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Special Theme: The Universal Museum

The "Universal Museum" exhibition at Minpaku was first planned for Autumn 2020, but was delayed by the global coronavirus pandemic. Despite this continuing pandemic, the exhibition was successfully held in Autumn 2021 with numerous safety measures in place. Our guest editor for the theme of this special issue is Theresia Hofer, who was a research visitor at Minpaku in 2018-19, and again in 2019-20 [Newsletter Editor].

Ways of Being in the World

Theresia Hofer
University of Bristol

By and large museums have been "show and see" cultural and educational institutions, a situation that needs changing, according to Kojiro Hirose, Associate Professor and curator of tactile exhibits at Minpaku. In his latest exhibition and through the concept of the Universal Museum that he coined, he champions the experience of exhibits and museums through touch, as well as through all other senses.

"Please do not touch!" is a meme often encountered in museums, and one that has become familiar in other places over the past two years, due to the coronavirus pandemic. In fact, the few touchable objects found in museums have largely been removed during this period, and it is still uncertain when they will be back. In the Minpaku special exhibition "*UNIVERSAL MUSEUM" – Exploring the New Field of Tactile Sensation* (Sept. 2 – Nov. 30, 2021), over 100 objects could all be freely touched, from the opening section with a replica of the famous Kofukuji Buddha, and throughout the main section, for which contemporary art objects and installations were commissioned from Japanese artists or were drawn from Minpaku collections. The exhibition caters not to any "niche group" of blind people or the usual audience of sighted people; instead care has been given to the experiences of as many visitor groups as possible, across a variety of senses and ages.

Hirose has not been alone in pointing out how museums – as European enlightenment institutions and later as paragons of modernization and nation states across the globe – privilege the sense of vision. But what happens when the link between museums and vision is consciously severed and other senses are foregrounded? How do visitors react and feel when they are no longer discouraged from touching museum objects? What role can anthropology museums more broadly play in giving more space to multiple sensory perceptions of the world?

The discipline of anthropology and its associated museums are generally dedicated to deep and contextualized understandings of humanity's full range of social, symbolic and material expressions, and the variable perceptions and

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experiences thereof. If this is accepted and as museums prepare for the post-pandemic era, we need to engage fully with the above questions. I personally believe we ought to embrace the new "Universal Museum" as a natural progression in attempts by museums to represent more diverse ways of being in the world, and making sense of the world.

What is the Universal Museum? An Interview with Kojiro Hirose

Kojiro Hirose
National Museum of Ethnology

Theresia Hofer
University of Bristol

Kojiro Hirose is Associate Professor at the National Museum of Ethnology. At Kyoto University, Hirose studied *biwa-hoshi* (blind minstrels) and *itako* (blind shamans), who worked as entertainers and religionists in early modern times. For his doctoral studies, he focused on new religious movements in modern Japan, with firsthand research into the welfare activities of religious groups, and published a book: *A Welfare Theory of Human Emancipation* (2001, in Japanese). At Minpaku, Hirose has studied tactile exhibits and exhibition making, making use of his visually-disabled situation. He also organized the thematic exhibitions *Touch and Grow Rich: You Can Touch Our Museum* (2006) and *The Universe of Braille – Celebrating 200 years of Louis Braille* (2009). Lectures presented in the USA, Germany, and other countries, contributed to an essay "The Richness of Touch: The Paradoxical Meanings of Disability in Japanese Culture", *The East Asian Library Journal* 13: 59 – 85, 2010. He continues to study and write about Japanese new religions.

In February 2020, Theresia Hofer (TH) interviewed Kojiro Hirose (KH) about his concept of the "Universal Museum". Excerpts from the interview follow (see also the *Exhibition Report* by Hirose).

TH: Am I right in thinking that you have been the first to use the English term "Universal Museum" as a loan word in Japanese, using it to refer to museums that welcome people with different sensorial dominances?

KH: Yes, that's right.

TH: Please tell us a bit about how and why you chose the term "Universal Museum"? What or who inspired you in this choice? And has the English term advantages over Japanese equivalents?

KH: In Japan in the 1990s, we began to move away from the concept of "barrier free" which was very popular in Japan then. For example, in order to access buildings or public facilities, some kind of slope or tactile maps or tactile signs should be installed.

TH: Or, say, sounds at crossings or metro stations.

KH: Yes, exactly. In the 1990s, those systems were installed in many places in Japan. But Universal Design is something else. While the barrier free movement was targeted at disabled or elderly people, Universal Design targets all people. The Universal Design concept spread from the early 21st century.

I got my job here at Minpaku in 2001. At that time the number of people visiting museums was decreasing and many museums were thinking about how to get more and new visitors. Some people said, we should think about the people who thus far were not able to come to the museum in 20th century. Usually, elderly people, disabled people and also foreigners, were mentioned as new target audiences. The Japan Museum Association, with headquarters in Tokyo, also got involved, and said that from now on, we should think of and create museums that are "kind to all people". In Japanese they used the phrase *hito-ni yasahi*, which is the Japanese translation of "Universal Design". But I think using the term "kind to" is not so suitable here.

TH: What did they mean with this formulation?

KH: Exactly! While I think the term "kind to" is very nice, the subject who is the actor is assumed to be "normal people". I was more taken with the concept of "inclusive design", which also started to gain popularity in Japan around that time. Some product designers had studied in the United Kingdom and came back to Japan and informed us about it. Inclusive design is a very good design policy, but still this concept and term were a little different from my own perspective. Inclusive is nice, but again: who includes whom?

So for me, the term "universal" had to be there. When I got my job here at Minpaku in 2001, I began use this term, especially after 2002 – 2003, when I had a chance to study in the United States at Princeton. I had to use English terminology a lot, rather than Japanese. In the United States, at places such as Metropolitan Museum and the Smithsonian Institutions, everybody was thinking about Universal Design in museums. I said how about the term "Universal Museum"? They said it's good, but it's not so popular among English

speaking people. So I kept thinking about this. When I came back to Japan, I first used "Universal Design Museum". But for Japanese people, a shorter term was better, so I chose "Universal Museum". Now my hope is to propagate the concept of Universal Museum from Japan to the world.

