

GARAGE №9 Magazine  
FALL/WINTER 2015

# GARAGE

Mc WSON PLATON Arianna HUFFINGTON *David Adjaye* Shane SMITH CHIM↑POM Karl LAGERFELD



Cover  
by Rem



# FEED THE RAT WITH YOUR GARAGE MAG APP

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## *SUPER RAT,*

**2006** Super Rat is our name for the rats that get stronger through developing resistance to poison. The rats are a portrait of ChimtPom. There's a lot of social pressure on us, but we just take it and let it make us stronger. Super Rat is the concept behind all of ChimtPom's activities.

We made a video of us catching the rats, and then we had them stuffed by a taxidermist. We painted the Pikachu dots on them. A typical installation of *Super Rat* includes both the video and the rats themselves.

In 2006, we made six Super Rats – the same number as the members of ChimtPom. We made





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In 2006, we made six Super Rats – the same number as the members of Chim↑Pom. We made another six in 2011, as a symbol of us, and the Japanese people, after the nuclear disaster at Fukushima. Since then, we've been making six more every year. The project will continue until people stop killing the rats.



Chim↑Pom *SUPER RAT*, 2006  
 Photographs by Yoshimitsu Umekawa  
 © Chim↑Pom; courtesy of the artists and MUJIN-TO Production, Tokyo



# GANGLAND

A SURVEY OF JAPANESE ART COLLECTIVES







CHIM↑POM  
 SUPER RAT, 2006  
 © CHIM↑POM  
 COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND MUJIN-TO PRODUCTION, TOKYO

Mizuki TAKAHASHI is a senior curator at Contemporary Art Center, Art Tower Mito. She worked with Chim↑Pom on their monograph *Super Rat*. For GARAGE, she traces the emergence of art groups in Japan and the collective traumas informing their practice, before talking with Chim↑Pom members Ryuta USHIRO and ELLIE about their work.



A Survey of Japanese Art Collectives



HI-RED CENTER'S CLEANING EVENT, OFFICIALLY KNOWN AS  
MOVEMENT TO PROMOTE THE CLEANUP OF THE METROPOLITAN AREA (BE CLEAN!!), 1964  
GELATIN SILVER PRINT

© MINORU HIRATA

COURTESY OF TAKA ISHII GALLERY PHOTOGRAPHY/FILM, TOKYO







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 MOVEMENT TO PROMOTE THE CLEANUP OF THE METROPOLITAN AREA (BE CLEAN!), 1964  
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CHIM+POM  
 K/AL TOO 2011  
 © CHIM+POM  
 COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS  
 AND MUMUK-TO PRODUCTION, TOKYO



“We stand at the vanguard,  
and will eternally stand there.

We are not bound.

We are radical.

We make revolution”

— from the manifesto of the artists' collective Mavo,  
declared upon their formation in 1923\*



THE COVER OF THE FIRST ISSUE OF  
MAVO (JULY 1924)

COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, KAMAKURA, JAPAN

The idea of the artists' collective was born in the early 20th century, a time of increasing democracy in Japan. The collective – like a revolutionary cell – represented the spirit of anarchy and a way of provoking the populace to react against the social system. This radical spirit is just as strong today.

The Russian Revolution of 1917 allowed Japanese artists to dream of brushing aside the old regimes in both society and art. Tomoyoshi Murayama encountered dadaism and constructivism in Berlin; on returning to his home country in 1923, he formed Mavo, together with Masamu Yanase, Kamenosuke Ogata, Shuzo Oura, and Shinro Kadowaki. The members of Mavo moved beyond the visual arts,



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On September 1, 1923, two months after Mavo was founded, the Great Kanto Earthquake struck the heart of the Japanese archipelago. More than 100,000 lives were lost in Tokyo and the surrounding area. The devastated cityscape became the stage upon which control of art was wrested from the elites by the proletariat;

