

‘In Praise of Distortion’

Line of enquiry:

Can we challenge Japanese society's pursuit of perfection by highlighting the beauty and expressive potential of distorted typefaces?

To design a... (what is the format?)

typography work

About..... (what is the topic?)

the value for imperfect beauty

That... (who is the audience?)

People raised in a pressurised Japanese society that demands strict and pre-structured thinking/ expectations.

*Can use to... (what will they know/
think/feel/do as a result?)*

Review the term 'distortion and accept that not being perfect is not a bad thing, but a positive aspect of individuality

In... (what context?)

the context of finding positive value for distortion.

Background

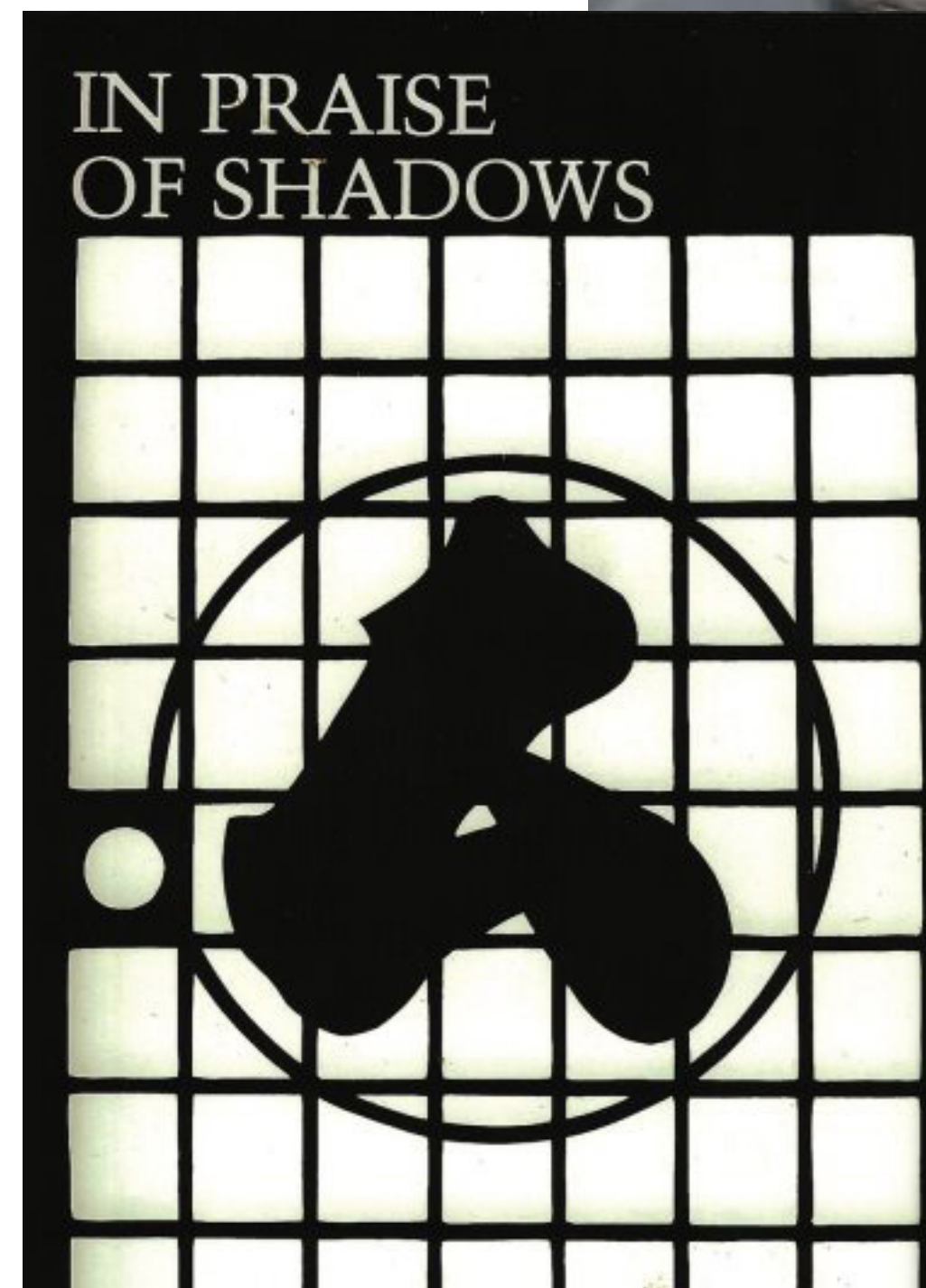
Japan is a society that values perfection and social success, with a score of second highest in the world for 'motivation for achievement and success' (Hofstede G, 2016).