TH: I see, so with the trip to Princeton you had exposure to the English terminology and also thought the term was better kept in English, even in the Japanese context. Do you ever translate the term "Universal Museum" to Japanese, or consider using other terms in Japanese for it?

KH: In Japan in the 1990s, Universal Design was translated into Japanese, as *hito ni yasashii*, literally "kind or friendly to people". I thought kind to is not so good and preferred to use instead a Japanese definition of Universal Design as *daremo ga tanoshimeru*. *Daremo* means "everybody", and *tanoshimeru* "can enjoy". First I used *daremo ga tanoshimeru hakubutskan*: "The museum that everyone can enjoy". These days I prefer to explain the Universal Musuem as a museum where people can use with "a variety of senses" (*kankaku no tayousei*).

TH: What inspired you in this new definition?

KH: When I said a "museum that everyone can enjoy", some people asked after experiencing my work: "You are trying to create a museum that visually impaired people can enjoy – that's great, but how about deaf people, or wheelchair users?" So I needed to clarify that indeed the movement of Universal Museum is mainly about visually impaired people. That is because my target is to change the traditional museum, which is entirely based on vision. This needs to change and I feel we have to open up the museum from this experience through only one sense – namely vision – to one using different senses, including smell and also body sensations.

TH: To me there seems to be an inherent tension between the word universal (as very broad concept encompassing all and everything) and the still pivotal role you attribute to blind people in the Universal Museum. Can you tell us bit more about the philosophy behind your concept of the Universal Museum? And why is it that visually impaired and blind people – you also call them tactile people – are to spearhead the Universal Museum movement?

KH: Originally I am a historian and I majored in Japanese pre-modern history. So with this knowledge, I wanted to re-evaluate the modern age and the meaning of modernization. The Museum was born as a symbol of modernization and it was based on seeing. The Universal Museum is quite different from that kind of classic museum, because it is basically based on touching and the use of other senses. Creating a Universal Museum implies an opposition of modernization. This historical point of view is important for me.

TH: Can you tell us about your next steps?

KH: In general people know Universal Design but they don't know the Universal Museum. So I want to propagate the Universal Museum, both practically and theoretically. The next big step for me is this coming special exhibition in this fall – in conjunction with the timing of the Tokyo Paralympics [2020/2021]. As you know it's an exhibition in the special exhibition hall at Minpaku. This is a separate building from the main building. So this will be just a first step to create a truly Universal Museum.

TH: But what about the rest of the museum? Is there appetite to realize the Universal Museum in the entirety of Minkapu?

KH: There is a lot of support for this here at Minpaku as a Universal Museum. The terminology is still one relying on the idea of an able-bodied subject "being kind" *hito ni yasashii* [人に優しい], to disabled people. That's in a manifesto from 2007 or 2008. So it is getting a little old. I hope the upcoming exhibition will move things in the right direction… inspire some new thought on this matter. We will also publish a catalogue, and that outlines and demonstrates a lot of fresh thinking on the new concept of Universal Museum (see Daniels' review). As you know, 2020 is the year Japan will host the Olympic and Paralympic games in Tokyo. I think the Olympics are also a symbol of modernization. The movement of the Olympics emphasizes the abilities of human beings. But what is the meaning of ability? The opposite of that used to be disability. I believe now is the time we need to re-think the meanings of ability and disability.

Theresia Hofer is Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the University of Bristol. Her research spans medical and linguistic anthropology in the Tibetan and Himalayan region as well as anthropological museum exhibits in Europe and Japan. She has curated *Bodies in Balance – Art of Tibetan Medicine* for the Rubin Museum in New York (2014) and is a collaborating researcher for the upcoming *Homo Loquens* exhibition at Minpaku (2022). Her publications include *Bodies in Balance – The Art of Tibetan Medicine* (Rubin Museum and UWP 2014), *Medicine and Memory in Tibet: Amchi Physicians in an Age of Reform* (UWP 2018). She is currently working on *Hand Signs from Lhasa*, a monograph on the social, political and economic dynamics in the lives of deaf Tibetans and their communication practices in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region, China.

Universal Museum and Touch Exhibition Review, from a Deaf Researcher

Keiko Sagara
National Museum of Ethnology

Keiko Sagara gained her MPhil from the University of Central Lancashire in the UK in Sign Language Linguistics with a focus on the numeral system of Japanese Sign Language and from a cross-linguistic perspective (completed in 2014). Her PhD from the Graduate University for Advanced Studies (SOKENDAI, 2021) was on diachronic change in Japanese Sign Language, Taiwan Sign Language, and South Korean Sign Language, with a focus on numerals and kinship terms. She now studies semantic change in these three sign languages and works as a sign language researcher at Minpaku.

The exhibition "*UNIVERSAL MUSEUM*" – *Exploring the New Field of Tactile Sensation* on show in Minpaku's Special Exhibition Hall (Sept. 2–Nov. 30, 2021) was unique in that all exhibits of the over 100 objects and installations can be touched. I write this exhibition review from the position of being a Deaf researcher and wish to share my experience of three specific objects in the show – a replica of the head of the Kofukuji Buddha, a work on the finger alphabet, and an installation where one can "touch sounds". I take my experience of these installations as a basis for a few reflections on the importance of the Universal Museum and how it connects the world in which visually impaired and deaf people live.

The first thing I saw when I entered the exhibition was a replica of the head of the Kofukuji Buddha, a National Treasure of Japan, which we could here touch on the front and also on the sides and back. The Buddha's ears had been burnt off in a fire and were partially missing. When I touched the missing parts, they felt rough and even painful. It was the first time I had ever felt pain when touching an exhibit. I was thinking about the painfulness of touch, and I remembered an experience that made me feel it. It was when I touched the body of my deceased father. When I touched his forehead, I felt the difference in temperature between his body and mine, the sadness, the love. It was a feeling that could only be understood through touch, and I will never forget how much it relieved my heart. Perhaps it is a

Author touching the Kofukuji Buddha head at the entrance to the Universal Museum special exhibit at Minpaku (Osugi, 2021)

blessing that I can remember my father by touching this Buddha's head.

