

A Fictive Handover Letter

Arata Hasegawa (Independent Curator)

To those of you who will keep PARADISE AIR going in the ten years to come,

It's nice to e-meet you. My name is Arata Hasegawa, and I'm an independent curator who has been a guest curator at PARADISE AIR since 2017.

You may think it's strange that I have been a "guest" curator for five whole years. I myself share that feeling. However, this role at PARADISE AIR has been of the utmost importance to me within my career. I don't know if the following actually functions as a letter of succession per se, but I will do my best to reflect and write. Please feel free to read it when you have a free moment.

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In March 2012, I quit the NPO I was working at, and in June 2013, I curated an exhibition for the first time. By the time that exhibition ended, I was 25 years old, meaning that it's now almost been ten years since I became an independent curator without an affiliation to any particular art museum. Coincidentally, PARADISE AIR is also now in its tenth year. We've both come such a long way.

I've just gone back many years on Google Calendar (is there no function to jump directly to a certain date?). It was the fall of 2015 when I first met the director of PARADISE AIR in Kyoto. I bought him a coffee, or, more accurately, he abruptly said "thanks for buying!" when it came time to pay.

The next time I spoke to him was in March 2017 in Tokyo. It was the year I developed hay fever and the exposed mucous membrane on my face was inflamed and leaking. At a formal cafe that seemed designed for business meetings, I was asked if I would be interested in being a guest curator for PARADISE AIR. I accepted the offer, but I wondered what the role would entail exactly (at times like these, I tend to focus on things that shouldn't be done, and at this moment, I thought to myself that the role should not be about curating exhibitions).

Going back to March 2015, I was invited to a public conference hosted by the Agency for Cultural Affairs. It was a survey project about training contemporary art curators who will have international reach. There, I met various individuals working in the arts. One of the speakers, Hiroyuki Hattori, said the following (I am such a fan of what he said that, to this day, I talk about it pretty much wherever I go).

He said that artist-in-residence programs are spaces that welcome artists at any stage of their career. They are open to the young artist seeking to encounter various people, the artist in the midst of their career who is finding their way, or the established artist who wishes to take a break to gather their thoughts.

I really loved this idea—that artist-in-residence programs are something, a system, that offers new options to artists at any stage in their existing career (which is set up like a ladder that can only be climbed in one direction, providing them with limited options). Indeed, that felt like a huge undertaking.

And so (going back to March 2017), upon taking on the role of guest curator, I contemplated what the art of curation could bring to a residency, beyond just putting on an exhibition. In other words, I didn't want to impose the labor required within existing systems in the art industry onto visiting artists. This resulted in a highly conceptual policy that centered on the thought process rather than the residents having to produce work (the theme for that year's LONGSTAY program was "The Thinking Reeds"). Through this experience, I have learned a few things. First, that residencies are made possible by the coordinators. A guest curator who can only come to the space from time to time does not provide any kind of infrastructure. Intangible artistic endeavors outside the traditional formats of creative activity—such as painting,

sculpture, or composing—are supported by a massive amount of actual labor. Maintaining an environment where the artist can feel safe living, creating, thinking, and exploring, without excessively intruding on them, is a truly difficult task. While curators play a necessary role for symbolic purposes like conceptualizing programs or hosting events and whatnot, the real focus should be on the flow of mutual communication between coordinators, artists, and the management team—because all of those parts together constitute the artistic "site."

Another thing: the screening process. Each year, the LONGSTAY Program attracts hundreds of applications, thanks to its great conditions and, probably, favorable reviews from past participants. I spend about three full days reviewing all the application documents and videos in our Dropbox. Of course, there are many extensive portfolios where I get a good sense of the layout and things are clearly worded, but there are many more that only list an Instagram account. Some applications only have a YouTube link where the total number of views is a single digit, such as a 20-second video of someone brazenly breaking plates in front of their house, for example. While these types of applications rarely make it to the final selection, I find them particularly motivating (even if the applicant is just trying their luck). These applications show me that being an artist is not just about climbing a one-way career ladder. Many people (technically everyone) within our society express themselves creatively, intentionally or unintentionally, and many wish to share their creative expression with others in some form. These activities cannot be fully captured by the existing systems in the arts, as there are way too many creatives, and their modes of expression are far too diverse.

The next thing is about our relationship with the city of Matsudo. There may be times where you feel discouraged, feeling like it's always just familiar faces from the same inner circle coming together. You might feel that the effort to directly and tangibly connect Matsudo's residents with artists is not as far-reaching as you imagined. However, after five years with PARADISE AIR, I definitely feel there are more and more people who feel that Matsudo has the potential for anything to happen at any time. I believe in the importance of this kind of environment where possibilities are always simmering. It's important to maintain this state that is much like a warm-up, where you prepare your body, limber up, and heighten your reflexes, to sustain the ability to find joy in the unexpected. Maintaining this state is the most difficult part. It's incredible that artists who previously stayed at PARADISE often return to visit, because it shows that the residency is not just being consumed as a one-time experience. The number of different countries that the artists come from may be important, but the number of artists returning to visit is even more significant. In this way, I think it's a good idea to create things you can be proud of, and standards that you want to maintain for yourselves, rather than experiencing highs and lows based on external validation.

Although I said I am writing a handover letter, I find myself writing about the things I couldn't achieve, rather than the things I have accomplished. I have a habit of going wherever people ask me to, so there were many times I could not prioritize going to PARADISE, and perhaps I emphasized the fact that I was a "guest" curator too much. However, as I wrote in the beginning, being a guest curator at PARADISE AIR was the most significant element in my ten years as an independent curator. It might not be obvious, but this experience has really transformed the way I approach things. I cannot say this enough, but I truly think this place is special.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if there's ever anything I can do for you.

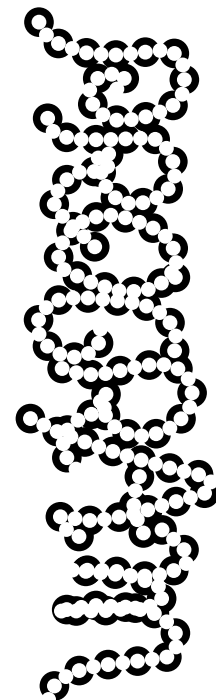
COORDINATORS

PARADISE AIR is run by a collective centered around a team of coordinators who connect resident artists and the local area. The coordinators are also freelancers working in a variety of fields including fine arts, architecture, video, performing arts, public relations, and events. We also have additional support from curators, interpreters, translators, accountants, photographers, local residents and artists, as well government organizations and private businesses.



From upper left: Mackie, Koji, Hajime, Yuki (Translator), Mei, Ishii-san
From lower left: Ayaka, Aki, Eriko, Junpei, Moe

That PARADISE AIR has been able to develop all these programs is due to our collaboration with Matsudo City's urban strategy. Working with the city, we have developed a creative approach to urban development that allows diversity and tolerance to flourish, by discovering and promoting the city's appeal and local resources through the artists' perspectives, and inviting a variety of artists to our program. When we explain our activities as a venture to the city and the Agency for Cultural Affairs, this is the summary we give.



Visiting Artist Programs

LONGSTAY Program

The LONGSTAY program invites artists with international aspirations from Japan and abroad, and supports their research and production during a three-month residency in Matsudo. In addition to financial aid for travel, production, and daily expenses, the program provides technical assistance from expert staff, as well as support for living, production, and research. The program requires that potential applicants “enjoy engaging in dialogue with the local community,” and involves experts as well as local residents in the selection process to allow for a variety of perspectives. During their stay, the artists interact with local residents to create artworks that make use of local resources.

SHORTSTAY Program

Inheriting the history and cultural traditions of Matsudo, the SHORTSTAY Program takes “One Stay, One Art” as its concept, inviting via open-call artists, curators, and researchers in the field of visual arts, performance, music, and design. The program supports artists visiting Matsudo at their own expense by providing free space to live and work for approximately three weeks. By welcoming multiple artists each month, the program creates a new site for art and culture where residents can inspire one another.

Check our website for open-call information.

Educational Outreach and Regional Partnership Programs

LEARN Program

The LEARN Program provides opportunities for resident artists participating in the LONGSTAY and SHORTSTAY programs and local residents to interact and learn from each other. Lectures and workshops are held at schools, public facilities, and community events to promote art education for local people and children, while also serving as a chance for artists to create works and conduct research. The program is also a gateway to expanding PARADISE AIR's activities to the greater community.

PARADISE Knot

PARADISE Knot is a program that supports exchange opportunities for artists, curators, and coordinators by cooperating with artist-in-residence programs (AIRs), museums, and other cultural and artistic facilities in Japan and abroad. Based on the concept of “One Stay, One Art,” which takes inspiration from the history and cultural traditions of Matsudo, the program doesn't adhere to the conventional image of AIRs as places to travel to and make artwork. Rather, it aims to update AIR sites by utilizing PARADISE AIR's network of artists and curators working in the fields of visual arts, performance, music, and design. PARADISE Knot sees these partnerships between facilities as “knots,” and carefully explores the connections between AIRs, as well as individual solutions to better connect programs with artists.

Operation Infrastructure Development Programs

Studio Program

The Studio Program provides vacant rooms in PARADISE AIR for rent to Matsudo-based artists, creators, and entrepreneurs as studios. Lessees have space to devote to their creative activities in an environment where they can interact with artists from Japan and abroad. The lessor, PARADISE AIR, generates its own financial resources throughout the year via rental income, thereby establishing a self-sustaining operational infrastructure independent of public funds. (In cooperation with omusubi fudōsan)

Research and Development

PARADISE AIR considers the network it has cultivated with artists in Japan and abroad, as well as information collected on applicants (including proposals for projects in Matsudo), as valuable accumulated assets. We plan to experiment and consider how to utilize and realize these assets in the LOOKBACK Project. PARADISE AIR also aims to become a core presence in Japanese art and culture: it will make progress so that it will become a world-leading AIR, and will also improve the venues in Matsudo that have served as experimental exhibition spaces.

PARADISE AIR: Then and Now

Junpei Mori (Director / Coordinator)

Wataru Shoji

Kanoko Tamura (Mediator)

Junpei Mori is one of the founding members of PARADISE AIR, and Shoji Wataru and Kanoko Tamura have been involved in the project since its early days.

Behind the trust they have built over the years with locals and public officials, which forms the foundation of this residency program, is a spirit of team building that welcomes change and enjoys challenges.

