

RongRong & inri-Tsumari Story

John Tancock

BEIJING, 2000-2012

Prior to 2000, RongRong lived in Beijing and inri lived in Tokyo. They met in Tokyo in 1999 and inri moved to Beijing in 2000. Between 2000 and 2012 the couple lived in Beijing, inri slowly acclimatizing to a very different way of life, mastering Chinese and eventually raising a family of three boys. For a variety of reasons late in 2012 the entire family moved to Japan where they live in Yokosuka, not too far from Tokyo. Now it is RongRong who has to adapt to life in a totally different society, although in his case he needs to visit Beijing on a regular basis to deal with the responsibilities of Three Shadows Art Photography Art Centre, the ambitious cultural hub in the Caochangdi district of Beijing that they established in 2007.

Before they met, they had independent careers but since 2000 they have worked as a couple, producing a body of work in which their individual contributions can no longer readily be distinguished. In the great lyrical effusions of 2000-2001 - *In Yulongxueshan, China* series; *In Fujisan, Japan* series; *In Bad Goisern, Austria* series; *In Helsinki, Finland* series (fig. 1-4) in which they declared their passion for each other in spectacular natural settings, it is as if the slate has been swept clean. The harshness of urban existence and its impact on the psyche that provided the subject-matter for much of their early work has been replaced by their own naked bodies in pristine landscapes.

By choosing the Great Wall of China (*In the Great Wall, China* series, 2000) (fig. 5) and Mount Fuji (*In Fujisan, Japan* series, 2001) for their self-depictions, it was almost as if they wished to emphasize their ethnic background. They went to Mount Fuji from February 13th to 15th, 2001, the coldest time of the year. inri kept a diary during the two days they were there. At 5:00 am on February 15th, she refers to “a bone-chilling cold, it started at our feet and then spread to our whole bodies. . . the world at fifteen degrees below zero.”¹ Later in the day at 11:45am she notes that “Facing the mountain I want to pray, maybe she has cleansed my heart. Is this a feeling only Japanese people have?” I asked RongRong. He said he had the same feeling. How is it that we could be together now? We planned it the first time we met: if we could meet again in Japan we’d go to Mt Fuji. This promise was kept. And now, all we could do was wait, but even our waiting could be seen as a kind of performance art.”²

For RongRong & inri, city dwellers accustomed to the urban chaos of Beijing and the glittering

streets of Tokyo in the 1990s, the sight of Mount Fuji in the snow seems to have awakened feelings similar to those of the Japanese *yamabushi*, for whom fasting, meditation, long mountain walks and exposure to snow and icy mountain waterfalls were all ways to achieve enlightenment. Although there was no religious motivation in their photographs, their state of rapture with each other and with the beauty of the natural environment resulted in similar behavior.

Back in Beijing it was not possible to sustain this elevated mood in which the human being was seen as part of nature, free of clothing and all restraints. inri moved to Liulitun, the village in which RongRong settled after the demolition of the Beijing East Village, and now the focus was on the gradual disappearance of a way of life as the old buildings and entire neighborhoods were demolished to make way for the new developments. In *Liulitun, Beijing* series, 2000-2003, (fig. 6,7) their naked figures huddle together for warmth on thin mattresses in bleak interiors and as the destruction of Liulitun reaches its final phase, they don funereal clothes and offer bouquets of lilies in tribute. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the *RongRong & inri, 2005* series (fig. 8) in which their ghostly bodies virtually disappear into a fabricated environment – the opposite in all ways of the 2000-2002 series—marked a point of no return. Real life took over!

Committed photographers, both artists also felt a duty towards the development of photography as an art form and in 2007, without financial backing, established Three Shadows Art Photography Centre in a handsome building designed by their neighbor and friend, Ai Weiwei. *Three Shadows, Beijing* series, 2008 (fig. 9) traces its construction and development just as *Caochangdi, Beijing* series, 2004-2009 (fig. 10) records the growth of their family as three boys - Fengshen, Fengyi, and Fengsan - were born in rapid succession. Formally posed and hand-tinted, these photographs show RongRong & inri wearing a wide range of clothes, modern as well as traditional as in the one showing RongRong in a traditional Chinese man’s robe and inri in Japanese kimono.

