

Shadows on a Wall: NEC Projectors Bring Japanese Artist's Vision to Life

Facility:

- San Jose Museum of Art

Vertical:

- Arts & Entertainment

Location:

- San Jose, Calif.

Challenges:

- Create an immersive multimedia environment for a Japanese artist's first solo U.S. exhibit

Solution:

- Four NEC PA550W projectors

Result:

- Successful six-month exhibition that garnered favorable feedback from the artist and museum visitors

Date:

- Feb. 6 through Aug. 21, 2016

When a Silicon Valley art museum was chosen for a world-renowned Japanese artist's first solo exhibit in the U.S., which included video animations, its staff needed a way to present the exhibit that would stay true to the artist's vision but also be easy to operate and maintain during the six-month show.

Major international artist Tabaimo's room-size animations blur the line between the real and the surreal, presenting the challenges faced by Japan's so-called "lost generation," caught between the postwar "solidarity" generation and the younger "enlightened" generation. This generation, which Tabaimo labeled danmen no sedai, tiptoes between past and present, reality and virtual reality, and isolationism and globalism.

In 2015, Tabaimo began talks with the San Jose Museum of Art in San Jose, Calif., to determine what her upcoming exhibit, titled "Tabaimo: Her Room," would look like and how it would be set up – including how the animations would be shown.

The Challenge

In initial conversations with exhibit curator Rory Padeken, Tabaimo made it clear that she wanted NEC Display Solutions projectors to show her work. The museum had worked with the company in the past and owns 17 older-model NEC projectors.

"Whenever we hear that an artist wants to use NEC products, our ears perk up, because we have quite a bit of experience with NEC projectors," said Rich Karson, the museum's chief of design and installation. "They are easy to work with and have very few technical issues, even when we put them through quite a bit of use by running them eight hours a day, six days a week."

Tabaimo specifically was looking for a cutting-edge, durable projector that could sync up multiple images into one animation, and also needed a lens that would let the projector be relatively close to the wall without distorting the images. Her gallery in New York, James Cohan, provided three NEC PA500U projectors for one of her animations, while Padeken was tasked with finding four more projectors for another. The artist specified a different projector for a third animation.

Padeken reached out to the Consulate-General of Japan in San Francisco. The consulate contacted NEC's Japanese representatives, who met with Tabaimo in Tokyo and agreed to loan four NEC PA550W projectors for the exhibit.

With the projectors secured, the museum turned its attention to transforming its gallery space into an environment that would complement and enhance the experience for visitors.



The Installation

The Tabaimo exhibit included drawings the museum commissioned the artist to create directly on the gallery walls as well as three animations: “danDAN,” a video installation with sound, completed in 2009; “yudangami,” a four-channel video installation with sound, completed in 2009; and “aitaisei-josei,” a single-channel video installation with sound, completed in 2015.

The total exhibit square footage is slightly less than 6,000 square feet, Padeken said, with multiple unique spaces that visitors encounter during the show.

“The majority of people are not familiar with this artist before they come to the museum, and it’s hard to imagine the work before they see it,” he said.

The museum renovated its galleries in collaboration with Tabaimo to create three distinct environments for the three main projection pieces to exist in, creating an immersive experience for visitors using sound and video.



After the renovation, Karson and his team had to configure the projectors’ setup in a way that accurately portrayed the artist’s vision. This required some creative thinking from the installation team.

For example, “yudangami” utilized four synced NEC PA550W projectors with NP12ZL lenses. The design team needed to hang the four projectors in a semi-circle, mirroring a convex semi-circle wall build-out. The projectors form one side of the circle, and the wall construction forms the other side of the circle.

The team had to measure out the exact radius of the circle and triangulate the positions of the projectors before suspending them from the ceiling. The projectors do not hang flat horizontally, but at an angle. Two of them each connect to one Mac Mini, and both computers are synced through Tabaimo’s software to play one continuous image.

“It looks like one projection, even though it’s coming from four different sources,” Karson said. “Syncing projectors is a very tricky type of installation for us to do, as far as the image and how it appears on the wall.”

The Results

Karson said that the projectors experienced no issues other than one projector bulb that needed to be changed out – an expected piece of maintenance for the length of the show, he said.

“It’s been a really positive experience – not just in terms of having the project match our creative vision, but it’s always a roll of the dice when we do video installations and have them up for a long time,” Karson said. “This show has a six-month run, which puts a lot of wear and tear on any piece of technology, and the team and I have been blown away that we’ve only needed to change one bulb. That’s unheard of. These are incredibly robust machines.”

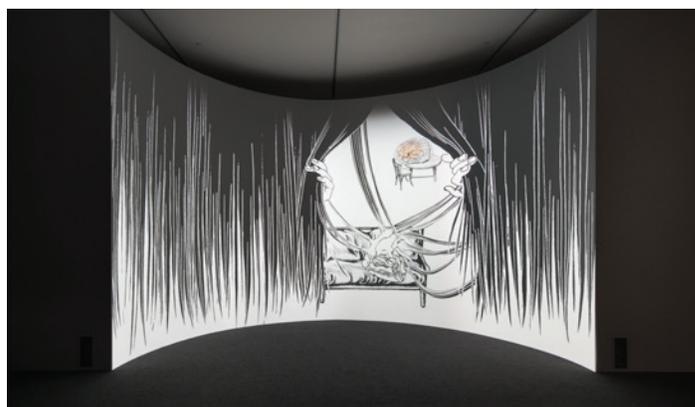
Feedback has been favorable from all sectors – Tabaimo was “incredibly happy” with how the exhibition turned out, Karson said, and visitors have been very positive as well.

“It’s hard to experience [Tabaimo’s] work through images, or even moving video,” Padeken said. “You need to be in the space to feel how large the animations are, and how they envelope you in this mesmerizing, surreal world. When I take people on tours, they always inquire how many projectors are being used and how they are showing the image, and they’re always surprised by the technology of the exhibit in general.”

Some of the responses on the gallery comment cards also have called out the technology. Carol M. Pizzo, the museum’s director of legacy stewardship, said that one card read, “Very surreal with the style of the studio. Love the show, especially ‘danDAN.’ Video projection is out of this world. Feels like I’m dreaming!”

Padeken said that the NEC projectors contributed to the success of the exhibition.

“We are completely grateful to NEC for supporting this project,” he said. “We probably could not have done it without them. This kind of corporate generosity is quite rare these days, especially in the art world, and they gave us an incredible gift in being able to bring Tabaimo’s work to a broader audience in the Silicon Valley.”



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