As this exhibition was curated and devised by a visually impaired colleague and the exhibits did not have visually recognisable titles near them, sighted visitors have to refer to a list at a short distance away to find out what each object or installation is about. The titles in braille were on, or near the exhibits, which made me wish I could read braille. It may be the intention of the organisers to make us feel that way. Furthermore, as all objects can be touched, visitors can experience a variety of tactile sensations, such as rugged, smooth or bumpy. Rather than being preoccupied with the titles of the objects and art works, I began to enjoy the tactile sensations that came with feeling each of them.

In the exhibition hall there were also displays dealing with fingerspelling, which is often used by deaf people. Within a set of black boxes visitors could touch different handshapes used to spell letters and sign numbers by deaf Japanese. Visitors could then try and guess which braille letter of the Japanese hiragana script each handshape corresponded to. As a person who often uses finger-spelling in my daily life, I could easily understand the handshapes by touching even if I couldn't see them. In fact, there are deaf-blind people who understand fingerspelling and sign language by touching another's hands and arms and who communicate with each other in this way. It was an experience that gave me a glimpse into the world of deaf-blind people.

Handshapes used by Japanese deaf people are touched inside black boxes. Visitors could then try and match them with braille letters on the outside (Sagara, 2021)

Last, there was a "Touch the Sound" section in the exhibition hall. Here visitors are informed that, "This is an installation that deaf people cannot enjoy directly." They were then asked: "Why don't you change your way of thinking and think that sound is not something to listen to with your ears, but something to touch with your body?" In fact, being deaf, I could not enjoy one aspect of the installation, which was an on-screen activity where visitor heard sounds of various sports and matched it to pictures of those sports. But there was also a table with bell shaped clay art works, where I could feel the sound by tapping a number of them. I could touch the sound. By tapping, I could feel the echo in my palm and could feel the sound. It reminded me of when I was once involved in a project inviting a deaf comedian from the USA to Japan. He is Deaf but loves music and one of his shows had a scene where he played xylophone. I remembered him saying "I can enjoy music even if I can't hear". I can feel the sound of the xylophone by striking it like this. If you think you can't enjoy music because you can't hear, you are wrong. The "sound" that flows for deaf people may be different from the sound that hearing people hear. It is good to be different.

"Touch the Sound" installation (Sagara, 2021)

A universal museum; a museum for everyone. I was impressed by the layout of the exhibition, which included many spaces for hands-on experiences as well as for touch. It is an exhibition that gives us new insights into things that we used to just look at. Here visitors cannot understand unless they touch.

Deaf and visually impaired people live in very different worlds. Deaf people rely on sight to live their lives, while visually impaired people rely on hearing to live theirs. The fact that they can enjoy the same exhibition, even though they live in completely different worlds, is because the exhibition was presented in a space accessible to everyone by means of the sense of touch. As deaf people talk with their hands and visually impaired people use their fingers to understand the written word, perhaps the key to each other's lives is the "hand". I hope that the Universal Museum will help to bring these two distant worlds closer together; that the conversations and connections between them will open a door to a new world, one they have perhaps never been aware of before.

Book Review: "*UNIVERSAL MUSEUM*" – *Exploring the New Field of Tactile Sensation*

Inge Daniels
University of Oxford

Over the past 18 months Covid-19 has made people around the world hyper alert to the danger of diseases entering our bodies through touch. As social distancing and hand-sanitising have become routine, anxieties about touching material surfaces and also other people (through handshakes, hugging, kissing) have not waned. Increasingly questions are being asked about the long-term impact of these changes; will our new bodily regimes governed by "do-not-touch" rules fundamentally alter all human interactions?

In this global context, the publication of "*UNIVERSAL MUSEUM*" – *Exploring the New Field of Tactile Sensation* could not have been timelier. This richly illustrated, edited volume accompanied an exhibition of the same name that opened in September 2021 at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in Osaka. Against the

backdrop of the 2020 (2021) Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo, its premise is to question the widespread disregard for touch in the museum context. By actively engaging visually impaired (and other disabled) citizens in the creation of both the book and the exhibition, it also highlights the importance of haptic, embodied forms of knowledge in creating a more inclusive society.

The design of the book cover sets the tone; the title consist of a clever amalgamation of Japanese katakana script and braille, while it also contains an artwork, that by superimposing braille onto colour strips, confronts us with our constant blurring of touch and vision when sensing the world. In an introductory section, the editor and curator Hirose Kojiro, a visually impaired anthropologist based at Minpaku, rather poignantly refers to himself as a modern *biwa hoshi* – blind, lute-playing priests who from the 13th century travelled all over Japan performing and reciting (war) poems. Through his "universal museum" research, study group and networking activities, he has for over a decade tirelessly endeavoured not only to make museum experiences throughout Japan more inclusive, but also to change negative attitudes towards disability more generally. He uses the term "universal" because he is keen to also include able-bodied people in the debate and entice everyone to ask questions about the emphasis placed on vision in exhibitions (and in society at large), while considering the benefits of more multi-sensory, embodied approaches.

The volume and the exhibition reminded me of the work of British sociologist Kevin Hetherington who, more than two decades ago, studied the experience of visually impaired museum visitors in the UK. In a seminal 2003 article, he questioned "western/modern" forms of subjectivity that centre around sight and cultural tendencies to essentialise "seeing as knowing" (K. Hetherington, 2003, "Spatial textures: place, touch and praesentia". *Environment and Planning* 35: 1933-1944). He argued instead that when participants were allowed to touch museum displays they experienced a mingling of self and object that produces an embodied, "proximal" type of knowledge (as opposed to representative, "distal" knowledge linked with vision). Herrington further zooms in on the place-making capacities of haptic ways of knowing the world, of which touch is of course just one source, and invites us to challenge places of "meaning and representation" such as museums by attending to multi-sensory experiences of place. This challenge has formed the starting point for my own research and curatorial practice that scrutinizes the ubiquitous "do not touch" policies in exhibitions and experiments with multi-sensory, immersive display techniques (Daniels 2019; see biography in margin). Similarly, the contributors to "*UNIVERSAL MUSEUM" – Exploring the New Field of Tactile Sensation* demonstrate the transformative potential of haptic knowledge to turn exhibitions but also community events and a range of other public outreach projects into more inclusive and participatory encounters.

