

## Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

BELONGING AND SOLO 07

**IZU HOUSE 08**

TOKYO JOURNAL 05

TRAVEL JOURNAL 05

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### Izu House 08

Toward the end of my Japan–U.S. Friendship Commission Fellowship in 2005 I met Nobuko Awaya, an intercultural studies professor and the caretaker of *Chihan-an*. Chihan-an is the 200-year-old traditional house of her maternal ancestors located in the tiny town of Ohito on the Izu peninsula two hours south of Tokyo and is regarded as an architectural treasure. Nobuko was just beginning to revive a legacy where the family home was utilized as a site for artists to gather and conduct workshops—something her grandfather Chihan had initiated two generations earlier. She invited me to create a dance work in this remarkable place. Work began in 2007 and, in 2008, we premiered *Izu House*, a site-specific collaboration with dancer and choreographer Leah Stein and percussionist Toshi Makihara (both from Philadelphia) and with dancer and performance artist Hideo Arai and vocalist Mika Kimula (both from Tokyo).



ESSAY: IZU HOUSE  
BY BRENT EDWARDS



IZU HOUSE  
GALLERY



IZU HOUSE VIDEO  
COMPILATION

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Background image: Chihan-an: Hideo and Leah in shadow. Ohito, Izu Peninsula.  
October 2007. Photo by Eiichiro Iwasa.

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This is also to say that site-specific dance, even when documented on video or in photos, accepts as its condition a radical limitation of impact. Intricately bound by immediacy and location, in a sense it only happens then and there, and so its potential audience is limited by the confines of the space: to twenty, or twelve, or—in cases of breathtaking extravagance like the Headlong piece—one. In this sense it seems almost fanciful to invoke the "tradition" of site-specific performance, an imaginary compilation of ephemeral moments whose "enduring meaning" (as Ralph Ellison once wrote about jazz) "took place off to the side, beyond the range of attention." [NOTE 2](#) If there is such a canon, it seems inevitable that some of its major moments must be unacknowledged, far off the radar of mainstream dance journalism and history.

With *Izu House*, a performance seen by no more than seventy audience members over the course of two days in early November 2008, [Roko Kawai](#) has begun to explore a version of choreography that suggests an entirely new range of possibilities for site-specific dance. On the one hand, the piece is a collaboration among a group of Japanese and American





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### Brent Hayes Edwards

Brent Hayes Edwards is a Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. He previously taught at Rutgers University, and joined the Columbia faculty in spring 2007 as the Louis Armstrong Visiting Professor of Jazz Studies. He is the author of *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Harvard University Press, 2003), which was awarded the John Hope Franklin Prize of the American Studies Association and the Gilbert Chinard Prize of the Society for French Historical Studies. Widely recognized for his groundbreaking work on the meaning of diaspora, Edwards has been profiled in *Black Issues in Higher Education* and *USA Weekend*, and interviewed on WHAT radio (Philadelphia), WPFW (Washington, DC), CUNY-TV, Chicago Public Radio, and BBC Radio 3. He served as one of the scholarly experts featured in *Harlem in Montmartre*, a 2009 PBS-Channel Thirteen documentary on jazz in Paris. With Robert G.

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This is the case whether the dance is performed in a room, on a stage, or in a public space. It is movement across the room, across the street, across the parked cars watching a dance performance. *Juice* (1969), performed at the Federal Plaza in Manhattan; public memorials such as Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1981-82); and landscape art such as Robert Smithson's earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970) on an isolated bank of the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

#### Note 1

Serra, quoted in Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 12. This ambition is evident in a broad range of site-specific sculpture, including architectural installations such as Serra's controversial *Titled Arc* (1981) at the Federal Plaza in Manhattan; public memorials such as Maya Lin's *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1981-82); and landscape art such as Robert Smithson's earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970) on an isolated bank of the Great Salt Lake in Utah.

...where dancers relay with viewers stationed in from Meredith Monk's to Doug Varone's *Neither East Side, to Headlong*

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One could call *Izu House* cross-cultural, in other words, because in many ways it concerns the links and divisions between Japanese culture and American culture. But it is not accurate to term the performance "intercultural" in the sometimes slapdash way that word has been come to be used in scholarship, grant applications, program notes, and artists' statements: as a mode of unidirectional "cross-cultural feeding" that some have called "another version of cultural imperialism, in which the West helps itself to the forms and images of others without taking the full measure of the cultural fabric from which these are torn." [NOTE 3](#)

Nor is *Izu House* intercultural in a manner often associated with the productions of directors including Jerzy Grotowski, Peter Brook, and Richard Schechner, which represent a Western theater that at times finds inspiration in non-Western performance conventions. [NOTE 4](#) If *Izu House* is intercultural, it is in something like the mode proposed by Schechner as an ideal practice of "interculturalists," who "probe the confrontation, ambivalences, disruptions, fears, disturbances and difficulties when and where cultures collide, overlap and pull away from each other. Interculturalists explore misunderstandings, broken messages and failed translations—what is not pure and what cannot successfully fuse. These are seen not as disasters but as fertile rifts of creative possibilities." [NOTE 5](#)

On the other hand, it is difficult to say that "cultures collide" in the piece because the performers are not representatives from one culture or the other; they are instead themselves hybrid in their personal histories and in their training. If "Japanese culture" is staged in the piece, it is as an object of inquiry, not as a predetermined set of tools, norms, or predilections. As Kawai has explained, Japan for her is not just the place where she spent a significant part of her early childhood and adolescence, but more broadly a sort of "trigger" of associations. She describes it as a "source of inspiration as well as provocation." And even if the piece is parochial—set not in cosmopolitan Tokyo but in a family home in Ohito, a tiny village in the middle of the Izu Peninsula—it also poses the question of culture as necessarily transnational, something that stretches across borders. *Izu House* is a version of site-specific performance that can only be termed *diasporic*, in other words.

