

MOT Collection: Rewinding the Collection
Sat. 20 Mar – Sun. 20 June, 2021
Collection Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

Foreword

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo houses approximately 5,500 artworks in its extensive collection, which spans the modern and contemporary periods with a focus on art of the postwar years. In an aim to communicate the diverse appeal of contemporary art, each installment of the “MOT Collection” exhibition serves to introduce artworks in the collection from various themes and angles in order to offer visitors with an opportunity to engage with works from various perspectives. Titled “Rewinding the Collection,” presented is a two-section exhibition that serves to shed light upon the origin and history of the collection.

Section 1 unravels the history of the collection that began in the “Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum” era. Approximately 200 works by various artists from the Meiji era to the 1950s are presented in chronological order in an aim to introduce the developments leading to art of the postwar years that is currently at the core of the collection. Section 2 features a selection of 40 or so large-scale works by overseas artists collected towards the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art in order to present a permanent exhibition that conveys the history of contemporary art, thus going back to the start line of the MOT.

We welcome viewers to enjoy the variety of works spanning a wide range of periods and regions that can be seen by rewinding the collection, and at the same time we hope that this will serve as an opportunity to think about the future course of the museum.

Part I: Before Postwar Art to its Beginnings

Our museum’s collection includes more than 3,000 works that were transferred from the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (opened as the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum, and renamed 1943) when the Museum of Contemporary Art opened in 1995. The Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum was established in the midst of reconstruction efforts in wake of the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and had mainly been used as a venue for art groups to present their work. The beginning of the collection dates back to 1927 just after the museum first opened. However, it was not until 1975, when the New Building designed by MAYEKAWA Kunio was completed, that full-fledged efforts were underway to collect works of contemporary art in aims towards establishing a “Museum of Contemporary Art.”

The works that are housed in our museum’s collection had each come to be collected by the museum under various times and circumstances after their completion. While some were collected shortly after being introduced in group exhibitions held in the Old Building era, there are others that were donated to the museum by the surviving families of the artist on the occasion of special exhibitions, as well as works collected with intentions to complement the previous collection and trace history from a broader perspective. Not only the time spent by the artist on the production, but also the layers of time involved in the presentation, exhibition, and collection of the work are woven like folds into these works.

In the Part I, the works are arranged in chronological order from the Meiji era, which marked the dawn of modern Japanese Western-style painting, to the 1950s, when “Postwar Art” had begun to show various developments. By also touching upon the exhibitions in which the works were presented, as well as the events related to their collection, we trace the origin of the Collection and think about its meaning and significance while going back and forth between multiple layers of time.

I-1__The Dawn of Modern Western-style Painting

Part I begins with the work, *View of Mt. Fuji from Shimizu* by GOSEDA Yoshimatsu, a Western-style painter from Japan’s Meiji era. This work was exhibited for the first time at the 2nd National Industrial Exhibition (1881) held in Ueno Park around 140 years ago. Such was an era when systems and frameworks related to art including art schools and art groups were gradually being developed in Japan, and half a century later, the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum opened as the nation’s first public art museum. While the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum served to introduce the art of the times, it had also become a venue where perspectives of looking back on modern art was widely presented to the general public through exhibitions such as the “Masterpieces of the Meiji and Taisho Era” (1927) organized by The Asahi Shimbun.

This room features works including those by artists of the *Murasaki-ha* (Violet School) that consist of the likes of KUME Keiichiro, and KURODA Seiki, an advocator Pleinairisme who formed the *Hakuba-kai* (White Horse Society) in 1896 upon returning to Japan after his studies in France. Also introduced are the works of artists associated with the *Yani-ha* (Old School) such as ASAI Chu, who established the *Meiji Bijutsukai* (Meiji Art Society), the first group of Western-style painters in Japan, in 1898. Many of these works were exhibited in the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum’s first collection exhibition “The History of Japanese Western-style Painters (1962), which was held in the museum’s original building prior to its reconstruction. This exhibition was made possible due to the fact that “the museum acquired the works of the late ASAI Chu and KURODA Seiki, the two most prominent artists in early Japanese Western-style painting, which had further enhanced the contents of the works housed in the museum’s collection.” Although there were no curators during this period, there were active movements in progress to collect works that reflected art historical perspectives and further introduce them to the public through exhibitions. This section also presents a selection of pieces from the museum’s collection that were acquired after the construction of its new building, particularly focusing on the Meiji era, including works by YOKOYAMA Taikan, who aimed to innovate nihonga (Japanese painting), and KANAE Yamamoto, who was an advocator of the *sosaku-hanga* (creative prints) movement, which aimed at self-produced printmaking.

