



The Suddenly Relevant Activist Antics of Artist Collective Chim↑Pom: Challenging Japan's Nuclear Power Agenda

Chim↑Pom with an introduction by Linda Hoaglund



Chim↑Pom

Chim↑Pom, the young Japanese art provocateurs' collective, first attained notoriety in 2008, when they hired a small plane to fly over Hiroshima to draw the word *Pika* (an onomatopoeic for the atomic flash) in smoke against skies once dwarfed by the mushroom cloud. Their un-announced "art prank," which they filmed for a video art project, drew sharp rebukes for its insensitivity to the *hibakusha* community and the group of five men and one woman had to publicly apologize. That was three years before the great trifecta of earthquake, tsunami and meltdown jolted the nation's consciousness into a re-evaluation of their singular nuclear history and vulnerability. Since March 11th, 2011, the group has responded by deploying their deceptive amateurism (none has attended art school and all have day jobs) to detonate Japan's post-3/11 taboos. In the PBS Frontline program "[Atomic Artists](#)"

you can see a range of their artistic provocations. For example, watch them "supplementing" Okamoto Taro's epic mural depicting Japan's nuclear past, "Myth of Tomorrow," installed in the Shibuya station to commemorate the victims of Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Lucky Dragon #5 fishing boat irradiated in the Bikini H-bomb tests. They call it "[Level 7](#)," which now supplements Okamoto with their rendering of Fukushima. Here you can find Chim↑Pom in Real Times

trespassing onto the periphery of the hobbled nuclear power plant at Fukushima in hazmat suits, to paint and raise a nuclearized Japan flag. "We parked our car at the main gate of the plant, and there is an overlook within the premises of the plant. That overlook was built to gain the residents' understanding for the nuclear power plant, and it had become a place where people see the first sunrise of the year. ... We walked to the overlook and got out our white flag, and painted in red the rising sun of the flag, which comes from the sunrise. And then we altered the flag ... in the image of the radiation symbol."



Hoisting the radiated Hinomaru flag with TEPCO Plant in the background, April, 2011

We came up with our name because we wanted something upbeat, that sounds like dotcom," – may turn out to be the perfect formula to push the boundaries of art and protest for a newly alerted, infuriated and energized public whose recent demonstrations in Tokyo have been the largest in mainland Japan since the 1960s.

I first heard about Chim Pom from Aida Makoto, when I asked him to recommend young artists for my film *ANPO: Art X War* <http://www.newday.com/films/anpoartxwar.html>, about Japanese artistic resistance to the ongoing U.S. military presence there. Aida is the prodigiously talented, slyly provocative artist best known internationally for his neo-classical painting "Map of an Air Raid of New York," (1996) and "The Video from a Man calling himself bin Laden Staying in Japan," featuring the turbaned artist extolling the virtues of hiding out in Japan drinking sake. When I interviewed Aida - who teaches at prominent art schools – he told me, "The Chim↑Pom members weren't in any of my classes. Usually, when I assigned my students art projects with political themes, they were just confused, but Chim↑Pom's leader, Ushiro Ryuta, approached me about making that kind of art. I didn't teach him anything. He comes from an unusual background, because his father was a ranking official in the former Japanese Communist Party. Apparently he was a prodigal son who squandered his youth partying, but you can see him grappling with those contradictions in his work today."

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Three years after their maligned debut, their outspoken politics –"Which side are you on? Do you take risks?"– fused with their disarming naiveté – "We were originally inspired by the MTV show "Jackass." But the world had changed, and so had Chim↑Pom.

Interview with Chim↑Pom member Ushiro Ryuta [here](#).



Chim↑Pom Red Card at TEPCO's Fukushima Nuclear Plant

Interview with Atomic Artists producer Emily Taguchi [here](#).

Producer/Director Linda Hoaglund was born and raised in Japan. Her previous film, *Wings of Defeat*, told the story of Kamikaze pilots who survived WWII. She directed and produced *ANPO*, a film about Japanese resistance to U.S. bases seen through the eyes and works of celebrated Japanese artists. She worked as a bilingual news producer for Japanese TV. She has subtitled Japanese films, represents Japanese directors and artists, and serves as an international liaison for film producers. An Asia-Pacific Journal Associate, she can be contacted [here](#).

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