Nurturing a sense of trust through sharing the process

Wataru Shoji | It's really amazing that we're celebrating our tenth anniversary. It means we're quite a seasoned artist residency program. In today's conversation, we'll focus on the present and future of PARADISE AIR by looking back at its beginnings.

Junpei Mori | Unfortunately, I really can't answer any questions about future prospects, since we never really thought ahead. Before we launched PARADISE, we were always doing one-off projects every year.

Shoji | Exactly. Before we started PARADISE, Matsudo was hosting annual art projects, and in 2010 and 2011, they were aiming to do a kind of art festival. In 2010, the city had a budget of about 30 million yen, but in 2011, they weren't able to get the portion from the Agency of Cultural Affairs, so all they had was the city's budget of three million yen. A private company was assigned to run the administrative office, but it was obviously difficult to operate on a tenth of the original budget. So in 2012, they decided to switch gears and bring the local people to the forefront. As they worked together with the neighborhood association, they invited artists like Yuta Nakajima and you, Junpei, and you started to get more involved, which led to PARADISE's launch in 2013. That's a very brief summary *[laughs]*.

Mori | I can't really recall any details, since it was so much work.

Shoji | Kanoko, you were originally involved in PR, right?

Kanoko Tamura | I guess I was already friends with Junpei in university, and I think

he just casually told me about this new project in Matsudo and invited me to help with the PR. The actual work was more around communication, and anything text-related. I helped translate and interpret, and also made newsletters with the neighborhood association. The person who made the biggest impression on me was Horio-san, who was part of the Matsudo Community Planning Council ^[HM1] (Matsukai).

Shoji | Right, he's the former editor of *Barefoot Gen*.

Tamura | The older men in Matsukai are baby boomers, so they were all go-getters in their respective careers and had a lot of experience. Even after their retirement, they were passionately involved in their city, using their expertise. So in that sense, I think at first they were a bit cautious towards PARADISE, wondering what us youngsters were up to, talking about artists coming from overseas and so forth. That was when I learned that Horio-san used to work as an editor, so we decided to have him help out with making the pamphlets to introduce the artists to the locals.

Shoji | That was when Matt Sheridan and Aleksandra Wałaszczek participated in the residency. You were coming up with slogans and things.

Tamura | Exactly! Nobody knew about PARADISE, so we wanted to let the locals know that these artists were coming to Matsudo, and came up with fun slogans with Horio-san. We also went to the designer Kensaku Kato's studio with him as well.

Mori | Right, we did!

Tamura | I think that at the time, Mr. Horio was kind of testing me in a certain way. We had many phone calls, and he gave me a lot of advice and feedback from an editor's perspective. I was very receptive to all of his feedback, taking it all in, which I think led to his approval and trust towards me. At some point, I realized he'd started to just casually strike up a conversation like, "Kanoko, how's it going?" *[laughs]*.

Shoji | Wow, he started to call you by your

first name *[laughs]*. That's certainly a feat.

Tamura | Once we gained their approval, the people at Matsukai helped us with so many things. I believe that Horio-san was the vice-chair at the time, and several of the members who first started working with us spread the word about how we were trying to start something interesting. They would invite us to events held at different neighborhood associations, though most of them were just about drinking together at an *izakaya* pub *[laughs]*. I feel like they loosened up as we joined them in cheerful, good spirits.

Towards a city where you can discover artists

Shoji | Around 2015, we had a process where Matsukai members would make the final selection of artists.

Tamura | If my memory serves me right, I don't think the Matsukai members were part of the selection process in the beginning. They weren't as actively involved, and kind of observing from afar even when the artists arrived. Junpei then suggested that maybe it would be a good idea to have them be a part of the selection process, and I think once they felt more directly involved in that way, they took more initiative in looking after the artists.

Shoji | Yeah, I remember an older woman would help artists put on a kimono, or an older guy would show them a katana ..., and they took a photo that looks like a scene from *Kill Bill* *[laughs]*. Good times.

Tamura | The artists would have these encounters on their own, and be like, "I just met an older woman who's going to help me put on a kimono, so I'm headed there this weekend!" *[laughs]*. There's also people in Matsudo that are the best audience, total pros.

Mori | Like Yashima-san (owner of the Yashima Lantern store).

Tamura | Exactly, it's not just people from Matsukai. There are certain people who come to every talk session.

Mori | Definitely, and there's also teenagers that are interns and people from Matsudo City Hall.

Shoji | I'm sure that interpreting for the locals was in itself a kind of training, Kanoko.

Tamura | Definitely. It wasn't just about interpreting from English to Japanese. I intentionally tried to interpret art lingo into a language that would be accessible to the locals, to convey what the artists were doing in a way that they would understand. Even for the selection process, if I were to just simply translate the artists' words or video messages into Japanese, it might not make complete sense to them.. They would only react once I was able to clearly communicate the artist's intention in a digestible way. I started interpreting for work around 2013, so in that way, I was able to practice the most through PARADISE.

Shoji | I guess it's a great training ground in that way.

Tamura | Yes, which is why I always start by sending anybody that is newer to Art Translators Collective, the translation and interpretation team I'm a part of, or a younger person who is interested in pursuing interpretation to Matsudo. You're always learning on the job with interpreting, so it's difficult to practice when you're starting off your career. It's not that it's okay to mess up because it's Matsudo, but more that the people there are the most generous and accepting.

Shoji | I can see how the people in Matsudo are really willing to listen.

Tamura | Of course, the conversations are about art proper, and the artists are always giving their all, so it doesn't mean that you don't try as hard because it's in Matsudo. But the space is not too big, so I think it's a great place to hone your interpretation skills.

Mori | It's nice to hear that.

A team to enjoy the entire process

Shoji | I do really want to emphasize that

Junpei, you're amazing at finding the right people.

Tamura | Junpei, I think that you're always throwing interesting people in the mix, so I do feel like PARADISE itself is formed by people who got involved in it through you, myself included.

Mori | When it was just me and Wataru, we would run into situations on a daily basis where we could only move things forward if one of us would speak up (and get scolded) and the other would maintain a good relationship. There are also aspects like with PR, where we upload articles on our website or take photos for documentation—things that someone could do but that would be a total waste if they weren't interested in it at all. So it's best to give the role to someone who is good at it. The project wouldn't grow to become like others if we didn't have people who are specialized. PARADISE is working out well now, but if it were a project where you were just writing bureaucratic reports all day, it wouldn't be exciting at all.

Tamura | Let me interpret what Junpei is trying to say [*laughs*]. It would be boring if we were to just plan and manage projects following a typical format, so we gathered the right people to enjoy the entire process, which is how we have our current team. So I think what you're trying to say is that our team is a result of gathering people whose areas of expertise complement each other, and who are assigned tasks and roles accordingly.

Mori | On the topic of team building, in a more traditional organization like a neighborhood association, each person has their own opinion on what's right based on their experience, which leads to arguments. They all have their own idea on how to run the general assemblies, how to take meeting notes and so on, and it's difficult to change a certain custom even if it's not rational at all.

Shoji | It's because people have a lot of pride in what they've done in the past.

Mori | Exactly. So I thought about how I could change the things that I felt were ineffective.

Tamura | I also think that the reason PARADISE has been able to continue for so long is because even though you've been the director for a long time, you have nothing against the residency changing, as in it wouldn't bother you at all. As you were saying, if people who have more experience or have been involved for a longer period were more set in their vision of PARADISE, it wouldn't allow for new perspectives. I think it's important that you are always ready to quit whenever.

Mori | I think I've always been that way from the beginning. I've made sure that anyone can archive data in our Dropbox and created a system that's not dependent on bureaucratic support, just so we can run things independently—basically always having an exit plan for PARADISE.

Tamura | That's why you were saying you have no future prospects.

Mori | Exactly, I don't.

Tamura | So in that way, maybe it's that PARADISE is just something where we gather people, plan things, and come up with ideas to simply enjoy the things we have to do, the things at hand. Nobody is really thinking about doing things in the moment to achieve something grand.

Shoji | Yeah, maybe it's important that we like to have fun with it.

Tamura | I think it's also similar with all the people that Junpei recruited as coordinators. Everyone has a different expertise, but we all share a similar vibe in what we think would be fun.

So even though I've been involved in different ways throughout this decade, it always feels familiar. When I work with people through PARADISE or come back to Matsudo, there's a strange feeling of homecoming, and I don't think that's changed in these ten years. It's always the same kind of energy, where we share this experience of suggesting interesting things and doing what we each can. I think this kind of environment is really rare.

In addition to the collective of individuals responsible for PARADISE AIR's operation, we would like to mention another important group: the stakeholders who support this structure. They have known each other for a long time, even if the nature of their collaboration is always changing together with the programs and projects. "The people on the inside" (the people in charge) of the organization change often, but this succession of individuals involved with PARADISE AIR has enabled relationships of trust to be formed.



PARADISE AIR



General Incorporated Association PAIR

PAIR is a general incorporated association established in 2016 for the planning and operation of PARADISE AIR. Although the association hosts PARADISE AIR, there are no full-time employees. The residency outsources work to professionals, with more than fifty freelancers involved each year (based on payment records).



Matsudo City

Since its establishment, PARADISE AIR has collaborated with Matsudo through urban strategies such as "Art City for Living" and "Urban Development with a Cultural Flavor." It is only through close cooperation with the city that artists can use public space freely to present work and hold workshops. Since 2018, the city has held the annual art festival Matsudo International Science Art Festival.



HAMATOMO E.F.



Hamatomo Entertainment Firm

Hamatomo Entertainment Firm owns the Hamatomo Building in which PARADISE AIR is located. PARADISE AIR began when the company started offering vacant floor space in the Hamatomo Building for rent at a reasonable price as part of its CSR (corporate social responsibility) initiative. Hamatomo A.L., a subsidiary of the Hamatomo Corporation, operates the Rakuen pachinko parlor on the first and second floors of the building.



Agency for Cultural Affairs

The Agency for Cultural Affairs selected Matsudo as a "Culture and Arts Creation Site Formation Project," a designation which provides selected cities with subsidies for cultural projects by local public bodies, including funding for PARADISE AIR's operations. In addition, General Incorporated Association PAIR has also received support through the Agency's "Project for Promoting International Cultural Exchange through Supporting Artist-in-Residence Activities," but unfortunately was not selected to receive the grant in 2023.