Here *diaspora* should not be taken simply to imply a return to origins, or a condition of traumatic uprooting (a community "scattered" by force, as suggested by the word's Greek etymology). *Diaspora* is a reminder that community never means absolute unanimity; it is always an internal negotiation—a confrontation with difference, even in the ways any space is shared.

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Nor is *Izu House* intercultural in the sense of the performance conventions of Peter Brook, and Richard Schechner's ideal practice of "interculturalism" which acknowledges the difficulties when and where these conventions are misunderstood, broken, or misused.

### Note 3

Una Chaudhuri, "The Future of the Hyphen: Interculturalism, Textuality, and the Difference Within," in *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from Performing Arts Journal*, ed. Bonnie Marranca and Gautam Dasgupta (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1991), 193. Richard Schechner uses the phrase "cross-cultural feeding" in his piece "Intercultural Themes" in the same volume (311).

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**NOTE 6** Thus *Izu House* is diasporic in the way that it brings together a group with different relationships to "Japaneseness," a group that, through the performance itself, stages "its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modeling or working-out of a collective social process." **NOTE 7**

There are a few other models of this sort of investigative performance. One thinks of Mike Pearson's remarkable archaeological excursions into the landscape of Welsh memory and community life, for instance. Perhaps the closest parallel is the strand of African diasporic dance pioneered by choreographers such as Pearl Primus and Katharine Dunham through extensive anthropological research in Africa and the Caribbean. **NOTE 8** Their influence resonates throughout the varieties of contemporary African American dance, on display in the work of choreographers and companies as diverse as Urban Bush Women, Ronald K. Brown, and Ralph Lemon. And yet, there are important differences between Kawai's *Izu House* and models such as Dunham's *Ag'ya* (1947), based on a Martinican combat dance similar to Brazilian capoeira, Lemon's *Geography* trilogy (1997–2004), or *Les écailles de la mémoire*, the collaboration between the Senegalese Compagnie Jant-Bi and Urban Bush Women that premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music a few weeks after Kawai's performance. Unlike these other performances, *Izu House* is site-specific, rather than a stage performance. It is fully collaborative, involving creative input from all the participants, rather than in any way an extraction or adaptation of "traditional" or "folk" material for use in a "modern" context. And, perhaps most importantly, it is a piece performed *in Japan*, rather than a show developed through research abroad that was then staged in the United States.

Kawai's collaboration demonstrates that the very meaning of site-specific dance is transformed when the "foreign" space is not just the place one goes to make contact with a diasporic heritage, but instead the location of performance. To decide that the performance has to take place *there*—far away from the international touring circuit—is to upend many of our preconceptions about what diasporic performance might involve. It is transformative both for the artists themselves and for the audience, especially in the context of Japan where the very idea of the "site-specific" is a notion that is peculiar and in many ways alien.

*Izu House* opens with a homecoming. The audience (about 16–18 for each showing), seated in the entryway (*genkan*) of the house, hears the piece arrive: a rippling of percussive sounds from the bamboo forest in back, and then a woman's voice singing drawn-out syllables from the other direction, very softly at first and then louder as the woman moves closer. Kawai herself is already in the house, the one performer visible when the piece begins, stretched motionless in front of the viewers on the tatami floor. At almost the same moment, the visitors arrive from doors on either side: Kimula at the front entrance and Makihara at the back. "*Tadaima*" ("I'm home"), they say as they come in, announcing their return. It is not diasporic

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absolute unanimity; it is always an internal negotiation—a confrontation with difference, even in the ways any space is shared.

**NOTE 6** Thus *Izu House* is diasporic in the way that it brings together a group with different relationships to "Japaneseness," a group that, through the performance itself, stages "its own coming together and coming apart as a necessarily incomplete modeling or working-out of a collective social process." **NOTE 7**

There are a few other models of this sort of investigative performance. One thinks of Mike Pearson's remarkable archaeological excursions into the landscape of Welsh memory and community life, for instance. Perhaps the closest parallel is the strand of African diasporic dance pioneered by choreographers such as [Pearl Primus](#) and [Katharine Dunham](#) through extensive anthropological research in Africa and the Caribbean. **NOTE 8** Their influence resonates throughout the varieties of contemporary African American dance, on display in the work of choreographers and companies as diverse as [Urban Bush Women](#), [Ronald K. Brown](#), and [Ralph Lemon](#). And yet, there are important differences between Kawai's *Izu House* and models such as [Dunham's Ag'ya \(1947\)](#), based on a Martinican combat dance similar to Brazilian capoeira, [Lemon's Geography trilogy \(1997–2004\)](#), or [Les écailles de la mémoire](#), the collaboration between the Senegalese Compagnie Jant-Bi and Urban Bush Women. Unlike these other performances, Kawai's *Izu House* is a piece developed through research abroad that was then staged in the United States. **Note 7** Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another*, 154.

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The blunt and matter-of-fact title could be taken to suggest that the house itself is the performance. *Izu House* also seems allegorical: a hint that the 200-year-old Suganuma family house, with its traditional geometric layout of square rooms divided by removable and slideable *fusuma* (screens or walls made of rice paper and wood), is meant to stand in for the broader history of the entire peninsula. There is a hush in the audience at the beginning of the piece, not only of anticipation but also of propriety, given the strong sense that one has entered someone's home and that here, "space is the medium of exchange between dancers, between cultures, between performer and audience, between secular and sacred." [NOTE 9](#) The feeling is intensified because the audience is seated just inside the threshold, with only the front rooms of the house visible. The *fusuma* leading to the back rooms are shut. Still, one notices the small signs of intimate life: the Shinto altars perched above the sliding doors; the *hidori* (the hearth, a small wood-burning stove sunken into the floor); the Yamaha piano in the corner.

