

MOT Collection

30th Anniversary Exhibit

Nine Profiles: 1935→2025

April 29-July 21 / August 2- November 24, 2025
Collection Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

Foreword

This year marks 30 years of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. The museum's initial displays from the permanent collection, taken from a total of around 3500 items including works originally from the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, aimed primarily to present currents of contemporary art accessibly and from an international perspective, through carefully-curated selections of representative works with a particular focus on post-war Japanese avant-garde art.

Subsequent ongoing acquisitions then brought new, additional viewpoints, these currents branching off in various directions, and undergoing change. Since 2005, under the MOT Collection banner, permanent collection shows have taken a multifaceted approach to presenting the museum's holdings, perhaps by focusing on an individual artist, or by comparing works in different media and from different eras, but with a single overarching theme.

To mark this milestone 30th anniversary, the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo presents "Nine Profiles: 1935→2025," a survey of 90 years of art exhibited over nine rooms, each dedicated to a different ten-year period. Despite covering so many decades—just as the museum's exhibitions did when it first opened—each room succeeds in revisiting the collection from multiple different perspectives. 1935 was chosen as the starting point due to the acquisition over time of a considerable number of works from the prewar and wartime periods, allowing links with postwar art to be identified; while the explicit naming of the year 2025 as the end point indicates that this is a view of the collection as it is right here, right now.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo collection currently stands at around 6,000 items, and is also far more diverse than it was 30 years ago. Constantly being updated, it will duly pass to the next generation incomplete, but various profiles emerge depending on where we focus, and how those features are presented. We hope "Nine Profiles: 1935→2025" will encourage visitors to take a fresh look at the art of our era, and ponder how the past has brought us to where we are now.

1935-1944

Perusing the works on display here we focus on Japanese cityscapes in the years between 1935 to 1944, how people lived, their comings and goings, their presence there. This decade of Japanese history was one of great upheaval that encompassed the flowering of popular culture in the early Showa years, the Second Sino-Japanese War sparked by the Marco Polo Bridge incident in 1937, and World War II, and this chapter traces what painters saw and depicted during this tumultuous period.

TSURUOKA Masao (1907–1979)'s *Rhythm* (1935/reproduced 1954) was painted for the Nan-o (Southern Europe) coffee shop in the bustling Shibuya district. Its geometric designs leaping across the canvas seem to embody the speed of urban life in the Machine Age. Tokyo at the time was bursting with the dynamic energy of efforts to restore the streetscapes and vibrancy lost in the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and the resulting modern urban culture—coffee shops, movie theaters, department stores—served as a colorful addition to people's lives.

Two painters who observed the glittering capital closely and depicted it in their own different ways were HASEKAWA Toshiyuki (1891–1940) and MATSUMOTO Shunsuke (1912–1948). In Hasekawa's works, painted amid a hand-to-mouth existence lacking studio or home, one can imagine the artist weaving through the throngs of people on the streets, trying to swiftly set down on paper some delight that appeared suddenly before him, while still fresh in his mind. In the works of Matsumoto on the other hand, who lost his hearing as a child, one imagines the figure of the artist scrutinizing each building, each contour of a person concealed in the cacophony of the city as he etched them deeply on the picture plane.

The year that AI-MITSU (1907–1946) painted *Still Life (Pheasant)* (1941) marked the start of the Pacific War, and increasing deprivation at home. In the ordinary course of things the pheasant in the painting would have been a precious comestible, but in order to paint it the artist apparently hung it from the ceiling for an extended period, allowing it to perish. One can imagine the act of painting being a life-or-death endeavor for the painter. The contrast between the inky darkness produced by layer after layer of paint, and the dubious light writhing within, gives this painting an uncanny yet powerful presence.

When considering the art of this period, the existence of war art cannot be overlooked. During wartime painters produced documentary paintings of military campaigns for the army, or portrayed those on the home front dealing with the experience of war in various ways—women stitching their prayers into strips of *senninbari* cloth, soldiers departing for the front, families learning of the death of a husband or son. Everyone was required to cooperate in the war effort, and in 1943 all art materials were rationed, painting becoming largely an activity for the purpose of bolstering the nation's fighting spirit. Yet behind the scenes, painters also doubtless felt disappointed or conflicted about not being able to pick up a brush and paint when and what they wanted.

