

What follows is a visual correspondence between Masanao Hirayama and myself, which is based on the game Cadavre Exquis.

Cadavre Exquis or Exquisite Corpse is a surrealist game that comprises collectively composing one sentence by writing a word on a piece of paper that is then folded and concealed before passing the piece of paper to the next player who has to write another part of the sentence.

I have fond memories of the time I started playing the graphic version of Cadavre Exquis as a teenager while studying art. Years later, the game became a regular and favorite in my art classes with children. While playing with them, I began to think about the possibility of using the game as the basis for a correspondence project with an artist. At the end of 2019, I asked the most intuitive artist I knew, Masanao Hirayama, if he would be interested in participating. He accepted right away.

The initial idea was to send him a drawing — he would continue drawing on it and send it back to me. I thought we would only exchange a few letters back and forth, but we ended up keeping the correspondence going for all of 2020. Finding Masanao's envelope in the mailbox always felt like a treat during a year that resembled a continuous lockdown. I would send the drawings in an envelope, and most of the time, Masanao would use the same envelope to send the artwork back to me — we would just reverse the To to From on the envelope.

The traditional format of Cadavre Exquis is to work on a piece of long paper folded in an accordion to hide sections from the other participants, but that would have become impractical at some point. Instead, I sent Masanao a simple sheet of paper where I painted and hid parts with cutouts. I usually drew them in the afternoon, so I would use the leftovers of pigments I had painted with that day and I always made at least one or two of them.

With Masanao's additions on my drawings or mine on his, the project reached a different level, erasing the chronological aspect of the game. It became impossible to know who did what part of the piece. The original and the additional disappeared to create a fusional surface. The hidden parts became just parts, some kind of collages.

When the question of naming the project came up, we agreed on 101 to 101 — 101 being the apartment number of both Masanao and me; him being at that time, in the ward of Setagaya, and me in that of Shibuya. I kept the artworks in a big file, which we planned to open when we felt it was time to end the exchange. When we did in 2021, we looked at the drawings and left the hidden parts intact, not revealing what was underneath as we had originally intended to do.

Audrey Fondecave

I tried a game, invented a century ago, in the present day. For a year, I corresponded with Audrey only by letter.

Shortly after we started the project, the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world. We set up this project without deciding when to finish, but after a year, we felt it was time to end.

According to the surrealist rules, the work is complete when it is unsealed, although I think you can say it is also finished even if it is not unsealed.

Audrey and I had to decide whether to open them.

In Schrödinger's cat, life and death occur until you open the box.

I like the modern version of Exquisite Corpse, where the unfinished and the finished coexist.

Masanao Hirayama