



WATARU KOYAMA

Selection Works

2025



Artist Statement:

I work primarily with moving image to explore the human mind through themes such as emotions, perspectives on life and death, self-evidence and common sense, and psychopathology, often in the shifting space between society and the individual. In recent years, I have focused on expressions that emerge from intimate relationships between the artist and their subjects.

The foundation of my practice is deeply influenced by my experiences as a socially withdrawn adolescent and as a staff member at a psychiatric welfare facility. These experiences have profoundly shaped my observations and imaginings of the human inner world, the process of dialogue with others, the relativization of social norms, and the act of imagining in the face of questions that may never yield definitive answers.

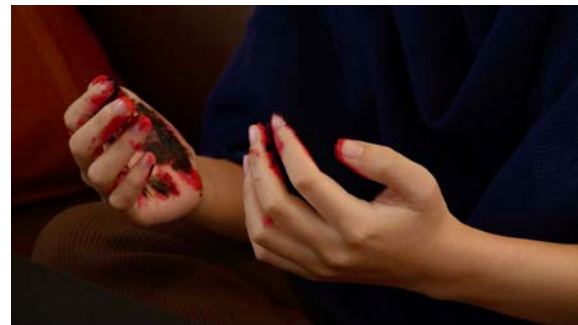
Humans can smile while carrying sadness, or cry out of joy. A loud voice may be compelled toward simplicity, but a soft voice can preserve complexity and nuance. My video works invite viewers to listen to the private voices of individuals,, and to imagine—without seeking conclusions—what lies within their innermost narratives.

In my exploration of the human mind, what I seek from artistic expression is the power to unsettle the many boundaries that define our humanity.



CRPPP -Comprehensive Repression Prevention and Protection Programme-

2023, video installation, 33 min 06 sec



This is a video that captures the process of collaborating with a woman who is both a person with a mental illness and a psychiatric nurse, as we discuss her “things she wants to try” and bring them to life.

She tells me, an artist, that “artists are skilled at playing in society’s miniature garden, but I want to break that “miniature garden.” While I cannot eliminate all the oppression she experiences from her “miniature garden,” I decided to explore ways to look at her miniature garden together and play without breaking it.

The title “CRPPP” is a twist on the program “CVPPP” primarily used in the psychiatric healthcare field. It was developed as a program to intervene appropriately in violence and aggression caused by patients’ symptoms while protecting their dignity and ensuring safety for both patients and healthcare providers. The original program, “CVPPP” (Comprehensive Violence Prevention and Protection Programme), has “Violence” replaced with “Repression,” representing psychological repression.

The Heart is Beating

2021-2022, video installation, 38 min 22 sec



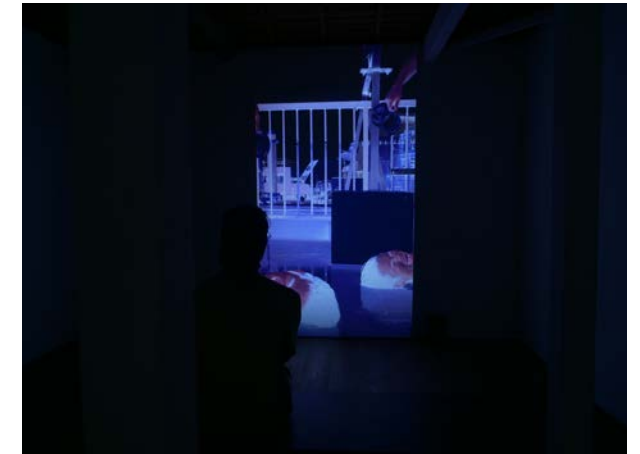
I was listening to a psychiatrist friend talk about the death of a person with schizophrenia. As we delved deeper, he mentioned that his own sister, who may have had schizophrenia, also died in a river several years ago. I could see glimpses of his dual perspectives: thinking about schizophrenia as a doctor and feeling about it as a family member. So, I suggested he write a letter and a medical chart about his sister.

This work was created through a series of dialogues between us, starting from the words his sister spoke just before she passed away: "My heart is beating." Narratives about mental illness and death often emphasize the tragic and sorrowful aspects. He says, "I cannot agree with simple sadness." Indeed, we may often understand many events in our daily lives too simplistically. He continues to think about questions that have no answers.

In his letter, he said, "I finally realized that I don't have to make a sad, crying face when I am sad, or a happy face when I am happy."

