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The sun goddess and her mirror image - Amaterasu's return from the cave

With an installation made of silk and light Kazu Huggler re-enacts a key scene from Japanese Shinto mythology. Her latest creation can be seen in the exhibition "Mirrors - the reflected self" at the Museum Rietberg in Zurich.



Detail of the Amaterasu Dress, KAZU 2019

photo credit: Christian Schnur

When thinking about mirrors, it is usually not Japan that first comes to mind. But the mirror actually plays a key role in the ancient religion of Japan. In Shinto shrines, a mirror is kept in the main altar and not, as one might think, the representation of a goddess! It is indeed only thanks to a mirror that the sun shines again in the land of the rising sun. This at least is how it is written in Iwatogakure, the main chapter of the Kojiki, the most ancient written document of Japan dating back to the early 8th century.

The sun goddess Amaterasu had hidden in a cave, exhausted and depressed because of the nasty and evil deeds of her brother Susanoo. She had closed the entrance to the cave with a large and heavy rock. The heavens and the earth lay in darkness and icy



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coldness, one disaster led to another. The other gods gathered in great sorrow and deliberated on how they could lure Amaterasu out of her cave. But neither an entire chorus of crowing rosters nor the reading of oracle bones managed to do the trick. Finally, the goddess of entertainment, Ame no Uzume started to dance wildly. She stamped with her feet on a reversed bucket and moved her body so licentiously and frantically that her Kimono opened, her breasts became visible and finally even her belt came undone. The gods found this spectacle hilarious, they laughed so loudly and hard that heaven and earth quaked. This even Amaterasu heard in her cave. She was most astonished at such jollity outside, in the world she had left in darkness. Her curiosity was aroused, she moved the rock at the cave's entrance slightly and peeked out. Two gods swiftly held up a bronze mirror and Ame no Uzume shouted "We are all so happy because a goddess that is even more powerful and shines more brightly than Amaterasu has appeared!" Amaterasu thinks that she sees that goddess in her own mirror image and she steps out of the cave to have a closer look. And that was how Amaterasu came back to the world in all her luminous beauty.

It is this key scene that Kazu Huggler will showcase at the Museum Rietberg. "I am particularly fascinated that the 1000-year old myth of Amaterasu and the mirror is still so intelligible and valid today", Huggler says. "The story of Amaterasu tells about a strong and powerful woman who is overwhelmed by the high demands and expectations others and herself placed upon her and finally has a burn-out. The phenomenon of young people who feel overwhelmed by what is expected from them, and completely withdraw from social life, lock themselves up in their rooms and become invisible (Hikikomori), has assumed alarming proportions especially in Japan. Amaterasu's inner force, her splendor come back the moment she becomes curious and wants to know why the other gods are having so much fun. This she realizes when looking at her own reflection in the mirror."

It is in this very moment that the visitor in the museum can look over Amaterasu's shoulder. The light emanating from her is represented by a white sun plissé made from silk organza that is spread out into a circle and artfully illuminated. Amaterasu's face is represented by a Manbi No mask from the Edo period. On her head she carries a miniature statue of herself, designed and cast in silver by the Japanese artist Atsushi Suwa (*1967). Suwa is mainly known for his enormously detailed, super-realistic paintings of people. Here, however, he has chosen a primitive, almost archaic design. The small figurine symbolizes the inner strength of the goddess, her glow that was dormant when she had withdrawn into the cave. The glow also that lights up again in that moment when she is attracted by the vitality and exhilaration of the others and steps towards her mirror image and thus back into the world.



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More information about the exposition at the Museum Rietberg can be found at:

<http://www.rietberg.ch/de-ch/ausstellungen/vorschau.aspx>

Fashion Talk with Kazu Huggler

On September 14th, Amaterasu and her companion Shinto goddesses can be seen live at the summer pavilion of Museum Rietberg. They will be wearing couture creations by KAZU that have been specially designed for this occasion. Kazu Huggler will narrate the mirror myth as it is written in the old documents and draw links to the present and to current social phenomena. More information on this event will follow in summer 2019.

Contact

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About Kazu Huggler

Born in Tokyo to a Japanese mother and a Swiss father, Kazu Huggler was raised in both Japan and Switzerland. After completing the International Baccalaureate in Zurich, she studied at Keio University in Tokyo and graduated with a degree in Japanese History of Art and Aesthetics. Huggler then enrolled in the Swiss University of Art and Design and completed her studies at the London's Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. In London, she apprenticed with Vivienne Westwood.

In 2003, Kazu Huggler founded her own fashion label KAZU, which is strongly influenced by the Japanese kimono and ancient textile designs as well as traditional Japanese philosophies of dressing. Kazu Huggler's creations are aimed at customers worldwide, but are produced in her own Atelier and in Switzerland.

Kazu has repeatedly showcased her artistic and her couture creations in art museums. She celebrated the 10 years anniversary of KAZU with a fashion show at the Nezu Museum in Tokyo. On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the diplomatic relationship between Japan and Switzerland, she gave a talk and fashion show at the Residence of the Swiss embassy in Tokyo. Her imperial highness empress Michiko was among the guests. In Zurich, she has presented her creations at the Museum Bellerive (2013), the Haus Konstruktiv (2015), the Museum Rietberg (2016) and lately, in the frame of the Zürcher Festspiele, at Kunsthaus Zurich (2018).

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