

Rethinking 'Ningen no tochi' (Human Land) — NARAHARA Ikkō 1954-1956

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Introduction

It all started with 'Human Land'. A single, unknown young man led the way to a new age of photography in a brilliant fashion. During a trip around the island of Kyushu, he visited Kurokamimura on Sakurajima Island, a village that had been buried in volcanic ash, and also Hashima, a manmade, coal-mining island that is commonly known by its nickname 'Gunkanjima', (Battleship Island). His meeting the people living in both these places, who faced extreme hardship, galvanized him to hold his first solo exhibition, entitled '*Ningen no Tochi*' (Human Land), in May 1956 at the Matsushima Gallery in Tokyo's Ginza district. Overnight the existing styles of photography that had continued since before the war were thrust aside and a new era was ushered in. The exhibition only lasted one week, but by its end the anonymous graduate school student had been transformed into a highly-regarded, up-and-coming young photographer. Inspired by this exhibition, a new generation of photographers came together to hold the '*Jūnin no me*' (Eyes of Ten) exhibition then went on to establish the 'self-agency' VIVO photographers' cooperative. The 'Human Land' exhibition, that was to herald in a new development in postwar Japanese photography, became legendary and it marked the spectacular debut of the photographer, NARAHARA Ikkō.

What was it that gave this debut exhibition the power to transform Japanese photography? In order to answer this, we must go back to 1956 and take a fresh look at the 'Human Land' exhibition. At that time, NARAHARA was involved with the avant-garde art movement, a fact that provides an important key to untangling the mystery of his sudden rise to fame. I want to reconsider the meaning of 'Human Land' by focusing on NARAHARA from the dual viewpoints of avant-garde art and photography during the period between 1954 and 1956. 'Human Land' was to become NARAHARA's core work in later years.

Chapter I. From the Viewpoint of Photography • Background

NARAHARA Ikkō (real name: NARAHARA Kazutaka) was born in his mother's parent's home in

Ōmuta City, Fukuoka Prefecture, in 1931. His maternal grandfather had wanted to become an artist and planned to enter art school, but upon being obliged to take over as head of the family, he became an art and antique collector instead, devoting the rest of his life to the appreciation of art. His mother repeatedly said that her father would have been very proud if he had been able to see NARAHARA carry out his dream of becoming an artist. His father came originally from Kurume City in Fukuoka Prefecture and had traveled to Tokyo where he worked in the Tax Office while attending in university; he eventually passed the National Bar Examinations and became a judge. His work required that the family move a lot and Ikkō spent most of his childhood as a transfer student at various schools, resulting in him always preserving a unique sense of distance in the way he departed himself.

He lived in Nagasaki from the age of three to six and it was during this period that he underwent various formative visual experiences. Their garden contained pomelo and banana trees, redolent of tropical climes, and structurally the city provided various dynamic and multi-national themes—light shining through the stained glass windows of the churches, the vermilion of the Chinese Temple and the dragon boat races. The blending of Western, Chinese and Japanese culture within the city and its festival-like atmosphere was to make a colorful impression on NARAHARA'S mind. His first contact with photography came when he served as a model for his uncle, YAMAMOTO Ken, who was a keen amateur photographer, and the lively portraits of his childhood produced at this time still exist today.¹ Ikkō was so good at drawing that people used to call him a 'young master', but at the time, he was more interested in modeling and devoted his boyhood to building gliders.

However, the tides of war turned against Japan and in the months leading up to surrender, aerial bombings occurred regularly, the city they were living in at the time, Owari Ichinomiya, being totally destroyed. That day the B29s had dropped incendiary bombs in a fan shape so he only had to run in a direction at right angles to the course of the planes to find the shortest escape route. With futon bedding over his head, he lay and watched as the bombs landed

in front of his eyes, before fleeing to the suburbs. Eventually, the entire city burned, creating an image of hell like one from a Hieronymus Bosch painting. In his youth, NARAHARA experienced both the dazzling richness of peace and the misery of war.

His sister, Hiroko, was born when he was fifteen years old and the pictures he took of his younger sibling, using the family's Semi-Minolta camera, were his first experience of photography. The serious way in which he used a tape measure to check the distance between her and the camera was to become a favorite story among family members. In 1948 his father was promoted to the post of Chief Public Prosecutor and was posted to Tottori, then the following year they moved again to Matsue in Shimane Prefecture. While he was in Tottori, NARAHARA learned the basic photographic techniques of developing and making contact prints. At the same time, he borrowed a large number of prewar 'Asahi Camera' magazines from a friend at a photo studio and from these he was able to learn more about cameras and the mechanisms they employed. When he was in the third year of Matsue Senior High School, a photograph exhibition was held as part of the autumn school festival activities and he entered portraits of his mother and sister as well as landscapes, all of which had been enlarged to a size of 10 by 12 inches.

