

ONIBI

Chronicle of the invisible Japan

Atelier Sentô

Drawings and photographs : Cecile Brun
Scenario and colors : Olivier Pichard

This story is inspired from one of our stays in Niigata in 2014.

We dedicate this book to the people we met then. All of them were so welcoming , generous and gave us the opportunity to enjoy their region and its secrets. Some of those friends appear in this book. We hope they will enjoy.

Many thanks as well to our families and friends who have provided us their support during the making-of.

Cécile & Olivier

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Kokekokko!

Destination Tokyo

Les saisons du Japon

Le fantôme de la tasse de thé

Tokyo ohanami

Nippon no Haikyo

Corée du nord

Neko Land

Saru

Japan...

End of summer.

The Niigata district lays its rice paddies to the shore.

Saruwada, a tiny village nested down the hill ...

Cut off from the outside world on this rainy day.

- I think we came for nothing... I asked the seller : There is no "matsuri" today.

- Yet I checked on the website...

- You may have mistaken the day for the month.

- Brrr,What a rain shower! I should have taken a coat... but it was so hot yesterday!

- What did you buy?

- Some steamed brioche and plain nuggets.

- Yum, it's good, it warms you up.

- It looks like calming down.

- Look! I was right after all.

- Don't we follow them? We shall be lost.

- Don't worry, they won't go far away, the village is so tiny. We shall catch them up later, but first...

- I'd like to have a quick glance at this place.

- Brrr, it's very cold in here!
- Because that's an old house, it keeps dampness.
- Hello!
- ...
- Uh, I can see that you have second hand cameras.

I'm looking for a polaroid , you know? The one with the photo that comes out on its own?

- It's junk!
- No, no, some are very good.
- I have something better.

- A bi-lens? But I already have one!
- This is a special one!
The Lenses have been polished by monks. It can take picture of super natural beings!
- I can see that you sell it for only 500 yens, it is not plastic at least?
- It's good japanese plastic.
- Does it work with any kind of film?
- Oh no! You need special films, rare and very expensive!
- But I give you a discount on the first one : with the camera included 10000 yens only.
- I take it!

- What happened? Did he hypnotize you?
- I made a good deal.
- You got ripped off!
- Oh!
- What?
- For a second I was under the impression that it was snowing outside.
- No wonder, it's freezing cold in here .
- Pff, and now it's raining again .
Come on, let's stop the rot, let's go back to the station!

- Aaah, what a mess!
- The next one comes in less than an hour , do we wait here?
- At least, we'll be sheltered .
- Do you think there are some ghosts awaiting the train with us? I could try my camera ...
- Don't waste your film, it's too dark.
- You'll have better opportunities ...
- I suppose you're right.

Yokai camera

*Viewfinder
Move forward
Shutter release*

Lenses polished by monks for a better picture quality

*8 pictures
D800 Tengu silver
Official film for yokai hunter*

Sensitive to supernatural waves

Instructions

- 1. Aim at the yokai*
- 2. Release the shutter*
- 3. Move the film forward to next picture*

An advanced technology to go unnoticed :

With an ordinary camera, the yokai is wary of something.

With the yokai camera he thinks he is playing a joke on you while you are not watching.

clic

It's time to take the picture.

Advice from a pro

Mr Takada professor at Tokyo university

- 1. Know your opponent. "My encyclopedia about yokai "is the ideal tool.*
- 2. Find the appropriate bait to lure your victim. Yokai are big eaters so be careful!*
- 3. Keep quiet and don't ever look them in the eye. Flash is not recommended.*
- 4. Never pet a yokai, even if it looks cute .*

- Aaah, It's far better when sun shines!

- What is she doing now?

1
Uchino Foxes

- Are you looking for something?
- Shh! I'm trying to take a picture of a ghost!
- I doubt there is any in the house.
- You'd better try in the garden, it's full of spiders!

You may find the gardener's ghost!

- Look...

- It's just an old doll.
- There's no ghost in the Fujiwara's house, only old memories.
- So where should I find some? I have to use my camera at least!
- Let's ask the "Margutta's", they have lived their whole life in Niigata, they should really know about it.

The Margutta 51 is a tea room, restaurant, hair dresser, art gallery where we used to go on a previous stage.

The place is run by a couple of retired people. Their aim is to take in unwealthy students passing through Niigata and fatten them up. What for? Nobody knows!