As one observes the arc of the development during these years, it is apparent that the overwhelming presence of nature in their earlier work has begun to dwindle to the pomegranate trees and lotuses in containers in front of their house in Caochangdi. Family responsibilities and the administrative burden of Three Shadows consumed much of their time, leaving less time



fig. 1 RongRong & inri
In Yulongxueshan, China 2001 No.1



fig. 2 RongRong & inri
In Fujisan, Japan 2001 No.1



fig. 3 RongRong & inri
In Bad Goisern, Austria 2001 No.6



fig. 4 RongRong & inri
In Helsinki, Finland 2001 No.1

for their own creative work.

Until 2012 there was no need for them to concern themselves with broader political issues and they were not bothered by the fact that, for a good part of the twentieth century, relations between China and Japan had been tense, certain issues dating from the second Sino-Japanese War still continuing to bedevil the establishment of a close relationship between the two nations. The situation worsened as disputes over Diaoyu islands (known as Senkaku to the Japanese), came to a head but above all it was for personal reasons that they made the momentous decision to move to Japan at the end of the year. Inri had lived in Beijing for twelve years but RongRong had never lived in Japan. The invitation to participate in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale provided a wonderful opportunity to readjust the balance between their lives as artists and as administrators/entrepreneurs, creating a distance from Beijing that permitted them to concentrate once again on their first priority, photography. The feeling that they were starting again, that they were “emptying” themselves as they left China for a new life in Japan, is immediately evident in the first photographs they took in the New Year.

JAPAN, 2012 TO THE PRESENT

Now the spoken language is a problem for RongRong, although not for the three boys who have picked up the language with remarkable ease. Both artists already had close contacts in the Japanese photography world but they were no longer at the center of a complex network of professional relationships that required their constant attention. Most important they were closer to the natural environment, so readily accessible and unspoiled once outside the major cities. For example the train ride by Joetsu Shinkansen from Tokyo to Echigo-Yuzawa station followed by the Hakutaka limited express to Tokamachi station takes less than two hours, and yet one arrives in a different world, pristine and remote.

The Echigo-Tsumari region where the photographers spent a great deal of time in 2012 is the setting for Kawabata Yasunari’s classic novel, *Snow Country (Yukiguni)* published in 1952. He described the sensation of arriving in the region in the opening lines of his classic novel, *Snow Country*: “The train came out of the tunnel into the snow country. The earth lay white under the night sky. The train pulled up at a signal stop.”³ His lyrical descriptions of the snow country are famous for their poetic brevity. “In this snow country, cold, cloudy

days succeed one another as the leaves fall and the winds grow chilly. Snow is in the air. The high mountains near and far become white in what the people of the country call ‘the round of the peaks.’ Along the coast the sea roars, and inland the mountains roar ‘the roaring at the center, like a distant clap of thunder. The round of the peaks and the roaring at the center announce that the snows are not far away.’⁴

He also conveys the tedium of “the long snowbound months—the months of seclusion and boredom, between October, under the old lunar calendar, when the spinning began, and mid-February of the following year, when the last bleaching was finished.”⁵

In 2012 RongRong & inri were invited to participate in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial in Niigata Prefecture. This triennial is unique in the world of contemporary art, inviting artists from all over the world to produce site-specific works in a region of unparalleled natural beauty and to observe first-hand “*sato-yama*,” the traditional lifestyle of humans in harmony with nature. When they arrived in the Tsumari region, they experienced the same shock of recognition as when they saw Mount Fuji together for the first time in 2001. They were overwhelmed by the grandeur of the mountains and the beauty of nature uncontaminated by any signs of modern life. When she returned to Japan, inri commented that it seemed as if time had stood still during the decade she had lived in Beijing but wondered how to capture these sensations in future works. RongRong was reminded of his childhood village although when he returns to visit the village where he grew up, there is nothing left. Everything he knew as a child has been destroyed.

