

MOT Collection: Rewinding the Collection 2nd
Sat. 16 July – Sun. 16 October, 2022
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.

I_ The “Yomiuri Independent Exhibition” and the “1960s Exhibition” 20 Years Later

The first installment of “MOT Collection: Rewinding the Collection” held in 2020-2021 had traced back to the dawn of Japanese Western-style painting beginning with work, *View of Mt. Fuji from Shimizu* (c.1880) painted in Japan’s Meiji era by GOSEDA Yoshimatsu, and from there introduced the developments of the collection up until the end of the 1950s. Following this, the second installment of the exhibition starts in the 1960s with NAKANISHI Natsuyuki’s works *Rhyme* (1959), which was also featured in the last section of the previous installment. The 1960s were indeed turbulent times, beginning with massive protests having taken place throughout the country against the renewal of the US-Japan Security Treaty as a result of intensified anti-base movements due to the Girard Incident (1957) in which a Japanese civilian woman was shot dead by an American soldier while collecting spent shell casings in a U.S. military training ground. In the years that followed, the nation found itself moving towards a period of high economic growth as the urbanization of society progressed in the wake of the Tokyo Olympics (1964) that had become a symbol for postwar reconstruction.

In this section, we rewind the history of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, whose collection we have inherited, back to this era. In doing so, we arrive at a time in which the museum, while also serving as a venue for exhibitions by independent art groups that had reconvened after the war, gradually expanded its collection activities to acquire an increasing number of works, leading to the presentation of its first ever collection exhibition “The History of Japanese Western-style Painters” (1962). The work *Hung Kimono* by FUJIKAWA Eiko, who after the war had founded the “Association of Women Painters” with artists such as KATSURA Yuki, was added to the museum’s collection in 1960 following its presentation in the Nika Art Exhibition, and was also featured in this exhibition that took place in the Sato Memorial Gallery in the museum’s Old Building.

The “Yomiuri Independent Exhibition” (initiated in 1954, renamed from Nihon Independent, and sponsored by the Yomiuri Shimbun newspaper), while also using the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum as its venue, had shown a distinct contrast to art group exhibitions due to its permissive, unjuried, and free-to-exhibit policy. Here, works of “anti-art,” which employed everyday objects and junk as materials in intent to break through existing concepts of art, had become more radical and extreme with each passing. In 1964, due to incidents regarding the removal and banning of certain artworks, as well as the museum’s establishment of “Guidelines Regarding the Codes and Standards for Displayed Artworks,” the Yomiuri Shimbun suddenly announced that it was terminating its sponsorship of the exhibition.

In this way, a selection of works which in a sense had deviated from museum standards, that is, from existing genres and exhibition rules, would in 20 years time come to be added to the collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in the wake of exhibitions such as “Movements in Contemporary Art II: The 1960s: Towards Diversity” (1983).

Many of the works featured in this exhibition have been collected since the opening of the New Building of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in 1975, when curators were appointed, and collection activities and the organizing of special exhibitions had started to gain momentum. In the “Movements in Contemporary Art” exhibition series, which began in 1981 as an attempt to present a comprehensive overview spanning the postwar period to the present day, various movements of the era were positioned and reconsidered within the context of postwar art, including tendencies towards “anti-art,” the “art informel” whirlwind that swept across Japan from the late 1950s to the 1960s, and the work of artists who were influenced by pop art that had developed against the backdrop of mass consumer society.

In recent years, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo actively engaged in the collection of works by female artists such as TABE Mitsuko who was a member of the Kyushu School, and painter and stage designer ASAKURA Setsu.

2_ The “1960s Exhibition” 30 Years Later

The collection of overseas art at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT) also includes many works from the 1960s. Intending to gain a more objective understanding of Japan’s postwar art that formed a central part of the 3,000 or so artworks transferred from the collection of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum to the MOT, works that illustrated overseas trends of the same period were acquired by the Fund for the Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (1988)*.

