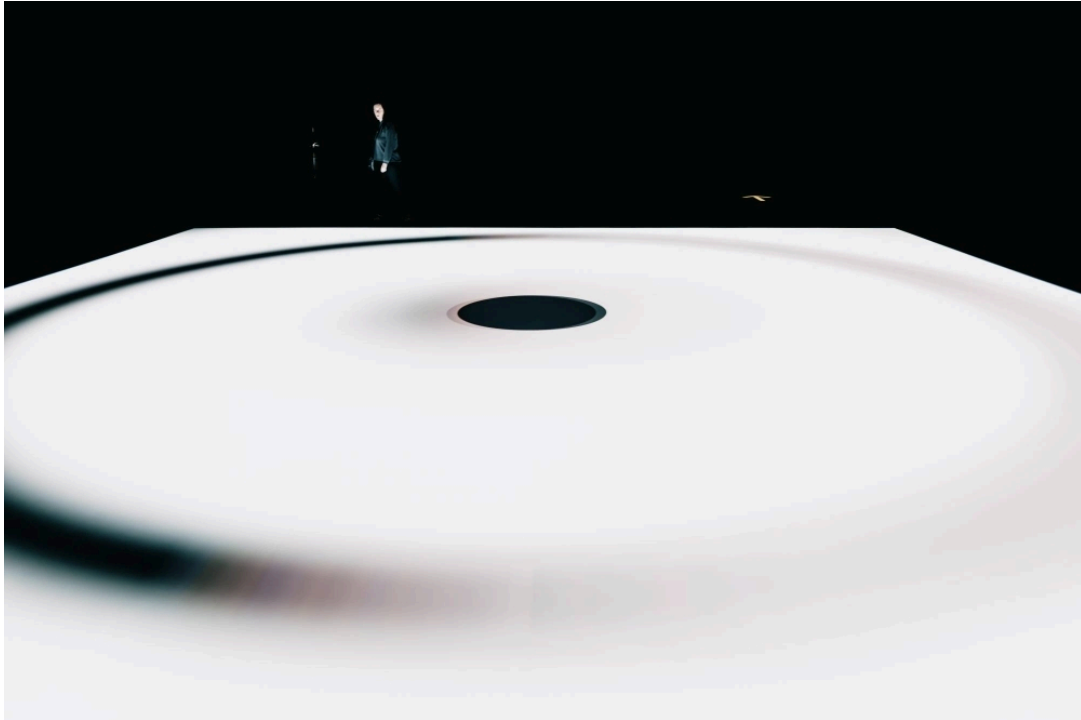


CULTURE / ART

Ryoji Ikeda adds to his universe of data in Helsinki



Ryoji Ikeda's "mass," a site-specific installation at Helsinki's Amos Rex museum, presents a stroboscopic video of black concentric rings that fill a square on the floor by rapidly expanding outward. | LANCE HENDERSTEIN

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HELSINKI – To enter Ryoji Ikeda's major exhibition in Helsinki, visitors first descend the white staircase of the Amos Rex museum into a brightly lit foyer. From there, they pass into the dim confines of a 2,200-square-meter domed underground gallery space. This transition from light to darkness induces a brief feeling of sensory deprivation as the eyes adjust. A continuous industrial hum, like the churning of unseen machinery combined with the vibrations from an intermittent synth bass, leaks from overhead speakers.

Split into four sections, the Japanese composer and multimedia artist's exhibition features five works that perceive the world through the audio-visual translation of information: "data-verse 1," "data-verse 2," "data.gram [n°5]" (a reconfiguration of installations from Ikeda's "datamatics" project), "mass" and "spin." While the other works have previously been presented in locations such as the Venice Biennale and CERN Science Gateway in Geneva, "mass" and "spin" are two new site-specific installations created for the Helsinki exhibition to take advantage of Amos Rex's unique interior space.

"Mass," an installation projected onto a large square on the floor, presents a stroboscopic video of black, concentric rings rapidly expanding outward to fill the square; the rings are pursued from the center of the projection by dark circles like black holes swallowing light. This radiating battle between shapes plays out until a black-out climax collapses upon itself, pausing briefly before new circles appear to begin the process again. The effect is hypnotic, acting as a repeated prompt — a visual mantra.

