

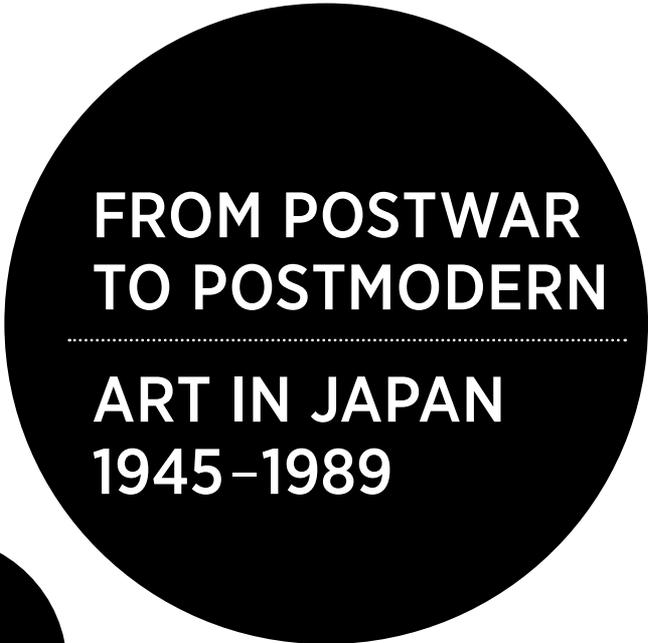
**FROM POSTWAR
TO POSTMODERN**

**ART IN JAPAN
1945–1989**

**Primary
Documents**

MoMA





**FROM POSTWAR
TO POSTMODERN**

**ART IN JAPAN
1945–1989**



**Primary
Documents**

Edited by

**Doryun Chong
Michio Hayashi
Kenji Kajiya
Fumihiko Sumitomo**

The Museum of
Modern Art, New York

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as details but appear in complete form on the pages
listed at the end of the captions.

Japanese authors of the primary documents in this
book are generally noted in Japanese form, with
family names followed by given names. Authors
of newly commissioned essays appear with given
names first, as do the book's translators. Japanese
names mentioned within the text of both primary
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Japanese order, except for those of certain figures
well known internationally by their given names first.

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FOREWORD

● Glenn D. Lowry

From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan 1945–1989: Primary Documents is the sixth in a distinguished series of documentary anthologies published by The Museum of Modern Art's International Program. Aimed at English-language readers with a serious interest in modern art, these books contain meticulously edited translations of source materials relating to the visual arts of specific countries, historical moments, disciplines, and themes, together with newly commissioned contextual essays and other materials. The series began in 2002 with *Primary Documents: A Sourcebook for Eastern and Central European Art since the 1950s*, which was followed by volumes focusing on art from Argentina, Brazil, Sweden and China.

The present volume originated in a curatorial exchange program with Japan that took place in 2008, coordinated by the International Program. The exchange program, generously supported by the Japan Foundation, The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, and The Asian Cultural Council, enabled three of our curators to travel to Japan, each for the first time, and to invite Japanese colleagues to New York in order to continue discussions about postwar Japanese art. The exchange also gave all of us at MoMA an opportunity to look more closely at the Museum's extensive relationship with the arts of Japan.

Through this process of review we rediscovered the long engagement the Museum has enjoyed with Japanese art and with museums, artists, and professional colleagues in Japan. Some of the key events in the course of this relationship include MoMA exhibitions such as *Japanese Household Objects* (1951), *Japanese Exhibition House* (1954, 1955), *New Japanese Painting and Sculpture* (1965–66), *New Japanese Photography* (1974), *New Video: Japan* (1986), and *Structure and Surface: Contemporary Japanese Textiles* (1999), as well as important acquisitions made for our collection. In addition, during the second half of the twentieth century, the International Program circulated a number of MoMA shows in Japan, including the famous *Family of Man* exhibition, which was on view at multiple locations in Japan throughout 1956, and *Two Decades of American Painting 1945–1965*, which toured the country in 1966–67.

Over the past four years, curators at MoMA have been working to understand this historical relationship better, as well as to conduct research on the related works in our collections and on Japanese art more generally. One result of the inquiry is this volume, masterfully edited by Doryun Chong, Associate Curator in the Museum's Department of Painting and Sculpture, along with his three coeditors in Japan: Michio Hayashi, Professor, Sophia University, Tokyo; Kenji Kajiya, Associate Professor, Hiroshima City University; and independent curator and scholar Fumihiko Sumitomo. These gifted editors all worked tirelessly to assemble the texts included herein, to review translations of the primary source material, to write and to commission new contextual pieces, and to ensure that the book offers up-to-date materials and findings to those interested in this important field of study. We are honored that the esteemed scholars Masatoshi Nakajima and Akira Tatehata offered their expertise throughout the process of gathering the material. In addition, Dr. Tatehata served as an editor for the fifth section of the book.

Doryun Chong also organized the exhibition *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde*, which will be on view at the Museum when this book is pub-

lished. We wish to express our gratitude to him for the tremendous energy and focus he has brought to the publication project since joining our staff in 2009. We are also most grateful to Jay A. Levenson, Director of our International Program, who conceived the series of documentary publications and has been responsible for their oversight, and to Gwen Farrelly, former Assistant Director of the International Program, for her critical work in managing and staffing the project and for her dedication and extraordinary skill in coordinating the many experts who were needed for this complex publication.

From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan 1945–1989: Primary Documents is published by The Museum of Modern Art in cooperation with the Japan Foundation, and we are indebted to the Foundation for its belief in, and support of, the project since its inception. Of course, the book could not have been produced without the generous support of a number of other key sponsors. The lead sponsor for the book and the accompanying launch events is The International Council of The Museum of Modern Art, which has sponsored each volume in the series. Generous support is provided by Mr. and Mrs. Minoru Mori, The Asian Cultural Council, Inc., E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Obayashi Corporation, Obayashi Foundation, Wendy Stark Morrissey, The Cowles Charitable Trust, ISE Cultural Foundation, The Saison Foundation, Frances Reynolds, and Byron Meyer.

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● Jay A. Levenson and Gwen Farrelly

This volume has benefited greatly from the expert guidance of a team of scholars, curators, and critics, both in the United States and Japan, who served as advisors to the publication. We wish to acknowledge and thank the members of these teams for the time and commitment they have offered this project: Paola Antonelli, Yūko Hasegawa, Tarō Igarashi, Ryūichi Kaneko, Barbara London, Midori Matsui, Yasufumi Nakamori, Ken Tadashi Oshima, Joshua Siegel, Yōko Shioya, Sarah Suzuki, Miwako Tezuka, Reiko Tomii, Midori Yoshimoto, and Michiko Kasahara.

A publication on this scale would not have been possible without the expert work of the project's research associate, and we are indebted to Sarah Allen, PhD student at the University of Chicago, for her rigor in overseeing the entire team of translators, for her editing of the full manuscript, and for her close collaboration with the editors of the publication to ensure a high level of quality for the primary source material and the newly commissioned columns. We also thank Justin Jesty, for his work on the early stages of the project and for the expert translations he has since contributed. In addition, we are most grateful to Yasuko Imura, the Japan-based research assistant, who worked closely with senior advisor Masatoshi Nakajima on copyright research and with the entire editorial team to prepare all aspects of the book; to Asato Ikeda for her essential work on copyright permissions; and to Ken Yoshida and Izumi Nakajima for their editorial contributions to the book's supplementary material.

Many members of the Museum's staff helped with this publication. We are particularly grateful to Sarah Suzuki, who, in her role as an advisor, dedicated much time and enthusiasm to ensure that the book properly reflects the Museum's interest in the field of postwar Japanese art. In the Department of Publications, we wish to thank the wonderful team that has been helping us to produce our series of books: Christopher Hudson, Publisher; Kara Kirk, former Associate Publisher; Chul Kim, Associate Publisher; Marc Sapir, Production Director; Matthew Pimm, Production Manager; and Hannah Kim, Marketing Coordinator. We are especially grateful to David Frankel, Editorial Director, for his many wise insights and for the essential support he brought to all phases of this project. In the International Program we are grateful to Ann Adachi for her assistance and research, which has so benefited this book, and to Sylvia Renner, former Department Coordinator, for assisting with many of the organizational details early on in the project. In our Development Office we wish to thank Elizabeth Burke, former Director of Foundation Relations; Anna Berns, former Development Officer; and MaryJean Melone, Development Officer, for all of their help in raising funding for the project. In the MoMA Library and Archives we are grateful to Milan Hughston, Michelle Elligott, and Jennifer Tobias. We also extend special thanks to Peter Reed, Senior Deputy Director for Curatorial Affairs. And we are especially grateful to Kathy Halbreich, Associate Director, for her encouragement of the curatorial exchange with Japan that led to this project as well as of the book itself and the accompanying launch events, and to Glenn D. Lowry, the Museum's Director, for his support of the entire publication project from its beginnings.

Outside the Museum, we thank Kyle Bentley, the editor of the English-language text of the book, for his essential work in editing the manuscript and for the enthusiasm and energy that he brought to the final stages of the project; and

Gina Rossi, the designer of each book in the series, for another original design that beautifully captures the spirit of the publication and the period. Justin Jesty and Sarah Allen, in consultation with the editorial team, assembled an expert team of translators, who were based throughout North America and Japan. It was important for all of us that this team include both senior and emerging translators in an effort to continue to develop new scholarship and translations in this field. For enabling our readers to access so many documents that were previously unavailable in the English language, we would like to acknowledge each of these translators: Maiko Behr, Mikiko Hirayama, Ryan Holmberg, Haruko Kohno, Kikuko Ogawa, Meiko Sano, Colin Smith, Christopher Stephens, Ken Yoshida, and Mika Yoshitake.

We are also grateful to the writers of the book's "In Focus" columns. These writers, who include Bert Winther-Tamaki, Yuri Mitsuda, Toshino Iguchi, Izumi Nakajima, and Motoi Masaki, were crucial for the distinctive perspectives they brought to the publication. And we would like to extend special thanks to Harry Harootunian, whose opening essay provides an invaluable historical overview of the period covered.

Finally, we thank all of the artists, authors, institutions and collectors who provided permission to include and reproduce texts and images in *From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan 1945-1989: Primary Documents*. Without their enthusiastic cooperation and support, this volume could not have been produced.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

• Doryun Chong

From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan 1945–1989: Primary Documents brings together critical historical documents, many of which are translated into English for the first time, in Japanese arts from the end of World War II through the next four and a half decades. This anthology follows a number of publications in English and other Western languages that have appeared on the topic in recent decades, including the now well-known catalogues for the exhibitions *Reconstructions: Avant-Garde Art in Japan 1945–1965* (Museum of Modern Art Oxford, 1985–86); *Japon des avant-gardes, 1910–1970* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1986–87); *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (Yokohama Museum of Art, 1994); and *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art* (Getty Center, 2007). All these volumes include groundbreaking new scholarship as well as a selection of translations of important documents. Building on these existing resources, this volume presents a chronologically and thematically broad range of texts, including art criticism, artists' writings, manifestos, and roundtable discussions. The majority of the texts here are related to art, and these are complemented by texts that address other, related disciplines, such as film and architecture. The editors' decision to feature as many fields as possible was motivated in part by a desire to reflect The Museum of Modern Art's multidisciplinary structure, programming, and collection, and, more importantly, to represent the extraordinarily multidimensional character of the creative production that occurred in Japan during the period covered.

This character did not arise ex nihilo, for Japan possesses a long and robust tradition of artistic modernism. Its history can be traced back to as early as the 1870s, when, in the wake of the Meiji Restoration of 1868, Western artists were brought to Japan to train the first generation of modern artists, and Japanese pioneers like Kuroda Seiki studied in Paris. It would not be entirely accurate, however, to locate the origin of Japanese modern art in the importation of European modern art, as significant exchanges of visual cultures had already been taking place between Japan and the West. The impact of *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints, with their daring compositions and palettes, on Parisian modernists such as Manet, Monet, and van Gogh—the phenomenon known as *japonisme*—is well known and studied. Artistic influence had occurred in the opposite direction as well, if not at a commensurate level. Japan was officially closed to the outside world under the *sakoku* (national seclusion) policy for over two centuries, from the 1630s until 1853, the year that US Commodore Matthew C. Perry and the “black ships” arrived, forcing open the country. Nevertheless, knowledge of Western pictorial techniques such as single-point perspective trickled into the country and had a role in transforming traditional picture-making. One might even argue that the urban and natural landscapes depicted in *ukiyo-e* that so enthralled European modernists had already mutated irreversibly due in part to the penetration of the Renaissance tradition that the nineteenth-century Western artists had themselves abandoned.

In the ensuing decades and especially with the advent of the twentieth century, Japanese modern art progressed independently as well as in dialogue with art being produced in European cities—Paris primarily, but not exclusively. News and information about the latest tendencies and breakthroughs reached Tokyo, the “Eastern Capital” of L'Extrême-Orient, with little delay. Japanese artists who had left Japan to be part of artistic communities

in such urban centers bridged the West and their country. They participated in various modernist and avant-garde movements, schools, and styles—such as Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, Dada, and Bauhaus—in the places where they were developing. Back home, these cutting-edge tendencies were adopted, altered, and naturalized to fit the artists' needs for finding an expressive form for life in a rapidly modernizing nation and its cosmopolitan cities. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a flourishing of homegrown artists' societies and avant-garde groups, including Second Section Society (Nika-kai), Mavo, and Nova. The onset of militaristic imperialism and the outbreak of World War II put a halt to the vibrant, by now maturing modernism in Japan. Toward the final years of the war, artists were forced to produce war propaganda or risk persecution and imprisonment. It is only to be expected that artists and thinkers of a defeated nation, coming out of a period of fascism and under occupation by foreign forces, would experience exhilaration and confusion simultaneously. This is where *From Postwar to Postmodern* begins.

"Postwar" is a highly contested designation. In political terms, the starting point of the postwar period is clear. But in art history and culture, the end of the war did not signify a clean break or a completely new beginning. Many mid-career or older artists and cultural figures were shaped as much by their war-time experiences as by their prewar training and activities, and their presence and work provided a critical link to the long history of modernism and avant-gardism in Japan, which had been temporarily—and traumatically—interrupted. As the postwar years unfolded and the end of the era was repeatedly declared, the actual end point grew harder to locate. It may have been 1955, or we may still be in the postwar.

Even though the periodization of Japanese history and art history after the end of the war is far from definite, the editors of this volume decided to cover the span of time up to the end of the 1980s and to divide it into five sections, for various reasons. The year 1989, of course, heralded the end of the Cold War. In Japan, the year is remembered more strongly as the end of the Shōwa period. This period, which corresponds to the rule of Emperor Hirohito, began in 1926 and encompassed World War II and the postwar reconstruction and prosperity. The conclusion of this longest reign in modern Japan coincided with the beginning of the end of the "bubble economy," followed by a long recession that many consider to be ongoing. While such economic and political changes may have cast a cloud over social moods, public discourses, and contemporary artistic production, the era since the 1990s has also witnessed a growth in scholarship, presentations, and publications on Japanese modern and contemporary arts at home and abroad, and this interest shows no signs of waning. With this in mind, and now with a sufficient distance from the Shōwa period, the editors decided that the end of the war and of the previous imperial reign represent logical bookends for the period to be contained in this book. In addition, we felt that this timeframe remained under-studied and deserved the broad treatment the book aims to provide.

Two of the book's five sections—the fourth and the fifth—cover a decade each, while the others cover longer or shorter periods. The editors tried to find the best breaks with which to divide the history into sections, and in doing so consulted with numerous colleagues and advisors. Each section consists of various subsections focusing on important themes or topics. Texts were chosen on the basis of their importance to the given subjects as well as for the variety they would provide across the book. Complementing the translated

historical texts are newly commissioned columns written by Japan- and United States-based scholars from both established and younger generations. They address particular topics that are not covered by the historical texts or that warrant a separate treatment. Each section features an introduction that provides a historical overview of the time period at hand and that situates the subsections and columns.

It is important to note the intentional omissions in the process of selection. The editors concentrated on choosing influential texts that discuss works and issues current at the time of the writings, with an orientation toward the critical avant-garde. Historically retrospective texts, even if they were influential and considered important at the time, were not selected. The focus on Japanese art and related fields also means that we had to disregard a large amount of writings on American and European art and culture, some of which were and are undeniably significant. Furthermore, the book does not include texts on modernized traditional art forms—such as *nihonga* (Japanese-style painting), ikebana (flower arrangement), ceramics, and calligraphy (with the exception of one text in Section 1)—which have continued to evolve and thrive throughout the modern period to the present, alongside those disciplines addressed here.

This book is intended for students, researchers, and general readers alike. Our aim of encompassing a broad time period and a wide range of topics meant we had to sacrifice depth and specificity in certain areas for the sake of diversity and coherence in the book as a whole. But the very need to make such sacrifices, and the difficulty of doing so, only points to the complexity and richness of artistic and cultural production in Japan, which cannot be covered by any single volume. This acknowledgment of an inevitable lack by no means diminishes our conviction that *From Postwar to Postmodern, Art in Japan 1945–1989: Primary Documents* provides an essential introduction to this remarkable period of creative efflorescence.

JAPAN'S POSTWAR AND AFTER, 1945–1989: AN OVERVIEW

● Harry Harootunian

On August 15, 1945, not long after the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Emperor Hirohito declared the Japanese government's acceptance of the terms of unconditional surrender as outlined by the Allied powers. Made by radio broadcast, the declaration signaled the end to both World War II and the imperial and colonial adventure that had marked Japan's path since 1931. Soon after, the first wave of American occupation forces arrived to begin the task of disassembling the country's imperial structure, dissolving the military, and identifying and purging members of the political class, high-ranking military officers, and others considered accountable for initiating the war. A war crimes tribunal in Tokyo would follow this opening act of the occupation in 1948, whereby the figures accused of complicity were tried, judged, and convicted. Only Hirohito was exonerated from the list of the accused, even though, with the same authority he invoked to terminate hostilities, he could have prevented the decision for war in the first place.

Censorship was common during the occupation, despite the initial democratizing goals. For instance, the occupation forces, together with Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, removed from circulation a documentary made by filmmaker Kamei Fumio in 1946 that "condemned Japanese capitalists for leading the country toward militarism and imperialism."¹ Such censorship anticipated the occupation's policy to reverse its democratizing course and restore the prewar political leadership and its infrastructure in preparation for the impending global struggle between the forces of the "free world" and those of "revolution," as announced by the Cold War. Whatever hope existed for a revitalized Japan under the US-led occupation was sacrificed to a double effort—that of reforming Japan's social, economic, and educational structures to supply its society with a new "democratic" endowment while also restoring the country as a reliable ally in Asia in the wake of the collapse of China's nationalist government. This double effort, which entailed an active military occupation between 1945 and 1952 and its continuation since that time under the provisions of the 1960 US-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (launching "the long postwar" that signified the latter country's client status), was necessary to make Japan the showcase of peaceful modernization in the Cold War era. Under the leadership of General Douglas MacArthur, the occupation forces busily made possible the restitution of vital elements of the prewar political order—including its personnel—that actually undermined the democratic impulse of their own reforms. What has been muted in the triumphalist narrative—described as "embracing defeat"—is how the "embrace" resulted in a victory for Japan as much as a defeat of the occupation's intended goals to remake Japanese society.

In the shadow of this "seamless" narrative is the lived experience of the Japanese themselves in the early years of the postwar. Japanese confronted utter physical destruction of their cities; disease, disorder, and pestilence everywhere; and a depleted countryside cut off from the cities because of incessant bombing and swollen with a population foraging for what remained of a meager inventory of food. This is the "scene of the crime," as portrayed by novelist David Peace in his novel *Tokyo Year Zero*:

For the city is no city, this country is no country—
I eat acorns. I eat leaves. I eat weeds. . . .