The works showcased here passed into the Museum's hands in 2018 from the collection of FUKUTOMI Taro (1931–2018). Fukutomi, whose childhood coincided exactly with the war years, was said to have collected art in order to "ponder my own history." Studying these works and turning our thoughts to what the painters saw and painted, or were unable to paint, helps us to cast a fresh gaze on the history of the war, through the eyes of those who lived it.

*Fukutomi Taro, *E o atsumeru: watashi no suiri gassetsu* (Shinchosha, 1995), 60.

1945-1954

1945—though the war’s end had brought freedom from the threat of air raids, in the burnt-out remains of Japanese cities, hunger and deprivation tightened their grip. In this room we shed light on the figures and faces of people portrayed and represented amid a period of postwar upheaval characterized by the widespread devastation of the country, the economic fillip of the Korean War under the Occupation, and the restoration of sovereignty in 1952, by artists who greeted Japan’s defeat at different ages, in different places and from different standpoints.

At the time, the underpasses at Ueno Station, which had survived the firebombing of the capital, were overflowing with orphans and people who had lost their homes. Returning to Tokyo following his mobilization for labor while a student, the young painter SATO Teruo (1926–2003) proceeded to spend the next ten years scrupulously sketching the faces of those who slept piled on one another under the station. *Heavy Hand*, one of the most prominent works by TSURUOKA Masao (1907–1979), who had been a member of the Shinjin Gakai group of painters before the war, was also inspired by a homeless man living in the underground passageways of Ueno Station. Here, against the backdrop of a structure rendered in Cubist style, a human figure straining under the overwhelming burden of a hand, stoically enduring outside pressure, is represented in monumental fashion.

Meanwhile, two months after the war’s end, the Nikakai group returned from the artistic wilderness. Following a wartime clampdown on avant-garde expression, exhibitions by the group resumed with a show at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, coincidentally also in Ueno, and venue for displays of war-record paintings during the war years. In 1947 the artists of the Shinjin Gakai, including Tsuruoka, MATSUMOTO Shunsuke (1912–1948), INOUE Chozaburo (1906–1995), and ASO Saburo (1913–2000) merged with the Jiyu Bijutsuka Kyokai (established 1937), which prior to the war had presented numerous works of surrealist or abstract inclination.

Also in 1947, having returned to Japan from serving on the China front to find the products of his Paris years completely destroyed, OKAMOTO Taro (1911–1996) submitted his first postwar painting, *Yushu* (Melancholy), in which white flags flutter at the “temples”^{*} of what appears to be a face, to the Nikaten exhibition, where it was displayed alongside the likes of *Baby Cedar* by NAKAHARA Minoru (1893–1990). Nakahara’s painting connects two times and places: Inokashira Park near the artist’s home, where a stand of cedars was felled prior to Japan’s defeat to make coffins for those killed in air raids; and the interior of his home, with his two young daughters asleep, soon after the end of the war. The back-to-front map of the Japanese archipelago is tethered next to the innocent sleeping face of the older girl by a “thread of good fortune” from an eggplant, said to be good luck if one appears in the first dream of the new year, in a small sign of hope.

Resistance by KATSURA Yuki (1913–1991), who had been active with the Nikakai since before the war, is from 1952. Hair pulled by a crab, hand clinging to the leg of a bird, a woman presents an odd visage amid the crackling tension between the three. However turning the canvas so that the left side is at the top transforms her into a raging figure whose gesture suggests she is casting the bird from her. On the wings of the bird is a newspaper article reporting the passing of the Subversive Activities Prevention Act in the same year. What emerges is a complex portrait of a woman inhabiting multiple personae as she navigates life in postwar Japanese society.

Alongside artists such as these who resumed their prewar activities, this room features the efforts of a new generation to capture human figures and faces. Postwar art in all its great diversity unfolded in new settings unfettered by art world convention, such as independent, open-call exhibitions without judging or prizes; the Jikken Kobo group of FUKUSHIMA Hideko et al (established 1951); and the Takemiya Gallery (opened 1951), which staged numerous solo exhibitions including by newcomers such as URUSHIBARA Hideko.

^{*}OKAMOTO Taro, “Yushu,” written in 1948, first published in the July 1948 issue of *Sogo Bunka*, Shinzenbisha.