Snap out of it

2020 - 2023, video installation, 16 min 37 sec



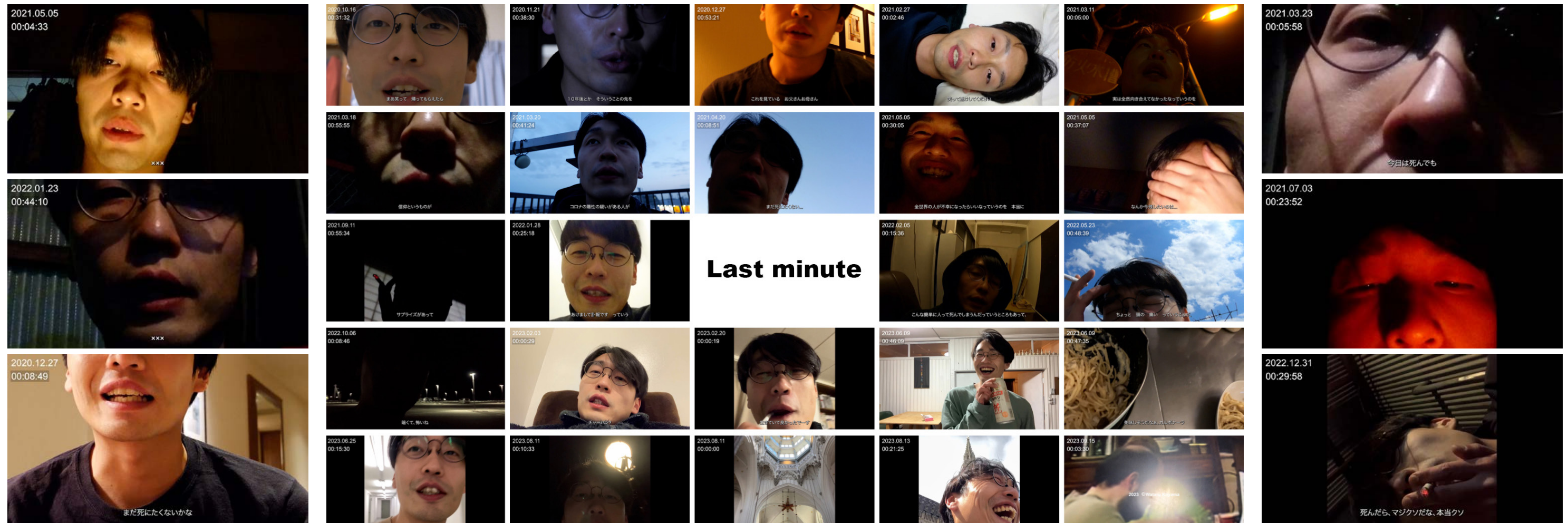
I came across a description in a document about pre war hydrotherapy (douche treatment) that said, “Mental illness is caused by a boiling head, so cool the head with water,” and it left a strong impression on me. Using those words as a starting point, I discussed sanity with a friend who has a mental illness.

Hydrotherapy for mental illness is recognized as an effective treatment method with modern theories and facilities. However, looking back in history, there are records of similar primitive practices worldwide, based on the idea of “cooling the head with water.” This image of old “hydrotherapy” also resonates with the torturous process of “waterboarding,” where confessions and thoughts are corrected.

In the absurd dialogue attempting to prove sanity or madness, we keep shouting, “Are you sane?” and “I am sane.” (This work is vastly different from the hydrotherapy currently practiced.)

Last minute

2020 - , video installation, 1 min (The 1 minute recorded video will continue until I die.)



This work is a video piece where, within a one-minute time limit, I irregularly record the “last words” (testament) that I want to leave at that moment when I feel the need to preserve memories and emotions. It’s a lifelong project, and I intend to continue recording until I die.

