

For Immediate Release: August 18, 2016

# *On the Beach*

## *Jurgen Lehl's Messages from the Sea*

Saturday October 8, 2016 – Sunday, February 5, 2017



Photo by Asaki Ohira

Towada Art Center is pleased to present *On the Beach—Jurgen Lehl's Messages from the Sea*, on view Saturday, October 8, 2016 through Sunday, February 5, 2017.

Jurgen Lehl (1944-2014) was celebrated for his line of products, which made the most of natural materials in his original clothing, textile, and jewelry designs. After first visiting in 1966, Lehl made Japan his home in the early 1970s, creating products with natural materials and technologies of Japan and other parts of Asia. He lamented the destruction of the natural environment and how it seemed to parallel the progressive loss of traditional technologies and their artisans.

Grieved and appalled by the endless amount of trash that washed onto the shores of his home and farm on Ishigaki Island in Okinawa, Lehl channeled his energy into repurposing the trash he collected into things of beauty and utility. The highlights of this exhibition are Lehl's lamps, made from bits of plastic collected on beaches near his home. Also on display are his photographs, which contrast the beauty of the sea with its current polluted state. Other works by artist Chris Jordan will also make a special appearance. Jordan's photos and videos capture seabird carcasses filled with plastic waste mistakenly fed to them by their parents.

Lehl's beautiful, utilitarian lighting fixtures raise concern for nature, the source of all human life. Together with the works of his respected friend Chris Jordan, Lehl's messages from the sea ring loud and clear.

These artworks were well received at both the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo and KYOTOGRAPHIE International Photography Festival. We are excited to present this exhibition in a completely new spatial configuration that is unique to the Towada Art Center.

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#### **Contact Information**

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## About the Exhibition

Name	<i>On the Beach—Jurgen Lehl's Messages from the Sea</i>
Exhibition Period	Saturday, October 8, 2016 – Sunday, February 5, 2017
Hours	9:00–17:00 (Last admission 30 minutes before closing) Closed Mondays (except for National Holidays, in which case the Center is open on the holiday and closed the following Tuesday) Closed Monday, December 26 – Sunday, January 1, 2017, for Winter Holidays
Venue	Towada Art Center
Admission	Exhibition + Permanent Collection: 1,000 yen Exhibition only: 600 yen

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Organized by	Towada Art Center
In cooperation with	Jurgen Lehl Co., Ltd.
With the support of	The To-o Nippo Press, The Daily-Tohoku Shimbun Inc., Aomori Broadcasting Cooperation, Aomori Television Broadcasting Co., Ltd., Asahi Broadcasting Aomori Co., Ltd., & Towada City Board of Education

Artwork contributed by Chris Jordan & KYOTOGRAPHIE International Photography Festival

## Jurgen Lehl

Lehl moved to Japan in 1971 after working as a textile designer in Paris and New York during the 1960s. He founded his own company and began designing clothes, furniture, kitchenware, and more. He is now known as a pioneer of lifestyle design.

In 2006 he conceived and launched the Babaghuri label, which focuses on handicraft and environmentally friendly production. The label aims to use as many natural materials as possible to produce clothing that steer clear of fashion trends and can be used for any occasion. The label's corporate policies dictate that all products must reduce pollution and be biodegradable. Traditional techniques and handicraft are respected in production, which the label entrusts to skilled craftsmen in India, China, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Japan.



Photo by Yuriko Takagi

### Selected Group Exhibitions

Feb 2015	<i>EARTH MATTERS: When Natural &amp; Creative Forces Meet</i> , Artipelag (Stockholm, Sweden)
Jul 2015	<i>An Art Exhibition for Children: Whose place is this?</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
Apr 2014	<i>Chris Jordan + Jurgen Lehl   Midway: Message from the Gyre</i> , KYOTOGRAPHIE International Photography Festival

