

**MOT Collection: Present Day and in Times Past—Multiple Perspectives**  
**– September 27, 2020**  
**Collection Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo**

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT) celebrated its Grand Reopening on March 29th 2019, almost three years after closing for renovations to upgrade its equipment and improve its utility as a museum building.

Currently, the museum houses approximately 5,400 artworks in its extensive collection, which spans the modern and contemporary periods with a focus on art of the postwar years. MOT has regularly introduced these works in “MOT Collection” exhibitions in an aim to communicate the diverse appeal of contemporary art from different perspectives. To commemorate the museum’s reopening, we present a selection of artworks centering on donated pieces collected during the museum’s closure.

The exhibition titled, “MOT Collection: Present Day and in Times Past –Multiple Perspectives” introduces approximately 180 works spanning the 1930s until recent years, centering on donated pieces from amongst the 400 or so artworks collected during the museum’s closure for renovations.

The series of artworks collected according to their respective backgrounds and unique perspectives, while serving to illuminate the past 90 years and its experience of major wars and social changes from different directions, present us living today with various outlooks and issues for thought. Bringing together these new acquisitions with existing works from the collection, the exhibition contemplates the nature of art and the meaning of the collection through the crossing of multiple viewpoints such as past and present, memories and documentation, museums and collectors.

Last but not least, we would like to take this opportunity to once again express our sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions for their support in kindly contributing / lending us precious works from their collections.

## **I \_\_ Painters During and After the War**

When the museum first opened in 1995, the main focus of the permanent exhibitions were to historically reflect upon art since 1945 in the context of “contemporary art.” While the year that marked Japan’s defeat in the war is a starting point for considering the history of art, if we were to trace the works of individual painters who had lived in these times and played an active role in the postwar period, it is necessary to look at what they had done during the prewar and mid-war periods, and the means by which these experiences are reflected in their practice. That being said, the museum did not have a sufficient collection of works, in particular those from the 1940s, which would serve to showcase this.

Over the past three years during which the museum was closed for renovations, we have acquired a number of works with the great support and cooperation of private collectors as well as the families of artists, finally enabling the museum to enhance its collection of art from this period. On this occasion, we introduce a selection of these works in three sections: “1. ONOSATO Toshinobu,” “2. SUEMATSU Masaki,” “3. The Perspectives of the Collector.” Onosato Toshinobu (1912-1986) and Suematsu Masaki (1908-1997) were painters who had established their artistic style in the postwar period, yet here we explore how they had acquired and developed their means of expression before and during the war. We also bring our focus to the perspectives of art collector FUKUTOMI Taro (1931-2018). Exhibited, are works that were painted in times of turmoil and chaos during and after the war, donated on this occasion by Mr. Fukutomi, who continued to develop his collection over the years while drawing connections with his own life that had started from amidst the devastated ruins of the war.

Also featured are the works of SUZUKI Kenji (1906-1987) who attempted to capture the lives of ordinary citizen through art over the course of the Showa era, as well as HAMADA Chimei (1917-2018), ARAKI Takako (1921-2004) and HIDESHIMA Yukio (1934-2018) who pose fundamental questions regarding human activities such as war and religion.

By adding a new series of acquisitions to the existing collection, we believe that perspectives and contexts that have never been seen before will come to emerge. Whether works produced during and after the war appear as being distant or continuously connected with us living now, we hope that this exhibition would serve as an opportunity to think about our everyday from various angles and gain a deeper understanding of the trajectory of each artist’s expression.

1. ONOSATO Toshinobu 2. SUEMATSU Masaki 3. The Perspectives of the Collector 4. SUZUKI Kenji 5. HAMADA Chimei, ARAKI Takako, HIDESHIMA Yukio

### **I.1 \_\_ ONOSATO Toshinobu**

ONOSATO Toshinobu (1912-1986) is a painter who throughout his lifetime had continued to pursue a means of expression that entailed filling the entire space of his paintings with circles and lines. While the museum housed two of his abstract paintings from the postwar period, since 2011, we have continued to receive donations of approximately 120 works from Mr. FUKUHARA Yoshiharu, Honorary Chairman of Shiseido Company, Limited, now making it possible for us to trace the path of Onosato’s practice from “concrete to abstract” which he had repeated both before and after the war. This exhibition centers on introducing his works from the 1930s to the 1950s.