However, the situation is not as idyllic as it seems owing to natural disasters such as the Chuetsu earthquake of October, 2004 and the depopulation that affects all remote areas as young people move away to big cities to look for work and entertainment. For the most part, only old people remain. Abandoned buildings are common, among them the 200 year old traditional wooden house used by RongRong & inri in many of the photographs of interiors taken during their stay in the region. The *Shedding House*, as it is known, was modified by Kurakake Junichi and a group of Nihon University College of Art Sculpture students, 3000 in all, and first exhibited at the 2009 Triennial. Over an extended period, these volunteers etched notches in the wooden structure in order to reveal the natural color of the wood that had turned black from fumes emitted by the stove over a period of two centuries or more.



fig. 5 RongRong & inri
In the Great Wall, China 2000 No.1



fig. 6 RongRong & inri
Liulitun, Beijing No.13 2002



fig. 7 RongRong & inri
Liulitun, Beijing No.1 2003



fig. 8 RongRong & inri
2005 No.1

It provided the perfect setting for RongRong, inri and the three boys to shed their urban ways and return to a more traditional way of life, an extended refashioning of their unique fusion of life and photography recorded so memorably in the 300 or more photographs they took intermittently over a period of two years. The body of work may be described as a reverie on family ties, the relationship of human beings to each other and to nature, away from the distractions of fast-paced urban living. While the human content is provided exclusively by the photographers and their three sons, more often than not they strive for a distancing effect in which they are both the photographers we know and socialize with and immaterial presences which turn away from the camera.

Modern dress was first to disappear. The Niigata area is famous for its kimonos and the famous *chijimi* linen so memorably described by Kawabata. RongRong & inri found old kimonos, including a particularly tattered one which appealed to RongRong and which he wears in many of the photographs. The two artists can be seen in the formal kneeling position in two photographs but in many others the mood is far less decorous, even anguished. RongRong can be seen lying in an abandoned pose on the floor of the room, grasping a pillar in a desperate embrace. inri lies on the wooden floor, oblivious of the snow-laden trees and the cold outside. The kimonos drop to the floor, the camera moves in on their heads which, with the exception of their eyes, are covered by their luxuriant hair.

In complete contrast is a beautiful sequence of photographs in which the figures, adults and children, turn away from the camera and view the landscape from indoors-inri in kimono, seated on tatami with the three boys framed by shoji screens, RongRong & inri seen only as dark silhouettes and a related photograph in which the three boys take center stage. We know exactly who they are but there is a timeless quality that the photographers achieve through the formal qualities of the composition and the printing process they adopt which reduces contrasts and emphasizes subtle tonal effects.

They stayed in the region long enough to experience all four seasons, a temporal experience that is crucial to so much Japanese art. In a rare exception inri and the three boys, who wear clothes that she designed herself, face the camera and join hands in a gesture of exultation seemingly occasioned by the pleasures of early spring. The boys wade through a pond and play in the melting snow, one of the few photographs in which there is a glimpse of one of

the sparsely populated villages in the region. For the children, this was bliss and the parents have described how they were warmly accepted by the few remaining elderly villagers who welcomed the arrival of children to enliven their solitude.

Photographs such as these are greatly outnumbered by spectacular landscapes in which diminutive human figures are seen from the rear, seemingly transfixed by the beauty of nature. In one memorable image RongRong holds the hand of one of his sons, gazing at a timeless vista of rice paddies unmarred by any sign of modern life. In another RongRong and inri photograph the three boys standing still in the middle distance, surrounded by rice paddies.

Unconsciously, it seems, RongRong & inri have adopted a motif - the Rückenfigur (a person seen from behind) - that appears in many paintings by the great German Romantic landscape painter, Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840). In paintings such as *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* (1818)^(fig. 11), Kunsthalle Hamburg and *The Stages of Life* (1835), Museum der Bildende Künste, Leipzig, the viewer is encouraged to place himself in the position of the Rückenfigur who is seemingly transfixed by the sublime vision in front of him. As early as 1997 in *The Wedding Dress* series^(fig. 12) and related works, the existence of a strongly romantic streak in RongRong's oeuvre began to emerge, becoming even more apparent in the *Bad Gaisern* series (2001). The return to the Tsumari region seems only to have strengthened this tendency.

