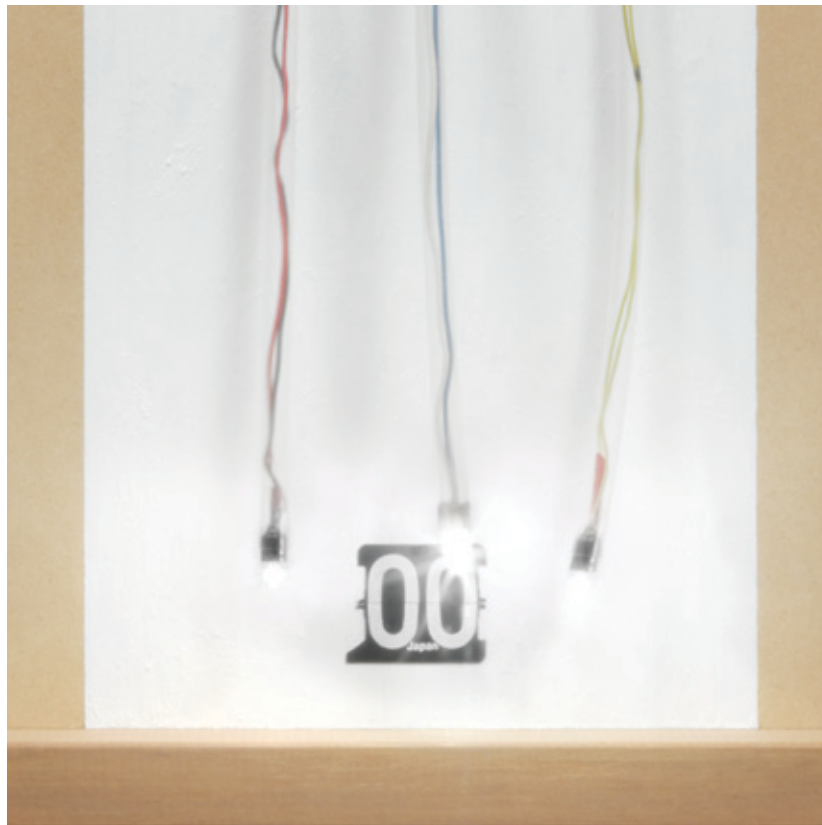


Jeremy Isao Speier  
Junichiro Iwase

# **DOUBLE ZERO:**

The Point Between Future Past



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Curator: Beth Carter

Contributions by: Ross Birdwise, Beth Carter, Junichiro Iwase, Jeremy Isao Speier

Artists: Jeremy Isao Speier, Junichiro Iwase

Design: John Endo Greenaway

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 Nikkei

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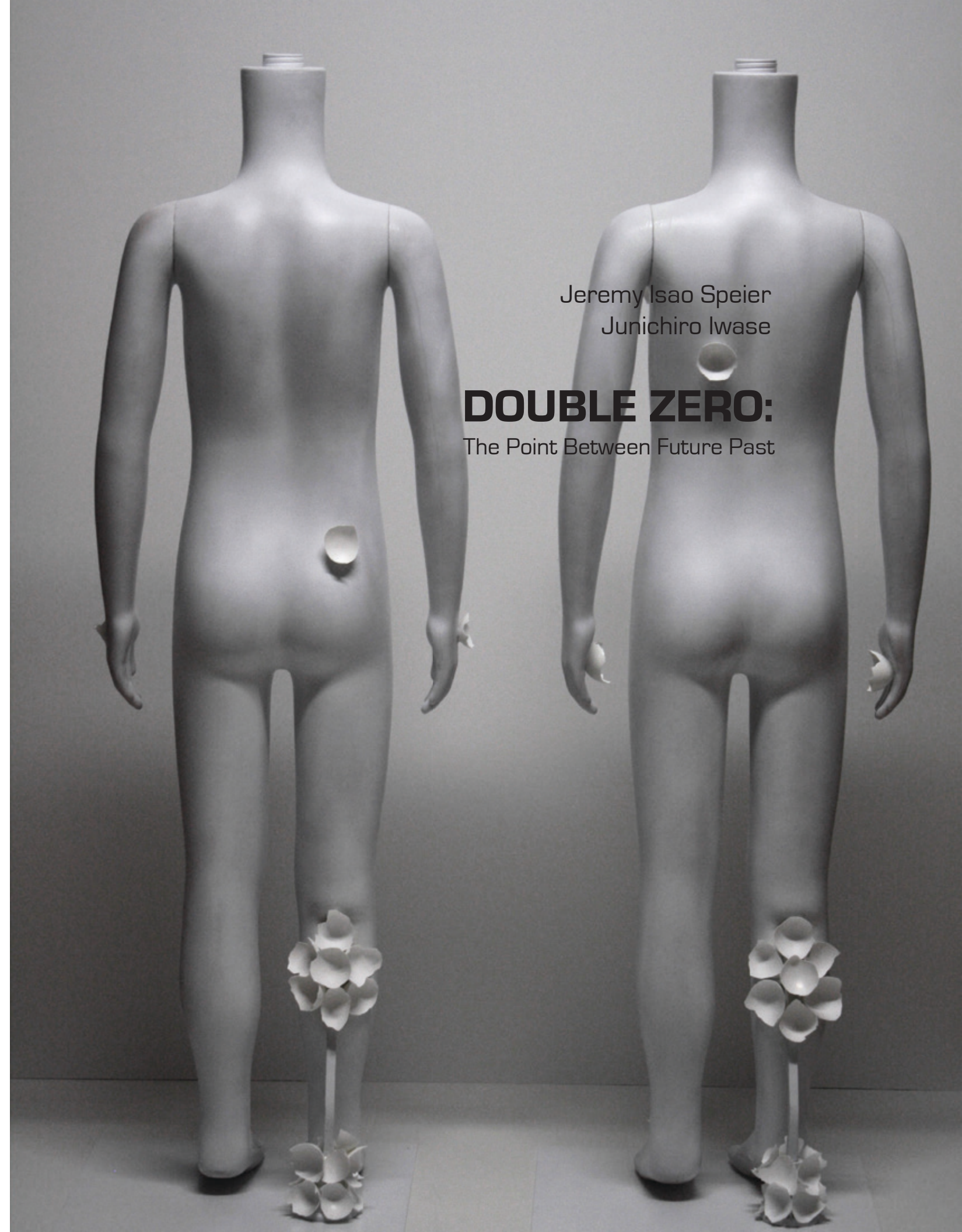
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Burnaby, BC V5E 4M7  
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Front cover: Made In Japan 13 (detail)

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Jeremy Isao Speier  
Junichiro Iwase

**DOUBLE ZERO:**  
The Point Between Future Past



## Foreword A Conceptual Mashup

By Beth Carter

Why is it important that we showcase contemporary art at the Nikkei National Museum? The museum was primarily founded in the early 1980s to preserve the early immigrant history of the community, and document the treatment of Japanese Canadians during World War II.