\*GENNIFER WEISENFELD,  
MAVO: JAPANESE ARTISTS AND  
THE AVANT-GARDE, 1905-1931,  
BERKELEY: UNIVERSITY OF  
CALIFORNIA PRESS, 2002



ODORI (DANCE)  
FROM THE THIRD ISSUE OF MAVO, 1924  
COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART, KAMAKURA & HAYAMA

CHIM+POM  
KI-AT 100, 2011  
© CHIM+POM  
COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS  
AND MUM+TO PRODUCTION, TOKYO



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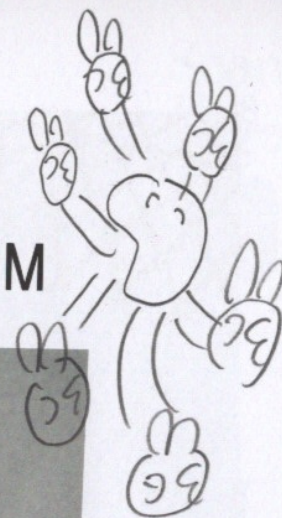
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# SOCIAL CIRCLES

## DISCUSSIONS WITH CHIM↑POM



FROM LEFT:  
MASATAKA  
OKADA, ELLIE,  
MOTOMU  
INAOKA,  
TOSHINORI  
MIZUNO, YASUTAKA HAYASHI, AND RYUTA USHIRO  
PHOTOGRAPH BY MAKOTO AIDA

FORMED IN 2005, CHIM↑POM  
IS AN ART COLLECTIVE BASED  
IN TOYKO. ITS MEMBERS –  
ELLIE, YASUTAKA HAYASHI

**Mizuki Takahashi:** Chim↑Pom was formed  
10 years ago. What motivated six artists  
with such different personalities to come  
together? Were you already friends?

**Ryuta Ushiro:** I dropped out of high school  
because I was a fan of the band.

**MT:** You got a plane to write the word  
“PIKA” – which means “flash” – in the sky  
above the city. The letters dissipated quickly  
in the wind. The plane wrote them four  
more times, and you filmed them from an  
angle that showed them all at once.



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PHOTOGRAPH BY MAKOTO AIDA



FORMED IN 2005, CHIM↑POM IS AN ART COLLECTIVE BASED IN TOYKO. ITS MEMBERS – ELLIE, YASUTAKA HAYASHI, MOTOMU INAOKA, TOSHINORI MIZUNO, MASATAKA OKADA, AND RYUTA USHIRO – WERE IN THEIR TWENTIES WHEN THEY BANDED TOGETHER, COMING FROM A RANGE OF PROFESSIONS AND DISCIPLINES. THEIR WORK IS OFTEN INFORMED BY JAPAN'S PAST AND COMMENTS ON ITS PRESENT, ENGAGING WITH SUBJECT MATTER RANGING FROM ANIME AND MANGA TO ONLINE SHOPPING AND NUCLEAR DISASTER.

**Mizuki Takahashi:** Chim↑Pom was formed 10 years ago. What motivated six artists with such different personalities to come together? Were you already friends?

**Ryuta Ushiro:** I dropped out of high school because I was a fan of punk and wanted to be a musician. Having had that experience of forming a band, it's natural to me to form a group when I want to do something.

**Ellie:** We all had links to the contemporary artist Makoto Aida. Aida isn't bound by social convention, and he tackles political and social issues in his works head-on – although this doesn't stop him from having a pretty dissolute lifestyle.

**MT:** Why art, not music?

**RU:** When I was working at Aida's gallery, I realized that art allows for every kind of expression – unlike music, or film, or sculpture, it isn't limited to just one medium. In punk, practice comes before logic.

Actions are an experiment that generates an idea, which seems obvious once it's there. The activity itself is transgressive – that's what makes it punk. When we made *PIKA* in 2008, that was the first time the subject of Hiroshima had been tackled from a non-victim point of view.

