

# Ako Goto

Born in Aichi, Japan, 1989.  
Lives and works in Shanghai, China.





Born in 1989, Aichi, Japan, Ako Goto is a sculptor whose practice delves into the interplay between fiction and reality, a theme that stems from her formative years growing up in a theatrical environment. Having graduated from Aichi Prefectural University of Arts and Music with a focus on sculpture, she integrates her personal experiences with her conceptual approach to create thought-provoking works that blur the boundaries between imagination and material existence.

Inspired by her mother's career as a stage actor, Goto's work is deeply rooted in the dualities of theatrical performance. Early memories of participating in stage design and questioning the line between staged narratives and real life have shaped her artistic exploration. Her primary medium, concrete, serves as both a tangible and metaphorical bridge between these dimensions. To Goto, sculptures act as "actors," bringing fictional worlds to life while maintaining their material grounding.

Through her practice, she challenges audiences to navigate the ambiguity of perception, asking: Is this fiction, or is this reality?

Her notable solo exhibitions include "Installation of Terracotta" (Lixil Gallery, Tokyo, 2012) and "Dear Gray" (Art Space & Cafe Barrack, Aichi, 2018). She has participated in prominent group exhibitions such as the Aichi Triennale and the Seto Contemporary Art Exhibition and received awards including the Kyokubi Prize (2008), the International Takihuji Art Award (2011), and Gunma Youth Biennale Prize (2019).

Through her work, Goto creates immersive, stage-like spaces that evoke both the physical weight of the materials she employs and the ephemeral nature of the stories they inspire. Her art serves as an invitation to reflect on the fragile boundaries of perception, offering audiences a profound exploration of the complexities of contemporary existence.





In the past, my mother played different people theater on the stage, and pictures I drew became part of the stage art. Whenever I said to my mother " Let's go home early " and she gave no reply. I asked myself: Is this "fiction"? Is this "reality"? The events that happened in this story are probably fictional, but the time passed is real, and my mother was certainly there.

Well, is this real? There are two worlds, "fiction" and "reality", which I can't grasp well. When I recognized the existence of sculpture, and I saw concrete sculptures for the first time, I felt a similar feeling to that. I think concrete sculptures and actors are similar. I have created many different sculptures, especially concrete sculptures, but (I think) I have created most of them as actors. Concrete sculptures always invite

us into a fictional world and inspire stories. But the material actually exists with the same strength and principles as we do. Here again: Is this "fiction"? Is this "reality"?

One solution is to the sculpture exist as a "real thing pretending to be real". I try to create (something like) a stage space with the story and scene setting inherent in the sculptures. Slightly before the story is born on the stage, materials, gravity and shape pull back to reality (Speaking of which, that kind of thing has increased in everyday life). I return to my question again: " Is there the world be caught exactly? " You cannot see accurately, even if something tends to "fiction" or "reality". It is always very difficult to catch its existence.

**Yoko Nose**

*Curator at Toyota Municipal Museum of Art*

The works of Ako Goto, using materials such as ceramics and clay, remain distinctly sculptural even as the boundaries of the field of sculpture become increasingly ambiguous. These creations possess a tangible mass and at times immense size, suggesting considerable labor in their formation. However, half of the work might be a reflection in a mirror, or a hollow revealed by carving out the reverse

of a human figure, offering a vivid and unexpected contrast between the real and the illusory, or between the solid and the void on the other side. In Goto's work, it is precisely because the tangible entity carries a definite and weighty presence that the void or absence manifests as a palpable deficiency. The shadow cast by this void, as a reversal of the substantial form, is intense and deep.