I-2__Independent Groups and Avant-garde Art Movements

The government-sponsored *Bunten* (The Ministry of Education Arts Exhibition) was inaugurated in 1907, and a series of independent groups, both large and small, were also born one after another from the Taisho to Showa period. KISHIDA Ryusei, upon receiving a great impact from the works of Post-impressionist painters like Van Gogh, which he had seen in *Shirakaba* magazine (issued by the “White Birch Society”), held an exhibition with members of his own artistic circle called *Fuzankai* (Fusain Society) in 1912. ISHII Hakutei, ARISHIMA Ikuma, UMEHARA Ryuzaburo who had studied in Europe, withdrew from the *Bunten* along with other artists in 1914, and formed the Nika Association. Since the completion of its new building in 1975, the museum had brought focus to the expression of independent groups that formed a counterpart to these academic institutions. The museum’s first exhibition organized by its curators was titled, “Prewar Avant-garde: Recipients of the Nika Award and Chogyu Prize, and Artists in their Surroundings” (1976), and aimed at “presenting a comprehensive overview of the history of Western-style painting, and renewing the understanding of avant-garde painting” in the prewar period. The portrait of MUSHAKOJI Saneatsu, which was painted by Kishida and donated to the museum by Mushakoji’s surviving family, was introduced in the exhibition, “*Shirakaba* and Art of the Taisho Period” (1977) along with a series of the artist’s cherished items such as the Picasso’s print that had been gifted to him during his travel in Europe.

Around this time, Europe had become a crucible for avant-garde art that emerged both before and after World War I, such as Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, Dada, and Expressionism. Japanese artists had the opportunity to view and engage with the latest overseas trends through magazines, as well as exhibitions organized by Russian Futurists Victor PALMOV and David BURLIUK, who had come to Japan from Russia with a large number of works in the wake of the chaos brought about by the revolution. Also flourishing before the Great Kanto Earthquake were avant-garde art groups such as “Action” which was founded by devote futurists and artists of the Nika Association including KAMBARA Tai and YABE Tomoe, and “MAVO” which had been established by MURAYAMA Tomoyoshi who had returned from Germany after interacting with local avant-gardes, and a number of his contemporaries.

I-3__The Great Kanto Earthquake and the Opening of the Tokyo Prefectural Museum of Art

In 1923, upon learning about the Great Kanto Earthquake, painter KANOKOGI Takeshiro in Kyoto immediately traveled to Tokyo and walked around the smoldering disaster-struck areas. The sketches made at the time, along with his masterpiece *September 1, Taisho 12 (1923)*, were donated to the museum by his surviving family in 1965. These are the earliest examples of works in the collection that depict the city of Tokyo, which the museum has continued to collect to this day.

Before the earthquake, after the occasion of the Tokyo Peace Exposition held in Ueno Park, artists had started to voice their desire for a “permanent” museum. It was the Kyushu-based industrialist and “King of Coal” SATO Keitaro who happened to learn of this movement, and donated the funds required for its construction. As the site for the museum was not decided immediately, construction

had been spared from the earthquake, and the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum finally opened its doors in 1926. The works of FUJIOKA Kanetaro and SUZUKI Shoichi were the first to be registered in the museum's collection the following year. Up until 1945, only 13 works were collected and housed in the old museum building, which mainly functioned as an exhibition hall. While many of them were presented in government-sponsored exhibitions, the selection criteria and artist details for the two aforementioned works remained unknown, and thus it can be said that the collection had started without having determined a specific policy.