However, the history of Japanese Canadians did not stop in 1949. Since then, there have been many significant contributions and events that continue to be important to the community. Art is a great way to examine Japanese Canadian identity and ideas in today's world, and to showcase the younger artists who are bringing attention to some of these issues.

When I first met Jeremy Isao Speier, I was drawn to his *Made In Japan* series. At the museum, we are often looking at cultural and traditional links to Japan. The changing nature of Japan at the forefront of technology in the 1970s is an intriguing contemporary angle.

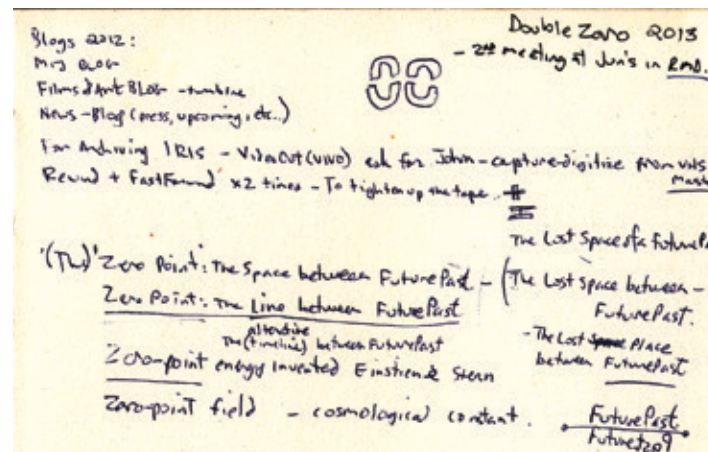
The use of flip numbers in the works brought back memories of a Panasonic clock/radio that I received for my 10th birthday – a gift from my grandfather. Its large clunky style took up most of my nightstand, and it had a ‘fancy’ wood veneer, and big knobs, complete with a doze button. I was thrilled. Jeremy's work triggers a sense of comforting nostalgia for our youth, and also questions how easily we discard our belongings. I know I kept my clock radio well into my 20s – something that is unheard of today.

I was equally drawn to Junichiro's ongoing series of eggshell inspired works. Eggshells are also perceived as a ‘throw-away’ material. I found it extremely unique that Jun utilized the eggshells in all forms of sculpture and drawing, and manipulated it to portray both fragility and strength.

Below: Made In Japan ephemera



Top: Speier sketchbook detail - artist's initial meeting



Why did I pair them together? I liked the idea that their work was very contrasting, but in my mind, the two artists and their approaches just seemed to fit together.

The artists had never met before, but embraced the challenge to work together. I know they got together for lengthy discussions and brainstormed concepts and a great title.

Nina Simon has stated: “Whether simple or complex, mashups are most successful when they create new value out of the combined content. At their worst, they feel like hack jobs – a toaster spliced to a television. At their best, they are elegant combinations whose sum is more interesting, or at least differentiated, from the parts.” (Museum 2.0)

Pairing Junichiro and Jeremy together has turned into a great mashup – and I feel we all have the chance to gain a greater inspiration by their collaboration.

## The elusive moment between past and present

A conversation between Jeremy Isao Speier, Junichiro Iwase and Beth Carter  
Thursday, May 23, 2013

In *Double Zero: The Point Between Future Past*, Jeremy Isao Speier and Junichiro Iwase focus on the gap between dualities of space and time, creation and destruction. The exhibit features sculpture, kinetics, video, photography, collected ephemera, and archival material culled from the museum collections.

Deeply inspired by the vulnerability, strength and beauty of eggshells, Junichiro Iwase uses this natural medium to explore perspectives on contemporary society and social issues, particularly the drive towards processes of creation and destruction. His series of seven figurative sculptures, entitled *Moonwalkers*, are like other-worldly life-size action figures.

In *Made In Japan*, Jeremy Isao Speier heralds consumer electronics of the 1970s and the pre-digital age. Speier uses kinetics and obsolete technologies, mostly made in Japan, in conjunction with recycled and found objects from Vancouver, speaking to urban gentrification and the loss of space.

In order to dig deeper into the thoughts and ideas behind the exhibit, the artists and curator sat down for a wide ranging discussion.

### Tell me a bit about yourself – your background, your artistic training, your inspiration.

**Junichiro** I think I come from a creative family, my mother is a fashion designer and my father is a traditional Japanese woodworker. At a young age I was apprenticing with my father on job sites, and I have always been naturally drawn to making things with my hands. I was not a very bright kid in school – except in art making.

I studied at Vancouver Community College. Then in 1994, I was accepted to the Johnson Atelier Technical Institute of Sculpture in New Jersey. It was a very hands-on program, and I spent four years there. It had a big impact because I got to meet a lot of well established artists in the field, such as George Segal, who I respected a lot, Claes Oldenburg, Joel Shapiro, Deborah Butterfield – all the giants in the field of sculpture. That was a real honour being able to work on their casting. After that I spent four years living and working in Japan. I wanted a change of scenery and I wanted to know more about Japanese contemporary art.

Making art has never been a profession for me – I never got into it as a way to make a living. It's more therapy for me. If I didn't have it, I think I would lose it – It is a creative way to express

myself in a civilized way. In Japan I was limited to painting because my rental expenses were very high. I was living in a tiny apartment, just a 3-tatami room with a small washroom. Every day you carry your tub and your towel and walk to the public sento for a bath – I really liked the experience.

**Jeremy** I also come from a very creative family – my dad was a sculptor as well as a video artist and my mother is a potter. My brothers are also artists. After my parents split up, my mom had a little pottery store in Kitsilano. I would go with my mom to her shop after school and I would sit for hours drawing. I didn't struggle in school, but I found it boring. I was lucky to have quite a few teachers who just let me draw if I stayed out of trouble. I was interested in making comics, t-shirts, etc. I started in graphic arts, but switched to more interdisciplinary visual art at Emily Carr. After school, I worked as an assistant for Jeff Wall for about a year. We worked long days, but I liked working for him – it was a good experience – he is very smart and passionate and he works hard.

