

Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

# Where My Words Belong

April 18 – July 7, 2024



Where My Words Belong, a group exhibition about “words” that looks at the diversity of linguistic practices in Japan and language rights, is coming to the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.

There are many different languages in the world, and each one contains a wealth of variations, such as different accents, or varieties in vocabulary and grammar according to one’s generation and experiences. Some people switch between different forms of language depending on the situation and whom they are speaking to: they might use vocabulary specific to a family or group of friends, or different languages altogether. Some thoughts can be conveyed without any words at all. These are all examples of personal use of language—what we mean by “My Words”—which are forever forming as part of communication. Just as we get a feel for the culture and history of a people by studying the language they have created, knowing someone surely begins by trying to accept their My Words as they are, without converting them into other words.

This exhibition presents the works of five artists: Yuni Hong Charpe, Mayunkiki, Mai Nagumo, Hideo ARAI and KIM Insook. Their works bring into sharp focus the differences that exist within a single language, as well as the practice of different languages, within a society that apparently speaks one and the same language. The idea behind this exhibition is to give each visitor the opportunity to embrace their own My Words, and those of others, whether through a work that portrays the difficulty of pronouncing words that don’t belong to one’s first language; or one that speaks of what it’s like when a person hasn’t had the opportunity to learn their heritage language; or one that involves gazing into the eyes of people on the other side of a language barrier; or through the experience of listening closely so as not to miss anything when another is speaking quietly.

## Artists and exhibited works

### ユニ・ホン・シャープ | Yuni Hong Charpe

The exhibition features a video work by Yuni Hong Charpe in which the artist's pronunciation of the French sentence "Je crée une œuvre" (which means "I create an artwork") is corrected by their daughter, who speaks French as her first language. It's hard to accurately distinguish and pronounce sounds that don't exist in the language you grew up speaking, and many people may have struggled with the accent of a foreign language or of the standard form of their own language. In the end, the artist learns to say "Je crée une œuvre" with the "correct" pronunciation. But even without the "correct" pronunciation, these are still words that the artist uses as My Words.

Yuni Hong Charpe was born in Tokyo Prefecture and moved to France in 2005, graduating from the École Nationale Supérieure d'Arts de Paris-Cergy in 2015. They currently split their time between France and Japan. Starting from archives and personal memories, the artist explores new narratives around the instability and multiplicity of constructed identities and the durability of memories, and seeks to give them concrete form through the body, language, the voice and/or choreography.



1. Yuni Hong Charpe, *Répète (Repeat)*, 2019



2. Yuni Hong Charpe, *Still on my tongues*, 2022

### マユンキキ | Mayunkiki

Mayunkiki, who belongs to the Ainu people indigenous to northern Japan, confronts the denial of the Ainu's very existence, and the assertion of stereotypes and ideals. Aware that she is sometimes taken to be a representative of an entire people or expected to embody some typically Ainu quality, she weaves words as an individual, respectfully presenting the things, people and words that have formed her. The artist's work in this exhibition consists of two filmed conversations: one in which she and photographer Kim Sajik talk about the process of relearning a language that might have been one's mother tongue, and one in which she and art translator Kanoko Tamura discuss what it means to decide for oneself what language one speaks. Within this safe space are presented the various elements that have made Mayunkiki who she is.

Mayunkiki was born in Hokkaido. From a personal perspective, she searches for what it means to be Ainu today, and gives this expression through filmed works, installations, performances, etc. She is a member of the musical groups Marewrew and Apetunpe, which sing traditional Ainu songs, and since 2021 has also pursued a solo career. She has performed and exhibited her work at many art festivals in Japan and abroad.



3. Mayunkiki, *Siknure – Let me live*, 2022, Installation view at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham Photographer Stuart Whipps, courtesy of Ikon Gallery.



4. Mayunkiki Photo by Hiroshi Ikeda

## 南雲麻衣 | Mai Nagumo

Having lost her hearing at the age of three and a half, Mai Nagumo underwent cochlear implant surgery when she was seven and grew up with spoken Japanese as her mother tongue. As a university student she encountered sign language, and she now identifies as a Deaf person whose first language is Japanese Sign Language. “When you can communicate in multiple languages,” says Nagumo, “I feel you’re always being asked which one you really belong to.” To not view spoken and visual language in binary terms but rather oscillate between them, always making a choice as to which to use, is in its own small way an act of resistance against monolingualism. In this exhibition, we present her video installation *Bogo no soto de tabi o suru* (A journey leaving my mother tongue; shot and edited by Mika Imai), which depicts her language acquisition and the way she relates to words.

Mai Nagumo is a dancer and performer born in Kanagawa Prefecture. Having studied modern dance from a young age, she is now active across the performing arts in general, including performances and plays that involve sign language. Her credits include Company Derashinera’s *Spectator* (2013) and Aya Momose’s *Social Dance* (2019). Nagumo collaborates with artists across various fields, creating works around the theme of “oscillation” between multiple languages, both spoken and visual, mediated through the physical senses of the actual people involved. She also runs workshops in which participants share feelings that transcend language.