Meanwhile, NAKAHARA Minoru, who started his career as a painter after encountering avant-garde art in Europe where he had resided as a dentist, established Gallery Kudan on the site where his home had burnt down immediately after the earthquake with financial aid from his father. Nakahara, who also participated in avant-garde movements such as "Action," held the earliest exhibition in Japan that was exempt from the examination of a selecting committee in this gallery. He also provided it as a venue for the "Emerging European Art" exhibition sponsored by Hochi Shimbun where the works of Edvard Munch and others were exhibited, while also lending the space to the activities of MURAYAMA Tomoyoshi and the artists in his circle. Nakahara's work was exhibited at the "Prewar Avant-Garde Exhibition" (1976), and was subsequently entrusted to the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, yet in 2017 the artist's family donated it to MOT on the occasion of its grand renewal.

I-4__1930s Avant-garde

In Tokyo, which was devastated by the Great Kanto Earthquake, reconstruction based on modern city planning was in progression. The wide streets lined with buildings, the lively downtown area where "modern boys" and "modern girls" come and went, as well as movies and radio broadcasts, had brought color to people's lives. Views of the new city of Tokyo are engraved in the print collection *A Hundred Views of New Tokyo*, which featured the work of eight artists including ONCHI Koshiro and FUJIMORI Shizuo. Such print works were also the focus of the collection housed in the new building of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, and a catalog of prints, which accounts for about half of the collection, was later published in 1985.

At the Nika Exhibition held at the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum, avant-garde works came to be gathered and presented in its ninth room from around 1933. Eventually, in 1938, the *Kyushitsu-kai* (Ninth Room Association) was formed at the behest of YOSHIHARA Jiro, who would later establish the Gutai group after the war, and his contemporaries including YAMAGUCHI Takeo. KATSURA Yuki, who had gained attention for her collage works, became a member of the *Kyushitsu-kai* after exhibiting for the first time at the Nika Exhibition in 1935. Katsura's [*Tree Stump*] is one of the works that were donated by the artist's family in 2013 on the occasion of her solo exhibition at the museum, and is the earliest example of a female artist in the collection. In the 1930s, in addition to the *Kyushitsu-kai*, small groups of young people who showed a tendency toward abstraction and surrealism were formed one after another. Groups such as the Jiyu Bijyutsu Association (formed in 1937) consisting of the likes of HASEGAWA Saburo, MURAI Masanari, Ei-KYU, ONOSATO Toshinobu, and the Bijyutsu Bunka Art Association (formed in 1939) with members FUKUZAWA Ichiro, ITOZONO Wasaburo, and AI-MITSU et.al had prospered, yet as the effects of the war gradually strengthened, stronger control and regulation came to be imposed on avant-garde expressions.

I-5__Artists Who Lived During the War

Painters such as SHIMIZU Toshi and MUKAI Junkichi traveled to battlefields in China as soon as the Sino-Japanese War broke out in 1937. Eventually, the National Mobilization Law was promulgated, and the *Rikugun Bijyutsu Kyokai* (Army Art Association) came to be formed in 1939 when the number of war painters exceeded 200. Around the same time, FUKUZAWA Ichiro and his fellow artists formed the Bijyutsu Bunka Art Association. The association's first exhibition at Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum presented TERADA Masaaki's work *Night*, while its second exhibition had featured AI-MITSU's *Still Life (Pheasant)*. In 1941, Fukuzawa, suspected of his Surrealist works being under the influence of Communism, was arrested under the Peace Preservation Law along with art critic TAKIGUCHI Shuzo. The association's second exhibition was held just after this event, and thus the works of AI-MITSU and Terada were considered as controversial in the sense that they could potentially provoke the military.

