

Johnen Galerie

ARTFORUM

Ryan Gander

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DAZAIFU TENMANGU SHRINE MUSEUM

4-7-1 Saifu Dazaifu

February 11–April 10

For the sixth edition of the annual art project sponsored by Japan's Dazaifu Tenmangu shrine, the 1,100-year-old site of Shinto worship in the region of Fukuoka, British artist Ryan Gander has created two indoor installations and four outdoor sculptures, among other works. Among the installations is *As Reliable as Change*, 2011, a dark, empty room constructed inside the shrine's treasure hall, wherein a theatrical set offers the simulated sight of the forest outdoors to anyone who glances at a narrow horizontal window set high in a wall. Outside, viewers encounter *Metaverse*, 2010, which comprises broken debris from a statue of a fictional bird, and *Like the Air That We Breathe*, 2011, a time capsule buried next to a Japanese cypress pillar. The capsule was made by the seventy-five pupils at the shrine's nursery school, and the pillar offers pictograms designed by the artist in response to each child's "precious object." Also as part of the Dazaifu Tenmangu project, Gander has initiated *New New Day*, 2011, a proposition for a new national holiday in which the public is asked to paint familiar objects white and rethink their importance; and he has commissioned a poster design from local design school students to publicize the idea.

Gander's work at the shrine provides situations and fake monuments that use fragments as metonymic keys for evoking narratives about the present's link with distant times and about the coexistence of parallel universes, while blending into the shrine's environment. His art here recapitulates the Shinto principles of inhibiting the visual representation of the highest truth, and maintaining a strong belief in its spiritual power, principles the faith carries out through the ritual presentation of empty space and simple monuments, as well as through the permeation of spiritual practice in everyday activities.

Calling attention to the contemporary significance of the traditional Japanese religion via his understanding of its structural affinity to his own artistic methods, Gander presents a rare example of successful border crossing while providing a concise map of his conceptual methods, which give spectators a vehicle for imagining multiple meanings of a simple phenomenon by presenting something deliberately fragmented or incongruent.



Ryan Gander, *Like the Air That We Breathe*, 2011, mixed media, 41 x 21".

— Midori Matsui