In 1950, acting on his father's recommendation, he entered the Law Department of Chūō University in Tokyo. His father's job took the family to Nara City and visiting them there during his holidays, NARAHARA became interested in the ancient temples for which the region is renowned. OGAWA Seiyō was a photographer who ran a studio called Asukaen in Nara, he was famous for his pictures of Buddhist statues and NARAHARA was fascinated to hear his stories about them, visiting temples throughout Nara and Kyōto to see them for himself. OGAWA was famous for pictures of ancient works of art, but NARAHARA says he was not influenced by his work. He had been travelling around old temples for about eighteen months when he visited the Golden Pavilion of Hōryūji Temple where he saw the famous statues of Shakyamuni Buddha flanked by two attendants, and so impressed was he by their beauty that he resolved to give up law and study art history instead.

Graduating from the Law Department of Chūō University in March 1954, he entered Waseda University in April to take a master's course in art. It was no easy thing for NARAHARA to transfer from law to the arts. He faced strong opposition from his parents, his father determined that he should make a career in law and his mother, who had watched her

father indulging himself in art, also against it. He was unable to win their approval as he approached graduation, but made up his mind to enter Waseda University regardless.

• 'Human Land' Exhibition

That spring, his father was transferred again and the family moved to Nagasaki. Although he had been born on the island of Kyūshū, NARAHARA did not know the area at all and so he decided to take a trip around it during his holidays. It was during this journey that he came across Kurokamimura Village on Sakurajima Island and *Gunkanjima* (Battleship Island), an artificial island that housed a coal-mining facility. On Sakurajima he saw a young woman placing flowers on a grave and he was extremely moved by the way she seemed so securely attached to the land. After visiting *Gunkanjima* in Nagasaki, which is surrounded by high stone walls, he returned to Tokyo. However, he could not dispel the impression he received of these people living where they do, and it remained deeply set in his mind after his return. The clear image they created gradually resolved itself into a single concept and he realized that 'by depicting these two "places", it would be possible to highlight the features common to the existence of the people living there'.²

At the time NARAHARA was 'tormented by unease, continually disturbed within his unstable world.' He wrote that 'I wanted some firm evidence that I would "live"; I wanted to see it in a positive way. The works in the "Human Land" exhibition were definitely not created to be good works, I took them in order for me to live, I photographed them in order that I myself may live...I wanted to fix the chaos in my mind, to give it shape, in other words, I chose photography as a way of realizing my desire.'³ In 1954 he bought his own camera, returning to Kyūshū during the spring, summer and winter holidays to take photographs.

At the same time that he produced 'Human Land', NARAHARA also created a photo poem that he called 'Stateless Land'. He visited Osaka Castle on his way back to his parents' home and looking out over the ruins of an arsenal that had stood next to it, he felt fascinated with the sight and photographed it before starting work on 'Human Land'. In Tokyo too, he wandered through the ruins of a munitions factory in the Ōji district, taking photographs. From the beginning NARAHARA had little to say about this series of poetic works on ruins he called 'Stateless Land', merely noting that it was a requiem for a dark childhood. NARAHARA grew into adolescence during the war and his experience of war was to have a decisive influence over him. He said that war had been

'normal', and that after the war, the 'empty skies' felt more like a sterile vacuum than peace.⁴ From childhood, he was surrounded by the scenes of destruction resulting from aerial bombing and it can be said that the pictures in 'Stateless Land' seemed identical to the views he had been used to seeing.

He wanted somebody to see the photographs he had taken and so he booked a gallery, one year in advance, to hold a solo exhibition. Initially, he planned to show 'Stateless Land' as the first section and 'Human Land' as the second. He wanted to contrast the negativism of the deserted landscapes in 'Stateless Land' with the positivity of 'Human Land', in which he captured people's images head on. In an early mockup for the invitation to the 'Human Land' exhibition, it lists 'Stateless Land', with the title 'Zone', as a prologue to 'Human Land'.

Furthermore, he had to produce large prints and have these fixed to panels for the exhibition so he employed company named Shashin Kōsha to handle this. In order to raise the funds to pay for it, he applied to Fuji Film for support. His concept for the presentation of the work was to print it in the form of a picture scroll and Fuji Film agreed to supply the paper for this and also to produce the posters for the exhibition. He had trouble in making the printer understand his intentions and the first print came out looking like a movie poster for the Japanese Shōchiku studios, leading him to ask for it to display a tonal range similar to that of a Western movie. Several attempts were made and he was beginning to think that it would be impossible to achieve, but finally he succeeded in time for the exhibition.

In this way the 'Photographs of Narahara Ikkō: Human Land' (Matsushima Gallery, Ginza, Tokyo) opened from May 5 to May 11, 1956. He prepared posters, invitations and pamphlets and it consisted of a total of 102 works, divided into two sections: Section One entitled, 'Village at the Foot of the Volcano' and Section Two, 'Island Without Green'. Section One was further divided into 'Village Buried in Lava, Kurokamimura, Sakurajima Island,' and 'Sinking Island, Moejima Island'. The land on the island of Sakurajima had been buried by an eruption in 1946 and being covered with lava, there was no ground water available, forcing the people to depend on rainwater for their everyday lives, but in the spring of 1956, a water supply was finally been completed. Agriculture there was largely limited to sweet potatoes and millet, it was a very hard life for the people and 'to say that they were "tough" would be a huge understatement.' In contrast, Hashima Island, which people referred to as 'Gunkanjima' (Battleship Island), served as the pit head for the Mitsubishi Mining Company's Takashima

