



Interview Shintaro Okamoto, The Ice Master

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Article by Yvonne Lo
 Photo credit Winston Hsu

From custom ice cubes for cocktails to life-like sculptures to ice bars and ice wares to ice fashion, Okamoto studio brings ice to a design and production level in ways never imagined. Okamoto studio's ice is as clear and crystal as lake ice. The things they can do with ice have no limits.

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AsianInNY Updates

- Industry Experts Rank EVA Among World's 10 Safest Airlines**
 Taiwan-based EVA Air has been ranked as one of world's 10 safest airlines by website [AirlineRatings.com](#). Others among the top 10, in alphabetical order, are: Air New Zealand, All Nippon Airways, Cathay Pacific Airways, Emirates, Etihad Airways, Royal Jordanian, Singapore Airlines, Qantas and Virgin Atlantic.



Okamoto studio and their works have been featured in various press and media such as the Huffington Post, Time Out New York, Wall Street Journal, and featured on television shows such as "Iron Chef America", "Martha Stewart", "Will Work for Food". You can find videos and articles of these on their website at <http://www.okamotostudionyc.com/news/>. Now it's time to add AsianInNY to the list of press and media. Covered in frost, Shintaro Okamoto, founder of Okamoto Studio, came out of the freezer and into the warm, toasty office to speak with us.

Singapore Airlines, Garuda and Virgin Atlantic. EVA has consistently been recognized by organizations [...]

- **Serve the People: The Asian American Movement in New York**

Wednesday, January 15, 2014, 7:00 PM
Interference Archive 131 8th St, Brooklyn, New York 11215
Serve the People: The Asian American Movement in New York charts a history of Asian American activism, organizing, and cultural production in the 1970s, the first exhibition to focus on New York as a center of this national phenomenon. Through posters, leaflets, ne [...]

- **Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company's Lunar New Year Celebration**

Brooklyn Center for the Performing Arts at Brooklyn College continues its 2013-14 World of Dance series on Sunday, January 26, 2014 at 3pm with Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company's Lunar New Year Celebration – The Year of the Horse. Tickets are \$30 and can be purchased by phone at 718-951-4500 (Tues-Sat, 1pm-6pm) or online at BrooklynCenterOnline.org. Commemorate [...]

- **Development Associate**

The Development Associate job is an evolving position, leading an established fundraising program while thinking strategically about ways to expand our audience, and ways to generate new income. The Development Associate will manage the department by maintaining the current years' budget and preparing budgets for future years. In addition, the Development As [...]

- **Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company to Celebrate the Lunar New Year**

The world renowned Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company is actively developing and rehearsing for dance and music performances to celebrate



AsianInNY: Tell me about yourself. How did you get involved with ice sculpting?

Okamoto: I started this company 2003 with my father, Takeo, he's the master sculptor. He sculpted ice for almost 50 years and I grew up playing around with ice. I grew up in Alaska and not a lot of Alaskans played with ice, but I did. He had a culinary background so he touched upon ice when he was going through sushi school in Tokyo. Then my family immigrated to Anchorage, Alaska. Couple years down, one boring winter, we went to the lake and found a block of ice. We pulled it out, carved it into a swan and gave it to a friend. From then, it became a self-taught community of ice sculptor during winter time. We started doing exhibitions and competitions.

Being an ice sculptor was a total accident. Painting was always my medium. I think in 2D and color. It's just the cross-road of life that created this monster that is taking over my life.

AsianInNY: How did Okamoto Studio begin?

for a dance and music extravaganza to celebrate the coming of the Year of the Horse at NJPAC in Newark, NJ. Aside from the fantastic program on stage, audience members can also join the Company for a very special 12 course Chinese [...]

- **The “Cool Japan” Strategy: Sharing the Unique Culture of Japan with the World**

Monday, January 13, 2014, 7:00 PM Japan Society 333 E 47th St, New York, NY 10017 In 2012, the newly elected Abe administration appointed Tomomi Inada as the first Minister in charge of “Cool Japan” Strategy. The strategy's aim is to share Japan's unique food, fashion, and traditional culture with the rest of the world while also [...]

