

# AKI SASAMOTO

## XYZ

«Finding a pattern is about finding clarity, a way to align myself at the intersection of two realities: the world of experience and the world of ideas. It is as satisfying as seeing a shape emerge among the clouds. In that moment, the sky is both gas and drawing all at once.»

Aki Sasamoto

## AKI SASAMOTO

XYZ

curated by  
Roberta Tenconi with Tatiana Palenzona

Pirelli HangarBicocca

17.09.2026 – 17.01.2027

### Public Program and Performance Calendar

**16 September:** 8 PM *Delicate Cycle*

**17 September:** 11 AM *Sounding Lines /  
catch or be caught*

4 PM *Secrets of My Mother's Child*

7 PM *Centrifugal March*

**22 October:** 7 PM *Secrets of My Mother's Child*

8 PM Conversation between Aki Sasamoto  
and Massimo Bernardi, Director of MUSE –  
Museo delle Scienze di Trento

**23 October:** 6 PM *Centrifugal March*

**24 October:** 11 AM *Strange Attractors*

4 PM *Wrong Happy Hour*

7 PM *Delicate Cycle*

### Museum Mediation

Museum mediators are present in the exhibition spaces to answer questions from the public, provide information and contextual elements that can deepen the fruition of the artworks.

### Catalog

Published in fall 2026, the volume dedicated to the exhibition is available at the Pirelli HangarBicocca bookshop and online.

Discover more on our website.



Aki Sasamoto in the documentary  
"New York Close Up," 2019 (film still)  
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### The Artist

Aki Sasamoto's (b. 1980, Kanagawa, Japan; lives and works in New York and Connecticut) practice encompasses performance, sculpture, video, and installation, bringing together observations from everyday life with references ranging from mathematics and physics to sociology and psychology. Across her works, objects, sounds, and movements create complex environments that can be activated by the artist's own presence and performative interventions. Behind the systems and relational dynamics she constructs through materials and gestures, Sasamoto humorously and eccentrically depicts the emotional tensions and vulnerabilities that shape relationships with family, friends, and lovers, ordinary gestures underlying conflictual situations often absurd and unpredictable. Language plays an equally central role, with long, improvised monologues weaving together autobiographical anecdotes and personal reflections. «There are two ways of being for me. One is *this world* (the everyday, banal relationships, and talking). The other is *thaat world* (productions, improvisation, and introspective thinking). There is also a void that occupies the lapse between *this* and *thaat*.» Sequences



*cooking show*, 2005, performance,  
The Chocolate Factory Theater,  
New York, 2005  
Photo TJ Hellmuth

constructed with almost choreographic precision coexist with moments of improvisation in a balancing act. Each installation brings together works that function as both stage props and obstacles or challenges for the body. Every element is conceived as a means for exploring human nature. This investigation embraces a wide range of interests, from the sciences and humanities to the artist's passions for boxing, fishing, stand-up comedy, and theater.

Sasamoto's artistic career began in the early 2000s, when she moved to the United States to study mathematics at Wesleyan University in Connecticut. The university environment, however, gradually shifted her interests toward theater and visual experimentation. Thanks to figures such as the choreographer Pedro Alejandro and the artist Jeffrey Schiff, Sasamoto was introduced to interdisciplinary practices in which visual arts, music, theater, and dance intertwined. She consequently switched to the Department of Dance and Studio Art. After graduating in 2004, she moved to New York and enrolled in

the MFA program in Visual Arts at Columbia University the following year, where she studied with artists Jon Kessler and Rirkrit Tiravanija—respectively known for the kinetic sculpture and for the interest in the relational dimension and activation of space through audience participation—both of whom played a decisive role in shaping her artistic vision. In this period, Sasamoto came into contact with figures from New York experimental dance scene, in particular the Swiss choreographer Yvonne Meier, with whom she would later collaborate. She also regularly attended a number of independent spaces for performance and theatrical experimentation, such as the Judson Memorial Church and The Chocolate Factory Theater. It was within this context that she conceived *cooking show* (2005), one of her earliest works, which was presented as part of a wider project by the lower lights collective, a group of artists and performers of which Sasamoto was a member. Inspired by television cooking shows format, the artist reimagines their familiar narrative structure through performance.