Kawai has commented that the performers strove to convey the unique atmosphere of the house, *Chihan-an*, sensing that "the personal and the historical all seemed to buzz inextricably through the space." The property has passed down in the family to [Nobuko Awaya](#), a university professor who has begun in the past few years to host artistic events there (others have included a music recital, a *Rakugo* comedy retreat, a *Noh* mask carving workshop) out of a determination to recreate her memories of the house in the middle part of the 20th-century, when her maternal grandfather Chihan made it a kind of salon as well as a family residence. For many years, he hosted small performances and *kukai* (communal haiku-writing sessions) that attracted well-known artists from the region. In the 1930s, his guests included some of the leading lights of Japanese literary culture, including the playwright and novelist [Mantaro Kubota](#), the novelist [Fumiko Hayashi](#), and the filmmaker [Heinosuke Gosho](#). In an unpretentious and oblique way, then, *Izu House* is an attempt at what Joseph Roach calls "surrogation": not a repetition of the salons as they were, but an effort to find "satisfactory alternates" for the lost past. [NOTE 10](#)

At the same time, the performers found that the house, even in such an isolated corner of Japan, reverberated with historical currents that went beyond the personal and the artistic. During World War II, it served as a refuge for family members fleeing the incendiary bombs dropped on Tokyo. The Izu peninsula itself is associated with one of the more important episodes in Japanese history: it was at the port of Shimoda at the tip of Izu where in 1853 the American naval commander Matthew Perry led a small armada of coal-fueled "black ships" in a successful effort to force the Japanese to enter trade relations. An intercultural performance of another sort, in other words.

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Kawai has commented that Ann Daly, "Afterword," in Ralph Lemon, *Geography: Art, Race, Exile* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 2000), 194. *Chihan-an*, sensing that the house's history had passed down in the family to [Nobuko Awaya](#), a university professor who has begun in the past few years to host artistic events there (others have included a music recital, a *Rakugo* comedy retreat, a *Noh* mask carving workshop) out of a determination to recreate her memories of the house in the middle part of the 20th-century, when her maternal grandfather Chihan made it a kind of salon as well as a family residence. For many years, he hosted small performances and *kukai* (communal haiku-writing sessions) that attracted well-known artists from the region. In the 1930s, his guests included some of the leading lights of Japanese literary culture, including the playwright and novelist [Mantaro Kubota](#), the novelist [Fumiko Hayashi](#), and the filmmaker [Heinosuke Gosho](#). In an unpretentious and oblique way, then, *Izu House* is an attempt at what Joseph Roach calls "surrogation": not a repetition of the salons as they were, but an effort to find "satisfactory alternates" for the lost past. [NOTE 10](#)

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Although *Izu House* is by no means a piece "about" gunboat diplomacy, it does suggest that international politics is woven into the biography of the house as much as birth, death, and the changing of the seasons. There are two shadow plays at different points during the performance: with an ingenious use of flashlights behind one of the translucent *shoji* walls, the dancers transform into shadow puppets, at once ghostlike and grotesque. The first is an intimate scene, a female child (Kawai) chatting with her grandfather (Hideo Arai): he asks her in Japanese what sounds various animals make (dog, cat, rooster). Then he says, teasingly, "And what sound do I make?" "Ji ji!" the girl replies. The audience chuckles gently at the incongruity between the nonsensical sound and the child's conviction. A few minutes later, there is another shadow scene behind the scrim, in which the same two performers, without any introductory set-up, enact an absurd, distilled imagined version of Perry's arrival in a loose adaptation of the Japanese *Rakugo* comedic style. "Where are you from?" says the one (Arai), in exaggeratedly accented English, the shadow of his head lurching and elongating as the flashlight moves behind them. "America," replies the other (Kawai), in a booming voice. The dialogue continues in ludicrous simplicity:

"Where is America?"  
"Across the ocean."  
"How did you get here?"  
"A ship."  
"What color is your ship?"  
"Black."

The Japanese questioner decides that the visitor needs to learn Japanese, and offers a nugget of instruction: *domo domo*, which he explains will be "very useful" because it can mean so many things: "Please," "Thank you," "I'm sorry," "Good." The Perry character in turn comes up with an English vernacular loose equivalent ("That's great!") and eventually the two depart together. When the American asks where they're headed, the Japanese says that he has no idea. "That's great!" the visitor exclaims with inexplicable glee.

The bizarre nature of the exchange itself satirizes the ways intercultural encounter is so often imagined: as "representative" cutouts coming face to face. The scene starts in silence as the silhouette of a small human figure makes its way up what seems to be an imposing mountainside. As the light shifts, we realize that the shadow is actually Arai's hand, making its way across the landscape of Kawai's face—as though to meet an other is to explore a foreign territory in every sense. But it also seems crucial that the same two performers appear in both exchanges. (Interestingly, Leah Stein, the one white American

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*Izu House* also insists that the medium of encounter is, unavoidably, language, and the piece's spoken and sung components emphasize the inevitability (and unanticipated creativity) of "misunderstandings, broken messages and failed translations," to return to Schechner's phrase. Towards the beginning of the piece, Arai emerges from a back room as though to welcome a visitor, and in a funny, anxiously accommodating monologue in Japanese, he asks about the unseen visitor's trip as he invites him in. "Where have you been? Oh, really? What was your business there? Do you want to come in? Would you like to eat some eel?" This moment also serves to invite the audience into the interior of the house; as he opens the *fusuma* for the visitor, Arai seems to notice the audience sitting in front of him in the front room and asks us if we'd like to join the meal. Then he slides open the doors, revealing the other rooms to view.