Okakura's The Book of Tea (1961) introduced me to a Japanese historical appreciation of imperfect beauty. Imperfection in this context includes not only imbalance but also distorted forms (Sueyoshi, 2020, p122), as can be seen when looking at the Shino Tea Bowl, which is celebrated as a Japanese national treasure. This perspective towards the meaning of distortion inspired me to shape my project.



The project seeks to revive Japan's former values for imperfect beauty. In my project, distortion means deviation from the original form or expectation, like the misshapen Japanese Hiragana characters carved in clay reminiscent of Shino Tea bowls.



Tanazaki, J. (1999) In praise of shadows. London: Jonathan Cape.

This Yugami (means 'distortion' in Japanese) typeface uses perfectly shaped acrylic moulds to create bumpy, unanticipated type forms. Through this typographic exploration, I celebrate the historical appreciation of distorted beauty in the hope of reintroducing it to modern Japanese society.





Audience engagement

Knowledge

‘More in-depth and specific research can be done on the concept of imperfections and distortions in culture, how to make the transition from imperfections to distortions, and the impact caused by this cultural phenomenon can be practised together. ‘

Communication

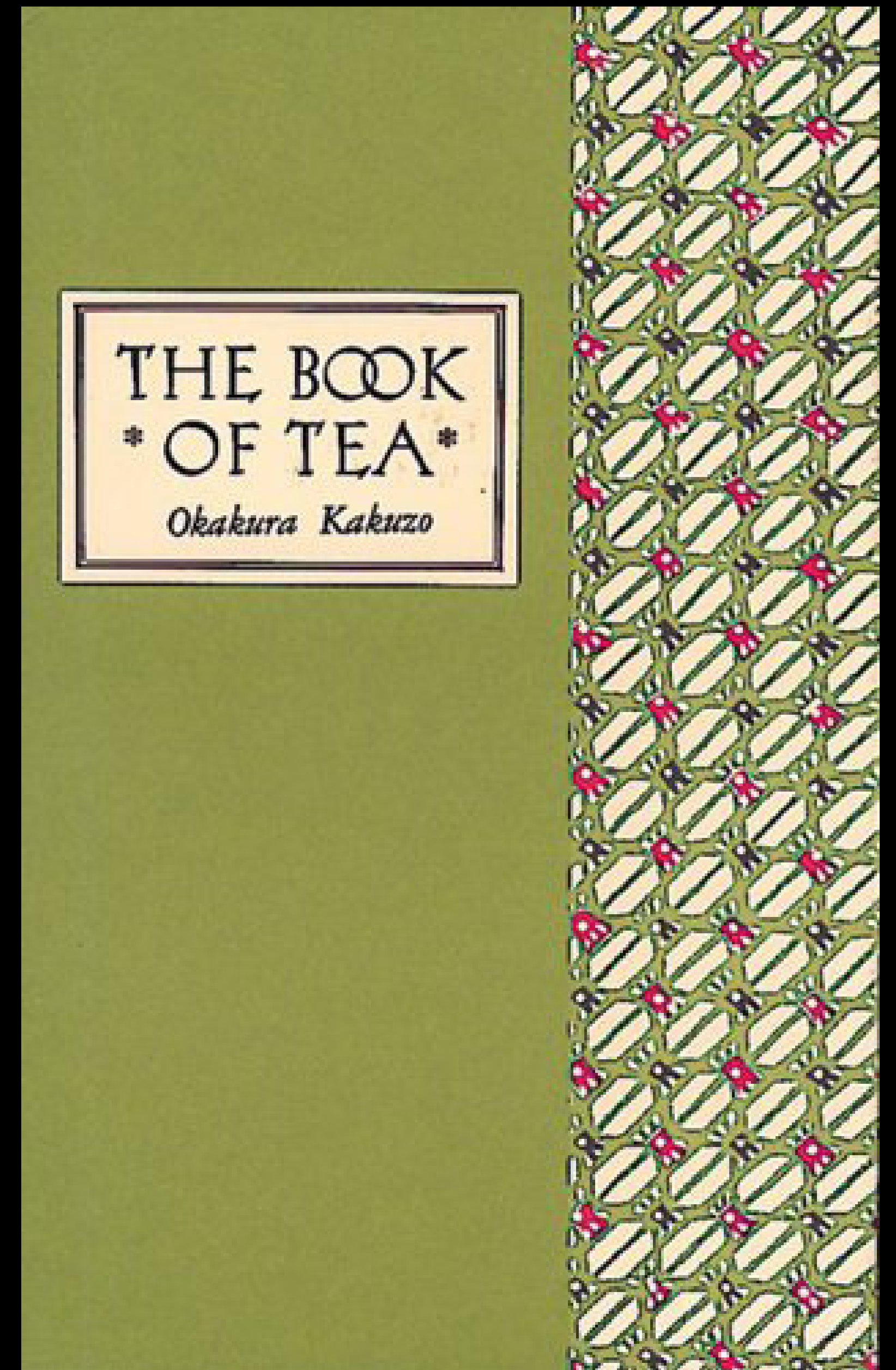
‘But how could the topic be better realised without words, so that your topic speaks for itself? How do you continue with the typographic characters you have developed? Where will they be exhibited and who should they address? I would be interested in the intersection with the target group. ‘

Knowledge

My focus from the feedback is on the knowledge and communication approach on the theme. I started my journey from the visual effect of distortion and arrived at the beauty of imperfection in Japanese culture. According to Sueyoshi (2020), the idea of distortion is included in the idea of imperfect beauty in Japan. However, I can see that my project gradually shifted from a perspective of distortion to a perspective of imperfect beauty.

