

Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

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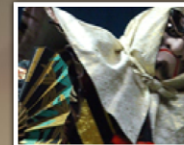
I took three major trips while on fellowship in Japan, each about a week long. In April 2005, I was able to get a highly coveted ticket to Kompira Kabuki, or the Grand Kabuki performed at the Kanamaru Theater near Kompira Shrine on Shikoku Island, just southeast of Osaka. Built in the 1800s, Kanamaru is still producing kabuki performances that use 17th-century stage technologies such as candle lights.

In June 2005 I set out northward. At the tip of Honshu I hoped to hear Tsugaru shamisen music performed live—in some of my dances I had improvised using recordings of this music (*Improvisation to Tsugaru Shamisen*). While driving through Hokkaido to the Sea of Okhotsk, I wanted to observe the dance and gain a contemporary sense of the indigenous *Ainu* people.

My third and last trip was to the southwest coast of Shimane prefecture. This region is thought to be the birthplace of Shintoism, the native religion of Japan. Local versions of kagura, the riveting, mythical, dance-folk dramas dating back centuries, are still performed in this remote area of the country. *Mitsumen Komori*, the classical piece I was working on during this period in Tokyo, required that I learn to dance with masks in order to portray three kagura characters. I wanted to see kagura in its original context, as kept alive by farm villagers for harvest and other celebrations, performed by young adult boys all night long at the local shrines to fantastic effect.



KOMPIRA



KAGURA



NORTH: HIROSAKI



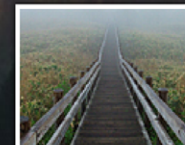
NORTH: HAKODATE



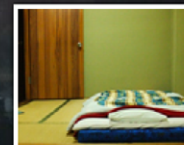
NORTH: AINU



NORTH: OSORE-ZAN



NORTH: SOLO



NORTH: SHIRETOKO

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Background image: Hiking on the Nakasendo Trail through Kiso Valley, central Honshu, en route to see Kagura in southwestern Japan. October 2005.

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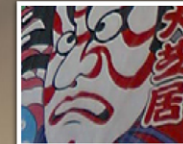
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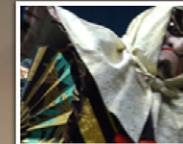
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Ainu

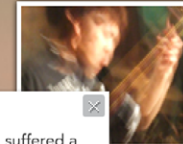
Now an ethnic minority on the northern island of Hokkaido, these native peoples suffered a similar fate to that of Native Americans. Today, Ainu are not permitted to marry "mainland" Japanese and their communities are either invisible, economically struggling and/or exploited as tourist attractions. As an ethnic minority in the United States, I very much wanted to travel to meet and speak to Ainu to see their dances and to learn about their history.



KOMPIRA



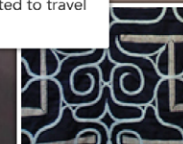
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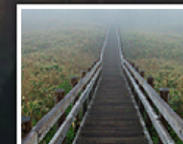
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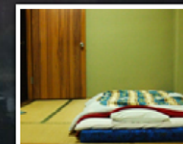
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Kompira 1



4.19.05 : KOMPIRA SHIKOKU

Shikoku Island was quick and last minute, but well worthwhile.

microscopic train timetables & colorful, glossy & complicated pamphlets advertising hotels & packages & renta-cars, &, &...i thought of making this a more extensive trip for going all the way down there, but finally got overwhelmed with only understanding 70% of what was going on between me & the travel agent. decided to keep it simple. i'd see the Kabuki in the afternoon, mom & i will eat, bathe & sleep in deluxe washiki (traditional japanese) style, and then climb the famed Kompira-San mountain, up stairs (785 to the top!) that lead you to various shrines & temples honoring the Sea Goddess. this trip seemed to cost a fortune by american standards (mom didn't flinch at price).

aimed for the 7:13am shinkansen (bullet train) out of tokyo. at that hour, tokyo is different—a less polite face—youngsters who'd been up all night partying still loitering the streets, a few bums, exhausted businessmen whom you can't tell if they're coming from or going to work. anyway, caught the next shinkansen. where conductors & snack girls are ironed and pressed, with perfectly refined smiles & a formal bow as they pass through and leave your car saying: "i'm sorry to have bothered you."

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Background image: En route to Shikoku, crossing the Inland Sea. April 2005.

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Kompira Shikoku

Kompira is the name of the mountain near the Kanamaru Theater that has preserved its 17th Century architecture and where Kabuki is still staged in the original Edo Period style. Many people have nicknamed this annual event "Kompira Kabuki."

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← Kompira 2

by the time we got to Kotohira town, i was frazzled from all the coordination & not knowing. i wish i could relax into the not-knowing, even enjoy it, be amused by it. i'd called 3x but... would my reserved ticket really be at Kanamaru Theater as they'd promised? i had no receipt, no fax, no confirmation code to vouch for my coming all the way down to shikoku. but this is japan, after all. if they *said* it was confirmed on the phone, it *is* confirmed. and so it was. my name was handwritten on their list at the ticket tent outside the theater, and they gave me their handy bag of local omiage (gifts) to go along with the show.

Kompira Kabuki, as it turns out, is hugely popular & sells out as soon as it goes on market. mostly old folks; only a handful of people my age, but mostly traveling with their elderly parents. didn't spot more than 3-4 young people who were there on their own. and only one foreigner! i thought this would be a *gaijin* (foreigner) magnet. but i guess it's just too hard to compete with the old folks at getting your hands on these popular tickets. even local people have a hard time.



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Background image: Kompira Kabuki, waiting for the show to begin. There were only a handful of people my age. These coveted tickets went mostly to elderly fans. April 2005.

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← Kompira 3

Built in the 1800s, Kompira Kabuki at Kanamaru Theater boasts being the oldest theater in Japan still producing Kabuki that uses (mostly but, I discovered, not all) 17th C stage technologies (they had some electric lights). I sat in the balcony close to the stage. It was magnificent to see the crowds streaming in, enjoying their gift packages from the ticket tents. between the 2 hanamichis (stage runways into audience), the main audience floor was made of tatami sub-divided by a low fence like wooden grid that you could walk on (like a balance beam) to get to your spot. (pretty great seeing old folks & women in kimono walking on these, while bowing & carrying bags). candle light lanterns lined the hanamichi & stage. above, the ceiling was a bamboo lattice where stage-hands scattered cherry blossom petals onto the audience's heads at a climactic moment in the first play. what a delight to see the smiles of the spectators at being showered. the actors were very near, and would break the "fourth wall" by coming out into the audience, cracking jokes about the local scene or contemporary celebrities. high up in the "west" (stage left) balcony, i could look straight down on the hanamichi below, just 3 feet below me, at an elaborately adorned aka-hime (red kimono princess) and notice his/her perfectly painted neck, the ornaments in his/her wig.