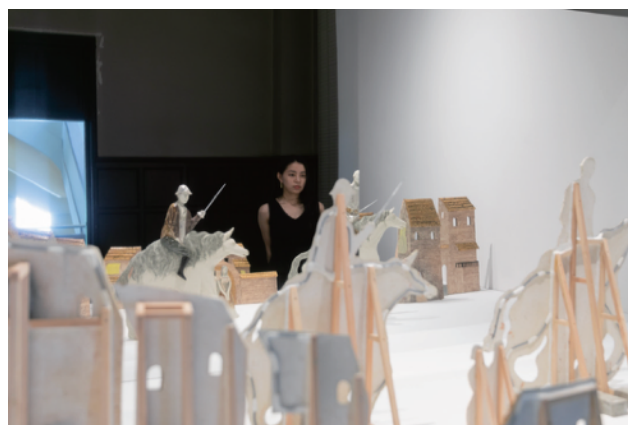
デジャブ/déjà vu, 2022

3331 Art Fair 2022. Arts Chivoda. Tokyo



**Masaki Nishida***Independent Curator*

Fiction and reality — a theme explored by many contemporary artists. Within this context, Goto offers a distinct answer. This oscillation between opposing sensations unfolds in front of the stage of ceramic figures that fill the room created by Ako Goto, who is completely turned away from the audience and facing the mirror in the back. People often have a desire to peek behind the scenes, but when it is so openly revealed like this, they instead find themselves perplexed. They desperately peer into the mirror, trying to grasp the narrative that should have been guaranteed and shared there, but the structures in front of them obstruct the reflection, confronting them with the fact that everything is an illusion. Realizing that the story they are earnestly pursuing resembles that of Don Quixote, a madman whose boundaries between fiction and reality have blurred, they feel a chill run through them. In the final exhibition room, the four half-busts of Goto, sitting around a table and conversing, also unreservedly reveal their hollowed-out backs. Whether they sprouted from a canvas mimicking a checkered tablecloth or were embedded there and unable to escape, they traverse between painting and sculpture, performing a semblance of “authenticity” while exposing their inner emptiness. Indifferent to this fact, they continue their conversation, reminiscent of the characters from Alberto Moravia’s novel *The Time of Indifference*. That calm yet definitive sense of nihilism pervades.



三度目の出発～ドン・キ・ホーテより～

*Third Departure ~From Don Quixote~*, 2020

Ceramic, wood, mirror

完璧な対話 (*Perfect Dialogue*). 2020

Ceramic, wood, aluminum

## Yukiko Tanaka

*Art critic/writer*

In this exhibition, Goto replaced “fiction” and “reality” with her works, offering a resolution. Standing at the entrance to Goto’s room, a jungle gym comes into view directly ahead, with a girl poised to start running in front of it. This is a park scene composed of life-sized figurative sculptures. Upon stepping into the venue, one soon notices that the girl’s body lacks depth. As you walk along the platform, a reverse T-shape about 10 cm high dividing the venue into left and right, another girl—previously almost invisible from the entrance due to the angle — gradually comes into view. It feels like watching a stage rotate to change scenes. The girls are suspended from the ceiling, and the flat clouds, much like the girls, are supported by thin rods and placed on the floor, reminiscent of stage backdrops. Descending from the platform into the artwork space, I found myself both a viewer

of the work and an object viewed by other visitors standing on the platform. As part of the artwork, I felt someone behind me, and when I turned around, it was one of the girls. Though the sculptures are life-sized yet flat, I experienced a moment of greater presence and reality than I might feel with an actual person, a sensation likely shared by others. Fiction and reality are not necessarily opposites; when the two intersect and intertwine, there are moments when they create a reality even stronger than the real. While painting is an illusion, sculpture, with its tangible presence, builds relationships through the body that lead to a stronger sense of being alive here and now. Through this exhibition, the embodied perception of the world presented will undoubtedly serve as a guide for many viewers in understanding the world that surrounds each of them.





**Tatehata Akira**

*Art critic/Director of the Saitama Prefectural Museum of Modern Art/Director of the Kyoto Art Center/Former president and emeritus professor of Tama Art University*

The installation features four life-sized, distorted, yet strangely realistic human figures crafted from pottery, arranged in a table setting, exuding a richly theatrical atmosphere. While there isn't a specific story to be discerned from the scene, there's an intriguing presence of a sense akin to despondency or defeat.



*Back and forth, 2014*

## Masaaki Irisawa

*Curator, Aichi Ceramic Art Museum curator, International Art Festival "Aichi 2025" curator*

Goto has incorporated theatrical elements into her figurative sculpture installations, experimenting with sculptural expressions where fiction and reality are two sides of the same coin, much like stage sets. In recent years, she has focused on the narrative qualities derived from figurative expressions, expanding her work to include collaborations with actors in performances and video projects, exploring expressions that traverse fiction ("there") and non-fiction ("here"). This exhibition focuses on themes arising from her life in Shanghai, where she is based, and her interactions with people in East Asia, a region often categorized alongside Japan. According to Goto, people living in East Asia often share similar physical features, making it difficult to deduce their country of origin based solely on appearance. However, through her interactions with locals, she discovered nuanced differences that coexist within

these shared contexts. For example, the direction of pottery wheel rotations varies by country and region; in Chinese, the terms for "outer curl" and "inner curl" carry opposing connotations; and the concept of "love" differs significantly across nations. These differences, while subtle and often overlooked, do not fit neatly into the broader frameworks of national or political distinctions. In this work, Goto captures these subtleties by creating sculptures modeled after real-life friends she met in Shanghai, each with roots in different parts of East Asia. These sculptures spin on rotating platforms, representing a world in constant motion. Through her unique lens, she portrays the almost indistinguishable "there" and "here" within this shared similarity, reflecting her ongoing exploration of the simultaneous coexistence of fiction and reality.