- **45th TAANY Annual Banquet**

When: Sunday, January 12, 2014 at 6pm Where: Mudan Banquet Hall, Queens Crossing (136-17 39th Ave, 2nd floor, Flushing, NY 11354) The Annual Banquet has been a tradition of our organization where we gather with our members and friends to celebrate the beginning of the new year and reflect on our accomplishments together of the passing year. [...]

- **Record Attendance at Seventh Asian Financial Forum**

More than 2,400 business leaders and senior government officials from 41 countries and regions took part in the seventh Asian Financial Forum (AFF), 13-14 January, at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. Delegations of senior executives from Australia, Canada, the Chinese mainland, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, Russia, [...]

- **Big Apple Circus Presents: Luminocity**

Sunday, January 12, 2014, 12:30 AM & 4:30 PM Damrosch Park Amsterdam Ave. and W. 62 St., New York, NY 10023 Welcome to Big Apple Circus LEGENDARIUM! Enter the intimate Big Top circus of years gone by, where the World's Greatest Circus Artists perform spectacular

Okamoto: I went to college in the East coast; I went to Brown University for undergrad. I ended up in New York, to finish up my painting degree for my masters at Hunter College. My father became free agent; he sold his business and he felt like he was done with Alaska. We always worked well together, and began to talk about what we could do and started looking into opening an ice sculpture studio here. It was challenging, because a lot of people were very discouraging of us to start one, because the city is a tricky place to do something like this. There was a lot of underpricing with other competitors; it was just a difficult place to be. But if anything, it gave us more encouragement to try something because we felt confident that we could bring something different and high quality. I was fortunate to have had such a great education and wanted to bring to the art world our ability and present what we could do – a fresh, modern, contemporary way of what ice is possible.

We really started with nothing and gave away ice sculptors for exposure. We were able to get connected to fantastic clients who were very supportive from get-go. New York City is such a club, its word-of-mouth. If you meet the right people, you can get referrals from all around. Still today, we never know what comes through the door, new clients every day, and something different every day.

feats and no one sits more than 50 feet from the ring! See the [...]

- **Sounds of Korea**

Date: Saturday, January 11, 2014 Venue: Korean Performing Arts Center 12 E 33rd St. 5th Fl., New York, NY 10016 Sounds of Korea, Korean Performing Arts Center's performance group, will proudly present the "Sounds of Korea" event at KPAC on Saturday, January 11, 2014 from 7:30pm to 9:30pm. This showcase is a meaningful event to KPAC as it [...]



AsianInNY: The ice that you use to create the sculpture, do you make them yourself?

Okamoto: We make some and we buy some. We have series of ice machines that make the raw block that allows us to control quality of the ice and the clarity of the ice. We get to freeze a lot of products inside the ice. Our machines create the clear ice by having the water circulate with the pump as it freezes from bottom to the top. What it does is eliminate all the still air bubbles that create the frostiness of the ice, so any impurities stays on the surface by freezing it from bottom to up. We buy some ice based on the sheer volume of work that we have to do to complete a project.

AsianInNY: As the seasons change, how does it affect your business?

Okamoto: We do fashion shows, film premieres, product launches, bar mitzvah, and weddings. It's a year-round adventure for us. During the fall seasons, we do more corporate events. During the holiday seasons, there are holiday parties and Christmas parties that go into the New Year's. The spring tends to be more advanced, for galas and award shows. When summer comes in, it's mostly weddings. We get dozens of orders daily, it keeps us busy.

AsianInNY: You recently participated in the New York Festival of Light, please tell us how you prepared for the festival and what ice art installation did you do for the event?

Okamoto: I got myself into that festival because of Ira Levy from Levy Lighting, who is the founder and organizer of the festival. We've been working together for a very long time, at different events. It was an inaugural event for them and wanted to bring in an artist to think of what's possible working with lights. He gave us a product to work with. We designed something that reacted something from that. It was a strand of LED lights, very festive, so that got us thinking organic shapes. So, we did clusters of organic forms that made little ice forms with glowing LED lights inside.