At that time, Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum had also become a venue for war art exhibitions. TSUDA Shinobu's *Full of Fighting Spirit* is one of the few works that were added to the collection during the war. It had been exhibited in the craft art section of the Wartime Special Art Exhibition (1944), and was added to the collection the following year. The exhibition commemorating the 2600th anniversary of the Chrysanthemum Throne (1940) had advocated the system of "Saikan Houkoku," that is, of devoting oneself to one's country by using a paintbrush, and a selection of 1800 works including UDA Tekison's *New Autumn* were presented in hopes to express "pride towards the greatness and dignity of Japanese culture". Amidst such times, MATSUMOTO Shunsuke, AI-MITSU and others formed *Shinjingakai* (New Artists Painting Association) in 1943 in search of a new platform for presentation. At the exhibition "AI-MITSU, MATSHIMOTO Shunsuke and the Beginnings of Postwar Art" (1977) held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, the works of the two artists were introduced as the starting point of postwar art. Works from during the war that were produced while artists confronted the times in each their own way, are presented along with a series of paintings related to the war that were collected by Mr. FUKUTOMI Taro and donated to the museum in 2018.

I-6__The Beginning of Postwar Art

The air raids of World War II burnt the city of Tokyo to ashes, and the underpass at Ueno Station was full of people who had lost their place to go. *Heavy Hand* by TSURUOKA Masao, who was a member of the *Shinjingakai* (New Artists Painting Association), is inspired by the site of a vagrant that the artist had come across in the station's underpass in the midst of the destitution that followed Japan's defeat. In the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum also located in Ueno, respective art groups that reformed had come to resume their exhibitions the year after the end of the war. So-called war paintings that were sealed in the fifth room in the center of the museum by the GHQ were released from requisition in 1951, and sent to the United States in response to calls for expanding the exhibition space. It was also during this time that the Sato Memorial Room was created, which served as the venue for the exhibition "The History of Japanese Western-style Painters" seen in I-1.

In the same building, in 1949, The Yomiuri Independent Exhibition had started as an exhibition unbound by existing art circles and institutions, inviting all artists to participate without their work being subjected to a selection process. From the 1950s to 1960s, the museum became a stage for the surging enthusiasm of KUDO Tetsumi and other artists of the "Anti-Art" movement who used everyday objects and waste materials in producing work, thus serving its role as an incubator for Postwar Art. In addition, various expressions such as *Jikken Kobo* (Experimental Workshop) that sought free and new expressions that transcended genres, the Gutai Art Association formed by the likes of YOSHIHARA Jiro with the youths in Hanshinkan (the area between Osaka and Kobe) including SHIRAGA Kazuo and the reportage paintings of NAKAMURA Hiroshi, were introduced in "Movements in Contemporary Art I: 1950s" held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in 1981. It was also the work of this era that became the starting point of the permanent exhibition "Contemporary Art from the Museum Collection" at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, which opened in 1995. In recent years, the collection of works by female artists such as FUKUSHIMA Hideko has progressed, further giving shape to the beginning of "Postwar Art" that illustrates a diverse and rich expanse.

Part 2: Back to the Startline of the MOT

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo was opened in March 1995 in Kiba Park. While approximately 3,000 works in the MOT Collection have been inherited from the collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in Ueno, MOT had devised its own collection policy and started acquiring works of art seven years prior to its opening.

Introduced in this section is a group of works that were acquired by the fund for the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo established in 1988. The purpose of the fund was to collect artworks for the museum, and acquisition efforts had continued in line with a long-term perspective and systematic plan over a period of nine years until 1996, when the fund was discontinued. As a result, a total of 534 works were newly added to the collection.

A significant characteristic of these works is that approximately 40 percent of them have been created by overseas artists. The collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum had centered on avant-garde art from Japan's postwar period to the 1970s, and as the budget was also limited, the collection of overseas works was not necessarily sufficient. To complement this, the fund placed importance on the collection of overseas works in order to grasp the developments of Japanese contemporary art not only through domestic trends but also from an international perspective, in particular, actively acquiring the works of overseas artists that hold a leading position within the history of contemporary art to form the core of its collection. The works presented here in the exhibition which have traveled from distant places through much time and effort while overcoming numerous difficulties, can indeed be regarded as fruits of endeavors implemented 30 years or so ago.