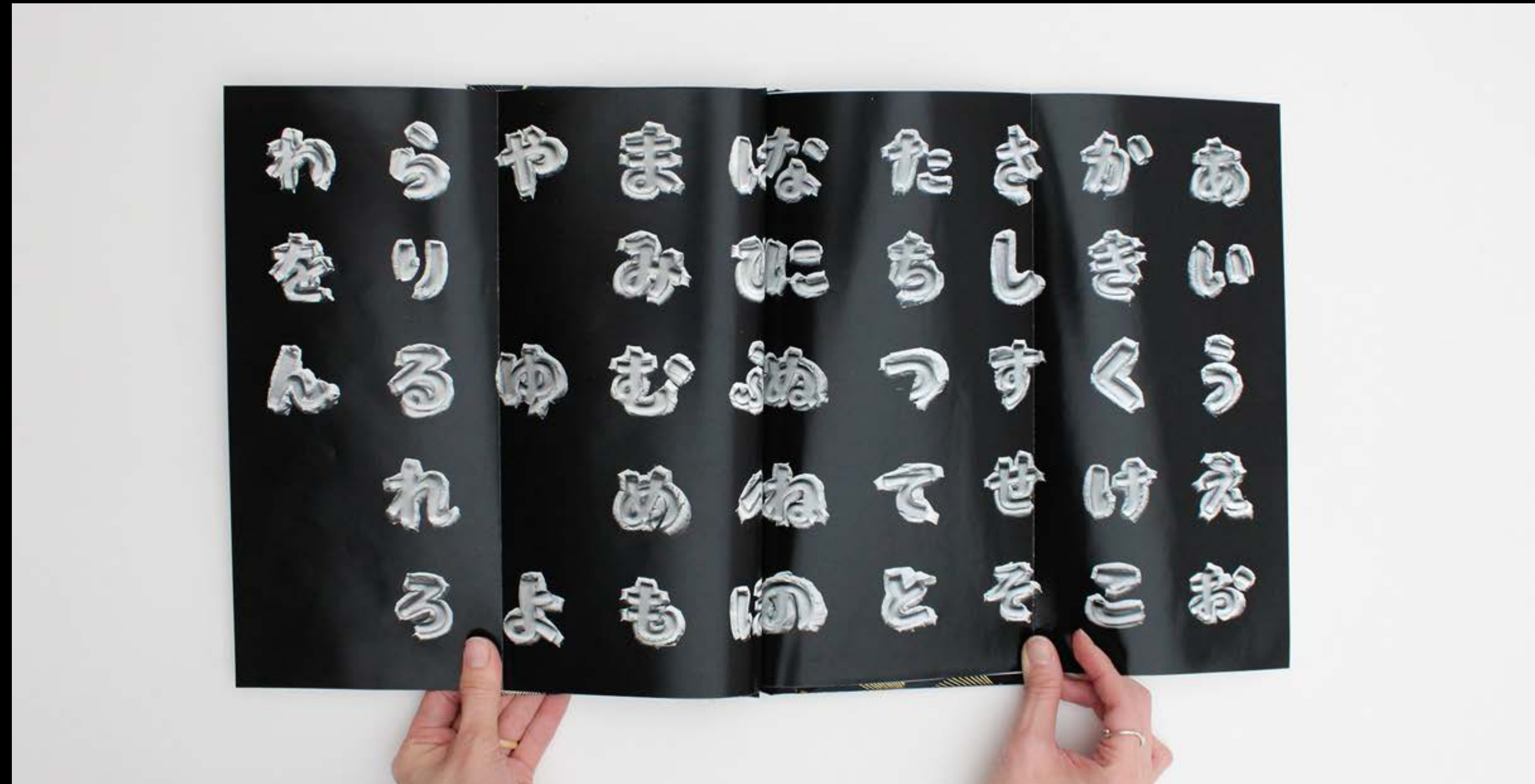


In this term, I will develop the project by focusing on imperfect beauty, slightly widening the focus from distortion. This is because I use Okakura's (1961) *The Book of Tea* as my main reference, and the Japanese tea ceremony and imperfect beauty are very much related. Concepts such as Wabi-sabi, which is the idea of leaving things unfinished or incomplete, and philosophy such as Kintsugi, which sees value in imperfect beauty, also come from the Japanese tea ceremony culture and are representative examples of imperfect beauty. By incorporating these concepts into the project, I believe that I can find a new approach to my line of enquiry which is 'Can we challenge Japanese society's pursuit of perfection by highlighting the beauty and expressive potential of distorted(imperfect) typefaces?'