In big cities snow does not linger very long, if at all. In the Tsumari region, however, cold winds from Siberia blow clouds from the Sea of Japan onto the central mountain ranges. Snowfalls of three to four meters are not uncommon, covering houses and causing life to slow down almost completely until it thaws. Some of the most dramatic photographs in the *Tsumari* series emphasize simultaneously the frailty of human life when confronted with the forces of nature and its resilience. Still wearing the tattered kimono, bare legs exposed, RongRong struggles to climb over a massive snow drift or trudges through the snow in a particularly mysterious image in the direction of a mountain peak in the far distance. Her kimono in disarray, inri lies partially exposed on a rock, seemingly oblivious to the melting snow and ice surrounding her. RongRong helps inri clamber over a rock or they stand side by side, deep snow drifts reaching the level of their shoulders.



fig. 9 RongRong & inri
Three Shadows, Beijing 2008 No.20-3



fig. 10 RongRong & inri
Gaochangdi, Beijing 2007 No.1



fig. 11 Caspar David Friedrich
Wanderer above the Sea of Fog (1818), Kunsthalle Hamburg.

With their acute awareness of the different characteristics of the four seasons, it was inevitable that Japanese artists would respond to snow-covered landscapes. In the winter landscapes of Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858) diminutive human figures struggle to reach their destination and at times can hardly be seen at all as in *Mountain and river on the Kiso road (Kisoji no sansei)*, 1857^(fig. 13). The heavy snowfall evoked a similar response in RongRong & inri, culminating in the dreamlike photograph in which driving snow and fierce winds drain the figure of all substance as it trudges through the snow.

In a limited number of photographs there is no human presence at all; as in the mysterious view of a path cleared through massive banks of snow and another of the encircling mountains, Kawabata's "the round of peaks," seen across a wide expanse of pristine snow. Here they have returned to the vision of the majesty of nature that the sight of Mount Fuji first evoked in them in 2001.

In *Tsumari Story* RongRong & inri continue the unprecedented experiment they embarked upon in 2000, the recording of their life together not as documentary but as spiritual saga. In successive stages they appear in their photographs as lovers, as forlorn city dwellers whose surroundings are being torn down around them, as cultural entrepreneurs in the development of Three Shadows, and as proud parents while three sons are born in rapid succession. Since 2012 they have changed the focus of their photographic self-portrait and have begun to chronicle the development of their life together as a family in relation to nature, a deeply felt allegory which frequently echoes themes explored in older art with which they are not necessarily familiar.

For these two remarkable artists, the camera is less a tool for recording surface appearances than for seeking deeper meanings through the creative use of their own persona in settings that suggest but do not narrowly define multiple associations and mysterious tales or stories. In *Tsumari Story*, RongRong, inri and their three boys are seen in landscapes in which water, snow and ice mark the passing of the seasons and the crucial role that water plays in human life and the universe. Without eliciting any obvious parallels, the photographs convey a strong sense of the parallels between the cycles of life and nature.

It is in the studio, however, and through a variety of means that this mysterious aura is

accomplished. In a number prints double-exposure is used to suggest the uncertainty of memory or the creative aspects of fantasy. In others, rice paper is applied to the surface of the negative in order to establish a pale, blanched tonality that can suggest blinding light, the steam rising from an *onsen* or, possibly, the fading of memory as time passes. In keeping with the intense romanticism of the series was their decision to print the images on old sheets of photographic paper, often yellowed around the edges, which they had been keeping for ten years or more until they were able to match it with appropriate imagery.

"When we travel to a new location," they have said, "it is not only what we see with our eyes that registers. We also smell the air, feel the humidity and the temperature. This is what we attempt to convey, as well as a temporal dimension that situates the apparent subject-matter in a realm beyond time."