Handling props such as an absurdly oversized knife or a fork, she converts ordinary gestures into dysfunctional acts, creating a tension between control and failure, irony and vulnerability, which would become a hallmark of her artistic vocabulary.

Initially, Sasamoto worked within a performative context linked to theater and choreographic language, creating interventions designed for specific occasions—often intended for a single presentation—in front of an audience. In these early productions, the artist's body played a key role, as she explored the limits of physical action and the dynamics that govern the relationship between gesture, space, and presence through exercises in endurance, coordination, and impromptu actions. In *Everything Chidambaram – Praying Project* (2005), for example, she relentlessly washes a soap sculpture by the artist Jeffrey Schiff while speaking endlessly, drifting from one topic to another. In works of this kind, repetitive, almost mechanical gestures create a space for unexpected associations, in which the action is progressively refashioned through unplanned narratives, error, and chance.

These performances gradually evolved as objects acquired increasing autonomy, while the life of the work expanded beyond the artist's physical presence. An example is *remembering/modifying/developing* (2007), presented as a thesis project at Columbia University and the following year at the Yokohama Triennale in Japan. The installation shifts over time, accumulating traces of itself: through CCTV cameras and sound devices, she records ambient sounds, images, and voices in real time and then reintegrates them into the work itself. In Sasamoto's intention, «I build video cameras into the installations to suggest the points of view of the objects within them. I'm interested in how we empathize with things. I like imagining how a cup on a table, for example, views me.»

Sasamoto frequently draws on mathematical concepts, systems theory, and physics, although she does not treat them as scientific models to be explained or proved. Instead, she uses them as means for observing behaviors, emotional tensions, and relational dynamics, translating formulas, classifications, and conceptual frameworks into concrete situations that are open to contingency, improvisation, and lived experience. This approach clearly emerges in the

installation *Strange Attractors* (2010), presented at the 2010 Whitney Biennial, in which mathematical models are transferred from the theoretical realm to the social and emotional spheres to describe mechanisms of attraction and dependence between individuals. Another example that involves diagrams is the video *Do Not Diagram* (2018), in which an ordinary donut serves as an opportunity for the artist to reflect on the mechanisms used to interpret reality. The diagram's ordering function—devised to clarify and establish connections—is transformed into a fragile system, vulnerable to error and ultimately destined to fail.

Over the years, Sasamoto has increasingly focused on installations that engage visitors, inviting them to participate in the processes that activate the work. In pieces such as *Coffee / Tea* (2015), created for the Frieze Art Fair in New York, viewers had to make a series of decisions as in a personality test that lead them down a maze-like path, turning the experience into an exercise in self-analysis that is at once playful and disarmingly sincere. Meanwhile, in her most recent presentations, the artist loses her centrality to make way for the relationship between objects and physical forces. Mechanical processes, automatically activated features or air circulation systems, gradually assume functions once played by the artist herself. Her experimentation thus resonates with the tradition of kinetic art, drawing in particular on Alexander Calder (1898–1976), whose mobiles are animated by the flow of air. In this sense, a significant work is *Sink or Float* (2022), presented at the 59th Venice Biennale. Conceived as an autonomous mechanism, the installation allows the object to move and come to life independently of the artist's presence—«almost like dancers»—, shifting the focus from individual gestures to the overall dynamics of the system.

## The Exhibition

The exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca is the first retrospective in Europe dedicated to the work of Aki Sasamoto. Conceived as a series of installations, sculptures, and performances, it presents an array of pieces spanning over two decades of the artist's career, exploring her interest in relational systems and the ways in which bodies, objects, memories, and behaviors are continually shaped by tensions, interferences, and forms of mutual connection.