### Related Publications

Jurgen Lehl and Tadanori Yokoo, *Made In Japan: The Textiles Of Jurgen Lehl* (Tokyo: Parco, 1983)  
Leonard Koren, *New Fashion Japan* (New York, Kodansha, 1984)  
Richard Martin and Harold Koda, *Flair: Fashion Collected by Tina Chow* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992)  
Jurgen Lehl and Yuriko Takagi, *Koromo: Jurgen Lehl's Fabrics* (Tokyo: Libro Port, 1997)  
Jurgen Lehl, *ZOMO* (Tokyo: Jurgen Lehl Co.,Ltd., 2002)  
Jurgen Lehl, *Babaghuri* (Tokyo: Jurgen Lehl Co.,Ltd., 2005)  
Akito Akagi et al., *Cha no hako* (Tokyo: Rutles, 2004)  
Jurgen Lehl and Yuriko Takagi, *DACHI* (Tokyo: Rutles, 2005)  
Yuriko Takagi et al., *Jurgen Lehl to Babaghuri wo sagasiniiku* (Tokyo: PHP Editors Group, 2009)  
Jurgen Lehl and Kazuko Koike, *On the Beach 1* (Tokyo: Hehe, 2015)

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## Artwork contributed by

**Chris Jordan (1963– )** | [www.chrisjordan.com](http://www.chrisjordan.com)

Born in San Francisco, California, USA, Chris Jordan is a photographer and videographer who documents the effects of environmental destruction on bird ecology in the North Pacific Ocean. (8 photographic and video works on display.)

**KYOTOGRAPHIE Kyoto International Photography Festival 2016** | [www.kyotographie.jp](http://www.kyotographie.jp)

Organized and produced *Chris Jordan + Jurgen Lehl Midway: Message from the Gyre*. Part of that exhibition will be reproduced in *On the Beach—Jurgen Lehl's Messages from the Sea*.

## Highlights

Jurgen Lehl began making lamps out of the vast amounts of plastic that had washed up on the beach near his home. *On the Beach—Jurgen Lehl's Messages from the Sea* showcases about 140 of his works, including the plastic lamps, which are beautiful objects of light, as well as Lehl's own photography of the beaches of Okinawa. These photographs, produced in sets of two, portray the same ocean scenery. One depicts the former beauty of the landscape while the other shows its current littered state.

Chris Jordan's photos and videos capture the birds of the Midway Islands in the North Pacific Ocean and their decimation by mistakenly ingesting the plastic that washes up on the islands' beaches.

*On the Beach—Jurgen Lehl's Messages from the Sea* invites viewers to experience firsthand the gap that exists between the illusionary world of the artist and the tragic reality of the world's oceans.

## Related Events

### Three-Part Talk Series

The museum invites Jurgen Lehl's close friends and colleagues to talk about his life and creation.

1. *Opening Talk | Saturday, October 8*  
Hideaki Matsuura (Jurgen Lehl Co.,Ltd.) & Kazuko Koike (Director, Towada Art Center)  
Venue | Towada Art Center Exhibition Space  
Admission | Free with exhibition ticket
2. *Talk\* | November (Date TBD)*  
Yuriko Takagi (Photographer)  
Venue | Towada Art Center Cube (tentative)  
Admission | Free with exhibition ticket
3. *Talk\* | November (Date TBD)*  
Mayu Tsuruta (Actress)  
Venue | Exhibition Space  
Admission | Free with exhibition ticket

*\*Event details will be announced on our website in early September.*

### Yutaka Oyama Concert | Saturday, January 7 (Time TBD)

Performers | Yutaka Oyama (Third-generation Tsugaru-jamisen player of the Oyama School), Junichi Saito (guitar)

Venue | Towada Art Center Cube

Admission | TBD

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## About the Artwork

Around 140 artworks that include illustration, sculpture, photography, video, and more.  
Please contact the museum if you are interested in leasing any of the artwork.