At one point during the rehearsals before the performance, Kawai mentioned that "it would be helpful to have some bilingual feedback" as they worked on the timing of various episodes. If *Izu House* is ultimately concerned with the complexities of diaspora, one might also add that its ideal audience is bilingual, for one needs to know the intricacies of Japanese as well as English in order to catch the full flavor of its playfulness. It is easy enough to sense the dadistic inanity of the section of the piece where the performers strut around frantically slapping their bodies and yelling "aka aka!" in some inscrutable ritual of purification, but it takes on another layer of implication if one knows the various connotations of the word in Japanese ("dirt," "filth," "red," "bloody," "brightly lit").

The closest surrogate of Chihan's haiku-writing salon is an amusing section that begins with Arai sitting next to Kimula, fingering her long hair. As she sits passively, he begins improvising haiku in Japanese about the beauty of her hair—and at the same time about the difficulty of improvising a poem about someone's hair. While he is speaking, the audience notices a long sheet of paper slowly being threaded through a crack in the wall behind them. Beyond the quiet wonder to the scene—which then explodes into an oddly intense tug-of-war over the long paper scroll—its humor pivots on the fact that *kami* is the Japanese word both for "paper" and for "hair."

At another point, Makiyara is drumming with his hands on the tatami floor just in front of the audience, while Kimula kneels in the room next door, carefully placing a trail of go stones on the floor in an arc. The audience sees them both, but they seem not to notice each other until Kimula builds her archipelago all the way to Makiyara. While she progresses from one room to

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Movement is as crucial as language to *Izu House*, as though to remind us that the intricate fabric of any lived space is in some sense unavoidably *danced*. That is, even the banal everyday movements of a family at home take on tactile and lyrical patterns: an improvised choreography with its own beauty, its own drama.

As with the spoken and sung sections of the performance, the movement is notable first of all in its variety of moods. There are moments of festivity, culminating in the section where the entire cast dances through the rooms of the house in a loop, boisterously singing *Soran Bushi*, a traditional Japanese folk song originated by fishermen of Hokkaido in northern Japan that has been recorded in innumerable versions over the years, from classic recordings, to student and cultural festivals in the United States, to "modernized" versions by pop stars such as Hikawa Kiyoshi. But the dramatic center of the entire performance is an extended *seiza* (seated) solo for Kawai in a kimono, surrounded by lines of black and white go stones that run in arcs through the rooms. The only accompaniment is a folk melody played by an unseen Arai on flute, who hums as he blows to create an eerie, doubled sound (much of the music is sung or played behind walls or in other rooms, giving the impression that the performance's soundtrack is emanating from the house itself).

At first Kawai is hidden by the kimono, which seems to float in the air on its own. There is some kind of rod or hanger inside the garment, and it hangs there stiffly, a scarecrow of traditional Japanese femininity. Hands then reach around it, caressing its sides, straightening it, seeming to beckon to the audience. Very slowly, still seated, Kawai inserts her torso into the kimono until her head emerges, and gradually makes her way to her feet, following and recasting the path of stones in some unexplained pilgrimage.

If *Izu House* starts with a return, it ends with a departure. The group disperses, scattering into the recesses of the house and the surrounding woods. The final scene is in the *ochanoma* (tea room) where Kimula sits at the sunken hearth with her back to the audience, talking. One is forced to strain to hear her words, which diminish in volume until they are inaudible. At first she recites a string of tongue twisters in Japanese, then a marvelous poem about rain written so as to suggest the sound of raindrops. The poem is in a style of Japanese poetry called *kakekotoba* (literally "hanging over word") in which the words overlap, with the last syllable of one word forming the first syllable of the next. It is mesmerizing. While she speaks, Arai

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At first Kawai is hidden by the kimono, which seems to float in the air on its own. There is some kind of rod or hanger inside the garment, and it hangs there stiffly, a scarecrow of traditional Japanese femininity. Hands then reach around it, caressing its sides, straightening it, seeming to beckon to the audience. Very slowly, still seated, Kawai inserts her torso into the kimono until her head emerges, and gradually makes her way to her feet, following and recasting the path of stones in some unexplained pilgrimage.

If *Izu House* starts with a return, it ends with a departure. The group disperses, scattering into the recesses of the house and the surrounding woods. The final scene is in the *ochanoma* (tea room) where Kimula sits at the sunken hearth with her back to the audience, talking. One is forced to strain to hear her words, which diminish in volume until they are inaudible. At first she recites a string of tongue twisters in Japanese, then a marvelous poem about rain written so as to suggest the sound of raindrops. The poem is in a style of Japanese poetry called *kakekotoba* (literally "hanging over word") in which the words overlap, with the last syllable of one word forming the first syllable of the next. It is mesmerizing. While she speaks, Arai departs by the sliding screen door in back, following a red string that stretches from Kimula in the house all the way out into the forest. There is a distant drumming in the bamboo, a music in the trees, moving away. Kimula's soliloquy fades as well: listening closely to her Japanese, the audience hears not a narrative but jumbled fragments of famous folk tales, clichés, and catch phrases. (An equivalent in English might be something like: *Once upon a time...And he huffed and he puffed...All the better to see you with...Let down your hair...And it was still hot!*)

It is an ambiguous conclusion, leaving the audience with whispered shards of the familiar (fragments of folk tales) rather than the comfort of narrative closure. This seems entirely appropriate for a performance that demonstrates so richly the ways that even an old family home, a remote site that seems altogether domestic, vibrates in response to larger forces. As Kimula's voice fades, the audience begins to notice the sounds of the world—a dog barking in a neighboring yard; the rush of cars going by on the road—which we come to realize were already there in Chihan, too, all along.

