



Awagami Factory in the small town Awa Yamakawa, Shikoku, Japan

I arrive at the Awagami Factory and get a very warm welcome by Kazumi Watanabe with whom I have been communicating the last year. Awagami only admit two or three Visiting Artist per year so I feel very lucky to have the possibility. The first day we speak about my project and I get an introduction about the materials and different options by Takashi Fukunaga(Fuku-san) who will be my 'sensei' the coming three weeks. I also have a talk about my artistic practice with Mr Yoichi Fujimori the director of the Awagami Factory. I show him the original prints on the Tengucho paper, that are in fact the reason that I'm finally here.

For quite some time seaweed has been a subject in my work, especially Zostera Marina the seagrass meadows that are threatened in their existence though so very important within the chain of life. Few people are aware of that more than half of the oxygen we breath comes from marine photo synthesizers, like phytoplankton and seaweed. Both use carbon dioxide, water and energy from the sun to make food for themselves, releasing oxygen in the process.

Mr Fujimori finds it very interesting and studies the prints carefully. He suggests that I use not only Kozo fibre for my second project involving coloured fibre but also mix it with dyed Mitsumata fibre, a different plant with shorter fibre and softer qualities. Since the names Kozo, Mitsumata and pulp are all new to me I still have to learn how it behaves and differs when working with it.

I decide to make some tests on A4 size to get some basic knowledge on how and what. I learn about the amount of kozo fibre, neri and water and it's influence on each other.

The adding of a vegetable mucilage, commonly called neri, is essential to the formation of a sheet of Washi. Mixing neri into the pulp suspended in water allows for the even dispersal of the fibres throughout the vat. Neri is most commonly derived from the root of the tori-aoi a plant similar to Hibiscuses found in the west.

At the end of the day my head is spinning with all the new information. I get settled in the guesthouse and unpack some of my things. The guesthouse is a traditional Japanese house with a tatami mat in the bedroom where I have different mattresses to make up my bed with. Then of course all the open and shut slides around the house windows. Further there is a simple kitchen and bathroom.

Later I manage to get a bicycle for shopping and small tours in the neighbourhood. Happy with that since it saves me time!



Fuku-San my amazing 'sensei' during these weeks making the first test paper large size

Except me there is only staff at the Awagami workshop and they work really hard. Two girls are quit young and have both just recently left the Art Academy one in Kyoto and the other one in Tokio. One of them, Nodoka, speaks a bit of english and I soon have good contact with her.

Sometimes there are visitors passing by for a short introduction or the shop that has a wide range of papers and gifts. To be able to calculate the amount of Kozo, Mitsumata and pulp, and also what needs to be prepared or dyed we make a plan and weigh the test papers made. I get my own working space with big and small buckets for the different fibres and colours. Soon I get the hang of it and can make try outs for my first project with different outcomes. In the first series I wanted to include the Seagrass meadows from Japan and have been incredibly lucky to have found some on the Shores of Naoshima, the island with work of the architect Tadao Ando blending buildings seamlessly with landscape and Yayoi Kusama's giant pumpkins installations among others. I had researched about if, and where, the Zostera Marina grows along the shores of Japan. I found out it's being well surveyed just like in Sweden because of it's positive affect on the water quality and for it's function as being the 'nursery' of the sea.

There are different ways of in cooperating natural fibres to the papermaking, but you don't have that much time since you have to work wet in wet. I like it when there is a sort of depth in the paper by the added snippets, all slightly different in colour as well. I take the test papers with me back to the guesthouse and lay them out on the tatami mat next to the window. I have enough to think about before going larger tomorrow.



60x60cm with snippets "Naoshima meadows"

The next day I'm ready for scaling up to the 60 by 60 cm. Fuku-san demonstrates the amounts and speed for me to proceed. Watanabe-san translates it all, although it seems impossible because Fuku-san speaks a lot and very fast... I learn how to operate the 'suction' machine. And how to transport the wet paper sheet to the large boards where they dry more slowly. I find this easier than the heated board that we used for the A4 sizes.

I learn that the amount of water for example is not that precise, since it just pours through, but that the order of what to add when, like the neri, is really important. The Kozo has its own will and the fibres are amazingly intriguing, almost featherlike and 'alive'. The surface of each paper is different and beautiful.

Mr Fujimori had said that I could probably manage to make three papers that size in the morning and three in the afternoon, and that's well calculated, since I also need time to look and think what the next step will be so that they will all be slightly different.

There is also quite some time needed to prepare for the upcoming 90 minute art class I will be giving at the Gakushima primary school in a local village next to this. In the morning we have a meeting together with Hiroshi Sugihara, a former teacher that will help with the translation. What can we learn about eelgrass meadows through art?

By creating artworks that show the beauty and mystery of these underwater meadows, I try to increase our marine knowledge and curiosity about life under the sea surface. I show Hiroshi and Watanabe-san the short video footage that I want to show the children and my own artwork that I want to tell about. Taking them with me below the sea surface and hopefully sparking their imagination of what they see down under.

Finally we also get all the technical stuff sorted out, I also want to show a Google Maps Earth bowl spinning in space just to point out how much is sea and how much is land.