The title “XYZ” introduces a layered conception of the artistic practice. In mathematics, X, Y, and Z are the coordinates that define the three dimensions of the Cartesian system—extending horizontally, vertically, and in depth—whilst in quantum physics they become variables used to describe the probability that a particle will occupy a specific point in space, questioning the idea of a stable, measurable reality. At the same time, X, Y, and Z are the last three letters of the alphabet and XYZ often appears at the end of lists or open formulas, suggesting something that could develop indefinitely. The artist also draws on the humorous tone of the American colloquial expression “XYZ”—Examine Your Zipper—a further shift in meaning that allows for multiple and ambiguous interpretations.

This reflection on space and perception is inspired by the novel *Flatland* (1884), one of the books most frequently cited by Sasamoto. Written by the English author Edwin A. Abbott (1838–1926), it tells the story of a two-dimensional world inhabited by flat geometric figures unable to conceive the existence of a third dimension. However, the protagonist, a Square, comes to experience three-dimensional space thanks to an encounter with a Sphere, thereby realizing that perception is always bound by the frame of reference within which we move. This event raises the possibility of imagining further levels of reality in which the conditions of existence themselves change as the coordinates vary. The same tension between system and imagination can be seen in the way Sasamoto engages with the exhibition space: «I love *Flatland* but I love the voluminous land even more. Chiseling into the boulder and speculating the direction of the forces that made the chunks and the pockets inside it, is an ultimate mystery novel.



*Do Nut Diagram*, 2018 (video still)  
Single-channel video, color, sound, 20'

What elements went into this story? The bigger atmosphere and geographic events can have a huge influence.»

At Pirelli HangarBicocca, Sasamoto creates a system in which autonomous works coexist in a single open space, prompting a dialogue that reveals how specific formal choices, themes, and reflections recur over the years. Real-time streaming, moving objects, air currents, or elements such as melting ice ensure the exhibition is a constantly shifting environment, cyclically re-configured by a schedule of performances in which the artist brings the works to life.



*Sounding Lines*, 2024, performance and installation view, "Sounding Lines," Para Site, Hong Kong, 2024  
Courtesy the artist, Para Site, Hong Kong,  
and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo. Photo Felix S.C. Wong

## 1. *Sounding Lines*, 2024

The exhibition opens with *Sounding Lines*, an installation composed of eight metal springs suspended in space that trace horizontal lines as they intersect, like the long threads of a spider's web. Small motorized arms strike the springs at irregular intervals, setting them in motion and producing vibrations and ripples along their entire length. The title refers both to the traditional method of measuring sea deepness by means of ropes lowered to the seabed, and to modern technologies that use sound waves. *Sounding Lines* encompasses some of the central themes of Sasamoto's production: the possibility (or impossibility) of accurately measuring the psychological distance and depth of interpersonal relationships, as well as the invisible force fields that shape them.

The springs are interspersed with wooden sculptures that echo, on a much larger scale, the shape of fishing lures, painted in vivid, iridescent shades that recall the colors of fish. Kitchen utensils such as knives, whisks, and strainers are inserted in or suspended beneath them. The lure—an object that simultaneously attracts and poses a danger—evokes the possibility of being caught. Inserted in this web of threads, tensions, and vibrations, for Sasamoto it becomes a way of representing interpersonal bonds, constantly suspended between closeness and distance. As the artist notes, «I have to measure my distance to each character in my life,» referring to a personal defense mechanism and comparing the shifting dynamics of relationships to the varying amplitudes of the waves propagated along the springs.

## 2. *catch or be caught*, 2025/2026

The installation is made up of two kinetic sculptures inspired by the shape of crab traps, which move along a vertical axis. The title is a reflection on two opposite existential conditions: to exercise control or to expose oneself to vulnerability. The metal structures, driven by a motorized system, move slowly up and down in an alternating sequence, opening once they touch the floor and closing when they lift again. By means of this continuous rhythm of tension and release, the work shows the alternation between a state of perpetual instability and an almost Hamletic sense of doubt: "to catch" or "to be caught"?