These works were also presented in the collection exhibitions that attempted to illustrate the movements of contemporary art in a comprehensive manner, as well as in “Revolution: Art of the Sixties from Warhol to Beuys” (1995) which was held as the third installment of a series of exhibitions commemorating the opening of the MOT. While also featuring artworks from the collections of overseas museums, the exhibition introduced a wide range of art from 30 years ago as a starting point leading to the art of today, touching upon movements in pop art, minimal art, conceptual art, etc. that had developed mainly in Europe and the United States, and performances by artists like members of the “Fluxus” who aimed to remove the boundary between art and everyday life.

The following year, the exhibition “1964: A Turning Point in Japanese Art” had brought attention to 1960s Japan that was subjected to incoming waves of internationalization as it recovered from postwar turmoil, particularly focusing on “1964” –the year in which the Tokyo Olympics was held– as a key turning point in postwar art. In addition to introducing avant-garde trends such as informel paintings and works of anti-art, it also took into account the history of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum as a venue for various art group exhibitions, and presented several works from these exhibitions that were not featured in the “Movements in Contemporary Art II: The 1960s: Towards Diversity” held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Such works included *Three Models* by KITAZAWA Eigetsu, which was originally presented in the 50th Exhibition of the Japan Art Institute’s Revival.

Bringing the timeline back to the 1960s, after the cancellation of the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, there was an increasing tendency for artists to venture out of existing exhibition spaces of the museum and seek out places for expression within their living environment. At the time, Tokyo had undergone drastic transformation due to rushed construction work that was carried out in preparation for the Tokyo Olympics, such as the opening of the Shuto Expressway and the Tokaido Shinkansen. In the midst of such circumstances, various performances came to suddenly emerge within urban spaces as if to cause a “stir” in society, like *Cleaning Event* (aka *Campaign to Promote Cleanliness and Order in the Metropolitan Area*) conducted by the Japanese artistic collective Hi-Red Center, and the Sightseeing Art Research Institute’s “Walking Exhibition.”

Documentation photographs and videos of such performance works that in themselves cannot be physically preserved, have been increasingly added to the museum’s collection as a means to complement the developments of postwar Japanese art, in particular after being highlighted in various “MOT Collection” exhibitions since the 2010s.

In response to an inquiry from the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education in 1965 regarding “The Mission of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum,” the museum had mentioned the need to function as (1) a venue for permanent exhibitions of contemporary art, (2) a place for presenting new works by contemporary artists, and (3) a place for facilitating social education activities. Later in 1968, a “Preparation Committee for the Construction of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum” was established due to the aging of the museum, with preparations underway for the opening of the new building.

*In second section of the previous installment of “Rewinding the Collection,” the overseas works acquired by the Fund for the Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (1988), were presented in a consolidated format.

3_“10th Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter” and the 1970s

In the year 1968, when the “Preparation Committee for the Construction of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum” was established towards the development of the museum’s New Building, demonstrations and riots were occurring frequently across the world, and student activism and protests against the Vietnam War were also spreading throughout Japan. Documentation of the performances by the “Expo ’70 Destruction Joint-Struggle Group” that took place in the streets of Shinjuku that had then been the base for underground culture, or within the barricaded campus of Kyoto University, as well as records of the various demonstrations they had taken part in, together serve to strongly communicate the circumstances of those times.

In 1970, in the midst of the nation’s period of high economic growth, Expo ’70 (Osaka Expo) came to be held with the theme of “Progress and Harmony for Mankind.” In this national festive event that had attracted near 67 million visitors, many avant-garde artists –including those who were critical of the Expo– came together with architects of the Metabolist movement to present various visions for the future. Prior to this was the exhibition “From Space to Environment” that was held in 1966 at Matsuya Department Store in Ginza, Tokyo. Under the word “environment,” the exhibition had aimed to explore the dynamic relationship between human beings and the environment that surrounds them, as well as inter-media expressions that merged cutting-edge technology with art. The works of YAMAGUCHI Katsuhiro, TADA Minami, TAKAMATSU Jiro, MIKI Tomio and others artists that had taken part in this venture, were also featured in the “Movements in Contemporary Art II: The 1960s: Towards Diversity” (1983) exhibition at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.