The day of the art class during my early walk I have a good feeling about it and that it will work out fine. At the school we are welcomed with tea and slippers, the vibe in the class is chill, there are 18

students between 11 and 12 years old, boys and girls in a dark blue loose school uniform. While we prepare the setup they sit around singing or taking a short break. Also Seiji Koda a videographer/photographer is present, he will film the art class from the rear. My introduction is maybe a bit to long but it does work and as soon as they get started with painting, I can see how they love it. All different images appear on the A3 size washi paper. The colour of the sea is different depending on the salty ness and depth and all the creatures they fantasize as well. At the end as we put them out on the floor all next to each other they all form a big sea together. One ocean, all water connected, sweet! We get a warm goodbye and everybody is very pleased and happy:)

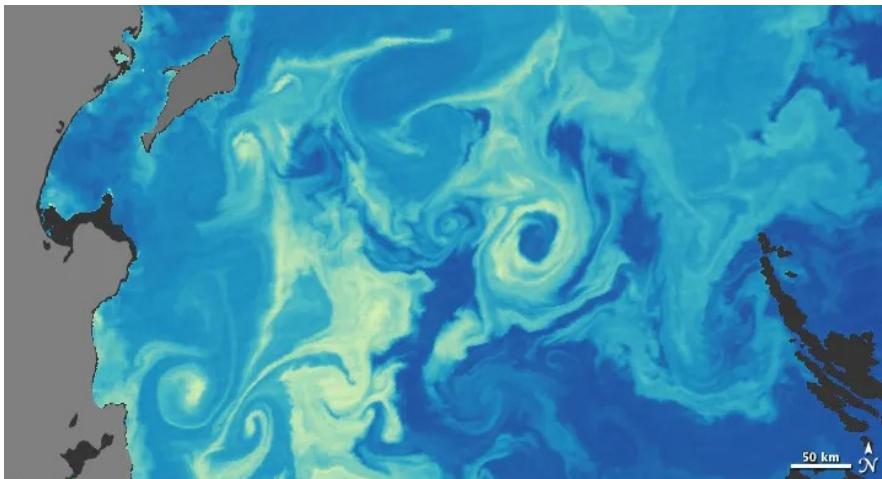
The next morning I first learn how to take down the drying papers from the board with a knife pressing down firmly from one corner to the other at the edges and then pulling it off gently but firmly diagonally. Amazing how beautiful they all are, quit pleased actually.

Still have to finish the series of 12 adding fewer and fewer of snippets.



Nodoka-san showing me how to take down the papers when dry.

The next project is a bit more challenging including coloured fibres and and heavier thickness of the paper. When applying for the Visiting Artist program I wrote in my proposal: “*Preferably I would like to mix different coloured/textured pulp into the other pulp creating organic structures/patterns. Also to experiment with pulp to create relief and/or more sculptural work.*” And added these two inspirational images.



North Pacific Ocean, Scientists use satellite images of the ocean to estimate chlorophyll concentrations in the water.

(photo: NASA, Robert Simmon and Jesse Allen)



Top shot of Icelandic waves on black lava beach

As an artist I feel that (Re)thinking the future is necessary because of the many challenges we face on our blue planet. I am very interested to work together with fellow artist, scientists and environmentalists, developing and sharing ideas and thoughts, to (un)learn and grow together in order to share our ideas with a public.

In my artistic practise I have felt a growing need to explore different ways of working directly through physical contact with landscapes and material, searching for a way to get deeply connected in the moment and 'play'.

My experience is that it takes time, work and exhaustion to reach to that state of mind.

The importance of our oceans and it's underwater jungles in ecological sense, the huge potential for future use but also the danger of overexploiting this fantastic resource that produces the oxygen of "every second breath we take" were things I only gradually learned by working with it.



Again I start with A4 format not yet knowing how the different fibres and colours will turn out. It is quit a challenge also because the thick paper takes a day or so to dry and the colour changes completely from wet til dry... I photograph every step just to be able to look back at what steps I have been taking and learn from that. I love how the Mitsumata black fibre mixes with the blue kozo, it's like feathers of a crow... The first two are a bit stiff and I don't like them very much, I also don't like the blue I find it too bright, so I start mixing it in a different hue and also letting the Mitsumata fibres stay intact in the mix. In this way creating my own palette of colours in several round pots. Then it's a matter of 'go with the flow' and not being scared... I think that my screenprint experience might have been helpful during this process, I recognize the adrenaline kick, being in the moment looking at what is happening and deciding what to do. A couple of days Seiji Koda the photographer is present following me, he is making a video portrait of each Visiting Artist that is later published on the Awagami website.

Since we have been calculating the exact amount of fibres to make an estimate of material costs. This is what decides how many sheets I can make. I was aiming for 8 or 12 depending on the thickness eventually. My experience with this series is that it's more demanding and tiring than the first, why that is is hard for me to say. In the end I can only look at what I have created with a bit of distance during the small presentation I have in the Library upstairs at the end of my residency. It's a nice event, both Mr and Mrs Fujimori and some of their family and friends are present and interested.



Here you can clearly see how structured the fibre becomes

We all feel that the xmas holidays are getting closer, the annual cleaning of the workshop is being done and in the weekend there is a harvesting day of Kozo and Mitsumata fibres in the Shikoko mountains. Young and old gather for this event, many have already experienced it before. The weather is cold but sunny, a super nice experience for me to finish the whole residency with. I feel really lucky and thankful to the Awagami factory and it's people for having me these weeks and for the generous support of Gerbrandy Foundation. I would love to go back to Japan some day.

Christina Hallstrom