The remainder of the book is divided into eight chapters that introduce the reader to an impressive range of projects; some feature in the exhibition but others showcase independent but related haptic workshops and events. I cannot do justice to all these inspiring contributions here, but in the remainder of my review, I will briefly summarise some of the key topics, while listing a selection of examples that I found the most beguiling. Overall, the focus of the volume is on innovative devices and methods that encourage people to actively participate in exhibitions, workshops and other events through in-depth haptic exploration with the hands. Throughout the book, we are thus introduced to a myriad of examples of original sculptures, artworks and books that invite creative explorations of minute details of human, animal and other forms and textures through touch.

One delineated group of objects are "touch replicas" of valuable objects. A video of Hirose, the editor of the book, touching a replica of the giant Buddha Head of the Kofukuji Temple in Nara offers fascinating insights into the multi-sensory benefits of these kind of displays (pp. 44-45) (youtube/rifkU9obBY8). New technologies such as 3D printing repeatedly feature as they have simplified the production of complex replicas such as archaeological findings (pp. 118-119) or Buddhist statues (pp. 122-123). A slightly different take on "touch replicas" are tactile reinterpretations of famous paintings such as Munch's *The Scream or Vermeer's Girl with the Pearl Earring* that were produced by visually impaired people using ceramics (pp. 160-161) or textiles, cardboard and other craft materials (pp. 162-165). Similarly, an installation of tactile photography produced by a sighted photographer and visual impaired

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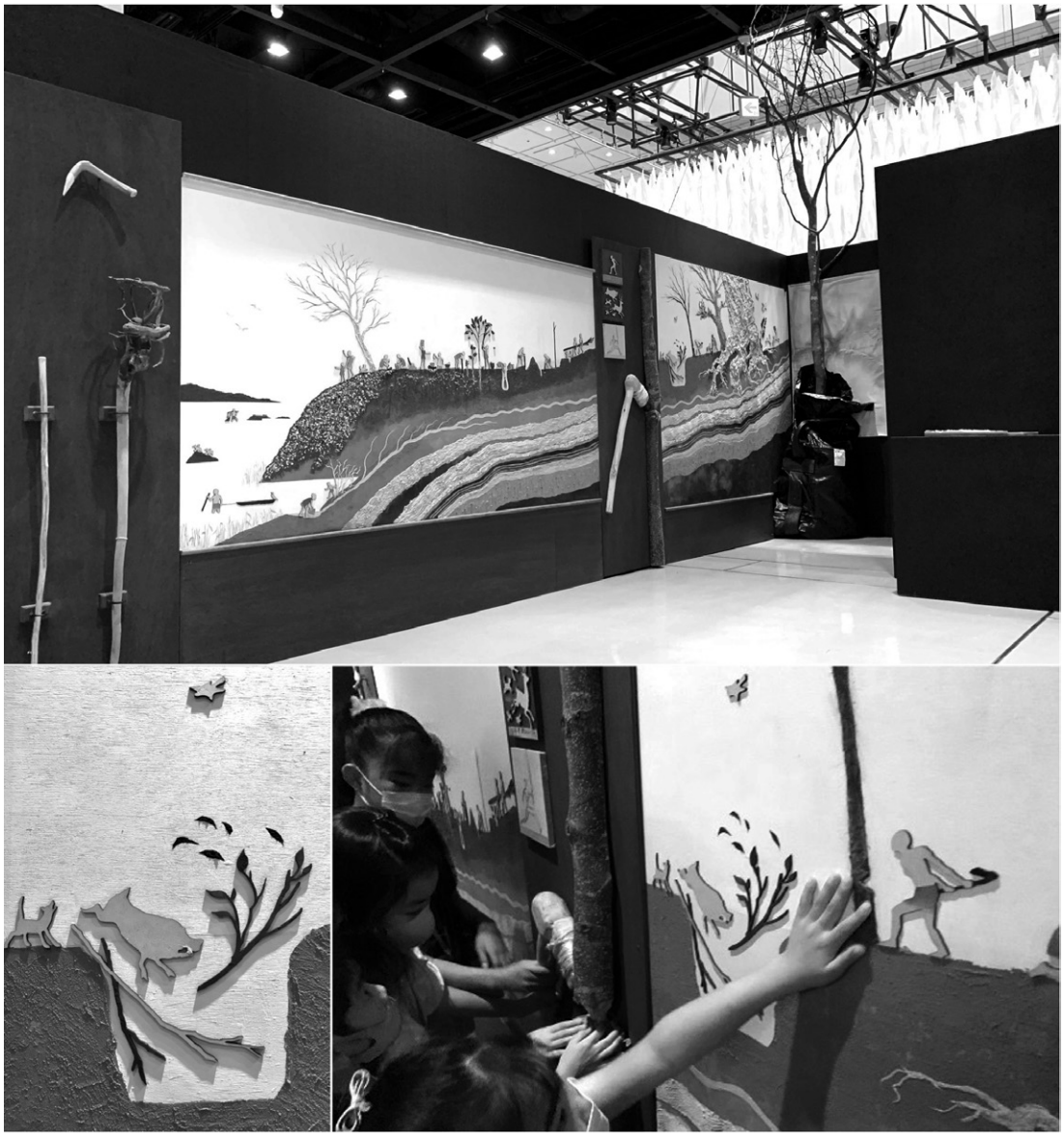
collaborators cleverly intertwines vison and touch. In this case, standard prints of photographs are paired with tactile embossed copies, while written texts and visual guides are also displayed in braille (pp. 156-157).