**MT:** You got a plane to write the word “*PIKA*” – which means “flash” – in the sky above the city. The letters dissipated quickly in the wind. The plane wrote them four more times, and you filmed them from an angle that showed the skeletal Hiroshima Atomic Bomb Dome, one of the few buildings to survive the atom bomb.

**RU:** We challenged a taboo. In our later works, we wanted to keep doing that.

**MT:** How did you decide who to invite into the group?

**RU:** I don't like groups that try to create a uniform style. Society consists of people with all kinds of different ideas, and every individual has a variety of personalities, too. I liked the idea of bringing together a team of people I wouldn't necessarily have got on well with at school.

**MT:** How do you work together, coming from a place of difference?

**RU:** It's not easy for six people to reach one conclusion. We have a meeting once a week, and we keep talking until we find agreement. If that doesn't happen, we play a game. We take six pieces of paper and everyone writes something – a drawing, or a key word, or a symbol. Then we shuffle them and deal them out, and



Chim↑Pom  
**BAKUHATSU**, 2007  
 Video (5 minutes, 41 seconds)



**I'M BOKAN,**  
**2007**

The damaged objects in *I'M BOKAN* address the image and idea of celebrity. The project is also about trying to figure out what real celebrity is. We went to Cambodia and worked for several weeks with a retired soldier who was clearing land mines. We used Ellie's belongings, including her iPod and designer handbag – items that symbolize commercial society – and exploded land mines under them. Then we

organized an auction and sold these destroyed items, with the proceeds going to a Cambodian charity for people who have lost limbs due to the use of land mines. We used the Dutch auction system for this, whereby the auction begins with a high asking price that then decreases until accepted by a buyer. Our inspiration was Princess Diana's visit to Cambodia to promote the removal of land mines – she was a real celebrity, different from the new, rich, American kind of celebrity.

plant had become a forbidden zone. We wanted to focus on the fact that people were prohibited from entering these places. Since we installed the exhibition, we've been repeatedly approached by news agencies wanting to use the photos that we took personally inside the exclusion zone. This makes us very angry. The journalists are using drones and zoom lenses and pretend-

DISCUSSIONS WITH CHIM↑POM



Chim↑Pom **SPEECH**, 2007  
 Video (1 minute, 53 seconds)

In the auction, the price began at the same amount fetched by Damien Hirst's diamond skull, *For the Love of God* (2007). We showed it in four currencies: US dollars, Japanese yen, Cambodian riel, and the number of prosthetic legs we could buy. Everyone realized that just one Hirst artwork could buy enough prosthetic limbs for the whole world. Because the project was about celebrity, we also wanted to question the values of the art market.

Chim↑Pom  
**ellieZABETH**, 2007  
 Bag (exploded by landmines)  
 25 x 36 x 15 cm



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**E:** The residents are each given a certain number of tokens per year, so they can go in and get their belongings. We've built up relationships with people affected by the disaster, so they're willing to give us their tokens. That's how we get in.

**RU:** The precondition of any exhibition is that there are viewers and that the exhibition should convey some kind of message to them. By mounting an exhibition of contemporary art in a place where there are no viewers, we're changing the message. In this case, a message is being continuously generated from a town where nobody lives. We cannot force people to remember the existence of these places, to which their former inhabitants are forbidden to return. If they're forgotten, they're forgotten. But the exhibition will continue to bear witness to the memory.

GARAGE  
chimPom



ChimPom KANE-ZANMAI ~3 tastes of cash~, 2014

## KANE-ZANMAI, 2014

This was ChimPom's first space of our own. Not a gallery or a studio: a shop. We rented the space from a friend. It was abandoned, pretty dilapidated. There are collectors who will buy straws because they've been

chewed by ChimPom – but chewed straws have no value to us. This got us thinking: what is the value of money? What is the value of art? We opened the shop as an experiment. And many people buy the chewed straws. They cost 868 yen each, which is about \$7.

