



Center for Japanese Studies Seminar Series
Inaugural Crown Prince Akihito Scholarship Lecture



**Manifesting Disaster, or
“My Minamata disease isn’t over yet.”**



Michelle Daigle

Doctoral Candidate in Anthropology, UH Mānoa
2011-2013 Crown Prince Akihito Scholar

2016 marks the 60th and 51st anniversaries of Minamata disease’s (methylmercury poisoning due to corporate negligence) official discovery in fishing hamlets in Minamata, Kumamoto Prefecture and in cities and towns along the Agano River in Niigata Prefecture, respectively. However, despite its seemingly historical nature, Minamata disease continues to draw attention through recent Supreme Court decisions in favor of the plaintiffs (2013), robust and interconnected social activism linking Kumamoto and Niigata, and cultural production through museums, storytelling, and various educational initiatives.

In this presentation, I draw on ethnographic research among activists and Minamata disease patients to examine the idiom of distress, *Minamatabyō ga mada owatte inai* (Minamata disease isn’t over yet). Utilizing my experience making *kokeshi* (dolls), I analyze how Minamata disease manifests not only through historical discourses of pollution and disaster, but also through patients’ embodied identity vis-à-vis activism and storytelling. Through this analysis, I shed analytical light on translocal discourses of distress and disaster, and respond to calls in disaster studies to reframe disasters as diachronic, rather than singular events with clear temporal, geographical, and social boundaries.



Friday, February 5th, 2016
4:15 - 5:45 pm
Tokioka Room (Moore Hall 319)