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In A Body in Fukushima, dancer Eiko and photographer William Johnston

measure the fallout of trust in technology

BY BYRON WOODS JUL. 01, 2015 7:00 A.M.

A BODY IN FUKUSHIMA
[photography exhibit]

Reynolds Industries
Theater
125 Science Drive,
Durham
Through July 23

Pleiades Gallery
109 E. Chapel Hill St.,
Durham
Through July 25

Durham Arts Council
120 Morris St., Durham
July 5–July 25 Free

A BODY IN PLACES
[dance
performances]
American Dance
Festival @ Cordoba
Center for the Arts
923 Franklin St.,
Durham
919-684-4444
www.americandancefest
July 7–12, 7 p.m.



They are the harbinger ghosts: the Gray Lady of Camden, South Carolina; the Gray Man, who's been sighted from Pawleys Island to Cape Hatteras. Both have one thing in common: If you see them, you are in danger. The presence of either of these Southern legends signals disaster if immediate action isn't taken.

But a different, more postmodern haunting now inhabits the lobby of Reynolds Industries Theater. For starters, the disaster has already taken place. A striking series of color photographs documents the ruin. A house tilts after being relocated to the center of a highway; a large turquoise boat snapped in half juts upward from the black sand of a shoreline; an eerie mass of serpentine vines reclaims the rails of an abandoned commuter train station.

In some of the images, there is the form of a solitary woman. She wears a dark gray kimono. In one photograph, her somber visage looks at us.

To be clear, dancer and choreographer **Eiko Otake**, who has performed for more than 40 years with her husband, Koma, is still very much alive. In addition to the photographic exhibitions of her work, ***A Body in Fukushima***, on display at Reynolds, Pleiades Gallery and the Durham Arts Council. she presents the latest

Body in Places, at Durham's Cordoba Center for the Arts as part of the American Dance Festival.

Yet there is a distinctly ghostly quality to the photographs. Even without the signature rice powder she usually uses as body and facial makeup (as in last week's moving memorial performance at New York's new Fulton Center, near the site of the 9/11 attacks), Otake's pale, frail skin and her gestures, poses and interactions with the objects she encounters including a broken concrete sea berm and a length of heavy mariners' rope still speak of *ankoku butoh*. The "dark soul dance" tradition has influenced her and her husband throughout their career. In that tradition of artistic protest, ghosts return to accuse, mock and warn the living by depicting the consequences of their thoughtlessness and cruelty.

Much of that impulse, and what Otake refers to simply as "remorse," drove her to travel twice last year to Fukushima, three years after the disastrous earthquake, tsunami and Daiichi nuclear power plant meltdown took place there.

"That was my generation," says Otake, a native of Japan. "I was always very aware that I was very much against nuclear power, but I didn't particularly do anything about it. I would go to anti-nuclear rallies from time to time.

"We have always had earthquakes all the time in Japan: week to week, month to month," Otake continues. "Combining water with earthquakes makes flooding; everybody knows it. The nuclear plans seemed like insanity to me. There was this mythology that technology wins, that technology takes care of the problems. I don't think I believed it; I'd say, oh, this is crazy. But I didn't move my finger."

In Fukushima, she and her colleague, Japanese historian and photographer William Johnston, entered sections of the quarantine zone a 12-mile perimeter of evacuated

radioactive for human habitation over eight days. They went to witness, document and interact with what they found. The evidence now hangs on our walls.

"My great concern was and remains that people will forget," Johnston says. "There are 130,000 nuclear exiles who still cannot go back home."

After the tsunami, the families wanted to return to clean up, put things in order and get on with their lives. "But within 24 hours the area was completely inundated by radiation, and they couldn't go back," Johnston says. As a result, families lost almost all of their belongings: "heirlooms, photographs, papers still here, but inaccessible because they're dangerous now. It destroyed these people's lives in ways we can't imagine."

For Otake, her time in Fukushima "was very scary, to be honest: like a nuclear winter or the end of the world, because nobody's there."

In some of the photographs, Otake's character struggles against concrete, asphalt or sand. In others, an eerie stillness presides. In one, her form seems cradled in a bed of vines along a railroad track: sleeping or dead.

"We fail," Otake concludes. "We create that technology and we don't know how to contain it. I want to breathe in that failure, so we don't believe in that any more that technology will take care of everything."

Johnston says, "People should realize this is a potential situation for all of us, all over the world where there are nuclear reactors. People need to remember there is no safe nuclear reactor. They all produce nuclear waste. And we don't know what to do with it yet."

Meanwhile, in the Reynolds lobby, the gray lady tarries, her warnings literally posted on all the walls. The night I'm there, a few audience members snag an exhibit

This article appeared in print with the headline "Heed the Harbinger."

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