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Background image: Chihan-an rehearsal, Izu Peninsula, October 2007. Photo by Eiichiro Iwasa.

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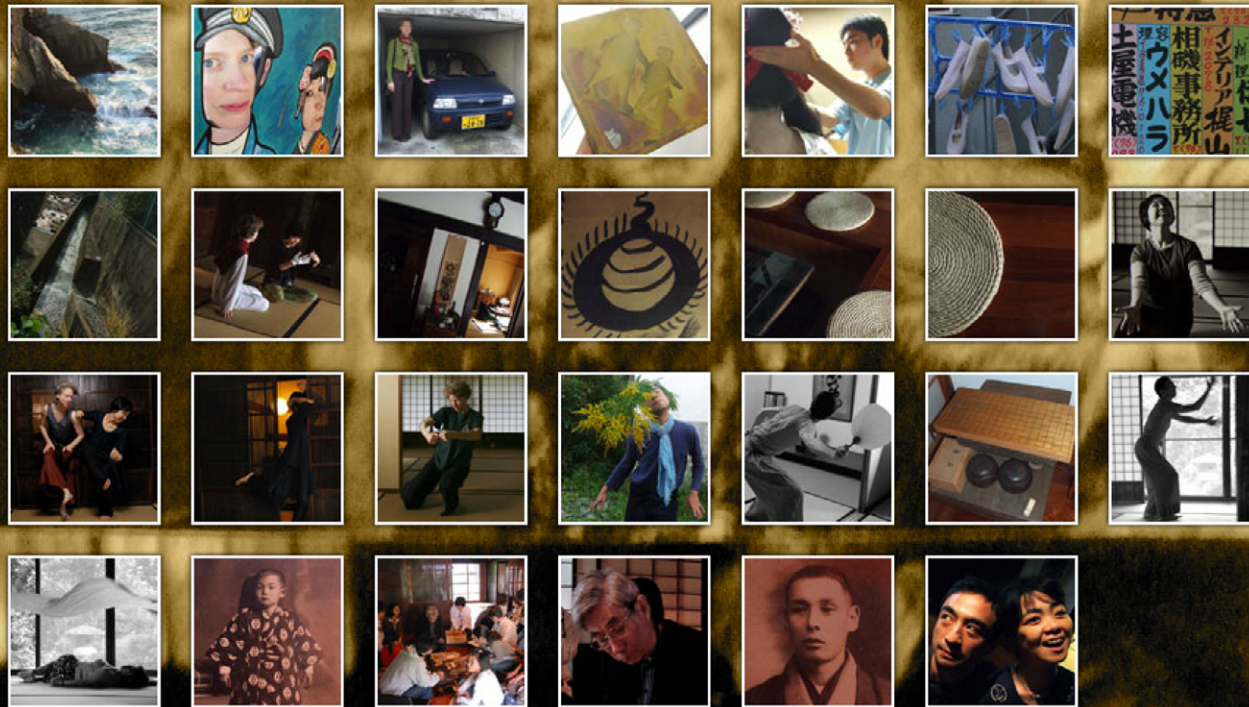
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Izu H



Dogashima, the west coast of the Izu Peninsula. Chihan-an is inland, at the "belly button" of the Izu Peninsula, but the Pacific Ocean is within an hour's drive to the east or west. October 2005.

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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors: Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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Leah and Roko pose as the protagonists in Yasunari Kawabata's novel, *The Izu Dancer*. Since Kawabata is Japan's only recipient of the Nobel Prize in literature, the imagery of the young student and his muse, an adolescent itinerant dancer, populate sites around Izu where the story takes place. Commodore Perry and Kawabata's pair are the leading icons of the peninsula's tourist attractions. Shuzenji train station. October 2008. Photo by Leah Stein.



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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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Ohito: Leah in someone's garage near Chihan-an. Leah worried if she, as a strawberry-blond fair-skinned American, looked "weird" in this setting. During the three autumns that Roko lived in Ohito, she saw only one other foreigner. October 2007.



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Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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Ohito: an old sign from an earlier era still alerts motorists of "school children crossing." October 2007.

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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