Background image: The view from my seat at Kanamaru Theater. April 2005.

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Kompira 4



i don't know enough about the differences betw 17th C & 21st C kabuki to always know where the staging was different. but what did stand out was that the main stars & extra fighters would themselves do *hikinuki* (drop character for a moment & act as onstage costume-change assistants for other actors), which is normally delegated to professional stagehands. one sword fight was fantastic, all done by bouncing squat motions, punctuated by the percussive woodblock sound guy. scene changes were clearly 17th C – but all stunning in their ingenuity. in one instance, the stage went from a drab brown hermit's shack on a mountain to the middle of a raging indigo blue sea. stage flats opened out like doors on hinges, revealing beautifully painted tidal waves on stage L & R. live musicians were rolled out on a stand to downstage L, singing & playing. a giant horizontal flap from above was released, hinged at about the "horizon line" of the stage. it came cascading down like a giant wing, and barely missed the heads of the musicians. and thus, we not only were thrown into the middle of the sea but given an adrenalin rush as the stage rocked with real life anticipation along with the change in drama.

the audience would "ahhhh" at these moments. at other times, the audience would laugh when the old technology was "endearing."

you really got a sense that townspeople, in the Edo Period, really must have enjoyed these shows, with all their clever surprises, bravura of actors taking improvisatory risks, the never-ending visual showmanship, the melodrama of emotional outbursts at a time when the government deprioritized all human sentiment. and of course, Kompira Kabuki brings very famous contemporary Kabuki stars here for their own annual pilgrimage to this authentic theater site. a way to keep the tradition connected to its grass-roots.

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Background image: Looking down at the front-center of the house inside the Kanamaru Theater. April 2005.

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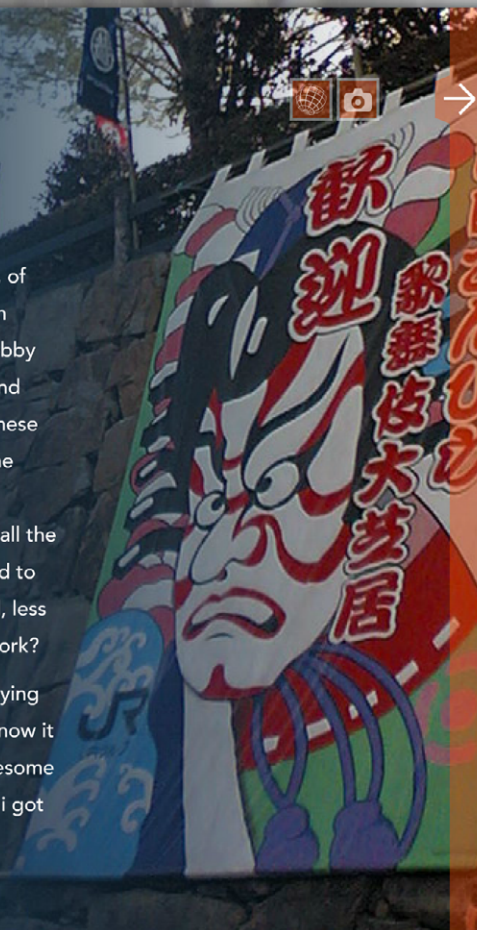
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Kompira 5

and it may be very anti-feminist for me to say this, but i really liked the all-male cast. kabuki is, of course, different than nihon buyo, though costuming, charactering, & storylines are often from identical sources. but after seeing hours and hours of young women doing nihon buyo as a hobby (life-hobby?), performing somewhat amateurishly, being doll-like beautiful, it was refreshing and engaging to see the solidity of men—even their grotesqueness as it was juxtaposed against these fabulous costumes—and their professionalism as performers. maybe the founder of kabuki, the female priestess Okuni, had a look of her own that delighted audiences as she danced and portrayed both male & female characters. but it feels like the evolution of kabuki/dance, with all the fantastic visuals, was created for men—that the beauty of the costume was somehow intended to compensate for the masculinity of the actors. when you put it “back” on a female, it feels odd, less satisfying. like if you dressed a ‘real woman’ in an over-the-top drag queen get-up, would it work? anyway, socio-anthropology aside, Ichikawa Somegoro, one of the young stars, was there (playing male roles). So handsome, and *skilled*. one movement of his eyebrows & you want to melt. i know it pushes all those politically-incorrect buttons, but the male stance in kabuki/dance is really awesome & seductive, protecting & noble. he’s become popular in mainstream films, too. the next day, i got mom to climb the 785 steps up Kompira-san.



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Background image: Scene on the path leading up Mt. Kompira to Kanamaru Theater to see Kompira Kabuki. April 2005.

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nihon buyo

"Japanese classical dance" (as a broad genre)

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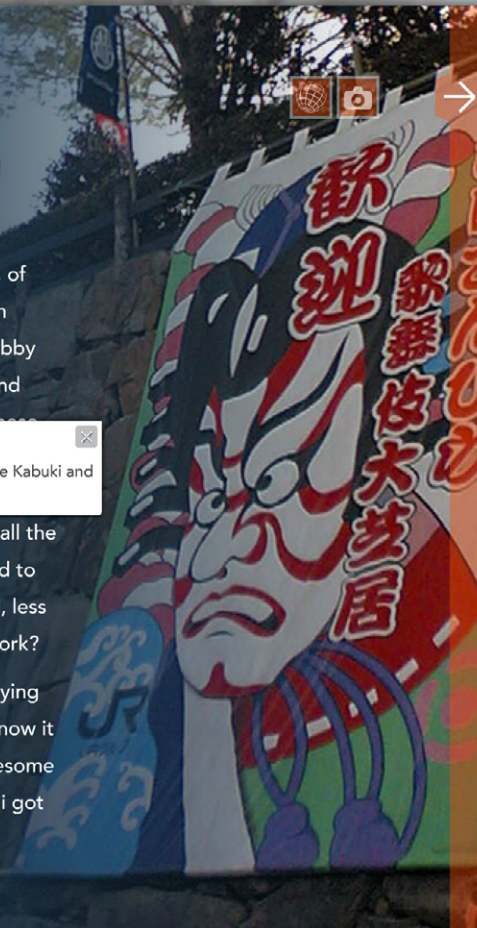


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Ichikawa Somegoro

Ichikawa Somegoro is a member of the Ichikawa Kabuki family, popular both in the Kabuki and as a movie actor.