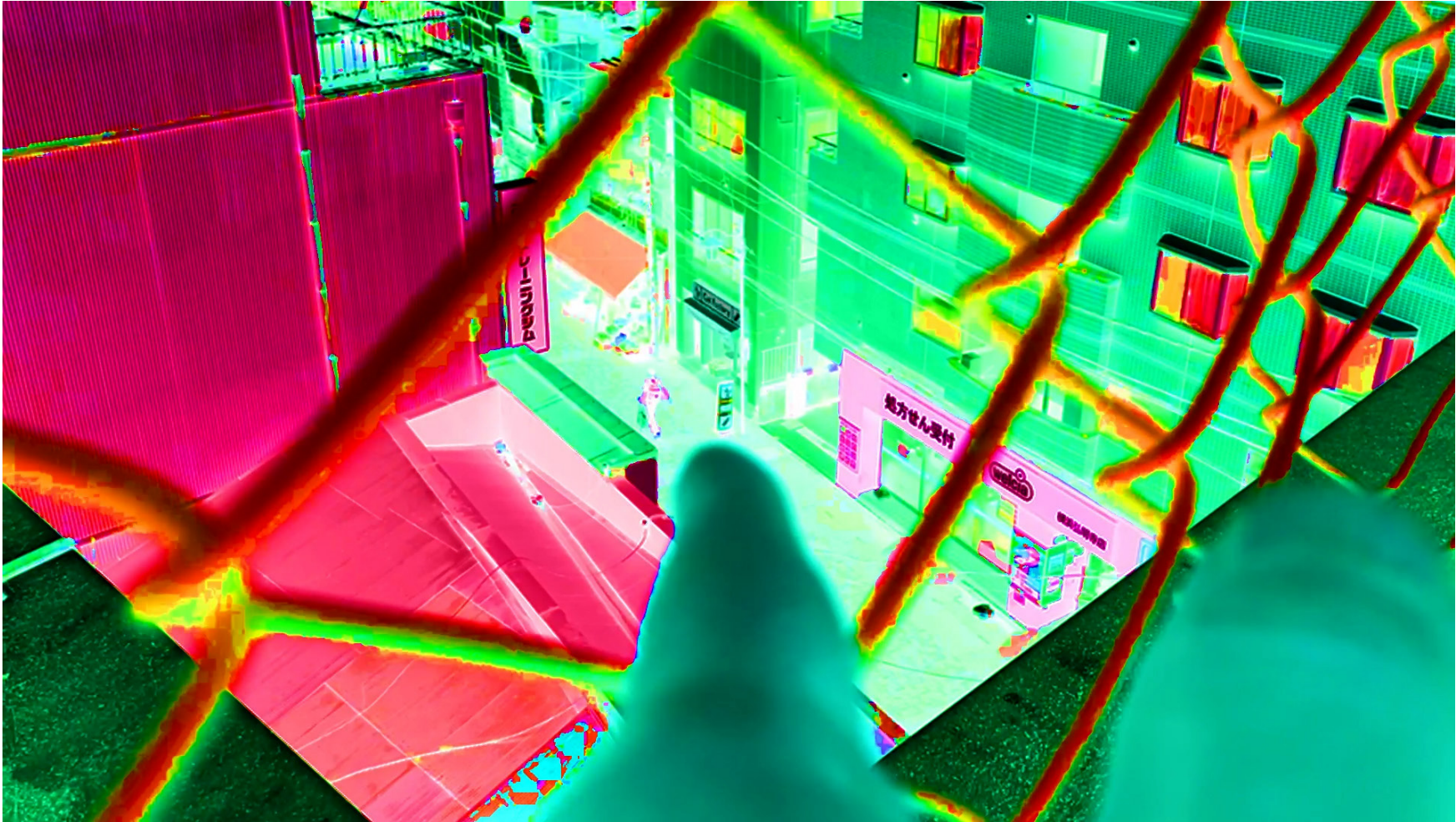
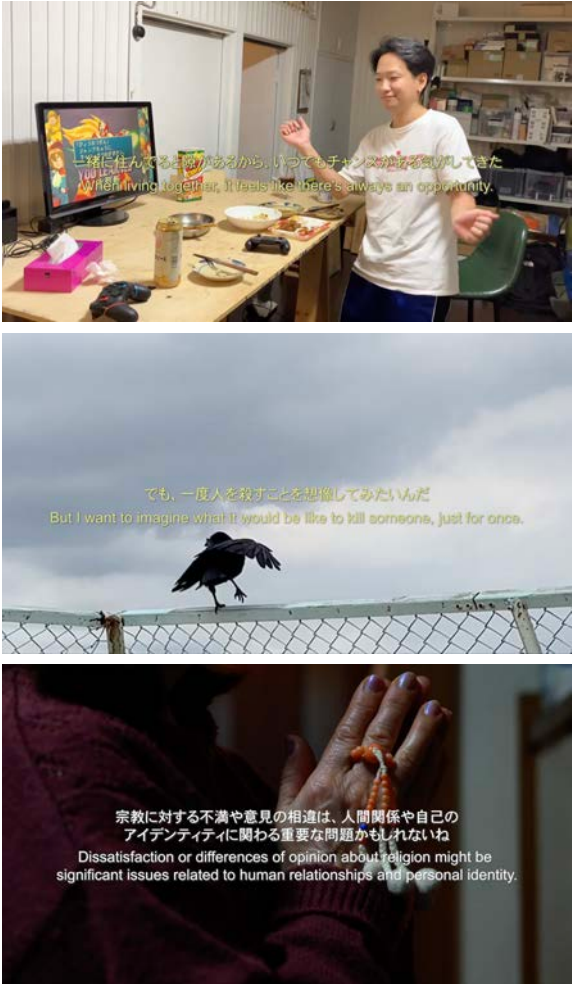
I plan to play this video at my funeral. Additionally, intentional audio deletions are made in the footage, as it contains content that cannot be disclosed during my lifetime.