In Section 2 we present leading works from the museum fund collection, which served as the starting point for the MOT Collection and continues to occupy an important position. In doing so, we consider both the meaning and value of the collection, as well as the potential that it provides for the museum's activities.

2-1 Minimal Art and the Gallery Spaces

MOT's galleries characteristically comprise of white cube spaces surrounded by white walls with high ceilings. One of the arts that work together with this kind of space to create a synergistic effect is Minimal Art. Minimal Art is a movement that developed in the United States in the 1960s that literally sought to eliminate all non-essential compositional elements of a work of art. It conveys no theme or meaning, leaves no trace of the hand, and is often characterized by extremely simple shapes and repetitive structures. Works of Minimal Art, which as an extreme form of abstract art is crucial in the discussion of postwar art historical discourse, is indeed one of the key highlights of the collection. These works had constantly been introduced in sections of the museum's permanent exhibitions, "Contemporary Art from the Museum Collection" (1995) and "Permanent Collection – 50 Years of Contemporary Art" (1996-2005), which were held over a course of ten years since the museum's opening.

Carl ANDRE places square metal plates directly on the floor, while Donald JUDD is known for stacking boxes made of industrial materials at regular intervals. Frank STELLA adopt the use of the shaped canvas in their work, whereby the shape depicted assumes the configuration of the canvas. Such artists had channeled a strong awareness towards the relationship between the work and the place where it is exhibited in order for the space to confront the work purely for its nature and essence as an object. Standing in front of the work in a homogeneous space that eliminates distraction, viewers are able to perceive the pure shape and volumes that appears before them. It indeed gives rise to a viewing experience that cannot be encountered online, but only comes to manifest between the work and those who are physically here in this very space.

2-2 Heroines of Pop Art

Flourishing in the United States in the 1960s, Pop Art, along with Minimal Art, is a core part of the museum's collection of overseas artworks. Pop Art, against the backdrop of the full-fledged arrival of mass society, references images of mass-produced products and mass media. Here, we bring focus to the figures depicted by Pop Art's two most iconic artists, Andy WARHOL and Roy LICHTENSTEIN.

Girl with Hair Ribbon is a work that had long been cherished by Lichtenstein, and as observed from its use of the three primary colors, black outlines, and Ben-Day dots, is one of the artist's leading master pieces from his signature series of expanded comic book panels. On the other hand, Warhol's Marilyn Monroe is based on a publicity photograph for a film in which she had appeared. Both Warhol and Lichtenstein succeeded in creating powerful pictures through duplicating the images of these heroines that themselves had been published in printed matter, and further introducing their own figurative manipulations such as color and line drawing.

Due to its visual impact, Lichtenstein's work has often been used in publicity as a symbol of MOT, while Warhol's work has frequently appeared in pamphlets and articles, and thus both have been engraved in people's memories. This reproductive loop in which an image originally featured in printed matter becomes a work, with that work then being distributed through printed matter, indeed signifies the destiny of Pop Art which brings focus to reproduction technology. Now this phenomenon is seen proliferating on an explosive scale in the space of the internet, posing even more essential questions regarding the power that images exert on us. Here, we also introduce Western depictions of figures that appeared before and after Pop Art, as well as works from the same era that harbor common tendencies.

2-3 David Hockney Print Collection

Born in England in 1937, David HOCKNEY is one of the leading painters of our time. He emerged as a standard-bearer of British Pop in the early 1960s, and after moving to Los Angeles in the mid-1960s, he established an international reputation for his works that captured bright sunlight-filled cityscapes and figures through clear and simplistic depictions. With a practice that encompasses painting, photography, video, stage design, and in recent years producing drawing using the iPad, he is a remarkable individual who is able to freely change his style. Even now over the age of 80, he still continues to illustrate a strong curiosity to challenge new forms of expression.

