

MOT Collection

Past Light, Present Sight

September 19, 2026 –January 6, 2027

Collection Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

Foreword

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo is home to around 6,100 works of primarily postwar art, and each MOT Collection exhibition presents a selection of these works, from a different perspective.

The latest, “Past Light, Present Sight,” focuses on the themes of light and time, and features a wealth of new acquisitions.

Whether it be light emitted many thousands of years ago by distant stars, sunlight that shifts amid the sands of time, the ethereal glow of moonlight, the glare of electric lamps illuminating their surroundings, or the evanescent flickering of fireflies, light in its myriad permutations features heavily in our day-to-day lives. Seeing, viewing, observing these diverse manifestations of light can also conjure up moments from the past, or scenes from a particular time, and one could say that the “now” we are living is shaped by the layering and linking of time, passed down along with light. Through works by artists including KOSEMURA Mami, TSUCHIYA Kimio, KUMAGAI Arisa, and TOYA Shigeo, “Past Light, Present Sight” turns its attention to the past inherent in the present, and contemplates the stratified nature of time.

In closing, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of these who have honored us with their unstinting cooperation in realizing this exhibition.

1. YOSHIDA Hiroshi

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of painter and printmaker YOSHIDA Hiroshi (1876–1950). In his twenties Yoshida began to travel the world, depicting the scenes he encountered there with consummate skill, in landscape paintings that captured the changing light splendidly thanks to vividly realistic drafting and nuanced use of color, and remain enormously popular today.

In 1925, upon returning from his third journey to the United States and lamenting the poor-quality late-Edo-period ukiyo-e prints he found circulating there, Yoshida made it his mission to develop a new kind of woodblock print, and threw himself energetically into the task. Twelve Scenes of Tokyo is a series of prints utilizing virtuosic color sense and a command of perspective to portray famous sites in the capital. The characters 自摺 (jizuri) written on the print indicate that the artist controlled all parts of the process personally, supervising the block carver and printer through to completion of the work. In order to use multiple blocks

and produce complex color tones, Yoshida would carefully select and blend the pigments himself, acquiring skill equal to that of any specialist craftsman. In Kameido, the flowering wisteria in the upper part of the frame is arranged with dynamic flair, while in the center, the steep taiko-bashi bridge and reflections on the water form a subtly gradated circle, giving the work its overall harmony. Kameido involved an incredible 88 color impressions. In The Sumidagawa River series meanwhile, by using the same block but changing colors, Yoshida succeeds in expressing the transition of time, and the exquisite subtleties of nature. The prints of Yoshida Hiroshi fix perfectly on the paper that sensed first-hand in the landscape, thanks to the artist’s exceptional technical mastery.

2. KOSEMURA Mami

Drawing inspiration from the realist painting of Europe and Japan, KOSEMURA Mami (b.1975) presents animated video installations and photographic works. This is our first showing of her early offering Flowering Plants of the Four Seasons, an installation composed of three videos: “Spring, Summer, Autumn,” “Winter,” and “Tenbukuro.”

“Spring, Summer, Autumn” projected on the horizontal screen references the paintings on interior room partitions of the Kano school. Taking individually chosen plants such as peonies, weeping plum, and peach, the artist combined them into groups, and carefully monitoring their growth, took approximately 1500 photos over the span of two months. These were compiled with images of partition paintings into this video. Just as the Kano school artists painted by copying classic exemplars intermixed with sketches from nature, Kosemura can be said to have “transcribed” paintings and live plants onto the screen with the aid of computer and camera. The flowering plants portrayed by the Kano school artists change through the use of Kosemura’s documentary-like technique and begin to inhabit a new timeline. In “Winter” Kosemura overlays footage of actual snow on kodemari (*Spiraea cantoniensis*) and a work depicting the bamboo of spring. In “Tenbukuro” meanwhile, a waterside scene of indeterminate season looms out of the screen in monochrome. Kosemura has taken the continuous (cycling) time of the seasons, turned it into three videos, and arranged it around this space. The result is a flow of multiple overlapping temporalities: the “times” captured by the artist’s gaze and recorded in photographs, and the “now” of watching the videos compiled from them.

