





**YASUAKI ONISHI**

13 April - 27 July 2012

reverse of volume RG

**YASUAKI ONISHI**

**Rice Gallery**





## foreword

We are happy to hear from a colleague about an artist who seems to be a perfect fit for Rice Gallery's educational and aesthetic mission; we are thrilled when not only are those criteria met, but also when the timing is perfect. Such was the case when Joshua Fischer, Assistant Curator, was researching contemporary Asian art in the hopes of commissioning an artist to create an installation coinciding with the April 2012 opening celebration for Asia Society Texas Center's (ASTC) new building by Yoshio Taniguchi. Josh had compiled several notebooks of possibilities when we received an email from Phoebe Adams, a longtime member of our Artist Advisory Committee and an Associate Professor of Sculpture at Kutztown University (Pennsylvania). Phoebe told us about Yasuaki Onishi, a Japanese artist who had just completed a residency and exhibition at Kutztown's Marlin and Regina Miller Art Gallery. When Josh saw the spectacular images of Onishi's installation he immediately contacted the artist and invited him to Rice Gallery. Since Onishi spoke little English and Josh spoke even less Japanese, they relied on invaluable translation provided by Patsy Brown, former



ASTC staff member and now Executive Director of The Japan America Society of Houston. We thank both Phoebe and Patsy for their generosity and insight that was invaluable in bringing Yasuaki Onishi to Rice.

The encompassing, otherworldly presence of *reverse of volume RG* made it a perfect setting for *Casting the Invisible*, a concert in Rice Gallery's concert series, *New Art / New Music*. We are grateful to Shepherd School of Music student Juan Olivares (clarinet) for organizing the concert inspired by Onishi's installation and for performing with fellow Shepherd School students Andrew Griffin (viola), and Henry Williford (flute).

The unique form and beauty of *reverse of volume RG* brought a great deal of media attention. It was the first of Rice Gallery's installations to go viral via the Internet as a feature on numerous high-profile blogs and sites including Anthology, Gizmodo, The Huffington Post, and was a Vimeo Staff Pick. We commissioned a video about Onishi's process of making the installation by

Walley Films of San Antonio, Texas. We receive rave reviews for each of the Walley's videos; however, as of this writing their *reverse of volume RG* has been viewed an amazing 80,000 times.

In a comment book overflowing with positive responses, one person wrote, "I cannot tell you how much this impacted me. As an art student, this is the kind of work that drives and inspires me," while another said, "I am by no means an artist, but this installation just brings me peace and inspiration, a very calming effect." We could not agree more with these individuals or the person who simply wrote, "It is beautiful, astonishing, wonderful."

Thank you, Yasu.

Kimberly Davenport  
Director







# introduction

Yasuaki Onishi and his assistant, Tappei Akazawa, arrived at Rice Gallery from Osaka, Japan, with nearly everything they needed to create Onishi's ethereally beautiful installation, *reverse of volume RG*. Onishi's preferred materials – inexpensive, plastic painters' drop cloths and black hot glue sticks – are not precious, and they can be easily purchased and stuffed into luggage or cardboard boxes for shipping without the precautions of fine art handling. Yet under Onishi's eye and hand, these banal materials were transformed into a monumental, mountainous form that appeared to float in space.

This process of material and spatial transformation is one Onishi has been honing since 2009 when he first began his "reverse of volume" installation series. Because Onishi has refined his technique over the years, he knew exactly what he and his assistant needed at

Rice Gallery to create *reverse of volume RG* in three weeks.

To begin, Onishi measured the amount of plastic sheeting necessary and seamed two sheets together to fit the gallery space. He then installed rows of fishing line just below the ceiling across the width of the gallery. Using scaffolding, Onishi stacked cardboard boxes at different heights like zigzagged skyscrapers reaching up toward the ceiling. Draping the plastic sheeting over each "volume," or stack of boxes, Onishi used the boxes as vertical supports to give the installation its basic mountain-like form. Starting at the center of the gallery, just below its 16-foot high ceiling, he and his assistant methodically dripped hot glue onto the fishing line at regular intervals. Each drip would stick to the fishing line and then gravity would pull the wispy strand down toward the plastic sheeting below.