After a brief time in the film industry, I moved back to my own work, mostly painting at first. My biggest inspirations, even going back to my teenager years, are art and music, then cinema and film. Music was a big part of my inspiration – it always triggered me in a way. I admire the autonomy that musicians had just to be creative. So I like to bring elements of music into my exhibits. After art school, I started to get more interested in cinema, and I started to make films. I consider myself both a film enthusiast and someone interested in making films.

### Both of your work is difficult to classify – is it sculpture, painting, or something else again?

**Junichiro** I see painting and sculpture and drawing as the same thing – you're manipulating – playing with negative and positive space. I've always liked to do both – and respected artists who could do both. I don't really have any direct influences, but in Japan, I was inspired by animation. I did some works related to that. It's easier making sculpture here in Canada than in Japan – most of the sculptors I know in Japan moved out to rural areas.

**Jeremy** There is a cinematic value to my works – in a way they combine all three of my interests. The hum of the projectors and motion of the kinetics provide a certain engagement – sculpture that has motion. It is more experiential.

**Junichiro** I started using eggshells by necessity because I had nothing else to work with. I was doing a series of egg eye paintings and I wanted to go back into sculpture. I needed a lot of eggshells, so I started giving the eggs to various soup kitchens in Vancouver. Then I would clean the eggshells out and dry them and play with them a little bit and see what would come – it was a more experimental process. I like the idea of contributing to society in some way. This gives me purpose to create something instead of just sitting in the studio and creating in my own mind. The eggs connect me physically and actively with the Downtown Eastside community.

**Jeremy** In Vancouver, I actually find there’s resistance to sculpture. There is almost a bias towards two dimensional art here – like photography, photo based work, painting and these are the things that are primarily more commercial and they sell more. And then conceptual art takes another swing, it’s not really an object anymore and that is more popular. So it seems sculpture is the one thing that a lot of the galleries don’t do so much. Media art even gets more attention. Maybe I’m exaggerating to make the point.

**Junichiro** I never really connected with art in Vancouver. Most of my art experience is in Japan and New Jersey. For me to become an artist I felt I had to leave. I was more interested in aesthetics in terms of art – but strong art that has good aesthetics also has a good conceptual basis

**Jeremy** Our work has lots of oppositions – but I think one of our parallels – I call it a hybridity of formalism (or aestheticism) and conceptualism. It is a balancing between the two. It’s a sort of bridging of these two places – which often tends to go one way or the other – and that’s definitely one of our similarities.

**Junichiro** I think your work is very formal. I was attracted to your work. They have a very strong Japanese element – the choice of material, the wood. They kind of remind me of shoji screens...

**Jeremy** I’m OK with that. I like this idea of Japanese modular, things that fit together, squares, screens, grid, space, sort of zen...

#### **What does Double Zero mean to you?**

**Jeremy** In its broadest conceptual sense, it is about social value and how it relates back to our heritage. Literally, the title came out of a drawing that Jun and I did together at our first meeting. We drew a timeline, talking about the past and present and future. Obviously this is relating to our work as

well. We see the point in between – the zero point – as our artwork. We are the zeroes – in a literal translation!

**Junichiro** Although we are working together on this exhibition, Jeremy and I, we have different interpretations of what the title means. For me – the idea has evolved and changed. In the simplest terms, my work in this exhibition would be relating to focusing on the present – being in the now – and it has nothing to do with the future and nothing to do with the past.

**Jeremy** It also relates to this idea of ground zero – the idea of clearing the slate and starting fresh. What we are looking at is not the future, not the past, not the present – we are creating out of this space – maybe liminal, maybe temporal.

**Junichiro** Our work is not historical – so it is interesting to display this contemporary sculpture in the context of a museum. We are interested in communicating a sense of living in the moment.

**Jeremy** The subtitle is important too. Future past is paradoxical – the past can never surpass the future – the future is always ahead of the past.

#### **Is there humour in the title?**

**Jeremy** I think there is a bit of humour – it is not too self important, not too precious. And there is lots of room for individual interpretation. There are definite pop culture references, such as to James Bond 007 or to the use of 1s and 0s in digital technology.

**Junichiro** It is kind of like a chicken and egg question – which came first, the future or the past?

**Beth** Very, very literally, we can see the two zeros as two eggs – related to Jun’s work – and the two zeros in the flipping clock pieces from the pre-digital age on Jeremy’s piece. I think there is a certain level of whimsy in the exhibit – in terms of the little airplanes spinning in circles, the gentle sound of the kinetics, and the drama of eggshells. Eggs by themselves are simple, but they have been taken and manipulated and transformed into something else again. It invites curiosity and uncertainty. For me, some parts of the exhibit are heavy and serious, and other parts are appealing to all ages.

**Junichiro** If you can’t laugh, then it doesn’t engage or doesn’t work. People often think my work is trying to be funny – even though I’m not trying to be.

**Beth** I feel there is a level of pure enjoyment – I might not get all the connotations of double zero but there is another

level of engagement with all the pieces that comes as you closely examine them. It will be interesting to see some of the reactions to this work from within the Nikkei community.

#### **How was the experience of collaborating on this exhibit?**

**Beth** You are two very different people and it is not easy to find a single title for two diverse approaches.

**Jeremy** I thought it was excellent working with Jun and exchanging ideas and developing this rationale together both visually and theoretically. For me its being part of this process – to exchange these ideas with Jun was as meaningful as the exhibit itself. It’s not an easy thing for two artists to come together and try to join forces. We are doing things a bit differently, but have enough similarities that we can find some common ground.

**Junichiro** It was really nice working with Jeremy. He really cares about the project and he was very meticulous about everything, and that’s what I respect. He is hard-working and he is very passionate about his work, in a different way than I am.

#### **What would you like the audience to take away from the show?**

**Junichiro** I want people to be a bit surprised to find this type of contemporary art in this location, and within the Japanese Canadian community.

**Beth** You initially referred to your figures as action figures, but they seem more formal and elegant than that. Are you trying to put across the irony – they are not just little plastic things, but life-size figures made of eggs? Is there a contradiction there?

**Junichiro** I feel like I’m not in control of what I’m creating. I originally thought of making action type characters, but I was surprised how they turned out. My body was just moving – not really thinking. My title, *Moonwalkers*, links to the idea that they are stark white and they look out of this earth.