1955-1964

The decade from 1955, three years after Japan regained its “independence,” was characterized by a quest for new values against a backdrop of political stability of sorts, a return to full and genuine international exchange, and better economic times brought on by burgeoning growth. Yet it was also marked by frequent labor disputes triggered by structural changes in the country’s industries, and by social activism, plus growing concerns around the Cold War-driven expansion of US military bases in Japan, and rearmament. 1960 was the year the renewed Japan-US Security Treaty came into force in the face of unprecedented opposition. Amid this blend of optimism and unease, artists took the initiative to form groups and embark enthusiastically on a plethora of activities, and this chapter traces some of the radical transformations in the look and form of artworks that emerged from this experimentation.

Artists like NAKAMURA Hiroshi (b. 1932) and ISHII Shigeo (1933–1962) took a close interest in social issues and demonstrated their revolutionary solidarity by portraying the realities they saw. Nakamura aspired to build political opposition to expanding US bases into paintings, relying primarily on montages of a *mélange* of scenes. Ishii, inspired by the Camus play *The State of Siege*, showed people’s feelings of alienation in the manner of an act from a bleak drama, with picture planes that force the gaze from the four edges of the frame to a shallow interior.

Around the same time, under the banner of “internationalization” exhibitions took place that were designed to connect Japanese artists to contemporary Western art trends.¹ A group of Art informel works presented by French art critic Michel Tapié attracted particular attention. As a new trend in postwar art, Art informel’s characteristic emphasis on the intrinsic qualities of materials, on actions, and the repetition of elements, would be actively grafted on to everything from painting to ikebana, albeit with some unique interpretive tweaks. Meanwhile, in the peeling paintings of Gutai artist MURAKAMI Saburo (1925–1996), and works of KANAYAMA Akira (1924–2006), who put paint on a toy car and let it run over the canvas, it is possible to identify not only “things” as elements of artworks, but a morphing of the substance of expression, with things standing in for the maker/subject. *Work (Bell)* by TANAKA Atsuko (1932–2005) relies for its very realization—the experience of time and space via the repetition of a sound—on an autonomous network and the action of the spectator pressing a button.

Explorations around “things” as subject gradually lost coherency from around 1960, when they were rated “anti-art”² citing the photographs of KUDO Tetsumi (1935-1990), and with the abrupt end in 1963 of the Yomiuri Indépendant Exhibition that had provided the main setting for these artists to present their work. During this period it was the collective Hi-Red Center who became narrators of the proliferating nature of things and their external expansion, intervening through “direct action” in the chinks and crevices of increasingly controlled urban spaces. The joint projects known as “plans” carried out by TAKAMATSU Jiro (1936–1998), NAKANISHI Natsuyuki (1935–2016), and AKASEGAWA Genpei (1937–2014), and others had an anonymous, fictive quality, and forged connections with viewers by rippling across the boundary between art and the everyday. Their work, which leveraged a particular type of imaginative power, is linked to the activities of ONO Yoko (b. 1933), who took part in a few “plans” on her return from the United States.

The word-based “Instructions” that Ono had been working on since the 1950s come to fruition when the individual viewer performs the action in their head, or reality, in the manner of a piece of sheet music. Artists’ experiments would move away from the museum, changing in substance and domain to actions, concepts, and relationships.

1. Exposition Internationale de l’Art Actuel (1956) and Contemporary World Art (1957).

2. From Tono Yoshiaki’s commentary on the 12th Yomiuri Indépendant Exhibition (*Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 2, 1960 evening edition).

1965-1974

These were the years when pollution and other downsides of Japan's postwar prosperity came to light just as the rate of economic growth peaked, with questioning of the ideas embodied by the 1970 Osaka Expo theme of "Progress and Harmony for Mankind," and the desirability of a society based on mass production, consumption and disposal; and backlash against state surveillance and the consequences of an increasingly information-oriented society, erupting into a plethora of protest movements. Here we look at attempts to revisit approaches to art amid these wider developments.