Communication

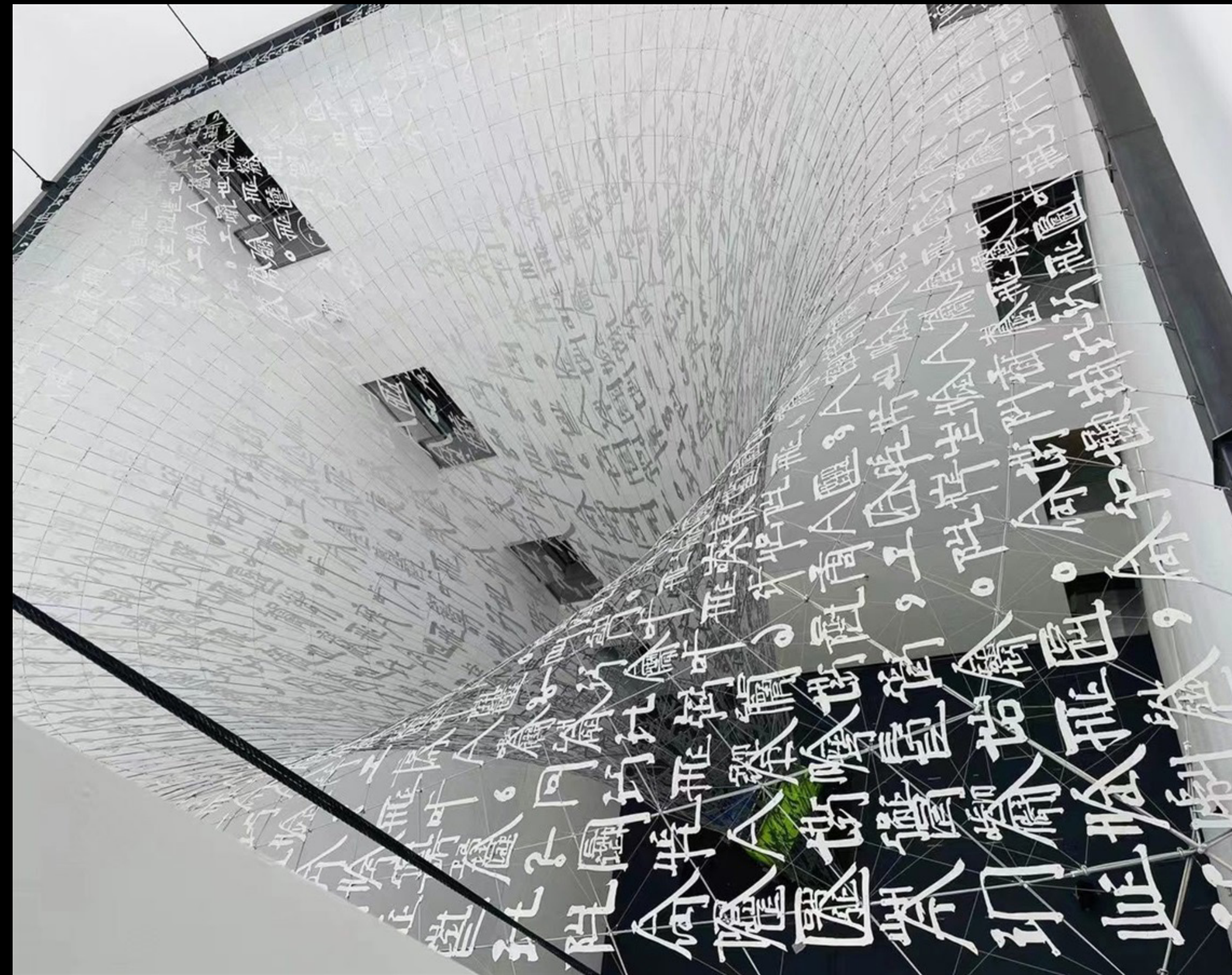
About the communication part, a major barrier is the language issue. As my project uses Japanese letters, my work also needs to be explained in English to non-Japanese speakers. This means I need to further explore ways of presenting my work itself in an understandable way, even if people can not read Japanese.



My initial plan was to use my clay typeface to create a type specimen, that is why I made a publication to support my idea and explain my work in English at the same time but I will also consider whether to further develop this publication, or use other media such as video, or create another easy-to-understand visual in this term.



At this moment, I am not currently thinking of making my clay letters into functional digital characters. I use Xu Bing's *Gravitational Arena* (2022) as my reference because it challenges his created work not to function as a readable text, but to 'provoke contemplation on the tensions, interactions and wrestling-like relationships between different civilisations' through the medium of letters. Similarly, I am using letters as a medium in an exploration to convey imperfect beauty, and the functionality of these letterforms as letters is of little importance in my project. Therefore, I will be examining ways of presenting visuals in this term regarding the way Xu's work is presented.



