

“Y-AIR: Akita Initiative”

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I participated in Art Camp at the University of West Bohemia in 2016. It was right when I finished working at an art institution on a remote island off the mainland of Shikoku, and opened my own gallery, which would become my base. I was thinking of what it means to be a “creative” in terms that go beyond “artist,” and conceptualizing a space that would interact with things that are an extension of living, that “could be called art.” It was then that a faculty member of Akita University of Art introduced me to the international Art Camp, a program which differs from artist residencies and large-scale events such as art festivals. I decided to participate in order to gain more insight on the operations of the program.

The characteristics of the program and observations made through participation and interviews are detailed in the report. Here, I would like to emphasize that a variety of courses were provided for different interests and skillsets, allowing for a diverse range of participants, from students to high schoolers interested in applying to university, as well as community members interested in learning. I assumed that it was more of a summer school for current students, so this was a pleasant and refreshing surprise. Executive Director Lenka Kodýtková advised me that if I were to organize a similar program in Japan, two important things to keep in mind would be to ascertain the scale and level (of participants).

In the report, I state that universities, especially one like ours that is favorably located, can realistically create a similar program in cooperation with private institutions. Needless to say, it would still require a lot of time and effort to structure such a program, as well as promote it among the community and to prospective students.

With long-term perspectives to guide us, we are experimenting with current possibilities. For example, elements from Art Camp were implemented according to scale and levels in highly compatible joint projects, such as supporting emerging artists in collaboration with the Akita University of Art, and residency-structured workshops for children in collaboration with a private foundation. In regards to the former, we are seeing signs that it will grow into something like a combination of Art Camp and Y-AIR, where young artists with differing backgrounds and interests come together. We continue our respective initiatives in hopes of realizing a multilayered program of small beginnings which will grow into a confluence of several channels.