It was during the Expo that the “10th Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter” (sponsored by the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper) was held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art. Abolishing the national-representation and prize-awarding model, art critic NAKAHARA Yusuke, who was appointed as commissioner, had selected 40 young artists from across Europe and the United States to take part. While being one of the first to introduce reductionist trends in art such as Arte Povera, Minimalism, Conceptual art, and Mono-ha that were in contrast to the works presented in Expo, it is also recognized as an exhibition that had positioned the Mono-ha within an international context. This biennale, which was conceived based on Nakahara’s concept of the “site-specificism,” wherein artists would work according to on-site situations while drawing from their respective concepts, had also demonstrated a certain shift in the structure of artworks as well as the nature of exhibitions.

More than 10 years later in 1984, the exhibition “Movements in Contemporary Art III: The 1970s Onwards: Internationality and Distinctiveness” was held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Here, the exhibition space was organized according to each artist, including ENOKURA Koji, and TAKAMATSU Jiro who had participated in “Between Man and Matter,” as well as the likes of LEE Ufan who was a member of the Mono-ha, and the conceptual artist KAWARA On. Photographs by ANZAI Shigeo that documented the production process and installation views of works by the various artists who took part in “Between Man and Matter,” had also lined the walls of the exhibition.

This section of “Rewinding the Collection” will also present works that were produced in and around the 1970s that harbored questions towards existing exhibition spaces and systems, such as *Corner Piece* by renowned land artist Robert SMITHSON which was added to the collection at the time of the MOT’s opening, and HIKOSAKA Naoyoshi’s *Floor Event*, which was acquired in recent years.

4_ The Opening of the New Building of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum

In contrast to the Old Building that presented an air of dignity through its grand rows of columns, the New Building of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, which opened in 1975, was designed by architect MAYEKAWA Kunio to harmonize with the nature of Ueno Park by positioning main floor and entrance hall on the basement level. Not only the building, but also the museum’s entire operations were reconceived. As questions were raised regarding its role as a “museum,” three core pillars came to be established in that while continuing to serve as a venue for art groups to present “new works,” it would also incorporate new functions of presenting permanent and thematic exhibitions in its designated galleries, and implement “cultural activities” such as holding educational outreach programs.

Nevertheless, the museum’s first new collection exhibition showcased a generation of artists regarded as major figures in Japan’s art world, including the likes of UMEHARA Ryuzaburo (1888-1986), whose works were already confirmed for acquisition by the time the curators had been appointed. Criticisms were raised in newspapers against the opening of the museum when it was yet to clearly establish its policies for collecting work. Thereafter however, the museum gradually came to set its course of direction towards “reconsidering prewar, postwar, and contemporary art” based on “critical perspectives of the present.”

Some examples of contemporary artworks collected by the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum during the early developmental stage leading up to the opening of the New Building, were those by artists such as SHIGI Gou (1943-) and UEDA Kaoru (1928-). A number of them were exhibited along with the works of super-realists from the United States and other areas at the 11th Tokyo Biennale (1974), which was the last installment of the exhibition to be held at the museum’s Old Building. Such works, after being added to the museum’s collection, were also featured in the 1978 thematic exhibition “Photography and Painting: Similarities and Differences,” which presented a comprehensive history spanning the encounter between photography and painting in Japan from the end of the Edo period / early Meiji era, to the contemporary situation in which photography and painting have increasingly come to confront one another in the age of advanced technology.

In this way, through repeatedly collecting and exhibiting various works, the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum gradually began to progress towards the “Movements in Contemporary Art” series that has been introduced in this exhibition. Even after the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo inherited these works, it still continues to engage in the task of looking back on and updating “postwar art” while supplementing various contexts and works in the collection.

5_ From the Late 1970s Onward: Solo Exhibitions by Japanese Artists

From here on forth across the third floor of the museum, we shed light on works that were collected in relation to various artists while focusing on a number of special exhibitions that were held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum and Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.