We set the prices on everything, except for the Prudential Eye Award trophy that we were given in Singapore. If someone offers us an appropriate price, we will sell it. It doesn't have to be expensive – it just has to be a price that we find interesting.

© ChimPom; courtesy of the artists

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### *Don't Follow the Wind,*

**2015** *Don't Follow the Wind* is an art project, not an artwork. It's an exhibition that we initiated in the Fukushima exclusion zone. Since the disaster had an international impact and is going to remain a long-standing problem, we wanted to tackle it from an international and historical perspective. We worked with several curators – Kenji Kubota, Eva and Franco Mattes, and Jason Waite – who chose 12 artists from various countries to exhibit works, including Ai Weiwei, Taryn Simon, Trevor

Paglen and Ahmet Ögüt. Chim↑Pom's executive committee went into the exclusion zone to install the exhibition. It's in different venues: private houses, a warehouse. Buildings that belonged to people who had to move away.

The show started on March 11, 2015, but nobody can visit it. We say "started" rather than "opened" because there is no closing date. People will be able to see the exhibition when the exclusion zone is re-opened, but nobody knows when it will be accessible to the public again.

everyone has to give a presentation about the idea on their piece of paper. If we receive a random symbol, we have to make up an idea on the spot. It's totally random what you get, but you have to put imagination into it, and after you do your presentation, you get the counter opinions and counter ideas.

**MT:** How do you decide which ideas are worth

**E:** When we created the book *Geijutsu jikkōhan* [Perpetrators of Art], we passed the texts around over and over again. Although the originals had been written by individual group members, the end product came across as that of a single personality, that of Chim↑Pom. In our work, there are things that reflect each of us as individuals, but

### *Black of Death,*

**2008** *Black of Death*, like *Super Rat*, is a kind of portrait. It's a portrait of Tokyo. Like the rats, crows are killed by humans every day because they're pests and scavengers, but they're becoming stronger and smarter as well. And like the rats, we felt empathy toward them, as creatures surviving in urban environments outside the rules. We wanted to communicate with them.

We got a taxidermist to stuff a crow for us, and we recorded the sound of crows. Then we drove through Tokyo on a motorbike, using a speaker and the stuffed crow to attract more crows. It was important that we moved at the same speed as crows fly. At first, other crows gathered to rescue their comrades, but they're intelligent birds and, after three days, they stopped coming to us. It's fascinating to see how the intelligence of wild animals evolves.

We wanted to cover the sky entirely with crows, so the National Parliament was a good place for that, as there are no high-rise buildings in the vicinity. There's an urban legend that there are no crows in the Imperial Palace, which is nearby, but that was where we found the most crows.



Chim↑Pom *BLACK OF DEATH*, 2007–2008

Photograph by Yoshimitsu Umekawa; © Chim↑Pom  
Courtesy of the artists and MUJIN-TO Production, Tokyo

**RU:** We want to do work that keeps surprising us. We have no interest in doing the same thing over and over again. Not in terms of the medium – it's more about the metabolism, how we're going to approach an idea. Although we often get ideas from current events, our primary inspiration comes from the everyday environment. Our work is

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**MT:** How do you decide which ideas are worth pursuing and which you'll forget about?

**RU:** It depends on how excited we are. When you've already thought through your own idea many times over, it becomes difficult to understand what's interesting to the others. The game makes the idea go far beyond the individual.

**MT:** Do you think being in a group allows you to lose your sense of ego?

**RU:** Groups often motivate the other members to tackle difficult projects and agendas. And we can do things as a group that could not be done by an individual. If one person tried to catch the Super Rats, they would look like a “creepy person.” With six people trying to catch them, it looks like fun.

**E:** I feel like Chim↑Pom is an autonomous being, like an alter ego. Sometimes, in a supernatural kind of way, it leads us in what to do.

**MT:** The fact that your works are made up of the fragments of the personality, skill, and thought of six people gives them an inbred complexity.