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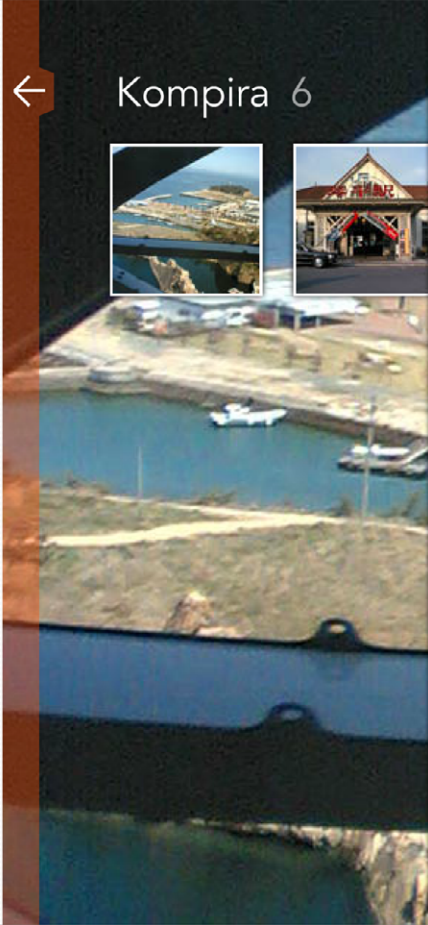
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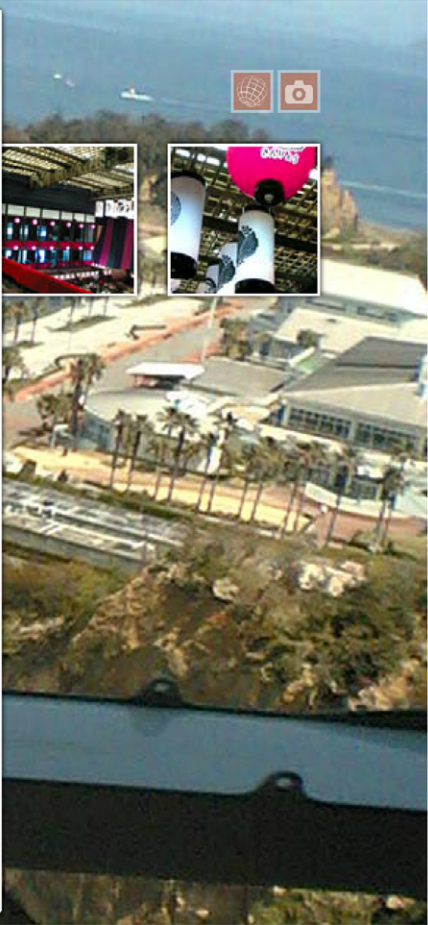




Seto Islands, crossing from Honshu to Shikoku islands. The view from the train en route to see Kompira Kabuki at the historic Kanamaru Theater. Built in the 1800s, this theater boasts to being the oldest theater in Japan and still uses 17th-century stage technologies. April 2005.







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The tiny train station for the town of Kotohira, en route to see Kompira Kabuki. April 2005.



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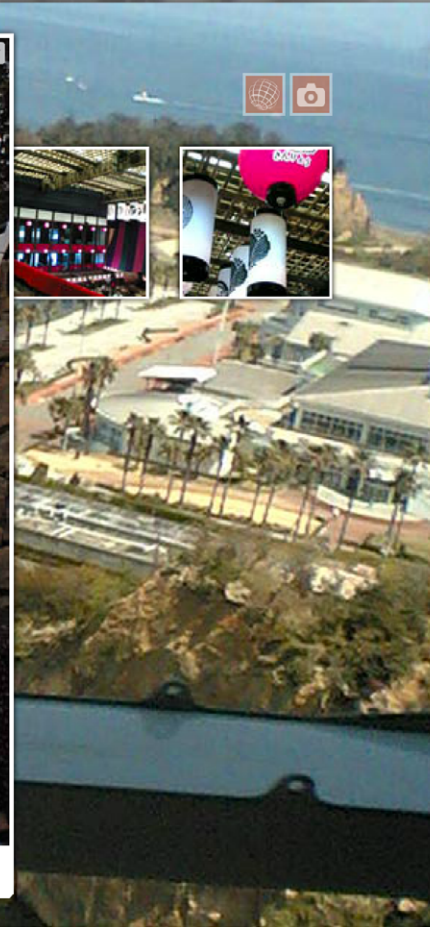
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Walking up Mt. Kompira leads to the Kanamaru Theater to see Kompira Kabuki. April 2005.



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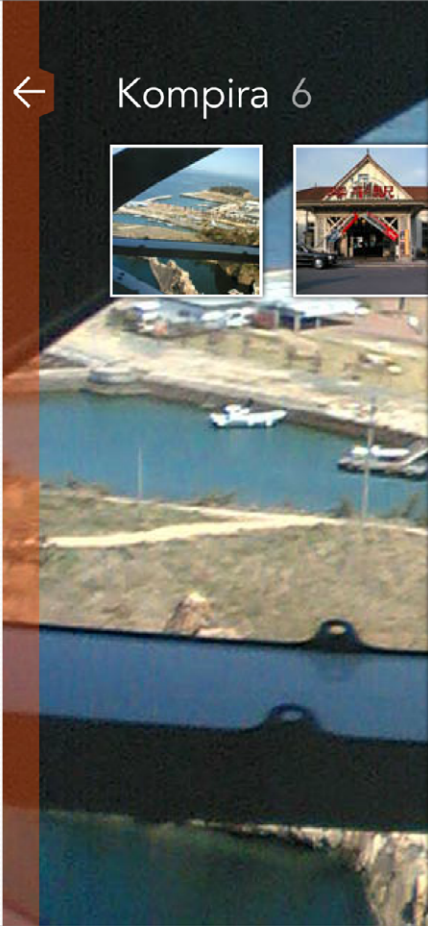
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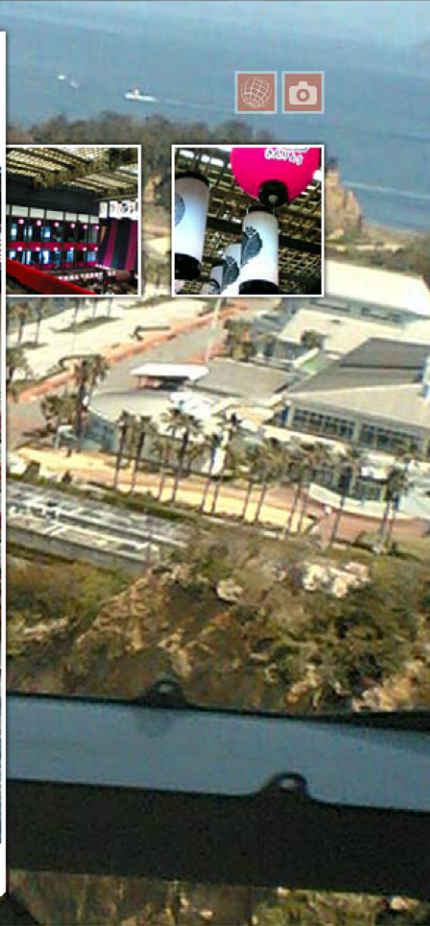
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The view from my seat at Kanamaru Theater. Above there was a bamboo catwalk from which stagehands scattered paper cherry blossom petals at climactic moments onto the audience. Many of the windows are engineered to direct natural light to key positions on stage. April 2005.

