

# ARToba Artspace — A Report of Creative Activities Linked with the Community of Toba

▶ Linda DENNIS

## Abstract

This paper aims to provide new insights to inform the future activities of ARToba artspace through consideration of the following. Firstly, the ways the mission statement of ARToba artspace in Toba, Mie Prefecture, Japan, relates to activities held to date in the space will be considered. These activities include artist residencies and exhibitions held between August 2018 and August 2019. Secondly, the ways ARToba's activities are an extension of Linda Dennis, the Director of ARToba's creative theme of 'Touch' will be detailed.

### Keywords:

window art gallery, artist in residence, student art project, regional Japan, Toba City, Mie Prefecture, TOUCH, connection, communication, collaboration, and community

## Section 1. ARToba

### I. Introduction

#### 1. ARToba Description

ARToba is a creative space linked with the community of Toba. Based in a former stationery store in central Toba, ARToba is a place for artists and art students to stay, make, and exhibit artwork, in response to local research. The large shop-front windows have been transformed into a window gallery, and artworks can be viewed from the outside of the building during daylight hours. Located only 11 minutes stroll from Toba station, and close to many historical landmarks of Toba, it is hoped that ARToba can play a vital role connecting artists with the surrounding communities.

ARToba was established in 2018 by Touch Base Creative Network, a creative network, connecting people, ideas, and

information. Touch Base was created by Australian artist, Linda Dennis as part of her activities linked with the theme of "touch".

In October 2019, ARToba Art Net community group was formed to specifically organize activities for ARToba.

#### 2. ARToba Mission Statement

ARToba aims to create a base for art in Toba City. To make a place where artists and citizens of Toba can have creative interchanges, while making the most of the history, culture, and natural environment of Toba.

Our wish is for ARToba, located in the center of Toba City, to function as a creative space connected with the community of Toba, and to be a place where artists and students interested in art can stay, conduct Toba related research, produce, and exhibit artworks.

In addition, to contribute to conveying the charms of Toba by showing artwork inspired by Toba to visitors from other places. To make a place of interchange with citizens, tourists and artists, through ARToba's activities such as the holding of exhibitions, event planning, exchange meetings, and art workshops. To aim to enhance interchanges between Toba citizens and international visitors through promoting ARToba's activities and events in a bilingual (English, Japanese) form.

#### Activity Guidelines:

- (1) Invite artists to Toba City, to enter local areas, perform research and express the results through art.
- (2) To make a place in Toba City where artists and students engaged in art activities can stay and produce artworks.

- (3) To make a place where creative interchanges between artists and citizens of Toba can occur.
- (4) To perform activities necessary to achieve the aims of ARToba.

### 3. Activity Timeline: August 2018- August 2019

#### 2018

- May:** Discussions with the building owner commenced
- Aug:** Onsite preparations commenced. Artist residencies by Linda DENNIS & Yumi MASHIKI.
- Nov:** Inaugural exhibition “From Primary Senses” by Linda DENNIS & Yumi MASHIKI started. Artist residency by Chiaki KATO

#### 2019

- Jan:** Exhibition “Open Toba” by Chiaki KATO
- Apr:** Exhibition “Sea Whistle” by Zoe PORTER. Artist residencies by Zoe Porter and Chiaki KATO
- May:** Artist Residency by Miyuki INAGAKI
- Jun:** Exhibition “Flapping in the Calm” by Miyuki INAGAKI
- Aug:** Joshibi University Student Study Trip Residency. Toba Stories Art Project in Arashima Display of documentation.

## II. Description of Activities to Date (August 30 2019).

#### Preparation Period:

In May 2018, initial discussions with the building owner commenced. In August 2018, onsite preparations started, with many working bees to clean and set up the building. During this time, residencies by two artists and two Joshibi students (Linda DENNIS, Yumi MASHIKI, Rena ISONO, Miki KUBO) were held. The two artists, two Joshibi students, and a number of Toba residents helped clean the building. Many Toba residents donated items for use in the art space.

ARToba was officially established at 11am on 11

November 2018 when the inaugural exhibition was held.

**First Exhibition:** “From Primary Senses” by Linda DENNIS & Yumi MASHIKI. (See Appendix 1)  
Dates: 11 Nov 2018-17 Jan 2019.

