

# EIKO & KOMA'S 'TIME' TOURS NATIONALLY

**DANCE DUO'S RETROSPECTIVE BEGAN AT CENTER FOR THE ARTS BYCYNTHIA E. ROCKWELL**

For a retrospective exhibition, a sculptor might gather pieces of her work; a painter could fill a gallery of framed oils or acrylics.

But what if the medium is dance? How can a museum offer a retrospective on work that has no permanent record?

This was the question that Sam Miller '75, senior adviser to the Minneapolis-based Center for Creative Research (CCR), raised with movement artists and former MacArthur Fellows Eiko and Koma Otake P'07, P'10. Otake (one of the founding fellows of CCR), has been in residence at Wesleyan since 2006.

Their answer is the exhibition they named *Time is Not Even, Space is Not Empty*, or "The Retrospective Project," as they call it more informally. The artists are on tour with it until 2012, following an itinerary that includes the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, the Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Park Avenue Armory in New York City.

Director of the Center for the Arts Pamela Tatge '84 MALS '10 described its beginnings in a blog entry from November 2009: "Downstairs from my office, the Zilkha Gallery has become a laboratory for the Eiko & Koma Retrospective. The experiment? How do you create a visual installation about the artistic legacy of performing artists whose work is time-based and often site-specific?..."

"Working with a team of student assistants, many of whom have studied with Eiko at some point over the last four years, Eiko and Koma are creating mini-environments that allow audiences to contemplate their artistic values and inspiration. These are presented alongside video installations and a visual timeline of photographs that date back to when they first met in Japan. It's amazing

to see their faces and bodies when they were in their 20s just beginning to develop their movement vocabulary."

Eiko & Koma, who began working together in 1972, are the recipients of two lifetime achievement awards, the Scripps Award and the *Dance Magazine* Award. They are noted for creating a theater of dance: their exquisitely slow movements are performed within a set they handcraft to evoke an austere, primal landscape.

They have been performing at the Center for the Arts since 2002. In that year they presented *Offering*, their 9/11 work about mourning; in 2006, they brought *Cambodian Stories*, their masterwork performed alongside young people from the Reyum Art Center in Phnom Penh. In 2007, they performed *Quartet* and *Grain*, and in 2010 they performed a program, *Regeneration*, which included their new piece, *Raven* (2010), and a reworking of *White Dance* (1976).

Additionally, Eiko has co-created a multi-disciplinary course in East Asian Studies with History Professor Bill Johnston on the history of the atomic bomb, which they co-taught in '06 and '09. The theme of the atomic bomb is also featured in her own course, *Delicious Movements for Forgetting, Remembering,*

and *Uncovering*, which combines close readings of postwar Japanese artists on the human experience of the atomic bombs, as well as a movement-based exploration of responses. The sense of community support engendered by the physical nature of dance enabled the students to read texts that were highly upsetting, her students report. Eiko has also taught campus-wide movement workshops both to students and faculty, many of whom have invited her to guest-teach or participate in panels and projects.

Miller, an arts administrator, was recently appointed president of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and has served as executive director of the New England Foundation for the Arts. He first began working with Eiko & Koma in the 1990s when he was the president and executive director of Jacob's Pillow Dance, America's longest running international dance festival. "Eiko & Koma were working with a pool of water in their set and they wanted a place where they didn't have to drain it and then refill it for each rehearsal. We had just bought a farmhouse next door and invited them to stay," Miller says.

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Wesleyan alumni familiar with Trager's work may have first learned of Eiko & Koma through his photography. Now another Wesleyan graduate, Lydia Bell '07, is helping to introduce a younger generation to the duo. Not only was she Eiko's student and an intern with the Center for Creative Research at Wesleyan, Bell is now administrator for the Eiko & Koma Retrospective Project. She says that Trager's photographs are an example of the sort of cross-medium presentation of choreography explored in *Time is Not Even*.

"It's taking dance and giving it a physicality in a photograph," she explains.

Now with Eiko & Koma's retrospective work, which Miller is producing, the dancers are again teasing out the concept of choreography crossing boundaries and finding an existence in the material realm.

"Retrospective' was obviously a term that we pulled from the visual arts," Miller says. "When we do a retrospective from visual arts, we are choosing images, writing about them, and putting them in a catalogue, and we can do that because the objects do exist in the material world. We use these objects to evoke the past." He points out that the Eiko & Koma Retrospective gives a younger audience a sense of the historical development of this pair, seeing the places where they have narrowed their focus and developed their movement "language" and repertoire.

Eiko Otake is quick to shift the focus from herself: "I joke to Sam, 'This is your retrospective.' Because he started thinking about art at Wesleyan with Professor John Paoletti, there are many Wesleyan elements in this retrospective. Sam is putting this in the context of a curatorial arts program, looking at the life of the artist rather than just the product. He is examining how developing an understanding of an artist's life inevitably involves a study of the society in which the artist works. This depth of understanding helps young audiences appreciate the work. So that's a pretty big vision.

"He's a wonderful thinker," she adds.

The curatorial arts program to which Otake is referring is Wesleyan's new Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance (see p. 7). Miller is the co-founder (with CFA's Tatge)

and program director for the institute, which will offer its first semester in the 2011–12 academic year. "Eiko and Koma were an integral part of a planning retreat this summer to design the curriculum," says Tatge, who is managing director in this further collaboration.

While Eiko & Koma's Retrospective will travel to different venues across the country, it also will evolve and develop. The duo is particularly excited by the shape of the different galleries and museums informing their work at each place.

In a video on the project (<http://vimeo.com/10654861>), Eiko and Koma reflect on the process of reviewing their decades of work. As they prepare the backdrop for *Raven*, the centerpiece of the Retrospective, they scorch a large white canvas with hand-held gas burners. In voiceovers, the two contemplate the meaning of fire to human civilization and then note that the marks they are leaving on the no-longer-pristine canvas give it a readable history of human actions.

"The idea of the Retrospective Project was, in certain ways, about looking back, and in certain ways, about deciding what it is we want to share, and how we want to share it—and then what it means to share," notes Eiko in the film. "We have videos, we have photos, we have sets, we have some motifs that we tend to come back to. So maybe what we bring into the retrospective are marks, and some reminiscences, and some memories of our marks." **UPFRONT**

For further information on Wesleyan's Institute for Curatorial Practice in Performance, please see: [wesleyan.edu/cfa/icpp/](http://wesleyan.edu/cfa/icpp/).

For further information on Eiko & Koma, please see: [www.eikoandkoma.org](http://www.eikoandkoma.org).

Eiko & Koma filled Zilkha Gallery with *Time is Not Even, Space is Not Empty*, a retrospective on their 40-year collaboration.