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Kanamaru Theater, catwalk detail. April 2005.

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My third and last trip was to the southwest coast of Shimane prefecture. This region is thought to be the birthplace of Shintoism, the native religion of Japan. Local versions of kagura, ancient Shinto dance-myth-dramas, are still performed in this remote area of the country. *Mitsumen Komori*, the classical piece I was working on during this period in Tokyo, required that I learn to dance with masks in order to portray three kagura characters. I wanted to see kagura in its original context, as kept alive by farm villagers for harvest and other celebrations, performed by young adult boys all night long at the local shrines to fantastic effect.

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Background image: Benkei was a renowned warrior-monk, famous for his great strength and size. Tanijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Mitsumen Komori

Originally created for Segawa Kikunojo V by Tsuchi Jihei, with music by Namizaki Tokuji in the tokiwazu style. First staged in 1829. *Mitsumen Komori* is a popular Japanese classical repertory piece depicting the comical antics of a twelve year old babysitter girl from the Edo Period (1603-1867). Trying to soothe her crying baby, she uses three masks to play-act a funny skit. This was the piece that I would work on intensively with Hanayagi Kazu for five months in Tokyo.

My third and last trip was to Iwate prefecture. This region is the native religion of Japan. Local versions of kagura, ancient Shinto dance-myth-dramas, are still performed in this remote area of the country. *Mitsumen Komori*, the classical piece I was working on during this period in Tokyo, required that I learn to dance with masks in order to portray three kagura characters. I wanted to see kagura in its original context, as kept alive by farm villagers for harvest and other celebrations, performed by young adult boys all night long at the local shrines to fantastic effect.

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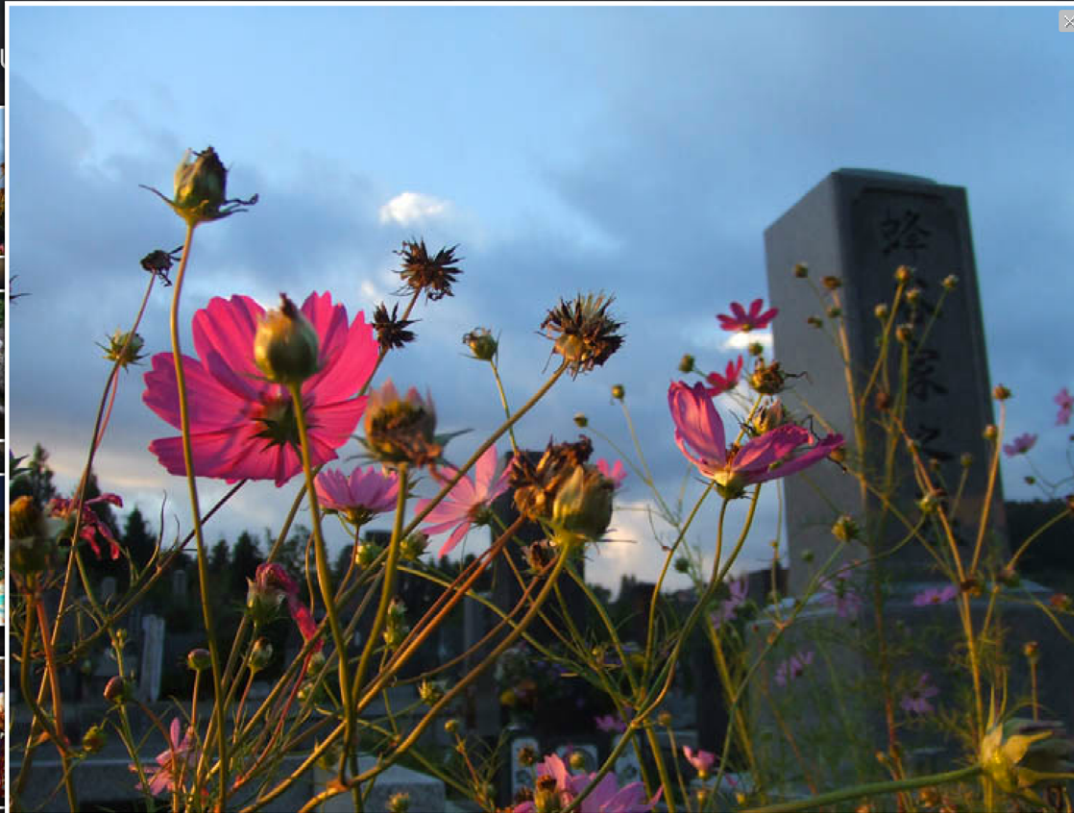
TOKYO JOURNAL 05

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BIOGRAPHY



Kagura



Travel through Kiso Valley, central Honshu, en route to see Kagura in southwestern Japan. Sunset in cemetery, Magome town. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