Onosato Toshinobu, moved to Tokyo at the age of 19 with aspirations of becoming a painter, and studied painting under the tutorship of TSUDA Seifu. Broadening his knowledge through his companionship with figures such as artist Ei-Q and critic KUBO Sadajiro, he presented works on multiple occasions, having been involved in the formation of the group “Kokushoku Yōga-ten” as well as becoming a member of the “Jiyū Bijutsuka Kyōkai”. The starting point for his artistic career were his landscape paintings of Nagasaki in 1934, yet thereafter followed a continued period of spiritual wandering, as reflected in his works depicting motifs of circles which he had produced in Gyeongseong in 1940. Onosato recalls that what had served to “transform” him were his experiences of the war –first drafted in 1942 and stationed in Manchuria in 1945, and later being detained in Siberia for a period of three years.

After returning to Japan in 1948, he resumed his practice by painting symbolic human figures that instilled him with a great sense of liberation, and at the same time enticed his starved spirit. In due course however, his works came to venture more on the abstract rather than on the reproducible, with circles once again coming to make an appearance. His decision of changing the way of writing his name from Kanji to Katakana around 1952 seems to be in connection with the development of his own distinct style of painting. In 1955, he painted works in which single-colored circles of the same size were arranged, with the gaps between them filled with a series of vertical and horizontal lines. Onosato describes the surprise and sheer fascination of creating works solely through circles and lines as the core essence of his practice. His further research into color and form gradually resulted in increasing the density of the picture plane, and in 1960, he came to present a method which entailed painting the inside of circles divided by a lines in a series of different colors. Through his endless handwork, Onosato hoped for the colored circles to shine like life, instilling viewers with inspiration and a sense of being alive, as well as for the paintings to harbor a certain vividness equivalent to that of living beings. Such view of art had indeed been born as a result of the artist’s desperate and intense experiences during and after the war.

### **I.2 \_\_ SUEMATSU Masaki**

SUEMATSU Masaki (1908-1997) made the decision to pursue painting as a lifetime career when he was in his mid-thirties. It was in 1944, nearing the end of World War II, during the time in which he had been forced to live in detainment in Perpignan, France.

In this exhibition we introduce drawing from this period that were donated by the artist’s family during the museum’s closure, along with a selection oil painting produced after the war.

In 1939, at the age of 30, Suematsu went to Paris to study Neuer Tanz, a new form of German expressionist dance. Due to the outbreak of World War II five months later however, he decided to remain in France, and in 1944, during his attempted escape to Spain, he was captured and imprisoned as an enemy alien in Perpignan near the French border. Although transferred to a hotel in the city as a result of his protests, he was forced to live there for the next year and a half in a state of confinement. Nevertheless, during this period of isolation Suematsu started drawing “with a sense of feeling as if having been reborn,” producing hundreds of works as a manifestation of his “overwhelming desire to dance within the drawing,” as he himself has described.

The dates and texts written into his drawings may have indeed served as a source for encouragement and inspiration in his day to day. The figures depicted are gradually abstracted, and his interest appears to shift its concentration to the means by which to construct their figurative rhythm within painterly space. Suematsu describes *Work (53-6)*, which he produced in 1953, as an attempt to express the expanse of the space created by the movement of the mind and body through precise shapes and articulate colors. In the sense that he had pursued such shapes of human desire, he considered it possible to title the work “group (of figures).” The work presents itself as a culmination of the artist’s ideas and concerns that he had engaged with during his days in Perpignan.

After returning to Japan on a Repatriate freighter in 1946, Suematsu reunited with INOUE Chozaburo who he had a friendship with in Paris, and participated in the "Jiyū Bijutsika Kyōkai" with TSURUOKA Masao and MATSUMOTO Shunsuke, which became a platform for presenting his work. Meanwhile, he shared his experiences of occupied France to occupied Japan through writing about the trends in the French art world in art magazines and working on translating subtitles for films, thus contributing to the cultivation of postwar culture.