In *Shadows on the Door* by TAKAMATSU Jiro (1936–1998), the shadows of a man and woman are repeated on the front and back of open doors, and inside. The blank silhouettes are ambiguous, fictitious presences (absences), unlike the similar figures freighted with meaning common in the 1940s and '50s, and their actions and whereabouts seem just as much of a mystery. Rather than enclosing the work in a frame, Takamatsu left it open, like these doors, to possibility. The technique of repetition is also evident in the comic-format paintings of TATEISHI Koichi (Tiger Tateishi) (1941–1998), and works by YOKOO Tadanori (b. 1936) that make printmaking their subject. The preference for possibilities that encompass such techniques points to an alternative direction in which linear, progressive timelines and trains of thought are severed.

Like Takamatsu's doors, from the 1960s onward substances and objects of all sorts became materials for artworks, undergoing transformation at the hands of the artist. Examples include GODA Sawako (1940–2016), who drew the likes of eyes and teeth on familiar objects to unearthly effect, and KUWAYAMA Tadaaki (1932–2023), who produced stunningly shiny canvases by employing an industrial process that resulted in works indistinguishable from industrial products, leaving no trace of the artist's hand.

In contrast, newcomers such as LEE Ufan (b. 1936) and SUGA Kishio (b. 1944) harbored deep misgivings about art that used matter as material to express the artist's intention. Aiming to elicit a response to the state of matter or object as and where it is, rather than mediated by human eyes or hands, they presented relationships forged therein between matter and matter, matter and place, matter and human being. Lee's *From Line* represents, on the setting of the canvas, temporal shifts that emerge from sensitive contact between canvas and paint/brush and body, not so much through expressive virtuosity, as motions and breathing arising from childhood writing practice. Suga meanwhile documents in photographs the status of matter, its texture, the act of meticulously examining it, and the conditions under which it was done.

As diverse relationships sparked works of art, SHIOMI Mieko (Chieko) (b. 1938) tried writing poetry to the earth that revolved around relationships between people. Issuing instructions to friends and acquaintances in far-flung locations, the poems assembled from their responses formed a coexistence of individualities, and are an offering to the people of the 30th century.

While these numerous experiments opened the doors to new worlds, ASO Saburo (1913–2000) felt the substances and spaces surrounding him to be alien, and in *Self-Portrait* one senses in the dull gleam of the artist's eyes a fearful awareness of threats to human life from the surrounding environment. YAMASHITA Kikuji (1919–1986) meanwhile made works that drew the eyes of others while directing his own gaze inward at army experiences rife with contradictions. His collages born out of multifaceted ideas encourage multiple interpretations that seem to presage the current state of the world.

1975-1984

In this room we shift perspective slightly to survey works by artists who found their personal modes of expression by moving overseas, and presenting work on the global stage. Restrictions on overseas travel after Japan's defeat in WWII were gradually relaxed as the economy grew and the country rejoined the international community, and by the mid-1960s, people were largely able to travel freely once more. This period not long after Japan's currency switched from a fixed 360 yen to the US dollar to a floating rate, coincided with the country's growing presence on world markets.

KUSAMA Yayoi (b. 1929), who with stubborn determination succeeded in traveling to the United States solo in 1957, when permission to travel was still far from guaranteed, threw herself into the New York avant-garde art scene, from the late 1960s onward distinguishing herself with a stream of provocative "happenings." Back in Japan however, where these activities were reported in greatly exaggerated terms, it was not until the late 1980s that Kusama was accorded due recognition for their pioneering nature. In 1975 she fell ill and returned temporarily to Japan, only to end up moving back there permanently to continue treatment. Kusama's paintings and collages of this period are delicate and introspective, yet fizzing with a fierce, forceful energy.

After several years in Mexico, KAWARA On (1932–2014) moved to New York around 1965. Kawara's style had changed completely since his Tokyo days, and the "Today" series begun in 1966 (–2013) made his name synonymous with conceptual art, ensuring his status as one of its leading lights. ARAKAWA Shusaku (1936–2010), whose magical objects had drawn the attention of the art world in the late 1950s, traveled to New York in 1961. There, through poet and art critic Takiguchi Shuzo he became acquainted with Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), and met Madeline Gins (1941–2014), who would become his lifelong partner in both professional and private spheres. These encounters nurtured Arakawa's explorations of painting that employed language, symbols and graphs to express his philosophical meditations.