In preparation for this exhibition both artists did a residency at ARToba in August 2018, and participated in a Bon Dance festival in Arashima. Linda DENNIS interviewed Arashima residents about local history, and made an artwork inspired by these stories. Yumi MASHIKI did research into Ama diver culture, and visited the island of Sakate Island. She spoke with many local people and took sound recordings to make three soundscapes inspired by Toba for the exhibition.

**Second Exhibition:** “Open Toba” by Chiaki KATO. (See Appendix 2)  
Dates: 20 Jan -5 Apr 2019.

In preparation for this exhibition, Chiaki KATO did a residency in Nov 2018, and did research into customs unique to Toba and surrounding areas. She researched Isawa Shrine and Akasaki Shrine in particular, and conducted interviews with people knowledgeable about this history. She developed new friendships in the area and continued email correspondence with Arashima residents.

**Third Exhibition:** “Sea Whistle” by Zoe PORTER. (See Appendix 3)  
Dates: April 13 – June 6.

In preparation for this exhibition, Zoe PORTER travelled from Australia to do a residency in April 2019, she attended the Haru Matsuri festival, and did research into Ama diver culture in the Ijika and Kuzaki areas by interviewing divers and photographing their activities. She then made artworks based on her research. Prior to coming to Japan, she communicated with staff of the Toba Sea-Folk Museum to do research about Ama divers.

**University Group Residency:** From 27 – 30 April 2019, a residency by 8 Joshibi University of Art & Design students was held at ARToba, for the Toba Stories Art Project. Students did research in Arashima speaking to local people about local landmarks as research for making artworks. A workshop was held in the Arashima area.

**Fourth Exhibition:** “Flapping in the Calm” by Miyuki INAGAKI. (See Appendix 4)  
Dates: 16 Jun-1 Aug 2019.

In preparation for this exhibition, Miyuki INAGAKI did a residency in early May. She visited the islands of Kamishima and Sugashima, and also met with Ama divers of Ijika.

Openings parties were held on the first day of each exhibition. The doors of the gallery were open from 11am – 3pm, and the artist, and many visitors spent time talking together about the artworks on display.

**University Group Residency:** From 5 - 12 August 2019, a second residency by 8 Joshibi University of Art & Design students was held at ARToba, for the Toba Stories Art Project. The students set up artworks and conducted workshops for local children in the Arashima area.

### III. Considerations

Activities held to date (30 August 2019) were considered in relation to the Activity Guidelines of the Mission Statement of ARToba.

- (1) Invite artists to Toba City, to enter local areas, perform research and express the results through art.

For all four exhibitions, artists were invited to stay in Toba at ARToba. All artists visited local areas, engaged with Toba residents as part of their research, and produced artworks informed by this. Their artworks were exhibited in the window gallery of ARToba.

- (2) To make a place in Toba City where artists and students engaged in art activities can stay and produce artworks.

The rooms on the second floor of ARToba were used for accommodation purposes. The kitchen, bathroom, and living area on the first floor were used for artists and students to do daily tasks. The gallery space was used for producing artworks.

- (3) To make a place where creative interchanges between artists and citizens of Toba can occur.

The exhibition opening parties provided excellent opportunities for interchanges between artists and citizens of Toba. Other informal gatherings, such as communal dinners, film screenings, project meetings, etc were also held at ARToba throughout the year.

- (4) To perform activities necessary to achieve the aims of ARToba.

To promote and communicate the activities of ARToba, online sites were created (website, Instagram & Facebook pages), and exhibition postcards were printed for each exhibition. As much as possible, all promotional texts were written bilingually (English & Japanese) to communicate activities on a global scale

### IV. Results

Considerations of the activity descriptions showed that they are in line with activity guidelines listed in the mission statement. One point that has not yet been achieved is the holding of workshops in the gallery of ARToba itself. We hope to achieve this in the near future. Also the lack of staff makes it hard to open the doors of ARToba on a regular basis, so the opportunities for visitors to gather within ARToba is limited. However, we hope to find ways to open the doors of ARToba for other art related activities on a more regular basis in the near future.

## Section 2. TOUCH Conceptual Relationships to Creative Theme of ‘Touch’

ARToba’s activities were initially organized by Touch Base Creative Network, a creative network, connecting people, ideas, and information. It functions as a platform for creative research, and project development. Touch Base was created by Australian artist, Linda Dennis as part of her activities linked with the theme of ‘Touch’.