Matsudo City Development Committee

Matsudo City Development Committee is composed of members elected by town councils and neighborhood associations in the vicinity of Matsudo Station working to create better urban space in Matsudo and to revitalize the area. The president of the committee serves on the jury in the final selection process for the LONGSTAY Program. The committee also organizes welcome parties for artists, and is a legendary presence, having led PARADISE AIR as its host organization from its start through fiscal year 2015.



omusubi 不動産

omusubi estate

Established in 2014, omusubi estate is a real estate agency that grows rice. The company handles rentals for PARADISE AIR's studio program, connecting us with our tenants. Based in Matsudo, they manage many shared ateliers, such as Senpaku Kōsha, a renovated 60-year-old company housing complex, and other properties that allow DIY renovations.



Society

The World / Japan / Localities etc.

Discovery and communication
of local issues and attractions
Realization of a creative society
fostering diversity and tolerance

Place

Local resources / public spaces
Educational institutions, etc.

PARADISE AIR

Creation and presentation of artwork
Dialogue through art
Creation of culture and art

Supporting resident artists
Fostering civic pride
Building human networks

People

Resident artists and local residents
Cultural and artistic experts, etc.

A sustainable cycle of creation and dissemination of culture
and art through artist-in-residence programs

These three young coordinators all encountered PARADISE AIR, which has always taken a flexible approach, and got involved in their own ways. So, what has this new generation absorbed from their experiences working with the program, and what direction do they want to move toward in the future? What does each feel about where PARADISE stands now?

Toward a progressive PARADISE AIR

Koji Kato | I was the first of the members here to get involved with PARADISE AIR, but Mei, you've been involved on and off since your university days, right?

Mei Miyauchi | Yeah, from 2017, I think. I was a graduate student at the time, and PARADISE founding member Wataru Shoji reached out to me and asked if I would come on board part-time as a coordinator's assistant, since I speak a little English. Some days I just went and had a good time.

Koji | I've been close to Arata Hasegawa, a guest curator at PARADISE, since my own grad school days, and when I asked him if he knew about any interesting work, he said, "There's this great place called PARADISE, why don't you give it a look?" I've been involved as a coordinator since the spring of 2019, the following year. I lived near Matsudo, but I hadn't come here before then.

Ayaka Ura | It was Koji, here, who invited me. I joined in April 2023, so I've been a member for about six months now. Since I work as an artist, I'd known about PARADISE from the outside, but now I feel like I'm slowly getting more of a view of what they do...

Koji | It's a time for having everything looked at from a fresh perspective *[laughs]*. I heard that when I joined, in 2019, that was when the initial members had all decided they wanted to bring in the next generation as members. The scale of the project and the number of people invited, through open calls, for the PARADISE artist-in-residence (AIR) program were also increasing year by year, so I think it was also a case of needing to grow member numbers to cover the work.

Mei | I didn't really have any awareness of a generational change when I started working with PARADISE. Everyone in the collective is very good at bringing people together. They pick up on when it looks like a particular student might have some time, or that it would be fun to invite a certain person to an event, and I have a feeling that my invitation when I was a student was as an extension of that, to liven things up, so I jumped in without any stress and enjoyed myself *[laughs]*. I officially became a member from 2020. I'd been working in an art museum before then, but I realized I wasn't interested in being in a building all the time, and when I talked to Mackie (Isao Kanemaki) about quitting, he asked if I'd like to work at PARADISE. I didn't have any idea at all what everyone else was thinking at the time, like Koji, and just joined without any stress...

Koji | No one put pressure on me to carry the weight of my generation either, or anything like that *[laughs]*. That's just what I was hearing from everyone else. When I joined, Junpei Mori told me, "You can do what you like. PARADISE is a space that could vanish at any time, so you don't have to bear any burden," so I still try to act with that in mind even now.

Mei | Yeah. When I joined, we were in the early stages of COVID-19 and there were still some artists coming to PARADISE, and I was still doing other work as well. As I mentioned a moment ago, my priority was seeing how I could work in a kind of carefree way, and Mori-san said, "I've created a monster with zero responsibility" *[laughs]*. When the pandemic really developed into a big deal, video meetings became more common, and we started working online, and it was a rough time for me because I wasn't sure what my profession was, but I got used to it, over time. Outside PARADISE, other jobs have themes, defined schedules, evaluation against targets... set paths like that, but PARADISE doesn't really do things that way. Rather than identifying targets from the outset, we hold regular meetings to share the situation with members and proceed from there. There are lots of things that the artists only learn when they come and spend some time at Matsudo. I used to feel some frustration

with this approach, but now I think that this methodology, not fixing and verbalizing values, is part of what makes PARADISE what it is.

The coordinators' perspective

Koji | In a sense, we arrived after the PARADISE format had already been put together. So, I was thinking about what my involvement would be like, and what would be possible. I'm also an artist, so at first, I was working under my own assumption that I'd be best placed providing technical support to artists on the creative side of things. But, sharing work with other members, I came to realize that maybe I could step in flexibly as needed, to fit the demand, rather than having a clearly defined role. Maybe I could say I've been shifting and adapting as I go.

Mei | I was jealous of your technical expertise, Koji!

Koji | Ah, don't be silly *[laughs]*. I was concerned about my own title, interacting with artists as a coordinator. But it's not like I can talk to artists more intimately than anyone else just because I'm an artist. Looking around me, everyone is engaging with artists from their own perspectives, and with their own passions. When I realized there were many perspectives, and I had my own, it came to me that I could relate to artists from my own unique perspective, without worrying about my title.

Ura | That's right. I still don't understand anything...

Mei | I know what you mean. The first year, even when attending the regular meetings, I spent them wondering what everyone was talking about. Because it felt like they were the continuations of conversations that had been going on for years within the PARADISE culture. Looking back on things now, I see that it would have been difficult for me, having just finished grad school and not knowing anything about work or freelancing, to interact on an even footing with PARADISE, which was already firmly established. That's why, back then, I thought it would have been good to have some

specific technical expertise, however small.

Ura | If an artist comes, I can look at their work and talk to them as an individual, but I'm still not sure if that's what it means to be a coordinator. I'm also new to Matsudo, so I tag along with artists when they go for a walk. I'm also planning to join the members who manage PARADISE and try to do something with them. Just when I start thinking that I might be able to handle some minute task handled by the other members, it ends up getting finished before I know it. To be honest, I'm struggling a bit figuring out how I can contribute to the organic PARADISE movement, which seems to always be shifting slightly as it moves forward. But it's a bit of a relief to hear both of you talking like that just now *[laughs]*.

Mei | I was struggling for about two years *[laughs]*.

Koji | Yeah, I was thrown into the thick of it too, and I've heard from more senior members that it's like that for everyone. As an organization, PARADISE is a "collective," meaning that everyone has their own ideas, and that the relationships among members aren't hierarchical. There's a flat structure to the way everyone interacts, and if something comes up that people want to do, they cooperate with each other to do it. But, from the standpoint of someone who's joined when things are already up and running, that can be pretty difficult. PARADISE is there as this product of accumulated, shared values and tastes, and it can operate in a fluid way. Diving in without an understanding of all that, at first, it's a desperate sprint just keeping up, with everything moving around in such a freeform way. It's a space where you can do what you like, but with all the effort that goes into keeping up with everyone else, it can be tough to create the moment to advocate for your own ideas. Even going through periods of uncertainty, though, I know that everyone is thinking through what they do. I trust in that, and there's never any feeling of mistrust. But I do feel that communicating what I want to do and moving things forward in my own way isn't so easy.

Ura | That's right. I feel like there's probably

no shortage of projects on the go here at the moment. Adding my own input, as things are now, is having an impact. I don't feel like there's much need for me to organize the stuff that's going on now. So, I'm just doing things as they occur to me, one after the other, and I'm still thinking about, well, what should I do?

Koji | You've got to think about it, don't you? I think Mei is putting a lot of effort into coordinating with locals and artists. It doesn't help that, when I talk to locals, sometimes I end up just saying what I want to say *[laughs]*. With her language skills and how good Mei is at getting people to open up, I can slip away and do other things. If we can get a good sense of what our respective work styles are, and strike a good balance based on what we each want to do, our skill sets, and our personalities, then I think everything should run smoothly. People with different professions come together, and that leads on to the artists and locals. I think it's the little, everyday operational tasks that come together to make PARADISE what it is.

Sharing works with the community and society

Mei | When I was a student, I was called in to help during Yarli Allison's residency, and we went to Nikko to shoot a work at the river. They'd created a fictitious story featuring a mythological kappa creature and were shooting that. The journey was fun, and during the shoot the artist suddenly took their clothes off and started painting their body green—I was worried we might get reported, but had a good time standing watch. It was tiring work, but fun. We were all saying how great a time we were having, how fun it was, on the way back.

Koji | From the outside, it can just look like we're messing around.

Mei | Yeah, exactly.

Koji | It's great how we all go to such lengths, and put in so much time, to support the artists' creative processes. There's a certain amount of structure to the program, but some artists want to go further, some

people want to do more out-there stuff, so we cooperate with them as much as we can. That makes things tough at the time, but those are the experiences that stay in your memory when you look back, and which lead to future interactions with the artists. For me, I had a lasting impression from spending a long time with a group of artists called bi- for the 2019 LONGSTAY Program. Their project was to create and operate another AIR program within PARADISE, and I participated in that residency as an artist. I had the opportunity to observe how they work and create during my stay, and had discoveries and encounters that would be impossible during the usual work of a coordinator. I realized all over again that the most interesting part for me is the experience of creating something together with others. The more I can work with artists, put the work into coming up with ideas and developing them, pushing further and further, the harder it is, but the more fun it is, and the more it feels like I'm doing something meaningful. I want to prioritize working that way, connecting with artists without being bound by the program framework. No one's forbidden me from that kind of excessive involvement *[laughs]*.

Mei | That's right. With the river shoot, after we had such a good time, that was the first time the artist told me, "You were such a great coordinator, coming with me to create the work, and having such a good time together." In that moment, I felt like, even though I'm not an artist, I can become someone the artists can talk to about why they made their works—by getting involved in the creative process, by being there on location, communicating closely with the artist, and participating on short notice in aspects of the production, as a performer. As an AIR coordinator, in the city, being able to speak about an artist's work on their behalf, and share it with the locals, with society, that's one thing that I can do.