3. Sightseeing Art Research Institute (NAKAMURA Hiroshi /TATEISHI Koichi)

Sightseeing Art Research Institute (Kanko Geijutsu Kenkyusho) was formed in 1964 by NAKAMURA Hiroshi (1932–2026) and TATEISHI Koichi (1941–1998). The invitation notes that “‘Kanko’ (sightseeing) literally means to see light” Back then, for Nakamura “kanko” was a term reluctantly used that poked fun at the indulgences of big-spenders, and cheap landscape paintings. However the pair seemed to have taken this idea and turned it on its head, deeming their own works to be light, removing them from museums and galleries, and heading out to show them to people, by doing so attempting to connect art and society and encourage engagement between them. Through works featuring eye-catching motifs such as Mt. Fuji and the bullet train, and performances at locations from Tokyo Station to the Tamagawa River, Nakamura and Tateishi endeavored to made audiences conscious of actively “looking/seeing.” In 1966, in conjunction with SHINOHARA Ushio and YOKOO Tadanori, they staged the exhibition “Four ‘Sightseeings’ in Art.” The deliberate clash in a single exhibition between four artists of different styles—Shinohara, flag-bearer for the “Anti-art” movement, and Yokoo, then starting to make a name for himself in graphic design, joining Nakamura who remained a devotee of painting, and Tateishi who was pivoting to manga—attracted significant public interest, and could be described as an attempt to inspire people to “look/see.”

Nakamura would thereafter continue to paint and explore the act of “looking/seeing.” Studying, validating each work and making a connection to the next, through this ceaseless cycle he brought time, motion and a series of changes to the static painting.

Tateishi for his part would move to Milan in 1969 under the name “Tiger Tateishi,” there producing panel-split paintings with manga energy, and making prints presenting narrative realms of space-time distortion and morphing objects in vibrant color.

4. SHINOHARA Ushio

SHINOHARA Ushio (b. 1932) with his trademark Mohican hairstyle and unstoppable energy continues to make art in his longstanding home of New York. During the 1960s he presented works characterized by their speed and dynamism, including giant sculptures fashioned from waste material, and “boxing paintings” made by applying paint to boxing gloves and pummeling the canvas. Dominating discourse in the Japanese avant-garde art scene of the era, Shinohara was an advocate of working “quickly, beautifully, and rhythmically,” describing his personal path to this in his book *The Avant-Garde Road*.

In March 1966 Shinohara staged a solo exhibition that was the culmination of his series featuring oiran (high-ranking traditional courtesans), and the following April, exhibited

paintings based on ukiyo-e prints “Four ‘Sightseeings’ in Art.” Though inspired by o-kubi-e (head-and shoulders portraits) of courtesans wearing traditional hair ornaments, in the Oiran series, all facial expressions and traces of the artist’s handiwork have been removed. Affixing a sheet of acrylic over the face, and using masking tape to define the surrounding areas in sharp, straight lines before spraying on fluorescent paint, resulted in a uniform, flat surface— giving the works a superficial, hollow brightness and contemporary quality reminiscent of Pop Art. Here, echoing one aspect of the artist’s original intent, the artwork is illuminated with black light, accentuating the brilliance of its fluorescent colors.

5. YOKOO Tadanori

Artist YOKOO Tadanori (b. 1936) has been active constantly since the 1960s in fields ranging from painting and design to writing. His participation in the “Four ‘Sightseeings’ in Art” exhibition of April 1966 coincides with a period when he was producing self-promotional advertisements and beginning to attract attention as a graphic designer. Two months later Yokoo staged a painting exhibition that became the launchpad for a career that continues to flourish today.

Since shifting focus primarily to painting in the early 1980s, Yokoo has drawn on anything and everything for his motifs. In these works, light manifests in myriad ways, from the sparkle of stars and fireflies, to streetlamps illuminating a Y-junction. Most distinctive among them, however, is the light of cosmic inspiration central to his practice. The pistol flash emitted by an angel, evoking the Annunciation; the figure of Picasso that prompted Yokoo’s switch from designer to painter; and the waterfalls recurring in his dreams can all be seen as expressions of that otherworldly luminosity.

Scenes accompanied by light range from famous sightseeing spots to fictitious towns; underground caverns to distant space. Captivated by the landscape paintings of Yoshida Hiroshi, Yokoo has written of the joy of travels merging Yoshida’s creations with his own memories. Yokoo’s works, in which multiple permutations of time and space coexist collagelike, fire the imagination of the viewer, and open portals to memory.