**E:** When we created the book *Geijutsu jikkōhan* [Perpetrators of Art], we passed the texts around over and over again. Although the originals had been written by individual group members, the end product came across as that of a single personality, that of Chim↑Pom. In our work, there are things that reflect each of us as individuals, but the final work is a distillation of the essence of all six of us. There's a kind of mental empathy at play, as though we've extracted the qualities that all six of us share to create Chim↑Pom.

**MT:** Your generation did not experience the economic bubble of the 1990s. Was this a contributing factor to the formation of Chim↑Pom?

**E:** When I was at university, the news was all negative – the banking collapse, the lack of jobs for graduates.

**RU:** Even though I didn't benefit from the economic good times, I didn't envy the generation before me, who were driven into debt by it. I'm very aware of the difficulties people face, even though I know that people outside Japan think we're rich, especially compared to other Asian countries.

**MT:** Have there been changes in Chim↑Pom in the 10 years since the collective was formed?

We wanted to cover the sky entirely with crows, so the National Parliament was a good place for that, as there are no high-rise buildings in the vicinity. There's an urban legend that there are no crows in the Imperial Palace, which is nearby, but that was where we found the most crows.



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Photograph by Yoshimitsu Umekawa; © Chim↑Pom  
Courtesy of the artists and MUJIN-TO Production, Tokyo

**RU:** We want to do work that keeps surprising us. We have no interest in doing the same thing over and over again. Not in terms of the medium – it's more about the metabolism, how we're going to approach an idea. Although we often get ideas from current events, our primary inspiration comes from the everyday environment. Our work is really site specific.

**MT:** So your work is sometimes generated by chance phenomena?

**RU:** Yes. We're often thought of as socially oriented artists, but what we're really trying to do is express the idea of people being toyed with by society. We don't provide solutions to social problems. Sometimes things happen that shed light on a problem that's overlooked because it's embedded in society.

**E:** We don't want to tell lies about reality. The controlled information on TV and the superficial emotional comments that spread online make me furious. It's important to experience things directly. That's how you understand the problems in the world.

**RU:** When we made *Don't Follow the Wind*, we thought about the reality behind the fact that the area surrounding the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power

Chim↑Pom

Chim↑Pom  
Photograph  
© Chim↑Pom



formed the collective Hi-Red Center. In sympathy with New York's Fluxus movement, they organized a series of exhibitions and events entitled *Mixer Plan*. On October 16, 1964, during the Olympics, they staged the happening *Movement to Promote the Cleanup of the Metropolitan Area (Be Clean!)* in Tokyo's upmarket district of Ginza. During a time of heightened police security, artists took to the streets in white gowns, face masks, and armbands decorated with "!", the collective's logo. With no prior warning to the public, they cleaned the sidewalks and trees with cloths and swept manhole covers with brushes.

Hi-Red Center's performance was an intervention in a cityscape that had changed dramatically due to the Olympics, with new developments, including motorways, hotels, and sports stadiums. It disrupted normal activity through the over-the-top act of scrubbing the streets for the public's benefit, and it drew attention to an unconscious shift in society, breaking down the barrier between everyday affairs and artistic practice.

When the stock-market bubble of the 1990s burst, Japan faced economic stagnation. Financial hardship, increasing unemployment, and an aging populace now stands

control. In Chim↑Pom's work, the Super Rats are, in part, a reflection of a superficial consumer society based on flamboyant materialism. Yet the Super Rat is also a symbol of tenacious survival in conditions of adversity, and Chim↑Pom's artwork conveys empathy for those who have to survive in harsh conditions.

*KI-AI 100* (2011) was made in the immediate aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The

a girlfriend!" The video conveyed a message of humor and vitality – a portrait of the young people as more than victims.

Mavo, Hi-Red Center, and Chim↑Pom are in sync with the speed of the times: unafraid of criticism, they take action against authority and convention. They believe firmly that anarchism dwells within artistic practice and shares in a global solidarity. Their messages recur endlessly in dispatches from Far East Japan.