Everything distorted—
Heaven an abyss . . .
Time disjointed—
Hell our home . . .
Here, now—
Ten minutes past noon on the fifteenth day of the eighth month of
the twentieth year of the reign of the Emperor Shōwa [Hirohito]—
But this hour has no father, this year has no son—
No mother, no daughter, no wife nor lover—
For the hour is zero; the Year Zero—²

The recurring theme of this horror of the “darkness of the lived moment” is the complete collapse of a conception of personal and national identity—a scene now filled with multiple attempts to find new subjective identities capable of anchoring people amid the material ruin and ceaseless chaos of everyday life. “No one is who they say they are.”³ The occupation authorities tried to respond to this problem in two ways: first, by creating the conditions for a healthy and clean democratic subject; and second, by offering a new constitution vesting sovereignty in this new citizen.

The authorities recognized early that—owing to the annihilation of the social environment and the disappearance of institutional and medical safeguards in the immediate postwar—Japanese were malnourished and susceptible to opportunist diseases.⁴ Worried as much about the health of American military personnel as for the Japanese, the foreign forces sought to immediately transform war-ridden Japan’s hygienic facilities. Behind this impulse loomed the conviction that underdevelopment was caused by a permanently sick population. In this regard, the attempt at makeover became the prototype for the later social scientific theorization of development in which sanitation and hygiene were identified as prerequisites for successful modernization. To achieve the goal of democratic nationhood, each body would have to be made healthy and each individual to be valorized. The Americans resorted to massive detoxification of the Japanese with DDT—a legacy from colonial rule in the Philippines—in order to subject the population to “a new regulatory regime that aspired to produce clean, democratic bodies.”⁵ Japanese were made to submit not only to forms of detoxification and immunization but also to programs designed to increase caloric intake. Despite exemplifying the democratic principle of valuing each individual, the immunological programs reinforced the Japanese conviction that the American military was carrying out multiple invasions, and now into the most private and intimate domain—the body.

Aligned with the project of creating clean and healthy bodies for democracy was that of providing Japan with a democratic constitution. Drafted by Americans and promulgated in 1947, the new constitution was aimed at transforming the prewar imperial subject, who had merely performed duties and met expectations of obedience, into the figure of a democratic subject—a citizen with rights and responsibilities. But in spite of the intention of investing sovereignty in a newly formed citizenry, the American authors made sure to retain the emperor (who had disavowed his divinity) as the symbol of national unity—reflecting both their fear of granting excessive popular democracy in the circumstances of an emerging Cold War struggle and their willingness to rescue decisive elements from Japan’s political past. After 1947, the US shifted its policy and sought to secure Japan as its principal ally and thus client in the Pacific

and Asia. This shift was accompanied by decisions to undo the judgments of the war crimes tribunal by early releasing convicted war prisoners, many of whom returned to major positions in the bureaucracy, political parties, and businesses. In this scene, the occupation forces actually began to clamp down on unions and other progressive left groups. Just before the occupation officially ended, the US embarked upon the first of its Cold War-era wars in Korea, which benefited Japan's economic recovery and pushed the country farther down the path to "single party democracy."

Among Japanese, the clash over identity and subjectivity was cast primarily as a battle between mind and body. Proponents of the mind—"modernist" (*kindaishugisha*) intellectuals and academics from the elite schools—quarreled with those who grounded subjectivity in the body and who saw "thought" as the myth that deluded people into disastrous defeat and hid from them the nature of this defeat. The struggle bespoke a more profound disagreement between those who privileged the body over social constraints that had bound that body to concealment and conformism and those who promoted the formation of an autonomous political subject capable of making informed decisions and acting on them. In a sense, both groups shared the belief that the self should be liberated from the shibboleths that had been employed to secure popular support for the war. Advocates of a liberated body believed that Japanese had been denied "sensory stimuli" down to the end of the war and called upon the population to throw off "the various veils of deception like the emperor system [and] *bushidō* . . . in order to start fresh as naked human beings."⁶ Modernists, for their part, envisioned a subjectivity that positioned the spirit over the corporeal: after all, "sensory objects," tainted by their association with "natural functions," had no reality outside of fiction and offered no power for integrating and mediating the group into a national body. They believed that no political spirit as such had existed in Japan until the present moment of defeat and reconstruction. A second chance (and Second Enlightenment) was now upon them to achieve a full and completed modern order and overcome the defective legacy of premodern residues that had led Japan's "incomplete" modernity into war. For some, what appeared at stake was a true liberalism in the postwar where one allegedly had not previously existed, while the appeal to enlightenment affirmed the rule of experts—"scientific managers"—in the equation of state and planned modernization. Postwar modernists promoted a program of enlightenment in hopes of constructing a rational autonomous subject situated to foreclose the lure of voluntary submission to irrational claims of authority that had captured the prewar masses. Involuntary surrender to irrationality was replaced by acquiescence to rational claims of authority. Identifying the masses with the irrational prompted postwar intellectuals to locate rationality not in the everyday but in the state (the non-everyday) and its political and bureaucratic leadership. In time, this discourse on "thought" and its heroic claims of a bourgeois individualism, gendered solely as male, was eclipsed by the formation of a new nationalism seeking to discipline democracy by turning people away from politics to the prospect of achieving economic well-being.

Postwar Japan did not live up to the ideals of either the modernists or the new cultural producers. The 1960s, marked by mass demonstrations protesting the 1960 US-Japan security treaty and student uprisings later in the decade, saw an earlier optimism fold into the Liberal Democratic Party version of liberal democracy and modernization, which, with its timeless politics, collapsed the future into an endless present at the moment Japan's economy

headed for global prominence. The dreams of social democracy and the heroism of rational subjectivity were said to vanish in the din of pronouncements promising higher standards of living, greater opportunities for domestic consumption, and affordable housing. But the promotion of policies of unlimited economic growth, income doubling, and the conceits of rational planification calling for the end of all politics (and thus conflict) in fact meant inaugurating a modernizing process on an installment plan—economy and production first, consumption and culture later.

The door was thus opened in the late 1960s and 1970s for the state to resocialize the masses into dutiful workers and relocate the everyday from the streets back to the home and firm. In order to displace political participation with the project of economic betterment, the levels of production for export had to be raised and then expectations for consumption eventually fulfilled. Thus, a policy directed at fusing democracy and consumption, state and market on an unprecedented scale was in play. But to accomplish the goal it was necessary to reshape the self into a figure capable of satisfying productionist aspirations, which was supplied by the construction of the new subject position of the selfless, loyal worker referred to as the “Good Japanese” and promoted by the Ministry of Education’s program for national socialization in the schools. The purpose of this socialization was the advancement of Japanese life, which now demanded the reinstating of the traditional spiritual compass to guide people’s everyday living. Failure to provide such spiritual direction along with economic prosperity would risk forfeiting the real ground of Japanese life and would make the people into mere “productive instruments.” What this project sought to counteract were the baneful effects of the war defeat, after which Japanese turned away from imperishable ideals and their cultural past in their eagerness to construct a new sense of self. In this moment of technological transformation, it was felt that Japanese must be encouraged to exercise devotion and diligence in work and yet not be fettered by modern selfishness.

By the end of the 1970s, this restructuring of the subject into a disciplined and self-sacrificing worker was yoked to a program to inaugurate a new “age of culture” dedicated to resuscitating forgotten traditional values as well as reconfiguring a comprehensive conception of Japanese culture and making Japan into a large “garden city.” Under the initiative of Prime Minister Masayoshi Ōhira, the plan for a new cultural age looked forward to a twenty-first century that would replace an age of economic recovery by locating the “mystery” of Japan’s success in the pitting of a premodern culture characterized by relationality or community-centered interests against a Westernized self and individualism. In the 1980s Japan briefly experienced a self-conscious swing to “postmodernism,” expressing forms of what was described as “abstract denial” in compensation for a discredited contemporary reality. This postmodern moment sought to put into question the aporia of representation by calling for the replacement of fixity, hierarchy, and planning with play, chance, and contingency. But too often promoters of the postmodern based their critique in the binary of Japan—or that which was believed to be essentially Japanese—and the West, a tendency that risked reinforcing a fixed narrative of Japan’s difference and exceptionalist endowment. A more enduring manifestation of the postmodern gesture appeared in novels like Tanaka Yasuo’s *Nantonaku kurisutaru* (Somehow crystal) and its valorization of the consumption of brand names.

Just as 1945 seemed to signify a rupture with the past but was in actuality a hiatus before the past was rescued in its decisive aspects, so the year

1989, marking the end of the Cold War, constituted no real break. Japan was less affected by the Cold War's end than by the restructuring of its relationship with the US that came with the emergence of China in the 1990s. Japan still remained within the Cold War's protective parenthesis of an endless postwar, which had successfully shielded the nation from the outside world and refused to disappear until that moment Japan recognized that it was no longer an American client. In the 1990s, the older strategies for a new age of culture, the ideology of the "Good Japanese," and the postmodern moment vanished as swiftly as the economic bubble burst and sent the nation into a long recession. What has survived is the impulse for newer forms of nationalism to resituate a Japan no longer sheltered by an interminable postwar, and the view of the Japanese body as merely a malleable or changeable environment, a habitat, driven by consumption of commodities in what the sociologist Miyadai Shinji has described as an "everyday that never ends."

Notes

- 1 Ann Sherif, *Japan's Cold War Media, Literature, and the Law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 122. The documentary was called *A Japanese Tragedy (Nihon no higeki)*.
- 2 David Peace, *Tokyo Year Zero* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 25.
- 3 Ibid. This statement appears throughout the novel.
- 4 Yoshikuni Igarashi, *Bodies of Memory: Narratives of War in Postwar Japanese Culture, 1945-1970* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 65-72.
- 5 Ibid., p. 65.
- 6 Ibid., p. 57.





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1945-1957

POSTWAR
RECONSTRUCTION—
FROM OCCUPATION
TO THE COLD WAR

Edited by Michio Hayashi

INTRODUCTION

● Michio Hayashi

In early September 1945, Japanese officials signed the Instrument of Surrender in a ceremony on board the USS *Missouri*, marking the end of the war and the beginning of the radical transformation of Japan under the United States-led occupation. The transformation began with a series of progressive reforms, including the complete demilitarization of the country, the drafting of a new “pacifist” constitution, and democratic adjustments to Japanese political, social, and educational systems. This progressive reform, however, was soon twisted so that the US could integrate Japan into its Cold War strategy, especially in the years of the Korean War (1950–53). The US war against communism turned Japan back into a military base and led to a wave of oppressive actions against the Communist Party and its sympathizers. The signing of the US-Japan security treaty at the end of the occupation in 1951 solidified this Cold War alliance and established the basis for Japan’s rapid economic growth in the following years.

The art world experienced seismic changes corresponding with this drastic social transformation. The modernism of the prewar years returned, accompanied by a vigorous desire to catch up with contemporary Western art movements, while the demand for new democratic exhibition systems and organizations grew rapidly. Many avant-garde groups, sometimes carrying on prewar artistic activities, appeared in resistance to the changing realities of the Cold War era. At the same time, the new technologically mediated urban culture incited a passion for multimedia experimentation and prompted artists to seek a new mass audience.

Art discourse was also renewed during this chaotic transitional period. The weight shifted from connoisseurship to a socially oriented and more theoretically informed criticism. While established intellectuals such as literary critic Hanada Kiyoteru (1909–1974) and poet Takiguchi Shūzō (1903–1979) guided this shift, a group of young writers (including the future “three greats”—Hariu Ichirō, Nakahara Yūsuke, and Tōno Yoshiaki) debuted in the early to mid-1950s and quickly became the most influential voices. Newly launched art magazines such as *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook, 1948–), *Geijutsu shinchō* (New trends in art, 1950–), and *Bijutsu hihyō* (Art criticism, 1952–57) became the main arenas for their activities. In addition, the opening of three modern art museums in the early part of the decade—the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, the Bridgestone Museum of Art, and the National Museum of Modern Art—accelerated the (infra)structural change

GROUND ZERO: A NEW BEGINNING

Matsumoto Shunsuke (1912–1948) began his career in the 1930s and was well known for his melancholic urban landscapes. In 1946 he wrote an open letter to Japanese artists, calling for the founding of a new artists’ association based on democratic, rather than traditional hierarchical, principles. The letter, a one-page text printed by hand and translated here, also urges artists to reflect on the role they had played, overtly or covertly, in supporting the fascist ideology during the war. While Matsumoto’s letter did not ultimately lead to the establishment of an association, his hope of constructing a new democratic art world was shared by many progressive artists of the immediate postwar years. Two exhibitions titled Japan Independent (Nihon Indépendant), one (1947–) connected to the Communist Party and the other (1949–63) sponsored by the Yomiuri newspaper

company, were established as important venues open to any artist who paid a nominal fee. (The Yomiuri exhibition came to be called the Yomiuri Independent in 1957.) The Democrato Artists Association in Osaka (1951–57)—whose members included Ay-O, Eikyū, Kawara On, Toneyama Kōjin, Izumi Shigeru, and Isobe Yukihisa—was founded in the same spirit.

It was also around this time that the artist Katsuragawa Hiroshi (born 1924) promoted the annual Japan Exhibition (Nippon-ten, 1953–59)—co-organized by the Youth Artists' Alliance (Seinen Bijutsuka Rengō, or Seibiren) and the Avant-Garde Art Society (Zen'ei Bijutsu-kai)—which became an important forum for “reportage” painters, who often adopted a grotesquely distorted figurative style. Yamashita Kikuji's *The Tale of Akebono Village* (pl. 4) and Kawara On's Bathroom (Yokushitsu) series, in which abject postwar realities are depicted through disfigured or fragmented human bodies, were both exhibited in the show's first installment.

AVANT-GARDE—TECHNOLOGY—MASS CULTURE

During the postwar years, new aesthetic theories to bridge art and society in a meaningful manner were in demand. Geometric abstraction was increasingly seen as irrelevant because of its aloofness from social issues. In addition, Surrealism seemed to concern itself only with the individual's inner realities and Socialist Realism with outer realities. Hanada Kiyoteru emerged in this period as the most sophisticated and influential Marxist theorist/critic. Together with the artist Okamoto Tarō (1911–1996), he propagated “avant-garde” aesthetics that differed from mere “modernism.” Somewhat reminiscent of Walter Benjamin, Hanada believed that “avant-garde” arts—including film and animation—could mobilize the dialectical interaction between inner and outer realities, high art and mass culture, nature and technology. As a model for his dialectical thinking, he employed the image of an ellipse, whose two foci (here representing thesis and antithesis) never become one. This dialectics in suspension, as it were, is echoed in Okamoto's concept of “polarism.”

IN SEARCH OF THE REAL

Japanese society faced many dilemmas in its rapid transformation. The construction of American bases in the nominally demilitarized nation, exploitation of laborers, and economic disparity between urban centers and rural areas are just a few of the many problems that arose. How to address and intervene in those problems became a pressing issue for artists, writers, filmmakers, and photographers.

The methodology of “reportage” was widely discussed and experimented with in this context. In an essay featured in this section, for instance, the young novelist Abe Kōbō (1924–1993), inspired by Hanada, systematically explicates a materialist-dialectical view of the subject. Tanaka Masao (1912–1987), writing on “beggar photography,” argues the importance of facing darkness to develop a true realism, but warns against settling on a form of mannerism. Lurking behind such discussions was the nagging question of what constitutes “reality” as such. For many artists in this period, including Abe, “reality” was something which always eludes our conceptual grasp but nonetheless conditions our life from outside, and as such was often associated with the term *bushitsu* (matter, material, object, thingness). The painter Tsuruoka Masao (1907–1979)—in a well-known roundtable excerpted here—insists on the similar notion of *mono* (thing, object, matter) and renounces spirituality, his words serving as another testament to this shared sense of an elusive “reality.”

MODERNITY AND TRADITION

The postwar cultural discourse witnessed the repeated evocation of Japanese “tradition” in response to the profound anxiety surrounding its disappearance. Okamoto diverged from the many intellectuals of the time whose antiquarian idea of “tradition” often complacently repeated the Western appreciation of Japanese culture. He proposed a reappraisal of the prehistoric Dionysian Jōmon culture (about 10,500–300 B.C.), whose earthenware, for example, was designed with explosively undulating forms and lines in contrast to the more orderly geometrical style of the later agricultural Yayoi period (about 300 B.C.–A.D. 300). Okamoto lived in Paris from 1929 to 1940, and his deconstructive view of “tradition” undoubtedly derived partly from his exposure to the “dissident” Surrealism of writers like Georges Bataille and the lectures given by anthropologist Marcel Mauss. (In fact, during his last years in Paris, he was a member of Bataille’s secret society, *Acéphale*.) Among the people inspired by Okamoto’s writings on Jōmon culture were architects Tange Kenzō and Shirai Seiichi.

Some practitioners of traditional arts also fought within their respective fields to revitalize “tradition.” For instance, avant-garde calligraphers who gathered around the magazine *Bokubi* (The beauty of ink) experimented with an explosive new style reminiscent of “action painting,” and Teshigahara Sōfu radically innovated the art of ikebana (flower arrangement). The text by Takiguchi Shūzō (1903–1979) attests to the complex situation in which those artists found themselves.

DISFIGURED CORPSES OR THE CRITIQUE OF HUMANISM

Running parallel to the anxiety over the loss of cultural “tradition” was that concerning the status of humanity. Images of disfigured bodies and corpses proliferated in Japanese art, as they did in European art, mirroring the vulnerable state of human beings in and after the war. Nakahara Yūsuke (1931–2011) analyzes this iconographical phenomenon from a critical standpoint. He advocates using an antihumanistic, analytical eye to detect the dialectical relationship between the disfigured human bodies and larger social conditions.

The essay by the young Kusama Yayoi (born 1929) does not refer much to the contemporary Japanese situation and is more deeply embedded in her personal anxiety and fantasies. But it is notable that, judging from her references, she had plenty of chances to look at the works of a wide variety of Western contemporary painters through reproductions. Although there was already much informational traffic from the West in the prewar years, it dramatically increased in the postwar period and quickly transformed the visual environment in Japan.

THE EXPERIMENTAL WORKSHOP AND THE GUTAI ART ASSOCIATION

Two important experimental groups emerged in the 1950s: the Gutai Art Association (Gutai Bijutsu Kyōkai, 1954–72) in Osaka-Kobe and the Experimental Workshop (Jikken Kōbō, 1951–57) in Tokyo.

The Experimental Workshop consisted of young artists working in various mediums (including painting, sculpture, photography, music, theater, dance, and film), who loosely gathered around Takiguchi Shūzō. Encouraged by Takiguchi, who in fact named the group, they actively collaborated to produce “total” works of art. The essay by Kitadai Shōzō (1921–2001) is a delightful account of their methodical approach to creating multimedia, theatrical/environmental productions both on- and offstage. Instead of generating a harmonious and organic unity of elements, they emphasized the “collision” of vari-

ous participants and mediums, each of which would remain autonomous. Their creative approach to intermedia art activities paved the way for further collaborative experiments in the 1960s and the '70s.

The Gutai artists were predominantly painters. But although their challenging of conventional aesthetics was rooted in their medium, it often led to explosive displays of multisensory works and performances that had the character of anarchic festivity. The two texts featured here by Gutai members, including the manifesto written by their leader, Yoshihara Jirō (1905–1972), discuss the material resistance of the painting medium as a springboard for their work to break free from the traditional aesthetics of self-expression. While it is true that Gutai artists strove for originality, they sought to achieve it not through a facile romanticism but, as Yoshihara's manifesto tells us, through a dynamic meeting between their own bodies and the physical material with which they worked.

