



Art Radar

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

"Tsumari Story": photographic duo RongRong & inri at Chambers Fine Art, New York – in pictures

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The husband and wife photographers' latest solo exhibition is on view in New York until 20 August 2016.

The Chinese-Japanese photographic duo has played a fundamental role in shaping photographic practice in China. Their latest exhibition in New York reveals RongRong & inri's influential practice, primarily based on the relationship between humans and nature.



RonRong & inri, 'Tsumari Story No. 7-1', 2012, silver gelatin print. Image: 46 3/4 x 58 1/4 in (119 x 148 cm). Sheet: 50 x 65 in (127 x 165 cm). Edition of 8. Image courtesy the artists and Chambers Fine Art.

RongRong & inri were recently honoured at the **2016 Sony World Photography Awards** exhibition in London for their outstanding contribution to photography. Their work has been recognised as fundamental to shaping the development of photography in China, Asia and beyond.

The photographic duo started working together in 2000, based in Beijing, where in 2007 they established the **Three Shadows Photography Centre** in Caochangdi and in 2008 the annual Three Shadows Photography Award. A second centre opened in 2015 in Xiamen.

An intimate photographic practice

Since the start of their collaborative career, the husband and wife duo has created works with a strong autobiographical element, reflecting **"the intimate world they have created together"**, as their website profile reads.

RongRong and inri's photography traces the development of their relationship, from the "lyrical effusions" of 2000–2001 such as the "In Yulongxueshan", "China Series" and the "In Bad Goisen Austria Series" to the recording of the rapid growth of their family in the "Caochangdi, Beijing Series" (2004–2009). The construction of Three Shadows Photography Centre designed by **Ai Weiwei** also provided subject matter for their photography.



RongRong & inri, 'Tsumari Story No. 12-4', 2014, silver gelatin print. Image: 46 3/4 x 58 1/4 in (119 x 148 cm). Sheet: 50 x 65 in (127 x 165 cm). Edition of 8. Image courtesy the artists and Chambers Fine Art.

The artists have established a photographic practice that pushes the boundaries of traditional black-and-white darkroom techniques. They use a variety of innovative techniques in the darkroom, including multiple exposures, layered effects achieved through the introduction of textured materials during the printing and use of hand tinting.

Thematically, their oeuvre focuses on the relationship between humans and nature. Their most acclaimed series such as "Mt. Fuji", "in Nature", "Liulitun" and "Tsumari Story" depict the beauty of the human body immersed in nature and the urban environment, displaying a profound connection between humanity's 'smallness' and the infinite expanse of our surroundings, whether natural or artificial.

Tsumari Story

Now on show at **Chambers Fine Art** in New York until 20 August 2016, "**Tsumari Story**" takes as its point of departure their participation in the **Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial** in Japan's Niigata Prefecture in 2012.

The location of the Triennial is in a rural area of Japan and, as the exhibition press release writes, "famous for its long winters and its spectacular snow storms". To prepare for their participation in the Triennial, RongRong, inri and their three sons abandoned the urban life-style in Beijing and moved to this region of Japan. The work that resulted from their temporary residence there reflects the beauty of the changing seasons in Japan.



RongRong & inri, 'Tsumari Story No. 2-3', 2012, silver gelatin print. Image: 16 1/4 x 20 3/4 in (41 x 53 cm). Sheet: 20 x 24 in (51 x 61 cm). Edition of 12. Image courtesy the artists and Chambers Fine Art.

Their daily lives and the possibilities of life in this new environment became the subject of their photographic series, **as inri explains** in an interview with *China Underground*:

The theme has always been about our daily lives, taking topics from the outside is seldom done. Even with the works done for brands such as Dior or Agnes b, were also things related to our lives. For Tsumari Story, it's not our living environment, but we tried to express IF we were living there, what it could be like, and it's not about living any more, it's about life, how life would be like.

The stage setting for their interior scenes was a 200-year-old house subtly modified by Kurakake Junichi. RongRong and inri portrayed themselves wearing Japanese kimonos, expressing "the intensity of their relationship in carefully staged encounters". Chambers Fine Art continues its description of the series thus:

The three boys respond with joy to their new environment, clearly reveling in the unfamiliar pleasures of the Japanese life-style, sleeping on the floor and bathing in the clear waters of onsen (Japanese hot springs). Venturing outdoors even in the most harshest conditions, the photographers can be seen struggling over snow-drifts and testing how much the human body can endure as their garments fall from their bodies.



RongRong & inri, 'Tsumari Story No. 2-28', 2012, silver gelatin print. Image: 18 1/2 x 18 in (47 x 46 cm). Sheet: 24 x 20 in (61 x 51 cm). Edition of 12. Image courtesy the artists and Chambers Fine Art.

In some of the images, the artists appear disembodied or fragmented in ambiguous spaces that merge interior and exterior, bringing Nature and Man closer together.

The relationship between humans and nature is paramount in their oeuvre, as is that sense of transcendence between the human and the natural spheres that permeates their poetic images. Quoted by Chambers, the two artists say:

Even when we travel to a new location, it is not only what we see with that registers. We also smell the air, feel the humidity and the temperature. This is what we attempt to convey, as well as a temporal dimension that situates the apparent subject-matter in a realm beyond time.