



MAK – Austrian Museum of Applied Arts
Permanent Collection ASIA
CHINA – JAPAN – KOREA
ARTISTIC INTERVENTION: TADASHI KAWAMATA

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The new installation on MAK's permanent Asian collection was opened in February, 2014.

MAK is one of the strongest Asian collection holders in Europe. According to its Asian curator Johannes Wieninger, MAK has been presenting several temporary exhibitions on the basement of the museum every year prior to 2012. Objects have been selected, borrowed and arranged according to various themes. In 2012, new director of MAK, Christoph Thun-Hohenstein, has set up a new vision for the museum, and planned a different way of usage of museum's basement accordingly. Since then, its Asian section was forced to move to a smaller exhibition hall on the first floor.

Chen Yi: Investigation: Reinstallation of the Asian Collection at the Austrian Museum of Applied Arts (MAK), University Vienna 2016





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Given the fact that all other exhibition rooms on the first floor have been installed by contemporary artists in 1990s, MAK's Asian curator has also expressed willingness in 2012 to cooperate with contemporary artist in presenting its Asian artefacts. Due to his personal preference, Johannes Wieninger has chosen Tadashi Kawamata, a Japanese artist teaching in Paris and doing art worldwide, to be his co-presenter of MAK's Asian collection. They worked together with Michael Embacher, an Austrian architect who realized Kawamata's abstract and innovative ideas into concrete forms, along with some other museum employees for the opening of the Asian collection.

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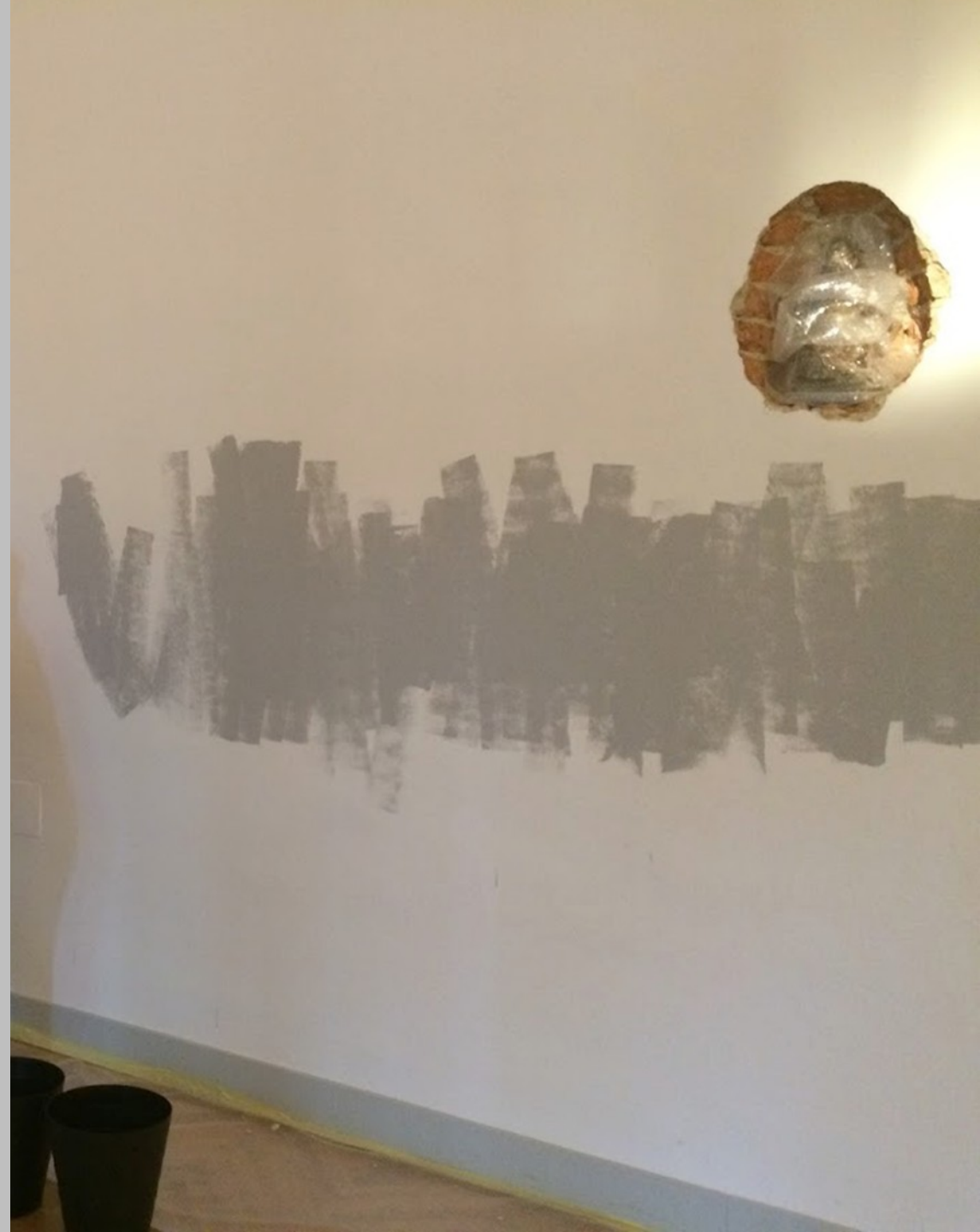