Bringing value to every step of the process

Ura | I think PARADISE is a feature of the city, so I've been thinking recently about interesting ways of recording what's

happening here, maybe in written form or something—the real things happening now, even if they aren't major events. I want to follow the creative flow as closely as I can. Artworks emerge from that flow, a certain artist comes and goes, then another arrives ... and all that's going on the whole time, somewhere in the city. I don't know what's happening where, or when, so I want to notice each and every thing, in my own way. So I miss as little as possible.

Koji | That sounds brilliant!

Mei | Just don't wear yourself out!

Ura | Varied responses [*laughs*]! Of course it won't be possible to get everything. But it would be great if I could capture some fresh insights. I think that would be good for me as well, always looking out for what might happen.

Koji | In my view, what happens at AIR is all about relationships between people. There are opportunities to create artworks too, but its role differs from that of an art museum, gallery, or art festival, and its value can't be measured in attendance figures, or any other number. So, we want a direct dialogue with the artists, to ask them what they want to do, and to go meet the people of Matsudo. The reason we tell the artists in residence at PARADISE that they don't necessarily need to hold an exhibition is that we think the most important thing is the process of them coming here, us meeting them, and having the time for people to meet each other. The issue is whether you can find that interesting in itself, and see value in that.

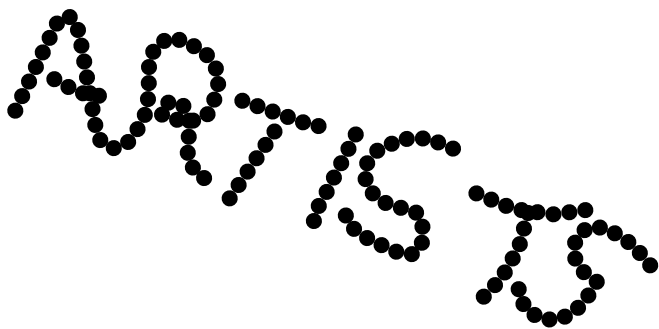
Mei | Right. I think it's amazing how PARADISE has kept that up for a decade. To be composed of multiple members, have a space, artists coming every month, operate the programs... that's just awesome. And it operates as a collective, instead of having one person responsible for everything. There's something really chic and cool about how it works with the local community to obtain funding, and how it has nimbly put together a network, or ecosystem, whereby artists circulate beyond Matsudo to Tokyo, Japan, and the world!

Koji and Ura | Chic and cool [*laughs*]!

Mei | Yeah. It's creating a normalcy to artists being in Matsudo all the time, and refreshing the way the city is used by taking advantage of parks and public spaces, and testing the flexibility of those public spaces when an artist has something creative they want to try. I think there's something really cool about doing that in such a chic way that involves artists. This isn't something that could be done anywhere. There are older men living in Matsudo whose ancestors have lived here since before the city administration was established—we've engaged with them and gotten close, so they can keep an eye on us.

Koji | That's right. PARADISE doesn't have a gallery, which is why it's ended up with its current style, with artists going out into the city to express themselves. This is what's led to fostering relationships with the people of the city.

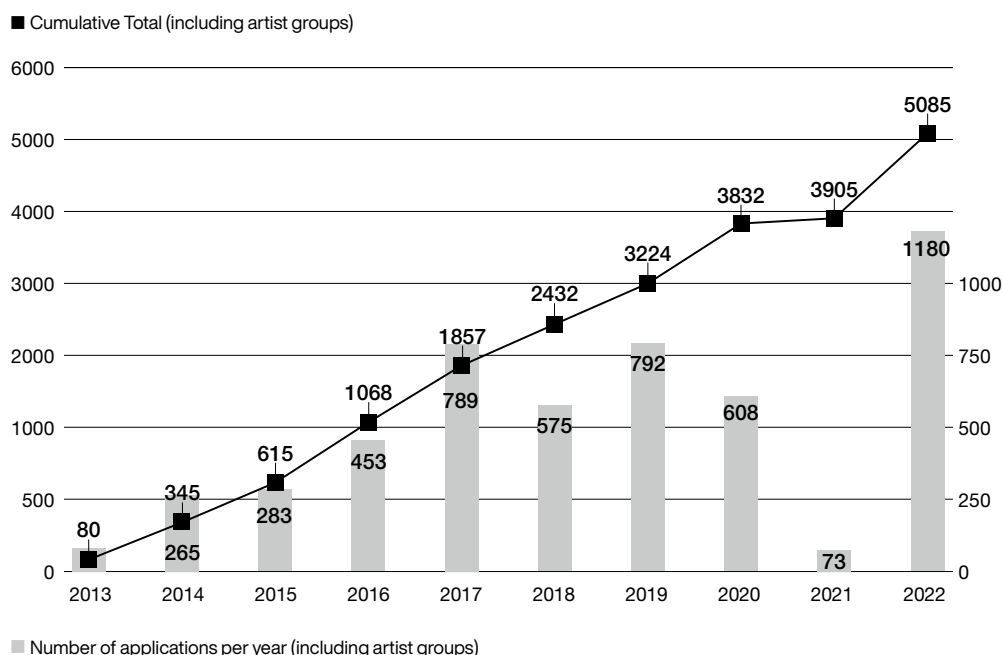
Ura | You know, there are still people in Matsudo who don't know about PARADISE. But the number who do know about it will climb a little today, and again tomorrow, and I think it's really special to consider how those interactions have been going on for ten years. I look forward to meeting more and more people while climbing this long staircase with PARADISE.



PARADISE AIR artists in residence are selected via an open call to stay, live, and work in Matsudo. At the end of May 2023, which marked the 10th anniversary of PARADISE AIR, we tallied our numbers. Among those who applied to live and create at PARADISE AIR, 428 applicants (636 people) were selected as the right fit and were able to attend. There were a total of 5157 applicants, including those who were unfortunately unable to accept. We were once again surprised to see the sheer number of artists who pictured coming to Matsudo, mapped out a plan, and applied to the program. The networks forged with the artists and the ideas they have contributed are an asset to PARADISE AIR.

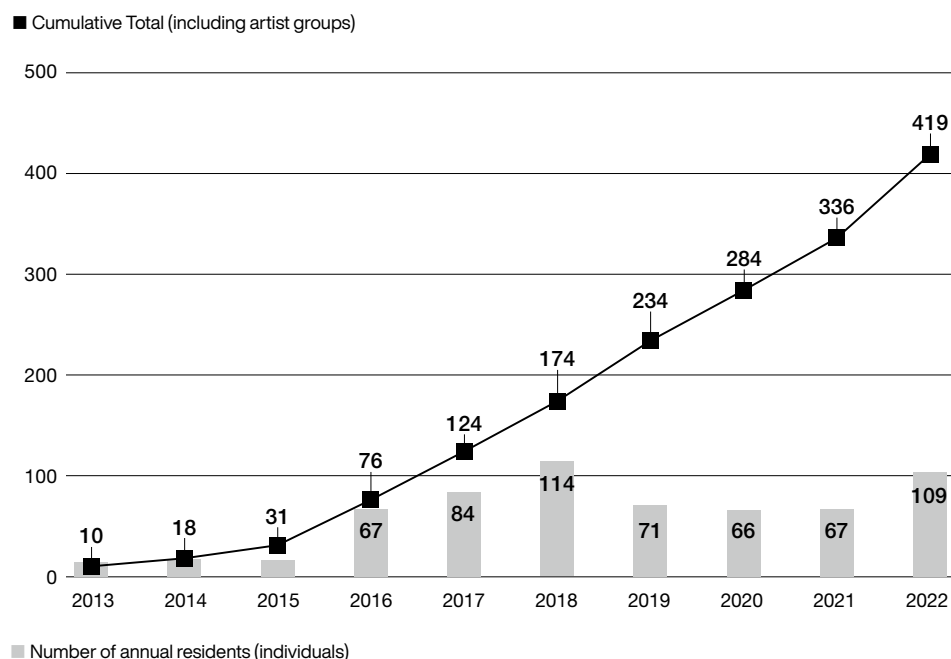
Number of applicants

There was an increase in applications once we became a general incorporated association in 2016. Applications reached a ten-year low in 2021 due to immigration restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the pausing of our LONGSTAY program. In 2022, there was a sharp increase in applicants in response to signs of easing of border policies.



Number of artists in residence

In 2016, our team grew and there was an increase in available rooms, which allowed us to accommodate more artists. Artist groups, as well as artists' families and partners, can also be accommodated. There has been a limit to the number of residents we can accept each year due to a cap on the number of rooms, but we began plans to expand by utilizing more floors and new rooms in 2023.



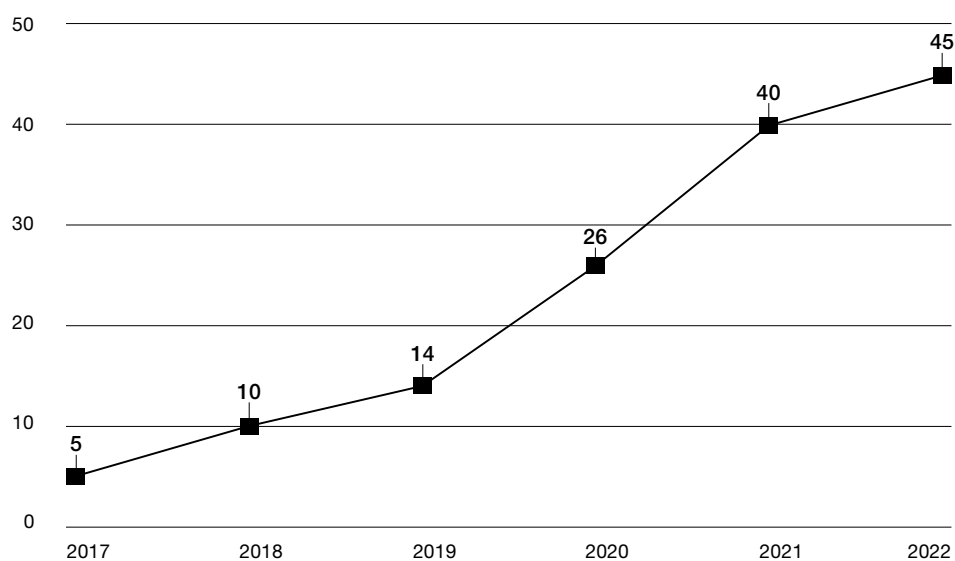
Origins of artists in residence 47 countries and regions

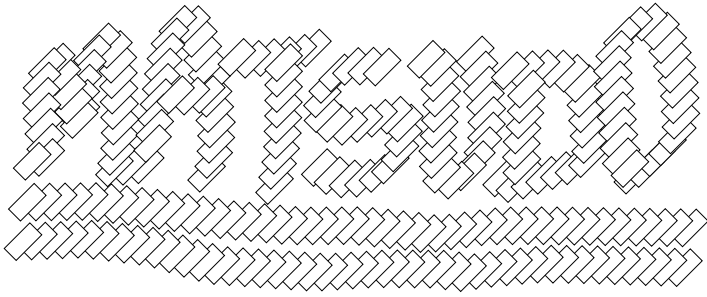
We occasionally see a spike in the number of applicants from a certain region thanks to word of mouth and referrals from artists who have attended residency. We take this as positive feedback from satisfied residents.



