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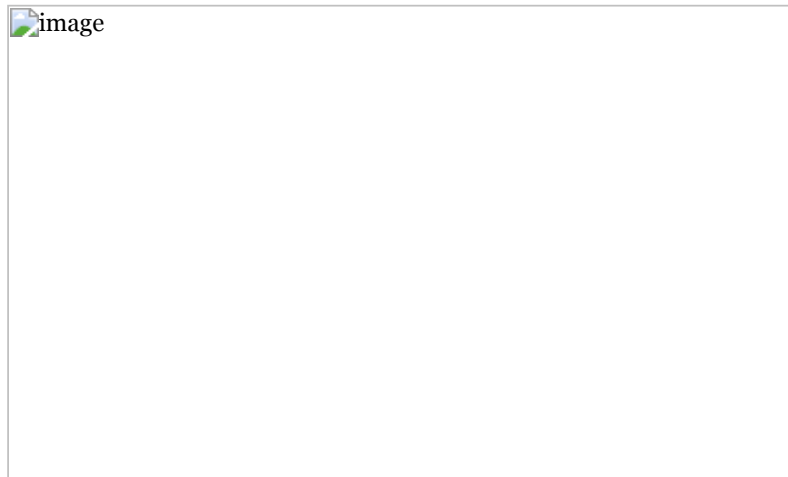
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## Current Shows

### Chim ↑ Pom

Mujin-to Production, Tokyo, Japan

 image

Chim ↑ Pom, *Saya mau perigi ke TPA* (2008), installation shot. © 2008 Chim ↑ Pom. Courtesy of Mujin-to Production, Tokyo

If art is going to include an element of shock, then it can't be the type that just wears off with repeated viewings. The

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Published on 02/10/08  
by Edan Corkill

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*provocative* must also be *evocative* – enough to spark fire-cracker explosions of thoughts and insights, where the inconceivable suddenly becomes incontrovertible. Insights like: mans best friend is not the dog, but the rat! The Third World is living off the trash of the First! The weapons of former despots should be drafted into a war against financial inequality!

Or: this bunch of pricks might just save Japanese contemporary art!

OK, I take that last one back. A *literal* translation of Chim ↑ Pom, the name of a six-person artist group whose third solo exhibition in Tokyo in as many months is now at Mujin-to Production, probably wouldnt be as coarse as that. Penis, perhaps, or something more cute, maybe - like pecker or willy. The point is that in a local art scene long verging on the yawn side of staid, even *thats* enough to make these guys sound immediately fresh.

Chim ↑ Pom formed in 2005 – a collection of wandering art graduate asteroids pulled into orbit around slacker art star, Makoto Aida. Basically we met each other during drinking sessions with Aida, member Yasutaka Hayashi explained to me a few months ago. Ellie, the groups only woman (or *gyaru* – gal – as she says in the lingo of her peroxide-and-dark-makeup generation), had modeled for Aidas paintings. The groups leader, though, is Ryuta Ushiro. It was he who explained the concept behind their controversial exhibition two months ago at Hiromi Yoshii gallery. The only thing rats, crows and humans have in common is garbage, he announced, as if that totally explained why we were peering through a one-way mirror into a small concrete room in which a rat, a crow and a human (Toshinori Mizuno, one of the groups members), were about to spend two weeks living off trash.

After two weeks, of course, the crow had died, but the others had pulled through, apparently having formed some kind of Free Trade Agreement between ground-hugging scavengers. Accompanying that performance/installation, *Becoming friend, eating each other or falling down together* (2008), there was a video documenting how the crow had been rescued in a midnight raid on one of the traps installed in the metropolis by the famously anti-crow Tokyo Governor, Shintaro Ishihara. We took your crows! the artists can be seen scrawling on a sign outside, adding the tag C ↑ Shepherd and jokingly aligning themselves with Japans environmentalist tormentor, Paul Watson.

In the current exhibition, Chim ↑ Pom are showing work that they made during a recent trip to Bali alongside other new work. The Bali piece, *Saya mau perigi ke TPA* (Take me to the garbage disposal plant, 2008), includes a video showing Ellie in the guise of a cashed-up bimbo chick tourist cavorting in a helicopter above a giant garbage tip. As she dumps junk from about 200 meters up, a local community of recyclers sifts through the refuse below. *Japanese dropping*

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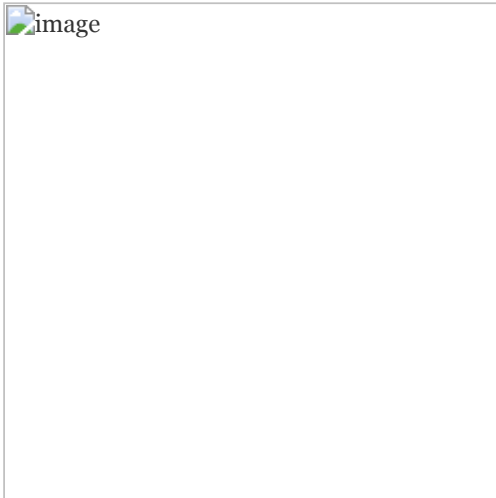


MAUREEN PALEY



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garbage on their poorer Asian neighbours?! The offensiveness is only just outweighed by the knowledge that the artists primary target isnt the Indonesians, but their own, unthinking countrymen.



Chim ↑ Pom, *Feelin like the guys make me hot o2* (2008), C-print, DVD. © 2008 Chim ↑ Pom. Courtesy of Mujin-to Production, Tokyo

Chim ↑ Pom produces work at a pace that only a six-person group could manage. In just three years they have built up a mind-boggling *oeuvre* that includes taxidermied rats, bleached and dyed bright yellow to resemble the video game character Pikachu, a biennale guerrilla performance held at the Tokyo Disney Resorts version of Venice, the mustering of hundreds of wild crows to the National Diet Building in Tokyo, the destruction of Louis Vuitton handbags in Cambodia using unexploded landmines, and Hard Rock Café signs drawn with kerosene-hoses and lighters (one of the new works in the current show).

Where its all heading is anybodys guess; what it tells us about Japan is crystal clear. Shock like that of confronting a live crow in a gallery hasnt figured in Japanese art since the late 1960s, when, to a backdrop of student and left-wing riots, Hi-Red Center donned lab coats and started polishing the sidewalks with toothbrushes. The prosperity and peace of the 80s and 90s steered local artists towards a predominantly refined academicism. Nowadays, with Chinas emergence as a geopolitical power, the pension scandal (millions of records were lost) and a spate of random stabbing crimes, cracks have appeared in the nations veneer of confident affluence. All of a sudden satire, cynicism and subversion are back on the table, and Chim ↑ Pom arent wasting a second.

**Edan Corkill**

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Frieze 81 Rivington Street, London EC2A 3AY, UK, +44 (0) 20 3372 6111 [info@frieze.com](mailto:info@frieze.com) [www.frieze.com](http://www.frieze.com)

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