Mine; it was only 480 meters long by 160 meters wide, surrounded by a 10 meter high seawall, giving it its distinctive 'battleship shape, it had shafts reaching a depth of 880 meters, making it the deepest mine in Japan. 'It was an island deformed to cater for modern society's demand for coal.' It boasted the highest population density in the country with 4,700 people housed in high-rise buildings that covered its surface. The only greenery was that to be found in flowerpots and during storms, the spray from the waves hitting the seawalls would rise higher than the roofs of the buildings. The exhibition contrasted the hardships of these two islands, presenting images of the people who lived on them, displayed on large and small panels.⁵

The fresh, new visual expression in this exhibition created an immediate sensation, with NARAHARA becoming recognized as a leading up-and-coming photographer overnight. Young critics and photographers spoke of his work in the highest terms. In his essay, entitled 'Aojiroi hibana' (Blue-white Sparks), the critic Fukushima Tatsuo described it as follows:⁶

'Memories of his exhibition, "Human Land" in May of this year still remain fresh in our minds. Why is it new? It was because never before had I seen photographs so alive with the vitality of the times. It was because never before had I seen photographs that represented my generation and life so sincerely. ... The critic, SHIGEMORI Kōen suddenly asked one day, "Have you seen that solo exhibition by a young photographer named NARAHARA Ikkō?" "No, not yet," I replied. "It is truly wonderful, you should go and see it, you really should." He seemed to be genuinely moved. Usually, he shows very little emotion, but that day his cheeks grew red with enthusiasm as he described it and when we parted, he repeated, "You really should go and see it." SHIGEMORI Kōen himself later wrote of the exhibition saying, "The way in which the quality of NARAHARA's work is evaluated is an important role for the photo critic and I stake my reputation on my appraisal."⁷

However, the general tendency was to be more critical. In a discussion between the two photographic greats of the time, KIMURA Ihee and DOMON Ken, KIMURA said candidly, 'Don't you think that there is something weak about it? Moreover, it seems extremely highly-strung.' DOMON replied, 'Neurosis may be something unique to young people, but the work does seem to be rather derivative. ...it doesn't have a feel of Japan. The photographs are stateless. ...I find the abstract detachment from life intolerable ...it seems to ignore the people, from the start. It alienates the people. ...really the camera's eye should be turned on protests against the alienation of people, alienation on

its own is no good.’⁸ NATORI Yōnosuke described it disparagingly as being ‘extremely artistic,’ adding that ‘the layout is very arty.’⁹ DOMON was an advocate of realism in photography while NATORI believed that photography should be used as a medium to transmit messages, that it should be the photographer’s role to visualize the intention of the editor who arranges the individual photographs to create stories. Unlike most other photographers who tried to make their names by submitting their work to monthly prize competitions in photo magazines that were then judged by famous photographers such as KIMURA Ihee or Domon Ken, NARAHARA was in a completely different league. Moreover, he had already adopted a stance in which he appeared completely unmoved by praise or criticism.

After he saw ‘Human Land’, Fukushima Tatsuo became determined to play a role in the creation of the new age of photography, leading him devote himself to work as a photo critic. This demonstrates the power that ‘Human Land’ had to hint at a whole new age of photography. As a result of the ‘Human Land’ exhibition, FUKUSHIMA was to take a leading role in gathering together up-and-coming photographers and making plans for a new exhibition, that came to fruition with the ‘Eyes of Ten’ in May 1957. Immediately after the third in this series of exhibitions, in May 1959, NARAHARA, HOSOE Eikoh, TŌMATSU Shomei, KAWADA Kikuji, TANNO Akira and SATŌ Akira joined together to form the ‘self agency’ VIVO (Vivo is Esperanto for ‘life’) photographers’ cooperative; this was an entirely new concept and it was established in an effort to raise the social standing of the profession. Following this, NARAHARA published ‘*Ōkoku*’ (Domains), TOMATSU, ‘*Senryō*’ (Occupation), HOSOE, ‘*Otoko to onna*’ (Man and Woman), and KAWADA, ‘*Chizu*’ (The Map), presenting fresh new images that completely changed postwar photography, and truly established a new age.

Subsequent to the ‘Human Land’ exhibition, things developed rapidly with numerous young photographers gathering around NARAHARA, using the editorial offices of the Rokkor magazine as their base. However, prior to the ‘Human Land’ exhibition in May 1956, NARAHARA belonged to a completely different world.