GROUND ZERO: A NEW BEGINNING

A PROPOSAL TO THE ARTISTS OF JAPAN (1946)

● **Matsumoto Shunsuke** (pl. 1)

To: _____,

This may seem too abrupt a suggestion and may turn out to be wishful thinking, but still I would like to ask my respectable readers to contemplate the following proposal.

The disgraceful battle has ceased, but our shattered country continues to suffer the harsh reality of defeat. It is imperative that political stability be quickly restored and all the ruins of the war that are left exposed on the national soil be cleared away. Thus, we, as artists, should do our best in contributing to this revival of Japan.

It is easy to support the building of a cultured Japan. However, it is obvious that the process is going to be an arduous road, even for those of us who have lived within the traditions of humankind and grew up in a country that took pride in being one of the most artistically advanced nations of the world. Though gradually, art worlds in various locations have begun to stir. The Ministry of Education Fine Arts Exhibition [Bunten] is apparently going to resume, and some existing art groups have already announced their comeback. While I have no intention of briskly dismissing these movements, which have undergone some minor changes, I cannot welcome the reappearance of the art world as it was during the prewar or wartime period. In a similar light, with regard to the political parties of Japan, Ozaki Yukio says: "political parties should primarily be unified and divided according to principles and policies, but parties in Japan are based in the master-disciple relationship between the boss and his followers. Rather than being a political party, this is instead simply a clan."¹ These words of Ozaki's can easily be applied to the art world. Needless to say, in the early

days, Japanese art groups were constantly dividing up, forming new groups, and opposing one another on the basis of principles and policies. But the art world of the past decade has been subject to favoritism and personal considerations. I am not necessarily against such a tendency; rather, I respect the beauty of friendships and master-disciple relationships. And exhibitions based on those close relationships should flourish. However, large exhibitions of artworks selected through open call are public vehicles. Inevitably, it becomes necessary to establish principles and standards to meet the expectations of public responsibility. Only when groups—taking clear positions—confront and compete with one another in public will the world of Japanese art be reconstructed. Unfortunately, however, considering that artists have not had the liberty to produce or exhibit their works freely for about a decade, it is unlikely that various schools and groups will emerge so suddenly. The groups that have the potential for assembly are, I assume, simply cliques founded on personal relationships. Initially, I was opposed to the revival of groups that are aligned with other already-established groups. I even strongly suggested that we call everything off to start on a clean slate. But now I refrain from taking an overly critical position, because I think these groups can function to prompt the recovery of artists who have lost any sense of security and belonging.

I am no longer associated with the Second Section Society [Nika-kai], and the Painting Society of the New Man [Shinjin Gakai], which existed until the end of the war, is now disbanded. However, that is that, and I'd like to take the opportunity to make the following suggestions.

In order to create an art world that allows artists to freely exhibit works, promotes the natural emergence of schools and sects based on free discussion, and enables mutual support and encouragement among artists, it is necessary, I believe, to establish a Japanese artists' association as the foundational organization. Thus, I propose the following policies for the association and ask for the readers' consideration.

- 1 The association must consist of those such as painters, sculptors, craftsmen, architects, critics, and art enthusiasts.
- 2 All members of the association are equal and no hierarchy is to be made. To be a member, one must be fully prepared to offer a lifetime commitment to art, and to take up the responsibility of becoming independent as an artist. If he or she forsakes that responsibility, he or she must immediately resign.
- 3 Galleries for permanent display must be established at the center of Tokyo and in other major cities across Japan.
 - A The galleries will be used for the regular display—in solo exhibitions and group exhibitions—of works by members.
 - B Galleries will also be used as offices for the association, and members are permitted to use them for their club activities.
 - C Galleries will be centers for the studying of methods that will ensure the penetration of members' works into the everyday lives of the people.
- 4 Projects of the association will be conducted by a committee which consists of a few members elected from the entire association body. This committee must be reelected annually, while regular administrative work is to be carried out by hired staff members.

- 5 Members are free to associate with any other communities or societies and are also free, moreover encouraged, to form groups among themselves.
- 6 Large exhibitions of association members will be regularly held when circumstances, such as those of transportation, become less constraining.
- 7 As a general rule, the association itself will not hold public open-call exhibitions. However, any of the groups formed within the association may hold such exhibitions (and these can be held simultaneously with the exhibitions organized by the association).
- 8 Members can recommend new members for the association, but their entry must be approved by the board. And the board retains the authority to ask members to withdraw membership.
- 9 When young, aspiring artists are first entering the art world, they can gain opportunities by submitting their works to our galleries. In this case, they are absolutely free to promote themselves, and their advancement is based on their dedication and competence. While this lacks the excitement of, for example, being chosen for a well-known open-call group exhibition and celebrated by the public, it will allow young artists to avoid errors that may have devastating consequences for their careers.
- 10 Exchange with overseas artists is to be made.
- 11 Members will directly interact with one another at the club, and a journal will be published regularly as a vehicle for communicating with the entire nation.
- 12 Joint research of materials and cooperative purchase of resources will be considered.
- 13 Reference rooms and research facilities will be established.
- 14 The issue of funding for management will be discussed when the preparatory committee is established.

I am aware that the above suggestions comprise nothing more than a meager list of private thoughts, that it is impossible to quickly assemble such an association when we still lack the means to freely communicate within the country, and that we have lost contact with many artists who were sent abroad as soldiers and have not been repatriated. No doubt, there are many of you who have lost the basic means to sustain normal life in this ever more chaotic society. But I strongly urge those who generally agree with the suggested purpose to contact me at the address cited below. I would also like to ask for any practical suggestions to improve the plan. When one hundred people have expressed the same aspirations and ambitions, I intend to call a preparatory meeting for the establishment of the association.

With the loss of the war, it has become complicated to be an artist here. There may even be those who will be accused of being war criminals by the Allies, and some may also have to experience criticism from Japanese citizens. If we were to question where and with whom the responsibility lies, I must say that it lies in part with those who feigned ignorance of the wrongdoing of higher authority. Although artists may be only indirectly related to politics, they must be ashamed of the fact that they could not take a firm stand against the war, as they could not use their artistic intuition to delve into the underlying reality of it. This is not merely an issue of whether or not one produced war paintings. It is absolutely necessary that we do not continue this tendency to look

the other way. Instead, we must be thoroughly determined to wear out our flesh and bones, to investigate and elucidate every aspect of the movement of Japanese art of these past few years. Whatever is constructed on fallacy is a fraud no matter how correct it may seem. To achieve our goal, let us discuss these issues entirely in the open. Let us build with our own hands a free institution that allows us to do just that. With such intentions in mind, I take the liberty of humbly submitting this proposal at the risk of being disrespectful to my reputable superiors and friends.

January 1, 1946

4-2096 Shimo-Ochiai, Yodobashi-ku, Tokyo
Matsumoto Shunsuke

Originally printed by hand as “Zennippon bijutsuka ni hakaru” and distributed by the artist.
Translated by Meiko Sano

Editor’s Note

1 Ozaki Yukio (1858–1954) was a liberal politician known as the father of parliamentary government in Japan.

IN FOCUS

REESTABLISHING THE ART WORLD DURING THE OCCUPATION, 1945–1952

• Bert Winther-Tamaki

One of the first events to roil the Tokyo-centered art world of Japan as it began to reconstitute itself in the aftermath of war defeat in 1945 was the so-called integrity dispute. Some of the most prominent painters of wartime propaganda tableaux dramatizing the glory of the Imperial Japanese Army and Navy now appeared to be refashioning their art to entertain the personnel of the American military occupation forces. These artists were lambasted as opportunists, with one painter charging, for instance, that “not only do they shame themselves with their prostitute-like activities, but they disgrace all artists.”¹ One of the accused, the erstwhile master of Japanese military scenes, Fujita Tsuguharu, now argued in defense that during the war he

and his colleagues had “simply executed their responsibilities as national citizens” and that artists should now “reflect sincerely and in good conscience on the causes of defeat.”² Nonetheless, in 1946 Fujita was summarily informed by the chief secretary of the Japan Art Association (Nihon Bijutsu-kai)—a newly formed artists’ exhibition organization intended to bring diverse Japanese artists together under a progressive program of reform—that he was not to participate in the Japanese art world because of his leading role as a war painter. Indeed, Fujita would leave Japan in 1949 and never return.

Meanwhile, American officials working under General Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, debated what to do with the war paintings themselves. The occupation was dedicated to eradicating Japanese militarism, and if these paintings could arouse new militaristic sentiment, then perhaps they should be destroyed. If, however, they possessed aesthetic value as works of art, then the occupation was responsible for their preservation. Ultimately, some 155 war paintings were confiscated and, in 1951, spirited

off to a storage facility in the suburbs of Washington, D.C. They were held there until 1970, when they were returned to Japan and deposited at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, under an arrangement known as “indefinite loan,” which remains their status to this day.

At the outset of the seven-year occupation, many of the reforms insisted on by the Americans were of a progressive nature, including women’s rights, land reform, the dissolution of *zaibatsu*,³ and the renunciation of war as a sovereign right of the nation. But this progressivism was sharply curtailed in the “reverse course,” with the onset of the Korean War and the general climate of the Cold War. Thus, in the latter period of the occupation, American officials collaborated with the conservative Japanese government in depurging Japanese war criminals and quashing the labor movement. The US-Japan security and peace treaties that restored Japanese sovereignty in 1952 required Japan’s military alliance with the United States. In effect, Japan was absorbed into an American-dominated postwar global order. This sequence of events stimulated much opposition within Japan, but it was the Anti-Subversive Activities Law that provoked an anti-American uprising of some twenty thousand unionists, mostly under communist leadership, who stormed the out-of-bounds plaza in front of the Imperial Palace on May Day 1952 in a violent encounter with the police. “Bloody May Day” was commemorated in a Socialist Realist painting by Uchida Iwao, while the ongoing American military presence in bases in Japan would continue to be the focus of strident critique by the Japanese avant-garde throughout the postwar period.

During the turbulent occupation, the postwar Japanese art world reestablished a full complement of reactionary, mainstream, and avant-garde institutions. Pre-war artists’ groups, exhibition organizations, and journals that had been terminated or consolidated by the military state during the early 1940s were quickly reconstituted, and new organizations were founded. The



Fujita Tsuguharu (1886–1968). *The Battle of Attsu* (*Attsu tō gyokusai*). 1943. Oil on canvas, 6' 4 ³/₁₆" × 8' 6 ³/₁₆" (193.5 × 259.5 cm). The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

exchange with European modernism and avant-gardism that had flourished before the war ground to a halt during the war, but the ties were eagerly rekindled during the occupation. In the early '50s, presentations of works by Matisse and Picasso were held in Tokyo and a major exchange exhibition between the Tokyo and Paris art worlds was organized, bringing a large selection of contemporary French art to Tokyo and affording Japanese painters their first tentative debut on the world stage of art in Paris.⁴ In 1950, the painter Okada Kenzō moved to New York—a harbinger of the later shift of the Japanese art world’s primary overseas interests to that city—and the New York-based sculptor and designer Noguchi Isamu arrived in Tokyo. Okada’s successful career as a “Japanese abstractionist” in New York and Noguchi’s sustained investigation of affinities between Japanese tradition and Euro-American modernism helped launch the postwar development of a distinctly Japanese modernism.

Notes

- 1 Miyata Shigeo, *Asahi Shimbun* [Asahi newspaper], October 14, 1945. Quoted in Hariu Ichirō, “Sengo no sensō bijutsu—Rongi to sakuin no unmei” [War art after the war—Debate and the fate of the works], Hariu et al., eds., *Sensō to bijutsu, 1937–1945* [Art in wartime Japan, 1937–1945] (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2007), p. 142.
- 2 Fujita Tsuguharu, *Asahi Shimbun*, October 25, 1945. Quoted in *ibid.*
- 3 *Zaibatsu* were large financial and industrial conglomerates that controlled large sectors of the Japanese economy during the imperial period.

4 The *Contemporary French Art Exhibition* (*Gendai Furansu Bijutsu-ten*), held at Takashimaya department store in Tokyo in February 1951, consisted of works from the Salon de Mai in Paris. Nineteen contemporary Japanese painters were then represented in

the international section of this annual Paris exhibition the following year. For an account of the exchange, see Segi Shin'ichi, *Sengo kūhakuki no bijutsu* [The vacuums in the post-war art of Japan] (Tokyo: Shichō-sha, 1996), pp. 60–68.

WHAT MUST “ARTISTS AS A GROUP” DO? (1953)

● Katsuragawa Hiroshi

This article was published in the inaugural issue of Konnichi no bijutsu (Art of today), a journal produced and distributed by the Youth Artists' Alliance (Seinen Bijutsuka Rengō, or Seibiren), of which Katsuragawa was a founding member. The text introduces general ideas behind the annual Japan Exhibition (Nippon-ten), the first edition of which—titled Japan through the Eyes of Artists (Bijutsuka no mita nihon no sugata)—opened at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum a couple of months after Katsuragawa's article appeared. Co-organized by the Youth Artists' Alliance and the Avant-Garde Art Society (Zen'eij Bijutsu-kai), the Japan Exhibition served as a central venue for “reportage” painting and was held until 1959. —Ed.

“I don't think that there are people who made money from the war or people who really want war—for some reason there might be people like that, but even so, the cause for war lies much deeper than in each and every individual.” Many of you may already be familiar with this simple statement that Picasso recently made to a reporter from the Associated Press, which deeply affected me in a number of ways. Picasso's new view of humanity and the insight into history that are condensed in his words possess a frightening truth and power. His view of humanity beginning as a young artist in his Blue and Rose periods indicated a sensitive understanding of the human, the kind held by an estranged petit bourgeois, but ultimately he came to grasp humanity in its essential connection to history and society, which are in themselves the work of human beings. First and foremost, we as painters must feel and understand this vibrant transformation of the history of the avant-garde within ourselves. And by doing so, we will be able to throw into relief the figure of old Picasso as the flag bearer of the modern avant-garde art movement.

Let us return to his words again.

“But even so, the cause for war lies much deeper than in each and every individual . . . ”

Why do wars happen regardless of the feeling and will of individuals? I don't think it's necessary to go into the reason here. But in the wake of Picasso's words, we would have to add, “So long as the cause of war lies much deeper than in each and every individual, then individual goodwill and determination will not be sufficient to prevent war . . . ”

Needless to say, it is a fact that our alliance is taking on a shape that far exceeds our initial expectations. Although creative work and everyday life have suffered from and are being held back by war policies, all the participating groups and individuals have gathered out of an anxiety that in isolation they will



Katsuragawa Hiroshi
(1924–2011). *Ogōchi Village*
(*Ogōchi mura*). 1952. Oil on
canvas, 38 ¼ × 57 ⅜" (97.2 ×
145.7 cm). Itabashi Art Museum,
Tokyo

not be able to grasp the cause that goes deeper than the individual, or out of a determination to break free of these conditions. The clear necessity of this situation bears out Picasso's words, and this indicates to me that a new matrix for the conception and growth of a new art in a new form is now developing.

Through group will and action, we will prevent wars that have their cause in a place far beyond the individual, and with the expressive power of the group, we will gouge out every bit of the *deep-rooted cause* that breeds war, thereby transforming old energy into new energy. In addition to taking action through group will, we must further realize our expression as a group through the expression of the *artist as a group*.

What do we have to do to reach that point?

For the past twenty years, this thing called *Nippon* has raised us,¹ *in whatever shape or form, and at the same time urged us to fight a hateful war*—we are the contradiction of *this thing that has within itself* the cause that completely ruined our youth. With the entire strength of the group, we have to gouge out this reality, our so-called *Nippon*, express it, and use this as a moment for transformation.

Nippon still maintains a powerful hold throughout its body. Simply put, because of the old, entrenched nature of feudalism and the daily life and emotion still bound up with it, we were deceived and led into war and our whole generation was robbed of its precious youth.

And again, it is trying to erect walls to contain and smother our rightful desires. But, at the same time, wasn't it this dreadful old matrix that sustained us in everything, that formed all the *categories* of our thought, and defined the character of our expression? (For better or worse, we still have to use the Japanese language.) This means that we have to confront this contradiction and everything that controls our activity with the actions, thought, and expression of the group. And by so doing, we will also, conversely, be defining ourselves. Why did past avant-garde movements in Japan fail to take root and then degenerate into modernism? In asking these questions and taking this approach, our self-criticism will become more clearly focused.

In France, there is an exhibition called *Les Peintres Témoins de Leur Temps*.² Following this example, we should organize a "theme without theme" exhibition—for instance, *Artists as the Conscience of Japan*, or we could call it *Nippon*, employing a theme without theme. Anyway, the image of the despicable war, defeat, and colonization that has the body of our generation etched onto it and the works produced out of each individual's experience of feudalism and poverty (criticism, documentary tableaux, photography) must be shown; or

works that unite and express the traditions of this matrix that has nurtured us and the everyday life of the masses (*nihonga*, crafts, ikebana, architecture, etc.); or works with new capacities that arise from the everyday life of the masses that make up the new Japan (applied arts, mass production of mural painting, art produced out of daily life, etc.). We should and need to hold an exhibition (?) that fulfills all our individual needs,³ based on our experiences and conditions up to now, and yet that, in synthesized form, would allow the expression of reality on a national and social scale that transcends the individual. I am certain that this can be realized only by our organization and movement. “A theme that is not a theme,” “noncollective group production,” “critical description and expression”: we must make these our aims precisely because they contain contradiction. In following Picasso’s words, this is roughly how I envision our alliance will express the will of the group organization. I hope to go beyond my individual thinking to fully critique society and debate a wide range of issues, and thus move further toward the concrete realization of our aims.

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Translated by Ken Yoshida

Editor’s Notes

- 1 Here, Katsuragawa pointedly uses the word “Nippon,” a more formal term for Japan than “Nihon.”
- 2 Les Peintres Témoins de Leur Temps (Painters as witnesses of their time) was an annual salon exhibition that focused on contemporary figurative painting and featured artists such as Bernard Buffet, André Fougeron, and Bernard Lorjou. The first installment was held in 1951 at the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris on the theme “Work.”
3. The question mark is the author’s.

AVANT-GARDE— TECHNOLOGY— MASS CULTURE

AVANT-GARDE MANIFESTO: A VIEW OF ART (1949)

● Okamoto Tarō (p. 3)

Have the shackles of everyday life become too heavy for the artists of Japan?

The ambiguity of the everyday has slyly caught our faint-hearted artists in the bonds of power, bringing out an escapist air as the sole sensibility in their works. Artists expose the filth of everyday life, while the viewer—who is just as sullied as I am—sheds tears of vile sympathy. This is apparently the mark of “taste” and “empathy” today.

Such people confuse life and art under the illusion that life is art. It is a way of understanding things that is thoroughly narrow and technical. And it is precisely because of this that they remain constrained by life and contaminated by it. Meanwhile, the outdated art-for-art’s-sake crowd console themselves in sentimental dreams and would have it that art is a fantasy with no relation to reality. But in fact they despise that reality, end up wounded by it, and perish. The

corpses of these people defeated by the contradictions of everyday life pile up in heaps. And yet, strangely, none of them was ever wounded by art.

Art, rather, is life. How could anyone avoid being wounded deeply by it? Being wounded by art is precisely what it is to really live, because through it one grasps the true condition of everyday life. This is what art is.