One minute is too short and tasteless as a final message. At the end of a human life, despite wanting to preserve everything important, it's impossible. Even if something important can be preserved, other important things will be left out. I want to resist this dilemma of the last words, even if just a little.

As a side note, my ideal is to continue recording until I am an old person taking the video, and for people around me to sarcastically say, “Oh, that person was still alive?”

Imagination of Killing

2023, single channel video, 10 min 26 sec



I consult with “him (AI program)”, who abides by the norms and ethics of killing.

More Light?

2021, sound installation, 25 min 55 sec

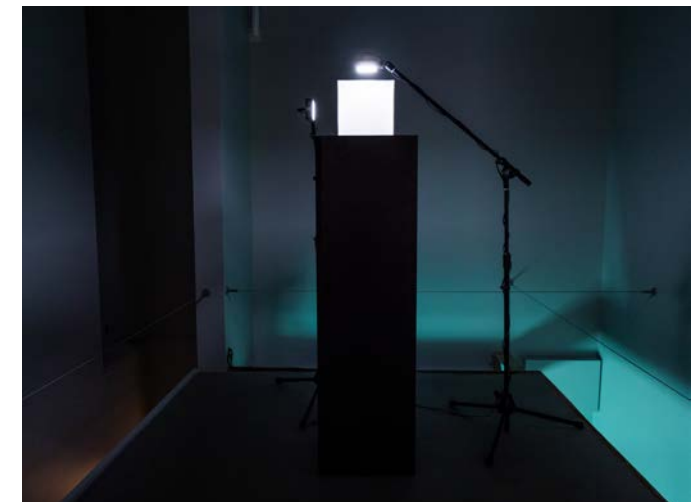
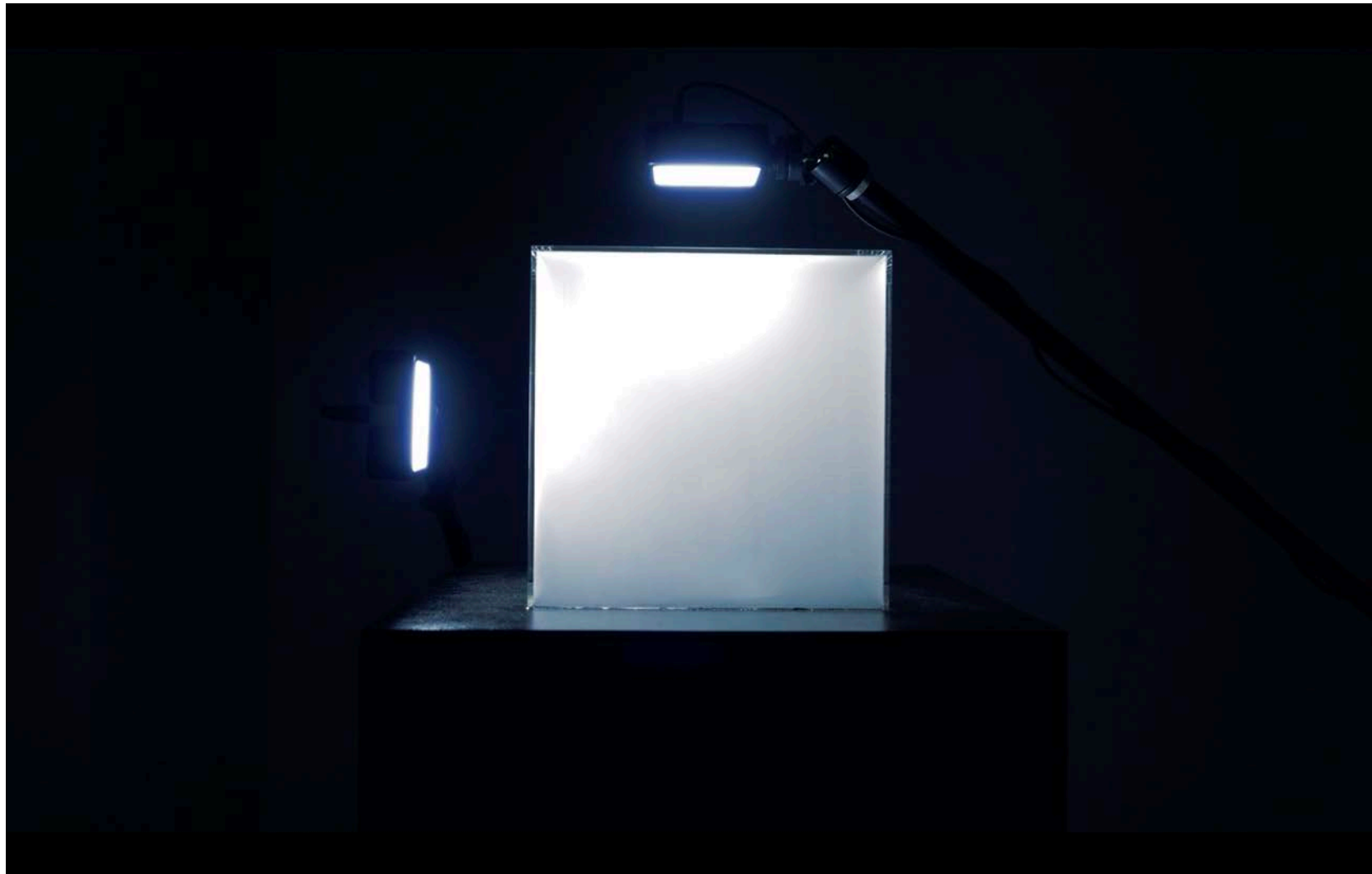