6. YAMAGUCHI Katsuhiro, YOSHIMURA Masunobu

Relation of C by YAMAGUCHI Katsuhiro (1928–2018) is a light sculpture face-off between a clear letter C, and an internally lit, red acrylic C. Blinking bulbs in the base of each letter create the impression of a call-and-response between the two. On seeing this work Yamaguchi’s friend, composer SATOH Keijiro, dubbed it “an evocation of weightlessness,” meaning a place that could travel in any direction, open to all possibilities. In his quest for lightweight forms made from transparent acrylic and fluorescent lamps, rather than

making a work complete in itself Yamaguchi aspired to something that would influence and be influenced by the surrounding environment. Declining to fixate on the idea of the artist doing everything by hand, Yamaguchi also incorporated the industrial method of drawing plans and having a contractor actually fabricate the work. The resulting sculpture offers the viewer a new kind of spatial experience.

YOSHIMURA Masunobu (1932–2011) formed the avant-garde art group Neo-Dada with Shinohara Ushio and others in 1960. Working out of his ISOZAKI Arata-designed studio, he undertook a series of radical activities, presenting works in which he enclosed himself in coffin-like, three-dimensional structures made from materials including plaster and sake bottles. In 1962 he moved to the United States, where he began incorporating acrylic and light into his works. Queen Semiramis II, made following the artist's return to Japan, is a light-based sculpture consisting of brightly colored neon tubes running through curved clear acrylic. Likening this acrylic to a "transparent coffin," Yoshimura wrote that the neon tubes recreated a wind tunnel experiment conducted by a crafts teacher at his elementary school during the war. Sealed inside Queen Semiramis II may thus be memories of the artist's childhood and a respected teacher who died in the war.

7. KUSAMA Yayoi

Visitors may well have spotted the works of KUSAMA Yayoi (1929–2026) not only in exhibitions, but as outdoor sculptures, or merchandise. Kusama's vibrant colors and repeating/proliferating motifs are striking in their simplicity and strength.

The dots and nets depicted in *Star Dust of One Hundred Million Light-Years* and protrusions covering the boat in *Walking on the Sea of Death* have been features of Kusama's art since childhood, becoming synonymous with her as she continued to explore them throughout her lifetime. For Kusama, portraying the polka-dots of her hallucinations and their mesh-pattern inversions, and fashioning protrusions in the form of male sex organs, an act born out of a fear of sex and violence, represent an urgent battle to calm and conquer an inner unease. Yet it is in the elevation of such obsessions to creative inspiration that Kusama's originality and resilience of spirit as an artist can be found.

Dots cram a vast canvas, protrusions cover boats and dressers, artist extinguishing the self in pursuit of the infinite space and endless time of repeating, proliferating motifs. In Kusama's art one may also perceive a vision of life emerging from the tiniest cell, and reverting finally to particles of cosmic light.

8. MATSUMOTO Yoko, SEKINE Naoko, Agnes MARTIN, FUKUSHIMA Hideko

A painter for over six decades, MATSUMOTO Yoko (b. 1936) views black as a luminous hue, and says her own distinctive black is born out of her perception of color, and desire to explore materials. Taking our cue from this, here we turn our attention to lustrous blacks.

Matsumoto's black stems from the charcoal foundational to her creative practice. In the drawing here, charcoal black and white pastel surge across the paper like fluid atmospheric currents.

SEKINE Naoko (b. 1977) builds her deep blacks from pencil strokes, with graphite and paper combining to create a complex visage. Smooth and radiant like a mirror, the surface of *Mirror Drawing* transforms on closer inspection into a totally different scene crafted by the painstaking accumulation of countless lines—the viewer's gaze alternating between this vast, glossy surface, and the delicate linework.

The black in the work of Agnes MARTIN (1912–2004) is likewise a product of the pencil. The US-based painter sought her own expression in geometric compositions, horizontal lines drawn at roughly equal intervals across a square canvas resulting in works with an austere aura. Look closer though and one finds the grain of the canvas and fine greyish-white particles of the gesso ground causing the pencil lines to waver and fade. Here a quiet luminosity unfolds across a ground bathed in hazy tonal variations.