KUBOTA Shigeo (1937–2015), who moved to the United States in 1964 to get away from the conservative Japanese fine art world and pursue new art forms, leading her to the Fluxus movement, was another who came across Duchamp during his lifetime. Then from around 1970, she began making works on video that evolved into pioneering video sculptures. In *Duchampiana: Marcel Duchamp's Grave*, black and white footage of the French artist's grave shot by Kubota in 1972 while traveling through Europe with a Sony Portapak compact video camera is colorized and played on multiple monitors.

SHINOHARA Ushio (b. 1932), who made his name as a flagbearer for the anti-art movement with his activities at the Yomiuri Indépendant Exhibition and elsewhere, traveled to the United States in 1969 with funding from the John D. Rockefeller III Fund. He has said that despite associating there with high-profile American artists he had got to know in Japan, breaking into the New York art scene was a struggle. Shinohara's motorcycle sculptures made from cardboard and other waste materials were born out of first-hand experience of the clutter and chaos of New York streets.

SUGIMOTO Hiroshi (b. 1948) moved to New York in 1974 following time as an art student in Los Angeles. Aided by its crisp, clean-cut style, his conceptual work, which began with the "Dioramas" series that demonstrated how the fake can become real by being photographed, would be instrumental in the rise of photography as a contemporary art form.

1985-1994

With the end of the Showa era and onset of the Heisei, Japan's postwar growth reached a pinnacle before plunging precipitously with the collapsing "bubble" economy. Throughout this process, what impact did information and capital bloated to excess, relentless advertising, and a deluge of images, have on the face of art? Here we survey the years from 1985 to 1994, focusing on the medium of painting and showcasing works that arose from the artists' attempts to verify their own existence at a time of wild fluctuations in the values and prices of things, overflowing with information that obscured the true state of affairs.

YOSHIDA Katsuro (1943–1999) presented the "Touch" series of paintings featuring close-up views of bodily wrinkles and folds. Yoshida noted that in the 1960s, when he was an aspiring painter, the conventional framework of painting and sculpture was considered somewhat conservative and old-fashioned, and around the end of the '60s he threw himself into "Mono-ha" activities that interrogated the materiality of the likes of wood and stone. But by the '80s, he was rubbing graphite on his fingers and touching the canvas repeatedly to produce a stream of texturally rich works. Perhaps this artist who said the directness of touching the picture plane with his hands suited him, was on a quest to find his own physicality by confronting that same picture plane.

In her early career TATSUNO Toeko (1950–2014) was known for minimalist prints, but by the '80s was constructing distinctive abstract realms in vibrant hues on vast canvases. *UNTITLED 90-14* (1990) radiates an animal-like presence, as if its organic motifs were moving and swelling of their own accord within the picture plane. Tatsuno said she aimed for "paintings where something seems to be standing there" through "forms that though not human, possess hints of the human."

MORIMURA Yasumasa (b. 1951) is known for disguising himself as a person or object and appearing in artworks from all over the world and through the ages, and here manifests as a piece of fruit in Cézanne's *Still Life with Apples and Oranges* (c.1895–1900, Musée d'Orsay). Morimura, who physically "learns" (*manabu*) about his subjects through the act of ornamenting his face and body to imitate (*maneru*) them perfectly, describes his production technique as "*manebu*, is a combination of the two. It could be that through the act of becoming another completely, this artist for whom self-portraiture has been a consistent theme is observing himself in the act of *manebu*, and affirming his own existence.

KOBAYASHI Masato (b. 1957) takes paint onto his hands and applies it to a spread piece of canvas, attaching it to a stretcher frame as he goes to give form to a painting. He says that advancing the painting without a frame means "the picture plane is 'just there'" and that his aim is to produce paintings that "do not lose any of their essence by merely existing." An artist who has consistently interrogated the meaning of "existence," one senses in Kobayashi's works a powerful light that escapes and radiates beyond the two-dimensional space of his canvases.

1995-2004

As the fallout from the collapse of Japan's economic bubble persisted, the year 1995, marking half a century since the end of the war, saw the opening of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo. This was also the year of the Hanshin earthquake, which struck in January; and the sarin attack on the Tokyo subway, in March; and the start of the internet age, with the launch of Windows 95. In 1999 the Museum staged "Modest Radicalism," the first of its MOT Annual exhibitions focusing on new art trends in Japan, particularly Tokyo. Featuring nine artists, including TAKAYANAGI Eri (b. 1962), OZAWA Tsuyoshi (b. 1965), and SUGITO Hiroshi (b. 1970), "Modest Radicalism" turned its attention to the art distinguished by an absence of visual volume, and an everyday quality informed by daily life, that had acquired prominence in the mid-'90s as a reaction to the "spectacle" of 1980s art.