Chim↑Pom  
*PIKA*, 2009

Photograph by Cactus Nakao  
Courtesy of MUJIN-TO Production, Tokyo

FROM LEFT:  
MASATAKA  
OKADA, ELLIE,  
MOTOMU  
INAKA,  
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MIZUNO, YASUTAKA HAYASHI, AND  
PHOTOGRAPH BY MAKOTO AIDA

FORMED IN 2005, CHIM↑POM IS AN ART COLLECTIVE IN TOYKO. ITS MEMBER ELLIE, YASUTAKA HAYASHI, MOTOMU INAKA, TOSHINORI MIZUNO, MASATAKA OKADA, AND RYUTA USHIRO – IN THEIR TWENTIES WHEN THEY BANDED TOGETHER, COMING FROM A RANGE OF PROFESSIONS AND DISCIPLINES. THEIR WORK IS OFTEN INFORMED BY THE PAST AND COMMENTS ON ITS PRESENT, ENGAGING SUBJECT MATTER RANGING FROM ANIME AND MANGA TO ONLINE SHOPPING AND NUCLEAR DISASTER.



free-ranging artists decorated the barracks that housed the survivors, liberating art from its institutional roots in museums and galleries.

Artists' collectives are born at such times of drastic change, when strong authority and rigid systems give way. Their activities often take the form of guerrilla action in cities.

After its defeat in the Second World War, Japan achieved economic growth at surprising speed, and the 1964 Tokyo Olympics provided a perfect opportunity to showcase the country's revival to the world. A year before this, in 1963, Jiro Takamatsu, Genpei Akasegawa, and Natsuyuki Nakanishi had formed the collective Hi-Red Center. In sympathy with New York's Fluxus movement, they organized a series of exhibitions and events entitled *Mixer Plan*. On October 16, 1964, during the Olympics, they staged the happening *Movement to Promote the Cleanup of the Metropolitan Area (Be Clean!)* in Tokyo's upmarket district of Ginza. During a time of heightened police security, artists took to the streets in white gowns, face masks, and armbands decorated with "f", the collective's logo. With no prior warning to the public, they cleaned the sidewalks and trees with cloths and swept manhole covers with brushes.

in paradoxical contrast to the high levels of well-being that stemmed from the material wealth accumulated over the last decades of the 20th century. The collective Chim↑Pom – Ellie, Yasutaka Hayashi, Motomu Inaoka, Toshinori Mizuno, Masataka Okada, and Ryuta Ushiro – uncovers the dark side of this society, which on the surface appears peaceful, allying themselves artistically with rats and other urban vermin.

Across Tokyo's Shibuya area, a shopping heaven for young people, rats have become "super rats": rampant vermin, resistant to pest control. In Chim↑Pom's work, the Super Rats are, in part, a reflection of a superficial consumer society based on flamboyant materialism. Yet the Super Rat is also a symbol of tenacious survival in conditions of adversity, and Chim↑Pom's artwork conveys empathy for those who have to survive in harsh conditions.

*KI-AI 100* (2011) was made in the immediate aftermath of the Great East Japan Earthquake and the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. The

city of Minamisoma was badly damaged by the tsunami, yet it didn't receive as much help as other areas because of its proximity to the power plant, which made aid agencies fearful of radioactive contamination. Chim↑Pom worked for days with young people from Minamisoma on the removal of debris, and made a video piece: forming a scrum against the background of a fishing boat that had been washed far inland by the tsunami, they recorded 100 "yells", which started off with a serious statement, "Let's revive the area!" and gradually morphed into the absurd yet honest refrain, "I want a girlfriend!" The video conveyed a message of humor and vitality – a portrait of the young people as more than victims.

Mavo, Hi-Red Center, and Chim↑Pom are in sync with the speed of the times: unafraid of criticism, they take action against authority and convention. They believe firmly that anarchism dwells within artistic practice and shares in a global solidarity. Their messages recur endlessly in dispatches from Far East Japan.

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