Flower—sun
A large flower garland
Trying to embrace
The infant raised its arms—
Empty!
Writhing,
Crying
The wound torn open
Will not be healed

In this snippet of an unfinished piece of mine from two years ago, the infant's wail captures pure suffering. Adults might treat such a thing with scorn, or refuse to take it seriously. But what adults know as the difficulties of the social world—the issues that prompt them to carry out little tricks that smooth the way or to dissemble and compromise their true feelings, which in fact amounts to hypocrisy and an evasion of reality—do not cause anything that deserves to be called suffering. Art is not discretion. Art's true motivation lies precisely within this senseless, this all too innocent and egocentric, pure suffering.

The world of art therefore cannot be established in reality. The wounds inflicted by art are the result of a suffering and despair that come from the fundamental contradiction between art and reality. The true artist does not daydream in vain. He burns continually with the will to realize his desires. Those irrational and unbidden desires, however, like those of the child who would embrace the sun, must always be denied reality. Artists must nevertheless stake their lives on the contradiction between art and reality, committing ever more audaciously to art and challenging reality. The more thoroughly this is pursued, the more constraining reality becomes, and ineluctably the artist will be wounded by art. Artwork is the fresh wound. But the intensity of it brings vigor to the living of one's everyday life, because what makes art productive is precisely the active dynamism of apprehending reality on one's own initiative through contradiction.

Avant-garde art is that which is conscious of this, and commits to it. But it remains self-evident that simply living life purely and subjectively does not constitute art. The pure will of the artist must be objectified, and by actually building a new form of beauty it challenges fixed and inherited aesthetics. In its liberated nature and simplicity, avant-garde art radically breaks through the feudal and closed confines of Japanese art. The old connoisseurs therefore treat it as heresy and maintain a certain distance.

They say it is "difficult to understand." But that simply proves that they are already out of touch with today's dynamic reality. The frank expression of avant-garde art is in step with the new life sensibility of the younger generation and the producing classes and bespeaks its affinity with them. If, however, we take the problem of difficulty as inherent, then art always carries an intrinsic moment of difficulty at the same time that it is universal. Art that is not difficult does not exist, and art that is not simple also does not exist. Here I should add a few words about the simplicity and clarity of the new form of expression being called avant-garde.

It has a clear and basic form, opening infinite possibilities for expression in its liberation from the technical skill of the artisan. Anyone can enjoy the pleasure of freely expressing themselves. They need only the élan and the interest in doing so. It makes no difference if it is quixotic and playful. The pedantic intellectuals and spiritualists will go in search of their themes and deep meanings, and pronounce whether or not they are enlightening. How ludicrous.

As the mode of production developed in modern society, the nature of artistic craftsmanship was sublated, wiping away its character as a trade. This process first appears clearly in Cézanne, and is present as a quintessential feature in the representatives of each subsequent generation, from van Gogh to Matisse to Picasso. We must understand that the liberated nature and simplicity of art after Cézanne, which initially appears amateurish, moves in step with the attainment of freedom in society by the people.

The claims of some left-wing theorists that Courbet, Velázquez, and Rembrandt are to be taken as technical models for Socialist Realism thus appear to be in error. If one were to force such a thing on the people, they would only despair at the demands of such technical skill. They would end up believing thereafter that artistic production was a sort of magic that only geniuses or specially skilled artisans could perform and that had no relation to them whatsoever.

Art is creation. Paintings must be made by everybody. The propositions “art is of the people” and “art is free” are absolute. Avant-garde art plunges in among the masses with an expression that is completely liberated. It eradicates the authority of esoteric technical skill that is underwritten by the power of the privileged few, and abandons the provincial confines of artisanal technique.

But it would be dangerous, and also wrong, to take these propositions too optimistically. To the contrary, freedom and simplicity are a moment of trial, as well as a touchstone for the artist. If freedom makes everything permissible, then the sincere artist will sense his limitations in the face of that enormous possibility and will surely despair at his own powerlessness. (If the suffering of the infant mentioned above is an egocentric, asocial moment of self-assertion that lacks awareness of limitation, then this is the despair of the artist made aware of his own limits and of reality.) The demonic vigor of creation lies within the movement that continues forward in spite of such despair and suffering. It is a solitary realm. The artist always faces the void alone. One must therefore recognize that there is, in addition, a moment in art that arises from the contradiction between social and asocial realms. It is a matter of apprehending both poles actively. That is, the artist stands optimistically together with the masses but nevertheless, in the face of constant crisis, hopelessly continues to make solitary leaps.

I said above that there is a difficult moment in art. Simplicity, however, is the most straightforward method for making manifest the chaos at the root of human nature, so it is here that a difficulty in understanding develops which ultimately transcends comprehension. This might be the everlasting definition of art. But what I mean to argue for is the need to seize and bring into being that moment of difficulty with utmost determination. This has been an intense dilemma for me in the past.

The intense desire of the artist to reveal himself, to convince and win the recognition of the other, is the will to power. But the stronger that will became, the taller stood the dark shadow, rising with equal strength behind it. Observing this never failed to strike fear into me. It signified dissolution into the other, my own death. I was frightened by that premonition. In the process of art making, at the same time that one desires the recognition of the other, the will

to avoid recognition also works fiercely. To put it another way, both the will to reveal and the will to avoid being revealed work as the fundamental motivations of artistic activity. This contradiction remains unchanged today. I try to make my works extremely clear, but also hopelessly will myself to transcend.

To spurn the understanding of the other is nothing but a refusal to objectify something. Here one must deliberately separate form and content. Formal criticism maintains that form governs content and content governs form. It dismisses any content apart from that which is expressed in form, and discounts the very existence of content in art that may be outside of form. But the artist's true experience says something different. Content always refuses form and exceeds it. For me a work in which there is no mismatch between form and content does not qualify as an object of artistic interest. In Japan there seem to be many worshippers and interpreters of Braque's paintings and the like, which unify form and content (here meaning that content has been reduced to form), but to me such works are exceedingly dull and do not withstand appreciation. Against this we have Picasso's works, where the mismatch of content and form produces a strong dissonance. Rather than appreciating them, it would be more accurate to say I am overwhelmed by the content which exceeds its form and forces itself upon me.

When content is unified with form it resolves into form and becomes objectified. Content can become content only by rejecting form and exceeding it. It is nothing other than the working of the artist's will. The artwork is not art. Aficionados will object to this claim, but content can be grasped from an active subject position only when the artwork (the form) is thrust aside and rejected as nothing more than an object.

I declare that the work of art does not exist for the artist, and that the *Mona Lisa*, the inkpot, and the ashtray are all objects with no distinction to be made among them. The issue is the artist's will, its drama. This drama is, of course, the dialectic, in which the artwork (object) overcomes the contradiction between reality (object) and artist (subject). The subject, which is always the motive force pushing this dialectic forward, encounters the artwork as a mere object and violently rejects it. At the same time, he spurns his own artistic-ness as but another opportunity for rejection. If he does not, art will not progress. None of the three moments of art are in themselves art, but are merely the bearers of the drama (art). One can understand the reason for things being called artwork and artist, but this is ultimately a static view, neither dynamic nor creative. Only in a realm where artwork and artist do not exist does artistic creation first become possible. This way of thinking is completely irreconcilable with the view of art as it has existed up until today. But it is the stance that the art of a new age must take. This is my view of art.

Let us now think concretely about the character of the art of the future. There is a marked tendency on the part of people who produce avant-garde art to understand it as a particular style. But for the reasons already given, this is clearly a mistake. It would not be an overstatement to say that avant-garde art does not exist as a distinct thing. A more aware approach would see that avant-garde art is nothing other than revolutionary art. It therefore has a mode and mission that is separate from the avant-garde of the past.

Around the time of World War I, the revolutionary artistic movement Dada leveled a blade of violent destruction against bourgeois morals. At the time, the movement was carried through by a group of artists who were in all ways a powerless minority in the face of an overwhelming rival. It is hard to deny that, as a result, it remained a collection of hopeless gestures, which

unavoidably took on a deep tinge of nihilism, emphasizing their own negative aspects. But today's avant-garde must face reality head-on. For that reason it is far more positive and optimistic. This affirmation and optimism, however, is born from a thoroughgoing rejection and skepticism. The reverse of this could also be said, as the two antagonists reside implacably within a single spirit. The artist must be able to withstand that contradiction.

In opposition to the nihilistic irrationalism of the Dada and Surrealist movements stood abstract art, which, in advocating purely rationalistic aesthetics, also took refuge quite naively in a one-sided optimism. (The counterbalance between rational and irrational did not arise by chance but was a moment enabled by the fundamental spirit that runs powerfully through European history. Its alternation of action and reaction, however, became far more fierce with the dawn of modernity. Up until this most recent war, the mainstream of avant-garde art, in Surrealism and abstraction, expressed that opposition in its clearest and sharpest form.) While both movements were radical, neither went far enough and both remained one-sided.

Logos must pursue its careful investigations, and subjective pathos must always burst forth explosively. The spirit of tomorrow's avant-garde art must contain both a romantic irrational passion and a thoroughly rational design, holding them together in violent antagonism. I do not imagine these heterogeneous elements blending or harmonizing. The two poles must be grasped in their separation, or, to put it more precisely, one must stake oneself on one or the other. Only that will induce the intense confrontation with the other pole. I see this as the most robust method for tomorrow's art. For the sake of convenience, in distinguishing it from the avant-garde of the past, I call this polarism. As the poles are torn further apart, the tension between them becomes inexorably stronger, and it is in that field that the fireworks burst. In those fireworks is artistic expression.

I try to realize this concretely in painting. The general idea I've developed is that of depicting the two contradictory aspects simultaneously, in their contradiction—namely, interweaving a classical, static structure, and a romantic, dynamic structure as two contradictory layers (the one centripetal, the other centrifugal and dispersing; in colors, the former gentle, the latter intense). Inorganic elements, organic elements, abstraction, figuration, attraction, repulsion, love and hate, cold and warmth, and so on and so forth, depicting them in all the contradictions which have refused unification. The result is a painting that generates an extremely intense dissonance. That dissonance must express the revolutionary present. And that will open out a new potential world of beauty never dreamed of in painting until now. Polarism is still just at its beginning, and in the future will probably become more complicated, with the degree of complexity in actual technique increasing. The question I now face is how to push this forward technically.

The concept of art that I have laid out is not a mere theoretical pursuit, but something rooted wholly in my experience. (Literary theories and theories of painting, or aesthetics and the study of art, are the matters that we usually discuss. Actual conceptions of art are quite rare. Art itself is not something that can be apprehended objectively through theory and critical spirit. I believe a conception of art cannot be founded in anything other than the lived experience of artists themselves.)

There has never been a time when artists have been forced to confront such colossal and perilous issues as they are today. We escape the fetters of old culture and attempt a hopeless leap toward a new age. We cannot be

intimidated by the likes of Matisse and Picasso, the bearers of an older generation, no matter how illustrious they are. They opened the field of art's vision in the first half of this century. But we must reject them. We must provoke even fresher and wider-reaching possibilities in art. We must overcome even our own ability as we surpass all our limits and constraints.

Our world seems filled with time. People don't know what to do with such abundance. But like a suffocating man gasping for lack of oxygen, the true artist despairs at the lack of time.

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Translated by Justin Jesty

IN FOCUS

ARTISTS' GROUPS AND COLLECTIVES IN POSTWAR JAPAN

• Ken Yoshida

In 1947, the Association of Syncretic Culture (*Sōgō Bunka Kyōkai*) released the inaugural issue of the interdisciplinary journal *Sōgō bunka*. With the group's founder, Hanada Kiyoteru, as the head editor, the publication advanced the importance of collective production (*kyōdō seisaku*), which the group set in opposition to the medium-specific and solipsistic mode they identified with wartime art. A decade later, some of the same figures—together with artists, writers, and critics such as Takiguchi Shūzō, Tōno Yoshiaki, Nakahara Yūsuke, Tōmatsu Shōmei, and Tsurumi Shunsuke—formed the Society of the Documentary Arts (*Kiroku Geijutsu no Kai*). The manifesto they issued reiterated the former group's call for transdisciplinary practices, and proclaimed that the "documentary spirit militates against the hardening of art by destroying aesthetic conventions to constantly open up new artistic territory and to revolutionize, reorganize, and expand the very strategy of art."¹ As demonstrated by these two groups, the Japanese art world during this period was driven by the desire to maintain

a fluid network of associations that would continually redefine the premise of art and reality and would stave off the static, monumental aesthetics of wartime Japan.

In 1948, a close-knit alliance developed between the Century Society (*Seiki no Kai*)—led by the Surrealist novelist Abe Kōbō and comprised mainly of writers in their twenties—and the Night Society (*Yoru no Kai*), which Hanada established with the avant-garde painter Okamoto Tarō after leaving *Sōgō bunka*. Seeking to theorize the most revolutionary means of comprehending and articulating the postwar, these groups obsessively investigated the threshold between the actual and the fantastical, the material and the psychological, using Marxism and Surrealism as frameworks. Among those who moved around in these circles were the art critics Hariu Ichirō and Kōno Yōko. Kōno was instrumental in establishing two influential postwar journals, *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook) and *Bijutsu hihyō* (Art criticism).

After the Night Society dissolved in 1949 over disagreements concerning communist politics, Hanada and Okamoto formed the Avant-Garde Art Study Group (*Abangyarudo Kenkyūkai*), designed to mentor younger artists and critics, including Nakahara, Ikeda Tatsuo, and Yamaguchi Katsuhiro. The Century Society, working with the Avant-Garde Art Society (*Zen'ei Bijutsu-kai*), had expanded its membership by enrolling visual artists such as Ikeda, Yamaguchi, Kitadai Shōzō, Katsuragawa

Hiroshi, and Teshigahara Hiroshi. With help from Segi Shin'ichi—an aspiring poet who would become an important art critic and historian—the group began to publish a series of cheaply made, palm-size pamphlets called *Seiki-gun* (Century), with the members contributing drawings, writings, and translations.

Around 1950, the younger artists began forming their own groups in order to advance their own ideas, though they maintained intimate, if conflicted, ties with their mentors. In 1951, Kitadai and Yamaguchi established the Experimental Workshop (Jikken Kōbō), which remained active for six years. Usually, however, these constellations vanished as quickly as they burst forth. Kitadai and Ikeda formed the Pouvoir Society after breaking from the Century Society, but it quickly disintegrated after only a year, due to political disagreements. Ikeda formed the Youth Artists' Alliance (Seinen Bijutsu Rengō) with Teshigahara and Katsuragawa in 1953, only to move on and establish Producers' Discussion Society (Seisakusha Kondankai) with artists Ishii Shigeo, Kawara On, and Iida Yoshikuni in 1955. Also in 1955, Hanada and Okamoto set up a new discussion group called the Society of Critics, later renamed Modern Art Research Society (Gendai Bijutsu

Kenkyūkai); Kawazoe Noboru, one of the founders of the architecture collective Metabolism, was among those who attended its meetings.²

Only traces of these brief yet intense encounters remain. Foregrounding collective strategies, the artists sought to create an open, dynamic environment. Despite their intentions, the groups often became insular. Katsuragawa once called the Century Society “misshitsu no abangyarudo,” or the “avant-garde in a locked room.”³ Others complained that the rigid and hierarchical rules observed during Night Society meetings belied the group's supposedly democratic premise. While the Experimental Workshop, Metabolism, and Gutai achieved a stability that the others did not, a spirited, collective method of engagement still lay at the heart of their practices.

Notes

- 1 Quoted in Thomas Schnellbacher, *Abe Kōbō, Literary Strategist: The Evolution of His Agenda and Rhetoric in the Context of Postwar Japanese Avant-Garde and Communist Artists' Movements* (Munich: Iudicium Verlag, 2004), p. 225. I have slightly modified the translation from this book.
- 2 Segi Shin'ichi, *Abangyarudo geijutsu: Taiken to hihan* [Avant-garde art: Personal accounts and criticism] (Tokyo: Shichō-sha, 1998), pp. 36–44.
- 3 Katsuragawa Hiroshi, “Hanada Kiyoteru to ‘Seiki’ no Kai” [Hanada Kiyoteru and the “Century” Society], *Shin nihon bungaku* [New Japanese literature], no. 447 (December 1984): 9.

A MEDITATION ON APPLES (1950)

● Hanada Kiyoteru

An artist once asked Okamoto Tarō a question that was the height of naiveté: is there ideology in apples? In response, Okamoto offered a statement that was equally naive: “I don’t know if they have ideology, but you can be sure they have some seeds.” Of course, there are different kinds of apples, and what we call seedless apples also exist in this universe, far too many to count. As Dalí so aptly proclaimed, Cézanne’s apples do nothing to whet our appetite: they are no more than one type of anti-epicurean geometric shape. And even if, due to insufficient abstraction, they retain vestiges of nature, just barely preserving something of an apple-like form, one thing we can be sure of is that they contain no seeds. Further, the Pre-Raphaelite apples to which Dalí pays

tribute, and even his own apples, are nothing more than, to use his distinctive language, “hyper-materialistic apples lent substance by physical gravity”—and like Cézanne’s apples, they surely contain no seeds. Generally speaking, even when Surrealists’ apples like Dalí’s do not show any sign of deformation and might actually appear at first glance to be the real thing, the apples themselves are never depicted; rather, their form is used to capture the raw desire of the artist in a concrete manner. Dalí felt compelled to come up with his own apples to rebel against Cézanne’s—not because he took particular issue with the apples themselves, but because he felt it necessary to oppose Cézanne’s intellect with his own instinct. These “hyper-materialistic apples” sound like something sophisticated, but ultimately they stop short since they’re nothing more than instinct trying to negate intellect under the guise of an apple, which makes it impossible to think there could ever be any seeds inside.

It’s not that I don’t respect the skepticism of Okamoto Tarō, who wanders back and forth between abstract art and Surrealism, but I can’t let his utterly naive belief that all apples contain seeds go unopposed. Some apples have seeds and others don’t. And needless to say, apples with seeds are meant for producers and apples without seeds for consumers. In the past, many artists readily abandoned abstract art and Surrealism and ended up boldly embracing Socialist Realism, which, in my view, was probably not because they discovered ideology in their apples, but more likely because they discovered that the apples had no seeds. Ultimately, it is inconsequential whether reason controls instinct or instinct overpowers reason, yet artists have never made the external world that rules over this inner world of ours their foremost concern. Of course, both Cézanne and Dalí stared long and hard at actual apples in front of them—apples that were full of seeds. But for Cézanne, these apples were nothing more than supremely ambiguous symbols of his intellect. And for Dalí, they were symbols of his instinct, albeit somewhat too clearly defined. Why didn’t they just confront apples as they are? Cézanne’s apples don’t appeal to the appetite, yet to me are no worse off than Dalí’s apples in this respect. For is it really instinct, or what Dalí calls “objects of symbolic function,” that has the power to demolish this conventionalized intellect? Wouldn’t the true destroyer be the thing itself? In other words, the apples themselves, as they are? . . .

Even though apples as they are, like instinctual apples, surpass the intellect, and no one has yet been able to completely grasp their true nature, it is utterly incomprehensible to me that almost no one today tries with any persistence to picture what that would look like. This does not mean, however, that I am advocating a return to naturalism. Cézanne’s apples, and Dalí’s apples, too, help us close in on the appearance of apples as they are. In other words, the method of avant-garde art has been used thus far to give shape to inner reality, but once we have grasped the relation between the inner and outer worlds in terms of how they are differentiated and integrated, we should once again take up the method of avant-garde art to shape external reality. If we don’t, I feel that this chance to see apples as they are may never present itself to our eyes again.