Takayanagi's art production begins with casual clues and insights from ordinary routines (such as the curiously attractive look of a cleaning cloth left to dry up). By treating the thing tangible or intangible as if she were feeling her way through the unknown, confirming its texture and characteristics along the way, at some point the meaning and purpose of that thing, and the perceptions that had previously bound her view of it, fall away, allowing it to emerge as something totally new. Takayanagi pursues radical art-making that "inquires of this process, the connection between object and act."*

Next, some works that also arise from familiar objects and actions, but are different in scope. Separating household items from their preordained purpose TOMII Motohiro (b. 1973) carefully selects them to serve as sculptural elements—color, shape, volume, center of gravity, material properties—chooses a "structure" that *fits* these qualities, and assembles them into works. Based on "instructions" that Tomii prepares detailing actions anyone can do, such as lining up or stacking, and materials, works like *ball sheet ball* that manifest again/anew with each exhibiting, could be described as posing the very question of what it means to "make a work of art" in the first place? Meanwhile, *Pencil* by TOYOSHIMA Yasuko (b. 1967) repositions the act by which pencils are reduced from the tip with each use to the middle, exposing an internal structure usually hidden, and suspending the pencil's inherent function of writing. Choosing as her expressive material the very "perceptions that seem to be unconsciously shared by a large number of people," Toyoshima mirrors vividly from a private perspective objects and tools, systems and rules part of school education and economic activity, and the society in which these function without us even realizing.

This chapter also presents works springing from the ordinary that destabilize our thoughts and senses and reveal different aspects of the world. These include *Mum* (2003) by KOIZUMI Meiro (b. 1976), in which the artist plays a "salaryman" figure at home on the phone to his mother, who following some idle chat then reveals that he is in a war zone, and launches into a microphone performance of gunfire and aerial bombing that gives the experience of a virtual war; and *Roll* (1999) by KAIHATSU Yoshiaki (b. 1966) which by chance shows the Twin Towers before they were destroyed in the 9.11 terror attacks.

*"On the works of TAKAYANAGI Eri—a conversation between TAKAYANAGI Eri and KURAYA Mika" Transcript, *Annual Report 2014 Bulletin No. 17* (Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, 2015).

2005-2014

During these years several issues came to dominate Japanese society that still persist today, such as climate change, population decline, and growing social inequality. The greatest impact however was from the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami of 2011. Here we cast our eye over works from the years 2005–2014 from today's post-disaster viewpoint, starting with Okamoto Shinjiro (1933–2020)'s *The Botanical Elements: PIKADON: Barcarole of KARANO* (2008).

Okamoto's vast, picture-book-like painting was inspired by the legend of Karano in the ancient Kojiki chronicles. Karano was a boat made from a giant tree, that in due course was burned, and its remains used to construct a koto harp whose tones were said to penetrate every corner of the land. The Tokyo air raids were an early formative experience for this artist who depicts the giant tree as an "atomic" cherry in full bloom; the boat as an "atomic" boat carbonized by atomic bombing; and the koto as an "atomic" koto that gives a resounding voice to those buried beneath the cherry tree. The word *karano* (also read *kareno*) means a desolate plain or field, and as such may readily conjure up the aftermath of a disaster; various experiences of the Tohoku catastrophe coming to overlap in the viewer's mind with this great tree and boat and musical sounds surrounding life and death and rebirth.