Number of local resources utilized by artists 45 locations

Artists are encouraged to create and present their work at locations outside of PARADISE AIR, which have increased annually thanks to the generosity of local residents.





Matsudo: a transit point

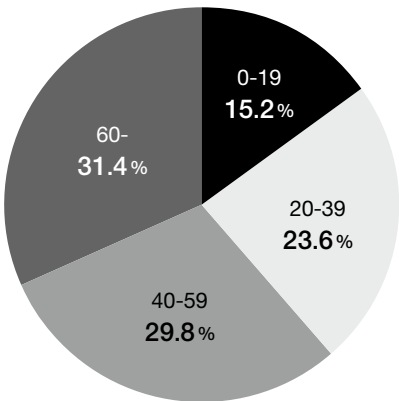
Matsudo is a city in north-west Chiba Prefecture with a population of around 490,000. The old Mito Road and the JR Joban Line bisect the city from north to south. As it was situated on the highway between Tokyo and Mito, Matsudo thrived from the Edo Period onward as a post town. Travelers and cultural figures would sometimes leave a possession or write a song as payment for lodging; it is said that some of these things can still be found in old homes in the city. This old post town, which once linked Edo and Mito, has grown into a new role: located between central Tokyo and Narita Airport, it now connects Tokyo with the world. PARADISE AIR aims to become a base where all kinds of people come and go—a transit point where artists from across the world can drop in during their travels.

Matsudo (as of October 2023)

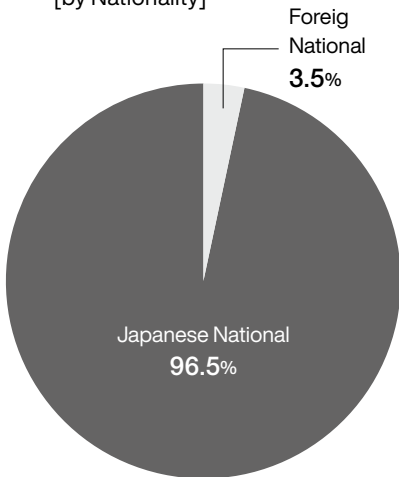
Area 61.38 km²
Total population 497,444
(246,133 men, 251,311 women)
Population density 8,104 per km²

Population demographics

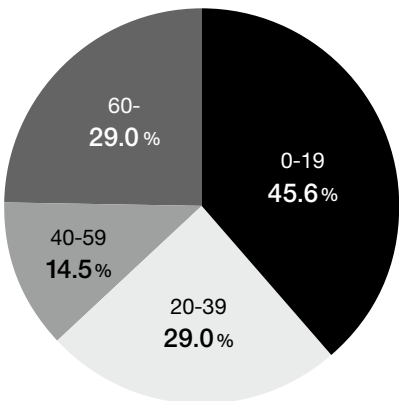
[by Age]



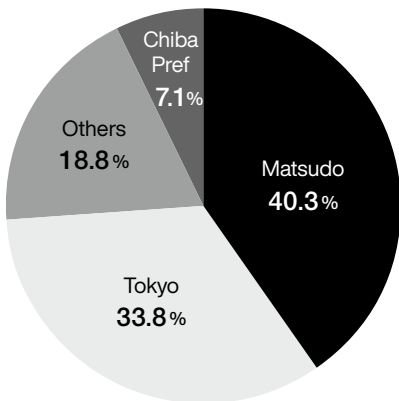
[by Nationality]



Age of PARADISE AIR event visitors



Residence of event visitors



The financial side of PARADISE AIR

Makoto Gotoh
Eriko Amo (Accountant)

For the past ten years since its founding, PARADISE AIR has primarily relied on public subsidies for its activities.

The free-spirited activities and distinctive work styles are founded on a creative approach to financial management that has been refined over the years.

The two individuals in charge of accounting at PARADISE AIR discuss the positive relationship between art projects and money.

Freedom in both activities and budget

Makoto Gotoh | I joined PARADISE AIR in 2016 when it became a general incorporated association. Initially, I only came to the space a few times a month because accountants and bookkeepers aren't needed every day and are usually outsourced by companies. However, in the case of PARADISE, managing the balance of payments for grants and subsidies, and preparing the financial statements, were major tasks that needed to be handled first and foremost. The city of Matsudo has consistently been selected to receive a grant from the Agency for Cultural Affairs every year, and PARADISE collaborates with the city on this project. Because we have this routine of receiving the same grant and subsidy each year, and reporting it as our expenditure, managing the budget and compiling materials for the financial reports is a core part of our accounting work. This is central to the accounting for all affairs, so I think my involvement at PARADISE is slightly different compared to a typical company.

Eriko Amo | For me, it's finally been about a year since I joined PARADISE (this interview took place in mid-September).

Gotoh | Yeah, just about a year. We have some members who have been with PARADISE since the start, and others who joined later, but we always make decisions as a group, rather than using a top-down approach. This means our meetings can take a lot of time. During the meetings, we decide how to allocate the remaining budget for the year and plan the budget for the coming year, which is a significant part of our work.

Amo | We just had that discussion this week. September marks the approximate end of the first half of the fiscal year, and many payments are due toward the end of the year, so it's a good time to review the current budget. Even if I don't bring it up myself, the other members remind me that it's time to look at the budget.

Gotoh | Before I joined PARADISE, I was an accountant for an art festival organized by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. I had experience with managing grants and overseeing accounting, including internal payments, but I think that's actually pretty rare. I think your experience is unique too.

Amo | I think I ended up working in this field because I liked it.

Gotoh | [*Laughs*] Well, for me, Mori-san asked me to join PARADISE because of the experience I had under my belt. I think he mentions this to everyone he asks to join, but he said to me that I could do whatever I wanted with PARADISE and use the space to explore and have fun. That caught my interest, and I also wanted to give it a try because it would be my first opportunity to take the lead in managing all of the accounting for a general incorporated association.

Amo | I joined PARADISE in July 2022. At the information session for potential new members, I learned that Gotoh-san, who I had met one time before in another project, was part of the team. There aren't many accountants involved in art projects, so I knew his name and had seen him before. Previously, I had worked seven years as an accountant for art project initiatives under the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, so I was familiar with artist-in-residence programs, and was interested in working in that field. I was particularly drawn to PARADISE because I had the impression that it was run mainly by its members, so I applied to join. After joining, my first major task was to understand the accounting system of PARADISE and to be able to operate it on my own. All of the activities are done intuitively, but the accounting is organized meticulously. Of course there's room for adjustment,

but the system itself is a very solid one, so I spent my first year familiarizing myself with it. The financial report at the end of the fiscal year is a big task, so I worked closely with Gotoh-san, and now I've finally been able to experience the full scope of tasks. Gotoh-san, you now work with us as a tax advisor.

Gotoh | Yeah, I basically get to pompously give you advice from the outside [*laughs*]. While Amo-san, as the accountant, manages the books and handles all of the bank transfers, I support the tax aspects as an advisor, meaning that I perform overall checks and help out with tax returns. In these past ten years, PARADISE has built a solid reputation through its achievements, including on the financial side, and I think there's a distinctive approach at PARADISE that has helped us earn this trust.

Amo | I definitely agree with that.

Gotoh | PARADISE is an organization that operates with a lot of freedom and discretion, but our projects are based on tens of millions in grants and subsidies. When we are selected to receive this funding, the basis is that the expenditures align with the applications we submitted. This imposes limitations, but I feel that members of PARADISE excel at navigating these constraints. For example, when we apply for a grant, we create a solid framework, setting project schedules and planning the budget. However, when it comes to deciding the activities, we start with abstract questions like, "What is the most interesting thing we're currently doing at PARADISE?" Then, as the discussion progresses, at a certain point, the vision gets clearer and we start writing things out in detail. We also try to highlight the significance of our activities as a large publicly funded program and specifically outline our plans. However, we leave some flexibility for the event schedules and artist name, maintaining some wiggle room for the details. I always kept these margins in mind when considering how to allocate the budget, and every year we somehow managed to make things work. That process was always really interesting for me, and it's rare to find an organization that operates in this way.

Amo | I know what you mean. Rather than following a path toward a fixed destination, everyone moves one step at a time toward a continually evolving picture that they envision, making sure they don't go too far, and leaving room for flexibility. I think it's an impressive thing to accomplish.

Expanding and contracting collectively

Gotoh | This year, which is the tenth year of the project, has been particularly challenging in terms of budget—not just for PARADISE, but also due to overall reductions in subsidies from the Agency for Cultural Affairs. Previously, PARADISE received two subsidies. The first is provided by the Agency of Cultural Affairs to the city of Matsudo, which then commissions PARADISE. This grant primarily supports culture and arts, specifically for initiatives aimed at revitalizing the region and municipality—in this case, promoting the appeal of Matsudo through its culture and arts. The other subsidy, which we received directly from the Agency for Cultural Affairs, supported our artist-in-residence initiatives. In past years, we received about five million yen from the latter, but this year we received none. This is a drastic reduction that could completely throw off our operations and even threaten our continuity.

Amo | That's right. But I was struck by the unique way PARADISE members handled the situation. I expected discussions on how to secure additional funding to make up for the loss and keep operations going in the same way, but they immediately started talking about downsizing. It felt like a very sensible strategy to set a new course and ensure the project could keep moving forward. Given that all of the members are freelancers who have various other work, being able to handle things with flexibility is also part of PARADISE's nature. While we do rely on subsidies, we also take on other projects to generate additional income, which creates a good balance. In this way, we continuously expand and contract, both operationally and financially.

