

Atmosphères vivantes
SEASON LAO

Atmosphères vivantes: Season Lao

Curator: Romaric Jannel (Collège international de philosophie | Ritsumeikan University)

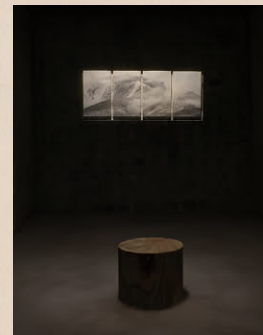
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It is a profound honor to present “Atmosphères vivantes,” a solo exhibition by Macau-born, Japan-based contemporary artist Season Lao in the historic Chapel of Nîmes University. This exhibition moves beyond traditional visual art displays, serving as a transdisciplinary experiment that situates contemporary practice within a broader scholarly context. By uniting two-dimensional works, site-specific installation-performances (*Kyoshitsu Shohaku*), and a research archive, the exhibition forges a dialogue about the “situations of life.” This project operates in synergy with the International Symposium “Traces and Atmospheres of Disasters,” where esteemed scholars from France, Japan, Italy, and Canada collectively explore how humanity might understand—through the “trace”—the unseen atmospheres that form and sustain our world.

When contemporary art engages with landscape, it invariably confronts the dialectic between materiality and perception. Just as Gerhard Richter utilized the aesthetic of “blurring” in his photo-paintings to destabilize the image’s veracity and approach the specters of history, Season Lao’s practice shifts the focus from the “production of objects” to a precise orchestration of situations (*jōkyō* 状況). This logic is evidenced in the archival section of the exhibition: from the driftwood recovered from the 2017 Northern Kyūshū floods—previously exhibited at the University of Tokyo and the Ishikawa Nishida Kitarō Museum of Philosophy (2025)—to the fallen timber from the Alpes-Maritimes region integrated into his work at the Asian Art Museum in Nice (2023). In the Latourian sense, these remains do not appear as inert elements, but rather as actants whose material specificities mediate relations among disaster, memory, place, and body. Lao’s interventions strip these material remains of their singular tragic weight, transforming them into a “living atmosphere” saturated with humidity, light, and collective memory. This represents a confluence of civilization and hope, as well as an ontological inquiry into the “signless” (*musō* 無相) aspect of important dimensions of human existence suspended between destruction and sustainability.

Furthermore, the exhibition is organically integrated into the long-term fieldwork of the anthropologist Mathieu Gaulène (Nîmes University), which focuses on trees that bear the marks of disasters, and was the subject of an exhibition in 2022 at Lagrasse Abbey, thereby articulating a distinct philosophical landscape. Through Augustin Berque’s concept of milieu (*fūdo* 風土), the exhibition argues that the environment is not a mere backdrop external to the human experience, but an intricate network of interconnectedness (*engi* 縁起) intertwined with human existence. Through studies of damaged life forms—ranging from the aftermath of Rikuzentakata (2012) to the lightning-struck larches of the “*Vallée des Enfers*” (2021)—the exhibition introduces philosopher Yamauchi Tokuryū’s logic of binegation (*ryōhi* 両非). This creative ground serves as a step toward overcoming the binary of “recovery” versus “ruin.” These wounded yet persistently growing entities recall a Heideggerian being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*), suggesting that the essence of life resides in a state of vulnerability exposed to perpetual uncertainty.

In the Chapel of Nîmes University—a space defined by both its history and an academic renewal—Season Lao’s practice compels the viewer to reconsider agency. Using an aesthetic of intentional void (*yohaku* 余白), the artist transforms the circulation of air, sound, and light into sensory media, rendering the viewer’s presence the final parameter that completes the work’s situational presence. “Atmosphères vivantes” serves as a revelation for the future. It posits that the atmosphere is not a mere aesthetic object but a shared, fundamental condition for survival and coexistence. In an era of globalized disasters, this collaboration between artistic research and academic inquiry invites us on a journey to explore the possibility of renewed reconciliation between humanity and the natural world amid the tremors of an uncertain age.



KYOSHITSU SHOHAU – An Empty Room Turns White For Enlightenment 虚室・生白
 Left: Season Lao: Natural Emptiness 자연 여백 Joong Jung Gallery (Seoul) | 2/8 – 27/9/2025
 Right: Season Lao : Une pièce vide vient blanche pour l'illumination | 13/5– 25/11/2023
 Musée des arts asiatiques (Asian Art Museum in Nice, France, architecture by Kenzō Tange)