### 1.3\_\_The Perspective of the Collector

FUKUTOMI Taro (1931-2018) is not only one of the most prominent businessmen of the postwar Showa period, but is also a well-known collector of modern Japanese paintings, ranging from Ukiyo-e to Nihonga (Japanese style paintings) and Yōga (Western style paintings). Fukutomi is said to have begun collecting art in a desire to reestablish his father's collection of Nihonga that were either lost due to the fires of the two air raid strikes in 1945, or he eventually had no choice but to part with. His collection, which has been researched, excavated and collected over 60 years, is highly acclaimed in terms of both its quality and art historical value. What he had channeled his efforts towards in addition to the collection of Ukiyo-e and Bijin-ga (traditional Japanese paintings of beautiful women) was the collection of paintings related to the war from the 1930s to the 1950s. Fukutomi himself regards this era as a significant moment within his life, describing it through phrases such as "my boyhood corresponds precisely with the 15 years of war" and "I cannot think of my own history without touching upon this era of war."

His collection encompasses a wide variety of works, such those depicting scenes of battle, sketches of around the battlefield, portraits of drafted soldiers painted at the request of their bereaved families, and even works that portrayed the way of life and customs of the time. In terms of Bijin-ga, Fukutomi himself had mentioned his preference for collecting images of women that "while conveying the social conditions and customs of the time in their background, presented the very nature of the life of the woman depicted." In the same way, amongst his collection of wartime paintings, it is possible to observe works that place focus on people and their lives. Fukutomi's investigation and collecting of works from this period that were not widely distributed could perhaps be considered as an act of ascertaining his own history. These series of paintings, which in addition to the images themselves, harbor multiple elements such as the purpose for and background behind their creation, as well as the means by which they were received, while encapsulating Fukutomi's personal gaze as an individual, reflect the era of the 1930s to 1950s. Through these, viewers will be able to look at, capture, and talk about the works of this complex period and the creative practice of painters from multiple angles. Such also leads to thinking about the multifaceted nature of painting. Here, we take the opportunity to introduce a section of this rich and extensive collection.

### 1.4\_\_SUZUKI Kenji

Born in Tochigi in 1906, the practice of SUZUKI Kenji (1906-1987) who worked as a sculptor, caricaturist, and printmaker, corresponds to the vicissitudes of the Showa period from the rise of social movement, in wartime, and postwar chaos. For this reason, Suzuki's work, which was created in an effort to resonate with the lives of those living in the same era, almost always depict people and serve as mirrors that reflect the aspects of the times. In 1925, two years after the Great Kanto Earthquake, Suzuki entered the sculpture department of the Tokyo Fine Arts School (current Tokyo University of the Arts). While studying wood sculpture under TAKAMURA Koun, he devoted himself to the proletarian art movement that had swept society at the time, publishing a number of comics conveying strong claims based on labor movements. In 1932 he returned to Tochigi where he deepened his interests in industrial arts, also establishing his reputation as a sculptor having received the special prize at the "Sanbukai" exhibition (1937).

Suzuki's interest in social movements continued after the war, and consequently developed into the "print movement" that centered in the northern Kanto region where he was based. Inspired by Lu Xun's print movement in China, in 1947 he published the print magazine *Kokuga* that was "to be made available to all working people", followed by the organization of touring exhibitions in which artworks were exhibited and displayed in various workplace environments. The prints of this period graphically combined bold lines with the grain of the plywood used as the woodblock, illustrating the accurate gaze of capturing human life and a sense of technical finesse cultivated through sculpture. Despite their remarkability, Suzuki's works present themselves as a form of social media intended for wide distribution to the masses, rather than attempting to measure value by creating limited editions. This attitude is more directly observed in his works of the 1950s and 1960s. Suzuki, who continued to capture the lives of the common people and their day-to-day work through his practice, had produced sculptures during the war that reflected upon the circumstances at hand. A rare example of such work is *Nephew Who Died at War*. The work of an artist, which illustrates an inextricable link between art and society through remarkable human expressions, presents viewers with an opportunity for much contemplation.

### 1.5\_\_HAMADA Chimei, ARAKI Takako, HIDEHIMA Yukio

The final chapter of the section "Painters During and After the War," introduces the works of artists who had turned their gaze towards human deeds throughout the course of history such as war and religion. Each of the works have a unique sense of depth that could be regarded as having been inevitably "conceived," thus drawing the attention of viewers.