Kosuke Baba is the boss. He serves tea and talk with the guests.

His wife, Sumie, Cooks the meals and cut hair.

In the end we're all prisoners of "Margutta's".

- It's too cold in my flat, so I come and study everyday here.
Chi Kook, Korea

- I feel lonely in my lab and all my colleagues are Japanese. When I come here they play Brassens' songs, so it makes me feel relaxed .
Benoit, France

- The school year is over now, my bedroom has been removed by University but as I wish to stay a little longer I could find accomodation in here providing that I give some help.
Fahri, Turkey

- What about you?

- Still worse, we're not even supposed to be here in Japan.

One month earlier in France...

- Oh! A mail from the "Margutta's", it's very kind of them, they did their best to write in French .

- You, do translate, otherwise nothing to eat.

- And what does it say?

- "It's settled for next month, we found a house for you!"

- I must have made a mistake in my latest mail in Japanese. They think we are going to Niigata .

- We 'll have to be tactfull when turning their offer down...

- Nobody can escape them!

- Ah! Cecile, Olivier, what will you have for lunch?

*Home made pickled onions, crisp and sweet .
Niigata rice, best of Japan, pearl like and flavoured.
Meat simmered until malting in mouth.
Mashed spicy and fruity onions*

- That's it, I remember why we came all this way long from France.

- 14 hours in a plane, 3 hours in a train then 5 hours in a nightbus, so that we can enjoy again...

- The Margutta's rice curry!!!

- Is it good?
- Say, do you know if there are some ghosts around here?
- In Japan we call them Yokai.
- Hum...
- ...
- Hey, Sumie! Have you ever seen Yokai around here?
- We should ask Mrs Kojima.
- I call her.
- No need to bother her for that.

- Poor Mrs Kojima , they have a hold on her as well...
- Hihi, good day!
- Ah! Mrs Kojima, how are you?
- There it is!
- Sweet beans! Thank you,
- There is a story about the fox lady of Uchino, but it is an old one ...
- At that time ...
I was only a child girl ...

Mrs Kojima's tale

- ?
- Hi, little girl ...
 - There is a man chasing after me, can I hide somewhere around here?

- Hop !
- Wow! She-devil runs fast !
- Hey, girl! Did you see a woman wearing a scarlet kimono?
- Well, she must have run to the canal.

- My lady, ...
- He's gone .
- Lady?
- Oh! What a big Onigiri!

Yoshida Inari shrine

- Do you really think it was a female fox?
- She doesn't even know why this man was chasing her!
- How to be sure?
- This may be a place for foxes.
- You see!
- Wait a minute! What are you shooting at, maybe they're not even there.
- We should find a way to attract them.
- Any idea?

- Ouch, wich flavour should I take?

Salmon

Tomato omelet

Chicken mayonnaise

Pizza

Sesame seaweed

Curry

- Oh well, whatever. Foxes eat anything.

- We'll look weird if somebody goes past...

- Hurry up!

- It doesn't seem to work.

– Maybe I should have choosen the salmon one?

- Look!

- Here she comes!

- So what? Are the foxes out?

- You smartened yourself up Mrs Kojima!

- Ask her what the foxes onigiri flavour was.

- Plain, of course. But with the best rice of Niigata.

- Ah for sure, it wasn't one of these horrible Onigiri manufactured in factory they sell in supermarket!

- Pff, How can I find that?

- It's my lucky day!
- I take this one please!
- How nice it is, we should eat it rather than waste it.
- Am I still in Uchino?
- I didn't walk much but I don't recognize any building.

- Hey! Did you find it?
- Ah! Yes, in a small old fashion shop.
- Oh, it looks good!
- Hop!
- Come on, come on little fox ...
- Psst, you should see that.
- !

- Oh.
It vanished.

- Oh no! We missed it!

- What shall I do? Still take a picture?

- Well, go ahead. Who knows: maybe one of them is still having a nap.

- Oh, where is Ms Kojima gone?

Click

- I don't know, she must have gone shopping.

- Do you think they're still there?

- Who knows, let's take another path.

- Wait, I got lost previously when going this way.
We'd better take this other way.

- But it's a longer one.

- That's ok: it will be the opportunity for a nice walk.

Photo 1/8

The Torii path (foxes)

Uchino

18/09/2014

Slightly hazy

Setting

light

Distance

Picture

- Hurry up, we'll miss it!

- Phew, just in time.

- So?

- Third stop.