A final group of devices discussed in the book that merit attention are a variety of tactile maps that shrink large environments to a human scale so visitors can grasp what places "feel" like, through touch. Most examples such as a ceramic map of the Shigaraki pottery region (pp. 70-71) invite touch by the hand. However, in my view, one "tactile map" stands out: a miniature replica of an ancient burial mount (*kofun*) turned inside out, with visitors encouraged to lie inside in order to feel its contours with their whole body (pp. 116-117). A number of other projects also experiment with bodily touch. These include several outdoor walks that reimagine the built environment, whether a city neighbourhood (pp. 78-80) or a dam (pp. 82-85), by moving the body through space. Similarly, an installation consisting of 2000 pieces of textile suspended from the ceiling (pp. 94-95) and two sound installations using clay bells (pp. 138-141) engulf visitors as they move and feel their way through the space or while sounds vibrate through their bodies. These final examples are innovative and important because by creating immersive spatial environments they transcend sensory bias and do not deny visitors any kind of "haptic contact".



Photos of an art and archaeology display, "Touch and Feel Life on a Jomon Shell Mound", at the exhibition. General view and visitors with the collage "Tree on the Shell Mound" by S. Aki, and detail of the surface (Photos: S. Aki and P. J. Matthews)

Exhibition

Development of the "Universal Museum" as a Global Concept

Special Exhibition "UNIVERSAL MUSEUM" – Exploring the New Field of Tactile Sensation

September 2 – November 30, 2021

At Minpaku, we held a special exhibition titled "*UNIVERSAL MUSEUM" – Exploring the* New Field of Tactile Sensation from 2nd September to 30th November, 2021. The purpose of this exhibition was to present a concrete image of the Universal Museum as a museum that can be enjoyed by all. This meaning of the term is Japanese English. In English, the term usually refers to a large-scale museum with comprehensive research and exhibitions. As chief curator of the special exhibition, I would like to introduce the alternative "Universal Museum" to the world as a unique concept and practical initiative born in Japan.

The Universal Museum is an initiative that also applies the ideas of universal design to museums, including fine art museums. However, it does not stop at simply accommodating the physically disabled or supporting the socially deprived. In order to realize a museum that "everyone can enjoy" we must make a dent in the values and world-view of the able-bodied (vis-à-vis the majority) and challenge the general understanding and stereotypes of museums. To build a new universality in this way is the essence of the Universal Museum. There are two requirements for its establishment: (1) Re-examining conventional visually dominant and visually oriented exhibitions and educational programs, and actively promoting the use of tactile sensation. (2) Involving people with disabilities from the planning stages of exhibitions and workshops to universalize the ideas and ways of life of the minority.

I would like to explain these two points below.

The history of museums began with the "modern era" and an emphasis on the visual. Looking back on their history, it is clear that museums developed as cultural facilities based on the act of "seeing/showing". In contrast, the Universal Museum advocates restoration of tactile sensation. In our "*UNIVERSAL MUSEUM*" special exhibition we have collected artworks that "must be touched to be understood" and have created an environment where visitors can spontaneously learn to touch and enjoy tactile sensation. An example of our approach is dimming lights in five of the six sections of the exhibition to allow a haptic-centered museum experience for visitors.

I, the chief curator of this special exhibition, am blind and visually impaired. There are very few instances in the world where a disabled person, especially a visually impaired one, has been in charge of an exhibition. I would be happy if this exhibition could be a catalyst to accelerate an international trend of hiring disabled people as curators and educators. It is also my hope that this exhibition will inspire and promote the creation of other forms of universal museum, e.g. for the hearing impaired and intellectually disabled.

The Japanese subtitle of this exhibition is "Touch! The Expo of Tactile Sensation", and is intended to convey to visitors our enthusiasm for collecting and exhibiting a wide variety of artworks and artifacts under the theme of "touch", for connection and stimulation. The English subtitle is "Exploring the New Field of Tactile Sensation". I lost my sight at the age of 13, and subsequently learned braille. When I was first introduced to braille, I thought, "There is no way I can decipher such a subtle protrusion of dots". However, after repeated tactile reading practice, I eventually had a moment of clarity. I could understand what I was reading. I call this experience "tactile sensation", or, the sensation of opening up my dormant sense of touch.

When we live our lives relying on sight, we tend to neglect the use of our other senses. Of the five senses, only tactile sensation is distributed throughout the body. Tactile sensation is crucial for gaining awareness of one's own body and the bodies of others. It is difficult to read braille without training, but when planning the layout of the exhibition, we gave the highest priority to enable many visitors to experience "tactile sensation" in their own way through fascinating exhibits of sculptures, archaeological materials, and three-dimensional paintings.

This special exhibition was held amid the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to "zero contact" being emphasized in many areas of life. I am proud to state that this exhibition was a practical example of how exhibits that need to be touched can be presented and displayed safely, as long as solid prevention measures such as disinfection and ventilation are properly implemented. My motto is "Changing society through museums". Visitors to this special exhibition will rediscover the importance of human-object and human-to-human contact. Then, their daily life and entire way of life, which is overly dependent on sight, will gradually change. Now that the three-month special exhibition is over, I also aspire to promote universal museum research to overcome "modernity" on a global scale. The blind cannot see an inch ahead; that is why we sharpen tactile sensation in our entire body and move forward one step at a time, along an unknown path that we cannot fully see. Surely, the future of the museum is also interesting because of its unpredictability!

Kojiro Hirose
National Museum of Ethnology

General view of the exhibition, with subdued lighting and all displays designed for enhancing tactile sensation (Kuwata, 2021)

Flyer for the exhibition. The braille at top reads: *sawaru to wakaru, wakaru to kawaru* (touch brings understanding and understanding brings change).

Column

Museums and Natural Disasters

HAYASHI Isao
National Museum of Ethnology

Putting the title words together, some people may think of a museum damaged by a natural disaster, while others may imagine an exhibition held at a museum on the theme of natural disasters. I started work at the National Museum of Ethnology (Minpaku) in April, 1994, and less than a year later, the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake (January 1995) struck. In June 2018, the news of the Northern Osaka Earthquake came to my attention at Narita Airport on my return from the United States. Minpaku was severely damaged in both of these earthquakes and had to close for 45 days in the former and 87 days in the latter.