As an artist, through the process of artwork making, Linda DENNIS developed her thinking regarding the concepts of Connection, Communication, and Collaboration, as being important abstract forms of interpersonal “touch”. This led her to begin creative activities with the aim of bringing people together. It is her wish for ARToba to be a place where new connections between people can be formed.

### Conclusion

The consideration of the ways the mission statement of ARToba artspace relates to activities held to date in the space provided a number of insights that can inform the future activities of ARToba artspace. Links to the Director of ARToba’s creative theme of ‘touch’ were also shown to be evident through the outlining of her research interests.

### References

I-Brain Co., Ltd, 2019, *Commemorative Book of the Toba Umi Art Project 2018 – 2019*, Toba City Tourism Division

Mansfield S., 2019, ‘Signs of Life: Urban Renewal in Nakamachi’, *The Japan Times on Sunday*, 22 Sept, p. 10.

ARToba Artspace Website: <https://touch-base-create.net/artoba/>  
Touch Base Creative Network Website: <https://touch-base-create.net>

Linda Dennis Website: <http://linda-dennis.com>

### ARToba Map



Address: 3-9-3 Toba, Toba City, Mie Prefecture 517-0011

女子美術大学・ラフバラ大学交流展覧会プロジェクト作成  
に研究テーマ「タッチ」を組み込む試み

リンダ・デニス

この活動報告は、国際交流展の参加アーティストのつながりを緊密にするために導入したテーマの効果を計ることを目的とします。すなわち、本報告は、2018年に東京で開催した女子美術大学・ラフバラ大学交流展覧会プロジェクトに、私の芸術作品の研究テーマを組み込もうとする試みについてです。研究テーマ“タッチ”と関係があるキーワード〈コネクション（つながり）〉〈コミュニケーション（意思疎通）〉そして〈コラボレーション（協働）〉をプロジェクトに取り入れることについてです。プロジェクト参加者が記入したアンケートを通して、これらの効果の分析を行いました。プロジェクトとテーマの関係を分析すると、参加者の間のつながり、コミュニケーションと共同研究に関して程度の異なる結果が出ました。

## Appendix 1: Exhibition 1

### Title: “From Primary Senses”

Artists: Linda DENNIS & Yumi MASHIKI

11 Nov 2018 (Sun) – 17 Jan 2019 (Thu)

Opening Event: Sun 11 Nov, 11:00am – 5pm

#### Artworks:

Linda DENNIS:

A participatory artwork that had been made for the 2018 Arashima Bon Dance Festival.

Yumi MASHIKI:

Three soundscapes incorporating sounds captured during her time in Toba. The pieces could be listened to online using the QR codes provided in the exhibition.

#### About the exhibition:

This exhibition was made up of artworks developed as a result of an artist in residence held at ARToba in the summer of 2018. Artist, Linda DENNIS, and composer, Yumi MASHIKI worked together with local people to prepare the building for ARToba’s opening as a creative space, participated in many local activities, such as Bon Dance Festivals, Arashima Morning Market, Ama Diver Hut experience, etc, and conducted research into local customs, including visits to the Toba Sea-Folk Museum.

#### Residency periods:

Yumi MASHIKI: Wed 8 – 15 Aug

Linda DENNIS: Multiple periods from August 2018



ARToba Window Gallery



Artwork by Linda DENNIS



Soundscapes by Yumi MASHIKI



Yumi MASHIKI research trip



Linda DENNIS and others at Arashima Bon Dance Festival, Aug 2018

## Appendix 2: Exhibition 2

### Title: “Open Toba”

Artist: Chiaki KATO

20 Jan (Sun) – 14 Mar 2019 (Thu)

Opening Event: Sun 20 Jan, 11:00am – 3pm

#### Artworks:

For this exhibition, Chiaki created a knitted piece and collaged drawings.

#### About the exhibition:

An exhibition of artworks based on local Toba life and stories from old times.

Words of the artist: “When I visited Toba, I felt that the local people have a lot of love for their land, and things which feel natural to the people living there, feel special to people visiting for the first time. I searched for inspiration for my artworks in local life and ancient stories”.

#### About the residency:

Residency Period: November 2018

Kato Chiaki participated in a short residency at ARToba in November 2018. During her time there, she visited the Sea-Folk Museum, Arashima, Nakamachi, and other areas. As an important part of her research into unique aspects of the area, she engaged in ongoing communication with local residents.



