

MICHAEL HOPPEN GALLERY

A JOURNEY OF DRIFTING ICE

To create *A Journey of Drifting Ice*, Nishino started out from the extreme north-eastern tip of Japan, on Hokkaidō's Shiretoko peninsular. Fascinated by the drift ice, which expands across Shiretoko's seas, he began to research the science behind these colossal formations and the remarkable journey ice floes travel from Russia's great Amur River through to the Sea of Okhotsk before arriving in Japanese waters. Nishino observes the drift ice as a naturally occurring transnational phenomenon, acting as a prescient appeal to our divided global society. In the light of the environmental crisis, Nishino's mapping of these disappearing geographical features is charged with additional urgency; the landscape of these long unchartered waters is changing rapidly, and Nishino's photography takes stock of both the ice floe's evolving position and the integral necessity of its ecosystems to the diverse communities which rely upon them.

For full details and larger images, please see the end of this document.



Sohei Nishino

A Journey of Drifting Ice, Shiretoko and Magadan, 2019

Diptych

Two archival pigment prints on Hahnemuhle Photo-Rag Baryta paper, with archival dry mounting to panels of laser-cut aluminium

(1)

108 x 228.5 cm

(2)

Edition of 5

92.5 x 247 cm

£40,000 excl. tax & shipping

(CATALOGUE)

[View detail](#)

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Image 1/11

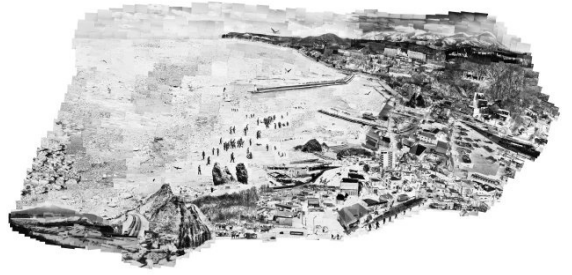
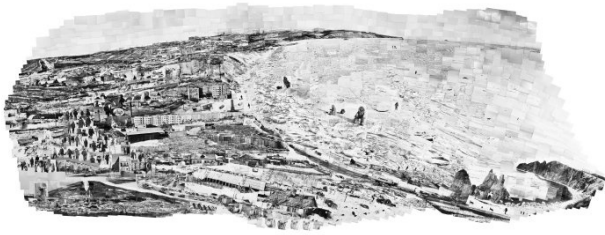