In this room we concentrate on the period spanning the latter half of 1970 to the early 1980s, in which movements towards a return to painting that had seemingly spread as a reaction against 1970s reductionism, as well as the subsequent developments of the Mono-ha, can be seen. In particular, we bring attention to artists who have held solo exhibitions at the aforementioned museums, and have multiple works housed in the MOT collection.

The first solo exhibition by a living artist to be held at the New Building of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum in the fourth year of its opening, was the “Aso Saburo Exhibition” (1979). From self-portraits painted in 1934-35 to his most recent works at the time with WWII in-between, the exhibition served to trace the 40-year career of artist ASO Saburo (1913-2000) who had consistently engaged in depicting images of human beings and the landscapes they inhabited. Aso had continuously presented his work in Ueno prior to this occasion since the era of the Tokyo Prefectural Art Museum, in the exhibitions of the Bijutsu Bunka Kyokai (Art Culture Society) that he had formed in 1939 together with artist such as FUKUZAWA Ichiro, Aimitsu, SAITO Yoshishige, the Bijutsu Dantai Rengo (Art Association) exhibitions of the postwar period, and installments of the Tokyo Biennale that were held since the 1950s.

Meanwhile, the first solo exhibition by a Japanese artist to be held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo was “NAKANISHI Natsuyuki: Toward Whiteness, Intensity, Presence” (1997). The exhibition, from among the career of Nakanishi Natsuyuki (1935-2016) spanning over 40 years, which had developed across various realms and media including his activities with the Hi-Red Center, featured the *Rhyme* series that was produced at the end of the 1950s, as well as the work *Clothespins Assert Churning Action* that was presented in the “Yomiuri Independent Exhibition.” In particular, it had mainly introduced Nakanishi’s attempts in painting, which had become a core part of his practice since the 1970s.

Thereafter, “Love Forever: Yayoi Kusama, 1958-1968 / In Full Bloom: Yayoi Kusama, Years in Japan” (the Museum for Contemporary Art Tokyo) held in 1999, became the first solo exhibition by a female Japanese artist in the history of the two museums. While positioning the activities of Yayoi Kusama (1929-), who had traveled to the United States in the latter half of the 1950s, in relation to contemporary trends such as pop art and minimal art, the exhibition presented a retrospective of the artist’s practice that continues to this day in two parts that respectively focused on her years in New York and her years in Japan, thus introducing a comprehensive overview of her oeuvre spanning from her early activities before moving to the United States to the works she had produced after returning to Japan in the late 1970s, as well as her latest installations.

From Aso’s *Self-portrait* (1974) that he had depicted in his late 60s, to Nakanishi’s *Tangent Arc IV* (1978) which demonstrates a turning point in his painterly practice, and Kusama’s collage work (1977) that she had concentrated on after returning to Japan, the distinct paths taken by various artists in tow with their nature and circumstances, appear to intersect with one another within the scope of this very decade.

6_ The 1980s: Starting to Collect Overseas Works

Prior to the active acquisition of works towards the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo as introduced in section two of this exhibition, the collection during Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum era, although limited in number, had also included works by overseas artists. The first of such works were those by 12 artists that had been collected together on the occasion of the "Aspects of British Art Today" exhibition held in 1982. Here, we shed light on overseas works produced by artists for this exhibition, which were synchronously added to the collection.

"Aspects of British Art Today" was the first exhibition in Japan in 12 years at the time to comprehensively introduce movements in British contemporary art, and was jointly organized by the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Fukuoka Art Museum, Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, National Museum of Art, Osaka, and the British Council. The exhibition began with an introductory section featuring eight artists that were also well known in Japan, such as Anthony Caro (1924-2014) whose solo exhibition (1995) was subsequently held to commemorate the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art. The sections that followed had taken on the form of a series of solo exhibitions by 25 artists that each contributed in conveying the diversity of British Art.