A schizophrenic who says, “When I’m on medication, I’m not really me.” A narration of a schizophrenic’s bi-polar daily life. This is a sound installation where you listen to audio through headphones while receiving light in front of your eyes.

She fits in with the normal person by performing the social roles that are given to her from the outside, but searches for a place to express the energy that boils up inside, craving freedom and liberation, but the moment she acts on it, she becomes a problem. The dilemma of suppressing one’s own identity and being known as an invalid because one is fully aware of the eyes of one’s partner and one’s doctor is blurred in the narration.

Cloudy Heart

2021, sound installation, loop sound.



Inside the acrylic box, hermetically sealed smoke drifts, and the sound pressure of a beating heart causes an invisible heart to beat in the fog.

I was told that one psychiatrist sometimes uses the term “fogging”. It describes the use of medication to moderately cloud the real world, which is too painful for a schizophrenic to see and feel.

In contrast, they say, “sunny” refers to the state of being exposed to the bare real world without the use of medication. I interpret “clouded” to mean a state of adaptation to this rational society, but many people are not “clear” and I feel that they, including myself, live by “clouding” themselves to some degree.

Fire Dialogue (#1 - #16)

2021, lambda print、 203×254mm (Variable size)



The motivation for this work is that I began to think about life and death as the fear of death, which cannot be seen and is vague, is spreading throughout the world in the form of a virus.

I put a cigarette in my mouth and ask you to share the light of your lit cigarette. Cigarettes are lit when we inhale, so it is difficult to light a cigarette if our breathing motions do not match. Breathing is not something we are usually conscious of in our daily lives, but there may be moments when we are consciously aware of our own breathing, such as when we are concentrating on sports or work, or when we have a physical ailment. However, I don't think we have many opportunities to be aware of the breathing of others.

In this act of sharing the light of a cigarette, you will first be aware of your relationship to it, which is caused by the close distance between you. While I wait for you to light the cigarette with your lighter, I can observe your face, unmasked, for the first time in a long time. Then we will rub the cigarettes together and become aware of each other's breathing.

In that moment when our breaths meet and the cigarettes are lit, I feel as if I can confirm our tiny lives.

Society is Community of Dream

2019, video installation, 16 min 26 sec



In this work, a friend with a mental illness is asked to talk about his experience with auditory hallucinations. “He” starts talking about how he “heard an auditory hallucination from a speaker in a convenience store. Then, a dialogue takes place between “he” and myself, with “he” and I giving shape to the images that emerge from the content of the conversation, each time using our hands to shape the clay.