Chapter II. From the Viewpoint of Avant-garde Art (1) Within the ‘Jitsuzai’ Group

After he entered graduate school in April, 1954, his interest in contemporary art suddenly increased and during the next two or three years he was to make numerous acquaintances who would become lifelong friends. He wrote, ‘I realized that art was the career I should follow. I was opposed to the current image of

art as a tableau, and I rebelled against the investigative approach to art history that was taught at university, instead I was attracted towards modern art, and began to think seriously about the state of artists today.’¹⁰ FUKUSHIMA described his emotions as follows. ‘He said that a new age was making itself known around the world and when he spoke of this, his intellectual eyes blazed with enthusiasm. When he spoke about the work of the artists around the world who had adopted a new stance by which to live through the new age, he appeared tense and passionate.’¹¹

At around this time, OGAWA Seiyō introduced NARAHARA to the artist, MANABE Hiroshi who in turn introduced him to IKEDA Masuo, HORIUCHI Kōji, and Ay-O. In April 1955, MANABE, IKEDA, Ay-O and HORIUCHI formed the ‘Jitsuzai’ group. NARAHARA participated in this up-and-coming group of painters, that denounced established art groups, as a guest member. This group originally formed when HORIUCHI, whose talent had been recognized by the owner of the Formes Gallery, FUKUSHIMA Shigetarō, was attracted by IKEDA’s work that he had noticed in the town and went to visit him. The two of them then invited MANABE to join, then the three of them called on Ay-O. In this way the four members came together.

In June 1955 the ‘Jitsuzai’ group held its first exhibition at Formes Gallery (June 28 - July 2). They had all agreed on the theme, ‘Sensō’ (War). MANABE showed five works, including ‘Hōtai’ (Bandage), Ay-O showed two, including ‘Hana’ (Flower), Horiuchi showed ‘Sensō no fūkei’ (Scenes of War) A. B. C., IKEDA showed ‘*Mahiru no kyōdō bochi*’ (Public Cemetery at High Noon), etc. (figs. 3. 4. 5). It should be noted here that Horiuchi’s and Ikeda’s works originated from the ruins of the same munitions factory in Ōji that NARAHARA used to produce his ‘Stateless Land’. The Ōji munitions factory was originally HORIUCHI’s territory, and after NARAHARA had photographed the ruins of the arsenal in Ōsaka, HORIUCHI took him and the other members of the ‘Jitsuzai’ group to see the ruins in Ōji, where NARAHARA took portraits of MANABE, IKEDA and HORIUCHI.¹² HORIUCHI wrote of it as follows: ‘After traveling for about fifteen minutes in the direction of Akabane from Ōji in Kita Ward, we arrived at the ruins of a factory. Dusk fell and bats were flitting around the old tower, imbuing the place with a strange atmosphere. I used the site to produce sketches for the ‘War’ exhibition while IKEDA crawled around on all fours, among the fragments of brick and debris to create the basic forms for ‘*Mahiru no kyōdō bochi*’ (Public Cemetery at High Noon) or ‘*Fuan na hankyō*’ (Uneasy Reverberations), etc., in which he strove to master the creation of brightly

colored works, with a motif cracked lines that continue beyond the horizon.¹³ In this way, the war-scarred ruins provided the starting point for all their works.

In August, the 'Jitsuzaiisha' group held its second exhibition (Aug 8-13). The theme this time was '*Muningen jidai*' (Unhuman Period). HORIUCHI showed '*Baikin no fūkei*' (Bacteria Landscape), Ay-O 'Unhuman Period', MANABE, '*Maibotsu kōji*' (Burial Work) and 'Hōtai' (Bandage), IKEDA, '*Mahiru no hitobito*' (The People at High Noon), '*Taikutsu na jikan*' (Boring Time), '*Taiyō no shita no kyūsoku*' (Resting Under the Sun), etc.¹⁴ (fig. 6. 8.).

It is worth noting that at this time, NARAHARA purchased a work by Ay-O. It could be said that it was a test his artistic judgment to have bought works by Ay-O and KAWARA On in those days, before their reputations were established. Ay-O held his first solo exhibition, entitled 'Young Friends' in February 1955 at the Takemiya Gallery (fig. 7). The work that NARAHARA selected from the 'Young Friends' exhibition represented a transition towards the work of the 'Unhuman Period' exhibition.¹⁵ At this time Ay-O painted many of his works on boards, and NARAHARA was the first collector of his work on canvas.

The 'Jitsuzaiisha' group was founded in April 1955, holding two exhibitions in June and August of the same year, and it is interesting to note that NARAHARA had wanted to book the gallery for his 'Human Land' exhibition during the same period (around May). The period when NARAHARA was working on the concept for the 'Human Land' and 'Stateless Land', refining them to produce the exhibitions, overlaps with his association with the 'Jitsuzaiisha'. During this period he saw HORIUCHI and IKEDA produce their works on the theme of 'War', inspired by the same ruined factory, and it can be inferred that it was through participation in the discussions with them that he received various hints that enriched his own ideas. Furthermore, the theme of the 'Jitsuzaiisha's' second exhibition, 'Unhuman Period', questioned the existence of humanity, and this leads directly to the theme of 'Human Land'. The style of each of the members was different, HORIUCHI's work was similar to Buffet's, Ay-O was inspired by Léger, while IKEDA's work was described as a 'physiognomy of happy emptiness', but there can be no doubting that NARAHARA was influenced by his friends as each of them showed their work.

The 'Jitsuzaiisha' had originally been formed as a repudiation of established art groups, but in October of the same year, MANABE took part in the NIKI-KAI exhibition, winning the Niki Award and being recommended for membership. This resulted in

increasing criticism within the group and on the November 12, MANABE resigned from the 'Jitsuzaiisha'.¹⁶ The 'Roundtable' column of the December issue of 'Bijutsu hiyō' featured IKEDA's critique of MANABE under the heading, 'From the Standpoint of the Jitsuzaiisha—The Logic of Repudiating Established Organizations'.