I have been asked several times whether my experience of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake inspired me to start my disaster research, but my own life was hardly affected, and I was not one of the volunteers who rushed to support affected people in the devastated areas. At that time, I had no idea that I would take up disaster as my research theme. It was the Aitape Tsunami disaster, which occurred three years later, that added disaster to my research topics.

On the evening of July 17, 1998, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake centered off the north coast of the main island of Papua New Guinea triggered a submarine landslide and the resulting tsunami, averaging 10 meters high and locally 15 meters high, affected an area 30 kilometers along the coast and 1.5 kilometers inland, west of Aitape in Sandaun Province. About 2,200 people were killed or missing, about 1,000 were seriously injured, and about 10,000 people lost their homes. A five-year multilateral joint research project entitled "Development of Earthquake and Tsunami Disaster Mitigation Technologies and their Integration to the Asia-Pacific Region (EqTAP)" had

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Video interview with a survivor of the Aitape Tsunami Disaster (Hayashi, 2003)

been started in the previous year under the Special Coordination Funds for Promoting Science and Technology. In the wake of the Aitape Tsunami Disaster, the EqTAP project added a monitoring study on recovery in the affected areas, looking at how people rebuild their lives in areas with little developed infrastructure after natural disaster strikes. As an anthropologist studying Papua New Guinean cultures and societies, I was assigned to this project.

The research was carried out in collaboration with the Papua New Guinea National Museum and Art Gallery (PNG Museum), which had already held a photo exhibition on the disaster. Based on the results, a tsunami disaster educational video was produced and distributed free of charge to primary and high schools, through the educational bureau of each province in coastal areas of the country. On the Japanese side, EqTAP launched its website, which included video interviews with people in the affected areas, information on post-disaster support and changes in peoples' lives, and reports on an exhibition by the PNG Museum in Port Moresby, and on the distribution and utilization of the educational video. This was my first collaboration with researchers in the field of natural science, and also the first time to deal with disaster as a topic for museum activity.

Since then, as part of research on the reconstruction of the area affected by the 2004 Niigata Chuetsu Earthquake, the 2004 Indian Ocean Earthquake and Tsunami, and the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, I have been gathering information on museum exhibitions and activities that aim to pass on the experiences and lessons of disasters. In addition, Minpaku has been commissioned by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) to conduct an annual museology training program, which includes a study tour of the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI) in Kobe and to facilities of the Chuetsu Memorial Corridor in the area affected by the Chuetsu Earthquake. Young curators from the PNG Museum and Aceh Tsunami Museum in Banda Aceh have joined as trainees. This was a new development to connect my research with Minpaku activities.

Disasters are historical events in a region, affecting the lives of people in many ways. I have conducted research on how related information is collected, recorded and disseminated through exhibitions, databases, storytelling, and other activities, and how collection, preservation and exhibition of the related materials is linked to individual disaster experiences and future disaster prevention/reduction. I have discussed these issues with JICA trainees and my colleagues. Although natural phenomena such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and typhoons have occurred repeatedly in human history, their impacts on human life as "disasters" are diverse, and each disaster has distinct characteristics. It is important to explain disaster not only in relation to direct hazards but also in relation to the natural environment, human technology, local history, and the ways people live. Museum exhibition spaces are limited, and there are also financial limits for how exhibitions can be developed to explain disasters.

In this context, I learned a lot from the Louisiana State Museum's exhibition on the disaster caused by Hurricane Katrina (August, 2005) in the southern United States. *Living with Hurricanes: Katrina & Beyond* explained various aspects of the disaster in relation to social and historical contexts, and addressed issues that visitors should keep in mind in their daily lives. In the introductory section of the exhibition, the disaster in New Orleans was symbolised by the damaged piano owned by a famous jazz musician. The exhibition also explained the vulnerability of the city due to its geographical location near the Gulf of Mexico and along the Mississippi River, and due to land subsidence caused by the pumping of groundwater for use in factories. It also pointed out economic disparities linked to racial and ethnic groups that became apparent during evacuation of the city. The critical responses of citizens to federal government relief efforts were also displayed using a variety of media including material objects, texts and graphics. In addition, the exhibition explained global warming and suggested what we can do about it. The Louisiana State Museum is dedicated to the history and culture of the state, and the Hurricane Katrina exhibit was curated by the museum's historians, together with artists and researchers from the Williamstown Art Conservation Center and the University of Rhode Island.

The exhibition *Katrina & Beyond* gave me many hints for evaluating disaster exhibitions. At present, I am investigating exhibition and experience-transmission activities at, and related to, museum facilities of

various scale that have opened along the east coast of Tohoku (Northeast Japan). This region was devastated by tsunamis triggered by the magnitude 9.1 undersea megathrust earthquake that occurred in 2011. In April 2021, I started working as a research manager in the archives of DRI in Kobe, where I continue to study the disaster-related collection and its utilization for future disaster risk reduction.

Great East Japan Earthquake and Nuclear Disaster Memorial Museum in Futaba, Fukushima (Hayashi, 2020)

Information

A new "Digital Tactile Map" installed at Minpaku

Minpaku has four levels with a total floor area of five hectares, of which approximately 1.8 hectares is open to the public (entrance area, museum shop, and exhibition galleries) (*National Museum of Ethnology: Survey and Guide 2019-20*). This is a large area to navigate and over many years the museum has been attempting to improve signage in all areas, with attention to how visitors move through the exhibition areas, and also to safety in the case of fire or natural disaster.

As part of efforts to make the exhibitions more accessible, a "Digital Tactile Map" has been designed, built, and installed in collaboration with Kyushu University and Yamaguchi University. Three units, each providing guidance for the entire museum, have been placed in entry areas near the Oceania, Korean Peninsula, Southeast Asia galleries in the main exhibition halls. The first unit was installed in March, 2018. Staff involved in design of the new Map were Shingo Hidaka and Yuriko Yamanaka (Minpaku), Yasuyuki Hirai (Graduate School of Art and Design, Kyushu University), and Koichiro Fumoto (Faculty of International and Comprehensive Sciences, Yamaguchi University).