Art Historian
New York, May 29, 2014



fig. 12 RongRong
1997 No.3 (1) Beijing



fig. 13 Utagawa Hiroshige
The Kiso road (Kisoji no sansei) 1857, Fitzwilliam Museum

Notes:

1. Wu Hung, *RongRong & inri – Tui Transfiguration*, Beijing, 2004, pp. 212-213
2. Ibid. p. 213
3. Yasunari Kawabata (Trans. Edward G. Seidensticker), *Snow Country*, New York, 1996, p. 3
4. Ibid., p. 158-9
5. Ibid. p. 151

Tsumari Story/Gelatin-Silver Story

Tokihiro SATO

‘Tsumari’ is old name of the Tokamachi district of Niigata Prefecture. Surrounded on all four sides by mountains, the name is said to be derived from the Japanese expression, *todo no tsumari*, which means ‘to come to the end’ but although similar phonetically, the Chinese characters used to write it mean ‘there is a wife’, conjuring romantic connotations in our imaginations. RongRong & inri’s *Tsumari Story* is a work of great imagination that was clearly inspired by this name. It features the first encounter of a man and a woman, following them as they form a family, creating a story that is both true and fiction, set against the background of a traditional Japanese house, standing in a snow-filled landscape of beautiful terraced rice fields, hot springs, etc.

Trees, fields and rice fields; all turn white as the snow settles. It is a silver world where the only sounds are the rustling of the snow and the sougning of the wind, but it overflows with light. Furthermore, the domestic space trapped within the deep snow, brims with familial love. We experience the tense atmosphere, when hands and feet are numb with the cold, as they trudge back towards the warmth of home. Moving from picture to picture, we are able to discover memories of snow country. What they present is not so much reality as an imaginary world set within distant memories. It is not only the situations and contents of the pictures that evoke these feelings, it is the soft texture of the prints, resembling down, floating in the air.

This spring I saw the printing facilities in the darkroom attached to their studio at the Three Shadows Photography Art Centre in Beijing. These include a huge horizontal enlarger enshrined in concrete room. It is quite old and used to belong to a commercial laboratory, but the projector is still in good condition. Today, demand for this type of equipment is gradually decreasing but in the art world, gelatin-silver prints remain extremely highly valued. This enlarger can be used to produce huge gelatin-silver prints. The plumbing in the darkroom is also easy to use. While we were there, inri told me an interesting story. She was talking about the way that the silver in gelatin-silver prints tends to become more prominent over the passage of time and she said that they aimed to purposely recreate this kind of effect in their prints. The discoloration of the photograph causes the silver appear to stand out, and thinking back, I remembered the old commemorative photographs that had hung on the walls or were placed in the special alcove of the main room in my parents’ home had all yellowed and the silver in them seemed to gleam. I do not know when these pictures were taken, but they were family portraits of my ancestors. We see any number of photographs like this in museums and galleries and the effect is also apparent in the photographs that are sometimes seen for sale in European street markets. Even among my own works, I am sometimes able to see it in prints that have become faded. It is what allows our imaginations recognize the passage of time.

The time that is trapped within a photograph, the event that could only have ever happened at that particular time, is sealed within it like a specimen. Relations between individual items within a photograph present a relationship disconnected from the viewer’s time. Imaginative power gives rise to the resurrection of a space in a graphic manner. It has already surpassed the flat world, becoming free even from time and space.

Fourteen years have passed since we entered the twenty-first century and the twentieth century has become recognized as the age of the gelatin-silver photograph. The nineteenth century saw the invention of photography with the daguerreotype, followed shortly afterwards by the Calotype, then came the wet collodion process before it reached its peak with gelatin-silver photography. Negatives evolved from dry glass plates to film. It can be said that vast archives of the twentieth century, when images can be said to have come of age, consist almost entirely of gelatin-silver prints and gelatin-silver film. Today the photographic world has been swept by the wave of digital technology and industrially speaking, digital photography now represents the mainstream. In China, the high-street photo studios, which have been in business since before the Communist revolution, still preserve gelatin-silver technology but generally speaking, digital photography has served as the main medium throughout the current period of economic prosperity. For this reason, RongRong & inri’s decision to employ gelatin-silver photography is quite significant.