Reduced to three after MANABE's defection, the remaining members held the next in their series of exhibitions, entitled 'Group Jitsuzaiisha—Chain Exhibitions', the following year, 1956, at the Formes Gallery. Opening with the 'Horiuchi Kōji Exhibition' (Jan. 24 - 28), it continued with the 'Ikeda Masuo Exhibition' (Jan 31 - Feb 4) then ended with the 'Ay-O Exhibition' (Feb 7 - 11). It was against this background that NARAHARA held his first solo exhibition, 'Human Land' (Matsushima Gallery, May 5 - 11) and the members of the group treated it as one of the 'Jitsuzaiisha' series, all of them helping set up the display. IKEDA reminisced about it as follows:

'On the day we set up the exhibition all the old group turned out to help. It was our first opportunity to see so many of Ikko's works at one time and even today, I cannot forget the surprise and excitement I experienced. Although close to us, he was a quiet man who suddenly showed his great skill and ability to his friends. It was wonderful and brilliant. I was completely ignorant about the photographic world, but I knew straight away that through this exhibition Ikko was going to become a successful photographer. The fact is that 'Human Land' turned an anonymous photographer into the most celebrated photographer overnight. I have never heard of another debut quite as splendid as his.

'Looking back, what I remember about setting up the exhibition was Ikko's indefatigable determination. We started setting up at about six o'clock in the evening and it was past midnight before we finally finished. He was quite uncompromising and had to make everything just right. He completely ignored the fact that our friends and I, who had come to help, were all becoming markedly tired and fed up with it. He kept choosing different pictures for display or changing their order, seemingly endlessly, and after several hours with no progress at all, even though we were driven to despair, he suddenly decided to start again from the beginning...'¹⁷

At this time, NARAHARA's closest friends were the members of the 'Jitsuzaiisha' group. The reason why he decided to use an exhibition to first show his work was because all the people around him were artists and for them, exhibitions were the normal way of showing work. NARAHARA reminisced that 'we all resembled starving tramps as we debated

various “things,” and in this we can feel his love and nostalgia for his friends.¹⁸ After the disbanding of the ‘Jitsuzaisha’ group they got together to produce a small book of poems and pictures entitled ‘*Gonin no katame no heishi*’ (Five One-eyed Soldiers). It was a private publication, printed using a mimeograph and only fifty copies were produced; NARAHARA provided the photograph, ‘Iron Flower’ for the title page, MANABE did the etching and IKEDA provided the poetry and illustrations.¹⁹

The importance of NARAHARA’s friendship with the members of the ‘Jitsuzaisha’ group during the time that he produced the ‘Human Land’ series needs to be reappraised and more emphasis placed upon it. It was only after the ‘Human Land’ exhibition that he was to enlarge his circle of friends in the photographic world through the Rokokor magazine’s office etc.

Chapter III: From the Viewpoint of Avant-garde Art (2) Within ‘Seisakusha kondankai’ (Creators Round-table Conference)

NARAHARA also participated in the ‘Seisakusha kondankai’ group that was founded in April 1955, the same time as the ‘Jitsuzaisha’. He had met one of its members, KAWARA On, before the group was formed. When NARAHARA was still in the first year of graduate school, he had attended an exhibition by KAWARA and later visited him in his studio where he saw all of his work, buying two of the ‘Bathroom Series’. These were three thousand yen each and he paid by installments of one thousand yen each month. NARAHARA was the first collector of KAWARA’s work and they continued to see each other after that.²⁰

KAWARA On showed his ‘*Yokushitsu*’ (Bathroom) series in a solo exhibition at the Takemiya Gallery in February 1954 then in December he showed his ‘*Monookigoya no deki goto*’ (Happening in a Storeroom) at the Hibiya Gallery (figs. 10, 11).²¹ In the ‘Bathroom’ series dismembered human body parts have been objectified and left lying in a bathroom. The ‘Happening in a Storeroom’ series is divided into three sections, ‘Section One: Unease, Section Two: Noise, and Section Three: Rhythm’, all of them depicting pipe-like objects that have been anthropomorphized and overflow within the storeroom. These two series both consist of small monochrome pencil drawings on paper.

It can be said that the reason why NARAHARA collected KAWARA On’s locked room paintings and Ay-O’s pictures of standardized human figures was because they held something in common with his own esthetic. The conceptual theme of ‘Human Land’ was quite similar to that of KAWARA On and Ay-O in the way in which they align themselves with existentialism

and question the existence of mankind so it can be said that NARAHARA shared the same contemporary subjects as theirs. It reflects the contemporary theme of ‘the will to face existence’ that is thought to have been developed through their experiences of the destruction and absurdity of World War II and also by the existentialism of Sartre and Camus.²²

In April 1955 the ‘Seisakusha kondankai’ (Creators Round-table Conference) was formed with the aim of ‘pursuing contemporary Realism’. IKEDA Tatsuo (artist), KUMAGAI Mitsuyuki (pen name of KASU Sanpei, filmmaker) and the TABATA Keiichi (dramatist) invited members of their personal circles to come together to study ways in which disparate genres such as painting, films, theater, etc., could be integrated to create new works. Among the artists were ISHII Shigeo, IIDA Yoshikuni, KAWARA On, AKUTAGAWA Saori and MAEDA Jōsaku, plus NARAHARA who joined as a photographer. They carried out regular research sessions, publishing a newsletter called ‘Realism’ and were active from 1955 to the end of 1957.

