NATSUMI AOYAGI
SANITARY FABLES
28.11.2026 – 04.01.2027

Maumaus, Sala Polivalente
CAM – Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian, Sound Room

28.11 | **17h00** Opening of the exhibition, Maumaus, CAM | **18h00** Talk with the artist and curator Sayaka Mitome, CAM Studio

Natsumi Aoyagi, *Sanitary Fables — The Snail That Drank the Sea Dry, The Sewer That Is Neither, The Crow That Found a Washhouse*, 2026, video still



Natsumi Aoyagi's practice seeks to reveal presences and transformations often overlooked by established systems and records, combining poetic language with images. In her first exhibition in Portugal, a partnership between CAM – Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian and Maumaus, the artist and poet presents *Sanitary Fables*, a work that investigates Lisbon's sewerage and public sanitation infrastructure, tracing its flows through the city. The project was born out of fieldwork Aoyagi carried out at water reservoirs and public washhouses during her first visit to Portugal. Encountering the historic reservoirs and the tranquillity of the old washing places sparked her interest in questions of public health.

In her exhibition, Aoyagi explores the historical ties and parallels between Portugal and Japan, particularly around ideas of public hygiene and the use of fables. The notion of public hygiene spread from London and Paris in the nineteenth century, and Portugal and Japan appropriated and reinterpreted it, each in its own way, influenced by their long relationships with the sea. In Japanese, 'hygiene' is referred to as *eisei*, a word that denotes defending one's own life. The artist's interest in fables relates to an earlier moment, in the sixteenth century, when the printing press that was carried from Lisbon to Japan by the Tenshō Embassy was used to publish the *Fables* attributed to the Greek storyteller and fabulist Aesop. Titled *Esopo no Fabulas* and also known as *Isoho Monogatari*, the work became the first Western literary text to be translated and published in Japan.

Adopting the fable, an allegorical form in which non-human beings become narrators, *Sanitary Fables* reconsiders sanitation, which we now take for granted, proposing a critical examination of contemporary society through these voices. Conceived by analogy with Lisbon's water supply and sanitation networks and drawing on moving image and sound, the work begins with video installations at the CAM – Centro de Arte Moderna Gulbenkian and at Maumaus and extends to several sites across the city, including public washhouses.

Natsumi Aoyagi (Tokyo, 1990) lives and works in Tokyo. In 2016, she completed a Master's degree in New Media at Tokyo University of the Arts. She develops projects grounded in research and fieldwork, exploring the possibilities of time-based media through observation, documentation, narrative and poetry. In 2022, she was nominated for the *Women to Watch* programme, and in 2023 she received the 28th Nakahara Chūya Prize for her poetry collection *Sodatsu no o yameru*, published in English as *Done Being Nurtured* (Spite Press). She is a member of the art collective kohonya honkbooks.

Curator: Sayaka Mitome | Organisers: The Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan; Japan Arts Council; National Center for Art Research, Japan | Support: Nomura Foundation

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Opening hours
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Sunday, 10h00 – 18h00
Saturday, 10h00 – 21h00
Closed on Tuesdays, 24 and 25 December, 1 January

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