In gelatin-silver photography, light passes through a lens to produce an image that is captured in light and shade as a result of a reaction with the silver salts in the emulsion. A light is then passed through this image and projected onto photographic paper that is then developed to produce a print. It is a very simple process, very material and one that has achieved technical perfection but today it has fallen into decline as an industrial system. As a result, gelatin-silver prints now possess a nostalgic aura. The latest technology in which ink is placed on paper, and that in which the blacks gradually rise up out of the paper, may appear the same at first glance, but the feeling cannot help but be completely different. This skin-like texture of the image is something that these photographic prints have preserved.

In this *Tsumari Story* series, the peaceful snow landscapes create a powerful impression, but eventually winter ends and spring comes to the mountain village, the rich streams of snowmelt giving rise to bounty and allows plants to prosper. Summer is then followed by autumn, in the ever-repeating cycle of nature, and human lives reflect this. A man and woman meet, a child is born, creating a family. An image of love and birth, life, death and rebirth. The twentieth century technology of gelatin-silver photography is used boldly to express familial love, the cycle of life and the mutability of the world.

There are two ways in which we, living in the contemporary world, may orient ourselves towards the future. One is to always use the newest things and think of the newest trends. The other is the opposite—to look to the past and revive it. ‘Learning from the past’ may be a rather classic expression, but it is also a method of looking to the future. In this way, the words of the *Tsumari Story* are supported by the *Gelatin-Silver Story*.

Photographer, Artist, Professor of Tokyo University of the Arts

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 past.

General Director, Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale

Tsumari Story

RongRong & inri

Broadly speaking, the types of precipitation that have form and fall from the sky are rain, snow, hail, and sleet. Dew is a vapor in the earth that produces round beads of water; frost is the frozen form of this vapor, its shape depending on the coldness of the air. The earth's vapors rise up into the skies to become rain, snow, hail and sleet, but if they come into contact with warm air, they all revert to water. Water fills the entire earth and returns to the earth in this way. In the depths of the earth, there is inevitably a warm vapor. When it becomes warmer, the 'earth' exhales vapor into the heavens in the same way that human breathe. This continues ceaselessly, day and night. The 'heavens' also exhale a 'vapor' that descends to the 'earth'; this is what I call the breathing of heaven and earth. It is the same as the exhalation and inbalation of human breath. The breath of heaven and earth nourishes all things. If the breath of heaven and earth changes from its usual state, it causes disturbances in times of heat and cold. Storms, heavy rains and other convulsions of nature are caused by the sickness of the heaven and earth.

From: SUZUKI Bokushi, *Hokuetsu Seppu Vol. 1* [Snow stories of North Koshi Province] (1837)

Since ancient times, the area surrounding Echigo-Tsumari in Niigata Prefecture has been renowned as one of the snowiest districts of Japan and in winter snows blankets the landscape. *Hokuetsu Seppu* is a book, written during the nineteenth century that describes the numerous hardships that have confronted people living there throughout history as they struggle to live in such a harsh natural environment. On occasion of our participation in the *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2012*, we felt it necessary to reexamine the relationship that exists between nature and humankind, leading to the commencement of the work that comprises this photographic series.

The breath of heaven and earth nourishes all things. People's lives and deaths have always remained closely related to heaven and earth. A life that did not conform to heaven and earth would result in a deep illness in later years. Like the plants that hold their breath under the weight of snow, our lives also originate and are nurtured by the same earth. The dignity of the forests, that incorporate the workings of all life, sends a shudder down the spine of those who enter them unprepared, forcing us to acknowledge that humans are not their equals. As we head towards the rural landscapes that people have gradually established within this vastness, we gradually recall the distant memories that have come down to us through our individual memories.