*Cluster-Amaryllis* is a collection of illustrated poems that HIDEHIMA Yukio (1934-2018) had produced in collaboration with the novelist ISHIMURE Michiko who was from the same hometown as him. Hideshima met Ishimure when he was around 20 years old, after which the two continued to maintain a long-term friendship. As if responding to her poetry, in this work, motifs associated with the artist's childhood emerge gently from the darkness, while the deep black conveys a profound sense of depth. This black is a texture that is unique to the mezzotint process, and Hideshima describes achieving this particular shade of black through finely engraving the entire surface of the copper plate and then adding sharper etches to it.

Fellow Kumamoto-born artist HAMADA Chimei (1917-2018) had opened up the path to printmaking for Hideshima, who had originally worked on producing pen drawings. Hamada, who enlisted in the military in 1939 and was dispatched to Mainland China, had transcribed the experiences of these times into a series of copperplate prints titled *Elegy for a New Conscript* from 1950s to 1954. As the artist himself describes, monochrome copperplate prints was the medium that he had turned to in his "helpless urge for depiction," and his desire to "not adhere to formalities such as old or new, but leave only what one truly wishes to advocate while disregarding everything else." The forms and images, born through a means of engraving as if splicing into the toughly resistant copperplates, convey the strong will of the artist who channels his gaze towards the foolishness of human beings.

ARAKI Takako (1921-2004) is an artist who had worked with glass and ceramics since the 1950s. *The Bible Series* is one of her representative works that was achieved through various trials and experimentation. The Bible motif is said to be based on a Bible left behind by Araki's brothers, which reflects her personal experience of having grown up in a complex environment where both her parents and brothers were involved in different faiths. Texts from the Bible are respectively transcribed onto thinly stretched porcelain clay, which are then placed on top of one another and baked at high temperatures. This carefully meticulous process enabled the artist to create a fragile texture. Combined with the symbolism of the Bible, this work evokes a sense of time beyond that of humans, thus illustrating how an individual's personal memories have reached a point of universality.

## 2\_\_MATSUE Taiji

Matsue Taiji (1963-) has been taking photographs of plots of land around the world in his own unique style integrating abundant details into otherwise neutral overhead shots. In recent years he mainly employs the techniques of aerial photography and video (which Matsue himself calls "moving photographs") for his explorations of optical possibilities than can only be realized with photography.

*JP-13* series focuses on the days when there were still lumberyards (*kiba*) in the area, and examine how the wood craftsmen and carpenters who had their workshops here were involved in the growth process of Edo/Tokyo by making use of the canals. Traveling along the canal from the former lumberyard area that is today Shin-Kiba up to the Kiyosumi-shirakawa district, Matsue captures in his photographs the construction of a new town that is in progress right now in the bay area, and the various urban functions in terms of distribution and traffic, while overlapping past memories and the present state of this part of Tokyo. At this occasion Matsue presents next to aerial photographs the results of his first attempts at panoramic photography, showing sceneries of the Toyosu Canal and the Onagi River, two canals that sandwich the area covered in the photographs that eternally frame the fleeting appearances of a city that changes with every moment according to the flow of the canals.

One prominent characteristic of Matsue Taiji's photographs is that they capture sceneries in conditions of flat, even light, with all kinds of details precisely in focus. While emphasizing aspects of flatness and grid structure, this visual appearance contains hints at the essential structure of the human mind regarding the creation of communities. In addition to photographic prints, a monitor installed

at the venue shows “moving photographs” that illustrate communal aspects of this temple area with images of cemeteries and pictures of apartment houses taken by Matsue over a period of several years, along with a rich notion of time. This video sharply touches the very nature of the medium of photography as it appears between life and death, while vividly portraying an area in which both are inseparably ingrained in human life, and old things and new things, past and future coexist.

### 3\_mamoru

The artist mamoru (1977-), who has a background as a musician, develops works and performances that through the act of listening, enable visitors imagine times and spaces that cannot be experienced directly.