The museum houses 150 Hockney works, which is uncommon for a single artist. His early representative painting *A Lawn Sprinkler* was added to the collection in 1991, and three years later, a further 147 print works were acquired en bloc through the fund. The majority of these are valuable works that had been preserved in the artist's studio, and can be considered as one of the most prominent collections that present an overview of Hockney's practice spanning the 1960s 1990s. These works premiered at the retrospective exhibition "David Hockney Prints 1954-1995" held at the museum in 1996, and since then have not only been presented in the MOT collection, but also loaned out to various Hockney exhibitions in both Japan and overseas. By gaining a wide range of exhibition opportunities, the works are exposed to different perspectives and result in new contexts being generated, both their interpretation and value to continuously be updated. From amongst these works we introduce the unique visual world depicted through Hockney's sharply observant eye, focusing on his illustrated scenes of water, which has long served as a recurring motif throughout his practice.

2-4 Installing "Surrogates" of Painting

A large number of parts made of plaster are installed in a close arrangement on the wall. Their surfaces are respectively painted in colors of black, white, and gray, making them appear like framed paintings. The word *Surrogates* in the title of this work by Allan McCOLLUM, suggests that this work does not consist of genuine paintings, but mere substitutes that are made to look like the real thing. This work, which gives rise to the peculiar and uncertain experience of viewing surrogates in a museum, had caused confusion and provoked a strong response from viewers when it was first exhibited at MOT in 1995, presenting many with the fundamental question: "what is painting?"

While the placement of the 240 parts appears to be random, it is decided based on the instructions that were provided by the artist at the time of the work's collection. The instructions outline multiple variations for exhibiting the work, and while on this occasion it has been installed so that it is in a horizontally long rectangular formation, it can also be presented in a more square-like layout. In this way, the work changes according to wall surface and the space in which it is exhibited. Although works perceivable as installations in the broad sense are nothing out of the ordinary in this day and age, there were very few in the collection that had been acquired by the museum fund at the time. Thereafter, from the latter half of the 1990s, the number of such works increased rapidly, mainly being introduced in special exhibitions at MOT. Various works that transform the space into works of art had emerged, such as those that use moving images, sounds, or light, and those incorporating structures that induce the physicality of the audience, becoming a common language as an independent genre of expression in contemporary art. Individual and detailed arrangements with the artist are essential when collecting such works so as to ensure that they can be repeatedly exhibited for generations to come.

2-5 Ongoing Endeavors

The fund's overseas collection of works had placed a great deal of weight on Europe and the United States. There were only three works from other regions, two of which were by Chinese artist CAI Guo-Qiang. Cai had been living Japan for quite some time up until the year in which the fund acquired his work for its collection, and having worked on projects in Iwaki, as well as being selected for the exhibition "Art in Japan Today" held in commemoration of the museum's opening, he was a foreign artist who occupied a unique position in Japan. This early representative work is a blueprint for his signature outdoor project using gunpowder. The magnificent image of concentrically exploding gunpowder is depicted through the traces of actually burning the gunpowder on paper. The coarse and realistic texture of the gunpowder and the excessively extended horizontal picture plane creates a spectacular effect that while stimulating the senses, reflects a high degree of perfection as a painting.

Presented in its surroundings is a selection of painted figurative works from the 1980s that paved the way for the diverse and eclectic developments in paintings since the 1990s. Viewers are also invited to engage with the works of Julian SCHNABEL who explored the nature and possibilities of the picture plane through paintings set on ceramic plates, and Anselm KIEFER who established his own interpretation of historical painting in the contemporary era, and Eric FISCHL known for his multi-paneled depictions of American suburbia. While the collection fund ended in 1996, since then approximately 1900 works have been added to the collection until present through both acquisitions and donations, and the target area has expanded to include South East Asia, the Middle East, South America and others. MOT's endeavor to expand and develop its collection continues, while re-examining the realms and frameworks of contemporary art.