### 3. *cooking show*, 2005

The exhibition includes video footage of *cooking show*, one of Aki Sasamoto's earliest performances. It was presented at The Chocolate Factory Theater in Long Island, New York, in 2005 as part of *Drawn*, a program of collective presentations staged by the lower lights collective—of which the artist was a member from 2004 to 2007. The work belongs to a formative stage of her career, which was still deeply rooted in a theatrical performance context. Inspired by cooking programs on TV and their behind-the-scenes production processes, in which actions are fragmented, repeated, and recorded separately before being reassembled in the final cut, she transfers this working method into live performance, while challenging its underlying assumptions. Shifting between absurdity, humor, and improvisation, Sasamoto transforms the kitchen into an unstable stage. Time expands, utensils become inadequate, actions lose their efficiency and effectiveness, and any attempt at control is gradually abandoned. As the artist recalls, «In a theatrical time, I attempted to put these chopped up narrative back together in real time.»

Conceived as a theatrical performance, presented before a live audience alongside simultaneous interventions by other artists from the collective, *cooking show* foreshadows many of the distinctive themes of Sasamoto's art: from the use of food as a narrative and metaphorical element, to the key role of improvisation, through the transformation of everyday objects.

### 4. *Baking sheet is never flat #1-11*, 2026

The work is composed of a series of industrial-style metal trays fixed to the wall: a long black elastic band hangs from each one, held taut by a potato suspended at its end. It continues a theme that had already emerged in Sasamoto's early production, in which everyday objects—often kitchen utensils—are manipulated and reconfigured into surreal sculptures that recall Dadaist assemblages. Potatoes also feature in the artist's earlier production, including *remembering/modifying/developing* (2007), where they are suspended from elastic bands, forming part of a constantly changing performative installation.

Created for the “Grilled Diagrams” solo exhibition presented at Studio Voltaire in London in early 2026, the sculptural series can be activated by the artist. By stretching the elastic bands across the space, Sasamoto throws the potatoes against the trays, causing dents in the baking sheets.

### 5. *Wrong Happy Hour*, 2014/2026

### 6. *Movie: Wrong Happy Hour*, 2015

*Wrong Happy Hour* recreates the atmosphere of a bar during happy hour. The installation takes the form of an enclosed space that, in the exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca, can only be viewed from the rear, through the wooden panels that block access to the actual scene, as if it were the backstage area of a film set. Its front and interior can be seen through a window on the outside of the building and are accessible during the artist's performance.

What unfolds inside the installation is revealed through the video *Movie: Wrong Happy Hour*, projected in the area next to the structure, which brings back Sasamoto's voice and image. As in all her performances, the monologue does not follow a written script, but develops a theme through improvisations combining personal reflections, observations, and non-linear narrative threads. In the work, the bar is a place associated not just with socializing, but primarily with the search for our own individuality—where we can reflect on romantic relationships and the expectations that run through them. The term “romance,” which also emerges in the diagrams drawn by the artist and in the flow of her monologue, recalls an uncertain field. «How can I understand romance? I don't really know what the opposite sex or any person other than myself thinks.»

The installation also features a mechanical element that can change the perception of the space. During the performance, when the audience is invited to enter and linger in the bar for a beer, Sasamoto gradually pushes the back wall, reducing the size of the space until those present are pushed outwards, in a process that is both physical and symbolic of compression and exclusion.