Our voices echo through the speakers in the space. However, at “his” wish, “his” figure is removed and his voice is overwritten by noisy electronic sounds. As a result, only my own words are heard in space.

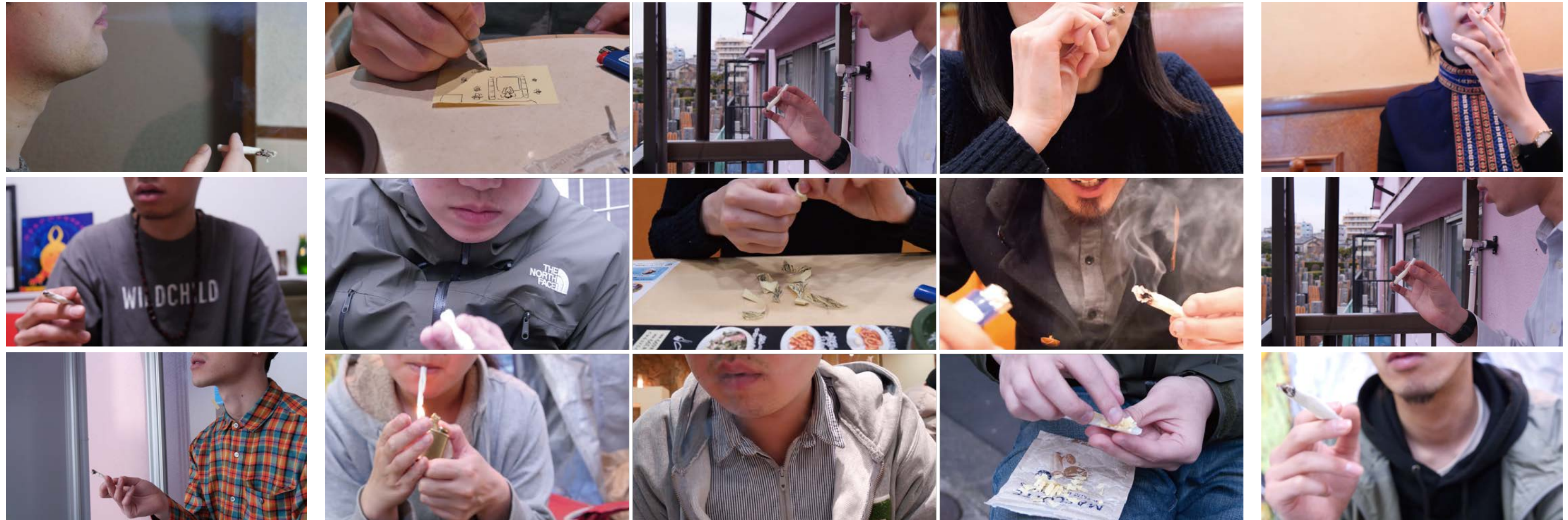
As a result, only my own words echo in the space, and the viewer is forced to look into the subtitles of the video projected on the box garden in order to read “his” voice.

The installation is not a dialogue, but rather a monologue of my own. The dialogue between the “invisible he” and myself was as if I myself (the viewer) were listening to an auditory hallucination.

(This work is based on the psychotherapeutic technique called “box garden therapy”).

I tried to forget but I can't remember

2018, video installation



In the famous Japanese gag cartoonist Fujio Akatsuka's masterpiece "The Genius Bakabon," Bakabon's father says the contradictory line, "I can't remember even if I try to forget".

In this video work, the phrase is thrown to various people and they are asked to tell stories related to "I can't remember even if I try to forget". After the story is told, the paper is torn into small pieces, and the torn pieces are wrapped and rolled up like cigarettes to form cigarettes. Finally, the participants are asked to smoke a cigarette that they "I can't remember even if I try to forget".

The words "I can't remember even if I try to forget" seem contradictory, yet somehow essential. I imagine that those who have experienced extraordinary disasters or wars may also have traumas that are recalled by such contradictory words. However, even in the most mundane, everyday experiences, there are events that the individual still cannot sort out his or her memories and feelings.

This work may be a time for "introspection," looking back on "things I still don't understand" in a light-hearted manner. I may not be able to put it into words well this time either.

I sometimes roll my own cigarettes, and I feel that the time spent rolling is a time of "introspection," but when I have finished smoking, that heavy "introspection" seems to lighten like smoke and gradually disappear, which was the motivation for this work.