The installation *THE WAY I HEAR, B.S. LYMAN 5th Movement Polyphony for Collective Imagination*, comprising of text and sound, is based on various studies of Benjamin Smith Lyman, an American geologist and miner who was hired by the Meiji government at the end of the 19th century to conduct geological surveys of Hokkaido. In 1874, when B.S. Lyman was surveying the Yubari River, he found a lump of coal on its riverbank and was convinced that a large coal seam lay underneath. Thereafter, his assistant discovered the Yubari Coal Mine that forms a part of the Ishikari coal basin containing the largest quantity of coal in Japan. This had led to the development of Yubari as a coalmining town, and as a result became an energy source that was quintessential in promoting the modernization of Japan.

If such is the case, the moment Lyman discovered that lump of coal, is also perhaps connected to our current that lies far ahead of those times. Exploring this idea, mamoru researched the vast amount of survey records and literature left by Lyman, and actually visited Yubari and collected the sounds that Lyman would have heard while tracing the footsteps of the survey team led by him. The fragmented records and memories of the same places in different times visited by Lyman and mamoru, through the spoken words repeatedly corresponding to and becoming out-of-sync with the texts presented across the two screens, serve to evoke various images and soundscapes within visitors. They indeed could be regarded as an attempt to access times and spaces that cannot be experienced directly through the act of listening.

### 4\_ONO Yoko

ONO Yoko (1933-) moved to the United States in 1952 due to her father's work while she was a student in the Philosophy Department of Gakushuin University, and thereafter studied music and poetry at Sarah Lawrence University in the suburbs of New York. From the late 1950s she started engaging with New York's avant-garde art scene, and in 1961, begun the production of her instruction paintings. Instruction paintings are a means of expression that is completed by the viewers imagining or enacting the instructions outlined through the artist's text. Ono had been writing such texts since the 1950s, and upon her temporary return to Japan in 1964, she published her first artist's book titled *Grapefruit*, which consisted of a collection of 150 or so instructions.

Ono's early instructions had consisted of several lines of text such as, “Imagine the clouds dripping. Dig a hole in your garden to put them in.” In recent years however, she has produced her *Word Piece* series that bear one-word slogans.

Avant-garde artist and filmmaker IIMURA Takahiko, who has been acquainted with Ono's since the 1960s, touches upon the “importance of blank spaces” in the expressions of her work. Among Ono's instruction paintings, her *Word Piece* series appear to offer more space for viewers to fill with their own imagination, and reflect an increasing sense of universality in the sense that they can be shared and appreciated across different times and regions.

In her interview with Iimura, Ono has mentioned that, “instructions are an incentive.” Viewers need not follow the instructions presented, and what is instead important is that they change. These works not only influence the minds of those who view them and serve to elicit active emotions and behavior, but also bring to mind the various responses of people who will later come to encounter the work. The works are also a circuit that connects to the unknown future through the current experiences that they evoke.

### 5\_OKAMOTO Shinjiro

OKAMOTO Shinjiro (1933-) is an artist, who since the early 1960s, has pursued the style of painting with acrylic on canvas. Employing a technique of painting the contours in thin lines and applying even layers of bright colors, he depicts a wide range of subjects, from the memories of his childhood in downtown Tokyo, to myth, religion, and war. Okamoto had sought his loquacious picture planes overflowing with images and text, to function as “paintings to be viewed,” “paintings to be read,” and even “paintings to be laughed at.”

On this occasion we introduce works that were donated by the artist during the museum's temporary closure. Inspired by the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States, the works had been conceived in retroactive response to his own boyhood that overlapped with the period of war, and were presented as a series in his solo exhibition “The Big Bomb at 25:00” (The Shōtō Museum of Art).

The work *Silver Dragonfly: The Map of Great Tokyo* linked the artist's memories of a mammoth dragonfly and the B29 combat planes, and served as a preface to this series. He regards the colored version of the work as depicting “the world that is to be observed,” and the line drawing *Silver Dragonfly* as “the world that is to be read.”