## 7. *Delicate Cycle*, 2016

Originally created for the SculptureCenter in New York in 2016, the installation and performance bring together a series of sculptural works that evoke the atmosphere of a laundromat. At the heart of the piece lies the idea of the cycle as a constant process of sedimentation and reactivation of memory, through which actions, gestures, and materials retain traces of the past despite changing over time. *Washer* is composed of industrial washing machines and tumble dryers arranged to form a wall; *Hex-Washroom* and *D-Washroom*, on the other hand, are two tilting wooden structures reminiscent of a bathroom or a home laundry room: open on two sides and suspended by a pulley system, they can be tilted and rotated by the artist like a rudimentary lift. The installation also includes a large ball made up of tangled sheets that can be pushed by the artist, evoking the image of a dung beetle—an insect that collects and compacts organic matter into balls that serve as both food and a nest. Inspired by her reading of *Souvenirs entomologiques* (1879–1907), a series of studies and observations on insects by the French naturalist Jean-Henri Fabre (1823–1915)—a cult figure in Japan since the book was translated in the 1920s—, Sasamoto mentions the creature in the title of the installation itself. Indeed, *Delicate Cycle* refers both to the wash cycle for delicate items and to the beetle's cyclical, patient, repetitive movements.

Camouflaged among the architecture and structure of the ceiling, *Sparrow on Sprinkler Pipe 1* and *2* feature two stuffed birds perched on pipes and connected to a small CCTV camera. Nearby, two monitors display images from the birds' off-center perspective of the surrounding area, thereby making them both observers and sentinels.

The video *Birds, Dung Beetles, the Washer* is shown on another screen. It combines images and sounds of running washing machines with others of parakeets perched on pipes and those of the ball of sheets being pushed by the artist. Sasamoto's voice, reading an extract from Fabre, overlays the visual sequences, turning an observation on insect behavior into a subjective reflection on work, care, and the distribution of roles in society, as is evident in the passage: «In the insect world we meet with a great many model mothers. It is only fair for once to draw attention to a good father. Now a good father is rarely seen, except among the higher animals. The bird is excellent in this respect.»



*Delicate Cycle*, 2016, performance and installation view, "Aki Sasamoto: *Delicate Cycle*," SculptureCenter, New York, 2016  
Courtesy the artist, SculptureCenter, New York, and  
Take Ninagawa, Tokyo. Photo Kyle Knodell

The installation is a constantly changing structure in which the artist intervenes over time by adding, modifying or separating elements, such as the drawings and diagrams made on the walls of *Hex-Washroom*.

8. *Past in a future tense*, 2019/2026

9a. *Weather Bar Forecast #1*, 2021

9b. *Weather Bar Forecast #2*, 2021

The title *Past in a future tense* describes a verb tense that does not exist: a past conjugated in the future—a grammatical paradox. This idea is embodied in the work through the perpetual motion of four whiskey glasses that continuously rotate, at different speeds, inside large transparent bowls made of blown Murano glass. Originally presented at the Bortolami Gallery in New York in 2019, and in an expanded version at the Okayama Art Summit in Japan in 2022, it evokes both the intimacy of a bar and the precision of a science laboratory. The bowls rest on a counter and three bar tables and are brought to life by the silvery ducts that run through the space. These channel air into glass bottles—also made of Murano glass specifically for this new presentation—from which it is released into the bowls, setting the glasses to rotate in a precise, controlled manner. The installation serves as a calibrated yet precarious mechanism, in which each component reacts to atmospheric changes via a system that appears to be controlled but is constantly exposed to the possibility of error and failure. The setting of the bar—traditionally associated with chance encounters and fortuitous relationships—and the choice of glass—a fragile material that is difficult to manage—become the means through which Sasamoto reflects on the tension between control and unpredictability, and between human intention and the autonomous behavior of objects.

In 2021, the artist expanded on this reflection with *Weather Bar Forecast #1* and *Weather Bar Forecast #2*, two videos suspended above the bar, like the screens that show football matches in pubs, in which Sasamoto appears in the guise of a weather presenter. By adopting the impersonal, visual language of television weather reports, the work contrasts the neutral tone of scientific communication with the alarming emotional dimension of the climate crisis. Here too, there are glasses, liquids, and visual demonstrations, which are directly echoed in the continuous movements of the installation.