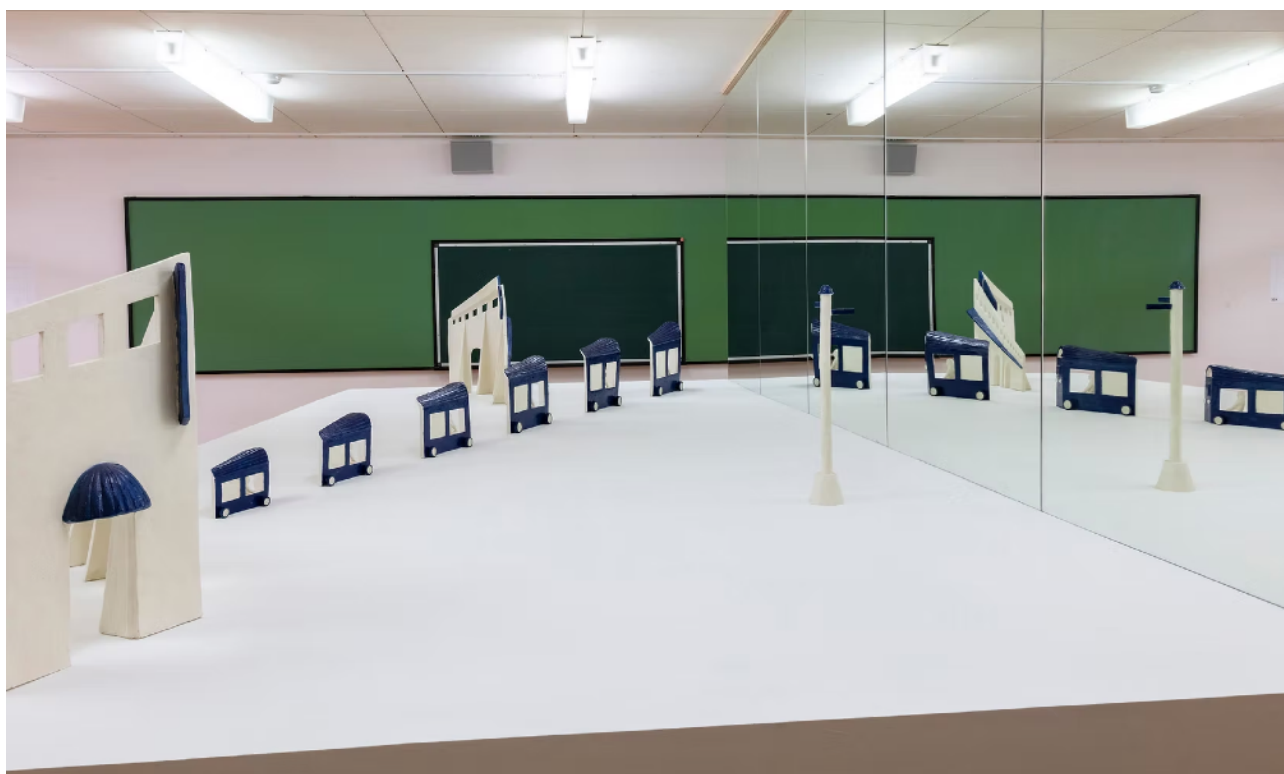
細い目 (*Small eyes*), 2024

Installation

Recycle clay, motor, mirror, woods







知らない方角. 2023  
Ceramic, wood, mirror



シャッターと揃いの服 (*Clothes matching and shutter*). 2022

Ceramic, wood, mirror







デジャブ (*Deja vu*). 2021

Ceramic, wood, mirror



三度目の出発～ドン・キ・ホーテより～  
*Third Departure ~From Don Quixote~* , 2020  
Ceramic, wood, mirror