Image 2/11

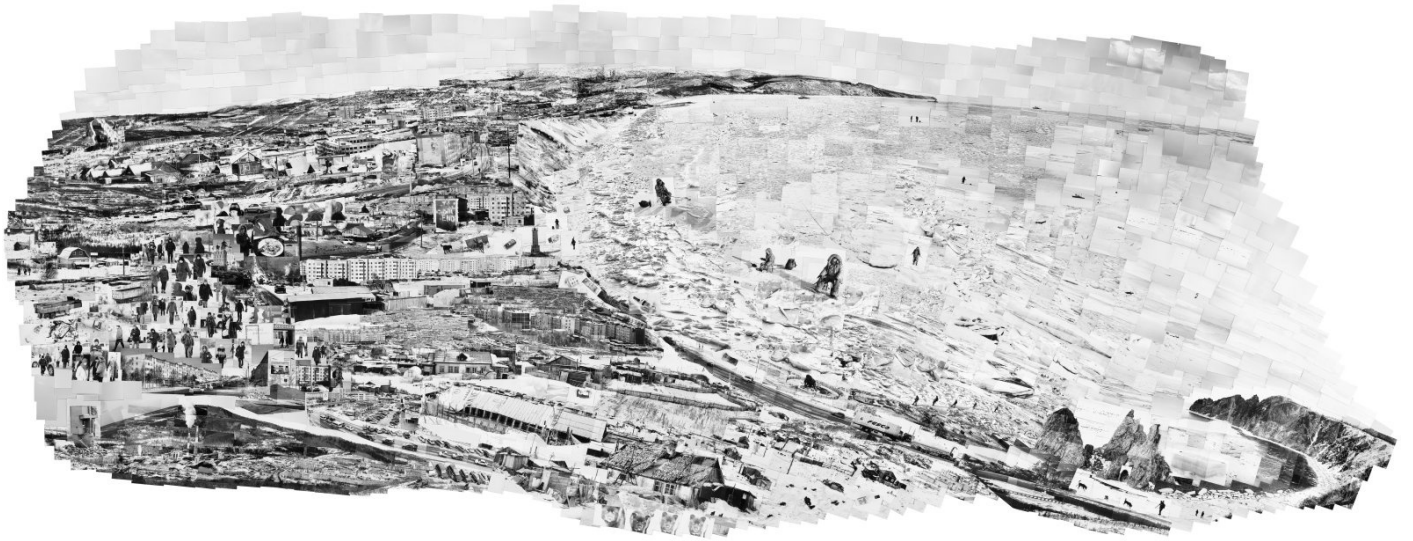


Image 3/11

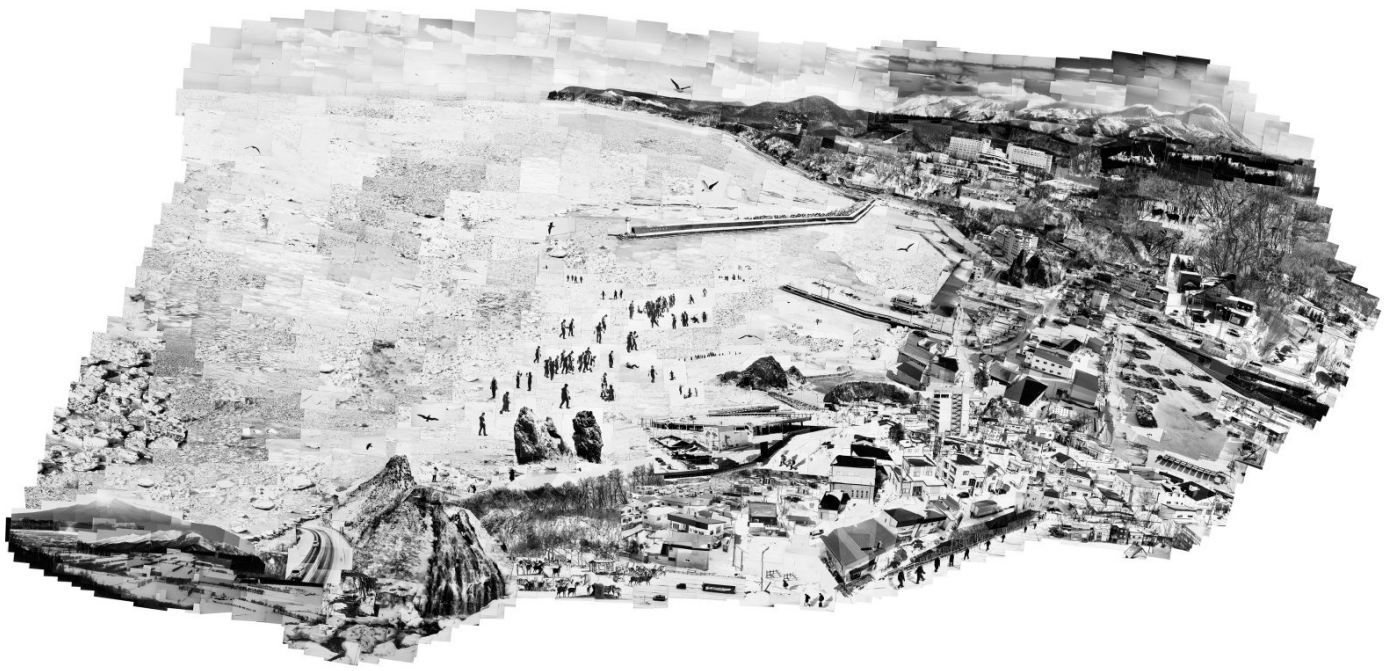


Image 4/11



Image 5/11



Image 6/11



Image 7/11



Image 8/11

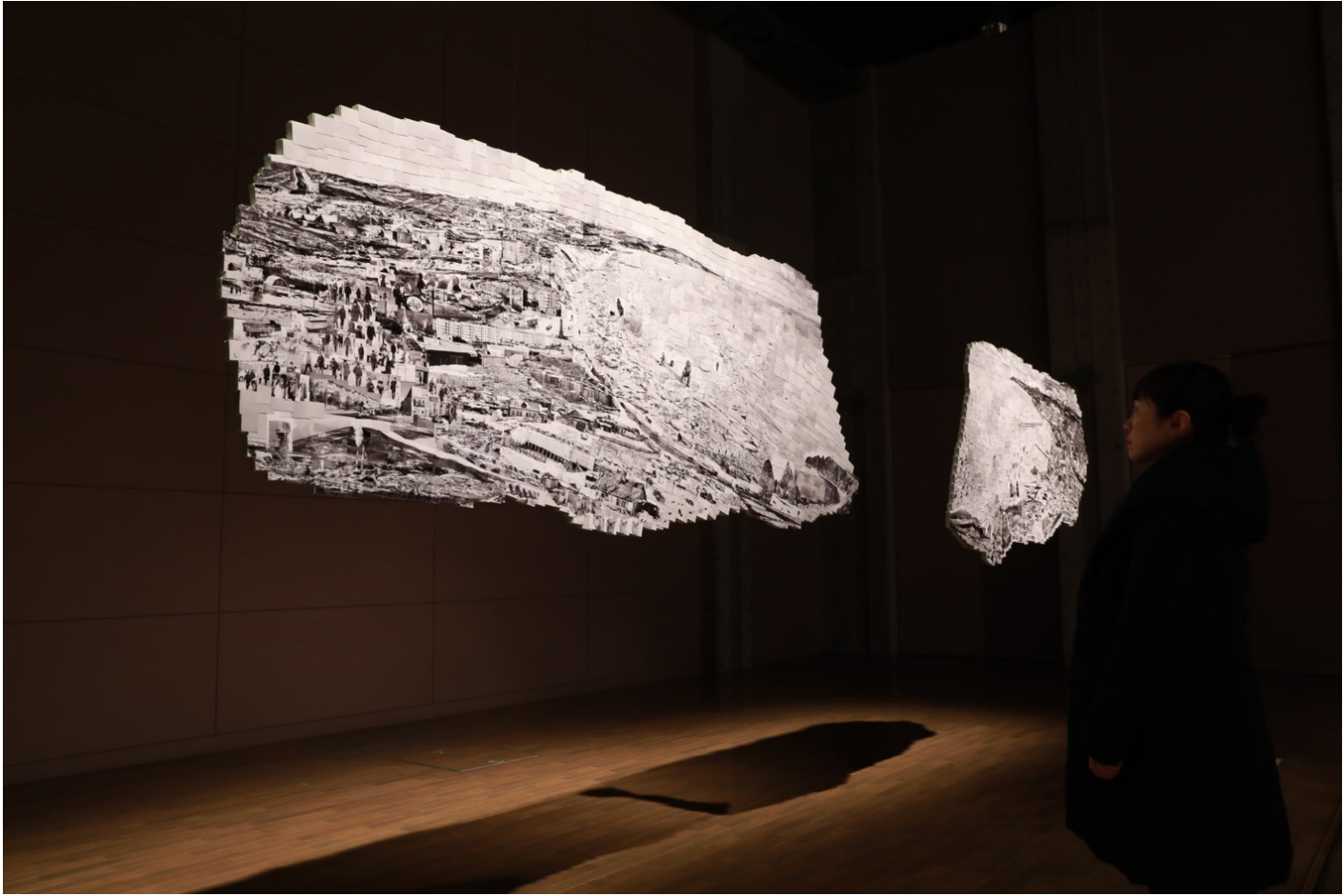


Image 10/11

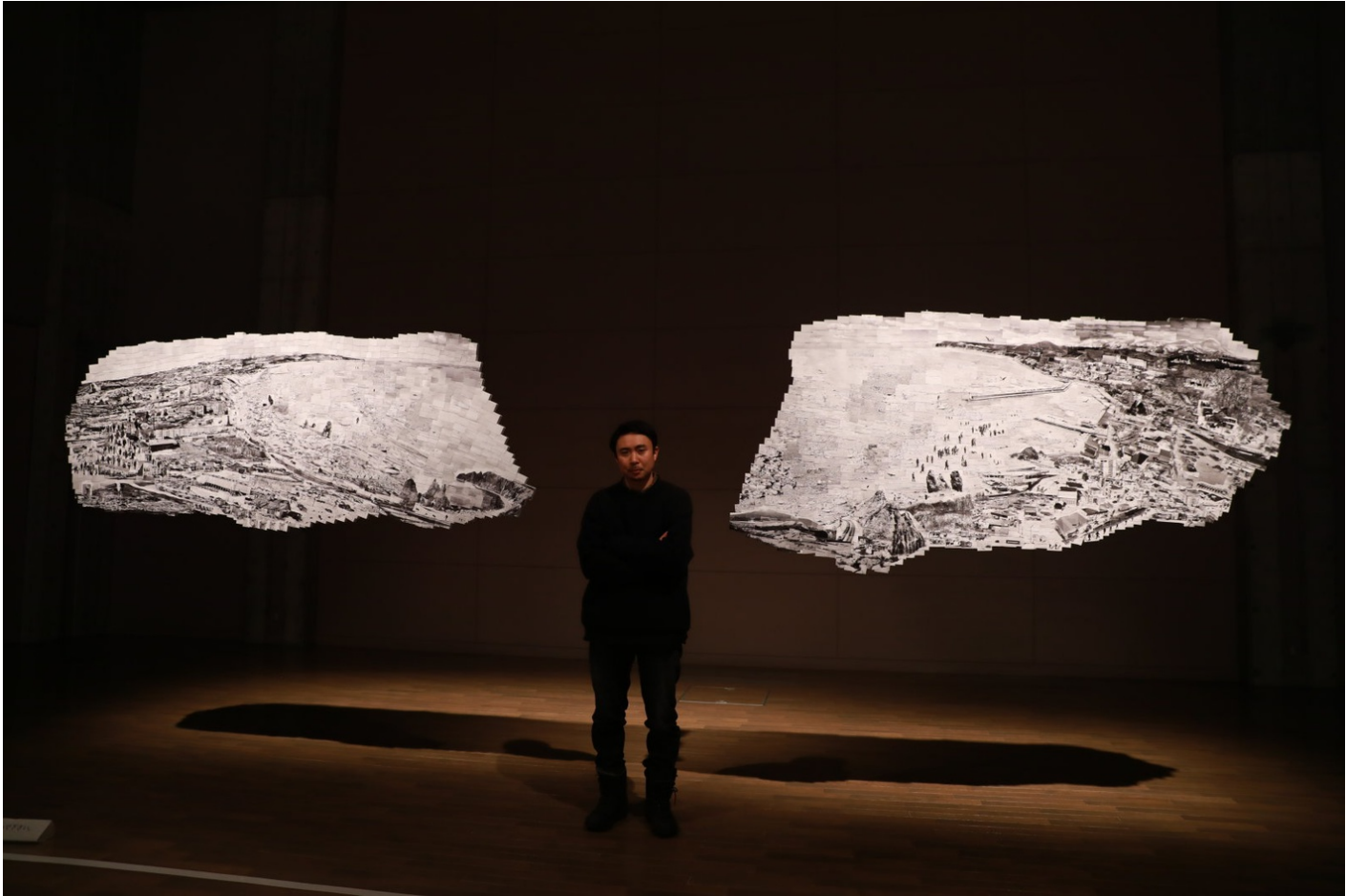


Image 11/11

Artist's statement (translated from the Japanese by Lucy Fleming-Brown)

"The Shiretoko peninsula at the eastern extremity of Hokkaido is a World Natural Heritage site and is visited by many tourists. It is famous for its abundant nature, which displays a variety of appearances throughout the four seasons. Even in the middle of the peninsula, when Winter arrives, drift ice spreads across the whole expanse of Shiretoko's seas. I was shocked by the countless, vast blocks of ice which drifted by, and the sound they made as they expanded and came closer across the sea's surface. Having been born in a relatively warm region of central Japan, there are many things which I do not know about the environment of these cold places; I did not know what drift ice was in the first place, or what it was capable of.

As I came to research it, I realised that the drift ice flowed here from the seas of distant Siberia. Furthermore, the ice is not created from seawater: it appears that the freshwater which flows through