10. *Over / Under*, 2015

*Over / Under* is comprised of two rolls of toilet paper facing opposite directions on their respective holders. The work takes the form of a query—which of the two is the right way?—addressed to visitors as if it were the key question in a personality test. Taking this minor domestic detail as a starting point, the artist reflects on the unconscious mechanisms that drive our preferences and habits. If you place the roll with the loose end of the paper facing outwards, you are part of the statistical majority of the population—a “normal” person; if you turn it towards the wall, you belong to the minority. The question itself is very straightforward, but the logic it sets in motion—the assumption that an apparently insignificant preference can be used to discover the identity of the person expressing it—is precisely what underlies profiling questionnaires, social media quizzes, and every contemporary tool that translate habits into categories.

The work was originally conceived as one of the many decision-making junctures in *Coffee / Tea* (2015), the installation that was commissioned to Sasamoto for the Frieze art fair in New York in 2015: a labyrinthine structure in which visitors were required to make a choice—coffee or tea, above or below, one direction or the other—at every fork in the path. The route they would take physically depended on that choice. Through a series of questions and choices, the installation transformed the visitor's journey into a personality test that ended with a final classification presented in the form of enigmatic verdicts.



*Point Reflection* (Video), 2023 (video still)  
Soundtrack by Matt Bauder  
Courtesy the artist, Bortolami, New York,  
and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo

## 11. *Point Reflection* (Video), 2023

In the video, snail shells, bottle tops, CDs, and small everyday objects are filmed from below in a single long take, as they drift, spin, and collide, moved by air current, on a transparent sheet of perforated Plexiglas. Sasamoto turns these movements into a sort of cosmic landscape crossed by unpredictable trajectories, where objects seem to behave like bodies suspended between attraction and collision.

Created for the solo exhibition of the same title held at the Queens Museum in New York in 2023, the video further develops the artist's reflections on orientation, equilibrium, and randomness already explored in *Sink or Float* (2022), the installation presented at the 59th Venice Biennale. The video camera, positioned beneath the sheet of Plexiglas set in one of the modified sinks that form part of the sculptural work, offers an inverted perspective: the upper surface of the sheet effectively becomes a space that can be observed from below, like an artificial sky traversed by constant turbulence.

In the video, several snail shells, decorated with small colored feathers, react to the air currents by spinning faster and in the opposite direction to the others. The artist describes them as “queer”: eccentric bodies that depart from the dominant trajectory, prompting reflection on difference, misalignment, and the possibility of moving in another direction. Sasamoto has been studying snail shells for years, ever since—around 2016—she learned about a rare specimen with a left-spiraling shell, i.e. one that spirals anti-clockwise instead of clockwise, as is the case in most snails. This peculiarity became the starting point for an examination of the concepts of symmetry and inversion, which in *Point Reflection* and *Sink or Float* appear as a system in which equilibrium is never fixed, but is constantly being redefined. For example, the artist's hands or face occasionally enter the frame throughout the video to reposition or move objects in order to prevent collisions and change the course of events.

## 12. *Strange Attractors*, 2010

In this work, Sasamoto explores chaos theory and particularly “strange attractors”—mathematical models that describe dynamical systems whose elements, whilst following unpredictable trajectories, tend to converge in recurring patterns. For the artist, these models provide a framework through which to observe forms of mutual attraction, particularly in emotional relationships.

Conceived for the 2010 Whitney Biennial, it takes the form of a single room composed of found objects or pieces created by Sasamoto. Coffee tables, glasses trapped in little hanging nets, and donut cushions are juxtaposed with cardboard tubes, metal rods, and diagrams drawn on the walls, like traces of movements or trajectories that are impossible to reconstruct in their entirety. Microphones, video cameras, and transmitting devices broadcast in real time the sounds and movements of visitors captured within the space, revealing an interdependent system in a state of constant flux. During the performances, which Sasamoto stages throughout the exhibition, the system reorganizes itself, adding new diagrams and marks to the walls in the artist's presence.