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In the last two weeks of intensive work, the construction sites were open to all visitors. Everyone could come in and talk to Kawamata and exchange ideas with him. Thus, not only the exhibition itself, but even the construction of the exhibition became an active site for cultural exchange and interaction.

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“What we both (the curator and the artist) agree is, we only have one mankind living on this earth and therefore we only have one culture.

If you arrive at this point, you will solve so many problems [...] We have no limits in time and geography.”

(MAK Asian Curator, Johannes Wieninger in the Interview)

This is also the core message conveyed by and the fundamental rationale behind this new Asian collection.

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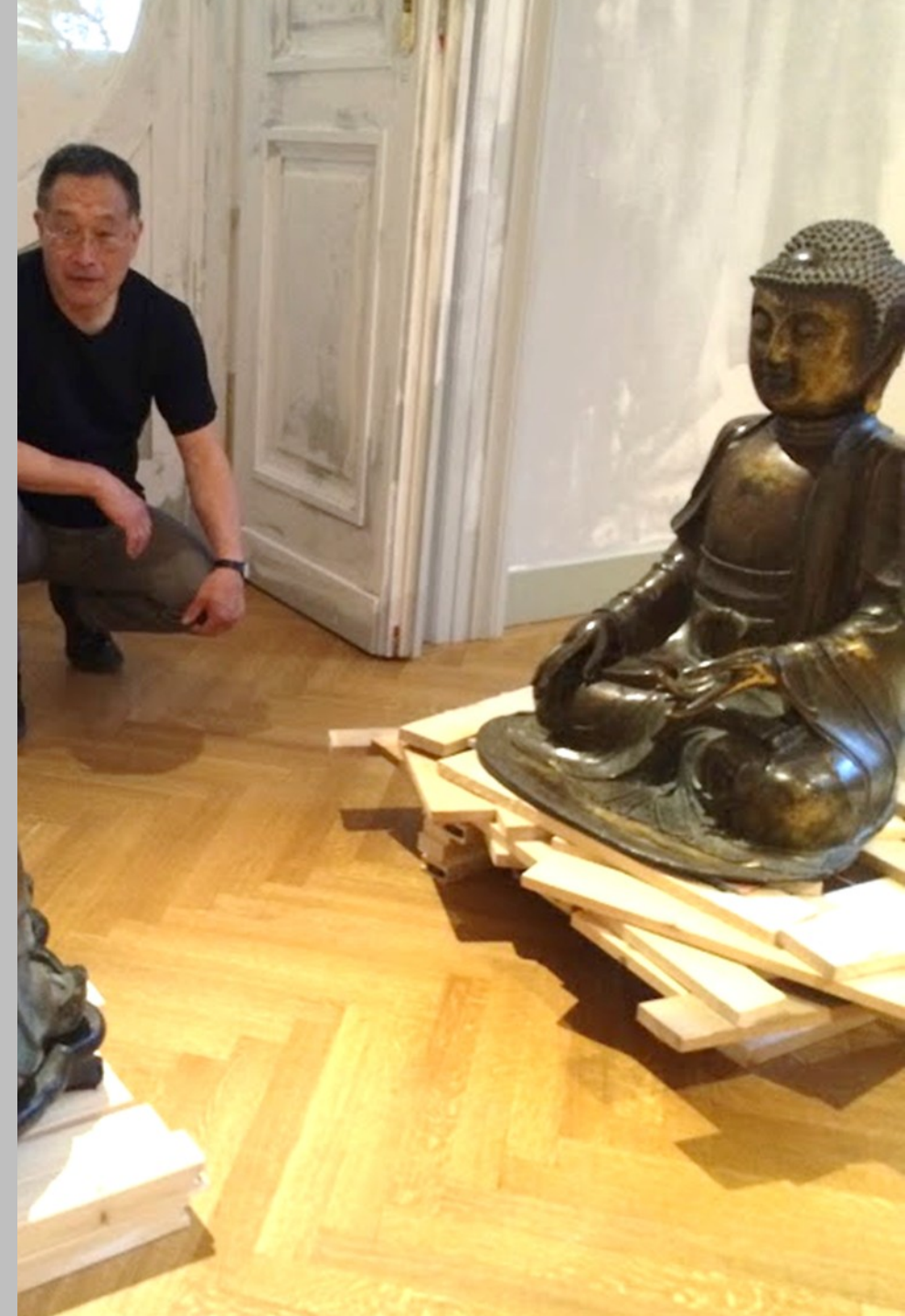