NARAHARA published an article, entitled, ‘Edward Weston’s Road’ in ‘Realism No. 9’ (1956). At around the same time that he produced ‘Human Land’, he also worked on a series entitled ‘Trees’²³ that is thought to have been inspired by the Weston’s work in the way it concentrates on living things. However, although he was attracted by Weston’s work, in this article NARAHARA points out the limitations of Weston’s Realism. He quoted Weston’s diary in which he wrote, ‘The camera should be used for the recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself,’ but then went on to point out the limitations of this. ‘To say that “the camera sees more than the eye,” appears to be merely an extension of a trust and reliance in a physical mechanism. For Weston, the question of Realism is simply a way of the fixing of the reality of an object. It could be said that in a certain context, that this does not go beyond a question of methodology.’ ‘This stance, that reveals itself in his work, can be said to merely bow passively before the mystery of the universe or life in nature, “a fixed mirror” as if it were. Unfortunately, there is no sign of the actuality of ‘modern ego’ grasping things actively in a decisive confrontation with self. ...The task that lies before us now is to release photography’s great strength, its documentary power, from Weston’s limited recognition of the world into a more active sphere, this is the challenge facing Realism photography today. We must grasp the mirror that has been brandished in our hands.’ NARAHARA points out that Weston lacked ‘the actuality of “modern ego” grasping things actively in a decisive

confrontation with self,' and set himself the target of 'to release photography's great strength, its documentary power, from Weston's limited recognition of the world into a more active sphere.'

So, in what way did NARAHARA set about challenging this problem through 'Human Land'? In 'Realism' No. 10, he published an important essay, entitled, 'Concerning My Methodology', in which he talks about 'Human Land'.²⁴

'I believe that in pursuit of realism in reportage photography the process of presenting an exhaustively thorough depiction of the subject's exterior form is absolutely vital as this will gradually lay bare its internal form. ...In the meticulous grasp of "Land", I bore in mind its relationship with the rest of the world from which it has been isolated, and tried to abstract the lives of the people who lived there... A photographer thinks through the act of taking photographs. By photographing two 'lands', I wanted to think about living today. For this reason, my intention in this work was to produce an essay that went beyond a simple reporting of the facts. It is also necessary to aim to create a kind of personal document. ...I believe that an aggressive stance towards the subject can make it possible to give birth to a document with actuality'.

Whereas Weston did not go beyond the passive act of fixing the reality of an object, NARAHARA described his technique as being a 'personal document', adopting an 'aggressive stance towards his subject', aiming for a more active actuality, a subjective reality, through painstaking photography. His intention being to create 'an objective existence within a subjective structure.'

He also participated in a discussion with six others that was published at the end of this article; this was a study meeting, organized by the 'Seisakusha kondankai' to discuss NARAHARA's work, the participants being the film critics YOSHIHARA Junpei, KASU Sanpei, FUJIHISA Masahiko, KANDA Teizo, Masugi Tatsuhiko, and the dramatist/theatre director, TABATA Keikichi. In 'Concerning My Methodology', he offered a deeper insight into his work than he did for the 'Human Land' exhibition, the text has a logical structure and we can see that he has put his intentions clearly into words. NARAHARA took part in several 'Seisakusha kondankai' discussions on the subject of Realism from April 1955. He made various observations on a form of Realism that existed under entirely different circumstances to the Realism of DOMON Ken.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that when talking about the origins of the concept for 'Human Land' in this important essay, NARAHARA touched

on René Clément's film, 'The Damned'. This is a French movie that depicts a drama of life and death among the crew of a Nazi U-boat isolated in the middle of the ocean. This setting, in a small space cut off by the ocean, is something that is shared by 'Human Land'. We can tell from the fact that NARAHARA alludes to this movie at both the beginning and end of the essay, that it remained in his mind throughout his writing. NARAHARA appears to have been attracted by the setting of the movie, together with the reality of sound and vision which was used to create a psychological affect, feeling that it was a good example of a 'document with actuality.' The main difference between the two is that compared to the horrific and helpless conditions portrayed in the movie, NARAHARA's 'Human Land' presented lives that were filled with hope.