Bing, X. (2022) *Gravitational Arena*.

3 colours
grayscale



16 colours
grayscale



B&W logo



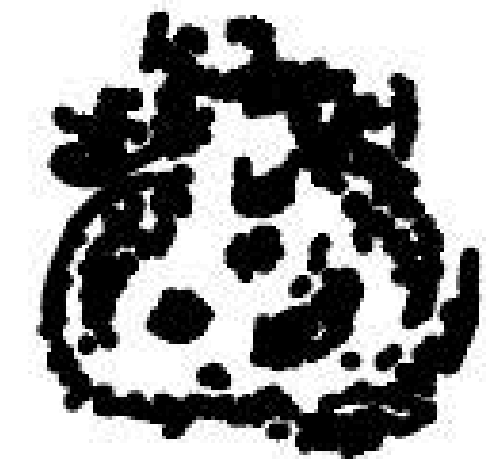
3 colours
B&W



shades of
gray



line art
tech drawing



16 colours
grayscale



I do not see it as a problem that I can not show my physical work directly to my main audience, many of whom are in Japan. I believe as long as I think carefully enough in showing my work online, I can deliver my message anywhere in the work with the internet. I think my clay type work has been completed to some extent, and now I need to consider whether the work itself needs to be changed or whether the way the work is presented needs to be changed in order to communicate well with my audience.



What's next?

Line of enquiry:

Can we challenge Japanese society's pursuit of perfection by highlighting the beauty and expressive potential of imperfect typefaces?

RESEARCH MAPPING

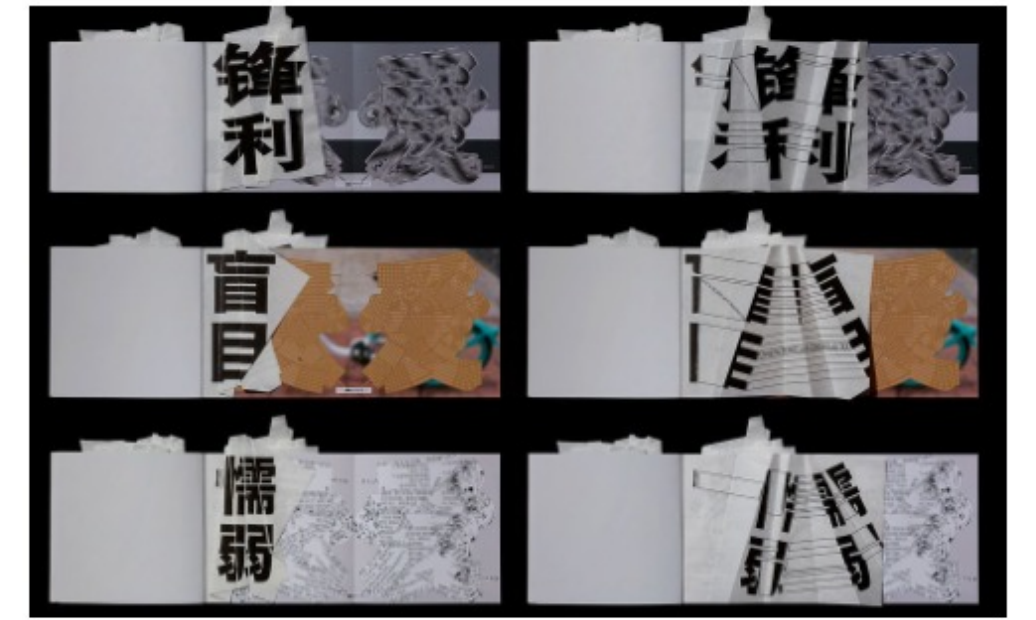
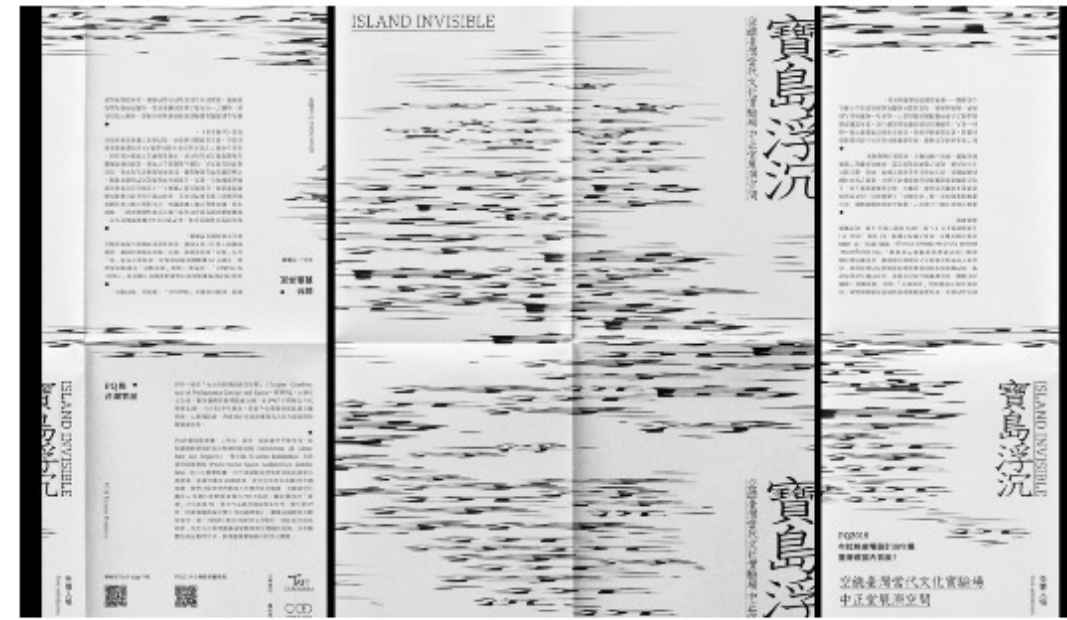
IMAGE