Russia's great Amur River is cooled by seasonal winds, and a large volume of frozen water covers the Sea of Okhotsk, before travelling south to come into Japan. The phytoplankton which attaches to the underside of the drift ice takes in sunlight to photosynthesise, and as the zooplankton comes to feed on the phytoplankton, they reproduce in greater numbers. Zooplankton is eaten by small fish, and then as bigger fish come to eat smaller fish, an extraordinary food chain develops. The Sea of Okhotsk's richly diverse ecosystem is supporting our own human existence. Having thought that it was formed in the sea, I felt a deep sense of shock looking out from Shiretoko.

Even whilst we draw lines which we call countries through the heart of our society,

separating places like Russia and Japan in two, here is a phenomenon which occurs in the middle of the natural world. Upon becoming aware of the existence of this concept, which indiscriminately transcends such boundaries, I was filled with a sense of wonder and relief.

In

January 2019, I set out on a journey to follow the drift ice to its origins. I went to visit the town of Magadan, on the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk, where the drift ice starts out. As well as the ice floes, I saw the people living there and the landscape of their town, and I looked out over the Sea of Okhotsk which extends all the way to the Shiretoko peninsular on the other side. My stay was short, but every day I walked for six to seven hours in temperatures ranging from -20 to -30 degrees, and by photographing the two regions I created a map of this geographical mass.

In relation to the world's environmental crisis, I heard again and again from people actually living in Shiretoko and Magadan that over the years the Sea of Okhotsk's drift ice is diminishing due to the impact of global warming and climate change. In searching for the origins of the drift ice, and by focussing on its movement, I have come to recognize just how important the existence of these ice floes are to the countries which surround the borders of Okhotsk. The grave problems playing out in the natural world may act as an urgent appeal to our divided human society.

Although this project was undertaken in response to a program inviting artists to the town of Shiretoko, I never thought that in coming to know Shiretoko I would set foot on the shores of far-off Russia. By imagining the movement of the drift ice which connects these two regions from one place to another, this work reflects upon our lives and the environment which surrounds us".

- Sohei Nishino