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Artist-in-Residence's Animated Video Installation Returns to Missoula

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The Missoula Art Museum is honored to present *Beautiful Sky Golf Course*, a video installation by Gaku Tsutaja. Tsutaja was part of the Open AIR Artist-in-Residence program during summer 2019. During that time, she set up her studio on the grounds of the Historical Museum at Fort Missoula. She chose to work in the judge's chamber of the restored courthouse, which was the location for a series of loyalty hearings in the 1940s. The U.S. Department of Justice used Fort Missoula as an Alien Detention Center and held over 1,000 first-generation Japanese immigrants from 1941 to 1944. The loyalty hearings were conducted in response to the attack on Pearl Harbor to determine if individuals of Japanese descent presented a threat to "national security."

Tsutaja created eight paintings that highlight the dark history of Fort Missoula during her residency and on-site studio. *Beautiful Sky Golf Course* uses these paintings as backdrops for the characters in her animation to bring the detention center to life. Tsutaja created the characters after learning about how the Japanese internees made a golf course for themselves while waiting to be released. Tsutaja uses golf clubs with animal heads in the video as stand-ins for the figureheads like lawyers, politicians, and other authority positions.

This work approaches the issue of immigration and racism with the new possibilities for the characters to break out of rigid stereotypes. Tsutaja focuses on the *Issei* (Japanese first-generation immigrants, typically male, who were denied U.S. citizenship after 1924) who were detained without their wives or children. Many had lived for decades in the United States and were well-established in their communities before being incarcerated at Fort Missoula. "The artist approaches this historic, yet timely, subject in a completely original way that is both humorous and quirky, but which also addresses the issues of discrimination and racism that fueled Japanese American internment," said Laura Millin, executive director of MAM.

Beautiful Sky Golf Course is on loan from Ulterior Gallery in New York, New York. MAM is grateful to the artist and the gallery for lending this piece. *Beautiful Sky Golf Course* is on view at the Missoula Art Museum from October 2 through December 19, 2020.

About MAM: Founded in 1975 and accredited by the American Association of Museums since 1987, MAM is emerging as the leading contemporary art museum in the Intermountain West. MAM is situated on the traditional, ancestral territories of the Séliš (Salish or "Flathead") and Q̓lispé (upper Kalispel or Pend d'Oreille) peoples. MAM is committed to respecting the indigenous stewards of the land it occupies. Their rich cultures are fundamental to artistic life in Montana and to the work of MAM. MAM is a fully accessible, free public museum boasting eight exhibition spaces, a library, and education center in the heart of Missoula's historic downtown.

If you would like more information about this topic, please call Brandon Reintjes at 406.728.0447 or email brandon@missoulaartmuseum.org.

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