Kazama Sachiko (b. 1972)'s *Alas! Heisoku-kan (Raging Battle-ship the Dead-End)* (2012) depicts an apocalyptic tsunami swamping the Fukushima Dai-Ichi Nuclear Power Plant. The plant sits here on a power company vessel flying the Japanese flag, listing so badly it appears doomed to capsize. The *heisoku-kan* of the title is a play on words referring to the blockading of Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War, and the sense of entrapped hopelessness pervading Japanese society today. It could also refer to a country facing an uncertain future as it battles to make a significant course change amid the disintegration of atomic power's mythical status since the 1970 Osaka Expo as the safe, "dream" form of energy. Referred to by the artist as a chronicle of the atom and atomic energy, the work traces back through time from the Tohoku disaster through hydrogen bomb testing at Bikini Atoll, to the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In contrast to Kazama, who endeavors to explore the present state of the world from the viewpoint of past societal events and phenomena, Asai Yusuke (b. 1981) draws primordial, (foundational narratives from the earth beneath our feet. In his work here, rendered in soil gathered from various locations, including Kiba where the Museum is situated, the growth of trees overlaps with human existence, flora and fauna joining in a dynamic dance of reincarnation for all things in creation. From such expression, even contaminated, fragile soil is also reborn, and it is not hard to imagine countless seeds dwelling within that soil, and the nurturing of life.

Unlike these vast canvases in which time, space, and story suffuse the whole of the picture plane, the works of O JUN (b. 1956) depict things originating in day-to-day life or personal situations. In the attempt to discern their themes of everyday instability and irrationality, one finds a kind of suspenseful ambiguity spread through the surrounding blank space. Perhaps this is because, while what O JUN depicts is merely some minor thing passed through the artist's body, the unfilled space suggests a boundless domain crammed with things not yet portrayed (perhaps about to be portrayed).

An artwork may always be there, yet is repeatedly reborn with every change in how we view it. New profiles that amplify the work's power and richness thus emerge repeatedly.

2015-2024

This final room of our 90-year survey introduces works that take different approaches to viewing the past from the here and now, and encourage us to think about that past together.

In *Rehearsal for a Reunion (With the Father of Pottery)* Simon FUJIWARA (b. 1982), son of a Japanese father and British mother, deals with paternal reconciliation. A dialogue/rehearsal takes place for the performing of the reunion as a play, mediated by a tea set made by Bernard Leach, “father of British pottery” who aspired to fuse Eastern and Western aesthetics. Yet the veracity of this somewhat circuitous footage remains unclear, leaving a sense of the complexity of human lives lingering as the stage goes dark. Fujiwara employs a range of techniques to present his own personal history, and broader history, and the ambiguous constructs of customs and values shared by society. The artist’s *Pavilion for a Mask* meanwhile was inspired by the abandoning of the Zaha Hadid Architects plan for the Japan National Stadium.

The “News From Nowhere” series of AOYAMA Satoru (b. 1973) is inspired by the eponymous 1890 novel by William Morris, in which the 19th-century hero slips through time to the 22nd century. Aoyama, who studied textile art in London, uses a sewing machine—an item of industrial machinery originating in the Industrial Revolution—to grapple with issues around industrialization, labor and gender. Here he revisits the socialist Morris’ criticism of modernity, dressing women portrayed in the 19th century in the clothing of present-day fashion icons to demonstrate links between modern and past issues.

The “Room” series of prints by KATAOKA Junya and IWATAKE Rie (both b. 1982) is based on a century-old book setting out arrangements for tea gatherings. Motifs elaborately collaged in a manner shaped by the perspective of interiors in nihonga painting could also be preparations made for guests irrespective of time or space. Integrating even the traces of tape that form of the outside of the images creates a series of picture planes homogenous in quality, that subtly disrupt the viewer’s gaze.

Wendelien VAN OLDENBORGH (b. 1962) makes works on video that tackle historical events and problems involving power structures such as colonialism and patriarchy. Her productions are based on detailed research and location-scouting, yet are unscripted. Instead Van Oldenborgh says she captures unfettered conversations at the shoot between collaborators with different viewpoints, crew and cast, editing as she goes along to piece together the nucleus of the work. *Of girls* takes as its material texts by MIYAMOTO Yuriko and HAYASHI Fumiko, two female writers active from the prewar years. Having people of different nationalities, generations and genders read the texts aloud and engage in a wide-ranging, overlapping dialogue around matters such as cooperation in the war, fascism, poverty, and same-sex love, from a present-day perspective, fashions a polyphonic place that throws their respective differences into relief. A structure in which different images drift across the long screen from right and left, overlapping, resonates with the construction of the film’s location, in which shoji screens partition rooms in the traditional Japanese home of Hayashi. The dialogue-like production characterized by this creative process, including the architecture in which the production is staged, remains consistently open to unexpected richness and complexity.

Texts by

TAMURA Mariko (pp. 6, 26)

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