In contrast, the black in the work of FUKUSHIMA Hideko (1927–1997) leaps dynamically off the paper. Fukushima's paintings are characterized by a water-based technique and a visual language centered on the circle. The varying intensity of the ink, brushwork, and shifting pressure and angle of her stamping combine to create a remarkably rich spectrum of blacks, radiating light that seems to reach far beyond the dimensions of the paper.

9. TSUCHIYA Kimio

Here we present works by TSUCHIYA Kimio (b. 1955), with a particular focus on recent acquisitions *At that moment* and *Absence*.

At that moment consists of four wall clocks suspended from ropes, hands stopped at the times four devastating disasters struck modern Japan: the dropping of the A-bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima, and the Hanshin and Tohoku earthquakes. Thus timepieces built to tell us when is "now" continue to convey moments that cannot and must never be forgotten.

Absence is a sculpture in dwelling form that combines various pieces of patterned glass manufactured in the Showa era in a metal frame, and contains charred residue created by burning debris from an abandoned house. The endeavors and memories of the people who lived in that house, the

years for which the building stood; everything that once was there is now a pile of minutely fine matter in the form of ash. Perhaps for Tsuchiya, the act of turning ashes into art preserves fading memories by giving them visual expression.

Running through this room—where these two works are joined by *Fragments of the Moon*, using broken china to represent phases of the moon, and *Domain of Memory*, offering a critical look at social structures through empty energy drink bottles—are the elements of memory, both of people and of objects, captured in a single moment as well as across the passage of time. Tsuchiya's works speak to a consistent, identifiable creative vision informed by his background as an architecture student whose family sold timepieces for a living.

10. KUMAGAI Arisa, MIYAKE Saori, NODA Tetsuya

For KUMAGAI Arisa (b. 1991), the grandfather who ran a boutique in a former red-light district and dressed in luxury Italian fashion label Versace, has long been an important feature of her work, not only here. This painting is paired with another that turns its attention to the devout Catholic faith of Gianni Versace, and is the product of Kumagai's fascination with that culture. It depicts a statue from the Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois in Paris, whose tolling bell signaled the onset of the Saint Bartholomew's Day massacre of Huguenots (French Calvinist Protestants) by Catholics. The artist's technique of throwing the presence of the motif into relief by making it loom out of darkness recalls the chiaroscuro of Baroque painting. The light and shadow emerging here not only emphasize the contours of the statue, but capture vividly the contrast of hollowness behind splendor, between youth and old age, outer and inner faces, as if to reveal the inherent contradictions of being human.

Both "The Missing Shade" consisting of photographs collected privately by MIYAKE Saori (b. 1975), and the "Diary" photographs of family and everyday scenes shot by NODA Tetsuya (b. 1940) are extremely personal in viewpoint, yet by taking a fresh look at the universal concerns of family and history through someone else's eyes, offer new perspectives.

11. TOYA Shigeo

In a career that began in the mid-1970s and drew on the Mono-ha and post-minimalist currents navigated by a previous cohort of artists, TOYA Shigeo (1947–2026) became known for a style that explored sculpture's very way of being. In the mid-1980s he began wielding a chainsaw to carve pieces of timber, and here we have a prominent example of the resulting works. The structure consisting of 34 lengths of timber may be interpreted as an assemblage of trees, i.e. "woods." At either end the work resembles an

elephant, an effect the artist said arose during the production process. The whole of *Death of the Kiln of the Elephant of the Woods* has been endowed with a roundness that echoes the form of a traditional climbing kiln. Viewers are encouraged to formulate their own interpretations of what linking death with the elements of forest, pachyderm, and pottery-making might mean.

Toya noted that with sculpture, "the more you carve and chip, the more is subtracted materially and swiftly disappears," adding, "In my case, the surfaces that appear with each cut of the chainsaw are consigned to the past tense in quick succession. The line that was there previously, is lost completely as a new one appears. So the trace of each swipe of the saw disappears, time and again.... That loss of everything materially, even when in my mind I am striving to knit internal and surface together, is frustrating."⁸ Those marks etched in an engagement with the nature of sculpture—attempts at accumulation that only lead to erasure—offer insights into the actions and meditations of the artist, and the time spent in the work's creation.

* "Chōkokuno rinne" [The reincarnation of sculpture] (Toya Shigeo Toya and Usami Keiji in conversation), ACRYLART, no. 14 (1990): 6.