**Jeremy** I would like the audience to come away with a new pair of goggles to view ideas about time, materials, trajectory, and a conceptual point of departure. There is an intrigue to it, but also a vagueness. It is open to be defined by the viewer.

#### **How does your own Japanese ancestry inform you as an artist, or affect your art process?**

**Jeremy** For me, my Japanese ancestry is embedded in myself and slowly percolates out into my creations. This *Made In*

*Japan* project has definitely piqued my interest in my Nikkei heritage. But also some of this stuff just comes out of me through the flow of creation.

**Beth** There are some artists who deny the influence of their ancestry, or who do not want to be pigeon-holed within that context, but they often still bring some element forward.

**Junichiro** I’m not exactly sure what Japanese Canadian is! I was born in Tokyo but raised here. Even though I went through the education system here, I don’t really feel like I’m Japanese or Canadian. In Canada, even though I was raised in the Steveston area, I am only in touch with my parents and family, and I speak Japanese at home. I’m not sure how it has an influence on my work, it’s hard to say.

#### **Let’s discuss some of these dualities**

**Beth** Although I’m pulling out these contrasts or dualities throughout this exhibit there’s the surface level and then there is deeper contemplation. What becomes clear to me, as we talk about these dichotomies, is that the more you look, the more you find both in each of your work. At first glance, the viewer will focus on a lot of the dualities in the exhibit – the contrast of hard and soft surfaces, linear and circular, techno and organic, motion and stillness, humour and seriousness.

**Junichiro** When you start deconstructing the pieces, the eggshells are so hard and the wood is so soft. The eggshells remind me of brittle bones.

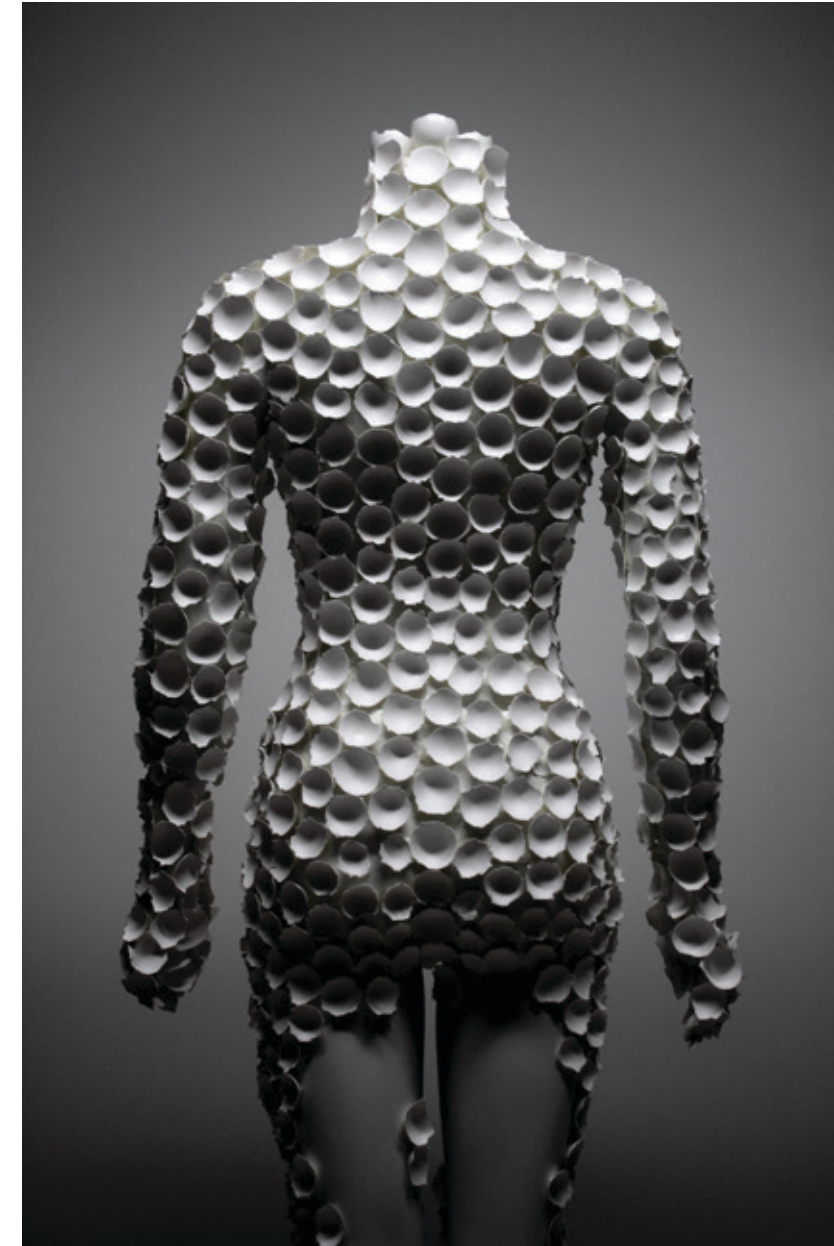
**Jeremy** Curators have said that my work, because of the spinning, is a circular motif. Even though the square and the cross shape are so dominant (though it is not a religious thing). The four directions is a type of cycle. The muted wood colours are sort of organic, but the technology comes out of mine more. Jun’s work is more obviously organic although you could argue that taking these eggs and meticulously arranging them into patterns is technical.

**Jun** For this exhibit, taking preformed models is a sort of technology. When I see Jeremy’s work, I feel like they are little brains. For me, they are very natural and very organic looking – the way the wires fall, and technology can also be looked at as organic – electricity is live too.

**Beth** There’s overlap in everything. All of them intersperse and the title invites a sense of duality throughout the exhibit. There’s a tension between your work – initially pulling quite independently – but as we look closer they come together really well.