- I can't wait! I can't wait!

2

The Enchanted Forest

- Don't raise your hope, it may not be a true yōkai, but only the village mascot...

- If it shows on the map, it does exist!

- Absolutely no living soul around here...

- Look how nice these persimmons!

- Autumn is beginning...

- Didn't we already walked this way?

- I think we've got lost. Streets look all the same...

- Look!

We can ask our way.

- Heee, american people!?!

- Hello!!!

- Hmm... Good day, we're looking for this creature.

- Oh, how cute!

- Sooo cute!

- Oooh, you're good at drawing!

- It's Buruburu-kun!

- That's what I suspected...

- This Buruburu, where does he live?
- Hmm, maybe in the old forest. The elders always tell amazing stories about it.
It's supposed to have been a magical place.
- A magical forest! No joke? Is it far from here?
- No, it's just a few yards away, behind the supermarket.
- Can I have the drawing?
- Can I take a picture of you?
- Me too! Me too!
- Bye bye!
- They put me under stress...
- From now, not a sound. We must not frighten him.

- Well, where is the forest?
- There is a sign.
- It says they cut the trees to grow rice and you can buy "magical forest rice" at the shop just behind.
- What a pity...
- What are you doing?
- I take the picture.
- But there's nothing left.
- I don't care.
- Well, at least it's a nice view.

Photo 2/8

Magical forest (Buruburu)

Bunsui

02/10/2014

Clear weather

Setting

Light

Distance

Picture

3
The floating world

- Oh, Cecile, Olivier, come in.

- Sorry, we're a little bit tired, we're going home.

- Juste a minute.

- I make some tea for you.

- No need, we're not staying.

- What have kept you so busy today?

We had an amazing day.

It began early this morning...

- Ouch, I didn't sleep well. We ate too much for dinner yesterday.

- Ah! A yokai!

- He's trying to enter through the window!!!
 - No, it's M. Shiga from the Craole gallery.
 - I can see that you're not busy today so come, I drive you!
 - But we were planning to go to the bamboo light festival in Murakami...
 - All right, all right, it's on our way.
 - As he's an architect and in charge of a gallery, M. Shiga is a very busy man. Still he takes us to visit lots of places: shrines, art galleries, workshops...
- And when the door is closed he always tries to enter through the window!
- Oh yes, M. Shiga is quite a character.

This morning, we followed the winding road between the sea and mount Kakuda. A wild landscape where waves smash.

- And this rock on the right side, guess what it looks like?
 - Hu... Don't know. You drive too fast.
 - It's a crab. A gigantic crab claw!
 - Oh... And do anyone knows how it turned into stone?
 - What? Well, all that's fibs!
 - Several years ago, government wanted to build a nuclear power unit around here but inhabitants strongly objected.
 - A power unit gives job when everything's fine, but when any problem occurs...
- Bam! The whole area is turned into a ghost zone.

- It is said that nuclear power unit give out a blue glow, like “onibi”, these will-o'-the-wisp preceding apparition... That's a fatal light, it can suck the spirit out of passing people...

New modern monsters have been invented to replace the old ones.

- This montain must be protected. It has a long story.

- In the old time there used to be a famous monk living here. His name was Ryokan.

An amazing monk, that was. He was doing no celebration but used to play with chidren and drink sake while sitting bellow trees.

- He was living in this hut.

M.Shiga was sitting in a sun patch inside the ancient place and he looked like calming down. But something caught our eyes...

A shadowy area within the bright one.

It was a tiny stone devil figure intently watching us.

From this moment, everything became stranger. We followed the road to Murakami...

The lantern festival was vibrating with a confusing atmosphere.

In this procession of blurred figures... You could nearly expect yôkai to come out of thin air.

One of the figures came out of the crowd towards us.

Her crystalline voice said...

-Hey! Are you sleeping?

- It's a very quiet place, isn't it? You could nearly feel a kind presence.

I should come more often.

- Over there... Over the mountain...

- ...It's Fukushima district.

- Oh well...

- Look.

The light turns golden.

- Finally, we couldn't reach the lantern festival. M. Shiga received an important call and we had to drive back...

Yet we have the subtle feeling that we've been there, in a way.

- More curry?

- Thanks, I can't eat more...

- It's already night? I didn't see the time pass.

- In that case, take a piece of cake.