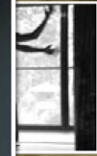
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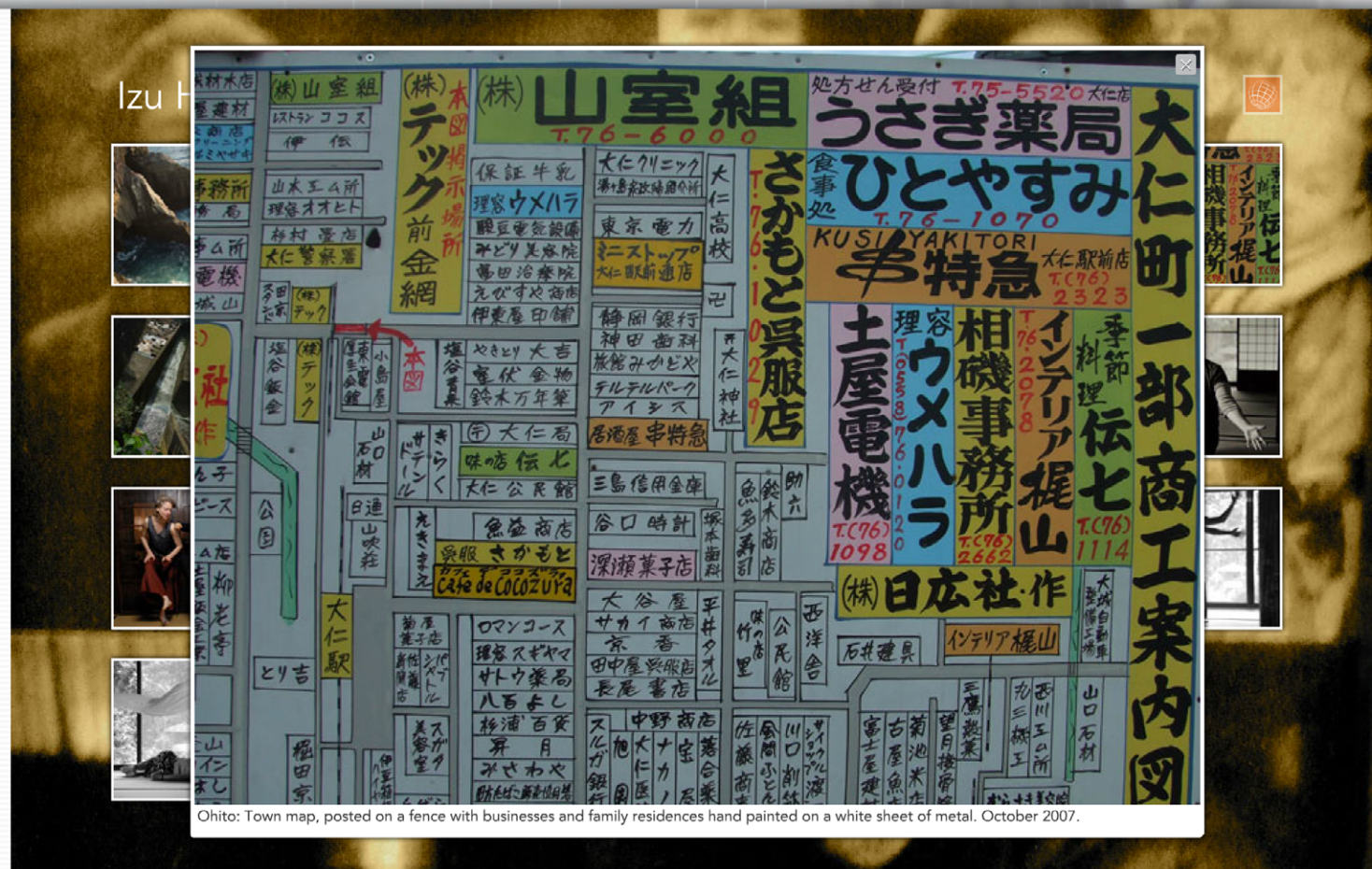
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Ohito: Town map, posted on a fence with businesses and family residences hand painted on a white sheet of metal. October 2007.

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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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Ohito: gutter, October 2007.





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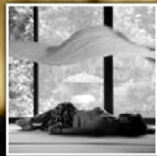
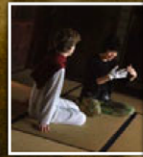
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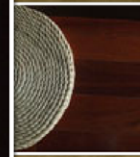
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Chihan-an interior: Nobuko and Leah talk about the architecture and functional layout of the house. October 2007.



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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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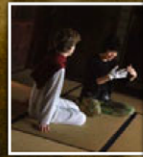
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Chihan-an: The view from the irori (hearth) to Nobuko's writing table. To the left of the doorway is the Suganuma ancestral altar and a calligraphic painting by Yuinen, a 91-year-old monk who spent time here on a retreat. Many retreatants left behind art-tokens of appreciation for Chihan's hospitality. October 2007.



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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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Izu H



Close up of calligraphic painting. As a philanthropist, Chihan invited artists, scholars and hobbyists to come for workshops and retreats. Today, we can see some of the work they left behind as art-tokens of appreciation, such as this painting of a snake by 91-year-old monk Yuinen. October 2007.

Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors: Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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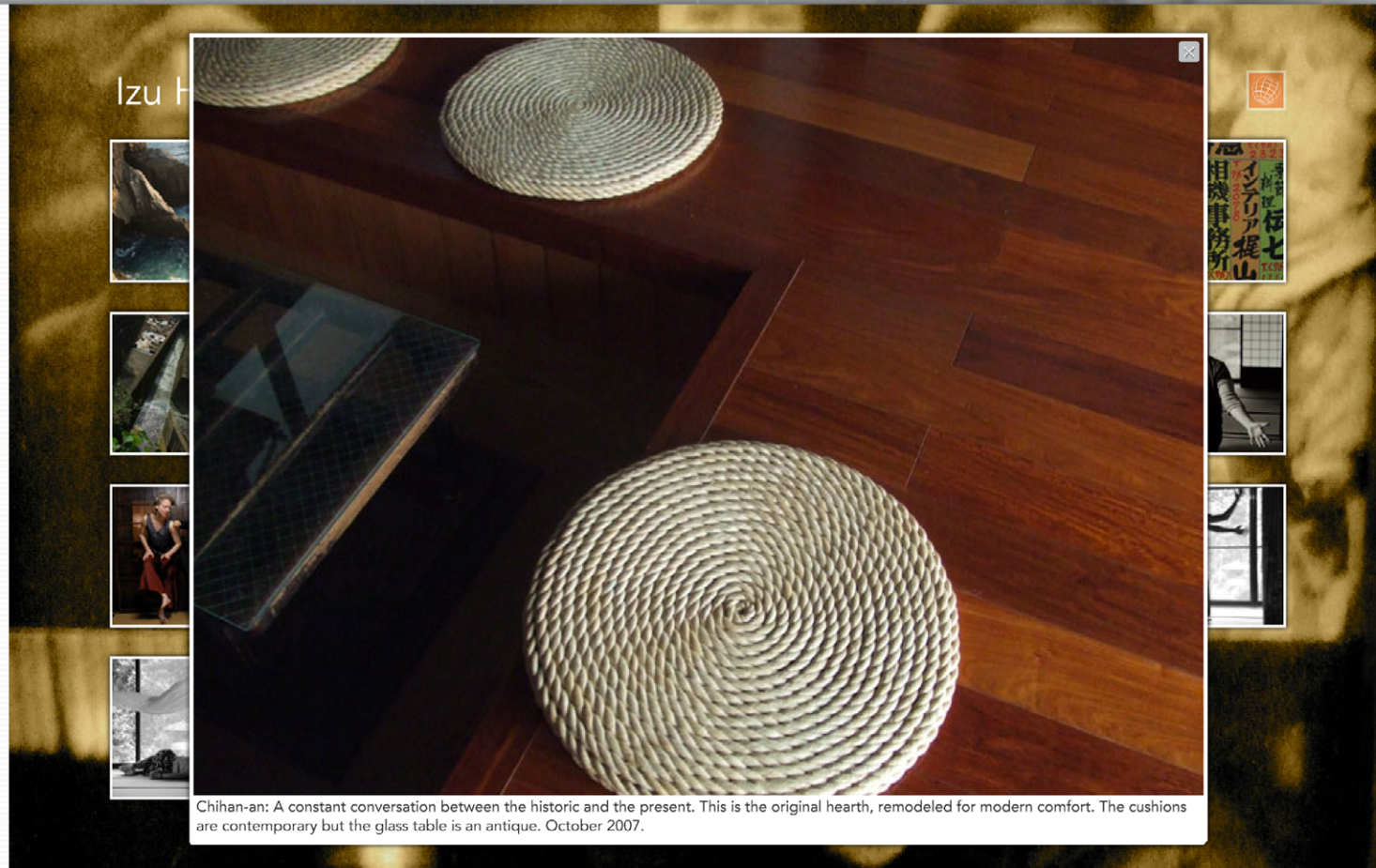
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Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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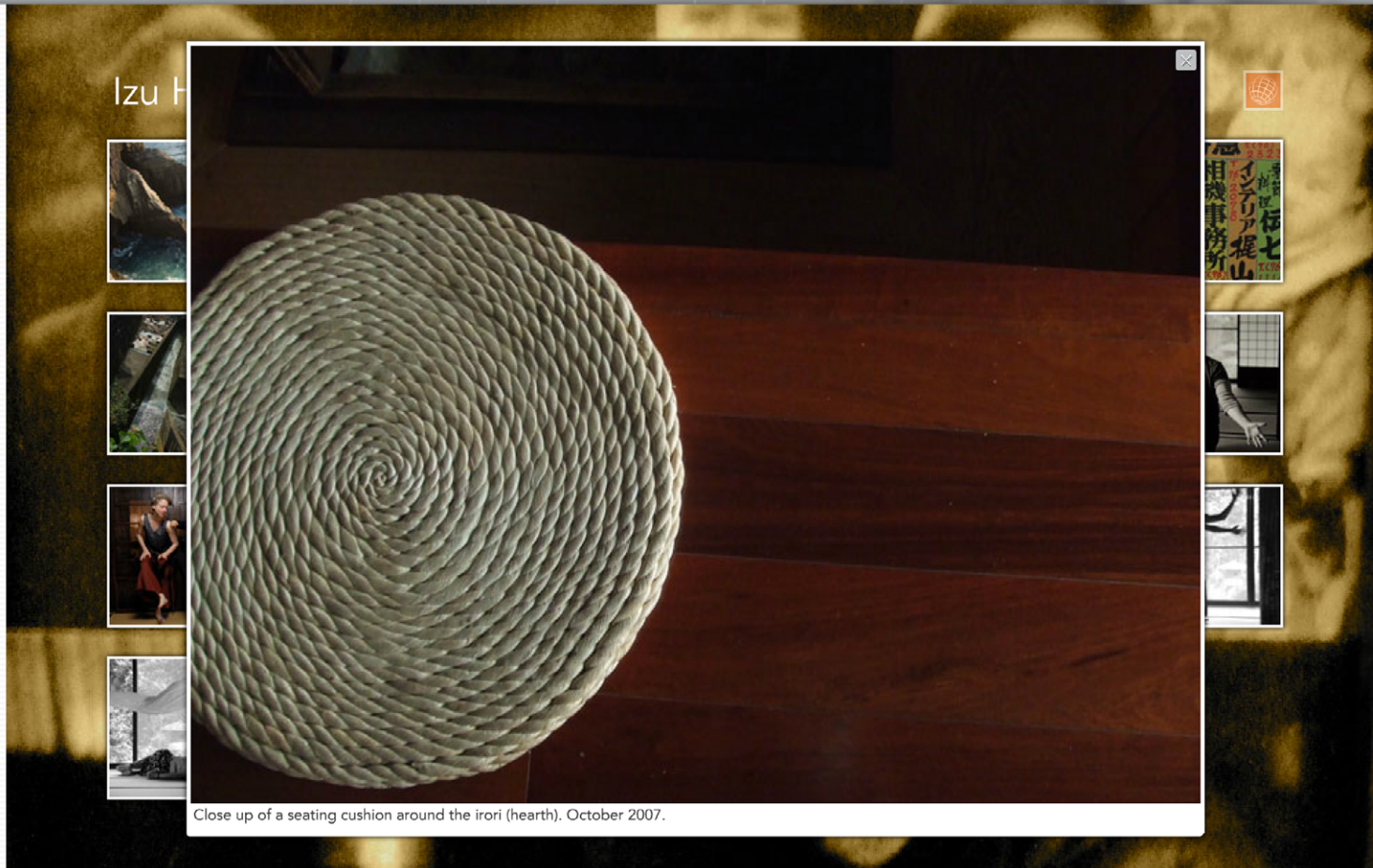
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Leah and Roko dance in the front room, where guests would enter after removing their shoes in the foyer, which is visible through the grated door. October 2007.  
Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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Roko dances between the foyer, where visitors took off their shoes, and the front room, where they waited to be received. "Izu House explores the transitional spaces between the outside and inside worlds, guests and natives, the folkloric wilderness and the structure of home, those deceased and generations unborn." October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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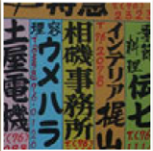