Moonwalker 1



Moonwalker 2



Made In Japan 13



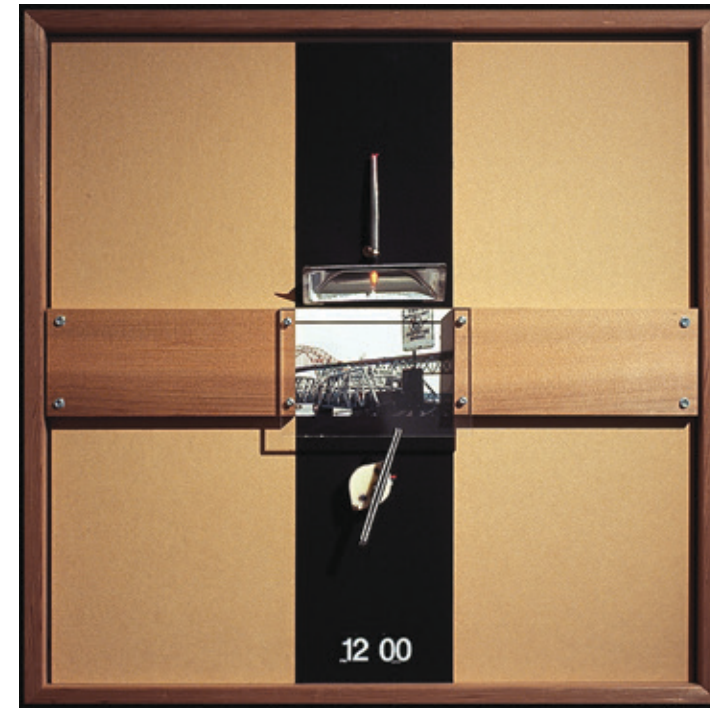
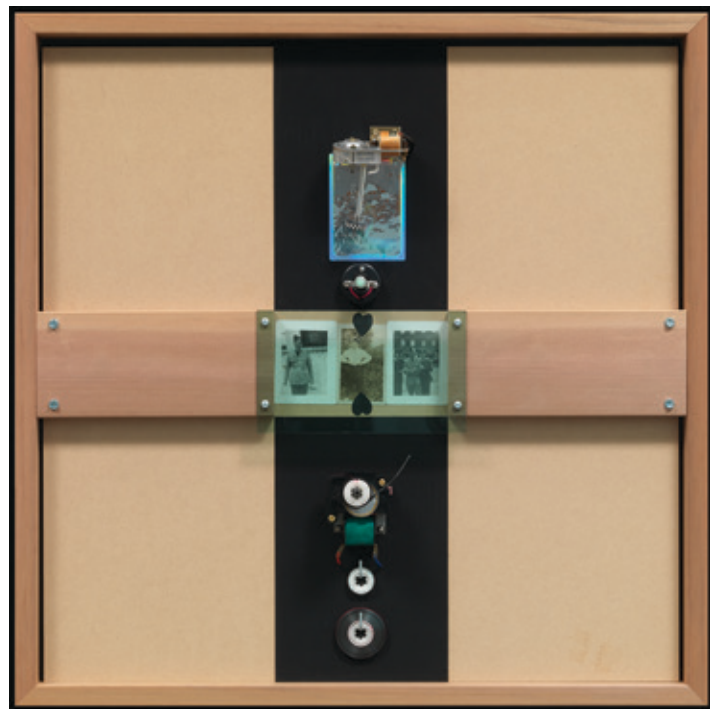
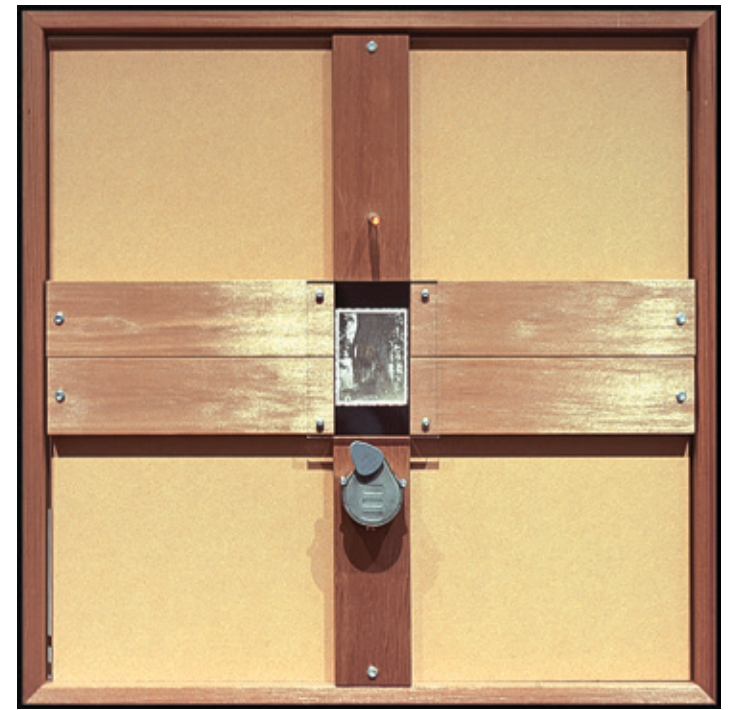
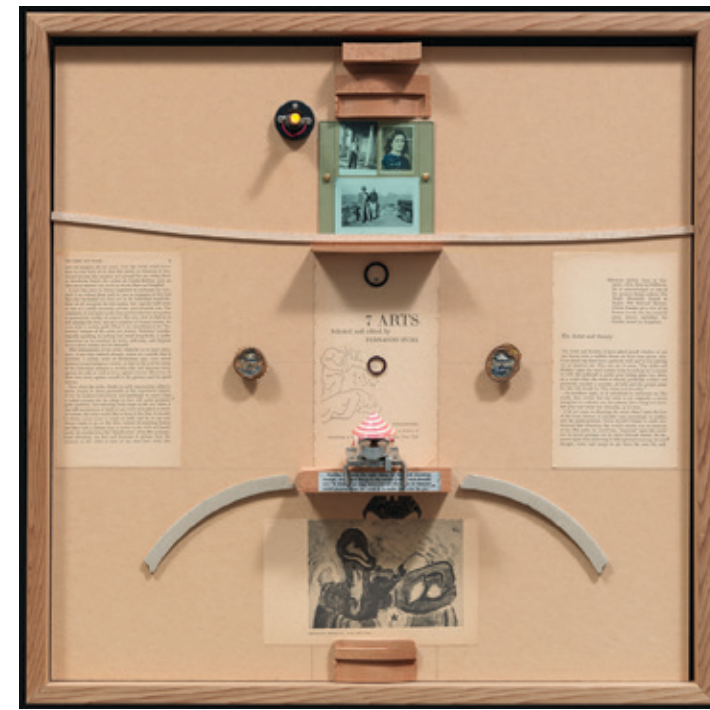
Made In Japan 16