TYPEFACE



Liked by leazerostudio and others
annam.ils the pick up where I left off drawing book
View all 7 comments
30 September 2020



EXHIBITION



imperfect beauty

imperfection

PERSON



Sen no Rikyū is considered the historical figure with the most profound influence on chanoyu, the Japanese "Way of Tea", particularly the tradition of wabi-cha

typography

Can we challenge Japanese society's pursuit of perfection by highlighting the beauty and expressive potential of distorted typefaces?

Wabi sabi

WEBSITE



Japan's unusual way to view the world

Wabi-sabi offers a refuge from the modern world's obsession with perfection, and accepts imperfections as all the more meaningful - and, in their own way, beautiful.

SMT IN THE MEDIA



Kintsugi: Japan's ancient art of embracing imperfection

Meaning "joining with gold", this centuries-old art is more than an aesthetic. For the Japanese, it's part of a broader philosophy of embracing the beauty of human flaws.



WABI SABI: The Art of Embracing Imperfection

"Imperfections are not inadequacies; they are reminders that we're all in this together." — Brené Brown

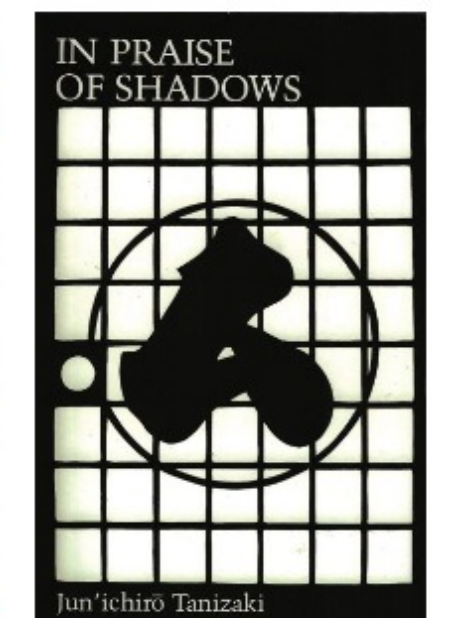
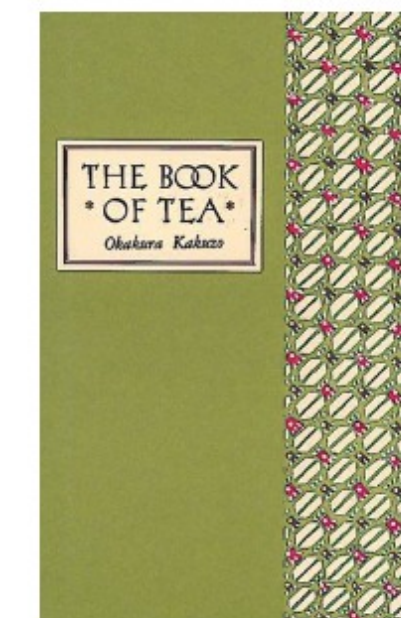
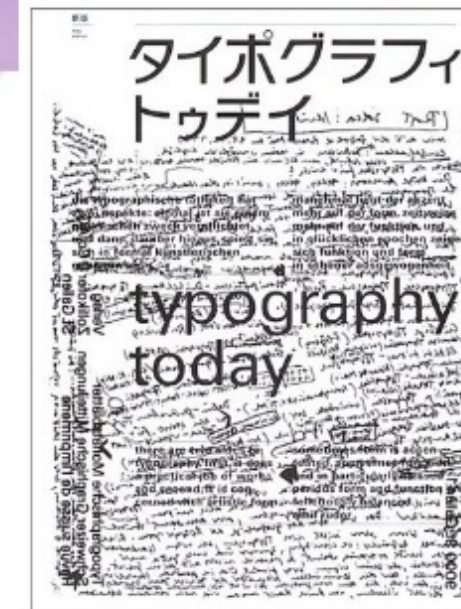
distortion

Momoyama tea potteries:

The beauty of imperfection

SUEYOSHI Sakuko

BOOK



MATERIAL



Installation 'Imperfect' (Tsuyoshi Ozawa, 2018) with plaster statues and plaster drawings. The title is the same as the title of this exhibition: 'Imperfect'. Many of the plaster statues are reproductions of ancient Greek and Roman sculptures. This artwork raises questions about Japanese art universities that require Western-style drawing in exams.

