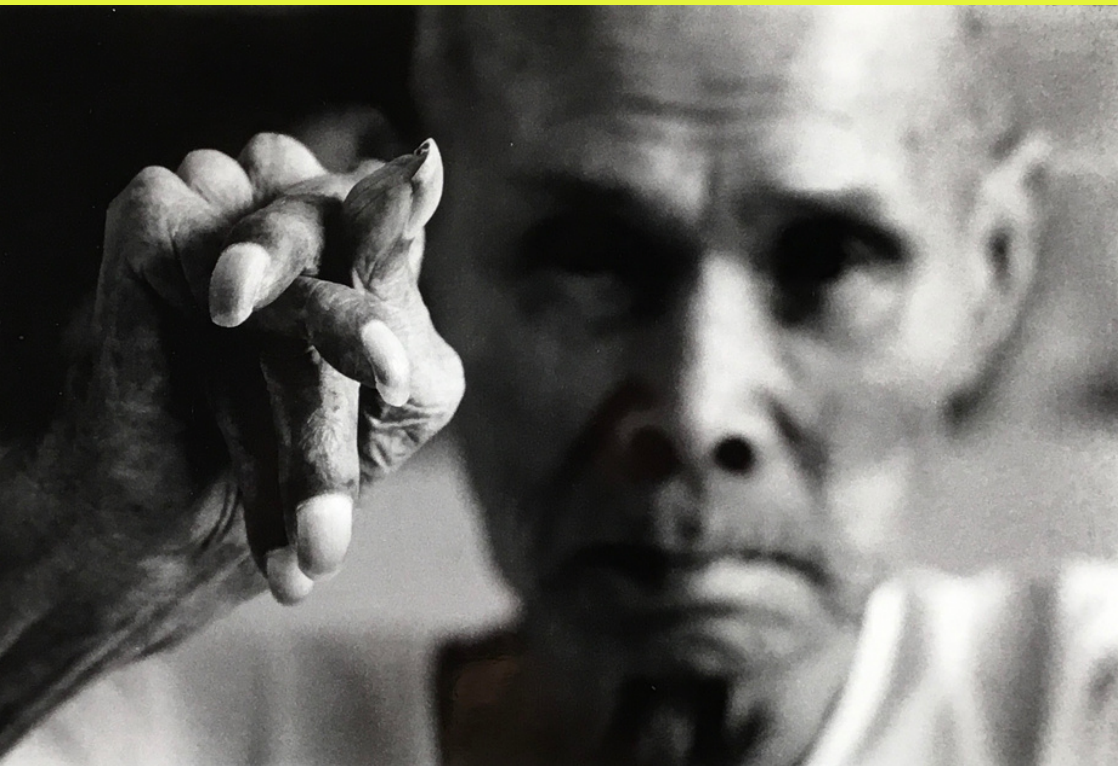


Minamata is not over...



No More Minamatas

VISUAL TESTAMENT
by Nine Photographers

No More Minamatas

VISUAL TESTAMENT by 9 Photographers

This booklet introduces the work of nine Japanese photographers who capture different aspects of Minamata disease through their photographs. Through their work, we hope to deepen the understanding of mercury poisoning and encourage further reflection on this ongoing issue.



This booklet was published in cooperation with Minamata Photographers' Eye Project.

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Message from Sakamoto Shinobu

坂本しのぶ

Sakamoto Shinobu, born in Minamata City, Kumamoto Prefecture in 1956, is a congenital Minamata disease patient and Representative of MICONET (Network for the Promotion of the Minamata Convention on Mercury).

In 1972, Shinobu traveled to Stockholm with her mother Fujie and other supporters to attend the first UN Conference on the Human Environment. She also participated in COP1 of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

“ We must protect women and unborn children from toxic mercury pollution. We must work together.

Minamata disease is not over yet. In Japan, many people continue to suffer from the damage caused by mercury contamination. My fellow patients with congenital Minamata disease are growing increasingly ill. Almost none of us can walk anymore.

There are still many people who have not been recognized as victims and are fighting in the courts. I want you to know the reality of Minamata disease.

I must repeat my message until pollution ends everywhere in the world.

”

— Sakamoto Shinobu

Minamata Photographers' Eye Project

For over 65 years, photographers have documented the devastating effects of mercury pollution caused by the Chisso Corporation's chemical factory in Minamata. Their photographs capture both the widespread environmental damage and the personal struggles of victims and survivors.

These images stand as a powerful testament—inspiring and encouraging people worldwide to learn from the Minamata tragedy. The Project's mission is to harness the power of photography to prevent future environmental disasters.



Archive

The Project's aim is to provide long-term preservation for over 200,000 items, including photographic film, prints, and digital data.



Workshop

The Project focuses not only on preserving but also utilizing these photographic records of Minamata through exhibitions, workshops, and educational programs that raise awareness about environmental pollution.



Follow the Project to learn more and see additional photographs



Photo by Shiota Takeshi 塩田武史

September 1971

Sardine fishing in the Shiranui Sea. Coastal communities were sustained by the sea. Fresh and plentiful fish and shellfish were easily caught. The catch from the sea was their staple diet.

The fish and shellfish remained unchanged in taste and smell—even after the waters had been poisoned by mercury. People continued eating the fish, unaware of the danger, even after Minamata disease began to appear.



Photo by Kuwabara Shisei 桑原史成
1960, Minamata Public Hospital.