Ploc

Photo 3/8

Stone made devil (onibi)

The Ryokan's hut

(between Yahiko and Bunsui)

13/10/2014

Clear weather but picture taken in a dark place

Setting

light

distance

Picture

Yahiko in autumn.

The mapple forest always appeals to a lot of visitors.

But on this day, it's nearly deserted...

- How nice all these leaves.

- We should go and have something to eat before we leave for the mountain, ok?

- Did you see that one?

4

The shadow of the montain

- Here it is: two tempura udon.
- Waaah!
- Say... It's a very peculiar camera you have there.
- It must make nice pictures.
- In fact, I don't really know. It's my first film.

- Do you know why udon are so good here?
- It's because they knead it old-fashioned, with the feet.
- Trust me: you'll never eat some like these in the town.
- True, they have a special texture.
- In Japan, we have a lot of ghost stories about feet.

- Are you pulling our leg?

- In some old houses, at night, when everybody is asleep, an enormous muddy foot comes down from the ceiling to squash us. There is no point in running away. It would lead to a dreadful death!

- But if you stay quiet and wash the foot, it goes away by himself.
Hey, who would turn a good bath down?

- There are some well known onsen round here. You should try them if you like hot springs.

- And what about yokai?
Do you know where to find some?

- Follow me: I'll show you.

- Ooooooh!

- What?

- Upon my word, you finished all your stock!
Look at that, boss!

- Indeed, they soaked it up.

- What's the problem with the stock?

- It was very good.

- Come back whenever you want.

- And look at this one! It's the octopus tree!

You cannot see it just now, because of the leaves, but branches are like tentacles. If it catches you, sure you cannot escape, no chance!

- Pfff. He's showing us around the village trees or what? It's the fourth!

- Admit the previous gingko was very nice.

- Did you see the Torii? It's a sacred tree: there must be lot of yôkai in here!

- Quick, take a picture.

- Uh, are you sure?

- Of course!

- We're not going to take a picture of every tree... We have only one film after all.

- Don't worry I fake.

- Come,
I know an old stump worth the trip!

- It looks like an other world, doesn't it?
- Look at this hole, there. Do you know where it goes?
- No. Where?
- Nobody knows.
- Hey, I have a brilliant idea! Take a picture of me in front of the temple.

- No way, I only take Yōkai's picture.
- Exactly, maybe I am one of them. Otherwise, how would I know all these things?
- If you really were a yōkai...
You wouldn't like to be taken.
- Bah! We as well, are adapted to modern world!
- Ok that's it!
- What? But you didn't press the shutter release.
- Yes I did!
- No I clearly saw.
- I take an other one, just to please you.

Click.

- At dusk, this place is full of yōkai.
They use to queue for something to eat. A real crowd.

- I wonder what they have for dinner...

- Sure, people from the area don't come here at night.

- You could end in the frying pan, haha!

- Brrrr...

- At least, I suppose it's better than bumping into the head nibbler...

- The head nibbler?!

- Hihi, Thank you very much for the nice stories.
Now we are going up to see the view from the top of the hill.

- Really? It's hard climbing. Why don't you come and have a bath in an onsen? I know one being run by dead people.

- We had a lot to eat for lunch, some sport would do good.

- It's up to you...

- See you soon!

- And above all, if you ear somebody walking behind you, but can't see anyone...
Stop to give him way and you'll be safe. Alright?

- Yes, sure!

- True it's a hard way...
- He was funny this old guy!
- But you just couldn't shake him off.
- Oh, poor one. He looked like boring himself, that's all.
- What's written there?
- Something like "don't drink please".
- But they offer cups anyway? Nice.
- Say, do you think the udon we ate were really footmade?
- Yes, for sure. Cool, isn't it?
- We should try to make some...

- Brrr, what a strange atmosphere.
- It's beginning to be dark.
- It's because we're in the shadow of the hill. It's only 4 PM. We still have two or three hours daylight left.
- If we hurry up, it should be safe.
- But I'm tired!
- Don't worry. If you want we can take the cable car for descent.

- Wow! It was worth it!

- We can see the whole district from mountain to sea.
Oh, there is already snow on the top...

- How nice the Sado island.

- So, what about the cable car?

- It's too expensive!

- We'll have to walk down. We can do it before night.

- Wait a minute, it took two hours to climb, didn't it?

- It's faster in the other way.

- Don't you ear something like a creak?

- Do you think it's the head nibbler?

Sounds

- Well then, what happened to you? You look so white.