AsianInNY: What's the most challenging sculpture you've made?

Okamoto: I think everything is challenging. We try to bring in something different and fresh every time. If we're doing something repetitive, our challenge would be to do it more efficiently, or bring in something different or make it more specific to that event. It's a tricky question, nothing is easy. That's how I feel working with ice. It's a material that melts away, that's clear, slippery, wet and heavy. You can't do it alone, it takes a great amount of team, and I'm really lucky to be around amazing people here every day.



Ben, Shintaro, Thomas

AsianInNY: As an Asian American, a Japanese American, have you encountered any difficulties growing up? How did you overcome it?

Okamoto: Of course, there was a lot of typical racial discrimination in the 80's. I was very fortunate though because I could draw. I remember coming to America when I was in third grade, it was the first day and it was lunch time, I stood in the corner of the room at the chalkboard and drew E.T., I remembered I was so obsessed with E.T, because it just came out. The teachers and kids were really receptive, when you can do something; it makes it easy to make friends. For me, it was very little; I always had people asking me to draw a unicorn or angels. I did that and it was a way to draw myself to a lot of people who took care of me.

I've been living in New York for about 15 years now. Coming to New York as an adult, I think New York is an amazing city. It's all about doing good work, and being sincere, and connecting to the right people.

AsianInNY: Do you have any words of wisdom, inspiration, or advice for upcoming artists?

Okamoto: Work hard, be sincere, and try not to work for free, maybe some for exposure. I often think artists get taken advantage of in society. What we create, the gift of creating something from nothing is often taken as free. I

think the challenge as an artist is this is your skill, this is your livelihood.