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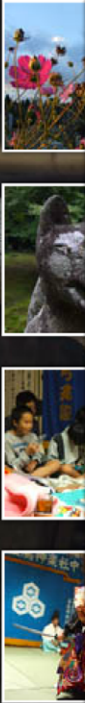
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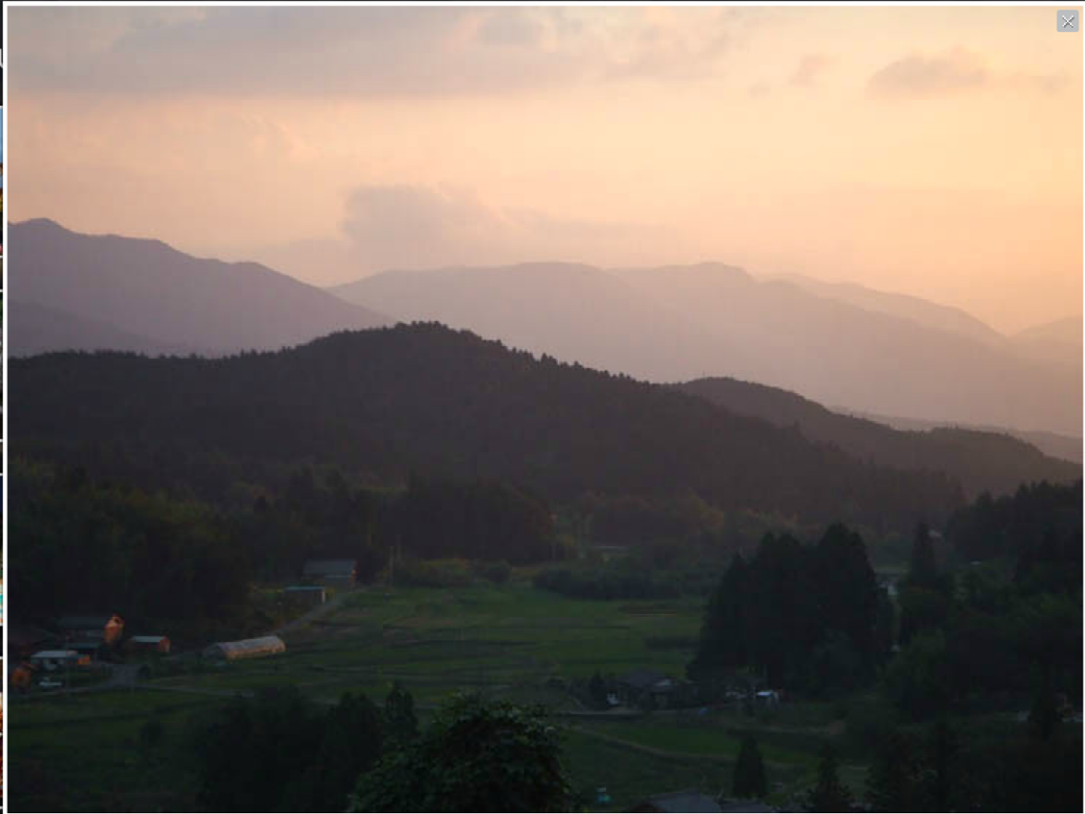
TOKYO JOURNAL 05

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← Kagura







Hiking on the Nakasendo Trail through Kiso Valley, central Honshu, en route to see Kagura in southwestern Japan. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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Kagura



Azuki beans and husks drying in the sun along the Nakasendo Trail. Kiso Valley, central Honshu, en route to see Kagura in southwestern Japan. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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Kagura



Detail of azuki bean husks drying in the sun along the Nakasendo Trail. Kiso Valley, central Honshu, en route to see Kagura in southwestern Japan. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakuragawa Kagura. October 2005.

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Azuki beans drying in the sun along the Nakasendo Trail. Kiso Valley, central Honshu, en route to see Kagura in southwestern Japan. October 2005.

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Kagura



On the coast of the Sea of Japan en route to see Kagura in nearby Shimane prefecture, southwestern Japan. October 2005. Photo by Christopher Switky.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

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Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura 2





Kitsune (fox) god statue at a Shinto shrine in Shimane prefecture, near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura 2



Ebiya-san, at that time an 87-year-old Kagura flute-maker in Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura 2



Tanijyugo Shrine: Shinto invocation ceremonies before the all night Kagura performances to celebrate the autumn harvest. Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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Kagura



Tanijyugo Shrine: All generations of townsfolk gather for the Kagura performances celebrating the autumn harvest. Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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Tanijyugo Shrine: All generations of townsfolk gather for the all night Kagura performances celebrating the autumn harvest. Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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← Kagura

Tanijyugo Shrine: Shinto invocation dance that marks the start of the all night Kagura performances. Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura 2





Helping a performer with the Okina mask, an auspicious "old man" dance for longevity and prosperity. Taniyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.





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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura





Boys with their game-boys getting settled in for the all night Kagura performances at Tanijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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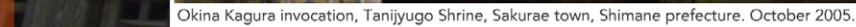
BELONGING AND SOLO 07 IZU HOUSE 08 TOKYO JOURNAL 05 TRAVEL JOURNAL 05 BIOGRAPHY

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← Kagura





Musashibo Benkei, a legendary/historic hero who is mythologized as the loyal retainer to General Ushiwakamaru of the powerful 12th-century Minamoto clan. A popular story across many traditional Japanese performance genres, the Benkei and Ushiwakamaru tale is seen in Kagura, Noh, Kabuki, Japanese classical dance. Taniyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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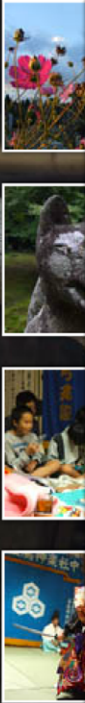
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← Kagura









Benkei was a renowned warrior-monk, famous for his great strength and size. Benkei vowed to collect one thousand swords in order to help finance the rebuilding of a temple. This dance begins with Benkei lying in wait at Kyoto's Gojo Bridge to collect his final sword, having theretofore defeated 999 swordsmen in duels. Taniijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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Kagura



Ushiwakamaru, a slight womanly figure comes upon Benkei at the Gojo Bridge and accepts his challenge to a duel. Tanijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura









The duel between Ushiwakamaru and Benkei. These all night Kagura plays are performed by local teenage boys and show off their indefatigable athleticism and endurance. Taniijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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Kagura 2



My host Yoko, resisting the night chill of the open air Taniyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura







Many of the plays were less familiar to me, such as this one which seemed based in older lore about village warriors fighting off attacks from demons. Tanijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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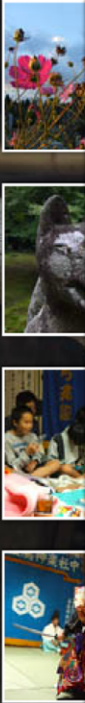
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Kagura



Best seats in the house — local children squeal with delight and reach out to touch the elaborately adorned demons who dance just inches from their faces. Tanijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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← Kagura







Ebisu, one of the seven good-luck gods of Shintoism and one of the three masked Kagura characters I learned to play while learning the Japanese classical dance piece, *Mitsumen Komori*. In *Mitsumen*, a fictional twelve-year-old babysitter from the 19th-century plays with Kagura masks she picked up from her local shrine. I wanted to witness how this religious folk dance exists in its local context today. Tanijyugo Shrine, Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.