完璧な対話 (*Perfect Dialogue*). 2020  
Ceramic, wood, aluminium





*Back and forth*, 2014  
Ceramic, wood, other



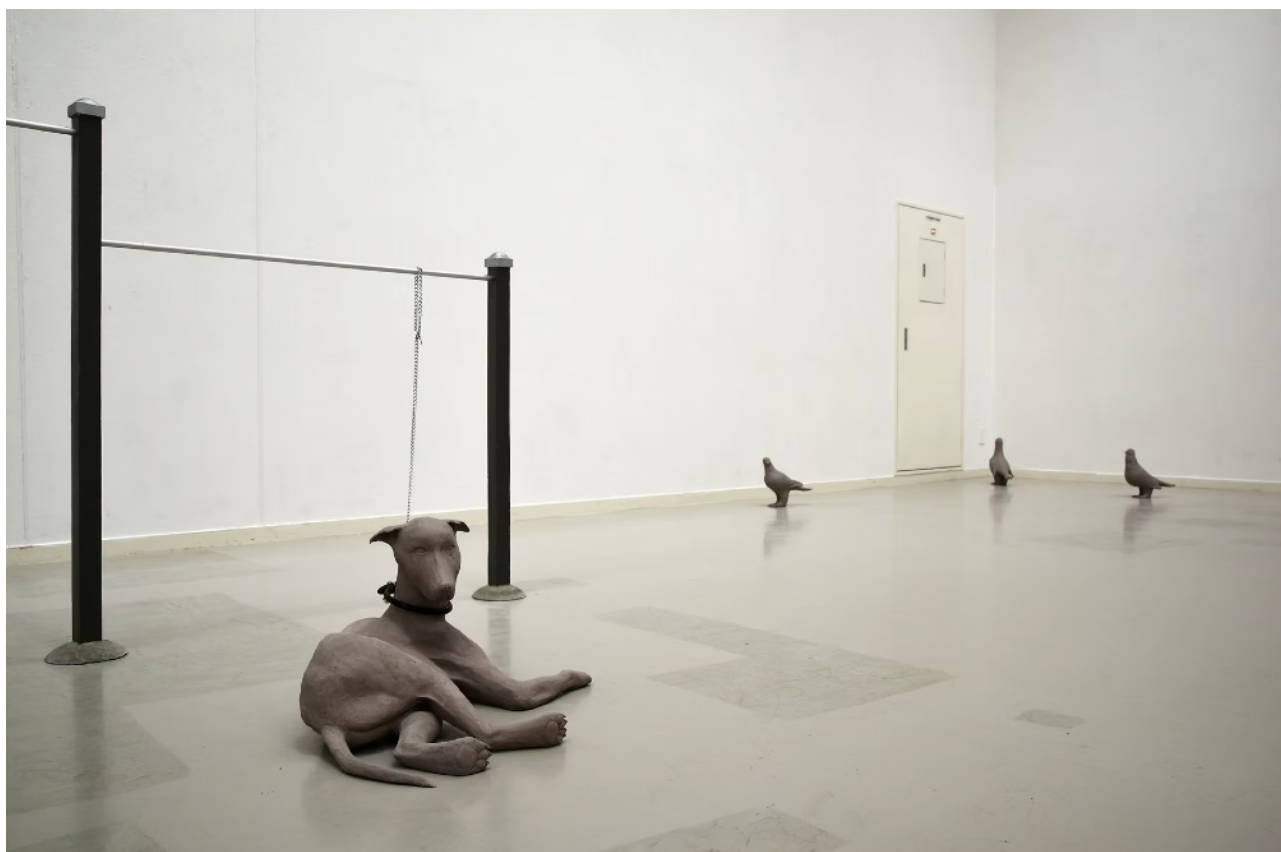
空洞のストレンジャー. 2020  
Ceramic, wood, mirror







*Catch and run.* 2020  
Ceramic, wood, aluminum





*Dear Gray.* 2018  
Terracotta, wood, other







*Playing house*, 2015  
Ceramic, wood









*Alice.* 2012  
Terracotta, pigment, wood  
188x 155 x 40 cm



*This new series began after moving to Shanghai, serving as a continuation of the previous work, Mirage. It captures the fleeting landscapes and the rapid pace of change in China, as experienced through daily life traveling by bicycle in Shanghai.*



*Additionally, drawing from personal experiences of earthquake disasters in Japan and the COVID-19 pandemic, the series reflects the Eastern Asian philosophy of All Things Flow and Transform ( “万物流転” ). Aligned with this theme, he has also launched an initiative to donate the proceeds from his artwork sales to earthquake victims.*



## Ako Goto

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Lives and works in Shanghai, China.

