

## **Tsumari Story** **Fram KITAGAWA**

Amongst the tide of urbanization spreading across the whole of Japan, the existence of Echigo-Tsumari can be considered a bit of a miracle. Thanks to the endless toil of generations of farmers, it is one of the planet's few snow heavy regions known for rice cultivation. *Tsumari Story* clearly depicts such a place in the ephemeral atmosphere before us.

This makes me think of when my father passed away. I believed my existence was quite close to that of my father; I had already heard about all the things he'd experienced, even witnessed them with my own eyes. But upon speaking with his friends, I discovered that my father had unique ideas and opinions that our family completely couldn't comprehend. Although he had been right there in front of me all along, even as his son I still couldn't understand. My father appeared to be floating before me as though well within my grasp, but in actuality he was suspended inside a balloon, always just beyond reach.

This sort of impression can only be described as Utopian.

The spring buds of wild grass burst forth in the mountains, a clear stream flows amongst rock under the summer sun, golden rice paddies glow radiantly, the winter sun beams above a boundless white abstract world. The living conditions in Echigo-Tsumari are harsh. The terraced agriculture and canals indicate an unfathomable amount of labor and toil. However, the residents of this little village continue to help one another and persist. Even now, despite the oppressive influence of the market economy, the supremacy of efficiency, and globalization, the local people still work ardently for the future. Stories similar to that of Echigo-Tsumari are far too many to enumerate, but no matter how much we attempt to record its geography, culture, climate, history, and way of life, there's simply no way to accurately depict its true face. At such times, is it that these people have no choice but to impractically release glass orbs like balloons, with the ever present threat that they'll come crashing to the earth? I can see this expressed in RongRong & inri's photos.

Once every three years in Echigo-Tsumari we hold an art triennale. During the 2012, RongRong & inri transformed the gymnasium of a closed elementary school in the mountains into their venue to exhibit these outstanding photographs. They printed the images upon a light, diaphanous fabric that is reminiscent of local, traditional textiles—which they then suspended from the ceiling and allowed to naturally drape downward. The characters within the story merge with their surrounding landscape and the entire landscape seems to float in the space between passion and peace. If we say that this work is about memory, that would be an oversimplification. It is much more physiologic, imagery which seems to reach out to the long, distant place.

[General Director, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale]