

Elixir Permanent installation for Echigo-Tsumari Triennale, Japan, 2003

I'm interested in looking at the potential for art to address the natural environment and the issues around it in order to generate a remedial role in creating both awareness and in fact a transformation of neglected and destroyed spaces.

Elixir is a site-specific permanent artwork that forms part of the 'necklace' of art, architectural and landscape projects that are transforming a mountainous traditional rice farming community and its spectacular landscape with its radical seasonal changes in Echigo Tsumari, Nigata Prefecture, Japan.

The region is regenerated by this contemporary cultural event and interventions, many of which are permanent. There is a variety of sites through the different villages, towns and landscapes

Art projects are commissioned every three years by a vast range of international and well known artists such as Christian Boltanski, Magdalena Jetelova and Yayoi Kasuma. as well as younger Japanese artists. As the boundaries between architecture and art are increasingly blurred, here the interweaving is with the environment itself, as a reference and a framing, resulting in a successful synthesis that reinforces a respect for the natural environment.

Within the landscape is the Elixir House, a restored, traditional, small, wood storage house. The interior within the dark wooden house is transformed into a light reflecting glass laboratory like space echoing both an old apothecary, and tiny, botanical museum. It is an experiential space that immerses one into the essence of the surrounding landscape.

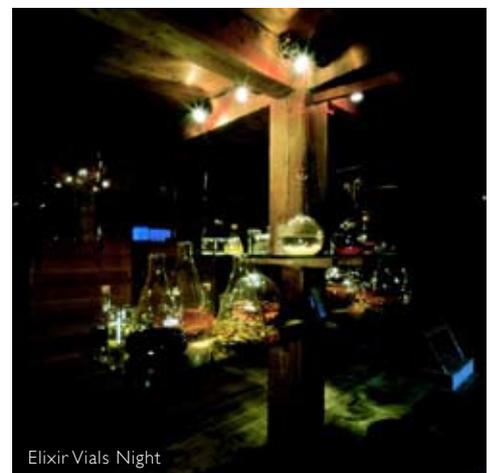
The wooden interior room of Elixir is lined and layered with glass veils stained with plant fluids, and inscribed with the plant names, botanical drawings and medicinal remedies from the surrounding environment (sourced from ancient books and individuals within the region). Around the edge hang, elongated, blown glass, vials each containing plant specimens that exhibit the plant used in the regions *elixirs*.

In the centre of the room, a layered cantilevered glass bench laden with glass laboratory vessels, these are filled with the *elixirs*; extracts of plants mixed with shochu as potions / drinks, which one takes from tiny glass beakers. A glass box containing the clear fluid shochu sits above, casting light reflections around the space, playing out the Japanese poetic of light from shadow.

The work reveals and regenerates an ancient tradition and knowledge of the medicinal plants whilst forming an intimacy with the natural surrounding landscape.

This art project belongs to the *Glasshouse* series of works. These often interface with architecture and landscape to create elemental, immersive and enmeshed spaces where I use a language of porosity and fluidity to create a fusion with the environment - slowed spaces that are reflective, to bring us into contact with the life-world. An in-between space where fixity of meaning becomes fugitive, enabling notions of transience and transformation to be invoked.

This work clearly brings us into the natural environment and heightens our awareness of its being and thus its fragility. In a more recent work this issue of the loss and fragility of our natural world is dealt with in a more sombre and direct way.



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