Did you see a ghost?

Photo 4/8

In front of the temple (the old man with a cap)

Yahiko

09/11/2014

Sunny day but picture taken in the forest

setting

light

distance

Picture

Craole art gallery

- Hello.

- Ah, here you are!

- Come. I want to introduce you to somebody.

- This is Mr. Sasagawa, a friend of mine. He is a collector, he likes antiques. His home looks like a museum.

- At first, I found him strange. But you should get on with him.

5

The two faced city

- Mr. Shiga told me you were interested in yōkai.
- We try to take some picture of them... But for time being we saw none of them.
- Yes, it's not so simple. Look.
- This woman looks very pretty, doesn't she?
- But if I turn the crank, she hides her face. Why?
- I continue to turn the crank. When the fan falls up... It's a monster!

- Do you mean yōkai hide among us?
- We look for them in forests, mountains, but they may live in town and you cannot tell them apart from men.
- Bah, you're too imaginative! It's just an old toy.
- That's a collector object, there is only one in Japan.
- I'd like to show you something else not far from here.
- You know, something strange happened to me yesterday evening, when taking the dustbin outside. It was dusk and the street was empty. Not a passer by, not a car, and yet it was impossible to cross the road.
- I was like stuck, waiting for the light to come green... And you know how it can be slow, that one.
- And what happened?
- So, after rather a long time, light turned green and I could cross.
- And you think it was a yōkai?

- Some yōkai are like non visible walls standing in walkers way. When you try to go further, you keep being stuck.

You have to wait the creature to gives the way.

- Hmm, yōkai preventing from crossing at red light?

- Maybe they are working for the local concil?

- Here we are! It's an old house belonging to a rich family of the 19th century. The inside is very beautiful but we are interested in the garden.

- They seem to enjoy.

- Do you think they use us as an excuse to go for a walk?

- Come see!

- From here, I feel like observing the present time from the past time. The two ages are like superimposed. Maybe it's the way yōkai see the world?

- Long time ago, people use to crowd in this garden to admire the moon.

But now, it's closed at night.

- Time passes by, places' fonction change. The town is full of empty spaces where nobody goes any longer. I think these places attract ghosts.

- This evening, with typhoon coming, it's the perfect time. They will come from all croners of the city. It will be swarming with yōkai! Haha!

- What?! A typhoon?!!

- Haven't you heard? It's all over the news.

- Oh yes, it's beginning to rain.

- Oh great, now I imagine all sorts of invisible monsters around us. With big eyes and teeth.

- Look!

- Do you really think that...

- Yes!

- It's worse and worse! What a storm!

Restaurant Tori no Uta

- Go ahead, show him you thingy!

- That's a very special camera. It can take pictures of the invisible world's creatures...

- Hmm, yet it looks like a toy... It's so light.

- Of course: it's made of plastic!

- It belonged to a child. Look, his name is engraved here.

- Haha, you were fooled!

- Wait a minute...

I have the instructions.

- Yes, no doubt...

- ... it's a toy.

- I know that.
- A lotus flower inside a hatchet.
- The hatchet is Shimokita. A peninsula with very harsh weather condition, at the far north of the Tohoku.
- What about the lotus flower?
- It's Osorezan. The mountain of dread.
- In the 9th century, a monk ended up in Shimokita. In the forest he found a lake surrounded by mountains looking like lotus petals.
Then he decided to build a temple.
- That's one of the most mysterious place in Japan. It's told to be the gates of hell...
That you can communicate with the dead...

- Thank you very much for driving us back but... Is it wise to drive during a typhoon?
- No fear! I'm used to!
- You know, you must not take it for granted what the boss said. He simply wanted to impress you.
- However, it's a strange story...
- Oh, they're talking about the typhoon. It's a big one!
- What? There's TV on board!
- Please, look at the road!

Photo 5/8

A woman in an alley

Niigata

old district of Furumachi

20/11/2014

rotten weather in the evening (typhoon)

Setting

Light

distance

Picture

- Do you think it's still far away ?
- No idea. I can't see anything with all this myst.
- The bus stopped. I guess it's the terminus...
- Brrr, you feel like beeing in a ghost city.

6

Unsettled horizon

- Wait, I pick up my camera.
- It's all broken over here.
- What a strange atmosphere...
- We're at the seaside.
- Look, some children.
- Let's follow them !

- They disappeared.
- Give a look around the house. I go and have a look at waterside.