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“Incompleteness” is another melody repeated in Kawamata’s work. For many people, Kawamata installation strikes them as an unfinished work. There is always room left for the exploration of more possibilities. He deliberately chose “temporary, fragile wooden structure to contrast the old Asian material.”

On the other hand, Kawamata also destroys his installation every time after the “show-time” is over. Kawamata has also only granted a five-year exhibiting permission to the museum from 2014 to 2019 for this new Asian exhibition.

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Sengon mit Spinnweb

Atropa belladonna

Drina, Luna Duna

ist man with

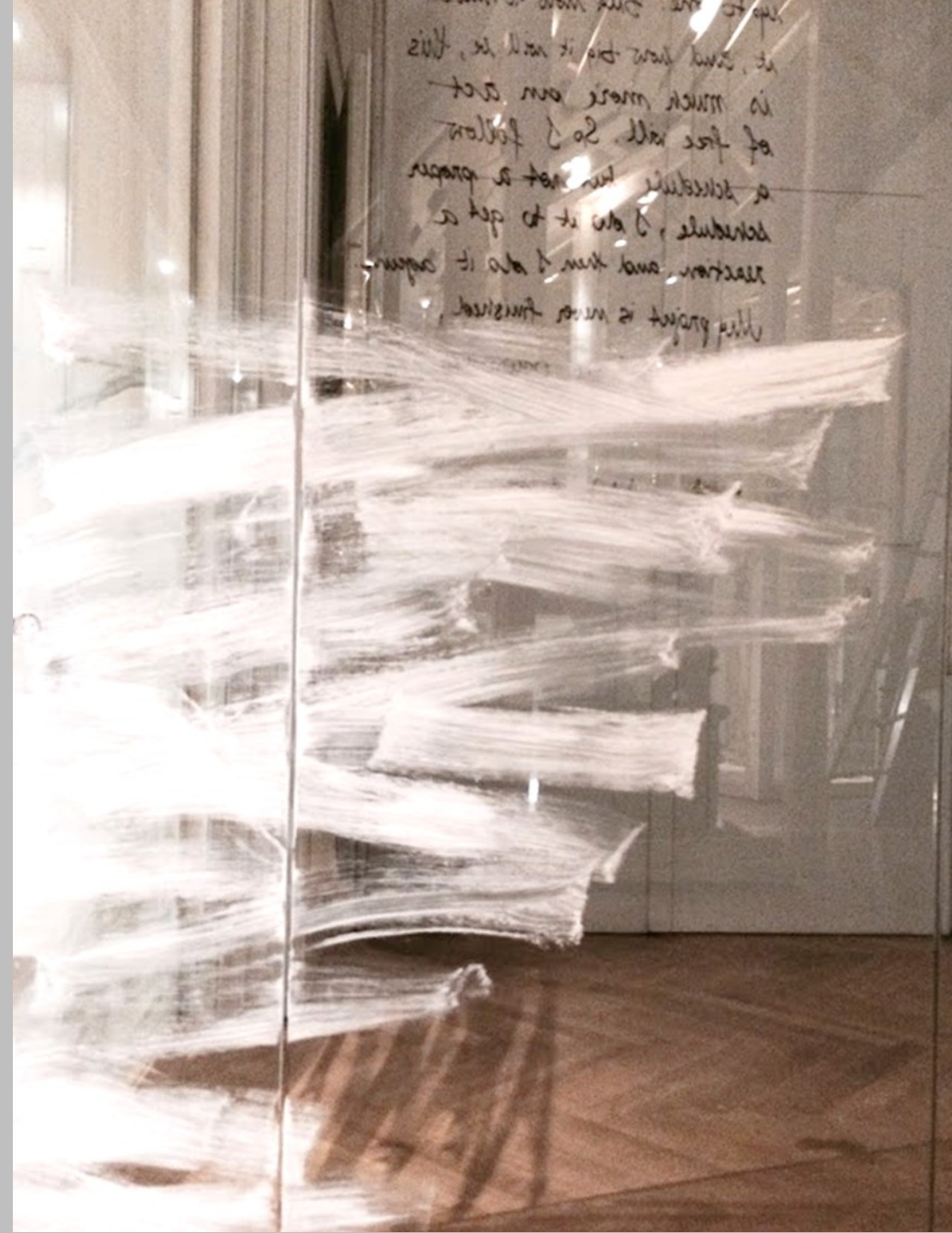
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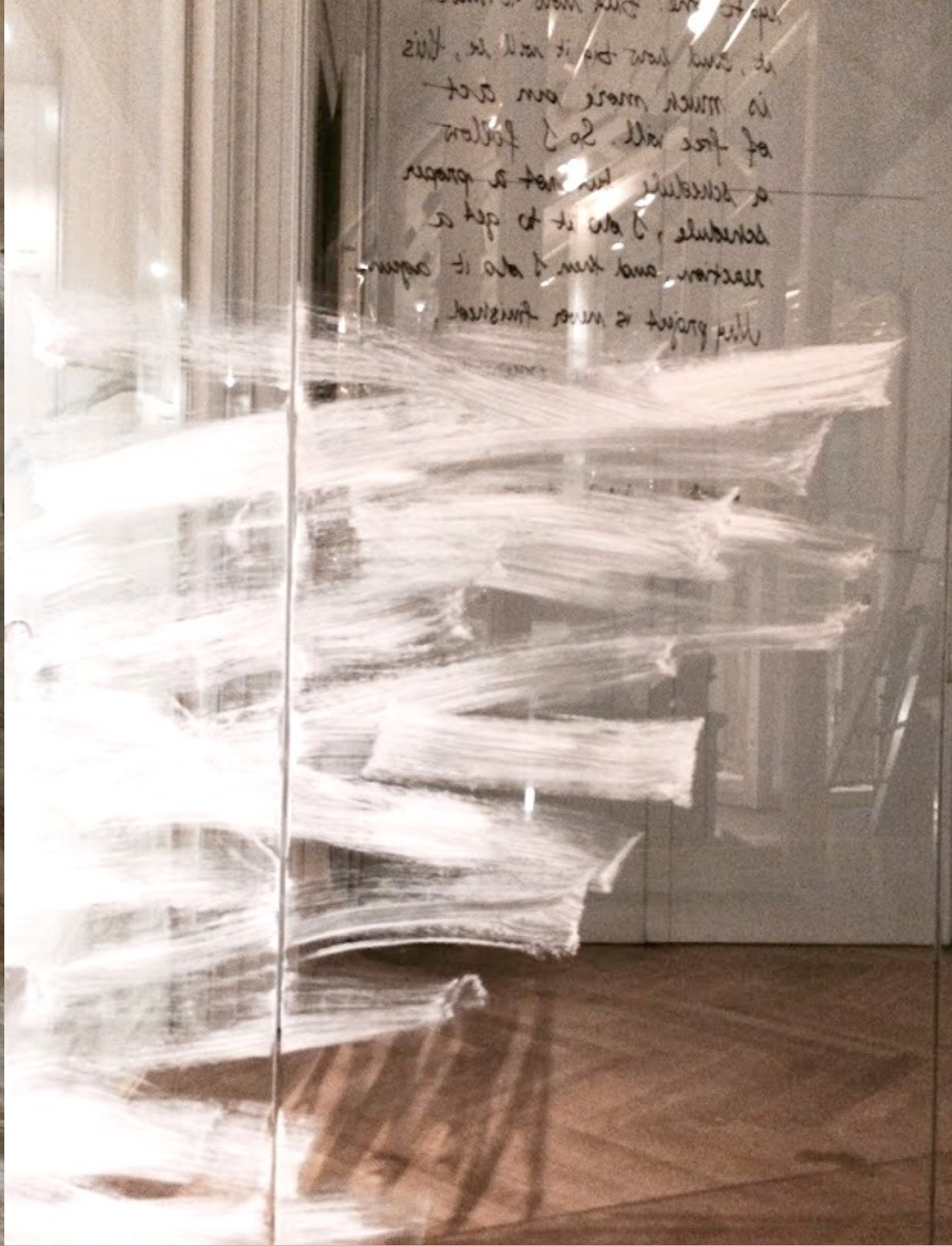
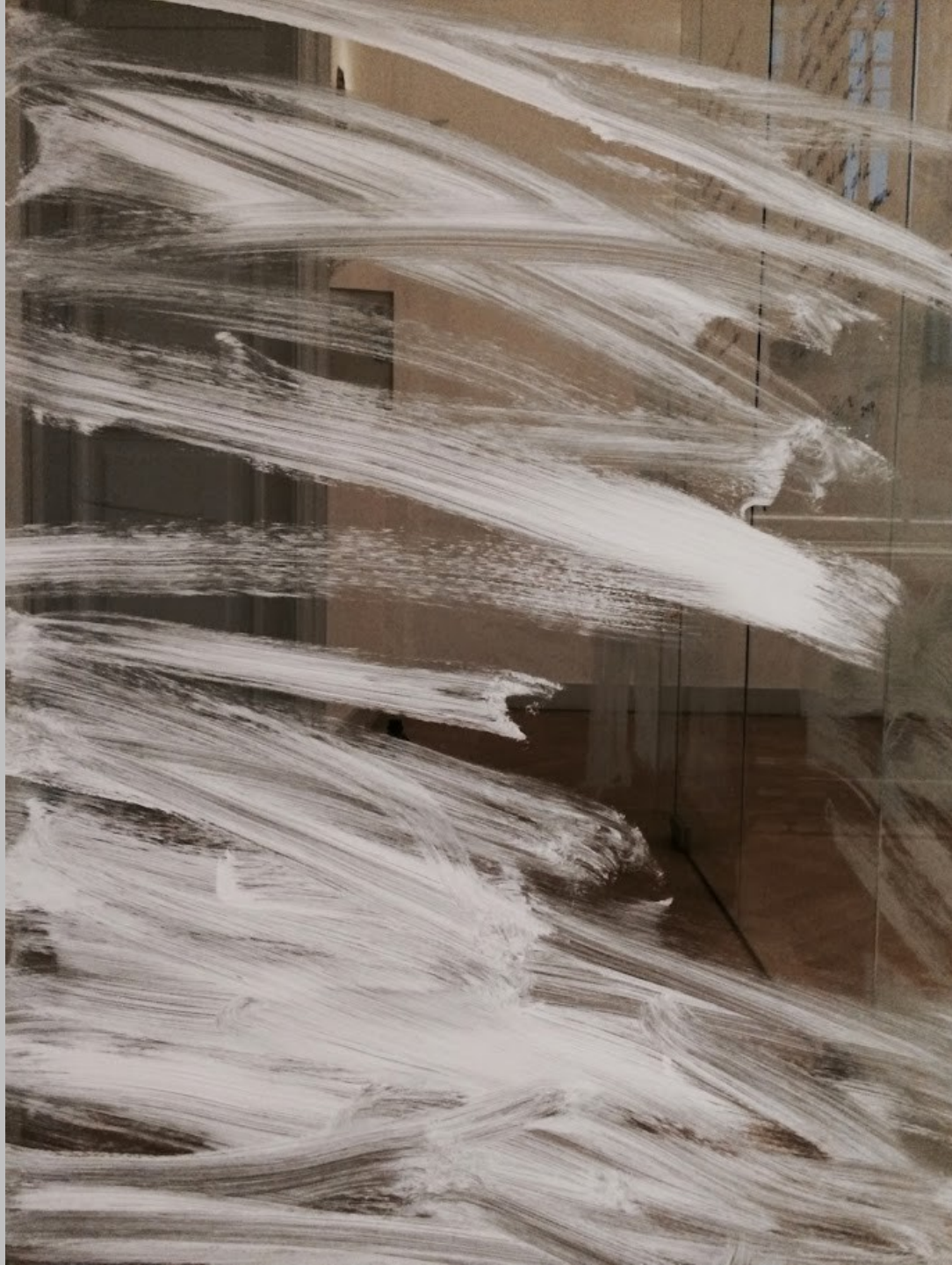


