

Love is Over

The Japanese collective Chim+Pom's rampage of playful social interventions began in Tokyo in 2005. Their emotive responses to the 2011 Fukushima disaster went on to solidify their reputation as leading cultural activists. **Ric Bower** spoke to Ryuta Ushiro 卯城竜太, the collective's leader, on the top floor of the Saatchi gallery where Ellie エリイ, of Chim+Pom, was performing *The history of humans*, after Chim+Pom won the Prudential EYE Award for Best Emerging Artist.

Elf-like, Ellie is perched atop a huge pile of origami cranes that have taken over a large part of the Saatchi Gallery; she has set herself the impossible task of unfolding every crane, a project that she undertakes hypnotically and with immense care. Every one of the cranes had been a gift to the city of Hiroshima, sent by a well-wisher, as a cathartic gesture in response to nuclear devastation reeked by *Little Boy* in 1945. Visitors to the exhibition are invited to share in this process of healing by refolding the cranes Ellie has unfolded. Our fumbling fingers, our complete inability to remake that which has been undone, became a metaphor for the powerlessness we feel when faced with such a mountain of suffering. Ryuta Ushiro 卯城竜太 and I sat and watched Ellie as we spoke. I began by asking Ryuta where the name Chim+Pom came from.

Ryuta Ushiro 卯城竜太: Ellie just had a realisation one day. It was like 'Oh, we are Chim+Pom!' Nobody knows why or what it really means, not even her.

Ric Bower: CCQ invited Chim+Pom to share evidence from a performance of their choice. You chose *Love is Over*. Can you tell me how it came about?

RU: One day, out of the blue, Ellie said she's gonna get married. →



She stated that: 'Marriage is a social act, different from privately living together.' So we decided to apply for permission to stage a demonstration and have a wedding ceremony on the streets; a kind of Royal Wedding parade. On the day, we were already very drunk before we hit the street; there were lots of police as a result of the application to demonstrate too. We've realised marriage is indeed something very public. Personal issues always have public meaning and, as an art collective, this relationship between personal and public is very interesting to us.

RB: When you did the performances around Fukushima, what did the locals think?
RU: There is nobody in or anywhere near Fukushima. It's an exclusion zone, so there was no response!
RB: Your performance *Black Death*, though, when you walked around in parks with a stuffed crow and a megaphone amplifying the sound crows make to call other crows, and then you drove around the city with hundreds of crows flying above you, this was done in the heart of Tokyo, with lots of people watching. Did people have the

slightest inkling about what you were doing then?
RU: We did *Black Death* twice in Tokyo, once in 2008 and then again in 2013. The first time, many people looked up at the sky and got excited. They didn't understand, but they wanted to know what was going on. When we did it again, people said: 'Oh! This is Chim+Pom! That's boring, we've seen that before!'
RB: You made an appearance on the Japanese pop culture television show *Bazooka*. How does Chim+Pom relate to the

kind of popular culture that serves a specific commercial function?
RU: Art has many kinds of audience. We don't mind what kind of people are looking at us and we don't restrict what kind of people we target. We want to create something universal that ordinary people can relate to, now or in the future.
RB: You invited young people from Soma, a town very close to Fukushima, to take part in a work of great spontaneity and optimism called *One Hundred Cheers*. Why Sheep? went on to remix it, turning it from an art

performance into a music video. How did that work for you?
RU: There was a story behind the Why Sheep? remix. We released *One Hundred Cheers* soon after the Fukushima disaster at a time when nobody was responding to Japan's nuclear problem, so we invited the young people from the town of Soma to join us in a circle shouting and cheering whatever came to mind. They cheered things like: "Keep it up!", "I want to swim in the ocean!", "I want a girlfriend!" and "Rebuild!" We wanted to give away the sound data of *100 Cheers* for free to anyone that wanted to use it. Why Sheep?