Perhaps I seem a little too fixated on apples. And this could invite criticism that while using apples to explain artistic methods is fine, a fixation on apples alone is not, since the aim of art should be to show how subject matter can promote action.

To begin with, though, I’m not just thinking of Cézanne’s apples or Dalí’s apples. Out of all the different apples, there are plenty with the capacity

to promote action through subject matter. One of the discoverers of non-Euclidean geometry, the Hungarian mathematician Bolyai Farkas, asked in his will that, instead of a tombstone, a single apple tree mark his grave, in order to commemorate three apples: the apples of Eve and Paris that had transformed life on earth to hell and Newton's apple that again raised the earth to the heavens. In some sense, Farkas, like me, doesn't regard "apples" simply as "still life" subjects and appears to have correctly understood the capacity of this subject matter to promote action. This also makes me think of William Tell's apple, which is not inferior to Newton's in the least. Tell's apple also saved the world from the torments of hell. When I think that today, as a result of developments in physics, apples are understood to follow the laws not of terrestrial gravity but of a geodesic, the shortest path between two points in curved space, Tell's apple seems fresh and far more appealing than Newton's. Perhaps we can say that Eve's apple is intellect under the guise of an apple and nothing more than a progenitor of Cézanne's apple, while Paris's apple is instinct under the guise of an apple and Dalí's apple is just one variant. If so, then we have yet to grasp the true nature of Tell's apple, and could this be the original form of apples as they really are? . . .

. . . As I stated above, the method of avant-garde art has been used to give shape to internal reality, and now we must adopt it again to shape external reality. But if the avant-gardists were to heed this wish of mine, would they be capable of depicting Tell's apple right away? Would the apple as it is show its true nature to the believers of abstract art who are enchanted by the concept of spheres, cones, and cylinders and to the disciples of Surrealism who are obsessed with the works of children, primitives, and the insane? In other words, would the artistic avant-garde attain the vision of the political avant-garde? To be sure, the artistic avant-garde would transform into the political avant-garde right then and there—that is, if they were to turn the gaze that they had directed to the inner world to the world outside. . . .

. . . The political avant-garde are those who, like the naturalists, focus unrelenting attention on the external world—not out of an interest in gazing at the world outside, but because they aim to subject it to deformation. And like abstract artists, they have hidden away behind their eyelids ideal forms that are by now no longer discernible. Moreover, like the Surrealists, they do not fear confronting the external world's irrationality, which can never be neatly resolved by intellect alone. And while remaining a part of the people, they do not dissolve themselves into the people but stand in front and lead them from a vanguard position. . . .

André Breton, who had published *Légitime défense* in 1926, was actively engaged with the world outside. He strove to be avant-gardist in a political sense as well, and was once urged by a politician to write a report on the state of industry in Italy. It was to be a survey of steel production output and other statistical data, not about ideology, but he immediately confessed that he couldn't do it, after which he shut himself up again in the inner world. This quite clearly shows that Breton was not a first-rate member of the artistic avant-garde either. It must have truly bothered him that the subject of the report was not ideology but rather steel production, because he made a point of emphasizing "not concerned with ideology" in italics, although surveying steel production would certainly have been much more interesting. If there had been a Joan of Arc or William Tell in the twentieth century, wouldn't it have been possible to immediately recognize the rise of fascism in Italy? . . .

But I seem to have digressed. Setting this idle talk aside, let me return now to my point about apples. My prediction above—that if the artistic avant-garde were to direct its gaze to the external world, it would promptly attain the vision of the political avant-garde—is a bit overoptimistic. If you are acquainted with Dalí's paintings *William Tell* [1930] and *The Enigma of William Tell* [1933] in particular, you will feel all the more certain that my prediction is off the mark. The reason is that there is not even a trace of Socialist Realism in these works. To be sure, Dalí's eye seems to be closer to Gessler's than to Tell's—closer, that is, to the eye of the official of the Holy Roman Empire who ordered Tell to shoot the apple.

In Dostoyevsky's novels, the [Friedrich] Schiller-like characters stand for naive humanists who are unfamiliar with the harsh realities of life and feverishly argue only for the right position, and perhaps I have unknowingly picked up the habit in our country of confusing characters in a literary work with the author. For some reason, I have an aversion to Schiller's work and had not even read his *Wilhelm Tell* until very recently. But all the different questions I had about Tell's apples finally led me to look at the play. And the result was something that will sound completely feeble: I was struck with total admiration for his skill. His characterization of Gessler is especially impressive. When the Zähringen family, a ruling house of nobles in Switzerland, died out in the early thirteenth century, the Habsburgs of Austria assumed control over their territory. They appointed Gessler von Bruneck as the local governor, after which he banned freedom of speech, assembly, and association and so mercilessly oppressed the people that it is still talked about today and need not be repeated here. Although Schiller, like Dalí, makes Gessler appear to be looking at the external world with a cold and heartless gaze, he more or less depicts the evil governor as a cautiously timid Surrealist who does not attempt to take even one step outside his inner world, a characterization that shows rather admirable artistic sensitivity. Gessler, for instance, has been a subject of Dalí's inordinate interest in so-called objects of symbolic function. As if possessed by something, Gessler requires that everyone bow to his hat, which he has placed on top of a pole, or he orders Tell to shoot an apple off the top of his son's head, and thus the hat is not just a hat for him, nor is the apple just an apple. In other words, this clearly shows that an object is not simply the object as it is, and that he is doing nothing more than grasping the irrational reality of his own inner world in a matter-of-fact way by means of a hat or an apple.

Let me add that it's not that I don't have any complaints about the play. What I want to see most is Tell's arrow, having left his bow, fly through the air against the wind to hit the apple right on the mark, but Schiller probably took into account the difficulty of dramatizing this scene. Playing with various techniques during it, he averts the viewer's attention from Tell to Gessler, and, as the audience is watching Gessler's every move with bated breath, he has a character suddenly yell out, "The apple has fallen!" When attention shifts from Gessler to the child, a red apple pierced right through the center is already rolling quietly across the stage.

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Translated by Sarah Allen

IN SEARCH OF THE REAL

FOR A NEW REALISM: THE MEANING OF REPORTAGE (1952)

● Abe Kōbō

The question of reportage has come to be widely addressed. It has arisen out of a demand and necessity in social reality, which has not been hitherto shaken this powerfully, but it is not without its frighteningly expedient and common aspects. Even very progressive writers, especially the proletarian literature group, hardly think about it in terms of its literary significance as a question of creative method, even though they acknowledge its political significance.

In the end, the reason is that they do not really understand the limits of naturalism and were not as serious about overcoming it as they sounded; therefore, they have failed to reach a deep political understanding of reportage literature. I would like to pursue this point while developing a theory of reportage.

Reportage is of major significance today, and it is also an important issue for literature, because the demand for reportage is the demand for realism, and art is, in essence, realism. Just as the aim of theory is not to interpret reality but to change it, art does not stop at interpreting the human soul but changes it. Realism can never come to a halt. It changes and develops with the situation. And reportage, too, will respond to the needs of the time when it is understood in terms of the theory and development of realism. Reportage is the new realism. Naturalistic depiction or an empirical account of everyday life is hardly capable of drawing out the depth of today's situation. But the advocates of the common proletarian literature do not comprehend this point. They do not understand what reality is. First of all, they cannot know if they don't know what it means to "know." At best, they can only experience phenomena. As a way for them to supersede empiricism, I would like them to first go back and start with epistemology.

As Stalin states in *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, objective reality is matter, which remains outside of consciousness. Consciousness is a product of matter and its reflection, but it is not matter in itself. To debate a new realism without closely examining the relationship between this material reality and consciousness would be practically meaningless. Empiricists think of realism as just the depiction of a worldview that is a construct of consciousness, because they confuse and fail to distinguish between reality and consciousness, or phenomenon and substance. It should be clear that this has nothing to do with realism from the standpoint of dialectical materialism or a realism that gives priority to matter over consciousness.

What is consciousness anyway?

Consciousness is the structure of language that is constructed when humans, through their act of living, create society out of the material structure called nature, and, in order to better grasp its reality, they put together language, applying it indexically to the abstract construction of laws of reality. Here, I again cite Stalin, who, in critiquing Nicholas Marr's linguistic theory, wrote of the structure of consciousness, or compared the structure of language

to geometry: "Geometry is abstracted from concrete objects, and observing them as material that has lost concreteness, it posits laws based on the relations among them not as concrete objects but as matter in general that has lost concreteness."

Accordingly, consciousness has an independent structure and is legitimately real. But it is not reality itself; as it uses language as mediation, it can be likened to a building made with architectural materials or to a cognitive sketch.

In any case, an important feature of consciousness is that it has an internal individual aspect and also a larger social and collective aspect. As Auguste Comte said, "Humanity is made up of more dead than living." Likewise, when thinking, we use the "language" of others, including the dead, and through this "language" we establish social space and time as something collective. Consciousness can transcend space, time, or experience to extend into an unknown place, future, or even the past and is capable of changing reality by probing the substance invisible to the eye. This capacity is closely related to human industrial technology. Consciousness is a necessary condition for humans and society.

Consciousness has its own law of movement and endlessly develops based on that movement, but the energy of the movement derives from material reality, an existence outside of consciousness. Therefore, no matter how hugely elaborate consciousness becomes, matter is not regulated or diminished in the least. On the contrary, it only shows its extraordinary depth. That is why we cannot pursue reality merely in the areas that have appeared to our consciousness. We must produce a method of realism that will penetrate the depths of matter unreachable by consciousness. Next, let us turn to matter.

Matter—this, however, is not matter found in natural science, or something that has an atomic structure. Physics and chemistry are each just one theoretical model of matter that has been abstractly grasped from one designated angle and reflected in consciousness. Matter that is objective reality or concrete matter and that materializes through our physical acts is meaninglessness. (Meaninglessness is commonly confused as having no value, but this confusion is due precisely to a mechanistic realism that conflates reality and consciousness. To the extent that meaning cannot exist independently of consciousness, it is just a reflection of reality, and one must consider matter as something outside of it.) Not only is matter meaningless; it is singular, unique, unstable, a spatial experience that defies or completely resists a common-sense understanding of space, and is fragmentary, never capable of totality.

If we, in this image of total reality that includes consciousness, underestimate the part that matter occupies, and regard the pursuit for or interest in it as something out of the ordinary, then ours can no longer be considered the position of a realist. Simple-minded moralists, sentimental traditionalists, and cerebral philosophers perceive this reality to be base decadence, and insist on destroying it. But they only end up exposing their blatant conservatism and opposition to progress. The structure of consciousness can, to some extent, also develop by a movement of its own, but the energy to develop, always and ultimately, resides in matter. Since consciousness is given the possibility of movement through the energy in matter unleashed through change, we can become realists who seek change by first taking up this cruel matter. Matter is infinite as well as the starting point. It is not an exception but is *everything*. It is an intense world brimming with rich and complex color. But at the same time, it is a meaningless, cold, and fragmentary world. . . .

Of course, the new is a mixture of impoverished nihilism and decadence. But isn't that reality itself? Where would we start if not from reality? We have to know reality first. Contradiction does not mean that A exists and B exists, but rather that X and Y simultaneously exist in A. Revolution drives forward together with the breeding of fascism. And this relation changes constantly, as the two engage in battle with sparks flying. What we have to grasp are the laws of this change and struggle.

Let us return to the topic at hand.

Lukács seems to have had a visceral hatred of revolutionary avant-garde art. Lenin apparently felt the same way (if you consider his attitude toward [Vladimir] Mayakovsky), but he did not try to bring this sentiment into his theory, whereas Lukács forced a theorization. He claimed that Surrealism was the basis of Hitler's Nazism and deemed Expressionism artistically and ideologically impoverished. In contrast, his high regard for the aesthetic tendencies and character of authors such as Sir Walter Scott, Balzac, and Thomas Mann can be thought of as snobbery. Aesthetic tendencies and artistic character may be wonderful, but what do we get out of gazing on them with reverence? The people are constantly striving to advance, and they would likely be proud to say, like Lenin, "I'm a barbarian" in response to such petit-bourgeois elitism.

We shouldn't be so caught up in appearances. On the basis of appearances alone, American agriculture resembles Soviet agriculture the most. It is quite possible for things that are far apart to look like one another. We need to stop relying on preconceived notions based on appearances, and examine from the inside these tendencies that your respected authors of character have lumped together in such a sweeping manner.

As the name suggests, Surrealism, for example, which was the most representative movement in this regard, took on the problem of the unconscious as a way of transcending reality or of approaching a greater sense of reality. In fact, its aim was to draw nearer to matter. Consciousness and matter oppose one another, and the Surrealists tried to show how matter under the reign of consciousness appears as a grotesque and monstrous abnormality. Because of this position, they were, of course, vehemently opposed to naturalism, and by extension psychologism, symbolism, and idealism. Their position was definitely not modernism, and in fact they rejected the modern. This was certainly not a rejection of realism but its advancement, and we should perceive it as such. But there was a huge mistake there as well. As Sartre has also pointed out, it ended in scandal. The scandal was that, notwithstanding their assertions and language, their concerns were ultimately too rarefied. Their theory was too pure to be realism. They had lost sight of everyday life and the different relationships of matter in motion. Eventually, however, Louis Aragon, Paul Éluard, Picasso, and André Fougeron emerged out of the movement, and while they, of course, severed their ties to Surrealism, they nevertheless developed certain elements of the movement in the right direction.

But why were they able to develop it? We have to grasp this stylized corpse of Surrealism, and, rather than pushing it around with disdain, examine what is right about it and how that part was able to develop. To a realist, the problem is method, not style.

They were right in distinguishing between consciousness and reality and in their efforts to discover matter. And there was progress when these people joined with the masses in the struggle against fascism, and when, as

communists, they came to understand that matter which moves is *matter which must be moved*—in other words, a change of consciousness was realized through matter.

At the same time, however, Surrealism itself, or the mistaken aspects of it, must be rejected and destroyed. There were those who capitulated to reactionary influence and became Trotskyites, converted to Catholicism, and sympathized with fascism. What is the basis for their counterrevolutionary position? It is grounded in their vacant gaze at matter, their simply gazing without attempting to touch and then, based on some vague feeling, taking the meaninglessness they saw as a pretext for nihilism.

Matter is something that cannot be fully grasped. It is infinite, appearing as a number of unfamiliar faces, one after another. But matter is never an ambiguous feeling. To onlookers, it is an anxious feeling and nothingness filled with menace. In action, however, matter may be cold and meaningless, but it is unequivocally pure and clear, a definite material resistance. . . .

So the problem of reportage must be thought in relation to these circumstances. Literature that deals with social problems is often critiqued as being weak and colorless and lacking in human portrayal. To be sure, works that competently depict society are rare in Japan, but that is because their method has been flawed, which accounts for the weakness and lack of color. This is not because these works were not able to portray human beings, but because they failed to pursue matter. It is necessary to portray human beings, but that is not necessarily the intention or the premise of literature. That is a method based on naturalism, which pits nature against the human and cannot be a solution for the portrayal of society. Of course, even naturalism can be used to communicate social problems as content. But what must concern us now is realism, and realism is not something that one simply sees; it must be something that activates movement. There was a time when it was possible for naturalism, too, to be a realism that could move people. But conditions are different today.

Reportage, or documenting as mentioned above, becomes an issue in literature due to the fundamental need to further develop realism. In order to change reality today, when revolution is shifting into the hands of the masses, reportage has been taken up as a question of new realism and has evolved into a new conception of itself, one that is obviously distinct from the reporting of common news articles. It means to grasp social reality, social significance, or rather the tense relation between social consciousness and matter. To put it differently, just as the naturalists tried unsuccessfully to solve social problems through the experiences of an individual (recently, Yamagishi Gaishi has tried to fuse Socialist Realism and the I-novel!), Surrealists would likely fail if they attempted to project social problems into the interior of the body. In Japan, many young artists are making the same mistake.

To reconceive documenting and reporting within the tense social relations of consciousness and matter is the only way to develop literature so that it can respond to today's problems. The issue of reportage should not be limited to one narrow genre of literature but, rather, is crucial for Japanese literature in general, and its addressing would breathe fresh air into this stagnant field. This can be said of art and cinema, too, not just literature. The problem has been taken up already in cinema with the documentary medium. Sasaki Kiichi has recently written that Italian Realism "is based on the rejection of the camera eye . . . that was once invented by montage" and has taken up analyzing and

restructuring this process as a direction for reportage. And Hanada Kiyoteru has argued that documentary film is a further development of animation film (as avant-garde film).

For artists and authors, this means that external, objective reality has once *again* become problematic, but only once *again*, and this is definitely not some new interest or a mechanistic extension of a naive bullshit realism. We must pass through inner reality first, and then with the eye of a materialist strengthened by the passage through the irrational as it appears in individual experience, the moving eye, the fluid and changing eye, we must equip ourselves with the techniques to grasp reality as it is. Capturing reality as such is not as easy as the naturalist would think. The world as it is seen or felt can no longer be the reality today. At the very least, it is inadequate to express a constantly changing reality.

But from the viewpoint of praxis, this is a simple and obvious problem. The eyes of those who have been trained amid struggle understand this directly. This is because their eyes are no longer the eyes of observers but eyes that organize matter for change. Matter captured by that organizing eye alone, without having passed through human psychology or emotion, must be quite beautiful and deeply moving. If they can peel away the empiricism and vulgar snobbery of their vision, then they should be able to put this into practice immediately—and to understand the new theory of reportage immediately, or at least understand its necessity.

However, those confined within the frame of the quotidian, empirical, and naturalistic will come to realize for themselves that reportage is difficult—almost an impossible task. Those of you who consider reportage to be something easy or something that depicts experience will ultimately be strangled by it, only to face the choice of either abandoning literature or dropping out. You should recognize that, far from being a trend that will serve to vindicate your position, reportage will call for your demise.

Let me repeat. Reportage is a new realism. The emergence of exceptional reportage literature will not only contribute substantially to praxis but will also invigorate Japanese literature, which is now in an impoverished state, and provide strength to strike out in a new direction. However, it is possible that the cultural demands of the masses and the development of reality have already overcome this state and have themselves, in turn, produced the possibility of the emergence of reportage literature in response to a kind of increasing colonialist pressure. Reportage is now coming to be seen as necessary from both inside and outside literature. When internal necessity and external necessity are united in practice, the method to give shape to this revolutionary reality will be born. And there, too, the road to Socialist Realism is being laid once again.

Excerpted from a text originally published as “Atarashii riarizumu no tame ni: Roporutāju no igi” in *Riron* [Theory], no. 18 (August 1952): 29–36.

Translated by Ken Yoshida

Editor's Note

- 1 The I-novel is a genre of Japanese literature that arose in the early twentieth century. It consists of confessional, autobiographical narratives written in an informal style.

IN FOCUS

THE REALISM DEBATE, 1946–1950

• Yuri Mitsuda

The “realism debate” was the first major debate of the postwar Japanese art world. It raged from 1946 to around 1950 in several art publications and coterie magazines and involved a wide range of participants arguing about what sort of realism should be put into practice.

Hayashi Fumio, a young art critic and member of the Communist Party, advocated “democratic realism” and was sharply critical of the historical perspective that Hijikata Teiichi, later director of the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, expressed in his 1941 book, *Nihon kindai yōga-shi* (The history of modern Western painting in Japan). Hayashi condemned Hijikata’s thesis that the origin of modern art in Japan was in “the pursuit of beauty per se” as advocated by ruling-class painter Kuroda Seiki (1866–1924). Hayashi preferred the “relentless pursuit of truth” in the work of bourgeoisie artist Takahashi Yuichi (1828–1894) and rejected what he saw as the excessive subjectivity and flight from reality in modern art. He demanded that artists adhere to typical Marxist aesthetics.