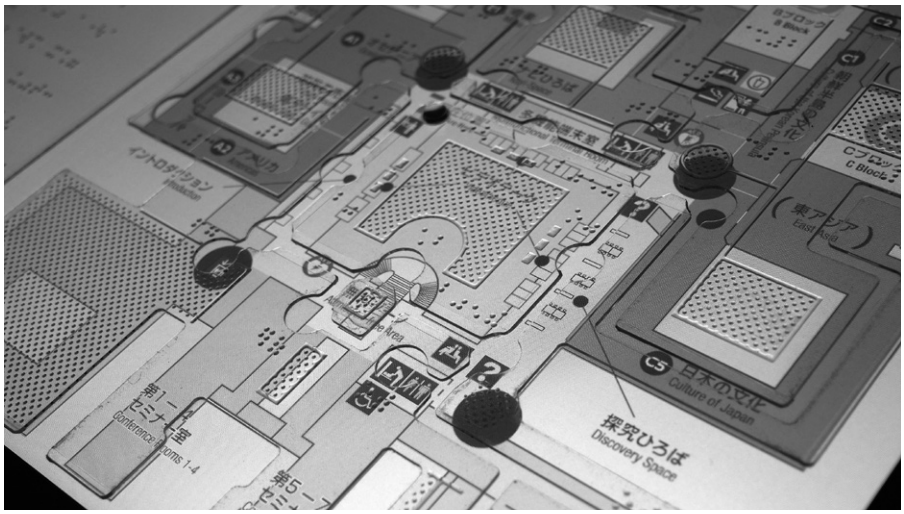
The unit size is approx. 67 cm wide, 43 cm deep, and 104 cm high. It includes a commercially available touch panel display, a newly designed tactile map with braille and tactile symbols printed on transparent acrylic, a computer for controlling the tactile map application, all housed in stainless steel with a melamine finish, and protected by a handrail (see photos).

The lead designer of the map, Yasuyuki Hirai, described the unit as follows (precis from an official press release in early 2021).

"The digital tactile map was designed as a cultural resource project of the National Museum of Ethnology from the perspective of inclusive design. Our aim was to make a tactile map that is accessible to people with and without visual impairments. From the beginning of the process, we worked with many people with disabilities in an inclusive design approach. From the dialogue, it became clear that existing tactile maps were only useful for a few people who could read braille. The digital tactile map therefore aims to provide information that is easy to use for people with and without visual impairments. In the future, we hope to design it in such a way that people with a variety of disabilities can make their own choices, from planning at home to reaching the exhibition displays they want to visit."

On the 12th March, 2021, the Digital Tactile Map was recognised with an "Expert & Consumer Award" of the Universal Design Competition 2021, presented by the Institute for Information Design (IUD) in Munich, Germany. The award jury (representing experts and consumers) was impressed because the designers considered the fact that only 12.7% of visually impaired people can read braille maps, and provided two new features: (1) An acrylic finger guide layer (tactile map) with holes connected in a loop by grooves on a touch sensor display; the holes being linked to a voice sound system that speaks the name of each zone, and (2) a new touch sensing technology that allows visually-impaired visitors to touch with both hands on the display, mitigating errors. See: (1) www.universal-design.org/universal-design-competition, and (2) www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILgoaAuaVjc (at 36.46 minutes).

How effective will the new Digital Tactile Map be? This will take time to see. For the last two years our visitor numbers and interactions have been very unusual due to the ongoing pandemic situation. It will take some years to gather feedback from visitors about the newly installed units, and to learn how they can be used to best effect, or technically improved. It will also be useful for the museum to exchange information with other organisations with similar aims. Minpaku is seeking a patent for a standard design of the Digital Tactile Map so that other museums can use the patent and implement Digital Tactile Maps. The concept of the universal museum as "a place that all people can enjoy" (see essays in this issue of the *Newsletter*) can be extended to constructed environments generally. Aspects of the new display system may eventually be useful wherever there is a need for touch guidance, in airports, train stations, hotels, shopping centres, and more. [Editor].



Awards

Naomichi Ishige
Professor Emeritus,
National Museum of Ethnology

Designated *Bunka Korosha* (a "Person of Cultural Merit") by the Japanese government (October 26, 2021). Ishige has been a pioneer and leader in the study of food culture as a field of cultural anthropology. He opened up new horizons by seeing food in relation to nature, environment,

cultures, customs and history. He travelled around the world, exploring the diversity and richness of food in various cultures. Ishige was also the third Director-General of Minpaku (1997–2003).

Itsushi Kawase
Associate Professor, Department of Advanced Human Sciences, National Museum of Ethnology

Received the *43rd Suntory Prize for Social Sciences and Humanities* (2021) for his book, エチオピア高原の吟遊詩人 – うたに生きる者たち(Singer Poets in the Ethiopian Highlands–The People Who Live by Singing), published by Ongaku no tomo sha, Tokyo. Kawase specialises in the fields of visual anthropology, anthropological filmmaking, and Ethiopian music.

Received the *Daido Life Foundation Incentive Award for Area Studies* (July 27, 2021) for introducing innovative methods of ethnographic filmmaking into African area studies. His approach includes filming the process of interaction between researcher (filmmaker) and those who are filmed, introducing local perspectives into ethnographic filmmaking, and using film making to provoke discussion between those filmed and those who view the films.

Rintaro Ono
Associate Professor, Center for Cultural Resource Studies, National Museum of Ethnology

Received the *Daido Life Foundation Incentive Award for Area Studies* (July 27, 2021) for his research on marine resource use in Maritime Southeast Asia. Ono uses the approaches of ethnography and archaeology to investigate human history from from Pleistocene to Holocene and present. His findings from excavation work at more than 20 sites have helped to reveal the migration routes of early modern humans in the region. He is a specialist in the study of fish bones, which illuminate not just the diversity of fish taxa used in the past, but also the range of fishing methods used.

