

The Horticultural Society of New York

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For Immediate Release:

HIROSHI SUNAIRI

Leur Existence – Tree Project

December 9, 2009 – February 12, 2010

Opening Reception: Wednesday, December 9th, from 6:00 to 8:30pm

Curated by Chris Murtha



"Nature tells us with no ideological standpoint about war, atomic bombs, peace, nature, and the environment." – Dr. Riki Horiguchi

The Horticultural Society of New York is pleased to present an exhibition of Hiroshi Sunairi's *Leur Existence – Tree Project* as part of its continuing exhibitions program featuring plant-based art. This exhibition is the culmination of the four-year process of collecting and distributing seeds from *hibaku* trees in Hiroshima, and the network of people that formed as a result. *Tree Project* will feature live plants, loaned by NYC-area participants, as well as photographic and written documentation of the process. A selection of the plants will be presented in ceramic elephant-foot pots, designed and created by the artist.

Over 60 years ago, the city of Hiroshima was decimated by one nuclear bomb and it was assumed that nothing would grow in that soil for 75 years. Miraculously, within two months of the bombing, new buds began to appear from the remains of burnt trees. These trees, which still live from the time of the atomic bombing, are called *hibaku* trees. In Japan, the story of the *hibaku* trees took on legendary status and gave encouragement to those who had lost hope after the war.

In 2005, Sunairi exhibited *A Night of Elephants*, an installation at Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, coinciding with the sixtieth anniversary of the atomic bombing. In collaboration with the city of Hiroshima, Sunairi collected branches from pruned *hibaku* trees to create a sculpture of an elephant lying on its side. Since then, Sunairi has been receiving seedlings and seeds of second and third generation *hibaku* trees from Riki Horiguchi, a tree doctor in Hiroshima. For this exhibition, seeds of Round Leaf Holly, Persimmon, Chinaberry, Chinese Parasol, Japanese Hackberry, Jujube and Platanus were distributed to nearly 400 participants in 23 countries. Up to thirty participants will lend their plants to be on view for the exhibition.

Elephants have been integral to Sunairi's recent work, symbolizing remembrance. In 2007, Sunairi exhibited *White Elephant*, a deconstructed life-size ceramic elephant, at the Japan Society in New York. In the same way that *A Night of Elephants* was a memorial for the people of Hiroshima, this installation was conceived for New Yorkers post 9-11. For Sunairi, the shattered sculpture reflected the fragile state of New York City after the events of September 11th. The ceramic pots featured in this exhibition are abstracted elephant feet, each one being unique and designed to house *hibaku* seedlings as they grow into trees.

With *Tree Project*, Sunairi has formed a network of people who can share the pleasure and healing benefits of growing plants, especially those from *hibaku* seeds. In this way, he has created a unique living memorial to a shared tragedy.

Hiroshi Sunairi was born in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1972, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. He received his BFA from State University of New York at Purchase in 1995. He is currently an adjunct professor in the Department of Art and Art Professions at New York University. Sunairi's work has been exhibited internationally at Japan Society, NY; Queens Museum, NY; Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, MA; Barbican Art Center, London; and Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan. Sunairi has exhibited with Andrew Kreps Gallery, NY; LA Galerie Lothar Albrecht, Frankfurt; Galleri Wang, Oslo; Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Bologna; and Ursula-Blickle-Stiftung, Kraichtal, Germany. *Tree Project* was recently included in the group exhibition, *THE DROP: 2012+*, in New York. In Spring 2010, Sunairi will be featured in an exhibition at the Queens Museum of Art.

The mission of The Horticultural Society of New York is to enhance our city's environmental and cultural life by providing unique educational, vocational, and therapeutic outreach programs, library resources, and art exhibitions. The exhibition program combines an innovative curatorial approach with a unique gallery space to showcase emerging and established artists in all media who are inspired by the natural world.

The Gallery at The Horticultural Society of New York is free and open to the public Monday to Friday, from 10am to 6 pm. For further information, please visit www.hsny.org or contact Chris Murtha at 212-757-0915 x121 or cmurtha@hsny.org.