At the time, NARAHARA had considered becoming a film director. He was well-versed in a wide range of fields, including art, literature, music and movies; he attended exhibitions of contemporary French art, watched concerts by foreign musicians and reacted perceptively to the foreign cultural trends that were being rapidly introduced during that period. Movies, together with literature, were a valuable source of inspiration to NARAHARA. 'Human Land' was more than just a title, it represents the a theme of the work, but it originated from a book by the same name (*Terre des hommes*) by the French author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry who was famous for the book, 'Little Prince'. Saint-Exupéry, who was also a pilot, wrote, 'It was overcast but across the plain there shone, like the stars, a few scattered lights In that ocean of darkness each one signaled the miracle of a human consciousness.' In the same way that Saint-Exupéry looked down on this miracle, NARAHARA looked at the people who existed on the land. Looking down with loving eyes, this macroscopic vision of 'Human Land' was one that would remain a key element of NARAHARA's work. At the beginning of 'Human Land', he added a quote by Paul Éluard, 'There is no miracle beyond memory and hope, but tomorrow will create today's life.' This was because he believed that no other words could transmit his intentions so succinctly.

In this way, 'Human Land' was born from a context totally removed from the world of photography. NARAHARA developed his thoughts on 'Human Land' through his interactions with both the 'Jitsuzaiisha' group and the 'Seisakusha kondankai'.

Final Chapter

The year after the 'Human Land' exhibition, NARAHARA set out once more at the request of the

Chūōkōron-sha publishers to add to the body of work. This time he took with him a new 25 millimeter wide-angle lens that had only just been put on sale, allowing him to photograph from viewpoints that he had felt were necessary during his first shoot but which had been physically impossible to achieve. With the addition of these new works, the final version of 'Human Land' was completed.²⁵

What is it that imbues 'Human Land' with such a powerful feeling of substance? The cold concrete of the underground tunnel displays a firm sense of presence that holds people at bay. The discarded wheel lying there provides a glimpse of human activity, quietly asserting a lost utility. The faint shadow of a person in the distance provides a contrast with the cement wall. NARAHARA also focused on the violent spray of the waves crashing against the seawall. In the movie, 'The Damned', the ocean beats mercilessly against the insensate, hard steel of the submarine and his photographs bring to mind the same fear we experience in the scene where the submarine slips beneath the vast expanse of the ocean. He used a bird's-eye view on a stormy day to create the impression of a battleship at sea. In addition, the overpowering sense of presence displayed by the miners forms part of the attraction of this work. Covered in coal dust, they present a surrealistic image, appearing to be some other form of life, but transforming into 'humans' once more inside the bathroom. This metamorphosis from object to human within the 'bathroom' space brings to mind the work of KAWARA On. The object-like humans within the bathroom exist here, too.

NARAHARA did not empathize easily with his human subjects; rather he shows them as individual human existences. Even though he depicts them in severe conditions, he does not try to condemn these, neither does he use a shallow lyricism, instead his photographs present the entirety of 'Battleship Island' and its inhabitants from an objective perspective. NARAHARA maintains a unique psychological distance from things. After the war ended and the skies, that had been filled with bombers, became empty, he realized that there was not just a single world; he gained a viewpoint of the world from both extremes. Furthermore, the law, which his father had practiced all his life and NARAHARA had also studied, looks at people's actions from a strictly objective, godlike position, judging everything according to the yardstick of the law. As a boy he used to hear people telephoning his father late at night with grim stories connected to his work, but he learned how to distance himself from these and look upon them with a cool eye. The fact that he had to keep changing

schools seems to have also contributed to his ability to remain detached and keep things at arms length.

Additional factors were his outstanding power of imagination, the large scale on which he worked and the scrupulous attention he paid to detail in his compositions. He carefully studied the significance of the lands he was to photograph and based the work on a clear concept. He photographed the same apartment, looking down from the same spot both in the day and at night, he produced overall views of 'Battleship Island' both into the sun and with direct light, he photographed potted plants as a symbol of the inhabitants' desire for greenery, he stressed the way in which the sea created an isolated environment, he photographed the 'boat' that was the sole connection with the outside world. In this way he showed the strength of the will to live displayed by the inhabitants, a theme that ran through the entire series. 'Children laugh everywhere'—the lively children served as a symbol of the indomitable spirit of human beings. The people who lived on 'Battleship Island' said that it was 'the best place in the world to live', one of the inhabitants of Kurokamimura Village had a slogan hanging on his wall that read, 'Napoleon was born on the island of Corsica'. They lived with pride. NARAHARA never lost his objectivity but we can detect a warmth in the way he looked upon them. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's affectionate gaze can also be discerned here.

The dichotomies of 'nature versus mankind', 'social structure versus mankind' have been firmly grasped in 'Human Land', the unique, macroscopic viewpoint that he uses to photograph 'sights of civilization' that were to become his lifetime theme, was already clearly visible at this time. More importantly, he possessed an overpowering strength of visual expression. His refined sense is can be felt throughout, he interacted with artists of the avant-garde movement and exposed himself to diverse art works, developing a good eye for beauty and it can be said that his photographic aesthetics were already apparent in this work. The central core of the work of the photographer, NARAHARA Ikko was already firmly established with 'Human Land'.