Yoko Ueba
Associate Professor, Department of Modern Society and Civilization, National Museum of Ethnology

Received the *Daido Life Foundation Incentive Award for Area Studies* (July 27, 2021) for her empirical, ethno-artistic study of the changing trends of handicraft culture in contemporary India. Ueba, who herself is also a textile weaver, has focused on production techniques to illuminate the roles and functions of textiles. Some of the results of her recent research were displayed in Minpaku's thematic exhibition, *The Vibrance of Indian Fabrics* (October 28, 2021–January 25, 2022).

Retirements

After many years at Minpaku, the following staff members will retire in March 2022.

SEKI Yuji
Deputy Director-General, Professor, South American archaeology, cultural anthropology

HAYASHI Isao
Professor, social structure, cosmology, risk and disaster; Melanesia, Polynesia, Japan

New Staff

Shinichiro Ichino
Project Assistant Professor, Department of Advanced Human Sciences.

Ichino conducts research in primatology and African studies, with a particular interest in the social evolution and conservation of endemic primates in Madagascar. After receiving his PhD in 2004 from Kyoto University, he worked at Kyoto University, the German Primate Center in Göttingen, and Kanazawa University. His publications include "Lifespan and Reproductive Senescence in a Free-Ranging Ring-Tailed Lemur (*Lemur catta*) Population at Berenty, Madagascar", *Folia Primatologica* 86, 2015, "Forest Vertebrate Fauna and Local Knowledge among the Tandroy People in Berenty Reserve, Southern Madagascar", *African Study Monographs Suppl.* 54, 2018, and "African Potentials for Biodiversity Conservation: Tamarind, Lemurs and the Tandroy People in the Gallery Forests of Southern Madagascar" in '*African Potentials' for Wildlife Conservation and Natural Resource Management* (T. Meguro, C. Ito and K. Kirigia eds, Langaa RPCIG, 2021).

Overseas Visiting Fellow

William Nitzky
Associate Professor, California State University, Chico, USA

William Nitzky specializes in the anthropology of rural ethnic China, cultural heritage, tourism development, and contemporary approaches in museum studies. He received his PhD in anthropology from Arizona State University. At California State University, Chico, he is Associate Professor of Anthropology and Museum Studies and Director of the Valene L. Smith Museum of Anthropology. He also serves as coordinator of the Museum Studies Program, which trains undergraduate and graduate students in museum work through hands-on practical experience. For the Museum, Nitzky led the curation of two exhibitions, *Hmong Reflections: Stories of Our Own* (2016) on the journey of Hmong refugees to California, and *Imprisoned at Home* (2018) on Japanese and Japanese-American internment camps during WWII. He has

also been active in visual anthropology, producing the PBS-aired documentary *Stories in Thread* and directing the film *Bang the Drum*, which examines transformations in the social life of the bronze drum among the Yao of southern China.

After eight years of research and three years of fieldwork across nine ecomuseum villages, he is now working on a book to be called *Heritage for Community: An Ethnography of Ecomuseums in China*. At Minpaku, he will collaborate with Taku Iida on "Comparative Museology in East Asia from the Viewpoint of Community Relations". For this project, two minority communities in Japan, the Ainu and the African diaspora in Osaka, will be surveyed with the aim of introducing new approaches in community-museum collaborative relations.

Publications

Online at: www.minpaku.ac.jp/en/research/publication

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Issue 1: R. Wakasone, "Dynamics of Faith in the Periphery and the Buddhist Concept of Kingship"; T. Iida, "Introduction" to special theme "Future of Academic Activities Opened with Digital Image Databases"; J. Konishi, "Creating the Database of 'A Collection of Osamu Yamaguti (Yamaguchi)'s Photographs of Asia-Pacific Musicology' as a Practice of Applicative/Applied Musicology"; K. Harada, "Analysis of Imagery in Regional Communities"; Y. Fukusima, "Can Local Libraries and Museums be Depositories for Vernacular Photographs?"; S. Ishiyama, "Digitization, Databasing, and Academic Utilization of Area Studies Pictures"; Y. Marukawa, "Image Annotation Support through Databases and Editing Systems".

Issue 2: Y. Yoshida, "Introduction" to special theme "Humans and Things Weaving a Performance Together"; M. Tanaka, "Beyond 'Function' and 'Metaphor'"; A. Mashino, "Tangible and Intangible in *Arja*, a Balinese Musical Dance Theater"; Y. Yoshida, "Trans-border Flow of Music as an Encounter with Instruments"; N. Niwa, "Explorer Toshio Asaeda".

Senri Ethnological Studies

107: F. Sano and R. Kikusawa (eds.) *Minpaku Sign Language Studies 2*. 180 pp. (English).

Senri Ethnological Reports

153: T. Nishio and H. Nawata (eds.) *Study of the Motoko Katakura Fieldwork Materials*. 216 pp. (Japanese).

Forthcoming Exhibitions

National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka

Special Exhibition

100 Years of Mongolia: Encounters through Photography

March 17–May 31, 2022

Four Mongolian Men Smoking (photo by Sakari Pälsi, via Finnish Heritage Agency)

Choco Night Club, Ulaanbaatar, 2017 (© B. Injinaash)

Villagers igniting slashed branches (Norio Yamamoto)

Thematic Exhibition

Slash-and-Burn Cultivation Viewed by SASAKI Komei: From Itsuki Mura to the World

March 10–June 7, 2022

MINPAKU Anthropology Newsletter

The Newsletter is published in summer and winter. "Minpaku" is an abbreviation of the Japanese name for the National Museum of Ethnology (*Kokuritsu Minzokugaku Hakubutsukan*). The Newsletter promotes a continuing exchange of information with former visiting scholars and others who have been associated with the museum. The Newsletter also provides a forum for communication with a wider academic audience.

Available online at: www.minpaku.ac.jp/en/research/publication/research-publications/newsletter

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