In the work *Crumbling Blocks, New Guernica*, his past works are vibrantly arranged, around which are a combination of images that permeate with disturbing elements, and images that while deconstructing his past motifs, are filled with a festive atmosphere. In addition, a part of this work could be seen as connected to *BIRDMAN: Dessin of Terrorism*. Unlike Picasso who had presented a contrast between war and peace in *Guernica* and *Dove*, Okamoto's works convey the artist's own experiences of war that are brought to mind amidst times of peace.

*Rolling Cherry Blossoms: The Big Bomb for Tokyo* is a panorama, which the artist, who remembers his childhood experience of the 1945 March 10<sup>th</sup> air bombings, had taken on the challenge of producing in his 70s. Seen to the left is the Ueno Subway Store, with the slope of Kudanzaka in the center, and Asakusa Matsuya Department Store and Battleship Yamato to the right, depicting a world in which these become scorched and burnt to dust, as well as an apocalyptic world of future space. Okamoto treats all myths, history, folk elements and personal memories as equal through his cool mindset and sophisticated handwork. By excessively filling the space of his paintings with imagery and words, he creates a highly critical painting that encourages various ways of viewing and interpretation.

### 6\_TOYOSHIMA Yasuko

TOYOSHIMA Yasuko (1967-) is an artist who continues to consciously ask questions about the frameworks, mechanisms, and rules that establish human thinking, recognition, and actions in society. Toyoshima has engaged in a means of practice that entails her to delve into the various mechanisms that people harbor within themselves, and visualizing their entire structure through recreating them as her own expressions.

*Sterilization* is a work in which a germicidal lamp and color samples are placed inside a display case. The colors of the color samples that should indeed be protected, gradually fade due to the ultraviolet rays emitted by the germicidal lamp. The role of the UV-cut film that is attached to the display case in order to protect the work from the outside world, has been reversed here to protect the outside world / viewers. *Panels* are a series of works with painting-like structures, yet they are at once paradoxical sculpted objects that present an intricate rendering of reverse faces and sides –aspects that usually remain unseen. In these works, what are supposed to be well known appear unfamiliar, leading the viewer's awareness to contemplate the space in which we stand and its very framework.

Questions regarding the mechanism of thought can also be directed to the act of capturing the past from the present. The work *Precedent* (special exhibit) was created through “researching the destinations and reasons for artists travelling overseas to places other than Western nations from the 20th century until Japan's defeat in World War II.” Regardless of the purpose for their trip, the information of the artists “collected under the narrow sense that they were engaged in artistic activities (in that place),” was carefully written on strips of washi paper, bringing to light the presence of multiple individuals within the times. The paper used as the material for this work, had also been employed in the making of balloon bombs during the war, and was produced locally in the artist's hometown. Befitting for a work made in paper, Toyoshima pasted these strips of paper with starch glue that is also used in restoration. The reversible adhesive method suggests that historical accounts and records may be altered, and that the past is by no means closed. This work, which includes multiple elements, can be said to present us in the form of a question, the process of understanding the past in the present age where various historical issues are observed.

### 7\_Monir FARMANFARMAIAN , Brenda FAJARDO, Shahzia SIKANDER

Here, we introduce artists who attempt new approaches to engaging with their history based on their own unique methods.

Born in Iran, Monir FARMANFARMAIAN (1924-2019) went to the United States in 1945 to study art and fashion design, thereafter which she pursued a career as an illustrator and graphic designer. Upon returning to Iran in 1957, she began producing works inspired by the traditional architectural designs of her home country, centering on geometric mirror mosaics and reverse-glass painting techniques. After 26 years of exile from Iran due to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, she reconciled her mosaic works. A characteristic of her works is the critical mix of traditional Islamic thought, decorative

techniques, and geometric modernism. The images of those who view her works are dispersed and fluctuate through countless facets in a way that appears to reflect the multiple backgrounds of the artist herself.

Brenda FAJARDO (1940-) is a pioneering figure amongst female Filipino artists. She completed her art education in the United States after studying agriculture in the Philippines. Her *Tarot Card Series* takes a fortune-telling method of European origin, and applies it to the circumstances surrounding contemporary Filipino people. By adopting popular materials and painting methods along with the use of delicate colors to address real-life issues within a fictional framework, the works, rather than presenting themselves as a straightforward protest, draw the sympathy of viewers through their friendly narrative style.

