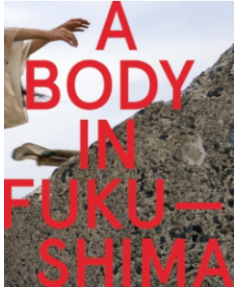


RESISTING FORGETFULNESS VIA EIKO



It's a strange, unsettling thing, but disaster can be visually beautiful. In a monumental new book called *Fukushima*, the site of the 2011 tsunami-prompted nuclear meltdown, by William Johnston. These images are imbued with an elegiac quality. Containing 160 color photos, the book traces the long-term collaboration between Eiko and Johnston, the photographer who teaches history at Wesleyan. From 2014 to 2019, the two made five trips to places in and around Fukushima, some of which are now ghost towns. I am writing now, during the 10th anniversary of the disaster in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to say why this book haunts me.

In these photographs in the evacuation zone, Eiko's body absorbs the desolation of these places. One by one, she shows her protectiveness, resistance, or resignation in her face and body.



Eiko in Yamadahama Seawall, all photos by William Johnston

Visually, she is inseparable from the landscape. She blends in with the rocks at Yamadahama. She clutches her waist amidst the ruins of Yamaoka Town. She kneels, perhaps in prayer, on Shinmaiko Beach. She stands huddled against the wind in front of a shuttered Yamaoka Sanitation Plant, she grabs her red silk cloth (re-sewn by her mother and herself each time it rips from her dancing at the Shiogama Shrine). Each scene opens a window into the possibility of story.



At Shiogama Shrine

The book also contains essays by Eiko that are eloquent, pained, and brilliant in their determination to understand suffering and movement to the movement of a virus to political movements like Black Lives Matter. She's a thinker/writer/artist who has spent years.





In Hittachi Benten

The gravitational pull Eiko feels toward Fukushima is explained in a letter to her deceased friend, Kyoko Hayashi, a survivor [to Trinity](#) (translated by Eiko). There is some part of Eiko that seeks to be in sisterhood with Hayashi, to understand what it is like to be in a nuclear holocaust. In Eiko's dancing for Johnston's camera, she wants her body to know and remember, and to share that knowing.

The aim here is to resist forgetfulness — and you see that in Eiko's body. You see how her body is weighed down with a fully alive response to place. And yet, as Eiko said in the recent [Poetics of Aging panel](#), “Part of my work is preparing to die,

In the “Afterword,” Eiko compares the disaster of the current pandemic to the disaster of Fukushima: “A nuclear plant or a pandemic are breakable. All are fragile. We know this now more clearly than ever.”

When I used the word “monumental” earlier, I meant it in several ways: *A Body in Fukushima*, published by [Wesleyan Univ](#), is a globally, environmentally huge. It is monumental not only for positing grieving as a source of art, but also for recognizing that a beautiful book, which is available at an affordable price due to funding from the Duke Foundation, is a warning.



Shinmaiko Beach

Note: To mark the anniversaries of the bombing of Hiroshima (August 6, 1945) and Nagasaki (August 9, 1945), Eiko performed in association with the Art Institute of Chicago, on Aug. 7.

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