Gotoh | Exactly. Since its founding, all of the members of PARADISE, except

for the directors, have been employed as subcontractors, meaning we have no permanent employees. I think this is an important aspect of our organizational design. In an organization with many employees, a budget cut of five million yen would inevitably impose more work on employees. Or, the workload could be decreased, and some people may end up leaving. Usually if an organization downsizes, it can be irreversible, but at PARADISE, the management team all have other streams of income, meaning that if their income from PARADISE decreases, they can increase the work they do outside of the collective. If the workload at PARADISE increases, they can decrease their outside work accordingly. It is pretty amazing for an organization to be able to expand and contract collectively with such flexibility. Also, PARADISE rents its rooms for a low cost from the owner of the building, so one thing is that we always have the space. Simply put, as long as we can cover rent and utilities, we can maintain the space and provide the basic needs of an artist-in-residence program. The remaining elements can be handled by members who are available to step in and assist as needed. When you think about it, PARADISE has always been a place to stop over at, to drop by, and rather than centering ourselves, we have always run the project by connecting people, mediating, and facilitating interesting activities.

Amo | That's true. Everyone involved in the project maintains a certain degree of independence in their work, and sometimes members bring in additional work for PARADISE via their individual activities. That can help compensate for the shortages we might have.

Gotoh | Each member has their own connections, which is a huge help. When we're facing financial difficulties, there are many different ways the members can take action, which is why things usually work out. In an organization that only does set work each year, if they anticipate a one-million-yen deficit, they will usually end up one million yen in the red. Although honestly, even at PARADISE, I've never felt completely at ease about our finances [laughs].

Amo | What I find interesting from an accounting perspective is that PARADISE manages bank borrowing well and also maintains financial strength. Our financial statements are solid, which gives us a lot of credibility; I see this as a great asset. I find the gap between that and the high degree of freedom within our actual activities fascinating. We have a surplus of about one million yen every year, which adds to our financial strength. We have about ten subcontracted members, host many artists each year, and facilitate various programs. Yet, it's fascinating how all the members are involved in a flexible and easy-going manner.

Demonstrating the value of our staff

Gotoh | As for the fees paid to the staff, I think it's an ideal balance if the PARADISE income covers roughly 30%–70% of the members' living costs, considering they are outsourced employees. If it only covered 10%, for example, it might feel more like a hobby. My hope is that all the members can strike a good balance between their work with PARADISE, their other professional engagements, and their personal lives. On another note, the rates paid to the staff are the same for all members. For members who have just joined, there is a trial period with adjusted fees, but as a general rule, everyone is paid a flat rate. To decide the number of workdays, each member is asked their work schedule in advance, and it is up to them to report their anticipated workdays per week in the coming year. The labor costs for those days are incorporated into the budget as the promised amount for their annual compensation. Of course this creates a sense of pressure, but it also allows for autonomy and freedom in planning. It's quite an interesting system. Not to mention, the cost of employees accounts for more than half of the total budget, which is quite substantial. From the viewpoint of funders such as the Agency for Cultural Affairs, they'd sometimes prefer it if we allocated more budget to events, because of the concern that spending budget on labor costs does not garner measurable outcomes. However, we firmly believe in investing in our staff, and are committed to demonstrating that they are invaluable to our operations.

As long as we can pay our coordinators, PARADISE can continue to achieve pretty much anything, and without them, we'd be nothing.

Amo | I think PARADISE has been able to gradually raise the fees paid to its members. As was the case in my previous job, payment rates for individuals are not adjusted easily, but here I noticed a concerted effort by everyone to raise that.

Gotoh | I think funders, such as the Agency for Cultural Affairs, are also accustomed to low unit labor costs because many events of a certain scale have been able to operate within those constraints. They might question why the labor costs are so high for an artist-in-residence program, which is not particularly extravagant, or why more budget isn't allocated to production costs for artworks. We try to challenge this by making them see how much their salary amounts to when broken down into a daily rate, and asserting a fair unit labor cost. Of course, we do not ask for anything excessive, but a reasonable amount. We've been intentional about this from the start. The Agency for Cultural Affairs tends to work with hourly rates, often starting at minimum wage for younger workers under 20 years old. We want them to know this approach is not right, so we deliberately refuse to lower our labor costs.

Amo | I totally agree with that approach.

Gotoh | Naturally, the budget also includes production costs for artworks. In some of our programs, however, the artists stay and work in Matsudo, but their work involves engaging with the community and producing their art within the city, which sometimes requires minimal production costs. Although their efforts are tangible and the results can be archived, these activities are not always reflected in the budget.

Amo | At PARADISE, an exchange of value takes place that cannot be quantified in monetary terms. Artists do not have to pay for accommodation because the owner of the building rents the space out to us at a low cost. I think this is because they benefit

from the program in ways beyond monetary gain. I feel that the same kind of invisible, non-monetary exchange exists between the artists and the residents of Matsudo.

Gotoh | If this was an art festival, for example, we wouldn't be able to just talk about these kinds of results—we would need to show metrics like the number of visitors, or have a concrete goal like creating artworks and exhibiting them. With PARADISE, however, if artists come to stay, engage with the community, and form good relationships through trial and error before returning home, that can be considered a success. This is the distinct nature of artist-in-residence programs and I think it's vital to keep emphasizing this value.

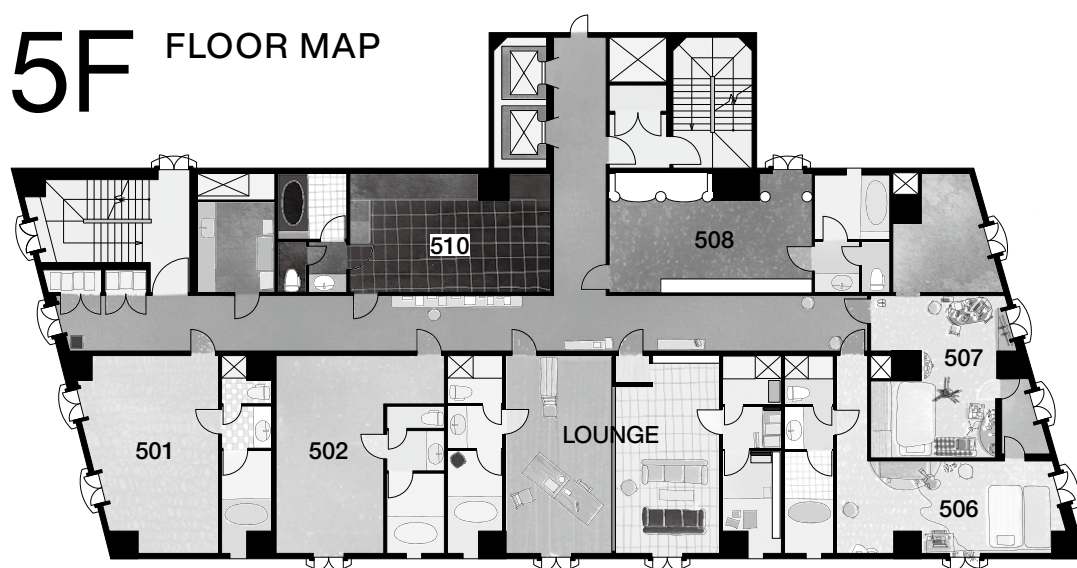
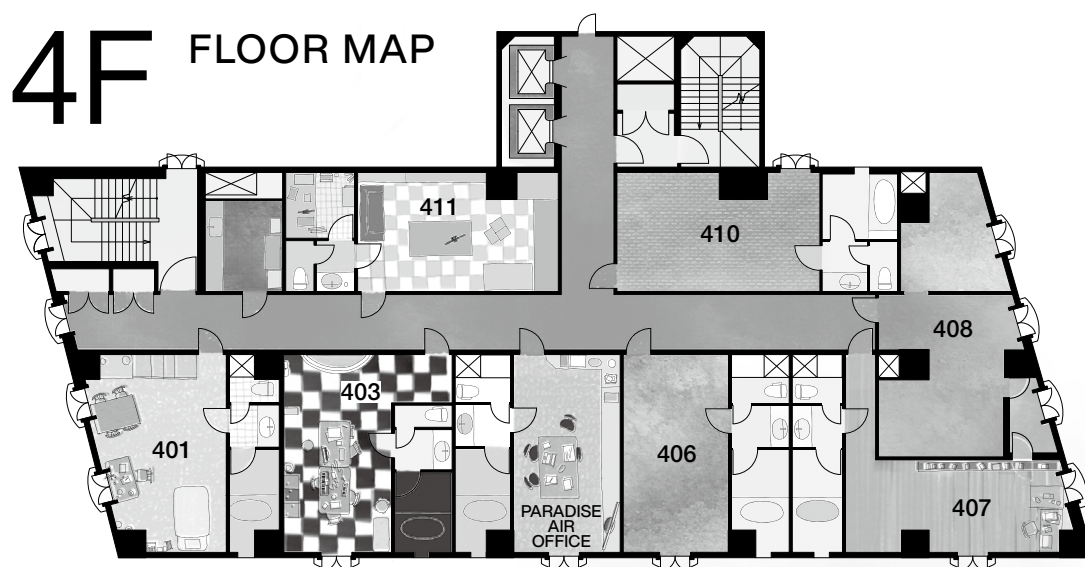
Amo | I believe Mori-san's initial comment about using the space however we want refers to how we can leverage the system of artist-in-residence programs to pursue our own ambitions, including broadening the program's scope. That makes working here exciting, and I hope I can shape PARADISE in my own way.

Gotoh | The approach of an artist-in-residence program can vary, but for PARADISE, which enjoys a degree of autonomy as an organization, it's important to focus on gradually developing our assets, such as the people involved and the space, in an interesting way. The key is that we enjoy the process and cultivate it without exceeding our capacities. It's about slowly extending the core values that we have and exploring how we can use them as a basis for play. I hope that PARADISE can continue forward with that kind of margin for freedom and exploration.

PARADISE AIR is situated inside a seven-floor building that was originally built as a hotel. The interior decoration has barely been changed since it was a hotel, and the rooms retain a kitsch atmosphere reminiscent of the Japan of yesteryear. They are used as artists' lodgings, but also as a lounge, a staff room, and creators' offices.