- Did you find them ?
- Um... no.
- Hey, you !
- What are you doing here ? It's dangerous !
- We're searching for yōkai.
- There are none left here : they moved.

- Everybody moved. Didn't you notice ? And you'd better go away too.
- But you are here.
- Did you listen ? Go away quickly!
- We'll wait for the bus. It will soon be there.
- Too late ! It's coming !
- ... It's not the bus.

- What a strange dream...
- Did you take pictures ?
- I think so.
- Crazy how cold it is... I can see my breathing.
- Yet we are still in november. I'm glad we're not staying for winter.

- It's nearly down.
- The typhoon calmed down, didn't it ?
- It's heading north. For sure we'll have a nice blue sky today.
- So what are we doing next week? Do we go to Osorezan ?
- I don't know, it's a long way...

Photo 6/8

Dream (aquatic monster)

A town at the seaside.

20/11/2014 at night

misty weather

setting

light

distance

Picture

Our journey to the north last a whole day.

The following day, early in the morning, a bus drives us through a dark forest.

Some mossy figures watch us silently.

We arrived : the mountain of dread...

- Ugh ! Do you smell that? It stinks of rotten egg.

- It's sulphur fumes.

7
The jizo's sleeve

- What a welcome...

- It looks like they don't sell cameras...

- Here they are, the lotus petals.

- Am I dreaming? Don't tell me you take pictures with this thing!

- You know this camera?

- We've got the same at home, somewhere in a cardboard box, but we don't use it anymore...

- We were told it was a very unique one.

- What? That? Not at all! It's a plastic toy. Pictures are a little blurred but kids enjoy it.

- Oh, I see...

- Look.

- Well, it's not great art...

- I guess yours are better.

- Not sure.

- Wait a minute. I'm coming back.

- Do you like corn?

- Oh yes!

- Here you are! Eat! This place is a bit of an ordeal ... You have to take strength.

- Thank you.

- And don't forget to take nice pictures !
It's important to have memories.

- My friend lost his child recently. We came for him.

- That's terrible.

- Do you know what people come in Osorezan for? They're not here for fun...

- You noticed all these children statues, didn't you?

- The colorful toys left in this sinister landscape...

- The food the crows are fighting for... their yells...

- Can we really find consolation in such a place?

- You stagger in the fumes, you leave sweets he loved so much as an offering.

His favorite toy.

- Did you notice ? You even find sandals... Some are so tiny that I nearly dissolved into tears.

- When arriving, my friend was so worried. He didn't talk. Now he feels a little better.

- He even came to see you. It's because of you camera, isn't it? What a coincidence...

- Hey, Kaori, let's go ahead!

- I must go. Take care.

- Don't stay too long around here.
You never know what can happen...

- I guess we got the answer we were looking for...

- All that is not so important, in the end.

- I finish my film and we leave?

- Don't go too far!

- Keiko, my little girl...

- You there, follow me.
- I come here everyday. I have to.
- The clothes on the little statuettes, I made them.
Do you know why we dress them ?
- The children who die too young stay stuck in our world.
They cannot leave.
- But they're not alone... It is said that a beast is after them to
devour them.
A kind of dog.

- Jizo are here to protect them.
- Children take refuge in their clothes'fold where they feel safe.
- If you stay tonight, maybe you can see the beast too.
- Brr, it's beginning to be late in the evening... We should go to
be sure not to miss the last bus.

- Where has she gone now?
- Ha !
- Where were you? I have been looking for you everywhere.
- Hey, do you listen? We are going to miss the bus. We have to go.
- Eh? What?

- I warn you : I'm not going to stay here at night.
- Wait, my camera!
- Don't you have it? What did you do with it?
- I don't know.
- Try to remember. You probably left it somewhere?
- No, I don't think so. I took a picture and I walked to the sulphur patch, behind the great buddah... where you found me. I still had it with me.
- Ok, don't worry. Go to the bus stop and have the driver stay waiting for me. I go and see if I can find it.

- One more minute please.
- Here he comes! Thank you for waiting.
- Didn't you find it?
- I looked everywhere but it was too dark. Sorry.
- It doesn't matter very much. After all it was just a knick-knack...
- I surely would have been disappointed by the pictures.

While leaving Osorezan...

In the bumpy bus, through the night...

We realise that our journey is coming to an end.

