

The 3.11 Portrait Project

Supporting earthquake recovery efforts in Japan through the power of photography



In March 2011, a powerful earthquake left eastern Japan in a state of unprecedented destruction. Almost one year later, an extraordinary Japanese photography exhibition has come to Toronto to celebrate the power of the human spirit to endure through emotional and environmental devastation.

The 3.11 Portrait Project showcases a collection of traditional family portraits taken by volunteer photographers in the midst of one of the largest natural disasters in Japan's history. Through the combined efforts of volunteer photographers, makeup artists, hairstylists and non-profit organizations, families in shelters and temporary housing centres were styled and photographed on-site against a plain white backdrop. The intentional simplicity of this setting allows the remarkable tenacity of each survivor to shine with a smile, turning grief into optimism—despite being surrounded by conditions that continue to test their ability to move forward.

Shiseido (Canada) Inc. is proud to sponsor the 3.11 Portrait Project, which unites victims and global audiences through photographic memories and serves as a bridge of support that connects people to each other. 100 percent of proceeds raised through the sale of commemorative t-shirts (\$25) sold at the exhibit through the Japan Foundation will be donated to ongoing earthquake relief efforts.

3.11 Portrait Project Exhibition Details



Location: The Japan Foundation, 131 Bloor Street West, Toronto

Admission: FREE

Dates: January 7-27, 2012

Gallery Hours:

Monday: 11:30 am - 7:00 pm EXTENDED HOURS

Tuesday: 11:30 am - 4:30 pm

Wednesday: 11:30 am - 4:30 pm

Thursday: 11:30 am - 7:00 pm EXTENDED HOURS

Friday: 11:30 am - 4:30 pm

Saturday openings: Noon - 5:00 pm (January 7 & 21)

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OR

www.311portrait.jp

About the 3.11 Portrait Project

The 3.11 Portrait Project is a collaborative mission designed to support earthquake recovery efforts in eastern Japan. The success of the 3.11 Portrait Project was achieved with the participation of photographers from different fields, hair and makeup artists, models, and local non-profit organizations in Japan.



Following the devastating earthquake in March 2011, 3.11 Portrait Project team members went to Tohoku in early April to take news photos and to assist with different aid organizations. Despite the almost complete devastation that surrounded them, these volunteers witnessed remarkable signs of hope: victims who had shut down emotionally from their immense suffering becoming more open each time a shutter was pressed; people who were overcome with joy when they located lost photographs in the dirt and rubble; middle-aged women who seemed to brightly laugh off even unprecedented hardship.

Astonished by the tenacity and optimism shown by the survivors, the photographers and volunteers who witnessed this asked their colleagues to work with them to take portraits of the victims. Members of the 3.11 Portrait Project have only one goal: “We want those who have lost everything to find even a little courage and hope, to find the momentum to take a step toward the future. We want to help them do this.”

The 3.11 Portrait Project photographers usually work in different arenas—some in advertising and others in magazines—and thus have different styles, and their individuality is revealed in portraits of victims taken against a common white backdrop. The only things present in each image are the feelings of the subject and the person taking the photograph.

The volunteers feel that photography's intrinsic preservation and communication functions will prevent this disaster from being forgotten, and that photography moves people and has the power to change grief into smiles. In front of them, the photographers have the optimistic, "I'm-not-going-to-let-this-beat-me" attitude of the people who have come forward to be their subjects. We would like others to experience their spirit, and encourage you to share their story through your media outlets.



Statement from the 3.11 Portrait Project Executive Committee

The devastation caused by the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake is widely known, but we started going to disaster areas almost two months after it occurred. When we rethought what the role of photography should be in this situation, we came up with one answer. To take authentic portraits, which are clearly different from news photographs, and to leave a record.



Although the subjects vary in number between individuals, families, and groups, we thought that having talented photographers come together as an organization to leave portraits and communicate with the next generation was a very meaningful way to support not only earthquake victims, but the “emotional recovery” of local communities and Japan as a country.