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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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BIOGRAPHY

← Kagura 2



My host's neighbor, an organic green tea farmer. Sakurae town, Shimane prefecture. October 2005.



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Background image: Ceremonial rope at Shinto shrine, Shimane prefecture near Sakurae Kagura. October 2005.

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BIOGRAPHY

North: Hirosaki 1

6.17.05

...but luckily that night, i got to Hirosaki city. upon first impression, it's a quieter, cleaner form of any city in Japan – with appealing sweet bread bakeries and the local 100 yen store.

but one block from the JR station was my very slick hotel and one more block was Yama-uta Restaurant... a true gem in this entire world!

Tsugaru Shamisen, i've always wanted to hear this stringed instrument live; i'd spent countless hours improvising to a CD (*Improvisation to Tsugaru Shamisen*). though visually akin to a banjo, its intensity is that of an african djimbe. the soul of the harsh northern countryside. and here, at Yama-uta ("Mountain Song"), is this quirky set up –



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Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

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Hirosaki City

Although not as famous as its neighbor Aomori on the northern tip of Honshu (the main island of Japan), it is a great destination, especially to hear musicians who play the Tsugaru shamisen (traditional banjo like instrument)

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Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

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JR

Japan Railway (the nationally subsidized rail system)

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Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

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North:

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Tsugaru Shami
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("Mountain Song"), is this quirky set up –

Improvisation to Tsugaru Shamisen



2:57

Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

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Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

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1:02

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Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

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0:12

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Djimbe

Large African drum.

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Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

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← North: Hirosaki 2

the boss Shibutani-san is a shamisen teacher himself who created the restaurant as a way to support his work. his students—winners at national contests—wait tables, bringing out “home-made” dishes of local seafoods & mountain vegetables, and then, every night at 7p and 9p, put down their order pads & get up on stage to give *powerful* performances. no one took one bite of food, one sip of beer during all this, it's so captivating. and the musicians all wear the silkscreened logo on whatever T-shirt they chose: “Tsugaru Shamisen” with a cartoon face of the boss.

tsugaru shamisen (clear boy)

rapt audience, food untouched

did the 7p show with every intention of seeing both. smoking was prohibited during the perfs themselves so sweet heaven for me. but at 8:15, the entire place lit up. i had the best seat in the house, the front-most stool at the counter for “singles.” but since i was the ONLY female at the counter, and the 50yo+ men alongside me were getting drunker and smokier by the minute, i got out of there fast. paid my bill and told the lady i'd be back at 9. but i was too exhausted and fell fast asleep.

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Background image: Yama-uta Restaurant. June 2005.

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← North: Hirosaki 3 →

in this low tourist season, these travel agents have lots of extra time to entertain the likes (and indecisiveness) of me. and i indulged in the self-intro: "i'm traveling from america now & wondered if..." it was a quick & easy way to give them a heads-up about the fact that i may suddenly look confused for no reason, to let them stop worrying about what a "strange woman" this is, traveling all alone ("oh, you're from america" seems to explain away my lack of appropriate feminine intrepidity—and husband!), and even fosters some chatty curiosity and protectiveness.

so i started to "tune in" to these moments when i could read someone's little joke, a pause & a hmmm, and the ever-ambiguous "nan-ni mo nai tokoro desukara..." (there's 'nothing' at that place so... can't recommend you going). Which usually meant it just be might an interesting place to go to...

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Background image: Neputa image at train station, Hirosaki. June 2005.

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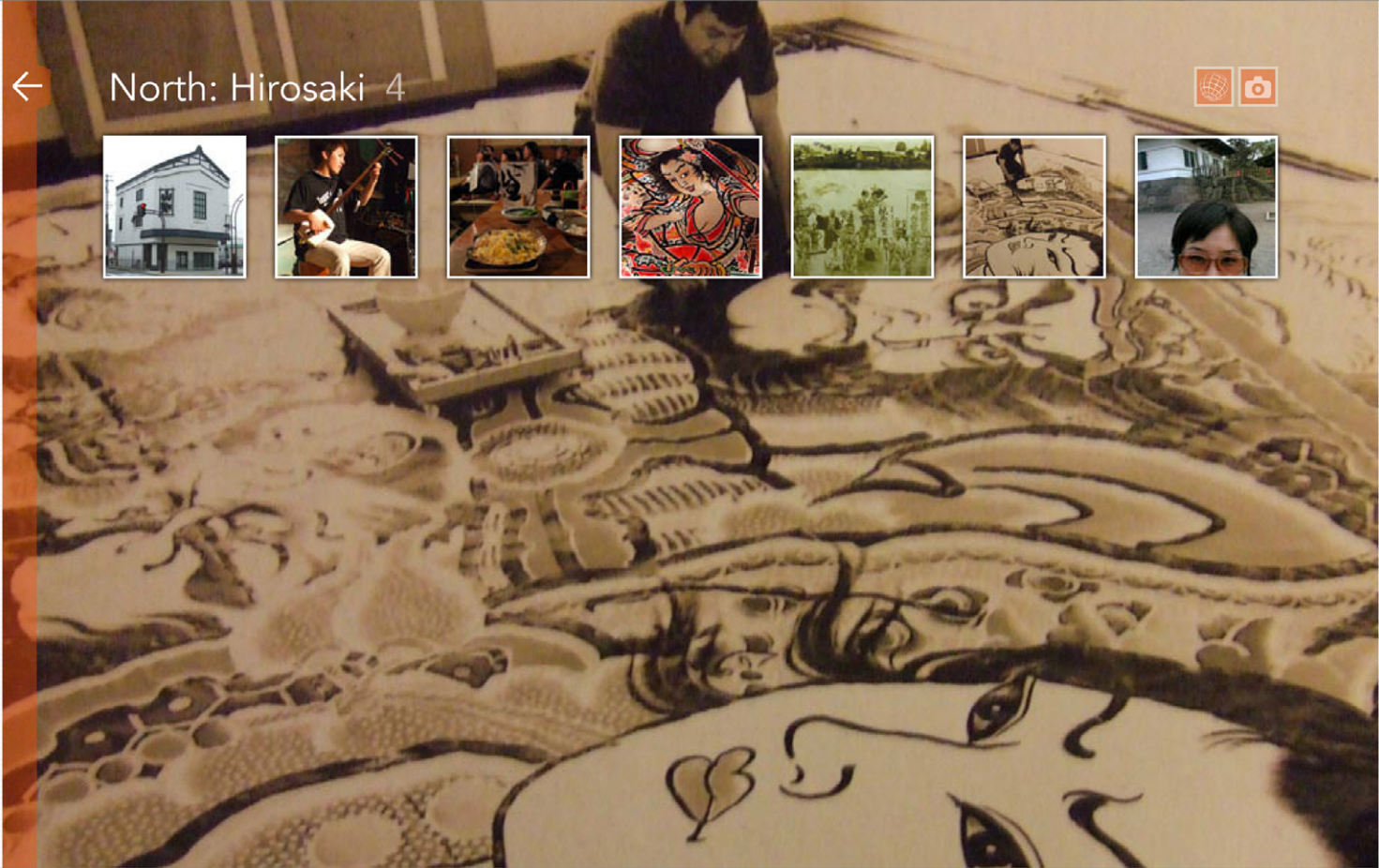
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←

North: Hirosaki 4





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Background image: Archival photograph showing a float painter for the Neputa Festival. Neputa Village Museum, Hirosaki. June 2005.