Hijikata responded by formulating a definition of realism based on Gustave Courbet’s assertion that both art and reality can be found in natural subjects. He advocated a subjective “pictorial reality”—found in neither Socialist Realism nor mimetic realism—in which the artist’s spirit would permeate the forms that he or she created.

Left-wing artist Nagai Kiyoshi rejected this proposition. To him, the true character

of art lay in perception. Thus, he argued that Hijikata’s favored approach was not realism and advocated a narrower definition, in which fidelity to the subject was imperative. Similarly, artist Ishii Hakutei spoke up for a naturalistic realism based in precise drawing or brushwork. Avant-garde critic Uemura Takachiyo, however, insisted on the broadest possible definition, asserting that avant-garde experimental styles were a realism attempting to depict the artist’s interior state.

The divisiveness of the realism debate was not simply a matter of different formalistic preferences. The true topic being discussed was the attitude with which the artist should confront reality and explore that reality through art.

During this period, literary critics likewise made realism the subject of their explorations. Hanada Kiyoteru, for instance, addressed issues of reportage in his writing. If we add to these examples the Realist photography movement of the second half of the 1950s, launched by influential photographer Domon Ken, we can see how important a topic realism became in the first decade or so after Japan’s defeat in the war.

Realistic depiction had been the fundamental requirement for paintings made during the war, with artists creating monumental, theatrical battle scenes at the request of the army and newspaper companies. But the question not raised then was whether or not “realism” could ever be the right term for such work. This was the question that lay behind the postwar realism debate. The debate summed up art made during the war, confronted the reality of the occupation after the war, and was integral to the process by which its participants confirmed the nature of art in a society undergoing rapid change.

ON BEGGAR PHOTOGRAPHY: THE IMPORTANCE OF PHOTOGRAPHING STREET URCHINS AND LUMPEN (1953)

● Tanaka Masao

The term “beggar photography” has become part of everyday speech in the world of Japanese photography. It is used as a catchall for photographs depicting the likes of orphans, lumpen, prostitutes, and others squirming about at the lowest level of society. But since it’s not a formal term, it’s not clear who came up with it or when. It’s likely that someone simply started using it when photographs of this sort became popular. Beginning with “art photography” and continuing with “landscape photography,” “portrait photography,” “still-life photography,” and “avant-garde photography,” there are many labels for photographs, but “beggar photography” is just a little too peculiar. It’s not the sort of term that would usually be coined. Since the subjects are indeed beggars, however, and nothing but, it’s really not strange at all for it to have come about.

Anyway, when and under what circumstances did this trend of beggar photography begin? It seems that two series published in *Camera* between 1949 and 1950—Kimura Ihei’s New Tokyo Album [Shin Tōkyō Arubamu] and Domon Ken’s City [Machi]¹—were the most immediate point of departure. As the first attempts to capture, with a sharp “lens eye,” how the lives of common people have changed in postwar Tokyo, these two series have been monumentally important for the development of Realist photography in Japan. Since both photographers took as their subjects orphans, lumpen, and prostitutes, the sorts of people one thinks of as being at the bottom of society, these series seem also to have been the beginning of the age of beggar photography. Yet to be precise, between 1947 and 1948, photographers like Hayashi Tadahiko and Akiyama Shōtarō had taken pictures representing prostitutes and others of a similar social standing in their environment around Yūrakuchō and Shinbashi. But these images, seeking as they do a certain romantic atmosphere within the decadence of postwar life, have absolutely nothing to do with later beggar photography. It would be more appropriate to consider Kimura and Domon the true point of departure for today’s beggar photography. Not only did they photograph orphans, lumpen, and prostitutes themselves, but they clarified the theoretical foundations of such photography—Realism—and have given the trend a strong push forward by guiding amateur photographers in their capacity as judges for the monthly contests in photography magazines.

It is thus that the strange age of beggar photography has arrived. First the frontispieces of photography magazines and then photography exhibitions and camera club meetings began being haunted by beggar photography. Photographing beggars has become practically synonymous with Realism. It is now at a point where a tragicomedy is being played out everywhere, with photographers being chased by beggars and threatened by prostitutes. There are even curious scenarios of magazine editors receiving letters of protest from *bijin* photographers for running images of beggars and beauties side by side.²

This unbridled craze for beggar photography, seemingly without principles, cannot go on forever. It’s only natural that criticisms of it have become stronger. For example, “It’s mere mimicry and pretty much meaningless for amateurs to photograph beggars simply because Kimura and Domon have.” And, “Where’s the importance in pointing the camera at this dark side of reality. Aren’t there brighter aspects to contemporary society?” One has started to hear these sorts of arguments frequently. Such criticisms might seem perfectly

justified on the surface. Where is the meaning in simply copying Kimura and Domon? What is the point in just photographing the dark side of society? The logic of either position seems sensible enough.

However, to state my conclusion in advance, I totally disagree with such positions and ways of thinking. Whether one is copying Kimura and Domon or not, there's a need for photographing beggars, and there's a need for turning the camera toward the dark side of society. That's what I believe and I will tell you why.

First, we should think carefully again about the situation at the time Kimura began to shoot the photographs for *New Tokyo Album* and Domon took the pictures for *City*. It's hard to believe that either of them began his series on the basis of a perfected conception of Realism. It was their camerawork that focused directly on the changes in common people's lives after the war, and it's hard to believe that either had a full understanding of and conviction in Realism, or were already grounded in it from the beginning. I think the strength of their camerawork came from a simple interest in the way people live.

But from this interest, as these series progressed, the two photographers gradually began to feel the strong need to represent the "human being" from a different perspective. With their "lens eye" focused sharply on the people, what captivated these photographers was the "human being" as a living being in all its interesting aspects. Human beings do not exist in isolation, but rather within relationships with one another. From this seemingly obvious fact, the artists gained a fresh feeling for their subjects. The new understanding became part of their conscious working method, and they began to realize that you cannot depict "living human beings" without showing "how the human being lives in society linked with other human beings." Both Kimura and Domon have had long careers and have photographed countless people, but it was only with these series that they became truly aware of how humans can only really be captured in relationship to society. To try to give photographic form to the "human being" on the basis of this awareness is clearly Realism.

What must be recognized here is that *New Tokyo Album* and *City* were created after the photographers began to feel the urgency of representing the "human being" in this new way—in other words, at the moment when they clearly recognized the nature of Realism. And like the related photographs that follow, this *theme* is very much at work in them.

It is entirely possible that, as the photographers' thinking changed, what was at first photographed for its "genre interest" was then photographed for its "human interest." *New Tokyo Album* and *City* initially aimed to capture the changes in daily life after the war. Kimura writes this at the beginning of *New Tokyo Album*: "The sights and sounds of Tokyo these days I find beautiful and enjoyable one and all. The question of how to approach these things, that is the work I would like to continue in *New Tokyo Album*." These words clearly indicate that his camerawork was inspired by a "genre interest." Accordingly, the early such series by both Kimura and Domon are dominated by photographs of the theatrical storytellers in Asakusa, couples in the square in front of the Imperial Palace, subway newspaper sellers, Ginza shoe shiners, residents of shantytowns in the city's outskirts, and similar representations of the daily life and customs of different human environments. Then, as the repertoire of their camerawork gradually expanded, and they began photographing subjects one rung farther down the social ladder, like orphans, lumpen, and prostitutes, they no doubt started to feel the meaninglessness in looking on the human environment simply

with a “genre interest.” They felt sharply that if they were unable to penetrate the society behind these people’s wretchedness, the society that was the direct source of their wretchedness, or how that society was connected to their way of living, and to make those insights part of their own thought and social views—if they were unable to capture their subjects with human feeling and from a human point of view—then they would be unable to depict orphans, lumpen, or prostitutes as “human beings.” A camera that simply captures a lumpen’s reality as is, without fabrication, cannot be said to have depicted the truth of that reality. In such a case, between the camera and the lumpen there exists only a mechanical realism. Only when the artist’s thought and social views are carried through the mechanism of the camera and put to work in the framed image has a true reality been depicted, and only then can photography connect with artistic sentiments. It was here that these two photographers mastered step number one of Realist theory: realizing that realism in art is rooted in the artist’s own way of thinking and social views.

It is of significant interest that Kimura and Domon, two of Japan’s greatest photographers, had their eyes first opened to realism by photographing orphans, lumpen, and prostitutes and the wretchedness of their reality. Their earliest so-called beggar photographs expose these people’s wretched realities, and through this exposure attempt to express the instability of society. But as the artists made firmer steps along the path to Realism, their way of thinking and social views took clearer form in their photographs, and their work became more heavily colored by their individual personalities. Works like Domon’s *May Day* (Shūdan Foto Exhibition, 1952) and his *Demonstration by the Government and Public Workers Union [Kankōrō demo]* (JPS Exhibition, 1953) have made a significant step forward from showing the reality of the down-and-out, focusing attention on class struggle and offering a sharp critique of reality from the standpoint of labor. These represent one stage in the development forward from the theory of beggar photography to Realism.

To repeat, Kimura and Domon became aware of realism through beggar photography, and by pushing ahead along that path arrived at a higher Realism. It is imperative for artists who support Realism to think about this process of development. This is precisely the point I wish to emphasize. If you are a copier or epigone of Kimura or Domon, that’s fine. The important thing is to take as many beggar photographs as you can, because in doing so you might find the impetus to make realism truly your own. One must go through that process at least once in order to correctly photograph the reality of contemporary Japan. Why must one look at the dark aspects of reality? There is nothing more meaningless than such a criticism. Surely, anyone with healthy vision and reasonable judgment will keenly feel that contemporary Japanese reality is dark. To overlook those human beings who live unmistakably in darkness and look only at the superficial brightness—is it not important to see how that itself is meaningless?

In one of his recent monthly photography reviews, Domon said, “I’m fed up with these feelingless, content-empty, carbon-copy beggar photographs. I feel like you all should just take a leap and try taking *bijin* photographs. I would love it if you took your realist vision and mode of representation and used it to break open that tired genre.” However, this is only a criticism of those nonrealists and antirealists who are slaves to the outer form of beggar photography, not of beggar photography itself. The proper course for artists who really want to achieve Realism is to begin with beggar photography and proceed from there

to a higher level. Copying *bijin* photographs is totally meaningless, but copying beggar photographs has significant meaning.

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Translated by Ryan Holmberg

Editor’s Notes

- 1 Kimura’s New Tokyo Album, consisting of ten images, was published in *Camera* from July 1949 to May 1950. Domon’s City comprised six images and appeared in the magazine between October 1949 and July 1950.
- 2 *Bijin*—or “beautiful women”—photography was a distinct category of work, like still lifes or landscapes, that emerged out of similar genres in painting, illustration, and printmaking.

THE PROBLEMS OF MODERN PHOTOGRAPHY (1953)

● Ina Nobuo, Kimura Ihei, Watanabe Yoshio, Kamekura Yūsaku, Tanaka Masao, and Domon Ken

Camera: At the end of this year’s Ars Photography Annual, there was a transcription of a roundtable on “The Artistic Qualities of Photography.” The response was huge, with many people writing in saying that, after having read it, they now know what photography really is, and others saying now they don’t know. Today, for those amateur photographers who don’t understand, I was hoping we could clarify this issue a bit. . . .

. . . I think readers can be aligned with two general camps. One camp contends that photography should emphasize the mechanical character of the camera, and the other says that the camera is a means no different from the painter’s brush. Domon and Kamekura belong to the latter side, while Kimura has maintained, like the last soldier left standing, that subjectivity ends when one presses the shutter release, and everything after that is the world of objectivity, the world of the camera’s mechanism. . . .

Ina Nobuo: Both sides are in agreement about the importance of finding a theme or subject matter, so there’s no issue yet at that point. The question comes after that. Which side do you put greater weight on: that of the human element or that of the mechanism? . . .

Kimura Ihei: When I take a photograph of a person or whatever, once I see the print, it always has to be an image of that person or subject. That much I can say because I approach my work from a documentary and journalistic viewpoint. . . .

Watanabe Yoshio: Maybe we can think about it this way. Even with the same brush, different people will have a different touch, and the way they put paint down will be different. Even if they’re painting the same person, they’re going to make completely different pictures. In photography, too, depending on the particular pictorial sense of a cameraman and the way he sees things, there are going to be differences, aren’t there? Kimura’s Tanaka is going to be different from Domon’s Tanaka, although we know in each instance that it’s Tanaka—that’s the point I want to make.

Kamekura Yūsaku: In painting, individual differences are great, but in photography they're small. That's because the mechanism comes into play.

Kimura: That's it. That's exactly what I have been saying.

Kamekura: In either case you take a picture, but the product is going to be different depending on the way Kimura sees Tanaka and the way I see Tanaka through the lens. That's where the issue is. If we're all shooting Tanaka, and if from that point it's just a matter of the mechanism, then everybody's Tanaka should be the same. If Kimura wants to capture the Tanaka he sees, then Kimura has to carry that vision through to the end. In the case of a stone, for Kimura to fully capture however he sees that stone, his mind has to be involved until the very end. . . .

Kimura: I've given it some thought, and I guess I just don't understand what any of you are talking about [*laughter*]. However much life experience I may or may not have, after I press the shutter release, I'm nothing.

Tanaka Masao: When you talk about what happens after pressing the release, do you mean specifically in the darkroom?

Kimura: After releasing the shutter, it's all science.

Kamekura: But at the moment he releases the shutter, the photographic process becomes possessed by Kimura. Can't we think about it like that?

Kimura: Look, I am the one pressing the release, so at that point I'm still there.

Tanaka: The act of pressing the button itself is not so important. The question is who is doing the pressing.

Kimura: When a photograph is actually being made, it's through physical processes, so the role of the mechanism is much greater. . . .

Watanabe: Kimura, when you take a photograph of Tanaka, the question is whether or not the Tanaka you are thinking about appears. If it doesn't, then it's still Tanaka, but it's missing your own subjectivity and personality. The Tanaka you wanted to capture won't be in the print or the final work. If your Tanaka does come out, then doesn't that mean your own subjectivity is there? The issue is whether or not what you wanted to capture is there.

Kimura: In order to capture Tanaka, I might release the shutter any number of times. But each time Tanaka is the one who's captured. There's nothing of myself. The more I pursue Tanaka, the more times he is the one captured in the photograph. . . .

Domon Ken: I wonder if we should be clearer about the difference between painting and photography. The question of the mechanism is, I think, the central issue—the camera as a tool, and the brush as a tool. As for me, I don't think the mechanism of the camera itself is an essential issue. Arguing about how a Nikkor lens is better than a Canon Serenar, discussing the technical differences between the two, putting them through close tests, and so on, that's a separate



Domon Ken (1909–1990). *Children in Kōtō, Tokyo, Kondō Isami and Kurama Tengu (Kōtō no kodomo, Kondō Isami to Kurama Tengu)*. 1953. Gelatin silver print, 11 × 14" (27.9 × 36.6 cm). Ken Domon Museum of Photography, Sakata

issue. In general, for cameras there's no need to be concerned about the mechanism. . . . As instruments, a camera and a brush are both types of tools or means, and to me there's no difference between them. Because you're a photographer, you use a camera. Because you're a painter, you use a brush. A sculptor uses a chisel. They're only different as tools of expression, as means. There's not really that much of an essential difference. . . .

Kimura: This is not the case with painting, but in photography, whether it's Kimura or Domon, the person making the picture is not part of the picture. If that were not the case, then photography would not have its universality or its social qualities. . . .

For example, Ina has brought a photo album by Ogawa Isshin, a Meiji-period photographer, titled *Ochanomizu* [after the Tokyo neighborhood]. The photographs show us what Ochanomizu was like decades ago. We see photographs, not Ogawa Isshin.

Ina: We see both.

Kimura: For people who don't know who Ogawa Isshin was, which is most people, they see an old photograph of Ochanomizu. No one thinks of Ogawa Isshin. . . .

Tanaka: There are all kinds of photographs, right? There are documentary images of a plain and undeniable reality that could have been taken by anyone, and there are pictures in which someone wants to express himself. I think a photograph taken because someone wants to express himself is qualitatively a different kind of photograph.

Domon: Expressing one's subjective viewpoint—I think this phrase is misleading. There are works that are made out of the desire to produce a subjective viewpoint of one's very own. We can see these attempts at subjective expression in so-called salon pictures. The issue is not whether or not one is trying to express himself. The photography of Kimura Ihei, being that of an individual cameraman, will have his subjective viewpoint regardless. It's wrong to think of it as a matter of expression.

Kimura: I never think about expression. If somehow I did express myself, that would be strange.

Domon: You might not try to express yourself, but there's still always something that belongs to you, Kimura Ihei. Even if it's the same Tanaka Masao, if I take the picture, clearly it's going to be different.

Tanaka: That's the essence of art.

Kimura: [*points at Domon*] Akashi-chō takes photographs of children in Kōtō ward,¹ and can turn his camera to subjects that he can criticize on the basis of his philosophy and personal experiences. But what he photographs is the objective reality of life. At that point, there's no Akashi-chō. It's just the children of Kōtō ward. If Akashi-chō photographs [the actress] Mizutani Yaeko, no one would look at it if Akashi-chō himself appears in it, like a ghost in a spirit photograph. They look at it because it's Mizutani Yaeko. With painting, however, there are cases in which the self can be seen. . . .

The camera should be directed at social reality, used to capture people and their daily lives and developed in a direction that makes it superior to the conventional art of painting. It's only at that point that the mechanical function and objectivity of photography appears. This is the world of photography. Call it realism based on photography's mechanism, or whatever you wish. This is the social mission of photography, and in this sense the photographer does have to have a philosophy when pointing his camera at reality. If he turns toward things that are simply beautiful, his work might lose to Umehara Ryūzaburō's paintings. But if he points his camera at objective reality, photography will win.

[*Momentary silence*]

Watanabe: I'm not sure how I feel about this idea of "winning."

Kimura: It will win. It will also have literary qualities. For the first time, the photograph will also have artistic qualities. It's because painting has been dragged along by Greek aesthetics that things are the way they are. That's why photography is looked down upon. Painters have been saying the same thing for ages. Photography should ignore all that; it should build something on the basis of photography alone, saying this is this, that is that, and should stand up as photography.

Ina: Regardless of whether it wins or not.

Kimura: Regardless is fine. . . .

Camera: Kimura, in last year's roundtable for the *Ars Annual*, you made the argument that Edward Weston's photography was not realist.

Kimura: No, it's not. Neither Weston nor Man Ray is a realist. That Man Ray photograph with the nail on top of the apple, that's definitely not realism. . . .

[In his photograph of insect tracks in the sand] Weston was trying to express his feelings as a man of the civilized world. Through his subject, he was using the camera to try to show beauty, so I am not sure if I would call that realism or not. The feeling that something is beautiful, and trying hard to capture that—I respect that he was able to do so to such a high degree with photography, but I don't think it's realism.

Kamekura: I don't think it has to be an image of a person lying around to be realist photography. I think the tracks of an insect are fine.

Kimura: My position is that one has to run up against actual society, record it, and wrestle with capturing human resistance and passion. That's realist photography. . . .

Tanaka: In twentieth-century realism there's the idea that, being human, one can think about objects only as a social being. There is also an emphasis on the self as something isolated, even within society. Weston is trapped within that isolation. As for Bresson, Eugene Smith, [Margaret] Bourke-White, they take photographs as realists out and about in society.