Shahzia SIKANDER (1969-) is an artist who studied Indo-Persian miniature painting in the region of Lahore in Northern Pakistan, and since 1995 has continued to live and work in the United States. Incorporating experimental expressions such as drawing, animations, and installation into traditions of classical miniature painting while further introducing political and personal motifs, she serves to open up new languages and new contexts, both in terms of the figurative and the thematic. In this work, which she produced through drawing reference from the Pakistan Armed Forces Band, the images of battle are fused with the pastoral appearance of the band, presenting the plain and indiscriminate coexistence of peace and violence in a nonchalant manner.

## 8\_KUSAMA Yayoi

On this occasion we introduce a variety of works by avant-garde artist Yayoi KUSAMA (1929-) that are housed in the museum's collection, spanning her early drawings produced in her hometown of Matsumoto in 1951, to paintings from 1989 that she had made after returning to Japan from the United States.

From a young age Kusama had found herself painting "polka dots" that had often appeared in her hallucinations, as if to suppress her fears and restore her own peace of mind. In 1957, in a time when overseas travel had been difficult, young Kusama went to the United States with the desire to become a painter, taking with her the thousands of works on paper that she had produced. In 1958, the year following her solo exhibition in Seattle, she arrived in New York where abstract expressionism was flourishing. During the 15 years that Kusama spent in the U.S, she gained much acclaim from the Western art world and came to establish her international reputation, producing a diverse range of works from installations to nude performances, as well as her "Net Paintings"\* series that she had immersed herself in day and night at a time when she found herself in abject poverty. Kusama's "soft sculptures" whose surfaces were covered with protrusions of phallus-like fillings born from her sexual obsessions, are also a series that she had initiated during her years in the U.S.

In 1973, Kusama returned to Japan in ill health. In her personal life, she had experienced the death of artist Joseph Cornell who she was long closely acquainted with, followed by the death of her father with whom she maintained a love-hate relationship. While in hospital, she focused on producing uniquely beautiful collages on the subject of death, and engaged in developing her literary creations at night. In the works *War, Graves of the Unknown Soldiers, Tidal Waves of War*, photographs of concentration camps cut out from magazines and books, swastikas, and motifs from the natural world such as birds and plants are pasted together, enabling the image of death and life to emerge as if emitting light from within the darkness.

In the latter half of the 1980s, Kusama worked on creating paintings characterized by a sense of smoothness and decorativeness that were acquired through silkscreen production. The work *Star Dust of One Hundred Million Light Years* presents a dazzling world where a myriad of polka dots and meshed lines are depicted in alteration. Kusama's art, which continues its process of repetition and propagation while constantly evolving, is replete with a sense of overwhelming vitality that penetrates the universe.

\**Pacific Ocean* (1960) is featured in the exhibition "The Potentiality of Drawing."

## 9\_MIYAJIMA Tatsuo

Featuring a series of red digital counters, this work by MIYAJIMA Tatsuo (1957-) was produced and installed in correspondence to the museum's exhibition space in 1998. A total of 1728 LEDs are used to display numerical digits from 1 to 9 that each blink at different intervals, finally arriving at a split moment of darkness after which the process of countdown is repeated.

While this work has been presented in the museum for the past 20 years, over the course of time, slight discrepancies came to be observed in the respective counters that were all initially uniform in brightness. After undergoing inspection and repairs during the museum's closing, the work and the dazzling space of light that it creates, has been restored to a state reminiscent of its earlier days.

The title of the work, *Keep Changing, Connect with Everything, Continue Forever*, is a reflection of the artist's considerations. That which "changes, connects, and continues" in the eyes of the artist is "art." Through this work, Miyajima communicates that what instills wisdom, courage and hope within us is a means of "art" that doesn't remain unchanged within the contours of its frame, but instead opens out to the world and serves to actively accept and express change –also being something that lasts forever.

There are indeed viewers who have developed a sense of familiarity to this work throughout the years it has been installed in the museum. Meanwhile, how will viewers who encounter this work for the first time perceive and react to the experience of being surrounded by the myriad of repeatedly blinking red lights? We hope that viewers will each to their own enjoy engaging in moments of contemplation regarding this work that has returned to its former place of exhibit.