David NASH (1945-), whose artistic practice entails an engagement with the natural environment, had visited Japan one month before the opening of the exhibition, and stayed in the woods of Oku-Nikko to create new works. For the work *Capped Arch*, that had been presented in the museum's outdoor terrace, he used a tree torn in two from the base due to a typhoon and that lay fallen on the ground, which he cut into parts with a chainsaw and then put together. Richard LONG (1945-) focuses on the subtle and understated act of walking in nature, as opposed to land artists like Robert SMITHSON who had worked on a much larger scale. In *England Japan Circles*, which was presented in the museum's spacious atrium, pieces of slate the artist had come across during his walks that he considered as "constructing the earth," are arranged in simple circles in a manner reminiscent of a prehistoric ruin, appearing to symbolize eternal space and time.

The works of British art produced from the late 1970s to the 1980s including those mentioned above, were also introduced the following year in 1983 in the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum's collection exhibition "Art Today: Japan and Britain" along with works by Japanese artists of the same period, such as SAITO Yoshishige's *Dissymmetry Diagonals No. 1, No. 2* and SUGA Kishio's *Partition of Realm*.

7_ A Series of Special Exhibitions

Here we introduce a part of the museum's collection from the early 1990s by specifically turning our attention to two exhibitions that were held at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, each connected to one another through artists ENDO Toshikatsu (1950-) and KENMOCHI Kazuo (1951-) who had both previously been featured in the exhibition "Structure and Remembrance: TOYA, ENDO, KENMOCHI" (1991) at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.

The "Structure and Remembrance" exhibition focused on three artists belonging to a generation following the Mono-ha, and presented works created from wood. Whereas artists of the Mono-ha often presented materials in unprocessed form and focused on the relationship between things, people and space, the three had produced works that clearly illustrated human involvement, and harbored aspects of temporality and symbolism. Endo Toshikatsu's masterpiece *Fountain*, newly conceived for this exhibition, consists of a highly simple cylindrical/annulus form made of burnt and charred wood, its hollow of which serves as a container for invisible energy. Meanwhile, Kenmochi created a large-scale installation that presented multiple layers of time, comprised of a combination of scrap wood and two-dimensional works that were made by overlaying oil paint drawings upon paneled photographs of a steel factory that he had used for his production.

Endo was also one of the artists who took part in "Art in Japan Today," the first installment in a series of exhibitions commemorating the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. In the 1990s, with the Cold War having come to an end, globalization progressed, and movements towards introducing Japanese contemporary art overseas had further accelerated. Therefore, in light of such circumstances, the exhibition intended to introduce the work and practices of artists who had demonstrated an outstanding presence within the international art scene. A wide range of artists were featured, also including the likes of KASAHARA Emiko (1963-) who although young was attracting attention and produced many works related issues of gender, TASUNO Toeko (1950-2014) recognized for producing colorful paintings of bold and dynamic forms since the 1980s, and Chinese artist Cai Guo-Qiang (1957-) who was based in Japan at the time.

Meanwhile, Kenmochi's two-dimensional works that were collected in correspondence to the "Structure and Remembrance" exhibition, were presented in the thematic exhibition "Surface Exposed: Photography in Art of the 90's" (1997). This exhibition, which highlighted new expressions in photography that had been introduced to the realm of art through conceptual art, featured works by artists in the collection including Kenmochi, SUGIMOTO Hiroshi, ISHIHARA Tomoaki, along with several guest artists. The "1906 to the skin" series by ISHIUCHI Miyako (1947-), which was printed in a different size for this exhibition, consist of images of the butoh dancer OHNO Kazuo who was born in 1906. Unseen time and memories are also accumulated within Ohno's skin engraved with countless wrinkles, which Ishiuchi had been fascinated by and here captures in black and white.

In this way, various exhibitions have served as opportunities in gradually developing the collection. In this exhibition, the works of Ishiuchi and Endo are presented according to the direction of the artists themselves. As such, the history of the collection also continues to evolve and be further enriched through an ongoing dialogue and interaction with artists.

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