Domon: Weston is definitely not a realist. There might be a difference between a salon picture that captures how the clouds look and Weston's photographs of insect tracks in the sand dunes. But leaving behind society or people and the world and going out into the sand dunes to shoot insect tracks, and trying to discover humanity or loneliness, that's definitely not the path of realism. . . .

Ina: Here's the situation with Weston. He had this to say about living in the world of realism: "If out in the world I find the abstraction I am so interested in, then how can I overlook it, how can I pass it by?" In the 1930s, when Weston started going in the way of realism in his art, there were two impulses in his work: one directed toward abstraction and one directed toward realism.

Domon: There's a huge difference between Weston's work and salon pictures, even though he's shooting abstract forms and dunes and insects, because he's just barely making use of the camera's mechanism.

Tanaka: Salon photographs might not have the potential to evolve, but Weston's works are always a part of this world. In that sense, they have a social quality.

Kimura: I wouldn't call it social. Rather, he's a lonely poet. In other words, he's not a poet trying to fight the world through photography. He's a recluse [*laughter*]. . . .

Camera: In that case, what do you think about the issue of having politically engaged themes and subject matter in photography?

Kimura: I think it's very important. If you think that anything is OK, then you end up like Weston or Man Ray.

Ina: I don't think it matters.

Kimura: I think one has to show a clear commitment to a struggle in actual society.

Kamekura: I don't think it makes a difference. There's the position that Kimura is talking about, and the social standpoint that came out of the realism of nineteenth-century naturalism. There are definitely those two perspectives. But I don't think they cover everything. I am not saying that what Weston is doing is new, but there's too much of *something* there to just dismiss it. I think a photographic realism can develop out of what he's doing. He's raising questions about

representation. If you think about social realism as not just simply a question of subject matter but also as a method of representation, then pushing realism forward becomes an issue of how one sees things.

Yet another position might maintain that the subject matter doesn't matter, that we should think about new means of expression, about a realism based in new methods. This conflicts with the other position. Some people stress one over the other, and some people are OK with two or even three kinds of realism. I'm OK with two or three. I think it's fine that there are artists who insist that such and such a position is bad, only their positions are correct, but negating someone else's position completely—I think that's a little narrow-minded. . . .

Domon: Ultimately, it's not necessary to think of realism too deeply. I think what one should do is take it as far as possible in a certain direction to make it more effective and give it greater historical and social meaning.

Ina: I think so, too, but Weston is a starting point, not an end point. He arrived after Steichen and then Eugene Smith came along after him.

Domon: Weston has taught us about the importance of opening up new possibilities of expression. For that reason, he's important. However, I think it's too bad that his influence has been limited to those photography fans who are into that sort of work. We should see that he is telling us to go forward in order to raise and extend the social and cultural worth of photography.

Kimura: That's why Weston is art for art's sake.

Domon: I think you're right in a sense, but it's also the reason that we must strongly emphasize the path of social realism. I think he'd agree with that.

Excerpted from a roundtable originally published as "Kindai shashin no mondai" in *Camera* 46, no. 4 (October 1953): 65–73.
Translated by Ryan Holmberg

Editor's Note

1. Akashi-chō, a neighborhood near the Tsukiji fish market in Tokyo, is where Domon's residence and studio were located.

DEPICTING "THINGS," NOT "IDEAS" (1954)

● Saitō Yoshishige, Tsuruoka Masao (p. 2), Komai Tetsurō, and Oyamada Jirō¹

The following is an abridged transcription of a roundtable held on the occasion of the exhibition Abstraction and Fantasy—How to Understand Nonrealistic Painting (Chūshō to Gensō—Hishajitsu kaiga o dō rikai suru ka), which took place at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (December 1, 1954–January 20, 1955). —Ed.

Journalist: The National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo is now holding an exhibition called *Abstraction and Fantasy* to commemorate the first anniversary of its founding. Overall, the exhibition gives us a condensed view of the various issues that are being mediated by the so-called avant-garde artists of Japan today. One viewer had this to say, "Until now, I thought that artists who were

avant-gardist just did whatever they wanted, working freely and with abandon. But after seeing these works together in one space, I am surprised to find that is not the case, and I can't help feeling that they are working within a single large framework." What would you say to that? . . .

Saitō Yoshishige: Because the artists are taking the same reality as the basis for their work, the point of departure is the same regardless of who it is, and that's why I think we can see an overall framework. In any case, I think it's very hard to step outside of it. That's what artists all over the world are struggling to do.

Tsuruoka Masao: So you're saying that the "reality is the same." To me, that's where the problem is. If you really think about it, there is actually a huge difference between what we call our reality and what's considered the reality of the West. That's the issue. I think there's a problem with working "under the influence of artwork from the West." Artists aren't starting from their own reality. It's fine to approach things using this or that method, but not many artists are taking their own reality as a point of departure. . . .

Komai Tetsurō: I feel that, in the end, whether a work is abstraction or fantasy, it has to have a sense of reality. Or let's say, it's all the more necessary.

Tsuruoka: Yes. How can I put this? Generally speaking, painting in Japan doesn't depict *things*. Not tangible *things*. I'd say that painting depicts an *idea*, an experience, the intangible. Even though *ideas* should be expressed with and through *things*, *artists forget about things in trying to depict ideas*. First and foremost, painting should be expression with and through things. Paintings on signboards, for instance, convey *ideas*. They never depict *things*. We are basically talking about something similar.

Saitō: That applies to painting in Japan in general. It's devoid of things. But in Europe, painting is about depicting the real, and that's the basis of representation from the very start. It is always about a reality that can be seen with the eyes. In the East, though, paintings don't depict reality, but rather try to capture a mental state. It's a kind of customary practice that remains today. And that is where Japan is the weakest—in this sort of thing. So if you put *yōga* [Western-style painting] and *nihonga* [Japanese-style painting] side by side and look at *nihonga* in the same way as you look at *yōga*, *nihonga* looks very weak by comparison. And that's because the angle or point of view is fundamentally different.

Tsuruoka: That's the point Komai made earlier. Those works, whether they are abstract or Surrealist, all need a greater sense of reality. That's what it comes down to. And by what means do we express a sense of reality? The only way to do that is with things.

But even when you look at realistic paintings, you'll see that they are not depicting things. They're about ideas. The artist is depicting an idea that has to do with the self. Traditionally, painting in the East doesn't represent things. It's always been an expression of the spirit or mind. The clearest example of this would be something like *nanga* [literati painting]²—if it's too realistic and explicit, it's a bad painting. And, to the extent possible, keeping a certain distance is considered good. Eastern painting tries to move away from things. It's painting in the West that draws closer to things.

Saitō: And so that appears to be the major weakness of painting in Japan.

Oyamada Jirō: It really shows when you make paintings like that. Hot passion alone does not work. Unless there's a cool passion, too, then that whole realm of abstraction is totally abandoned before it can ever become focused and concentrated. Everyone just gives up in the middle. And that makes the work superficial.

Komai: So they are not depicting things, but their mental state becomes objectified as a thing, right?

Saitō: That's right. It has to be expressed as a thing.

Komai: That's right—as matter. But what's called abstract painting seems to signify something Eastern.

Saitō: No, I think it's the opposite. There are those who say that abstract painting is something Eastern, but to me there's an essential difference. As I see it, abstract painting moves from the mind toward things. But Eastern painting isn't mediated by things. On the contrary, it moves from things to ideas or something mental. So I think it's quite the opposite. . . .

How should I put it? The modern mind, after all, really emerges out of positivism, and it is not clear whether we've completely put that behind us. The irrational is supposed to be premised on the existence of the rational, but in our case the irrational exists on its own as nothing more and even turns into something mysterious. I have to think that Eastern cultural practices are to blame. I'm referring to the feudalistic elements that haven't undergone a complete revolution. What we call a rational mentality—I'm constantly reminded of how insubstantial it is.

Tsuruoka: As Komai mentioned earlier, in making paintings, we seem to be too reliant on a sense of cultivation—that is, on Western standards of what it means to be cultivated. How much of that is really a part of ourselves? Besides what we think and say, how much of it makes up our spirit? So the question is: to what extent are we living in reality? We are not grounded in our own reality. We need to probe what is around us—around our immediate selves and in our larger environment. I brought this up earlier, but in Western countries people lead their own well-defined lives as individuals. As human beings. Looking at life over there, it doesn't seem as absurdly chaotic as life in Japan. Once you enter that society, there's a certain life that you're compelled to lead. It's well defined and ordered. Our reality isn't like that, though. Here, there are people eating in the streets and sleeping there during the day, too. You trip over them while walking—that's reality. Reality in the West isn't anything like that, so to what extent does it have value for us? Working with this way of thinking means starting more from our own chaotic reality; it doesn't have to be a neat, clean start, but what's the point if we don't evoke our own reality? . . .

Journalist: Let's return to the subject of what is shared by the artists in the *Abstraction and Fantasy* exhibition. You have all touched on the fact that these paintings don't depict things, that the paintings are made with an established sense of cultivation, and that the paintings are not grounded in a rational men-

tality. This indicates a shared way of addressing painting. So what position should be taken or what is the approach to be taken in the making of the work vis-à-vis these problems? And what sort of resistance emerges that should be overcome? These are questions I'd like to ask you as artists.

Saitō: Let me address the point about paintings made with one sense of cultivation. We can agree that, to a certain degree, standards of European culture are involved in their making. I think that's somewhat necessary as a way of opposing feudalistic elements in Japan. And it doesn't bother me that confusion is part of the process. So I'm not that surprised by what was said earlier. But we need to ask ourselves what can come out of this confusion, so it would be good to more clearly articulate the present weakness that we see in this painting.

Komai: I mentioned "a sense of cultivation" earlier. To ensure there's no misunderstanding, let me confirm that I didn't use "cultivation" in a positive sense. Rather, to put it simply, I used it to mean "imitating" or something like that.

Saitō: Yes, I understand that.

Komai: A true sense of cultivation would be something positive.

Saitō: In any case, the act of painting is grounded in something different. It is not grounded in an authentic reflection on the production of painting but rather on a superficial stylistic concern.

Tsuruoka: I brought up the notion of "things" earlier, and what I said applies to my own work as well. The necessity of expressing things—I feel this very much in my work. By things, of course, I don't mean things that actually exist, but things as they exist in painting.

Saitō: In trying to get a clearer notion of "things," we might note that in realistic painting the thing is that which correlates to the object that is painted. In other words, the thing is that which is copied. But this new thing that you've just mentioned exists only in painting—nowhere else. It's a thing that appears on the picture plane as a statement that the artist has made a thing.

Tsuruoka: Yes. And it's a way to express color, composition, and form with clarity.

Saitō: [Ben] Nicholson's painting is abstract, but I'd say that it's very much a thing—a thing in which color has been transformed into a quality. One senses that it's a thing with the same value as something in nature. It's not at all a fantasy. What's created is the sense of a material object. . . .

Tsuruoka: About my earlier remarks on things. I brought up the issue of our humanness as the ultimate problem—a humanness from which the spiritual is eliminated and taken to its very limit. This has been a personal issue of mine. I've utterly eliminated what I consider to be my own spirituality. You could say that ultimately the human is left in an abyss, as a thing, as an inorganic existence without a spirit, or simply an organic existence on par with other animals. In my own thinking, I want to take this as far as possible, to push the limits of my own existence. I've adopted a certain method, or tried to pursue this to its

limit, to the point of life or death or the brink of collapse. It's taken me to the universal question of the organic or the inorganic, and what I perceived there was this ambiguous state of our existence. As human beings, we float around in a void under the sway of that spirituality, while carrying on with an air of superiority. To the extent that I can, I want to pull the human down from this ambiguous position to a point where there is no difference from other things. And having done so, I think I'll be able to manifest that in my own work. That is, as a thing. . . .

The situation I'm talking about is akin to when, for example, someone is thrown into a fire, which would be considered an act of extreme violence. I'm interested in the situation that occurs then. At that time, it's not a matter of the spiritual or anything like that, but there is something we can derive by really pushing such limits. Having said that, it might seem that I'm doing this in my own work, but I'm not. What I do is look at life and then the body—that's what it comes down to. I want to grasp something in the human condition that arises when we feel totally defeated or under such pressure that we lose the capacity for thought. But then, that is not all. It would be meaningless if I went that far and didn't come back.

Excerpted from a roundtable originally published as "'Koto' dewa naku 'mono' o egaku to iu koto" in *Bijutsu hihyō* [Art criticism], no. 26 (February 1954): 13–24.
Translated by Sarah Allen

Editor's Notes

- 1 Sugimata Tadashi also participated in the roundtable, but does not appear in this abridged version.
- 2 *Nanga*, also known as *bunjinga*, was derived from the Southern School of Chinese paintings. Made by people who considered themselves "literati" or cultured intellectuals rather than professional artisans, the works in both genres feature expressive brushwork and minimal color and generally portray Chinese landscapes.

MODERNITY AND TRADITION

AN INTRODUCTION TO TRADITION (1955)

● Okamoto Tarō

THE RICKSHAW IS A GOOD THING

It was quite a while ago now that I happened to hear a recorded radio broadcast of a former rickshaw driver recounting his bygone dreams in a gruff, gravelly voice. It went roughly like this:

"The rickshaw, for sure. There's nothing better in the world, you know."

"So what's so great about rickshaws?" asked the interviewer.

"Just look at those cars. First of all, they have no character, no feeling. When you think about it, the old days were pretty good, really. A moonlit night, a group of fine young ladies riding in the back, the feeling of picking up speed—that was something, something really good.

“And in those days, when I was looking for some narrow street, since I was pulling the cart by hand, I could just enter any alleyway and ask around. But try doing that in a taxi! Ha! Ah, man-powered’s the best in the world, after all!”

He was practically bubbling over with enthusiasm. But when he was asked, “So what do you do now?” the punch line came:

“Oh, I’m a taxi dispatcher out in front of Nakano Station.”

I doubled up with laughter. There, before my eyes, was conjured the image of those lousy critics who, having donned the mantle of traditional artists, now take a position of authority, and—excuse me for saying so—it amused me to no end.

Until quite recently, they, too, were essentially pulling rickshaws. But with the changing times after the war, they seemed to have lost themselves, gazing up at the moon and absorbed in their emotions, all the while working as taxi dispatchers out in front of some cultural train station. In fact, most recently, in keeping with the spirit of the times, it even seemed they might be capable of pulling out their battered old rickshaws once again.

What charmers they are. I don’t take issue with their attitude at all, except when they advance their cause under the authority of the great banner of Culture. That is when it starts to become unacceptable. When it comes to rickshaws, almost anyone will smile and walk right by. But when it has to do with Buddhist sculpture from Nara, or the Katsura Imperial Villa, or Noh theater, people aren’t smiling anymore.

Of course, tradition is our blood and our bones. If only it were really the joy of our lives today and the motivating force in our everyday world; how wonderful that would be.

However, the truth of the matter is that “tradition” commonly evokes, unfortunately, the exact opposite. Today, when the new generation hears mention of tradition or the classics, frankly, it sounds curiously authoritative and pedantic and complicated. It is gloomy, dark, heavy, faded, and damp, like the stone weights we use for making pickles.

Perhaps, if they had studied hard and educated themselves, deepening their knowledge, then it might not have been that way. But if they don’t intend to make the effort, or else don’t have the ability to do so, then, well, it seems not fated to be. Indeed, even quite intellectual individuals have lost their bearings and been blown about every which way by pachinko, mah-jong, popular song, and strippers.

Surely, no people more than the Japanese have placed such importance on tradition while at the same time losing sight of it in their own lives. Of course, it is inconceivable that this is the true nature of the classics themselves. It only seems so because the traditionalists are the sole distributors and are forcing their wares on the public. They combine the aficionado’s intoxication with a seemingly serious theoretical admiration for the classics, a posture that is mistaken for the actual inherent nature of the classics themselves.

Take, for example, the quote: “The moment I stand before the Kudara Kannon, a mysterious melody seems to ramble through the ravine. Inside the dimly lit temple hall, the flickering flames rise up in a blaze of white, and when we approach, they seem to solidify into eternity, leaving us no recourse but to fall completely silent. I dare say the flickering of those white flames was a dirge for the suffering of the Asuka people” (Kamei Katsuichirō, *Yamato koji fūbutsushi* [The ancient temples and natural features of Yamato, 1943]).¹ Such nonsense is unforgivable. As ordinary “non-Asuka,” twentieth-century folk, we cannot deny that it was so, and some faint-hearted souls are bound to be intimidated.

Without question, the Kudara Kannon is exceptional. However, such reminiscences of “eternal flames springing up from the earth” or “the divine figure quietly awakening within me a long lost urge for prayer” produce only a vivid impression of the writer’s own pious countenance and fail to carve out an image of the most important thing, the Kannon figure as an entity of substance. In short, they amount to nothing more than flowery prose, and end up suggesting only that those who possess such talents can be happy. This doesn’t seem to have anything to do with tradition.

Some critics are dramatic enough to make you tremble with fear. Referring to the middle gate of Hōryūji, one particular volume on tradition begins ominously: “Within this space there is a certain air of mystery.” It continues, “Going straight along this path, one encounters the central pillar. When one goes in, the gate seems at once to allow entry and to deny it. Although it is a gate, it is closed. Although it is an entrance that invites, it rejects. . . . It seems to be saying, ‘I am a gate, but I cannot allow you to enter.’” It goes on, “This is a gate, but not simply for an open passageway. It also suggests closure. While inviting, it also rejects” (Takeyama Michio, *Koto henreki: Nara* [Pilgrimage to the ancient capital: Nara, 1954]).²

When I read this, I was completely astounded. What kind of gate is this scholar familiar with? I wondered. Gates aren’t normally associated with regular open passageways; any kind of gate would, of course, “suggest closure.” Similarly, any gate would have the dual function of “inviting” and “rejecting.” That is what a gate is. (The need for such explanation is ridiculous!)

These attributes are not anything unique to the esteemed middle gate of Hōryūji. They are also found with the gate to the home of someone you visit in order to borrow money, or with the entrance that a burglar tries to sneak through when stealing into a house, and so on. There is no denying that each presents the relevant parties with this very same heightened tension between invitation and rejection. When a distinguished scholar states that this is something that he has discovered as a result of standing for a long time in front of Hōryūji, however, it assumes an aura of tradition and begins to sound as though it has taken on some kind of deeper meaning.

This tone is maintained throughout. To the reader, it is like being lectured from the scripture. There is no choice but to think that whatever the writer is discussing must be something impressive.

So what kind of tradition can be born anew from that? With that kind of posturing, the classics just end up becoming more and more abstract. The more tradition is paraded about and exalted academically, the deeper the unfortunate split with culture becomes. In other words, our own tradition ends up becoming more and more like something that belongs to some other people entirely. . . .

OUR GREAT AND SPLENDID LAND

Art criticism relates purely to value. It discovers value and in this way creates it. Therefore, true artists are also necessarily critics. They absolutely cannot, however, be connoisseurs. To be an artist is not only to have no interest in such a thing but also to be incapable of having any interest in it.

Nevertheless, for a long while now, connoisseurs and critics have become indistinguishable. Almost all critics nowadays do not actually critique, but rather appraise. Moreover, they delude even themselves into believing that their appraisals have some connection to artistic merit, and force them onto the

general public. It is for this reason that words such as “authentic” or “fake” have become a standard for artistic and even ethical value.

There is a thing called occupational aesthetics. I once read in a French medical text the statement “Voilà un beau cas!” (What a beautiful case!), used in reference to a cancer that looked horrific enough to make one nauseous. During my own archaeology studies, as I held in my hands excavated primitive tools and clumsy stone vessels, like those of the Chelles-Acheul culture, which constitute some of the oldest implements of humankind, I myself felt that almost every one of them was beautiful.