*Strange Attractors* refers primarily to what is known as the “Lorenz attractor,” a mathematical model in which a trajectory revolves



*Strange Attractors*, 2010, performance and installation view, "Aki Sasamoto's Life Laboratory," Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT), 2025  
Photo Yurika Kono

around two poles, moving irregularly from one to the other. Sasamoto links this abstract form back to the everyday, tangible image of two intertwined donuts. Their circular shape can also be found in the orthopedic cushions and the diagrams drawn on the walls. The Lorenz attractor also raises a topological question concerning spatial notions: «how to get inside a donut and eat it from the inside out without breaking it?» It is a question that suggests the possibility of traversing, manipulating or overturning a structure without destroying it. During the activation of the work, Sasamoto also introduces an association between four human archetypes—"Norm," the ordinary/average person; "Tink," the enchantress; "Odds," the odd one out; and "Prof. Kaufner," an academic researcher—with trajectories of the Lorenz attractor, transforming the mathematical model into an ironic reflection on the dynamics of attraction, desire, and exclusion.

### 13. *Secrets of My Mother's Child*, 2009/2026

Presented in 2009 at The Chocolate Factory Theater as a theatrical performance and later at The Kitchen in New York as an installation, *Secrets of My Mother's Child* derives from the artist's personal reflections on closeness and misunderstanding. Drawing on her bond with her mother, Sasamoto creates a room comprising furniture, everyday objects, and salvaged materials, all adapted to the dimensions of her own body, hinting at a domestic space marked by emotional tensions and communication difficulties. At the basis of the installation is a secret—something that, by its very nature, resists being shared—made explicit by reference to the equation " $X \times Y = 1$ ," an equilateral hyperbola whose two lines approach the Cartesian axes,  $X$  and  $Y$ , indefinitely without ever meeting. For the artist, this mathematical model becomes a way of reflecting on the difficulty of achieving mutual understanding and the possibility of becoming closer to another person without ever fully knowing each other. This idea takes sculptural form as a suspended metal structure with two "trajectories" that evoke a converging motion that nonetheless denies the possibility of an encounter. Another mathematical reference can be found in a sculpture, titled  $X \times Y = 1$ , composed of a stool placed at the center of the installation, whose legs have been cut away and appear to bend in space like malleable elements, while



*Secrets of My Mother's Child*, 2009, performance, "Domestic Partners," The Chocolate Factory Theater, New York, 2009  
Photo Ryutaro Mishima

other objects play a performative role when Sasamoto activates the installation. *Airport Bathroom* is a structure that the artist steps onto, wearing wooden sandals—inspired by traditional Japanese *geta*—made to fit sharp kitchen knives in the soles. In *Pickling Pot*, on the other hand, Sasamoto squeezes her body into a barrel, drastically restricting her movements, whilst in *Drawer Eats Memory*, she transforms a chest of drawers into a physical and mental repository of memories, with drawers cut to allow her to climb inside. «I create installations that are redolent of the human body. I don't think about filmic evidence, but rather how the body comes into contact with and relates to the world, much as Le Corbusier did with his chair designs.» The installation is accompanied by a video in which Sasamoto filmed her mother performing calculations using an abacus.

#### 14. *Centrifugal March*, 2012

In 2012, Sasamoto conducted a research trip about the approach to death in New Delhi and was struck by the widespread use of ice beds to temporarily preserve dead bodies, a practice shared by various religious communities. Drawing on this tradition, *Centrifugal March* takes the form of an installation and custom performance that explores the blurred boundary between physical and spiritual existence, while also examining the way in which memory redefines a presence and a recollection. The title refers to Sasamoto's view of the connection between human beings and objects. According to the artist, a centripetal force draws objects closer to people until they come to resemble those who have owned them, while a centrifugal force performs the opposite action, pulling bodies away from life and gradually reducing them to mere matter.

The installation brings together found objects, modified elements, and ephemeral gestures. It features half-spheres of ice containing small objects suspended by a system of knotted shoelaces above metal containers. As the ice slowly melts throughout the day, drops of water fall onto handmade microphones positioned in the bowls on the floor, producing amplified sounds that are streamed in real time: the dripping creates a continuous soundtrack, accompanied by the transformation of matter.