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For Kawamata it is important to surprise the visitors. This exhibition itself, offers many alternative perspectives to see Asian objects. For example, coping with the giant and decorated plates, instead of erecting them on table in an upright position as most museums do, they place some plates directly on the floor, and let the viewers see from above. This is also a way chosen by Kawamata to challenge the European cultural assumption on Asia and Asian art.

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Instead of offering lengthy talk on the danger of Euro-centrism, or offering an assumed de-Eurocentric/ universal approach, Kawamata simply did something new. He simply followed his artistic intuition to arrange the “familiar Others” into unfamiliar forms.

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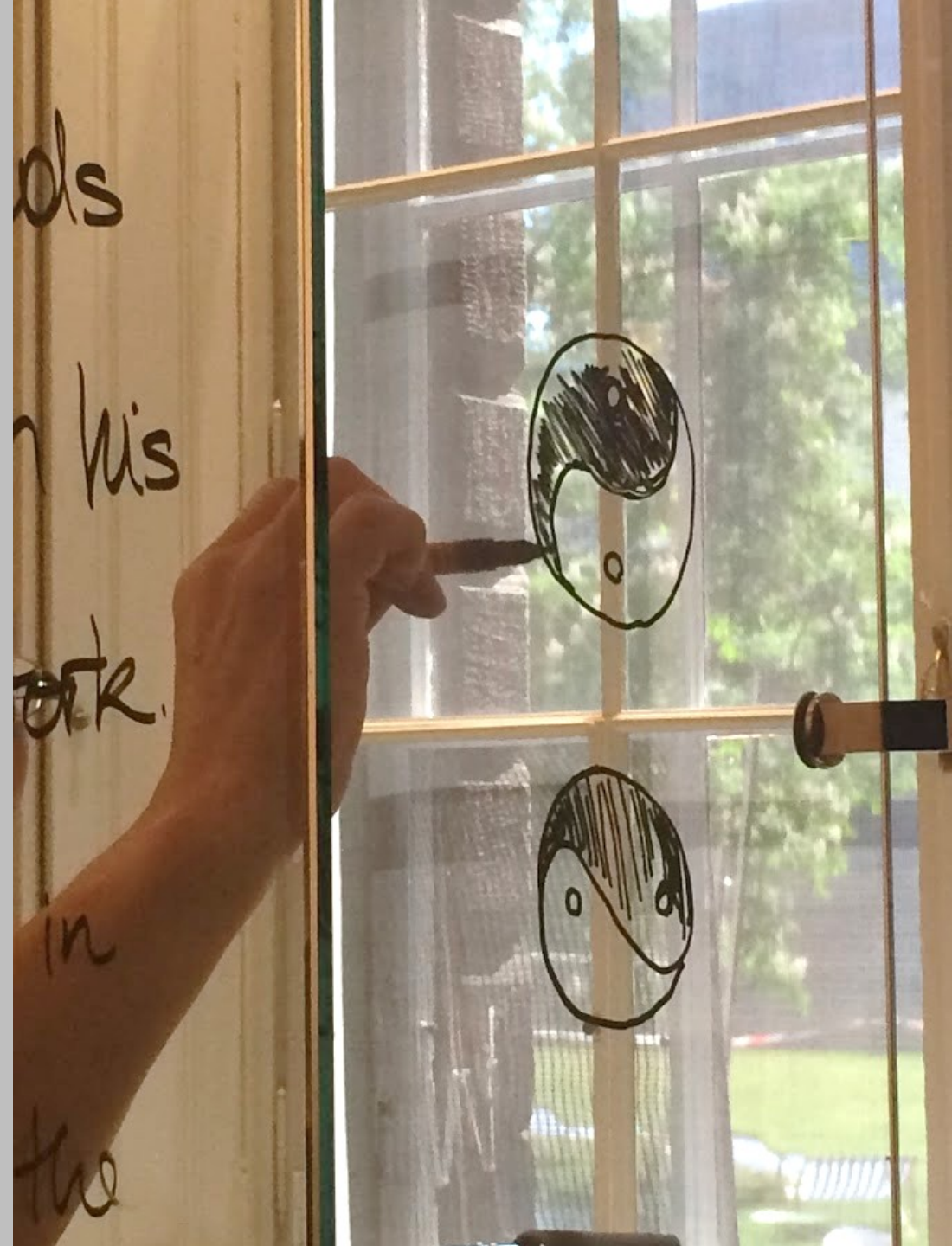
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However, as student coming from China and feel deeply connected to its culture, I still hold doubts in the way of mixing up fine art and artefacts, mixing up religious objects and objects for daily use, and how the installation has transformed all the ancient objects into a part of an contemporary artist's personal work. All forms of practices in presenting historical artefacts are based on certain understandings of the Others, and meanwhile, offering consciously or unconsciously, the interpretations of the Others from Us. Here by using the word Other, I do not merely point to a geographical difference, but also to a completely different cultural system where everything appears to its practitioner with different significance, and the different connections made between entities and events in the interpretation of world and human experience. So my question is, whether these interpretations of art and artistic objects of the Others, should, or should not confirm with how they were viewed in its original cultural context.