Produced over a period of approximately two years, from 2012 to 2014, this series of photographs underwent a fundamental change in direction due to the fact that during the course of working on it, we came to live in Japan. Three-and-a-half years after the 3.11 earthquake, people still have no clue how to solve the problems created by the enormous natural and manmade disasters it caused because the true nature of these problems has yet to be revealed and the whole country remains in chaos. Our initial intention for this series was to reflect a worldview based on the image created by the origin of the name of this area, 'Tsumari' and its local legends. We wandered through the snow-covered maze with no clear objective, imagining a story of a man and a woman who are seized by extreme emotions while living within Tsumari's harsh natural environment. However, as the series progressed, we began to question the necessity of burying ourselves at this time in a worldview comprising of hackneyed aesthetics with no sense of the future. Despite our loss of direction we continued to photograph and just as we were about to give up all hope of completion, we returned to the basis of creativity, namely we asked ourselves 'what do we need to aspire to in order to demonstrate our present attitude towards life?' We were saved by the crystalline waters of the melted snow from Mt. Hakkaisan and when this flow became one with the 'cycle of life' that had formed the basis of our prior work, the roar of the surging waters seemed to flow through my entire body, purifying me.

I would like to dedicate this story to my late father who fit into the scenery of the terraced rice fields better than anyone else, staying at Myokayama primary school with us while we searched the mountains for wild edible plants. Finally, we would also like to offer our sincere gratitude to everybody who assisted us in the creation of this story.

List of *Tsumari Story* series

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| 21. No.1-35 2012 | 47. No.9-2 2014 |
| 22. No.1-36 2012 | 48. No.13-1 2012 |
| 23. No.1-39 2012 | 49. No.6-18 2012 |
| 24. No.1-37 2012 | 50. No.7-1 2012 |
| 25. No.1-40 2012 | 51. No.13-3 2012 |
| 26. No.1-38 2012 | 52. No.11-5 2014 |

the inside back cover of a book: No.15-3 2012

Artists' Biographies

RongRong	Inri
1968 Born in Zhangzhou city, Fujian Province, China	1973 Born in Kanagawa prefecture, Japan
1992 Entered the photography department of the Central Industrial Art Institute, Beijing	1994 Graduated from the Nippon Photography Institute, Tokyo
1993 Moved into Beijing's East Village, and began a long-term photographic study on the lives of the young avant-garde artists who were living there	1994-97 Worked as a photographer for the <i>Asabi Shinbun</i>
1996 Established <i>NEWPHOTO</i> magazine	1997 Became a freelance photographer and started individual creative work
2000 Started to make collaborative works with inri	2000 Started to make collaborative works with RongRong
2001 Took part in the KUNST Artist in Residence program, Vienna, Austria	2001 Took part in the KUNST Artist in Residence program, Vienna, Austria
2007 Established Three Shadows Photography Art Centre.	2007 Established Three Shadows Photography Art Centre

