



**Above:** Mella Jaarsma  
*Shelter Me* (installation detail), 2005  
Photo credit: Lily Hibberd

## **Art Circus** *[Jumping from the Ordinary]*

Yokohama 2005: International Triennale of Contemporary Art, Japan  
28 September – 18 December 2005  
Artistic Director Tadashi Kawamata  
Reviewed by Lily Hibberd

Since its inception in 2001 the Yokohama Triennale has been situated in two large warehouses at the end of a pier in Yokohama, an industrial port that is a one-hour train ride from Tokyo. I was very fortunate to be at the opening preview to this year's Triennale while on a junket, as a lesser advisor in a program being developed by the Japan Foundation for the 2006 Japan-Australia year of exchange. Everyone enjoys a VIP experience once in a while (even though a host of other people hadn't paid either). Yet I held certain reservations in writing this review, as being a preview meant that a lot of the work was not quite ready or was in pre-performance limbo. And although Tadashi Kawamata's curatorial approach was a bit hit-and-miss, I think I understood the drift and there were a few remarkable pieces that left an impression on me.

The title 'Art Circus' sounds silly in English but it sums up the atmosphere reasonably well. There were actually several circus-type troupes in the show, including The Flying Circus Project and Buren Cirque cie Etokan. Believe it or not, the Buren Cirque is an art circus that performs in an installation-like stage modelled after the stripey work of Daniel Buren (who also co-founded the act).

A lot of the work was based on the Relational Aesthetics model: ideology presented in a participatory mode. There were bars and cafes managed and attended by artist groups, such as the SOI Project (Thailand) and GRAF (Japan), where you could hang out and drink beer with the creators. A few works asked for your physical engagement, like KOSUGE1-16



**Above:** KOSUGE1-16 + Atelier Bow-Wow + YOKOCOM  
*Athletic Club No.4 Project* (installation detail), 2005  
Mixed media performance  
Photo credit: Lily Hibberd

+ Atelier Bow-Wow + YOKOCOM's giant soccer ball game, the nutty gambling den of ©uratorman Inc (set in a huge cage filled with life-sized models of world-famous curators) and the Japanese artist collective COUMA whose undertaking was to play table tennis all day. Two artists had their sewing machines out, running up toys in the space – Taisuke Abe even making some good sales at the preview. The best example of these participatory artworks was *Shelter Me* by Dutch-born artist Mella Jaarsma, which comprised a number of structures halfway between housing and clothing that viewers could climb into and wear (perhaps an impractical version of Lucy Orta's work). All of these pieces sensibly fit the Triennale's theme and yet they left me feeling uninspired. There were a number of other works in the show that I was partial to, although I had no idea how they related to the curator's premise – or anything else in the exhibition for that matter.

Some of quiet pieces were lost in the pandemonium. Near the day's end, I noticed Hiraki Sawa (Japan) on the exhibition map and it took a lot of searching to find his work. In a small box-like room was a slow and thoughtful video projection. A black and white film called *Trail* showed unremarkable scenes: the corner of a room, a window frame, a carpeted

step. After watching awhile, a series of shadows appeared, walking along the edges of objects presented in each scene. Rows of miniature elephants and camels would begin a silent journey across windowsills and bathroom sinks. Another work that made a play on shadows was by the late Japanese artist Jiro Takamatsu. A large painted panel depicted numerous silhouettes in multiple layers, as if people had passed by and left a shadow as a mark of their presence. Although this was a large work, it was hard to appreciate being in a dark area and surrounded by projections and complex installations. Most disappointing of all was that in writing up this article I realised that I had missed a small video piece by Janet Cardiff, an artist who has always fascinated me.

The Japanese artist Tadasu Takamine would be a familiar name to art lovers from Melbourne for the unforgettable video work *God Bless America*, which was part of *Living Together is Easy* at the National Gallery of Victoria in late 2004. Takamine was still in the process of installing his piece during the preview, though there was already a hint of brilliance about it. The work, *Kagoshima Esperanto*, spoke in a very direct way about loss, or the personal and collective passing of things in the world (due to annihilation, expiry or