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← North: Hirosaki 4





Yama-uta restaurant in Hirosaki city features dishes of local seafood and vegetables and two shows a night of Tsugaru shamisen (banjo-like instrument), in the dynamic style of northern Honshu Island, near the Tsugaru Strait. June 2005.





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Background image: Archival photograph showing a float painter for the Neputa Festival. Neputa Village Museum, Hirosaki. June 2005.

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←

North









Yama-uta restaurant. The boss Shibutani-san is a shamisen teacher himself. His students wait tables and at 7pm and 9pm nightly put down their order pads and get up on stage and play a captivating set. June 2005.

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Background image: Archival photograph showing a float painter for the Neputa Festival. Neputa Village Museum, Hirosaki. June 2005.

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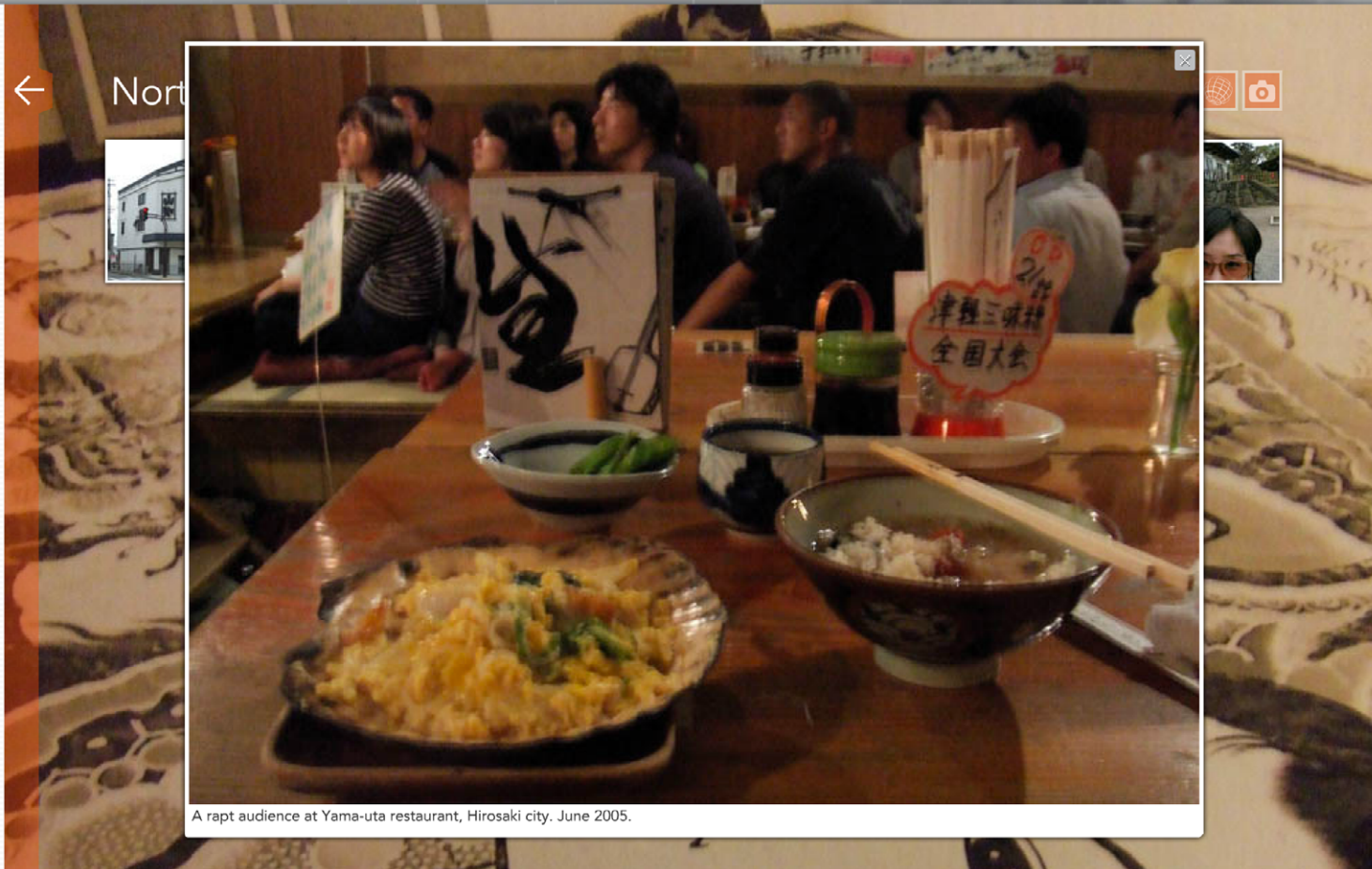
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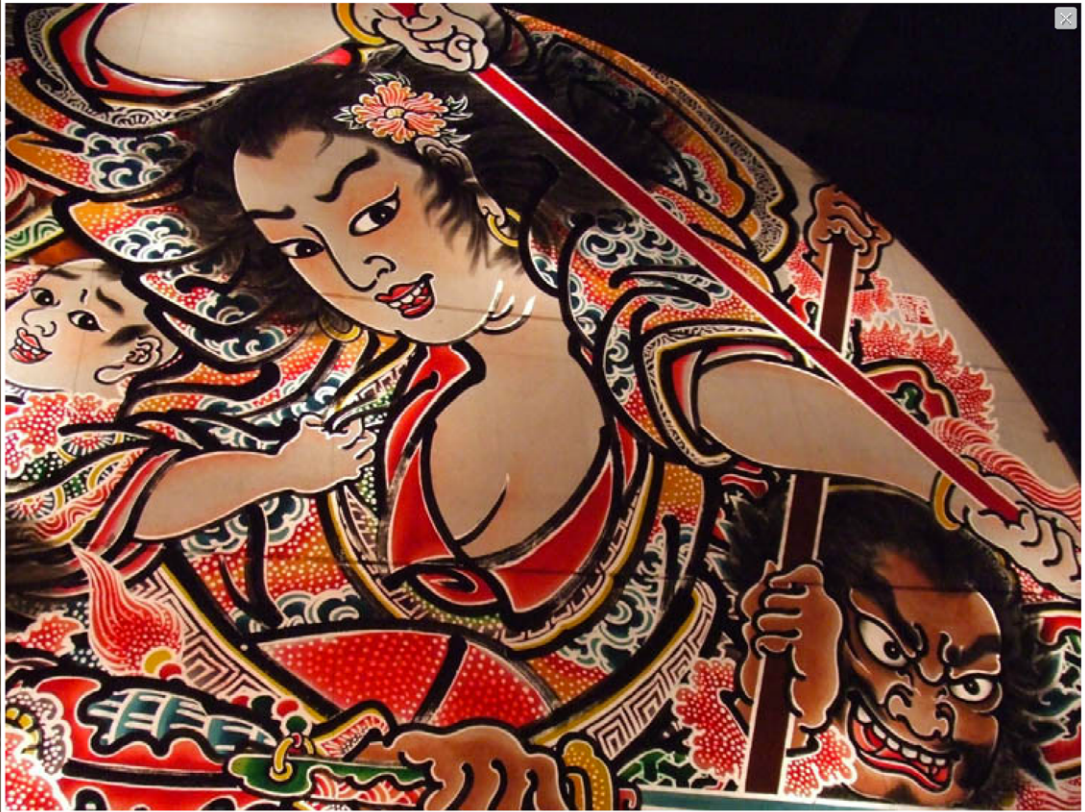
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An illuminated paper float from the Neputa Festival, one the nationally popular summer festivals that takes place the northern cities of Hirosaki and Aomori. Neputa Village Museum, Hirosaki. June 2005.