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Here the curator and the artist may have successfully avoided the trap of distorting the Others from a Eurocentric standpoint, but they surely have reinterpreted and recreated the meaning of the Others in a more cosmopolitan perspective. Instead of granting back the objects its original cultural significances, the practice here is more likely to substitute Euro-centrism with a “Globalism”. This could possibly be the future direction of exhibiting Asian art in European Museums.

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... And this is where I need to go back to the Österreichisches Museum für angewandte Kunst. It was very surprising to find the intervention created by the Japanese artist Tadashi Kawamata for the Asian Collections, where directly and indirectly he has developed display solutions both ground-breaking in appearance and also meaningful in terms of sustainability. It is necessary to say this intervention is an ephemeral work of art itself and not only a standard display scheme with vocation of permanence.

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The selection of objects from the Asian collections is displayed in a classicist gallery with painted walls and ceilings, where there are no conventional showcases, but a sort of scaffolding structure built of recycled wood and glass. The atmosphere is incredibly surprising: there are no labels and all the object information is handwritten in every single glass. The objects laid directly in the ground or over stands built with glass over custom-made pottery pieces which serve as bases. A couple of Buddha sculptures stand on piles of wooden boards. The entire gallery appears as if some renovation works were being done.





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Visitors can feel the objects very close, as they lay very low, and they can be easily understood and looked at even by children. This allows to somehow make objects descend from the domain of the “sacred” which still we can find in most of museum showcases, and present them in a more domestic and approachable way.

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http://www.mak.at/en/lecture_tadashi_kawamata

<https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/en/image-article/tadashi-kawamatas-re-installation-maks-asia-collection-shot-marina-faust>

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