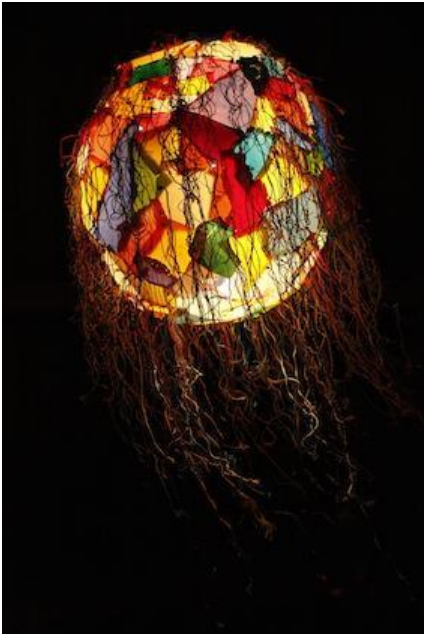


Photo by Jurgen Lehl



Photo by Asaki Ohira

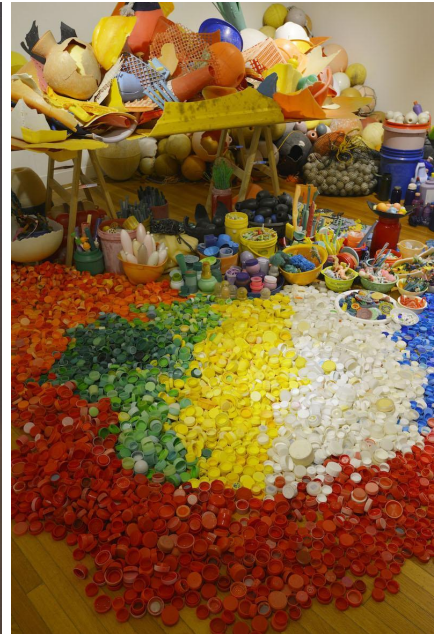


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## *The End of Civilization*

Fifteen years have passed since I began spending a third of each month at my beachside house in Okinawa.

I till the field and I ponder new ideas for creating things. In the intervals, I go down to the beach in front of my house to walk the dog and get a change of air. Such is my routine, but every time I go down, I am filled with a mixture of anger and sadness.

Walking on the sandy beach, I enjoy picking up beautiful shells or pieces of coral, but more than shells and coral, what I find are large quantities of trash that has washed ashore.

Sometimes, to my delight, I happen on an old glass float. But mostly, what I find is ugly plastic debris...pieces of styrene foam, plastic bottle caps, detergent receptacles, cheap toys, and so on. Some of this trash is Japanese and some has drifted ashore from other Asian countries. Whenever I find it, I pick it up, but the next day I find more.

Eventually I came up with the idea of collecting all this trash, sorting it by color, and creating something with it. I wanted people to know—so much trash washes ashore, I can fabricate things with it.

The other day, when traveling, I had a chance to visit the beach at Yonaguni. While walking in the sand, I had the oddest feeling something was not right. Thrusting my hand into the sand, I scooped some up to inspect it and got a shock. Mixed in with the sand were countless particles of plastic, about the same size as the sand grains. It looked like a beautiful beach from afar, but this is what it had become. We human beings had done this. It was the end of civilization...the thought struck me with real force.

Although not Japanese, I have lived here more than 40 years. I remember Japan when it was still beautiful. If I can, I hope to live in this country the rest of my life.

Which is why I want everyone to know—that Japan has gotten this dirty, that we need to clean up this trash, and how important it is to live without producing trash. This is an issue not only for Japan. It is something I would like to tell the whole world.

As everyone perhaps knows, there is trash we can see and trash we cannot see. If either continues to grow, it will mean the end of civilization. The earth is also working hard to clean itself, but our collective efforts as individuals can go a long way towards cleaning up the environment.

If I can do something to make people aware of this, now is the time to act. This, I feel strongly.

Simply showing people all that ugly plastic trash may not get them to understand its actual horror. If so, then I will create something I think is beautiful, not just beautiful objects but something practical, able to serve people usefully once again. This is but a small act of resistance on my part, as someone who creates things for a living. To draw people's attention to the great volumes of plastic trash. I consider this my last job in life.

Jurgen Lehl  
September 2014

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