A fisherman was taken to the hospital in Minamata from a neighboring town, suffering from what was then called a "strange disease." At first, Minamata disease was feared to be contagious. Patients endured not only severe health damage but also the stigma and discrimination from neighbors who were afraid of being infected.



Photo by Miyamoto Shigemi 宮本成美
December 1971, Chisso headquarter in Tokyo

Minamata disease patient Kawamoto Teruo (right) confronted Chisso president Shimada Kenichi (left), demanding that his promise be written in blood. The victims sought direct accountability and compensation from the factory.



Photo by Ishikawa Takeshi
1972

A fetal Minamata disease patient and her mother. Some children were born with Minamata disease after being exposed to mercury while in their mothers' wombs.



Photo by Aileen M. Smith
1972, Chiba

Patients and supporters gathered at the gates of the Chisso factory in Goi, Chiba, demanding that the company negotiate directly with them.



Photo by Tanaka Fumiko 田中史子
July 28, 1988

For Minamata disease patients, even simple actions such as walking in a straight line are difficult. When the photographer asked them to walk again for another shot, they were too exhausted to continue.



Photo by Kitaoka Hideo 北岡秀郎
July 1973, Amakusa city

Narrowing of the visual field is one of the many symptoms of Minamata disease. Other symptoms included numbness, tremors, hearing loss, speech difficulties, and sensory impairment.



Photo by Koshiba Kazuyoshi 小柴一良
1974

The Chisso Corporation began with carbide production before expanding into fertilizers. During Japan's postwar rapid economic growth, methylmercury—resulting from the company's acetaldehyde production process—led to the Minamata tragedy. Today, the factory still operates in Minamata under its new name, JNC Corporation.

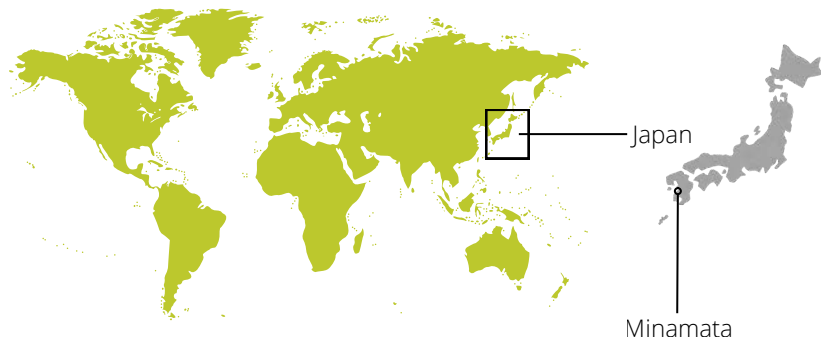


Photo by Akutagawa Jin 芥川仁

October 29, 2016

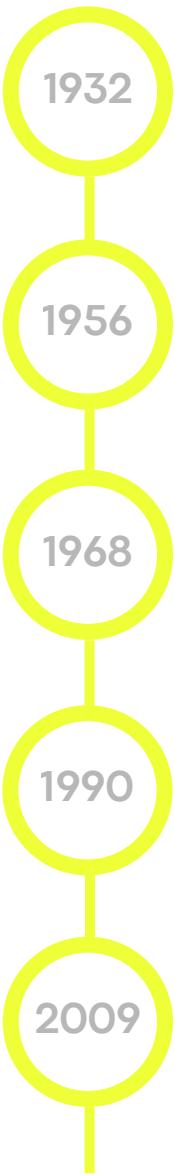
After thirteen years of construction, part of Minamata Bay was dredged and reclaimed to become a public park. Survivors of Minamata disease are aging; some continue to share their stories with younger generations, others are fighting the government and corporation for justice, while many simply try to live out their lives peacefully. The Shiranui Sea remains as calm as ever.

What is Minamata Disease?



Minamata disease is a neurological syndrome caused by severe methylmercury poisoning. It was first discovered in 1956 in Minamata City, Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan. The cause was the release of methylmercury into Minamata Bay by the Chisso Corporation. The toxic substance originated from the company's acetaldehyde production facility. Chisso was a leading producer of acetaldehyde, a raw material used in plastics, accounting for 80% of Japan's domestic market and fueling the country's economic growth.

This industrial success came at a devastating human and environmental cost, making Minamata one of Japan's most serious cases of industrial pollution.



1932

POLLUTION BEGINS

The Chisso Minamata Factory began producing acetaldehyde, using mercury as a catalyst. The mercury methylated during the chemical reaction and was released into Minamata Bay.

1956

FIRST REPORTS

Local health authorities received reports of a “strange disease.” Around the same time, residents noticed cats behaving erratically (“dancing cat disease”) and dead fish floating in the bay—early signs of a grave environmental crisis. Even following the initial outbreak, the company and government failed to take decisive action to halt the spread of the pollution and poisoning

1968

OFFICIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In 1968, the Japanese government officially recognized Minamata disease as pollution-related. The following year, victims and their families filed the first lawsuit against Chisso.

1990

COMPLETION OF MINAMATA BAY RECLAMATION

A massive cleanup and reclamation project took thirteen years to complete. Fishing in Minamata Bay resumed in 1997.

2009

SPECIAL RELIEF

Over 40,000 victims have received some form of compensation or medical support under a special relief law. In 2011, the Chisso Corporation transferred its operation and assets to a new company.

Today, more than 70,000 people have received some form of relief. Legal battles continue as victims seek recognition and redress from both the government and the polluting corporation.



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