CONVERSATION



Comme des Garçons' hump dress questions the question of perfect physical beauty.

JOURNAL ARTICLE

During the history of ceramics in Japan, the group of tea potteries that developed from the Azuchi-Momoyama period to the early Edo period was called Momoyama tea potteries. These primarily consisted of Shino ware, Seto ware, Oribe ware, Bizen ware, Iga ware, Shigaraki ware, Karatsu ware, and Raku ware. One of the characteristics of the Momoyama tea potteries was "imperfection." Momoyama tea potteries have been studied in various ways, including from the perspectives of the history of ceramics and the history of the tea ceremony. However, there have not been many studies that have focused on the form of imperfection to consider its aesthetic elements.

This paper will examine why imperfection, which is considered a negative element in design terms, can be an aesthetic. In particular, this paper will focus on two Momoyama tea potteries characterized by imperfection that have been handed down through generations: the Gray Shino Tea Bowl called "Mine no Momiji" (or "Maple on the Peak"), Mino ware (16th-17th c.), the Gotoh Museum; and the Freshwater Jar called "Yaburebukuro" ("Torn pouch"), Iga ware, natural ash-glazed stoneware (17th c.), the Gotoh Museum. The design elements of line, surface, volume, texture, dynamics, and balance will be analyzed to highlight the aesthetic character of imperfection.