## Education

- |      |                                                                   |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2014 | M.A. in sculpture, Aichi Prefectural University of Arts and Music |
| 2012 | B.A. in sculpture, Aichi Prefectural University of Arts and Music |

## Solo Exhibitions

- |      |                                                           |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 2024 | “300km/h”, Kumo, Shanghai, China                          |
| 2018 | “Dear Gray”, Art space & Café Barrack, Aichi, Japan       |
| 2013 | “Virtual stage”, Contemporary Art Museum ISE, Mie, Japan  |
| 2012 | “Installation of Terracotta”, Lixil Gallery, Tokyo, Japan |

## Group Exhibitions

- |      |                                                                                                                              |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2024 | Touching the Bottom: International Art Festival "Aichi" Regional Development Project, New Century Craft Museum, Aichi, Japan |
|      | Fusion and Evolution, Tao Xi Chuan Art Museum, Jingdezhen, China                                                             |
|      | Spring and Autumn Grand Market, Tao Xi Chuan, Jingdezhen, China                                                              |
|      | Everyone's Market × The Hanger Pop Up Group Show, The Hanger, Shanghai, China                                                |
| 2023 | Representation of the world as I am, Zhu Qi Zhen museum, Shanghai, China                                                     |
|      | The return of the wings, Furukawa museum, Aichi, China                                                                       |

**Group Exhibitions (Cont'd)**

- 2022      Seto Contemporary Art Exhibition 2022 Pre-exhibition, "Elements", Sobokai elementary school, Aichi, Japan  
Seto Contemporary Art Exhibition 2022, SETO Site, Aichi, Japan
- 2021      Shaped clay, expansive garden, Aichi Prefectural University of the Arts Satellite Gallery SA・Kura, Aichi, Japan  
Contemporary art practices, Kyokusyo Museum, Gifu, Japan  
Morio Shinoda and the artists of the Kyokusho Museum, Gallery Rashinban, Tokyo, Japan  
3331 Art Fair 2022, Arts Chiyoda, Tokyo, Japan
- 2020      Fan de Nagoya Art exhibition, Nagoya Citizen Gallery Yada, Aichi, Japan
- 2019      ART Nagoya, Hotel Nagoya Castle, Aichi, Japan  
Gunma Youth Biennale 2019, The Museum of Modern Art, Gunma, Japan  
Seto Contemporary Art Exhibition 2019, Seto Site, Aichi, Japan
- 2018      UNKNOWN/ASIA, Herbis HALL, Osaka, Japan  
UNKNOWN/ASIA EXTRA, Daibiru Honkan, Osaka, Japan
- 2017      Aichi Triennale Technical sta, Libidiunga Cardoso joint work, Aichi, Japan  
CCC AWARDS, T-SITE Garden Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2016      NT Exhibition, PI Gallery, Aichi, Japan
- 2015      The Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park Artist-In-Residence Program, Shiga, Japan  
Arts Challenge 2015, Aichi Arts Center, Aichi, Japan  
Ren-Con Art Project, Nagoya City Arts Center, Aichi, Japan
- 2014      Master course Exhibition, Museum of Aichi University of Arts, Aichi, Japan  
Art Award Tokyo Marunouchi 2014, Venues Marunouchi, Tokyo, Japan
- 2013      Cubic Museum +, Art rabo Aichi, Aichi, Japan

## Group Exhibitions (Cont'd)

- 2012      Aichi University of Arts Graduation, Aichi Arts Center, Aichi, Japan  
            Art Award Tokyo Marunouchi 2012, Venues Marunouchi, Tokyo, Japan  
            Tokoname eld trip 2012, Aichi, Japan  
            Master's course Exhibition, Art Museum of Aichi University of Arts, Aichi, Japan
- 2010      Inuyama City Project, Aichi, Japan  
            Nishio Castle Town Art Festival, Aichi, Japan  
            Nagakute Art Festival 2010, Nakgakute Cultural Center, Aichi, Japan  
            Twenty-year-old memory exhibition, CBC Studio Gallery, Aichi, Japan
- 2008      Origin regression, Nagoya Citizen Gallery Yada, Aichi, Japan  
            Atelier exhibition, atelier of Aichi Prefectural University of Arts, Aichi, Japan

## Awards and Recognitions

- 2019      Gunma Youth Biennale 2019 Prize
- 2018      UNKNOWN/ASIA Akio Takimoto Award
- 2017      CCC Awards Prize
- 2015      Arts Challenge 2015 Prize
- 2014      Sculpture Superiority Work Award from Aichi University of Arts  
            Niwa Encouragement Student Award  
            Art Award Tokyo Marunouchi 2014
- 2012      Art Award Tokyo Marunouchi 2012 Prize
- 2011      International Takihuji Art Award
- 2008      Kyokubi Prize





## GALLERY INFORMATION

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