Leah improvises in the front room at Chihan-an. Hideo and Roko behind the shoji (papered walls), begin to create one of the two shadow plays in Izu House. October 2007.









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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors: Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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Izu H



Hideo improvises in the grounds behind Chihan-an. This would become one of the last images in the piece, later performed by Roko and Leah. The white building behind him was where Chihan, a landowner, stored rice duties from his tenant farmers. October 2008.



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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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Hideo improvises in the birthing room. As the innermost space in the house, this room is still reserved for honored guests. Nobuko Awaya, as all the Suganama babies before her, was born here. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors: Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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The go table at Chihan-an. "While the women participated in the bloody red, chaotic 'messiness' of birth, on the other side of the fusuma (sliding door), the menfolk concentrated on a game of go: gridded, calculated, black and white." October 2005.

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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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Chihan-an: Hideo, during an authentic movement session, in the birthing room. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.

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Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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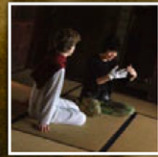
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Izu House 08



Chihan-an: Mika helps the dancers choreograph the "Chihan taking a nap" scene, performed later by Hideo. October 2007. Photo by Takayuki Moriki.



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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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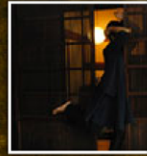
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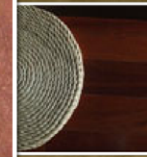
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## Izu House 08



A young Suganuma ancestor. Photograph from Nobuko's family collection, re-photographed by Roko Kawai. October 2007.



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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors:  
Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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One day Chihan's nephew, Mr. Sugiyama, came to visit with three generations of his own family. As the son of Chihan's younger sister who had returned after her divorce, Mr. Sugiyama spent much of his childhood in these rooms. Nobuko shares family photographs around the irori (hearth), while one of the granddaughters watches our rehearsal videos. For most of his family, this was the first time they had ever been inside of a traditional Japanese residence. October 2007.

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Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.

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Nobuko and her Uncle Sugiyama looking at photographs of their ancestors. October 2007.



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Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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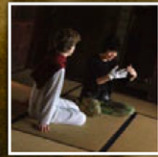
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Suganuma ancestor. Photo of a photograph from Nobuko's family collection. October 2007.



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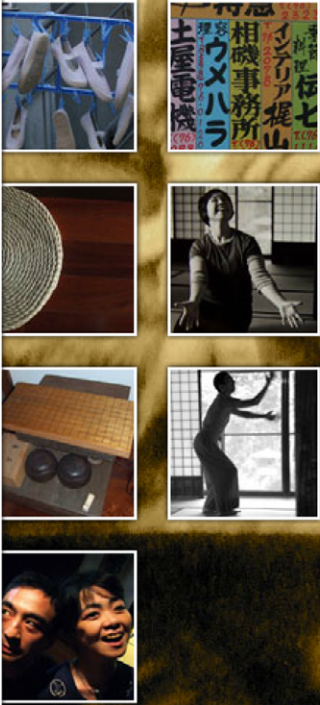
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Izu House 08



Hideo and Mika are longtime residents of Tokyo's congested working class neighborhoods, far from the relaxed countryside of Ohito. They made a wonderful artistic pairing with Japanese-American artists Roko and Toshi, who were also born in Tokyo but had built careers in Philadelphia. October 2007.



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Background image: Photo of photo of Nobuko Awaya's ancestors: Chihan as a young man and his family. October 2007.



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Izu House



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Background image: Chihan-an: Hideo and Leah in shadow. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007. Photo by Eiichiro Iwasa.

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Background image: Chihan-an: Hideo and Leah in shadow. Ohito, Izu Peninsula. October 2007. Photo by Eiichiro Iwasa.



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### Tokyo Journal 05

In 2005, I received a Japan–U.S. Friendship Commission Fellowship, an opportunity to live in Japan and carry out artistic research. For seven months I absorbed the visceral, physical energy of Japan today, which is so different than when I was there as a child. I was born in Tokyo but when I was three my family immigrated to Pennsylvania. In many ways, my life is a continued dance between these two countries. Depending on the locale, I am constantly shifting how I carry my torso, how I project my voice, how I weight my touch, how I use my eyes, how I see myself, how I interpret others interpreting me. I returned to Japan at the transitional age of twelve and left again at seventeen. It had always been my goal to go back as an adult, as a professional dance artist. I wanted to discover where my own views were—and remain—naïve. Before this trip, it had been 23 years since I last lived there.



BIMYOH / JA



BUSINESS CARD



COMFORT BODY



DANCE IDEAS



FEAR & TREMBLING



JR WRECKAGE



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THE VISCERAL

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Background image: Opaque in Ginza, Tokyo. September 2005.