5. Mai Nagumo Photo: Harumichi Saito



6. Mai Nagumo Photo: k.kawamura

## 新井英夫 | Hideo ARAI

Hideo ARAI has been highly praised for his physical expression workshops in which people who find it difficult expressing themselves in words or moving their body as they wish—such as the disabled or the elderly—listen out for their inner “body’s voice” in an environment of mutual respect. To communicate, one must not only be capable of expression but also able to listen. In this exhibition, visitors are shown the work involved in noticing slight movements in the body and listening to subtle sounds played in the venue, so as to draw their attention to the “body’s voice” that precedes words and thus help them hear other people’s *My Words*. ARAI himself faces a chronic disease that causes a gradual loss of movement in his muscles throughout his body, and his diary-like improvisatory dance videos provide an opportunity to think about the connection between body and language.

Hideo ARAI is a physical performer and dance artist born in Saitama Prefecture. He led the performing arts group Denkiyokubadan, which staged open-air plays, dance-based street performances and the like; he also trained in Noguchi Taizo, a physical method whereby one relaxes the body and follows nature, studying under its creator Michizo Noguchi. Moving to solo work, he has put on dance performances in Japan and abroad, while holding workshops in schools, public halls and welfare centers across Japan. Even after a definitive diagnosis of ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis) in the summer of 2022, he has continued to throw himself into his work, transcending the relationship between caring and being cared for.



7. Hideo ARAI, improvisational dance session with children and their family, ©Aqua Metropolis Osaka 2009



8. Hideo ARAI, *ODORU KOKOROMI*, Improvisation Dance with ALS, 2022- Location: Mogamigawa Museum Shooting: Kiyoko Itasaka

## 金仁淑 | KIM Insook

KIM Insook's contribution to this exhibition is the video installation *Eye to Eye* (won the 2023 Commission Project Special Prize at the Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions), which shows the children of Colégio Sant'ana, a Brazilian school in Shiga Prefecture, on a life-size screen, together with a new work that captures her subsequent encounters with the children of Colégio Sant'ana. Foreign residents who don't use the Japanese language form their own community, and rarely have the chance to interact with the Japanese-speaking local community. But even if they lack a common language, meeting gives them the chance to become friends and look each other in the eyes. This work, which the artist carefully built up through a series of exchanges, is just that: a platform for meeting them one by one.

KIM is an artist born in Osaka Prefecture. She lived in Seoul for 15 years after moving there to study, and now splits her time between Seoul and Tokyo. Her projects are based on communication around subjects such as the individual's everyday life, memory, history, tradition, community and family, and she creates installations consisting primarily of photography and video. At the root of her work lies the idea that "diversity is universal."



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KIM Insook, *Eye to Eye*, 2023, Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions  
2023 Commission Project ©KIM Insook



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## Information

### Where My Words Belong

Exhibition Period	Thursday, April 18 – Sunday, July 7, 2024
Opening Hours	10 AM – 6 PM (Tickets available until 30 minutes before closing)
Closed	Mondays (except 29 Apr, 6 May), 30 Apr, 7 May
Venue	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Exhibition Gallery 1F
Admission	Adults – 1,400 Yen / University & College Students, Over 65 – 1,000 Yen / High-school & Junior High-school Students – 600 Yen / Elementary School Students & younger – free
Organized by	Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo operated by Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture

## Also on view

March 30 – July 7

Saeborg "I WAS MADE FOR LOVING YOU" / TSUDA Michiko "Life is Delaying"

Tokyo Contemporary Art Award 2022-2024 Exhibition

April 6 – July 7

Ho Tzu Nyen: A for Agents

MOT Collection: Walking, Traveling, Moving—From the Great Kanto Earthquake to the Present / Eye to Eye

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- 1 Yuni Hong Charpe, *Répète (Repeat)*, 2019
- 2 Yuni Hong Charpe, *Still on my tongues*, 2022
- 3 Mayunkiki, *Siknure – Let me live*, 2022, Installation view at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham  
Photographer Stuart Whipps, courtesy of Ikon Gallery.
- 4 Mayunkiki Photo by Hiroshi Ikeda
- 5 Mai Nagumo Photo: Harumichi Saito
- 6 Mai Nagumo Photo: k.kawamura
- 7 Hideo ARAI, improvisational dance session with children and their family,  
©Aqua Metropolis Osaka 2009
- 8 Hideo ARAI, *ODORU KOKOROMI*, Improvisation Dance with ALS, 2022-  
Location: Mogamigawa Museum Shooting: Kiyoko Itasaka
- 9 KIM Insook, *Eye to Eye*, 2023, Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions 2023  
Commission Project ©KIM Insook
- 10 KIM Insook, *Eye to Eye*, 2023, Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions 2023  
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