The fourth and fifth floors each have eight rooms, three of which are used as artists' lodgings. On the fifth floor, a wall has been taken down between two rooms to form a single room, which is used as the lounge. Each room has a bath, a toilet, air conditioning, a table, and a bed; the shared kitchens contain fridges, hot water dispensers, and washing machines/dryers. The location is highly convenient: Matsudo Station is two minutes' walk away, and there are convenience stores and supermarkets in the neighborhood.

RESIDENCE



PARADISE AIR and Its Future

Isao Kanemaki (Educator, Coordinator)

Moe Fujisue (PR Manager, Coordinator)

Aki Miyatake (Communications Manager, Coordinator)

As the first members of PARADISE AIR, Isao Kanemaki, Moe Fujisue, and Aki Miyatake have connected the locals and artists, laying the groundwork for PARADISE's integration with everyday life in Matsudo.

Having built a singular artist residency through trial and error, the three members reflect on their individual transformations and share their future visions.

Gathering in Matsudo from various places

Isao Kanemaki (Mackie) | When I was in my late twenties, I traveled abroad for the first time and went to an exhibition in Paris. At the Centre Pompidou, volunteers, probably students, were explaining the artworks, and locals and tourists of all ages and genders were really enjoying it. In many museums in Japan, people are asked to quietly view the works and not take photos, but I really liked how viewers at the Pompidou were encouraged to engage in dialogue with the artworks. I felt that the environment surrounding art and related things in Japan could change if there were more places like this. I kept thinking about how to make this happen after I came back, and then right around the time when I was scheduled to quit my six-year job at a museum shop, I applied to work at an art museum but it didn't work out. Right around that time, PARADISE AIR was becoming a general incorporated association and expanding its scope. I had shared my experience and thoughts in Paris on Facebook, and Junpei Mori, who saw my post, invited me to try things out at PARADISE.

Moe Fujisue | I joined PARADISE a bit after Mackie, when PAIR was founded as a general incorporated association in May 2016. I studied architectural design up to graduate school, and had quit the studio I worked for at the end of 2015. I then traveled around Southeast Asia for three months, and when I came back, Junpei also messaged me [laughs]. We knew each other from working on a project together when I was in graduate school. I was still figuring out what I wanted to do after coming back from my travels, so at first I just went to check out PARADISE. It was right when Emilia Giudicelli was doing

her residency, so I watched her eight-hour dance performance in a park as I listened to Junpei talk about PARADISE. I was totally captivated, and decided to join on the spot. Junpei was really surprised at my quick decision [laughs]. I had worked more in the field of community development than architectural design at my previous job, so I was interested in PARADISE and its location in Matsudo through that lens. I wasn't specialized in art in terms of my education, but I felt that I could help out in terms of city planning.

Aki Miyatake | I think that your decisiveness is really amazing. I joined in 2017, so a year after the two of you. PARADISE was invited to participate in Festival/Tokyo, a performing arts festival, to showcase a performance in Matsudo. The organization didn't have anyone who had experience in coordinating for the performing arts, so I was asked to join. Just like Moe, my educational background wasn't in art—I studied English and international relations in university. But I had been helping out a friend who was studying at Tokyo University of the Arts, since they needed someone who could support productions as a coordinator. I had met Junpei when I was in college. We worked on the same theater performance around that time, and we kept running into each other through different projects after that. Junpei asked me to join PARADISE right around when I was quitting my job—he basically had a nose for recruiting all of us at the perfect timing [laughs].

Moe | I remember Junpei telling me he'd heard through the grapevine that you were going to have more time on your hands [laughs].

Mackie | I didn't know anything about artists-in-residence (AIR) programs, and couldn't speak any English, so I had a bit of a disadvantage in the beginning. As I began to help coordinate for the artists, I realized that even though their art was really interesting, they weren't really getting much across to the people in the community. So I did a lot of research on educational programs at museums here and abroad, and presented my ideas to our team, but I wasn't getting

a really enthusiastic response. As I kept doing that, I realized that my ideas failed to take into account whether they would work well in the context of Matsudo specifically. I realized that even if we weren't doing events, the simple fact that these artists were in Matsudo and working with PARADISE was interesting, and that should be the basis of our program. From there, I understood that PARADISE's biggest challenge was to come up with more ways for the locals to engage with the residency.

Moe | I agree. When I first learned about PARADISE, I was really interested in the location itself in Matsudo: a former love hotel turned into a *pachinko* parlor building. I'm sure that many locals didn't have a good impression [laughs]. But I felt like we could overcome this negative image by creating a different side to the location, while also honoring its uniqueness, and that's the aspect that I still find interesting. Even before I joined, I had felt the serendipity of how PARADISE was formed in this building. At first, there were art events, and then the founding members found this place, negotiated with the owner, and created this artist residency space. It's a place that was realized through the hard work and ambition of many people, like all these things gathering towards a source of light.

Aki | I had been hanging out in Matsudo since 2010, when Junpei, who was a student at Tokyo University of the Arts back then, was hosting events. I remember that many of the people who would lend their spaces for the events were older. One time, one of the venue owners came to see a performance, which happened to be quite cryptic at first sight, something that was not clearly categorizable as dance or theater. It was this really avant-garde performance that blended electronic music, instruments, and physical movement. But the venue owner was smiling afterwards, saying how they were amazed to encounter something new at this age, which was really surprising.

I think that people in Matsudo are really interested in welcoming weird things, which is why they also embraced PARADISE, and that spirit continues to this day. From the

beginning, my experience of Matsudo has involved meeting people who are accepting of things that don't make sense to them as a kind of entry point to new things, and I think that is a really powerful aspect of this place. I feel like it also connects to what you were saying, Moe, that this world was created through this guiding light. It's like everyone finds Matsudo fascinating because all the people share this kind of sensibility.

Moe | I totally agree.

Transformations that occur through the unfolding of everyday life

Aki | Moe, you were doing community development at your previous job, but now you mainly work on PR at PARADISE, right?

Moe | Yes, that's right. Something I grasped from working at an architecture studio is that even if you learn all the ropes and set off on your own, you need to know how to manage a business or you won't know how to promote your work when you start your own studio. I encountered this kind of dilemma where the design might be amazing, but the ability to promote or communicate the project is lacking. So I wanted to work in PR for my next job. I thought it would be interesting to have a job where you get to genuinely communicate the things you think are great. But when I actually started doing it, I learned that the work actually entails so much more than that.

Mackie | I think that promoting PARADISE is about figuring out your approach in conveying information to the outside world, as well as consulting with the artists on where they want to go and what kind of work they want to create with whom. All of these aspects connect to how we coordinate the program. So it's not just about focusing on your expertise and completing the tasks for that role. In this sense, after six months of working as a coordinator, I realized that everything happening in our daily life connected to PARADISE. It's a feeling I gained through coordinating the LONGSTAY Program. This was just my personal experience of course, but around 2019 or so, I started feeling like we were coming up

against the limits of our skill levels in terms of what the artists needed for coordination.

Moe | I agree. We had more artists in the program, and we felt that we weren't doing enough.

Mackie | So I was personally going through that kind of period and thinking about the future of PARADISE, when I was invited as a guest speaker to talk about PARADISE for Bamboo Curtain Studio's 25th anniversary event. It's an AIR program in Taiwan that has been running for many years, and that event became a big turning point for me. At the time, the members of Bamboo Curtain Studio were discussing closing the location after 25 years. One of the reasons was because they were getting evicted due to gentrification, but they were also saying how they were content even if they didn't have a physical space anymore, as long as the artists could continue to develop their practices based on their experiences with the residency. For them, the most valuable thing was the artists who had participated in the program, above all else. I was really impressed to hear that perspective, because it means that they really trust the artists and are also confident that they were able to diligently grow their program over the years.

The spread of COVID-19 was really getting serious when I came back to Japan, so I was also thinking about whether I should continue working for PARADISE in the same way. I was able to shift my mindset to prioritizing passing the baton to various people, instead of just focusing on us working as the main coordinators.

Moe | I think I also struggled with something around the same time you had your realization, which was that I wasn't sure how to interact with the newer people who were joining our team. Since PARADISE is a group of freelancers and we don't separate things by age, I wanted all of us to be equal and work at the same level, regardless of our different characteristics or skills. I assumed that other people could do what I could do, but I realized at one point that I needed to change my approach. What was important was honoring the diverse environment where

each person could offer their experiences in their respective fields—I needed to focus on the things that other people could do that I couldn't do. The three of us had a lot of conversations about our approach around that time, so I think it was a kind of transitional period.

Aki | Yeah, I do think it was that kind of phase.

Taking inspiration from everyone's free-spirited, individual pursuits

Mackie | I do think that our shift in approach was significant, not just in terms of the things on the ground and running PARADISE, but for ourselves in continuing the work. Starting from 2022, Moe, you moved to Taiwan while still working for PARADISE, and Aki, you started to regularly visit India, so I feel like we all kind of branched out.

Moe | I didn't have as much work because of the pandemic, so I started to learn Chinese. I immediately got really into it and wanted to go to Taiwan. Everyone was very supportive when I asked if I could go for a year. After I lived there as a language student for a year, I wanted to stay longer, so I switched to a resident visa that would allow me to continue working as a freelancer there. I wouldn't have been able to get the visa without my experience working with PARADISE, and I hope I can contribute to the program in some small way through being in Taiwan. Even though the lingua franca at PARADISE is currently English, I might be able to offer more support for artists that are coming from Chinese-speaking countries once my language ability improves.

Aki | We've also been able to slowly develop some projects. We shifted to working remotely during the pandemic, and your decision to move to Taiwan created a pathway for us to also continue working for PARADISE abroad, which is how I ended up going to India [*laughs*]. Although the pandemic was a really tough time for us, I think that we're a group of people that are really determined to not simply give up during these moments of crisis. Because AIR programs are all about providing a space for

people to gather, there were times during the pandemic when we were contemplating whether to close down, but we didn't want to do that. We had always adapted to the situation and overcome things in unprecedented ways, and PARADISE itself is a gathering of various professionals, a hub for all kinds of wisdom. I also want to go abroad and see what's possible. If each of us branch out in our own ways, PARADISE will organically expand as well, and everyone in our team values that kind of shift.

Moe | I'm really grateful that everyone is so understanding about my own pursuits.