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Background image: Archival photograph showing a float painter for the Neputa Festival. Neputa Village Museum, Hirosaki. June 2005.

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Archival photograph showing how Neputa Festival was celebrated in the early 20th-century. Neputa Village Museum, Hirosaki. June 2005.

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North: Hirosaki 4



Sightseeing around Hirosaki city, here I am at Hirosaki Castle I often felt strange, as a single female, traveling alone. June 2005.

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North: Hakodate

6.19.05

i love the *idea* of Hakodate. actually living there may also be really interesting. as the southernmost port of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, it has an long and complex relationship with Russia (some signs are in russian). it's one of the few ports where the xenophobic shogunate allowed foreign trade, pre-modernization. it's the border against which the "Wa" ('pure' Japanese on Honshu island) fought off "invading" Ainu ethnic tribes (who were already natively inhabiting parts of Honshu) until, in an about face turn, it became the frontier to some of Japan's earliest imperialist campaigns. Along with Okinawa, the "newly-modernized" imperial government decimated Ainu leadership & incorporated them as "citizens." however, as i would see (or not see) in my circle around Hokkaido, very few Ainu communities remain visible and those that are, are showcased in trinket-y tourist towns, making a living off of selling 'products' of their cultural and spiritual heritage.

i love coastal towns. people living close to the sea. the scale of ships at dock. the place where new peoples, pests, & ideas negotiate welcome, exchange or resistance. after checking into the hotel, i went for a walk along the dark, quiet harbor. the hotel-guide had given me a tourist map with "midokoro" (must-see places). greek orthodox church; eh. old russian consulate; eh. red brick (considered very exotic here) harbor warehouses; eh. no, i don't think i'll spend an extra day in hakodate. saw some of these sights late at night. the redbrick had xmas lights strung along its arches. hmmm. "nigiyaka" (bright and lively) was the clue-word for "touristy spot" i realized. "nigiyaka" vs. "nan-ni mo nai." (there's nothing there).

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Background image: Tsukiji Fish Market, Tokyo. May 2005.

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Hakodate

Port on the southern tip of Hokkaido island, well-known for international activity, especially with Russia and China.

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Background image: Tsukiji Fish Market, Tokyo. May 2005.

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North: Ainu 1



6.30.05 : MEETING AINU—2ND TO LAST

beginning to wonder about all this driving. mom always said it was “embarrassing” (ie, shameful) to be seen without a MAN to take care of the driving. at this point, i just wanted to feel like the hours & hours in the cigarette-stenchy rent-a-car was going to be worth “something.” more farmland.

next, to Akan National Park... “crown jewel.” a series of 3 large volcanic lakes in the middle of Hokkaido. still hadn’t really met anybody of ainu descent. hoping my desperation to find something “worthwhile at the end of the rainbow” wouldn’t objectify those whom i’d meet.

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Background image: Hokkaido road trip, driving through farmland. June 2005.

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North: Ainu 2



next... Lake Kussharoh and its Sunayu shore—literally, Sand Hot Water. at first it looks like just a sandy beach, deserted on this rainy day, parked swan peddle boats at empty docks. a few people around. i took off my shoes & dug a small hole.

scalding water poured in! unbelievable! i went closer to the lake's edge. chill waters there. i dug another hole closer to the lake & mixed the waters.

i had my bathing suit on under my clothes as the book suggested. i suppose that during the season, groups come here and dig bigger holes and jump right in. but it seemed so odd for me to be the only one, taking off my coat (hokkaido still had snow in the mountains), and sitting half-naked in a sandhole. so i bathed just my feet & ankles.

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Background image: Hokkaido. Tracing back inland from Shiretoko Peninsula to Lake Kussharoh and its Sunayu shore or, literally, "Sand Hot Water." June 2005.

Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

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North: Ainu 3



"well, kotan is 'yuhmei.'"

as well it should be...

this was the village of Kotan. a little nook on the main road, just a few buildings along the shore. decided to just do the bath, & quickly peek into the adjoining museum & reconstructed Chise (traditional ainu house).

the 3rd lake, Akan, after all was more famous for its authentic dance performances.

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Background image: Hotspring in Kotan, Hokkaido. June 2005.

Roko Kawai: an artist's workbook

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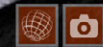
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North: Ainu 3



yuhmei

Well known, with wonderment.

"well, kotan is 'yuhmei.'"

as well it should be...

this was the village of Kotan. a little nook on the main road, just a few buildings along the shore. decided to just do the bath, & quickly peek into the adjoining museum & reconstructed Chise (traditional ainu house).

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