NARAHARA's second solo exhibition, 'Domains' (1958), followed the same two-part structure that he had used in 'Human Land', contrasting the world that exists within a monastery with that of a women's prison, and for this he received the Japan Photo Critics Association's Newcomer's Award. He then moved to Europe for three years, basing himself in Paris and publishing a collection of work under the title, 'Europe. Where Time Has Stopped' (1967). This was

his first photo book, the work brought together as if it were a collection of poems and he described it as being 'a private talk on Europe'. This book went on to receive the Japan Photo Critics Association's Artist Award, the Minister of Education Award for Fine Arts and the Mainichi Art Award. In Spain he photographed the vivid battle of life and death within the bullring, the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona, the white walls, blue skies and song of Andalusia, as well as the cave dwellings of Granada that allow us to glimpse the original form of the village, capturing the radiance of life with his whole body and a clear eye, bringing it together in his second book, entitled 'España Grand Tarde' (1969). Next he moved to the U.S.A., basing himself in New York for four years, where he confronted the vastness of the American continent, and publishing the results under the title, 'Where Time Has Vanished' (1975).

After 'Human Land' NARAHARA moved his 'venue' to Europe or the U.S.A. but he continued to record sights from the civilizations created by mankind. These 'Human Lands', presented through a poetic sensibility all display a macroscopic perspective, as if human's efforts have been viewed from the farthest reaches of space, and yet at the same time the spaces that he creates contain an intimacy that naturally draws us towards them. They fill us with a strange sensation, as if we look through 'the 'sky in our hands'.

If we rethink 'Human Land', that was to form the core of NARAHARA's work, we are able to grasp its original form. However, even his starting point, 'Human Land' itself is filled with an enigma that cannot be easily unraveled.

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Translated by Gavin Frew

NOTES:

1. p. 253
2. "Showa shashin - zen shigoto 9 Narahara Ikko" [Showa Period Photographs — The Complete Works 9, NARAHARA Ikko] p. 157
3. NARAHARA Ikko 'Daisan no Shinjin - seikatsu to iken' [The Third Newcomer - Life and Opinion] "Foto Art", Feb. 1959, p. 142
4. "Asahi Camera", Nov. 1960, p. 158
5. p. 264
6. FUKUSHIMA Tatsuo 'Aojiroi hibana Narahara Ikko' [Blue-white Sparks, NARAHARA Ikko] "Gekkan Camera", Feb. 1957, pp. 111-113
7. SHIGEMORI Koen 'Narahara Ikko no rezon dētoru ni tsuite' [Concerning NARAHARA Ikko's Raison D'Étre] "Camera", Aug. 1956, pp. 114-118
8. KIMURA Ihee/DOMON Ken 'Hito to Sakuhin' [People and Works] "Sankei Camera", Sep. 1956, pp. 140-141
9. NATORI Yōnosuke 'Ima mondai no kumishashin to rensaku ni tsuite' [Concerning Controversial Contemporary Issues in Composite Photographs and Photographic Series] "Foto Art", Aug. 1956, p. 80
10. "Foto Art", Feb. 1959, p. 141
11. FUKUSHIMA Tatsuo, op. cit.
12. p. 263
13. HORIUCHI Kōji 'Kaisō no Ikeda Masuo' [Recollections of IKEDA Masuo] "Mainichigraph derukusu bessatsu, Ikeda Masuo geijutsu to ningen", pp. 74-75
14. "Atoerie" Oct. 1955, pp. 116-117
15. p. 273- fig. 10
16. "Bijutsu hiho", Dec. 1955, p. 62
17. IKEDA Masuo 'IKKO to watashi' [Ikko and I] "Rokugatsu no kaze", No. 16, Dec. 1976
18. NARAHARA Ikko 'Shashin ni fureta koro, debyu-saku no koro (1)' [When I Came Into Contact with Photography, At the Time of my Debut Works (1)] "Camera Jidai", Jan. 1966, pp. 40-41
19. pp. 262- fig. 4
20. MATSUI Kakushin 'Kūkan ni jikan o kuwaeta yojigen kankaku no me, Narahara Ikko', [A Four-dimensional Eye in Which Time is Added to Space, NARAHARA Ikko] "Jinbutsu jūikkei", Aokishoten, 1997, p. 191
21. "Bijutsu hiho", May 1955, pp. 18-24
22. '1953 nen raitoappu — atarashii sengo bijutsuzō ga mietekita', [1953 Lightup — Beginning to Recognize New Postwar Art], Meguro Museum of Art - Tama Art University, 1996, 'Sengo Nippon no riarizumu 1945-1960', Nagoya City Art Museum, 1998
23. 'Narahara Ikko - rensaku ki sono tataikai to haisha no sugata' [NARAHARA Ikko - Series. Tree. The Fight and the Defeated], "Rokkor", no. 20, Dec. 1956, pp. 20-23
24. NARAHARA Ikko 'Watashi no hōhō ni tsuite' [Concerning My Methodology], "Realism" No. 10, Seisakusha Kondankai, 1956, pp. 16-17
25. After the exhibition 'Ningen no tochi' (Human Land), consisting of 102 pictures in May 1956, the series was published in "Chūōkōron" in May 1957, covering 19 gravure pages. At Chūōkōron's request, NARAHARA once more traveled to take further pictures for the series. The series was featured again in 'Ōkoku' [Man and His Land], ('Eizo no gendai No. 1', Chūōkōron-sha, 1971) together with the Ōkoku series. In 1987 the photo book, 'Ningen no tochi' [Human Land], (Libroport), was published, containing 108 works.