

Portraits of Japanese Tsunami Victims in Their Destroyed Homes (PHOTOS)

By Camille Mann

In March 2011, a powerful 9.0 earthquake off the coast of Japan triggered a devastating tsunami along 250 miles of Japan's coast. Giant waves carried away cars, leveled homes and even damaged nuclear reactors. The death toll of the disaster is almost 18,131, with 2,829 missing, according to Japanese government's Fire and Disaster Management Agency.

The fishing town of Otsuchi was hit particularly hard. Otsuchi was all but wiped out by the tsunami, which tore through a 32-foot-high reinforced concrete sea wall, washing away one bridge entirely and damaging another, according to the Guardian.

Argentinean photographer Alejandro Chaskielberg was in Tokyo in 2012 for exhibitions when he learned about the effects of the disaster on Otsuchi from his curator, Ihiro Hayami. Chaskielberg visited the town, where waves as high as 60 feet destroyed 60 percent of the city, and what resulted was his series, "Otsuchi Future Memories," which features poignant photos of Otsuchi tsunami victims in the ruins of their old homes.

"During both trips, my interest in the consequences of the tsunami increased as I got to know more about it," Chaskielberg said. "I had intention of working with a fishermen's town in Japan, on one side, due to the fishing culture they have, and on the other, due to my interest in working with themes covering the relationship between communities and water." When Chaskielberg arrived in Otsuchi for the first time, it was a year and a half after the tsunami. And what he saw was a city still in ruins.

"I was faced with the view of a great plain full of pasturelands covering the place where the city had been before," he said. "I saw many red flags among the grassland, marking the places where they had found a victim. I saw some typical vending machines in the middle of nowhere, because everything around was destroyed. Large mountains of debris were located in different parts of the city, where all kinds of destroyed objects were accumulated like cars, house remains, finishing nets, boards, light of the city, etc."

Forty percent of the inhabitants were still living in temporary housing, which resemble containers. After meeting a couple families, Chaskielberg took photos in the empty spaces where their houses had been.

"I invited them to stay the night in those empty spaces, remaining in silence and motionless for several minutes," he said. "This was something pretty introspective for all because they started to remember the past and some were obviously moved." Many of the families reminisced with Chaskielberg about their old rooms and their most precious belongings.

"Some of them regret having lost the images of their loved ones who died and feel it is something unrecoverable, as if they had lost part of their own memory," he said. "However others prefer to forget and are not interested in yesterday's images. They choose to leave the past behind."



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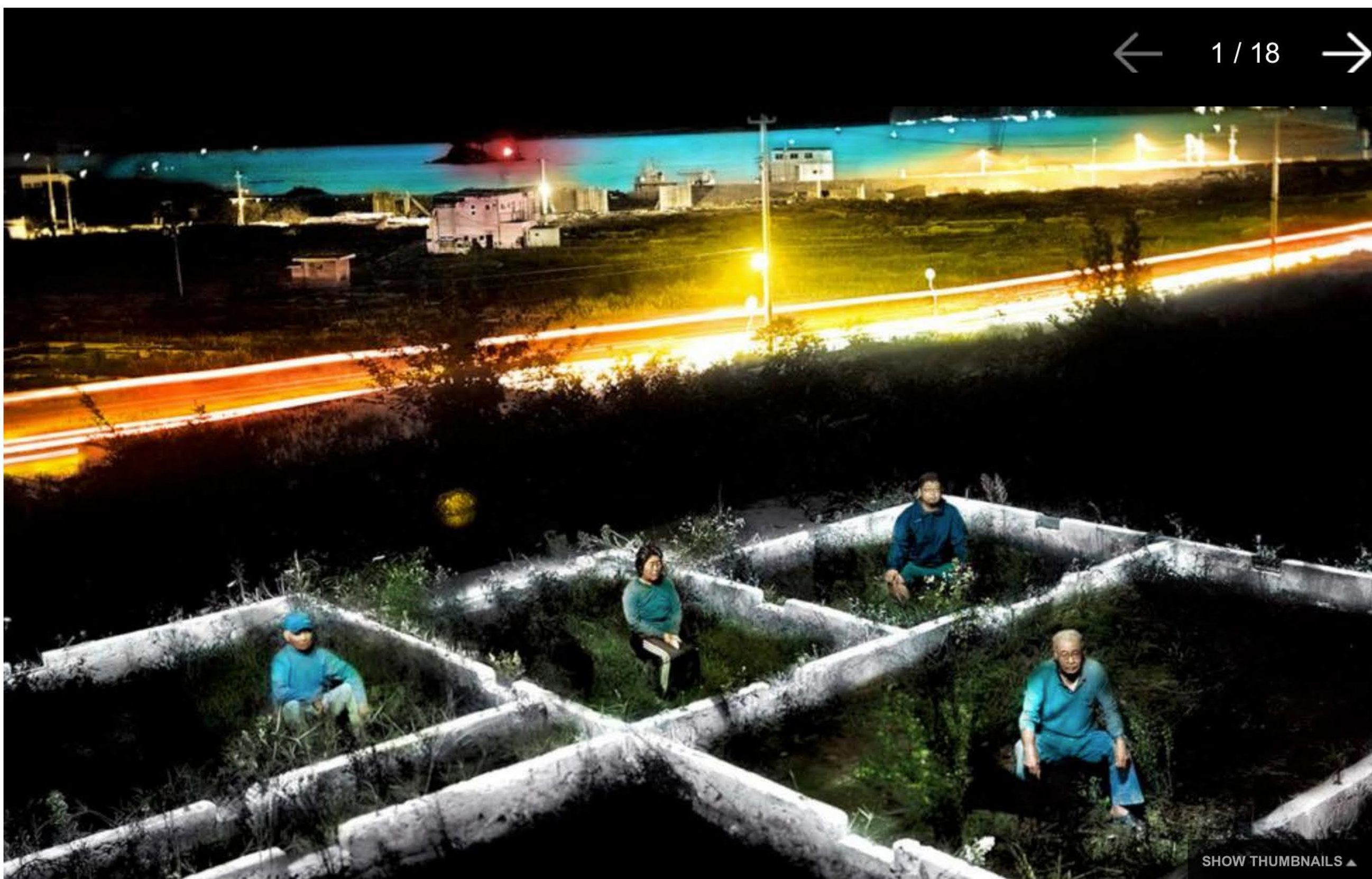


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The members of a family, seated in the place where his house stood before being destroyed by the tsunami of March 11th, 2011. (Alejandro Chaskielberg)

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To see more of Chaskielberg's work, visit his [website](#).

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