Photo 7/8

The dread mountain (shapes)

Osorezan

26/11/2014

Weather slightly cloudy

setting

light

distance

Picture

Shortly after our departure, snow began to fall down in Niigata. In the plane coming back to France, I think to the rough and unending winter that begins for them who remaind.

Down there, the icy wind is blowing endlessly as far as inside the houses.

The memories of these few monthes spent in Japan are already rushing in my head.

When I lost my camera, I felt like getting out of a dream.

Now, even more, when overflying Syberia, our journey looks in the distance, almost unreal.

What happened in Osorezan, beside the sulphur patch? As if it had hypnotized me.

- Tea or coffee?

- Tea, please.

-!!!

Are we really surrounded by invisible spirits?

- Oh, look! This is my film, the one I lost with the camera.

- What is it doing here?

- I don't know.

Later on, when developping the film, I find an additional eighth picture following mines.

Did I take it? I don't recognize the place.

I slip the film in my pocket and close my eyes. A light sulphur smell is floating in the airplane.

Photo 8/8

The other world (mysterious picture)

Place unknown

Date unknown

Setting

?

Picture

Notebook of a yōkai hunter

Niigata's district map

City of Niigata

Crab rock

Sado Island

Uchino

To the Fujiwara's house

Station

Inari Taisha shrine

Konbini

Niigata

Saito residence

Craole Gallery

Tori no Uta restaurant

Hakusan park

Yahiko

Yahiko mountain

The forest shop

Udon restaurant

Cable car

Octopus tree

The maple bridge

Station

Memories of our journey

Developping yōkai pictures

- The yōkai pictures caught on the film are very fragile. You have to be very careful.

As the film doesn't like light, you begin with diving into total darkness to lock it up into a watertight box.

Usually, the photographer dives the film into a chemical bath. But yōkai hate the smell and may leave the film.

So we use an alternative methode : the caffenol.

Instant coffee

C vitamins

Soda crystals

You put the solution into the box, shake it ten times and let it rest for one hour before rining out and fixing the film. Yōkai do love it !

- Hey boss, one expresso please !

There it is : developed. And now you can expose it to the daylight and observe what is resulting.

- Shucks...

Printing

- For the printing, same problem : you can't use a regular enlarger. yōkai are light-sensitive. It would erase their image from the picture.

So we use a very old method called cyanotype. It dates from the earliest times of the photography and it makes it possible to print the photographs straight at the sunlight.

First, you scan the negative to print it large on a transparent paper.

At this stage, you can notice that the yōkai picture doesn't show on the negative. It's absolutely normal.

Hiding from the sunlight, you prepare a mixture with ammonia iron citrate, potassium iron cyanide and non mineral water..

You carefully cover the transparent paper with the solution and let it dry in total darkness.

When it's dry, you flatten the negative against a piece of paper with a glass frame.

And expose it to the daylight. Under UV ray, solution darkens at places where negative doesn't mask.

You must try several times to find the perfect exposure time. Approximately 1 minute 30 under summer sun.

Then, quickly, you gently rinse paper with water to stop the chemical reaction and add a drop of vinegar to enhance details.

That's it, you have a nice yokai portrait.

- Arg! she had me!

- That's a little twisted but it works.

Now, try for yourself!

Glossary

Yōkai : Supernatural being who like to play tricks on men.

Onigiri : Rice balls generally wrapped into a piece of nori seaweed.

Jizō : Bodhisattva statues, often appealed to for children's care.

Onibi : Will-o'-the-whisp preceding yōkai appearance.

Torii : Symbolic doors dividing the real world and the spirit world.

Tempura Udon : Doughnut and corn wheat pastas laid on a vegetable stock.

Yen : Japanese money. 1000 yens are equivalent to 9 euros (more or less)

Onsen : Public bath in hot spring water.

Hidding along a country path or in the shadow of a temple, Japanese spirits, foxes, tanuki and other yōkai spy on wandering travelers, waiting to play tricks on them. Cécile and Olivier, newly settled at the Japanese seaside in Niigata, buy an old strange camera which is supposed to print spirits on the film. While trying to catch them on picture, they establish the portrait of a Japan balanced between two worlds.

The authors

Atelier Sentô is a duo, Cécile Brun and Olivier Pichard, used to travel in Japan, meet people there, draw and take pictures. They enjoy sharing their experience of unknown Japan, far from the cliché. A Japan where you can find lost villages in the mountain, popular festivals and forgotten spirits.