Sasamoto uses *Centrifugal March* to explore the way in which bodies and objects traverse time after death. Certain material objects take on sentimental value because they become repositories of the memory of a deceased person, almost to the point of replacing their presence; at the same time, human beings too can be reduced to traces, residues or presences entrusted to the memory of those left behind. The slow melting of the hemispheres thus becomes a fragile measure of time and emotional endurance. During the performances, Sasamoto takes this process a step further, using the other elements featured in the installation, including an ice scraper and a large block of ice resembling a mattress.

## Selected Exhibitions

Aki Sasamoto has presented solo exhibitions and projects at numerous international institutions, including Studio Voltaire, London (2026); Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT) (2025); Para Site, Hong Kong (2024); Queens Museum, New York (2023); American Academy of Arts and Letters, New York (2023); Danspace Project, New York (2020); The Kitchen, New York (2017); SculptureCenter, New York (2016); Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, New York (2012).

Sasamoto has also participated in numerous international group exhibitions at institutions such as National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Seoul (2024); San Jose Museum of Art (2024); Verge Center for the Arts, Sacramento, California (2024); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2023, 2013); Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv (2023); Museum of Contemporary Art Busan (2022); Kunsthal Rotterdam (2021); Hiroaki Museum of Contemporary Art, Aomori (2021); Power Station of Art, Shanghai (2016); High Line Art, New York (2014).

The artist's works and performances have been presented at numerous Biennials, including the 59th Venice Biennale (2022); Aichi Triennale (2022); Busan Biennale (2022); Okayama Art Summit (2022); Kochi-Miziris Biennale (2016); the Whitney Biennial (2010); Greater New York (2010); and the Yokohama Triennale (2008).

In 2021, the artist completed a residency award at Atelier Calder in Saché, France, and in 2023 she received the Calder Prize. Aki Sasamoto is Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Sculpture at Yale University's School of Art.

This publication accompanies the exhibition "XYZ" by Aki Sasamoto

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and Take Ninagawa, Tokyo

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## Pirelli HangarBicocca

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**Our mission is to make art  
open and accessible to everyone.**

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a non-profit foundation dedicated to producing and promoting contemporary art. It was conceived and is supported by Pirelli. Established in 2004, Pirelli HangarBicocca has become a benchmark institution for the international art community, local public and region. It is a museum that is free of charge, accessible and open, and a place for experimentation, research and dissemination, where art is a point of reflection on the most topical themes of contemporary culture and society. It caters to a broad and diverse public with a program of major solo exhibitions by both Italian and international artists, a multi-disciplinary program of accompanying events and in-depth discussions, theoretical and informational publications, and educational courses. A team of museum facilitators is on hand at all times to help the public connect with the art. Vicente Todolí has been the foundation's artistic director since 2012.

Situated in a former industrial building, once a locomotive manufacturing facility, Pirelli HangarBicocca occupies 15,000 square meters, making it one of the largest single-level exhibition spaces in Europe. This vast area comprises the Shed and Navate spaces, which are used for temporary exhibitions, and the permanent display of Anselm Kiefer's *The Seven Heavenly Palaces 2004-2015*. This monumental installation with seven reinforced concrete towers has become one of the most iconic works in Milan. The building also houses a number of services for the public: a spacious entrance with reception area, facilities for educational activities, space for conferences and meetings, Bookshop and bistro with a charming outdoor area.

Main Sponsor

**PIRELLI**

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## Upcoming Exhibition Program

**Shed**

**CARLOS BUNGA**

18.02 – 18.07.2027

**HICHAM BERRADA**

16.09.2027 – 16.01.2028

**Navate**

**LUCIANO FABRO**

08.10.2026 – 21.02.2027

**JANET CARDIFF**

**& GEORGE BURES MILLER**

08.04 – 25.07.2027

**CECILIA VICUÑA**

14.10.2027 – 20.02.2028

**Pirelli HangarBicocca**

Via Chiese, 2

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**Free admission**

#ArtToThePeople

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exhibition guides on  
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