Selected Solo Exhibitions

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| 2014 <i>Tsumari Story</i> , Three Shadows Photography Art Center, Beijing, China
<i>Tsumari Story</i> , Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan | <i>All you need is Love: 10th Anniversary Exhibition</i> , Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan |
| 2012 <i>Rebirth from Ruins: RongRong&inri Photography 2002-2009</i> , Kuhlhaue Berlin, Germany | 2012 <i>Transformation: A View on Chinese Contemporary Art</i> , Istanbul Modern, Turkey
<i>Passing Through Memory. Suzhou Jinji Lake Art Museum Opening Exhibition</i> , Suzhou Jinji Lake Museum, Suzhou, China
<i>To Walk Alone: Contemporary Chinese Photography</i> , Tokyo Photo, Tokyo, Japan
<i>The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial</i> , Niigata, Japan |
| 2011 <i>Three Begets Ten Thousands Things</i> , Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, China
<i>Three Begets Ten Thousands Things</i> , Shiseido Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
<i>RongRong & inri</i> , Michael Ku Gallery, Taipei | 2011 <i>Staging Action: Performance in Photography since 1960</i> , Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
<i>New Photography from China</i> , Getty Museum of Art, Los Angeles, USA
<i>Interconnected: Selections from the Three Shadows Collection</i> , Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing, China |
| 2010 <i>RongRong & inri: Selections from the Three Shadows Collection</i> , Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing, China
<i>RongRong & inri</i> , MEM Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
<i>Compound Eye</i> , HeXiangning Art Museum, Shenzhen, China | 2009 <i>Europalia-International Art Festival</i> , Brussels Art Museum, Brussel, Belgium
<i>Third Guangdong International Biennale</i> , Guangdong Museum of Art, Guangzhou, China |
| 2008 <i>From Six Mile Village to Three Shadows New Works by RongRong & inri</i> , Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing, China
<i>Ruins to Renewal: Works by RongRong & inri</i> , SF Cameraworks, San Francisco, California
<i>RongRong & inri: The Power of Ruins. Between Destruction and Construction</i> , Casa Asia, Madrid and Barcelona, Spain | 2008 <i>DIOR & CHINESE ARTISTS</i> , Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, China
<i>Lasst hundert Blumen blüben</i> , Kunstverein Dresden, Dresden, Germany
<i>2008 Daegu Photo Biennale</i> , Daegu, Korea
<i>Right Hand, Left Hand-Couples in Contemporary Art</i> , MOCA Shanghai, Shanghai, China |
| 2007 <i>RongRong & inri</i> , Rencontres d' Arles, France | 2007 <i>Net: Reimagining Space, Time and Culture</i> , Chambers Fine Arts Gallery, Beijing, China
<i>Convection</i> , Three Shadows Photography Art Centre, Beijing, China |
| 2006 <i>The Third Space</i> , Alexander Ochs Gallery, Berlin, Germany
<i>Liultun</i> , Chambers Fine Art, New York, USA | 2006 <i>Another world-photography from China</i> , Lukas Feichtner Galerie, Vienna, Austria
<i>Intimate Beijing-Photography exhibition (China-Japan-Netherlands)</i> , 706 Factory, Beijing, China
<i>Imer Scopes</i> , Shanghai Gallery of Art, Shanghai, China |
| 2005 <i>Beyond</i> , Walsh Gallery, Chicago, USA | 2005 <i>About Beauty</i> , House of World Cultures, Berlin, Germany |
| 2003 <i>Tui-Transfiguration: The Image World of RongRong & inri</i> , Dashanzi Art district, Beijing, China | 2004 <i>5th Shanghai Biennale-Techniques of the Visible</i> , Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, China
<i>All Under Heaven</i> , Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerpen, Belgium
<i>Le moine et le demon: Art Contemporain Chinois</i> , Musée Art Contemporain Lyon, Rhône, France |

Selected Group Exhibitions

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| 2014 <i>Hong Kong International Photography Festival</i> , HK, China
<i>International East Asia Photo Culture Forum Exhibition</i> , Higashikawa, Japan
<i>China Photography 1911-2014</i> , Stavanger Art Museum, Norway
<i>The Symposium of Challenge the Tradition-20th Century Western Classical and Chinese Contemporary Photography</i> , Inside-Out Art Museum, Beijing, China
<i>China ARTE Brazil Exhibition</i> , São Paulo, Brazil
<i>Hanart 100: Idiosyncrasies</i> , Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong, China | 2003 <i>Chinart</i> , Museum Kuppfersmuhle Sammlung Gothe, Duisburg, Germany; Museo Arte Contemporanea di Roma, Italy; Ludwig Museum, Budapest, Hungary
<i>A Strange Heaven</i> , Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, Czech |
| 2013 <i>Portrait of the Times-30 Years of Chinese Contemporary Art</i> , Power Station of Art, Shanghai, China
<i>How Far-Exhibition of Chinese Contemporary Photography</i> , Songzhuang Art Center, Beijing, China
<i>New Framework: Chinese Avant-garde Photography 1980s-90s</i> , Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong, China
<i>Collection Exhibition 2013: The Aesthetics of Photography</i> , Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo, Japan | 2002 <i>Beijing Afloat</i> , Beijing Tokyo Art Projects, Beijing, China
<i>Dream 02</i> , Red Mansion Foundation, London, UK |
| | 2001 <i>Chinese Contemporary Photography</i> , Galerie Steinek-Halle, Vienna, Austria
<i>Cross Pressures</i> , Oulu City Art Museum; The Finnish Museum of Photography, Finland |