12. Ad REINHARDT, SUGIMOTO Hiroshi, FUJII Hikaru

The "Timeless Paintings" produced by Ad REINHARDT (1913–1967) in his later years are painted entirely in black, effectively eliminating narrative and temporality. Take some time to study this example closely however and you will find aspects of the work not immediately noticeable, such as differences in tone, and partitioning of the picture plane.

In his "Theaters" series, SUGIMOTO Hiroshi (b. 1948) leaves the shutter open throughout the entire length of the movie, resulting in the images that ought to appear on the cinema screen instead manifesting as a blank white surface. While those images may be lost, the cumulative exposure gives a sense of the time passing in that place. Sugimoto's "Seascapes" meanwhile captures oceans around the world, splitting the frame between sea and sky with horizon at center in a way that conjures up thoughts of eternity in visions of distant ancestors surveying those same vistas.

For Covid-19 May 2020, FUJII Hikaru (b. 1976) filmed a room in an exhibition of which he was part. The shoot was undertaken while the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo was closed in 2020 during the pandemic, and without the presence of people, one could be deluded into thinking even the value and significance of the works had been forgotten. Watching this video dealing with a contemporary event is a vividly real experience, awakening as it does for us who lived through the same era, memories of "that time." Fujii's work will no doubt also tell future generations of these times, and the art of these times. Turning our thoughts to how works

we are seeing now were seen in the past, and how they might be seen in future, adds an extra dimension to art appreciation.

13. Dan FLAVIN

Dan FLAVIN (1933–1996) began incorporating artificial light into his works in 1961, affixing fluorescent tubes and incandescent light bulbs to monochromatic panels. Creating his first piece made entirely from fluorescent tubes in 1963, he subsequently focused exclusively on works using fluorescent lamps. As other artists exploring light emerged during the '60s,

Flavin was distinguished by his commitment to employing commercial fluorescent lamps of fixed specifications, combining tubes of necessarily limited sizes, colors, and forms in a systematic manner to build a diverse body of work.

Flavin embarked on his largest series, “Monument” for V. Tatlin, in 1964. One of the works in this series of fifty, which employs cool white fluorescent tubes two, four, six, and eight feet in length in different arrangements while remaining uniformly white, is Untitled (“Monument” for V. Tatlin). As the title indicates, the series is dedicated to Russian constructivist Vladimir Tatlin (1885–1953), and this work alludes to Monument to the Third International, a grand structure conceived by Tatlin that never came to fruition. While monuments are typically semipermanent in nature, Flavin’s “monument” displays its brilliant white glow only when switched on, or for the lifespan of the fluorescent tubes. Manifesting as our immediate experience of seeing light in the present, Flavin’s work offers a sense of not only light’s strength but also its transience, in an ironic take on the notion of the monumental.

[About This Work] SATOH Keiji

SATOH Keiji (1927–2009) began composing music in his twenties, and on graduating from university in 1953 joined Jikken Kobo, a collective of young artists working across music, visual art and performance, where he developed a creative interdisciplinary practice alongside fellow members that included Yamaguchi Katsuhiro and Fukushima Hideko. Satoh then went on to present a series of works exploring the possibilities of sound, his boundless fascination with vibration and magnetism driving continuous experimentation that saw him creating sonic artworks well into his final years.

Pampas grass—wave is a work moved by the power of magnets and vibration, named for its resemblance to *susuki* grass swaying in the breeze. Motors and magnets in the silver tubes cause the axes to oscillate, tracing tiny circles, while transferred vibration and magnetism cause the spheres to glide weightlessly. The arrangement of the 13 individual units in a wave form evokes electromagnetic and sound waves, as the different speeds of the individual spheres and their

collisions suggest elements of music and theater. Do not be surprised, however, to find yourself drifting away from these associations at some point, simply mesmerized by the work.

Pampas grass—wave was installed at the Kobe Municipal Youth Science Museum (Bando Kobe Youth Science Museum) in 1989, and displayed there for around 35 years. Gifted to the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo by the city of Kobe when the Science Museum was revamped in 2024, it has resumed its buoyant movements in a new location. Enjoy a quiet interlude observing this field of waving grass against a backdrop of trees and water beyond the museum windows.

MOT

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