Reflecting on PARADISE's valuable work

Mackie | Although I thought we could connect more with the rest of the world after the pandemic, with ongoing wars and the weakening of the Japanese yen, I personally feel that it's difficult to just casually travel abroad now. AIR programs are living things that are extremely affected by their respective eras, so it's important to know what's happening both nationally and internationally, and I want to incorporate new perspectives from all of the artists that join us from around the world. On the other hand, while we want to really delve into the possibilities of what we can do here, the Agency for Cultural Affairs has reduced their budget for AIR programs, so the industry itself is on the decline. We have to confront this issue, and we also have to use our skills to show the value that PARADISE has created in the past decade.

Aki | Exactly. The environment surrounding AIR programs has also changed in the last decade, both in Japan and around the world. In terms of Matsudo, I do think PARADISE is gaining recognition because the local media consistently covers our work, and some people have even moved here because of our program.

Mackie | When the proprietress of an old Matsudo coffee house told me she received a letter from an artist that was staying at PARADISE, or another shop owner said they were directly in touch with an artist, it made

me really happy to know that the artists are communicating with locals on their own. It's ideal that the relationships between the people and the city organically grow without our coordination, and I feel like more of that has been happening in the past few years. Recently, we also have young people learning about PARADISE and joining as supporters, like they sensed that something interesting might happen here. Maybe it's like a safe haven? *[laughs]*.

Aki | I have no idea what we're able to offer them, but for some reason they come help us out every week *[laughs]*. It's really nice.

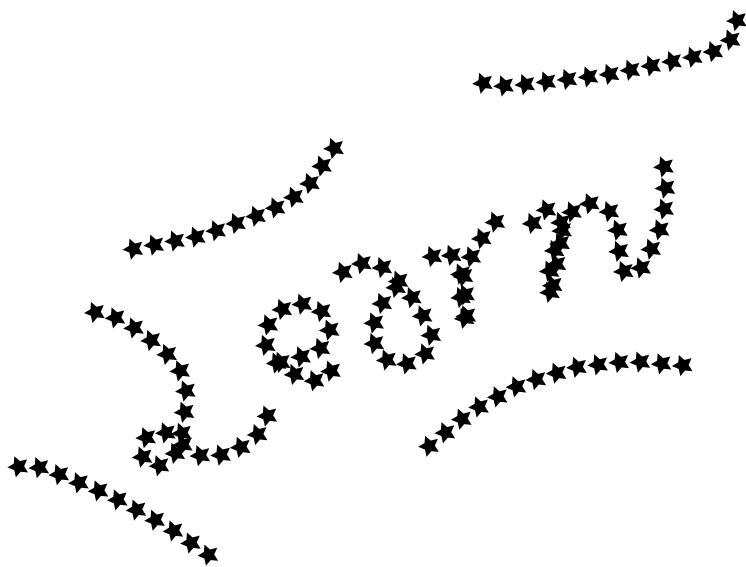
Mackie | It is, for sure. The PARADISE building is aging though, so we know that the space isn't permanent. I also want to see through the process of how this place will close.

Aki | Will it launch a new chapter based on a totally different ecosystem?

Moe | Or will it close, and then begin again in a different form? I think everyone will have varying opinions.

Aki | Looking forward to the next 10 years, it's totally possible that it will close. But I don't think we're pessimistic about it, because we're interested in how our members will respond to the things that will happen in the future and what actions they might take.

Since its establishment in 2013, PARADISE AIR has created spaces for artists and the local community to connect through its residency activities. Not only do the artists engage with the local community while creating works, but we also now offer volunteer programs for middle- and high-school students, hold local art initiatives, and even organize communal meals with the artists. These daily interactions with the artists continuously provide opportunities for learning.



The following are three letters that were written for the PARADISE AIR text archive. The authors are artists who participated in the LONGSTAY Program in different years. Each wrote the letter after returning to Matsudo in 2019 through their respective artistic activities.

The way previous artists in residence are welcomed back, the management team's and Matsudo residents' visits to artists abroad, and the deep friendships formed between the management team and artists—these relationships were cultivated over time, not just through a single residency. Through these letters, we hope you feel the spirit of PARADISE AIR.

Back in Paradise

Vasco Mourão

Past Experience

During the 2015 LONGSTAY Program it was the first time I've created an artwork based in a city while living in it. Matsudo was both my home & inspiration for 3 months.

It was such a pivotal moment in my artistic practice that since then I keep exploring this process in other cities around the world.

And 3 years later (!!!) I had the opportunity to return to Japan by myself and asked the PARADISE AIR team if I could stay again in Matsudo.

I was eager to once more explore, draw and live in a Japanese urban setting.

To create a series of artworks that speak directly from my daily experience of a specific place.

Second Time

Coming back to Matsudo was truly great.

Being my second time, it was easy for me to find my way and work independently, knowing that the PARADISE AIR team was one text message away if anything came up.

So all I had to do was to concentrate, set up a nice work routine and draw.

Equally important is that now I have in Matsudo a group of friends and fellow artists that I enjoy being with, some favorite places to eat or drink and know the city well enough to have a pleasant everyday life.

All of this makes me feel part of the community, making my second stay in PARADISE AIR even more special.

Home

I really consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to return and maintain my relationship with PARADISE AIR and Matsudo.

For my line of work, the Japanese urban landscape is infinitely inspiring, so the opportunity to go back to Matsudo was a precious thing.

At the end of my stay, I exhibited my work at the Almost Perfect Gallery in Tokyo.

That wouldn't be possible without the PARADISE AIR support for my stay in Matsudo.

PARADISE AIR was already a special place for me personally and my artistic career but now it feels like a second home and that is just amazing!

Can I go back again? 😊

Thank you all,
Vasco Mourão

The best Paradise Matsudo City has ever had

Alicja Rogalska

I came to Japan for the first time in September 2018 for the LONGSTAY residency at PARADISE AIR. I couldn't have imagined a better introduction to the country, its culture and to the local art scene. The PARADISE AIR team provided me both with the professional assistance needed to develop my work and with a warm welcome; organizing talks and meetings with the local community, as well as social events, meals and providing emotional support - the importance of which can't be underestimated when one is thousands of miles away from home and the usual support networks of friends and family.

Located in a quirky former hotel, just above a pachinko parlor and a 5-minute walk from Matsudo train station, PARADISE AIR is in fact not just an artist residency - it's a network of friends and allies, a patchwork community of local residents, artists, students, and whoever else is around: there is always a space at a table and food and drink to share, perhaps even a karaoke song or two (or most likely about 30).

I returned to Japan and PARADISE AIR the following year, in May 2019, to participate in Celebration - a large-scale exhibition at Kyoto Art Centre (which later toured to Poland), organized as part of the 100-year anniversary of Polish-Japanese diplomatic relations. I was invited to participate in the project after the curators saw my solo exhibition *Singing in the Dark* at the Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art which was co-organised by PARADISE AIR. In the summer of 2019 I was also invited to take part in *Her Own Way* - an exhibition of work by Polish female video artists from the 70s to the present day at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum. None of this would have been possible if it wasn't for the support of PARADISE AIR.

But most important to me are the people I met, the friendships developed during my stays there and the various conversations we had: in homes, offices and universities, over the best ever *tsukemen* ramen (conveniently located a few blocks away from the residency), in countless sushi bars, smoky local pubs, hot tubs at an onsen, during urban walks and nature hikes, at street carnivals and shrine festivals.

I'm just finishing my breakfast of natto at home in London, hoping to come back one day to the best Paradise Matsudo City has ever had.

A Destination That Became A Journey

Purin Phanichphant

It's been over three years since my first landing in Matsudo, a destination that keeps calling me back, where I make a pilgrimage year over year. Every time I take a stroll along Edogawa river, eat Ten-zaru at Tanakaya, or find myself buying single-drip coffee from Mahameru, I feel at home again. Perhaps it's the city's spirit that got into me. Perhaps it's the fact that Japan happens to be my natural transit point between the USA and Thailand, both of which are my home bases. Perhaps it's the welcoming PARADISE AIR staff and the quirky artists from around the world whom I meet whenever I make a visit. For whatever reason, the three-month LONGSTAY residency turned out to extend into a three-year one, and I have a feeling that it might turn into a Super-LONGSTAY (three-decade?) and beyond.

Having done a handful of artist residencies, I always describe PARADISE AIR to others as a place where I got to live and make art above a Pachinko parlor in what used to be a hotel for three months. Specifically, I'm particularly obsessed with the variety of themes within each room, the remnants of a torn down wall within the 5th floor lounge, and the DIY furniture and lighting fixtures made by Junpei. This "let's make the most out of what we have" creates a sense of limitless possibilities and a fertile ground for creativity. For example, we put together a pop-up show in July 2019, titled "A Second Look," consisting of seven artists who happen to cross paths around the same time.

Realizing the benefits of such residency programs on the cultural liveliness of a city, the impact it has on local and international artists, and the fluidity in which the program and its staff embodies, I'm inspired to create my own residency in my hometown. As it turns out, Matsudo was not just a destination, but a beginning of an artistic journey that I get to embark on.

The daily documentation of artists in residence can be a colossal task. Despite this, we have continued to document, because the value of these endeavors often emerges much later—as evidenced by the numerous photos and texts that were unearthed while creating this book.

Our documentation includes portraits that highlight the artist's physical presence in Matsudo, which have provided a unified format to record various activities. Photographer Hajime Kato takes these portraits in each artist's favorite location in Matsudo. Since 2017, we have created an annual booklet called *TRANSIT Portable*, showcasing the names and portraits of all our artists in residence.

PARADISE AIR Website and Social Media



web



Instagram (#p_air)



Instagram



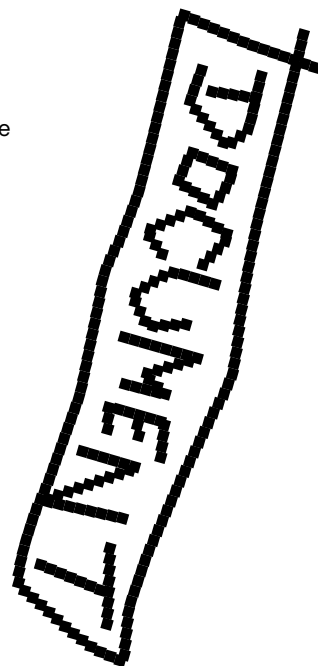
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note



PARADISE AIR 10th Anniversary POWERS OF TEN

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