

# Submission for IWPA Open Call 2020 - FREE THEME-

TITLE

## IZUMO

### WORK STATEMENT

Growing up in Japan, I always wanted to travel—to see the world and experience what it would be like to live in the West. When I was twenty-seven, I moved to New York and started documenting cultures other than my own—the Americas and other parts of the world.

As years go by and I've gotten older, my interests have shifted to the culture I am most familiar with—my home, Japan. This series of photographs is part of my process of returning to my roots and rediscovering where I came from—especially the traditions that have informed my culture. The project started from my hometown, Fukuoka, on the western island of Japan. Through my mother's illness and passing, I also reconnected with my father's hometown, Matsue, in Izumo province which is home to many rituals and mythologies. There, the journey eventually led me to the eastern part of Izumo, to the small, sacred port town of Mihonoseki and the ancient Miho Shrine.

The people of Mihonoseki have long cherished and been devoted to their gods, and lived with what they see as the blessing of the sea for hundreds of years. Rituals are important in their lives and are passed down from generation to generation. I documented one of the most important, the Aofushigaki ritual, in which a famous episode from the Kojiki mythology written 1,300 years ago is re-enacted, involving the death and rebirth of a god. In Izumo, I experience and view these intimately important yet very remote events and rituals from my vantage point as an immigrant in America who cannot help but find meaning in the Sakura (cherry blossoms) as a timeless metaphor for the acceptance of the transience of all life. As a photographer, this image beckons me to create and discover the meaning of beauty in the course of our short lives.

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LIEH SUGAI

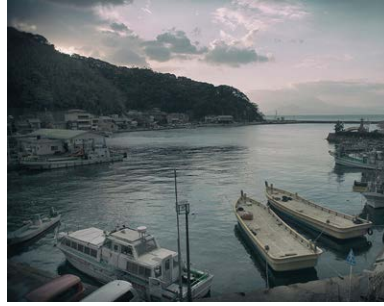
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The night before the Aofushigaki Ritual at Miho Shrine. The man responsible for the lantern touch keeps the fire alive during the ceremony.



Overlooking the Miho Bay in Mihonoseki, Matsue, an ancient port town closely associated with mythology and located on the eastern tip of the Shimane Peninsula, in the Sea of Japan.

In the words of Japan's first Nobel laureate, Hideki Yukawa: "Mihonoseki is one of the few places where you can find the roots of the Japanese soul."



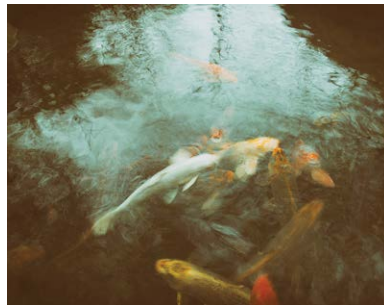
Hanaikada, floral raft, at the end of Sakura (cherry blossom) season.



Sasara boy in the Aofushigaki Ritual.



Mrs. Yanai worships at the Aofushigaki Ritual every year.



Reflection on a koi pond. Koi fish symbolize good fortune/luck and also have a deep connection to Ebisu, the god of fishermen and luck.



Night scene at Miho Shrine.



Ujiko people during the Aofushigaki Ritual. Ujiko are dedicated to the belief in and worship of the shrine and they play a crucial part in the rituals at Miho Shrine. This status has been passed down through the generations for hundreds of years.



Kannushi (Shinto priest) hold the Yoi-Matsuri ceremony the night before the Aofushigaki Ritual.



The Aofushigaki Ritual is held in Sakura (cherry blossoms) season every year.

For the Japanese, Sakura is an enduring expression of life, death and renewal. It is a timeless metaphor for the acceptance of the transience of all life.

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