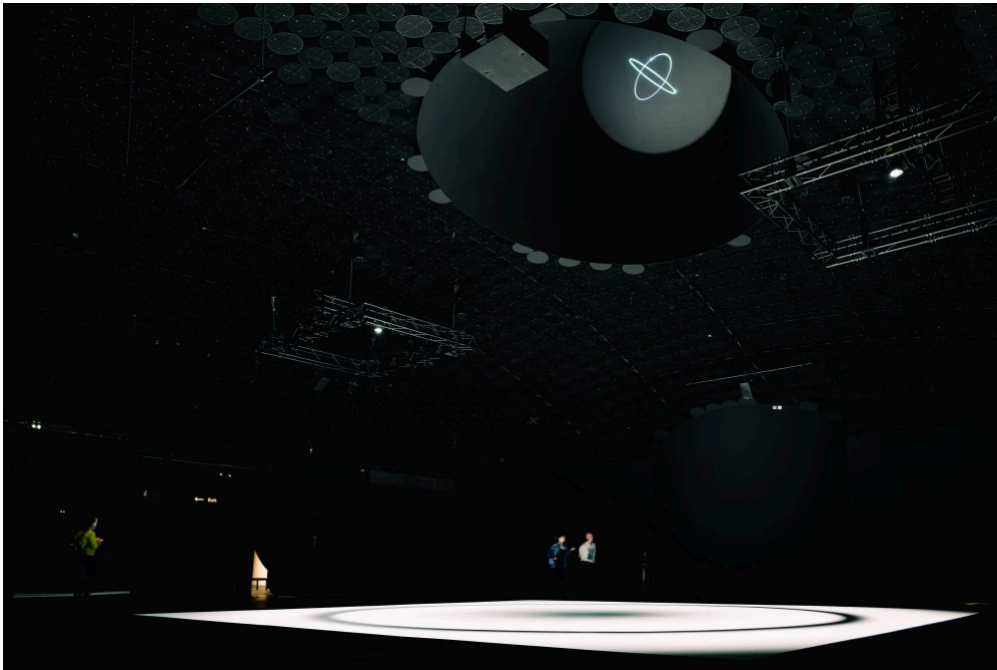
Gaze long enough and the imagination wanders.

In my mind's eye, what at first appear to be black holes become ripples in clear water, then an inkblot spreading across fresh white paper. With that image, the pulsing sonar-like tone in the background also shifts from something digital, cold and extraterrestrial into the gentle clinking of a glass wind-chime, a sound strongly associated with summertime in Ikeda's native Japan.

Above "mass" hangs "spin," a "laser kinetic projection sculpture" resembling a rotating atom. As a laser beam projects a spinning geometric shape onto a window nestled into one of Amos Rex's concave ceilings, its rings move in continuous elliptical rotations that at times appear to be three-dimensional, but then flatten

themselves into a two-dimensional “X.” This optical illusion, however, is created from numerous dots of light. The pattern of “spin” never repeats, creating infinite iterations.

There are no texts explaining what any of the five works on display mean inside the space. Ikeda has said he prefers viewers to decide the meaning of his work for themselves, echoing Marcel Duchamp's creative act, in which the spectator brings the artist's work into contact with the world by adding their personal contribution.



In “spin,” a laser beam projects a spinning geometric shape that never repeats, creating infinite iterations. | LANCE HENDERSTEIN

Mass can be thought of as the measurement of a body's inertia, and Ikeda's “mass” acts as a sort of perpetual motion machine. The work's absolute darkness may allude to the absence of life or consciousness, that great nothingness before the Big Bang. White, of course, blends all the wavelengths of color in the light spectrum. When the white pulsing circles of “mass” are viewed at certain angles or in a photograph, it becomes clear that they do in fact contain color. Perhaps, then, the full spectrum combined as one into a white light could stand for a complete, perfected understanding that humanity can never reach — even with the accumulation of innumerable amounts of data.

While “mass” contains the full spectrum of light, “spin” is monochromatic, with only one wavelength, making use of an industrial laser used in medicine. “Spin” also recalls Ikeda’s previous work with iterative geometric shapes like “cyclo,” (1999) a collaborative research project created with German artist and musician Carsten Nicolai (aka Alva Noto), which focused on the visualization of sound to create an “infinity index” of sound fragments.

Viewed together, “mass” and “spin” are a duet of light and motion, a binary star in Ikeda’s ever-growing universe — technically separate but meant to be viewed as one. A harmony that sings the ancient refrain: as above, so below.

While “mass” and “spin” are only viewable in Helsinki, a concurrent exhibition at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa in Ishikawa Prefecture also features a new installation, “data.gram [n°6],” which consists of 23 video works, some previously unreleased. Though the work was scheduled to be on view through May 12, the exhibition has been temporarily suspended due to the Jan. 1 earthquake that rocked the nearby Noto Peninsula.

It’s a humbling reminder that although gifted human beings like Ikeda can marshal data and technology to reimagine our universe as never before, we are still at the mercy of the power of the natural world.