Artwork by Chiaki KATO



Artwork by Chiaki KATO



Artwork by Chiaki KATO



Exhibition Opening



ARToba Window Gallery

### Appendix 3: Exhibition 3

#### Title: “Sea Whistle”

Artists: Zoe Porter

April 13 (Sat) – June 6 (Thu)

Opening Event: Sat 13 Apr, 11am – 3pm

#### Artworks:

Ink drawings, watercolor drawings, digital print, artist books, objects made from felt.

#### About the exhibition:

Artworks inspired by local AMA female divers and Japanese sea mythology.

Zoe is an Australian artist who works across a range of media including drawing, painting, installation, video and performance. For her exhibition and residency at ARToba art she produced a number of new works on paper based on local Ama as well as Japanese sea mythology.

Her watercolours reference images sourced from the Sea-Folk Museum and documentary photographs of Ama divers in Toba, as well as elements of Ukiyo-e prints of the Ama and their ancient traditions. Throughout her residency Zoe also created a series of artist books and video, which included research into the practices of the Ama and sea yokai mythology.

#### About the residency

Residency Period: Sat 6 – Mon 15 April 2019

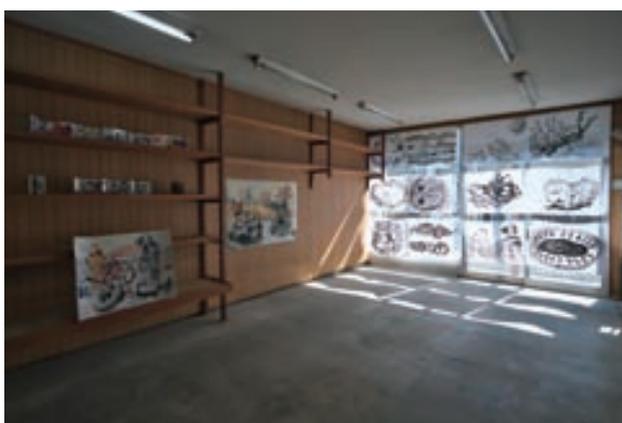
Zoe Porter came to Japan for a residency at ARToba in early April 2019. Prior to coming to Japan, she did research into AMA culture, and produced some artworks.

During her time in Toba, she attended a local festival, visited the Sea-Folk Museum, and areas of Ijika and Kuzaki to meet AMA divers and see their activities. She then produced many pieces of artwork and a number of artist books for this exhibition.

After returning to Australia, she continued to make artwork inspired by her experiences in Toba. Zoe exhibited a number of Toba related artworks in Brisbane in 2019: “Pivot” group exhibition, Onespace Gallery, collaborative performance “Sea Oddities” at BAD Festival, “Women’s Work”, curated by Brisbane Art Matriarchs! (BAM!) at Brisbane City Council’s Outdoor Gallery, and at her solo show “Umiama” at Onespace Gallery. Zoe’s residency at ARToba was a topic for the event: ONExchange Conversation – Zoe Porter + Linda Dennis held at Onespace Gallery on 7 Sept 2019.



Artwork by Zoe PORTER



Artwork by Zoe PORTER



Artwork by Zoe PORTER



Zoe PORTER research in Toba

## Appendix 4: Exhibition 4

### Title: “Flapping in the Calm”

Artists: Miyuki INAGAKI

16 Jun (Sun)– 1 Aug 2019 (Thu)

Opening Event: Sun 16 Jun, 11am – 3pm

#### Artworks:

Installation. Oil paintings, embroidery, fabric, found objects.

#### About the exhibition:

An exhibition inspired by the scenery of islands and seaside towns of Toba.

#### About the residency:

Residency Period: May 2019

Miyuki INAGAKI did a residency at ARToba in May 2019. In addition to this, she had traced her family roots to Toba, been to Toba a number of times before to do research on the islands there. During her residency at ARToba, she did research on islands, visited the Sea-Folk Museum, and visited Ijika, meeting AMA divers and local business people.



ARToba Window Gallery



Artwork by Miyuki INAGAKI



Research in Ijika, Toba



Artwork by Miyuki INAGAKI



Exhibition Opening Party



Artwork by Miyuki INAGAKI