Moonwalker 3



Moonwalker 4



Top left: Made In Japan 9  
Bottom left: Made In Japan 14

Top right: Made In Japan 15  
Bottom right: Made In Japan 12

Top left: Made In Japan 11  
Bottom left: Made In Japan 3

Top right: Made In Japan 5  
Bottom right: Made In Japan 10

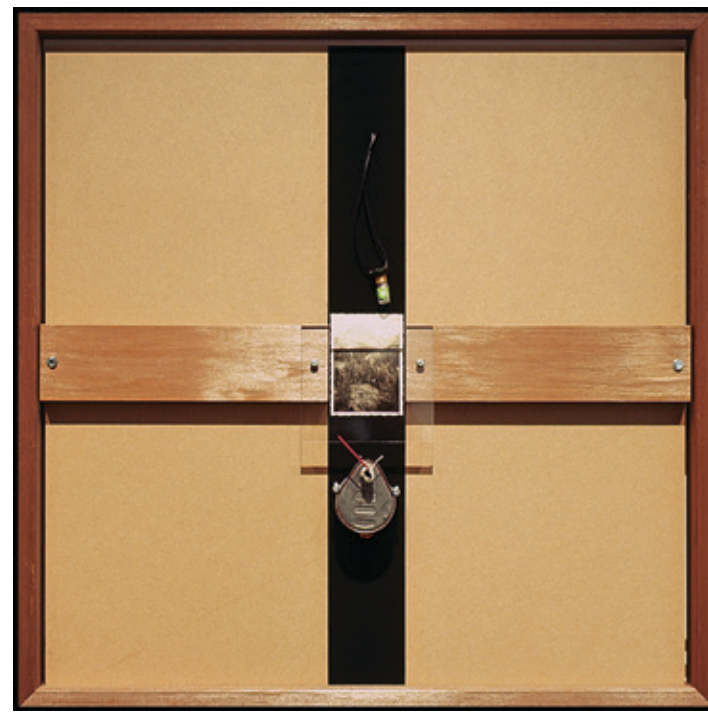
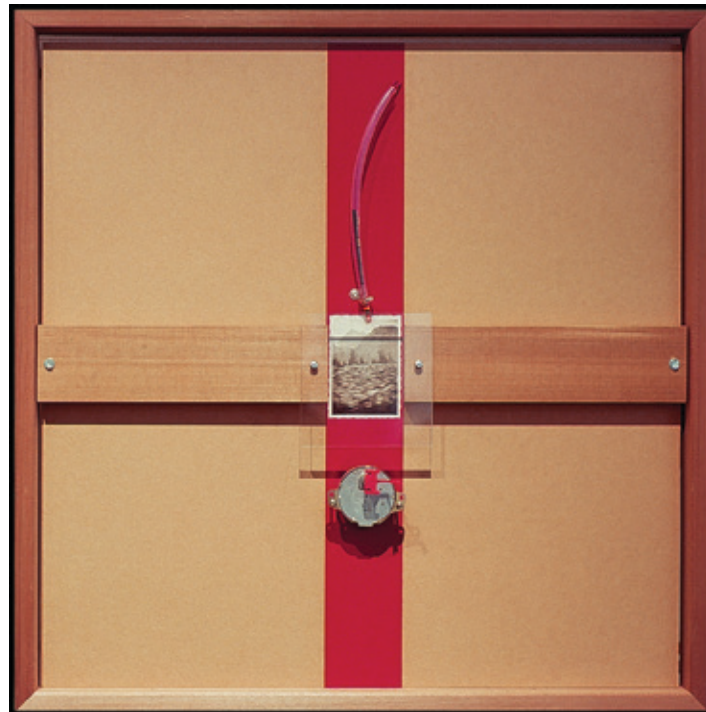
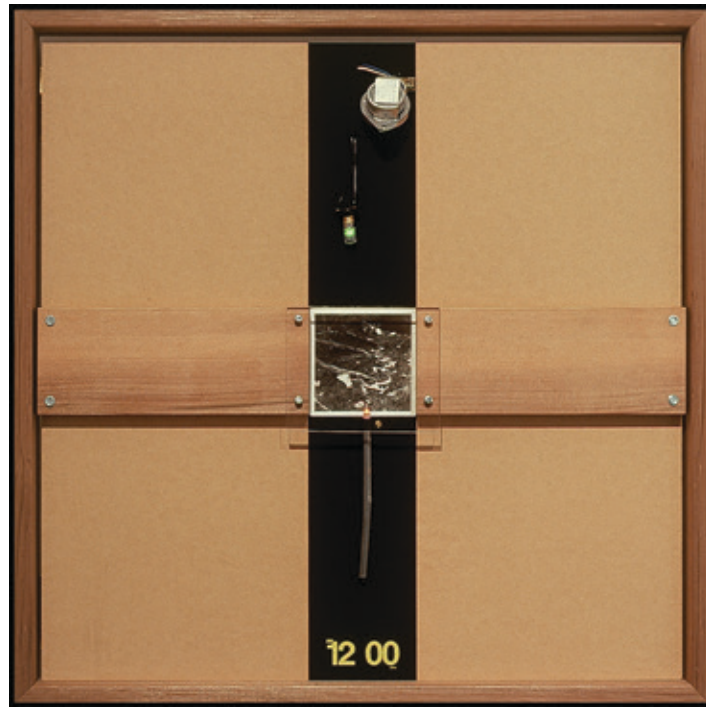




