs when a nation writes history. In Japan, one merely realizes the idea that contemporary art deterritorialized the ideology of a nation-state, being integrated with the speculative market world of the post-Fordism. After all, the creation of art and the mechanism of its acceptance, even the work presented in global circulation, has been regulated within the framework of a nation-state. The issues surrounding the recognition of the history of Asia is especially subject to strict regulation as the political agenda in the first degree. Among the geopolitical fluctuations after the Cold War, the post-colonial expressions and practices did passingly recollect the oppressed memories in the occupied territory. Society today, however, has chosen the future of the post-democracy in which parliament freezes the arguments around memories to eliminate the political situation that can reveal its dissensions. Art institutions in Japan are integrated with its government, whose mission is simply a stable administration of the social system. Is it possible to restore memories of those who were eliminated from the public sphere within artistic creation through such an art institution? What and how can it be?