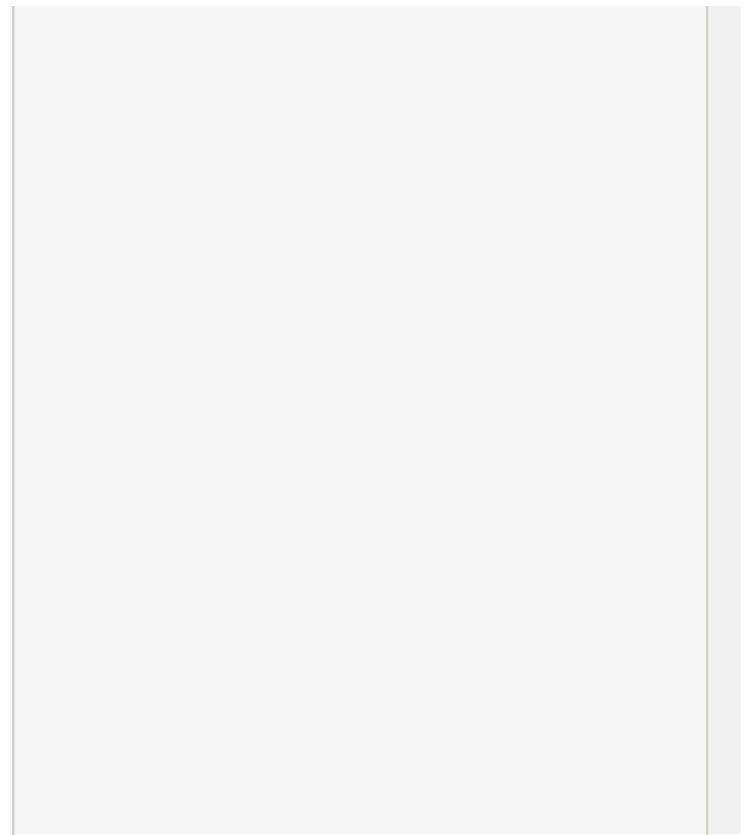
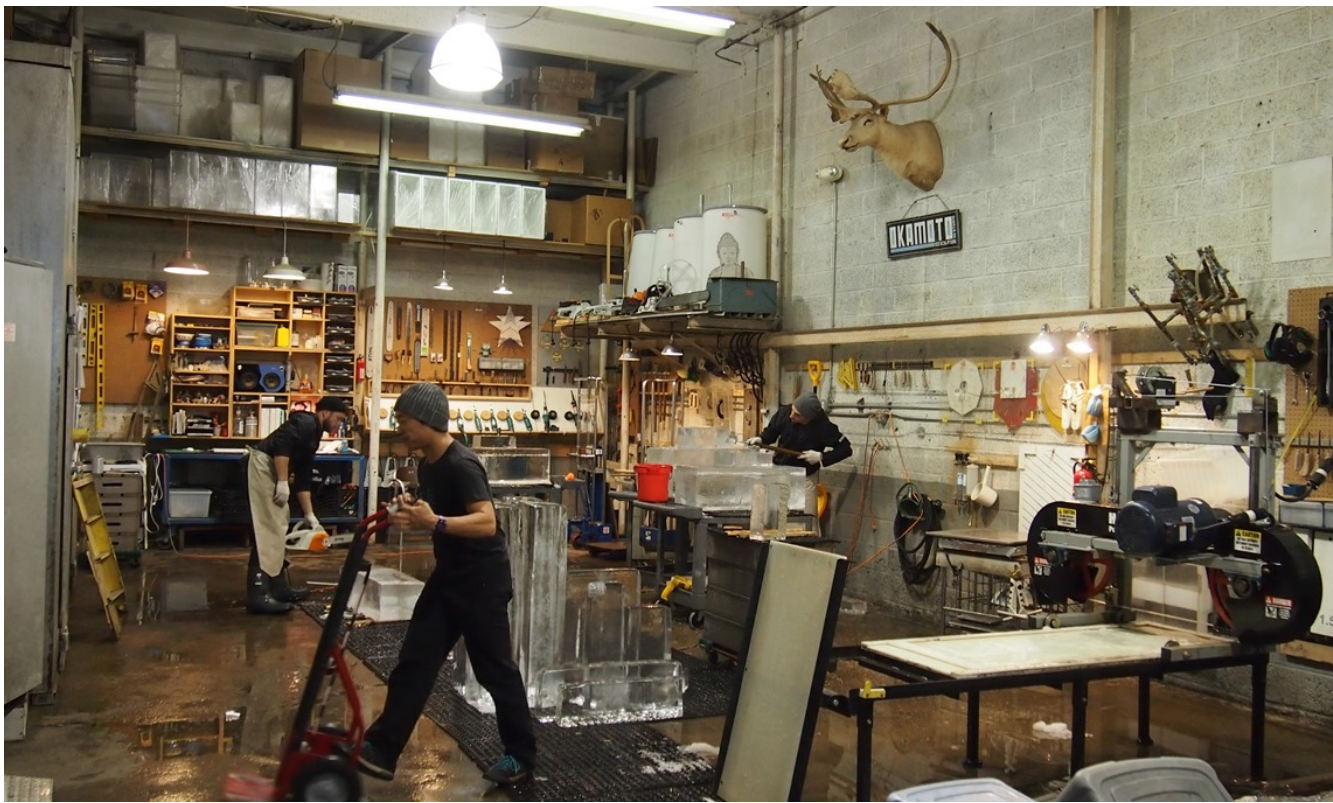
AsianInNY: What is your current project and what's your next project?

Okamoto: Right now we're entering our holiday seasons. So there's a bunch of holiday programs coming up whether it's a live carving performance at Central Park for tree lighting, and we're doing the same thing for Lincoln Center. We like to do things as community-based as possible. And we do a lot of private events, corporate events. We have a whole range of stuff. We're doing a performance of a live installation at the Financial Center in February. We'll be doing a lot of stuff for Super Bowl. Busy, busy.

It was a pleasure to meet Shintaro Okamoto and his team. Next time you have an event or an occasion to celebrate, look up Okamoto Studio. They will consult, design, and produce an ice sculpture for you will render your event unforgettable, and make it exceptional. Okamoto Studio fulfills each client's needs and desires, translating these into the language of form, light, and evanescence. Their team of artists guides you through the possibilities to elevate your special moment, with careful attention to detail, timing, and budget.

To view their portfolio, services, and features, visit okamotostudionyc.com.









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