Moonwalker 5

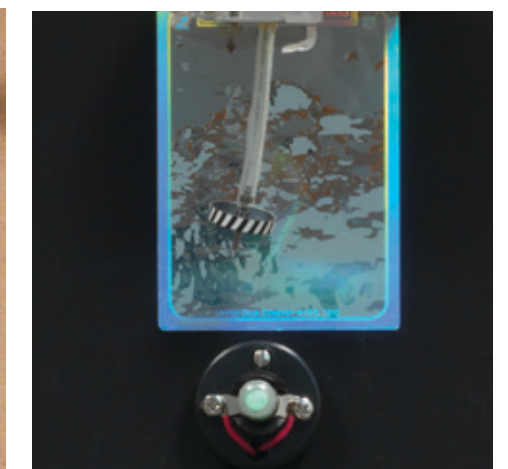
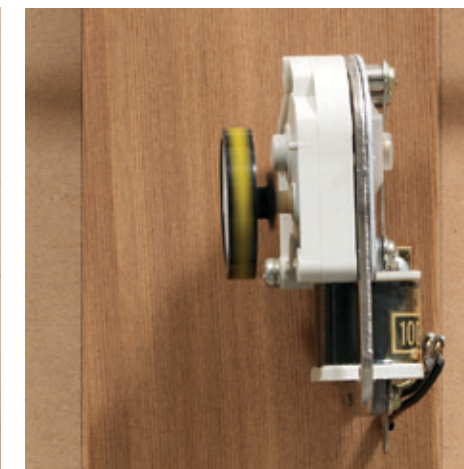
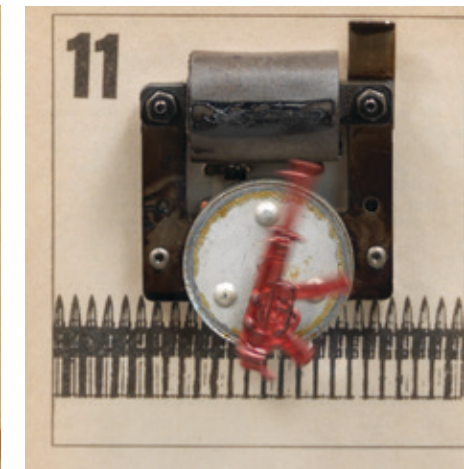
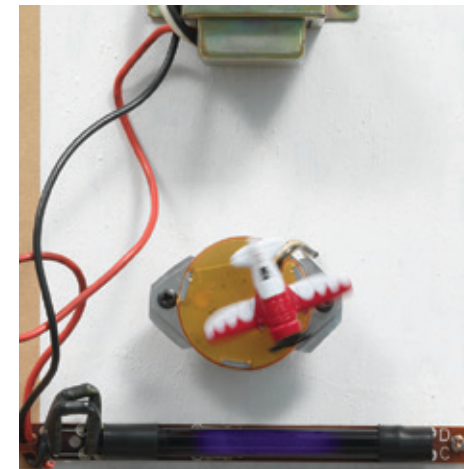
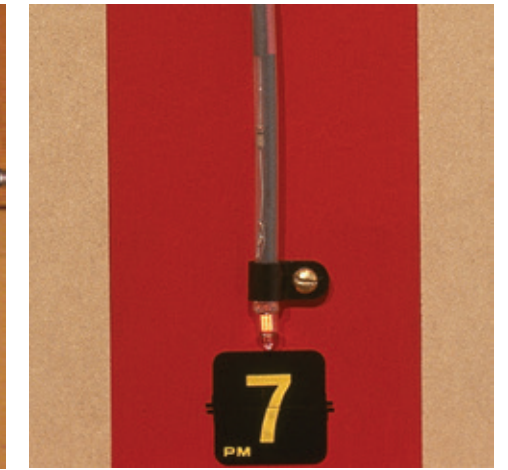


Moonwalker 6



Top left: Made In Japan 1  
Bottom left: Made In Japan 7

Top right: Made In Japan 4  
Bottom right: Made In Japan 8



Made In Japan (details)

# Traces

By Ross Birdwise

Jeremy Isao Speier's and Junichiro Iwase's exhibit *Double Zero: The Point Between Future Past*, (2013) has an open-ended, free associative quality. Like its title, the works are suggestive, materially rich, somewhat conceptual, but resistant to any overarching interpretation or narrative closure. The exhibit functions as a catalyst for the viewer's thoughts, feelings, and associations. This isn't to say that the works and the connections between them do not mean anything, or that they do not point the viewer in certain directions, but they are not pushy about it. It is more about setting up a field of potential energy that the viewer can enter into and play inside of. My personal feeling is that the processes that informed the production of both artist's works were as much intuitive as they were conceptual. I also think that the artists have deliberately chosen to issue an artist statement that is playful and suggestive, rather than conclusive about the nature of their work. This text I am writing, in the spirit of the works exhibited, is not claiming to be conclusive. It merely suggests possible interpretations and some fragmentary responses to the works.

Iwase's striking series of all white sculptures, *Moonwalkers*, features six adult and two child mannequins. All of the mannequins have eggshells attached, in varying degrees, to their surface. The eggshells seem vulnerable and fragile, but in fact are very strong. The children are the least coated, with the odd eggshell attached here and there while the adults generally tend to be more densely covered. The smooth, concave insides of the shells face outside, but this also means that the rough, cracked, sometimes pointy edges of the eggshells face outwards too, so we get a surface that simultaneously recedes and juts out at us, at once rough and smooth, at once inside and outside. From a distance the shelled surfaces of the figures resemble honeycombs and barnacles, but also clothing and armour. Because the children only have a few shells attached to them, the shells looked almost like small flowers blooming from the otherwise uninterrupted surfaces of the skin.

I began to form impressions that are informed by my visceral, free-associative, intuitive, but also intellectual engagement with the work. I began to think of the figures in terms of some sort of accumulation of trauma that gradually occurred over time. The 'armour' as a kind of front or scar tissue a person might have, both figuratively and literally. I read the child figure's relative lack of eggshell armour as a sign that they were less fully developed, less fully scarred by certain negative

experiences than the adult figures. The initially playful and open-ended qualities of the works first began to turn as this trauma impression became more definite for me, leading to a darker feeling than the initial encounter, which seemed more like meeting some aliens from another planet than some traumatized human beings. I think this impression was also aided and abetted by Speier's *Made In Japan* series, while not exactly about trauma per se, seems to be about fragmented memories, lost times and their relationship to social and material conditions and objects.

Speier's works are largely made from discarded objects from times past. One could roughly describe them as assemblages, or as Jeremy prefers, new-media, lo-tech. Each piece has a cross-like composition, on top of and around which are affixed various old photographs, softly whirring, and cycling mechanical parts, the soft ambience of tiny, seemingly antique lights, old pieces of clock radios, and other ephemera that generally creates a strong, formal composition made of fragments of the past. The pieces, in terms of medium, hover in a space between assemblage, painting, and kinetic sculpture.

The passage of time, fragmentary memories, traces, and its connection to material objects is, for me, a strong element of Speier's *Made In Japan* objects. In *FuturePast* both artists have physically merged their works by placing associated ephemera along with objects from the Nikkei National Museum collection in the vitrines in the centre of the gallery. There is also a cinematic reference. The old photographs attached to the surface of the works are like lost frames in a film we will never see, and also relate to Speier's fragmentary, appropriated take on James Joyce in his film *Hero*, projected on the rear wall of the gallery space. The photographs in *Made In Japan* are fragments, depictions of anonymous families and friends we never knew, trips we never went on, lost, discarded and senseless bits of old machinery places and times forgotten. It is an impersonal loss and nostalgia we can apply to our own lives, our histories, our families and technologies that were in our lives.