The excess black glue dripped all over the plastic's surface, utilizing the material's original function as a drop cloth while at the same time forming a rich pattern on the installation's surface of splatter marks and squiggly lines. Onishi thinks of this process as a kind of opposite architecture, "building" the installation from the ceiling down instead of from the floor up.

After these thousands and thousands of drops of glue were applied to affix and suspend the sheet from the fishing line, the cardboard boxes could be removed from below. This was the critical moment of "reversal," where Onishi's installation all of a sudden owed as much of its presence to its physical, material form as to the negative space or void left behind. The plastic sheeting became a hovering, shell-like cast of the now-absent boxes, with their angular, bulky shapes left as faint impressions in the form of a topographical surface. Onishi's final touch was to use fluorescent lights to illuminate the installation from below to create a cool light that made many visitors

mistake the commonplace material for elegant rice paper or a more rigid and durable material.

*reverse of volume RG* was perceived very differently outside and inside of the gallery. Seen through the gallery's front glass wall, primarily visible were the thick layers of vertical black lines and the installation's undulating exterior surface. At first glance, standing in the center of the gallery's foyer, it appeared to be a suspended, glowing mass whose exact depth was difficult to perceive.

Entering the gallery, *reverse of volume RG* transformed into an airy opening. Like stepping into an inner sanctum or cave-like chamber, the semi-translucent plastic sheeting enveloped the viewer in a fragile, tent-like enclosure speckled with inky black marks. Visitors could walk in and out of the contemplative space, observing how the simplest qualities of light, shape, and line changed. The installation's experiential and paradoxical qualities left a lasting impression. Standing under

its canopy felt unexpectedly serene. Sound was muffled and the space was enclosed, blocking the view through the gallery's front glass wall, yet the space inside felt spacious, comfortable, and was brightly lit. The material was light as a feather and incredibly fragile, but could also appear as rigid as a rock face. Many artists attempt to hide or conceal how an installation or sculpture might be suspended, but in Onishi's case, the black strands drew attention to what is normally "non-space" between the sculptural form and ceiling. These qualities created a holistic, integrated experience where clearly Onishi was as sensitive to the space he was working within as he was to his chosen materials.

Of course, nothing lasts forever (especially hot glue), and Onishi's temporary installation had to be dismantled, but this seemed fitting for an installation that alluded

to the natural world and the constantly changing phenomena of gravity, light, and perception. After de-installation, the gallery was completely empty except for a few black trash bags full of the plastic sheeting and glue. It was almost as if Onishi's interest in reversals and material transmutations continued to be followed, but in this instance the trash bags had simply converted Onishi's masterful installation back into something mundane, normal, and outside the realm of art.

Joshua Fischer  
Assistant Curator



























## about the artist

Yasuaki Onishi was born in 1979 in Japan, where he studied sculpture at the University of Tsukuba and Kyoto City University of Arts. Recent solo exhibitions include JOYCE Gallery, Beijing, China (2013), and *Inner Space*, Wilfrid Israel Museum of Asian Arts, Hazore'a, Israel (2012).

Onishi participated in the group exhibitions *Miniartextil*, Villa Olmos, Como, Italy (2012), and *Ways of Worldmaking*, National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan (2011). In 2012, Onishi was an Artist in Residence and created site-specific installations at Kutztown University's Marlin and Regina Miller Gallery, Pennsylvania, and Oficinas do Convento, Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal. Yasuaki Onishi lives and works in Osaka.







Yasuaki Onishi, *reverse of volume RG*  
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Rice University Art Gallery is located in Sewall Hall on the campus of Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005, and on the web at [ricegallery.org](http://ricegallery.org).

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