The damage left in the wake of this unprecedented earthquake far exceeds anything that we imagined. It is impossible to imagine the physical and mental pain of the victims. In light of people’s difficulty facing harsh realities, taking portraits in this situation is not an easy thing. But people must move past difficulty to go forward. We thought that rather than shutting away the feelings they had after the earthquake and the deep sadness that they couldn’t put into words, releasing these feelings would give them a foothold to tomorrow and to recovery. As photographers, we believe our mission is to support each of the victim’s next steps by taking their portraits.

We had the rare opportunity to go to the disaster areas several times to take portraits. During shoots, we saw earthquake victims who had shutdown emotionally open up little by little, and have had people say wonderful things after shoots like “I want to make this an opportunity to move forward positively with my life,” and “I’m glad I had my picture taken. It cheered me up.”

These moments confirmed for us that they were able to find some sense of closure on their post-earthquake feelings by having their photographs taken and that their portraits gave them the momentum to take a step toward the future. And we realized that we ourselves, through sharing the victims’ feelings in some way, were greatly encouraged and deeply comforted.

This activity also revealed a crucial fact. Photographers at local photo studios play an important role for families and local communities. People told us things like “We went to the photo studio a lot before the earthquake,” “I would take the kids to the studio whenever there was a special occasion,” and “All those photographs were washed away.” These photographers themselves were severely impacted. We are providing all of our services for free, but we are mindful of not interfering with the future recovery efforts of local photographers and hope that this project helps with future economic activities. For this reason also, we would like many photographers, including those from local photo studios, to participate in this project and as many people and companies as possible to cooperate with and support the project so that we can shoot according to the requests of the victims and help prepare the environment for economic recovery.

We continue to believe that photography’s intrinsic “preservation” and “communication” functions will prevent this disaster from being forgotten and that photography moves people and has the power to change grief into smiles.

3.11 Portrait Project Executive Committee
www.311portrait.jp

3.11 Portrait Project Executive Committee (As of August 2011)

Representative: Nobuyuki Kobayashi (Photographer, zenne, Inc.)

Secretariat: Koichi Ishii (Representative, NPO Machiasobi)

Executive Committee Members:

Sakiko Ishii (NPO Machiasobi)
Ryuzo Ishikawa (Photographer, studio STR)
Hideyuki Endo (Style Works)
Mari Hagino (Reflexologist, Sole to Soul)
Takayoshi Oshida (Photographer, studio lushlife)
Eiichiro Kato (Graphic Designer)
Kazunori Kano (Figurative Artist)
Atsuki Kawano (Photographer)
KEN (Hair & Makeup, AVGVST)
Kou Kobayashi (PR, 3.11PP)
Hiroshi Sakurai (Hair & Makeup, AVGVUST)
Yuka Sato (Hair & Makeup)
Hidenobu Shibata (Representative, Shibata Farm)
Yuko Shindo (Photographer)
Tomoko Shiraishi (Style Works)
Yukiko Taira (kind Manager)
Taca (Hair & Makeup, kind)
Yurie Takagi (PR, 3.11PP)
Chie Takeyama (kind Manager)
Motoharu Tashiro (Photographer)
Minoru Nagase (Representative, Liaison Publishing Co., Ltd.)
Takashi Hida (Hair & Makeup/President, kind)
Kenichi Funada (Photographer)
Saki Hojo (Iwate University)
Miho (TENCARAT)
Takahiro Motonami (Photographer)
Tomoyuki Morimoto (Photography Assistant)
Yamada Takako/ANN (Photographer)

Sponsor: Shizukuishi, Iwate

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NPO Machiasobi

NPO Toono Magokoro Net

HAKUBA Photo Industry Co., Ltd.

Gin-ichi Corporation

Epson Sales Japan Corp.

BNP PARIBAS CARDIF GROUP (France)

Hair & Makeup Office [kind]

AVGVST International

Kumamoto Hitoyoshi Senior High School

Edogawa Matsue Public Elementary School 2

LOCATION SERVICE [Nai'a, Inc.]

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