In some ways Speier's work is an elegy to the anonymous, forgotten, aspects of the past and resonates with the perpetual death/becoming of the present moment as it passes into the future (past becomes present, present becomes future, future becomes present, at any given instant of our lives and our deaths).

Even though Speier's works reference nostalgia, I find the dry formal organization of the work tends to be a more analytic but also immediately material experience for me than a sentimental one. It makes me think about nostalgia, history, and forgetting in their own right more than it makes me wistful or remember my own history or that of my family. I find the tone at once philosophical yet also fascinated with the small material details of the debris of time that partially constitute the physical aspect of his work.

My impressions of Speier's work were formed prior to viewing the *Double Zero* exhibit, as I had previously viewed the works in his studio. I think I carried these impressions with me to the gallery space and found them reinforced, in a kind of feedback loop between past and present, and in the dialogue

between Iwase's *Moonwalkers* and Speier's *Made In Japan* series. I am merely offering a way, hopefully a plausible way, of interpreting and experiencing these works. I want them to retain their openness despite the definition I have traced of their contours, their textures. Like the elements in this exhibit, this text is a fragment, a trace, a partial memory of an encounter. I am curious to know your impressions.

*Ross Birdwise is a musician, visual artist, and occasional curator and arts writer who is interested in collaborative working methods, interdisciplinarity, and improvised and intuitive approaches to art, music and writing and their relationship to theory, research and composition.*



Hero (still)

## Artist Biographies



**Junichiro Iwase** was born in Tokyo in 1971 and studied Fine Art at Vancouver Community College and the Johnson Sculpture Atelier in New Jersey. Iwase has adopted a wide variety of approaches in his own practice, including painting, drawing, and sculpture. Some examples of his diverse range in practice include: creating artwork for a community temple in Japan; exhibiting sculptures in response to HIV/AIDS crisis in NYC; bringing awareness to social concerns in Japan via animation; creating sculptures out of materials which provide food-relief for citizens in the homeless sector; producing work to assist in community fundraising efforts; and more recently, completing a commission for a digital image screening to celebrate diversity in film. Currently, Iwase lives and works in Richmond, B.C. and continues to exhibit his work at international venues.

[www.junichiroiwase.com](http://www.junichiroiwase.com)

### Artist Statement

1. "Something about the surface or skin of things"
2. "Art is food for The Spirits" (I feel art is not created for humans but intended for something other. The something other is open to interpretation and I have substituted it for the word "Spirits" to maintain positive feelings. Although I am not a religious artist, I like to think I am spiritual. For our exhibition, "Spirits" could refer to lost time and space, creation, destruction, sacrifice.

List of works in the exhibit:

Moonwalker 1, 2013  
Eggshell, acrylic gel, mannequin  
H: 5'7"

Moonwalker 2, 2013  
Eggshell, acrylic gel, mannequin  
H: 5'6"

Moonwalker 3, 2013  
Eggshell, acrylic gel, mannequin  
H: 5'5"

Moonwalker 4, 2013  
Eggshell, acrylic gel, mannequin  
H: 5'8"

Moonwalker 5, 2013  
Eggshell, acrylic gel, mannequin  
H: 5'4"

Moonwalker 6, 2013  
Eggshell, acrylic gel, mannequin  
H: 5'7"

Moonwalker 7, 2013  
Eggshell, acrylic gel, mannequin  
H: 3'9"

**Jeremy Isao Speier** is a Japanese Canadian Vancouver-based interdisciplinary artist who graduated from Emily Carr College of Art & Design in 1992. He works in film/video, sculptural kinetics and sound, and installation. Since 2003 his work has been in thirty seven solo and group exhibitions, screenings, and actions in Canada. A visual artist and filmmaker, he is an avid auteur and cineasta of film and the cinematographic image. Speier is working on his third film for his Trilogy of Films titled *Crome*, loosely based on Huxley's first novel *Crome Yellow*. The Trilogy of Films is an ongoing exploration of literary works and tropes protracted into the cinematic. In his practice Speier investigates time, perception, materiality and memory, technology and kineticism. Jeremy has also been working on print projects recently Co-Authoring the publication, *Rereading The Riot Act, And On-Vancouver 2011*, Publication Studio, and a collaborative work, *Rooms*, (2012) in BoulderPavement, Banff Press, both with writer Anakana Schofield. Speier is currently editor for an artist book project and art publication, *Little Tokyo Collaborative Essay Series*, which is an essay collection that has evolved and departed from his exhibition, *Little Tokyo in the Industrial Playground*, (2012).

[www.jeremyisaospeier.com](http://www.jeremyisaospeier.com)



### Artist Statement

*Made In Japan* is a project that embodies the consumer electronics of the 1970s and the pre-digital age. It speaks to an era when Japan once ruled the consumer electronics market and was in the pre-digital and pre-global era. Japan was a leader in technology, now it's struggling to find its place in the digital-age. With globalized manufacturing and assembly, fewer electronics are being made in Japan. *Made In Japan* looks at the lie of commodity, and is a critique of consumerism.

*Made In Japan* was also the title of a live album by English Rock band Deep Purple. In 1972, it was released in Europe, and in 1973 it was released in the US, and in Osaka, Budokan and Tokyo, Japan, epitomizing this moment.

I am interested in the loss of space, the gap that was created and still exists before the digital take over. This includes the global transformation from analog to digital.

I am also interested in time: Newtonian-time like the frame of a filmstrip across the time line; or Kant-time as neither an event nor a thing; Einstein's special theory of relativity, and velocity equals distance over time . . . I am investigating the intersection or juncture where matter and memory cross over time and perception.

List of works in the exhibit:

Made In Japan 1-16 (2009-2013)  
Sculptural kinetic installation  
23" x 23" x 3" each

Made In Japan Mix tape (1970-1980), (2013)  
Poster on Cougar paper stock  
12" x 18"

Razors 1-2 (2013)  
C-print  
15 ¼" x 13" each

Hero (2009)  
HD Video

FuturePast (2013)  
Installation including ephemera from both artist's collections and the Nikkei National Museum.