had also been feeling powerless after what happened and they were inspired to make something new from it, which is great.
RB: It feels like you are real life Manga characters! Is Manga important to you?
RU: Interesting! Our whole generation is influenced by Manga, of course. We carry the essence of Manga within us, but we're not necessarily consciously aware of it.
RB: I get the sense you needed to do things, to make work, because you didn't feel you had any power as a citizen after Fukushima. —>

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平成 年 月 日

賀正

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① 開会時刻	午後 10時 00分
② 解散時刻	午後 10時 30分
③ 集团示威運動出発時刻	午後 10時 00分
④ 解散時刻	午後 10時 00分

平成 26 年 1 月 25 日 (土曜日)

午後 10時 集合

場所 新宿区立大久保公園 (新宿区歌舞伎町二丁目四十三)





Title Pages: *The History of Humans*, (installation performance view), **Chim + Pom**, 2015. Photo: Gáston van Múlders for CCQ

Previous Pages: *Wedding invitation, LOVE IS OVER, Chim + Pom*, January 24th-25th 2014, Kabuki-cho district, Shinjuku

This page, top left b&w: *LOVE IS OVER, Chim + Pom*, January 24th-25th 2014, Kabuki-cho district, Shinjuku. Photo: Andrey Bold

Both pages: Ellie holding LOVE sign, crowd shots from above, group shot above, pair dressed in white: *LOVE IS OVER, Chim + Pom*, January 24th-25th 2014, Kabuki-cho district, Shinjuku. Photo: Leslie Kee

Both pages: Ellie being picked up and kissed: *LOVE IS OVER, Chim + Pom*, January 24th-25th 2014, Kabuki-cho district, Shinjuku. Photo: Ryan Chan

Both pages: Ellie with megaphone, Ellie kissing in crowd, *Chim + Pom* on LOVE sign: *LOVE IS OVER, Chim + Pom*, January 24th-25th 2014, Kabuki-cho district, Shinjuku. Photo: Kishin Shinoyama

But what kind of power does art actually have?

RU: This is not just a pertinent question for us now, but for all Japanese artists and also for Japanese society as a whole. I think we are deeply confused about it. After all, art can't eat or sleep or wear a suit; it cannot defeat disaster. Art cannot physically help people if they are paralysed. To do something as an artist though, anything at all, is empowering in itself. We say that 'art is power'... but what does that actually mean? That's what we were asking ourselves when we went to Fukushima and took action, any action. To say art has power is meaningless... art is completely impossible. We have to take a step though – any step – however stupid it might seem. Art doesn't offer a single correct answer, but it does offer artists the opportunity to find their own answers.

RB: Tell me about your friendship with Makoto Aida?

RU: Makoto Aida is a contemporary artist in Japan. He is completely crazy! Apart from Ellie none of us went to art school, so we didn't have much skill or knowledge, but we did know Makoto Aida's work from when we were younger. We met him by striking up a conversation with him in a bookstore, now he is a mate. I organised an artists' collective of 30 young Japanese people with Makoto Aida. We chose six members from this collective to form Chim + Pom.

RB: Is Chim + Pom always changing then?

RU: No.

RB: And what does the future hold for you?

RU: We don't think about that. We prefer to embrace the unexpected—**CCQ**

The six members of *Chim + Pom* are Ellie (エリイ), Ryuta Ushiro (卯城竜大), Yasutaka Hayashi (林靖高), Masataka Okada (岡田将孝), Toshinori Mizuno (水野俊紀) and Motomu Inaoka (稲岡求). chimpom.jp

The history of humans was performed at Saatchi Gallery as part of *Chim + Pom's* prize for winning the Prudential EYE Award for Best Emerging Artist on the weekend of START Art Fair.

Prudential Eye Awards is a partnership between Parallel Contemporary Art, Saatchi Gallery and Prudential. The annual awards focus on emerging Asian artists. prudentialeyeawards.com

START art fair, presented by Prudential, was held at Saatchi Gallery between 10th and 13th September 2015. Its aim was to shine a spotlight on emerging artists and new art scenes. startartfair.com

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