The excitement and pleasure people derive from their own respective specialties make them feel a kind of aesthetic sensation. The aesthetics of antiques and the intoxication the traditionalists feel for them are no doubt a similar phenomenon. Say, for example, that a connoisseur of antiques has found an old object with a distinguished provenance. He finds himself enchanted. If, furthermore, it turns out to be such a rare article that he can expect a great profit, then undoubtedly its beauty will shine yet one degree brighter.

Though a scientist might cry, “Beautiful!” no one would mistake the object of his admiration for art. But with antiques it is peculiarly easy to become deluded into seeing such a comment as a reflection of artistic value. Thus, the connoisseur’s view ends up circulating authoritatively as an aesthetic judgment.

Artists have hardly ever shone the spotlight on Japanese tradition as a living thing. Unfortunately, the result of this is that, as I have already said, our culture has been split between the traditionalists and the completely disconnected pachinko and mah-jong crowd. Tradition needs to be something that belongs to the everyday amateur. We must completely abandon the authoritarian meddling of individual specialists. In short, we must resolutely restore tradition to the hands of the ardently self-declared amateurs. . . .

THOUGHTS ON TŌDAIJI

All classics are the spiritual result of their respective eras, of a commitment to the present made against every possible opposition that has become enriched with a powerful life force. Not leaning on the authority of the past, standing proud, they are overflowing with signs of a life lived intensely and to its fullest potential. And only these things are passed down to those of us who have made a commitment to our own present, stimulating us both spiritually and physically, in the form of tradition.

Consider the temple sculptures in Nara, now peeling and faded to gray; they are far from “a blaze of white flames,” but rather seem almost tragic, like weathered bridge girders. It is as if we were quietly glimpsing a dream of the past in the dim hall with its extinguished lamps. But at one time they were thickly covered in gold and decorated all over in vivid reds and greens. With a thousand arms sprouting from behind, grasping at empty space, and ten or more dazzling golden faces positioned around the figure’s face, together with the glittering crown, halo, and canopy—it was a startling, stunning, violent demonstration of color.

Now take a moment and think about the Great Buddha of Tōdaiji. During that period when industrial production had not yet developed, what nerve, what sensitivity they must have had to cast a golden Buddha measuring some fifteen meters tall, a scale that is staggering even now.

Today, the gilding has long flaked off and the statue stands somberly under the dust of a thousand years, but when it was brand new—in the



Okamoto Tarō (1911–1996). Photograph of Jōmon earthenware excavated in Toyama Prefecture. 1956. Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, Kawasaki

days when it shone brightly in the color of raw gold—it was surrounded by a towering, richly colored seven-structure temple compound, painted, it is said, with the five-colored earth dug up from Sahoyama mountain. The tower bells rang in the wind, and the front garden resounded with Tang dynasty customs of military and civil officialdom, as men in mesmerizing masks performed court music and danced in primary colors and golden splendor. The thought of such a sumptuous spectacle quite takes my breath away.

We often use the phrase “Nara of the rich blue-green earth” [“aoni yoshi Nara no miyako”] to refer to Nara in its heyday, but the “rich blue-green” color of those times was actually more of a cloudy, somewhat muddy green, and was a

strangely unbecoming and distasteful hue. Added to that, the gaudy combination of vermilion, pink, and gold, in what could only be called a vulgar clash, makes even me, as I speak of such things, wonder whether it was really a good thing.

People of those times were doubtless so simple-minded that today we would hardly be able to stand them. They probably rejoiced honestly and naively over such abnormally large, richly colored, and brightly glittering objects. Not even a hint of the delicate modern sensitivities, the sophisticated distortion or affectation, was to be seen.

Or how about the aesthetics of Jōmon earthenware [dated about 10,500–300 B.C.], the oldest cultural products of our people? I have previously expounded on this in detail in “Jōmon doki-ron—Yojigen to no taiwa” [On Jōmon earthenware—A dialogue with the fourth dimension] (*Mizue* [Watercolor], February 1952). Their intensity and spatial tension were the first and probably the last such instance in our history, and, through the various periods of Japanese culture since, that overwhelming surge of energy was never to be seen again. Still later, the tradition from the Azuchi-Momoyama period [around 1574–1600] to the Genroku period [1688–1704], leading up to the work of Kōrin, was indeed a splendid dream for us as well.

With this intensely vibrant and luxuriant culture unfolding on the one hand, a lineage with completely opposite features existed on the other. This was the *wabi-sabi* culture that materialized in the medieval period.³

From the Kamakura to the Muromachi period [1185–1573], the powerfully new and assertive philosophy of Zen became the spiritual backbone of the times, introducing nothingness as an intermediary to the broad affirmation of reality. Riding on the wave of this ideology came an artistic revolution.

Although it was expressed subtly, this also reflected the assertiveness of the times. Noh, which today is considered the exemplar of elegant simplicity and solemnity, raised the humble, popular entertainments of *dengaku* and *sarugaku* to an art.⁴ And while being reviled as practitioners of “beggar performance,” the performers elevated their artistic self-awareness to a theoretical level in the *Kadensho*, the classic treatise on dramatic theory. All of this shows an assertiveness and strength rooted in present reality.

With tea as well—what brilliance and boundless, intemperate ambition the tea masters had! Confronting the reality of those violent times in chaotic, bloody battlefields, they established themselves by discovering new art in unthinkable places, taking the fashionable tea-tasting contests that were no more than an aristocratic pastime and rapidly elevating them to the point that tea-centered life as a whole became an art, embodying the simple words of tea master Sen no Rikyū, “The way is but to boil water, make tea, and drink it.”

These men were far from traditionalists. They were the originators of a modern art that boldly exceeded ancient traditions.

Of course, in those times, as today, there were many cultured men who yearned after the past and disparaged and despised new art. The poets of the mainstream literary circles immersed themselves in the allusive variation of *honkadōri* [ancient poems] and *daiei* [compositions on predetermined themes], thus ignoring direct emotions of their own and striving desperately to incorporate into their poetry the words and tastes of the past. They raised burdensome barriers, such as secret transmission, esoteric teachings, initiation rites, and so on, for even the simple appreciation of *The Tale of Genji*, the *Kokinshū* anthology, and other stories and poetry collections of previous eras. For incense appreciation or *kemari* [a ball game], they established complicated rules in order to preserve the ways of olden times. These customs were not practiced as living arts in later times, however, and soon disappeared, never to be passed down to us today as tradition.

Unfortunately, the vitality of medieval culture was gradually distorted by the feudal society that closeted Japan during the three hundred years of the Edo period [1603–1867]. The tenacious, paradoxical, self-assertive methods of the artist gradually became formalized and conceptual and were replaced by a lowly mercantile, egoistic desire to escape from reality.

Sensibility became focused on the inside rather than the outside, and connoisseurship came to seek out not the intense outpouring of vitality, but rather its minute intricacies. Art became degraded to a world of fashion, flavor, and form.

It would appear that it was in fact the Meiji era [1868–1912] that pasted the definitive label of “Japanese tradition” onto the surface of this passive interior culture. As the country broke out of isolation, modern Western civilization, which was at once aggressive and extravagant, rushed in, and there was a sense of being completely overwhelmed by these signs of strength.

Naturally, ultranationalism would be one reaction. To counter Western science and humanism, it was necessary to urgently and desperately assume the posture of uniquely Japanese tradition. Just as the method of integrating Western culture was quite unnatural, so, too, the corresponding Japanism had a strained artificiality.

Japan responded to the positive and active nature of Western culture by advancing a negative, passive culture. In response to that clear, empirical modernity, a conceptual spiritualism and legacy of form was initiated in the stately name of Japanese culture. The familiar revivals of tea ceremony and other feudal arts and the modern formalist *nihonga* [Japanese-style painting] promoted by [Okakura] Tenshin, [Kanō] Hōgai, [Hashimoto] Gahō, and others all occurred during this period of conscious revivalism.

As a people, we must not trust this hasty response based on our complex toward Western culture, a response which has created a shadowy fiction of a culture. It is merely the consequence of a culture's having finally lost

its true substance. But what is even worse is that, as a result of this fiction, the Japanese people restrict their own culture from its very beginnings and end up pushing themselves farther and farther into the dark underside.

In comparing the magnanimous, dramatic, innocent external culture of the ancient period to the interior subculture of the feudal period and later, I do not claim that one is better than the other. They are both our past. First, with an open mind, we must plainly and simply but rigorously and thoroughly rethink them both, while also looking our own present in the eye. Though I have said it before, I must repeat that the very first consideration is to frankly address the present.

We have already reached a pinnacle of modern world history, in terms of the arts as well as the sciences. Of course, it is impossible for tradition to be divorced from the demands of the present. It is passed down through the very tasks we must perform in the reality of today and, consequently, the framework of the past that we are meant to overcome becomes more clearly defined.

Even if the issues of spatiality, methods of logical consideration, awareness of self and society, and so forth that have long since disappeared from Japanese culture were at odds with the culture of the past, or even if they were completely opposed to it, we cannot today function or think about things without them. This is an irrevocable condition that we are bound to bear. Further, there is no reason for the ultranationalists to become so pretentious.

Today, we must take on both Japanese tradition of the past and Western tradition, and overcome them both. This is the fate of being burdened with the most advanced cultures, respectively, in history. It is only by overcoming such a fate that we can open up the way to a new and monumental cultural tradition.

We must grasp and take in everything we confront as human beings and draw sustenance from it. Surely, then, the passion to live life strongly and completely will become the guiding light to a new culture. We must put up a good fight, gouging deep traces of this struggle into the earth and filling them in with color; withstanding the wind, the lightning shocks and blustering storms, and the direct rays of the harsh sun, these traces will serve to carry on human tradition.

Excerpted from a text originally published as "Dentō josetsu" in *Chūō kōron* [Central review] 75, no. 12 (December 1955): 58–67.
Translated by Maiko Behr

Editor's Notes

- 1 Kamei Katsuichirō (1907–1966) was a writer and literary critic who associated with the proletarian literature movement in the prewar period and then became a major figure of the postwar Romantic school. The Asuka period in Japan lasted from the year 538 to 710.
- 2 Writer and literary critic Takeyama Michio (1903–1984) is best known for his 1948 novel *Biruma no Tategoto* (Harp of Burma).
- 3 *Wabi-sabi* is an aesthetic that celebrates beauty in the imperfect and transient through asymmetry, irregularity, and austerity.
- 4 *Dengaku* and *sarugaku* are performance genres that are considered precursors to Noh and *kyōgen* theater. *Dengaku*, which is still practiced today, consists of songs and dances associated with rice planting, and became formalized with the rise of the warrior class in the thirteenth century. *Sarugaku* grew out of Chinese-inspired variety art in the eighth century and largely involved comic skits.

THE JAPANESE CHARACTER OF TANGE KENZŌ¹ (1955)

● Iwata Kazuo (aka Kawazoe Noboru)

THE TRAGEDY OF HIROSHIMA

How shocked Tange Kenzō must have been at the news of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. This was where the architect had attended high school, and, sensitive as he was to the times, he must have felt devastated. The flow of history advances mercilessly without regard for such private sentiment. And yet, such sentiment turned over and over until eventually it is expressed in some new form is, in itself, the very nature of history. . . .

That the atomic bomb will never again be used against humankind is the prayer of all humanity. When uttered by the citizens of Hiroshima, it is a prayer imbued with every form of sorrow and anger, a prayer more plaintive and penetrating than that of any other people on earth. The words “No more Hiroshima,” erupting from the depths of these citizens’ souls and making their way throughout the world, would cast a grim realism over the idealistic peace movement. And so it was to capture the sorrow and the anger of the people of Hiroshima, as well as their prayer for world peace, that the international monument known as the Hiroshima Peace Memorial had to be built.

Thanks to the conceptual genius of Tange Kenzō, what ended up being only a castle in the sand—his urban planning for the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere—has materialized in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park as a complex consisting of a main museum, a memorial exhibition hall, a lecture hall, and a great arch soaring overhead like a rainbow. The industrial exhibition hall that is now the Atomic Bomb Dome can be seen across the way.

The contradictions inherent in Hiroshima came to epitomize the many contradictions of postwar Japan, and it was through the design of this Hiroshima project that Tange would distinguish himself in the field of postwar architecture. For Tange, modern Japan’s foremost architect, the tragedy came to exemplify all the conflicts of the world.

THE CONTRADICTION OF ISE

. . .

Pressed to complete his design for the competition [for the Hiroshima project], Tange recalled the raised *azekura* construction of the Shōsōin repository at Tōdaiji. He immediately associated the function of the proposed memorial—to preserve and display artifacts, memoirs, and personal effects related to the atomic bombing of Hiroshima—with that of the ancient treasure house, which could be considered Japan’s oldest “museum.” The inspiration Tange found in the Shōsōin is evident in his emulating of the pilotis used for the raised storehouse floor, and in his modern louvers for controlling interior light levels, which recall the historical structure’s stacked triangular logs [*azeki*] for regulating humidity levels. . . .

“We were relying on a wooden model that somehow didn’t really lend itself to this design, but we were trying to identify the prototype that appeared so powerfully in our hearts. Before long, I began to sense that it must be Ise. And then I began to resist the concept. I tried to destroy it. I tried to break down the symmetry, to lay the main beams diagonally instead of east to west, and went so far as to add variation to the cross-sections of the pilotis. But then, even I began to realize that these efforts were only manifestations of resistance”. . . .

Amid the chaos of the postwar period, Tange Kenzō was consumed by this inevitable struggle with Ise.² Constituting the oldest and grandest example of a Japanese ethnic tradition, Ise also served as a symbol of the emperor system and, to him, was the progenitor of the kind of designs conceived in wartime. He resisted this association [with the imperial system] but still wished to express the will of the people inherent to [this system]. The implementation design for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum had been drawn up and work had begun amid a remarkably strong and growing democratic movement. Thirty-five members of the Communist Party had been elected to the lower house, and an all-out attack by the conservative camp that was trying to enforce the Dodge Line economic stabilization policy was under way. Tange's project remains unfinished due to the dual nature of its design. The people did not embrace it, and the ruling class, which had already begun to plan a revision of the Peace Constitution, had by now come to have little, if any, interest in a "peace city."

In the midst of social disorder, both Ise and Hiroshima embodied a hope for the future, reflecting the will of the people on the one hand, while attempting to symbolize some form of power on the other. The contradiction of Ise and the contradiction of Hiroshima melded in the stark modernism of Tange's louvers and the giant pilotis rising forcefully from out of the wasteland. The complex, with its rough, unfinished surfaces and desolate ruin, serves as a mythical site of the century shaped by the atomic bomb, and captivates us with its mysterious intensity and allure. . . .

STAGNANT BEAUTY

...
After the war ended, Tange Kenzō gradually began to eliminate walls from his designs. This new direction was revealed first in the Hiroshima museum, with its birdcagelike design of louvers atop pilotis, and continued with an aquarium based on the diminishing curve of a seashell, and a Ginza shopping center with its walls concentrated at the back of the building.

As Tange heeded the call for a reevaluation of tradition, which arose out of the stagnation of the democratic movement, he began to focus his attention on the possibility of reviving traditional Japanese wooden architecture based on the *kiwari* system through this practice of eliminating walls.³ In this way, the harmony with and openness to nature that is part of Japan's cultural heritage became tightly bound to the themes of modern architecture. . . .

GLASS AND INNER GARDENS

...
While traveling around Europe from June to September 1952, in conjunction with his attending the Congrès International d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) conference, Tange found Europe to be virtually crushed by tradition. To him, the United States, with its high level of industrial architectural production, was far more impressive. He sensed that perhaps this was the new direction for architecture, an impression reflected in his design for the Shimizu City Hall [1954]. This building was considered so similar to Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Lever House that it was commonly known as the "Little Lever House." Nevertheless, it does not have the flat, shiny appearance of Lever House and its glass and black sashes give it an intensity more reminiscent of Mies van der Rohe. . . .

An architect ever conscious of the people, Tange provided an interior garden in the Shimizu City Hall. However, his was a garden enclosed



Tange Kenzō (1913–2005).
The Hiroshima Peace Memorial
Museum in the Hiroshima Peace
Memorial Park. 1955

completely by glass, a sand garden that denied entry and was reminiscent of Ryōanji. . . .⁴

Here Tange, acknowledging his debt to Le Corbusier, created a strange merging of a modern industrial structure and a traditional rock garden. He tried to reimagine the stagnant, confining *shinden*-style residential architecture of the imperial court and aristocracy in the Heian period as a modern office building, but succeeded only in recasting the old fascism in the form of a neo-fascism dressed up as advanced capitalism. . . .

The inner garden, with its expanse of white sand, brightened the first floor. And yet, amid all its pleasantness, it was also an expression of Tange's guiding intent—to discipline the masses by impressing on them from above that this was not a place of rest, but a model of beauty. Beauty is necessary for the masses, too, and this is where the true *raison d'être* of the architect lies. Nonetheless, allowing it to take such a form was in fact the equivalent of bringing back the *tokonoma* alcove, which the masses had supposedly banished from the home. The *tokonoma* was a feature of feudalistic Japan, where, in a time of limited communication even within the home, its role was to reflect the authority of the head of the household through seasonal changes of a hanging scroll. It also served as a space for his wife to convey her unquestioning love for him by displaying tenderly arranged flowers. Similarly, the rock garden at Ryōanji expressed a grand will to become immersed in the greatness of nature and the vitality of the humble folks and outcasts who came to serve as gardeners. The glass-enclosed sand garden [of Tange's Shimizu City Hall] refuses the common people the slightest room for interpretation, effectively denying them even their small share of active engagement, and by replacing Ryōanji's rocks with only black and white granite slabs, it alienates the powerful will of the common people.

With the inner garden and glass walls used in this way, what did the space represent if not a new form of fascism in the guise of advanced capitalism? . . .

THE TRAGEDY OF JAPAN

The tragedy of today's Japan begins with the fact that the Meiji-era bourgeois revolution was never achieved. As a result, imbalances were exposed in many facets of our culture. Modern architecture is achieved only in conjunction with the modernization of the peoples' daily lives, the modernization of industrial production, and the modernization of government. When modern architecture is attempted in the absence of these conditions, it starts by seeking material

from foreign sources, which, when imported, undergo a startling distortion under Japan's feudalistic institutions.

What, then, of the question of tradition? The exceptional examples of traditional Japanese architecture are hidden away in Kyoto and Nara, isolated from the everyday lives of the people. When the architect tries to learn from tradition, he does so by poking around in western Japan, or, shall we say, by hunting for ideas there. Since these ideas are alien to the daily life of the people and yet make up elements of a tradition, they become condensed into a world of Japanese uniqueness, thus limiting the abundant potential of the character of the Japanese people and burying it in distortion.

This is a tragedy for Japanese architecture. However, the greater the tragedy, the more modern architects struggle bravely against it, and the braver those architects are, the greater the tragedy they create becomes. Tange Kenzō is just such a tragic figure.

People cite characteristics such as modular proportions, openness, and the fusion and versatility of garden and interior spaces as examples of what modern architecture can learn from traditional Japanese architecture. The greatest legacy of tradition, however, must be the desire for plastic expression, which is reflected in the architecture of any given period.

On this point, Tange Kenzō takes a much clearer position than any other architect. He realized that breaking down Japanese culture into discrete components and adapting them to the modern world would degenerate into the formulation of a simplistic "Japonica" or "Japanese Modern."⁵ Synthesizing those components and unifying them in a major structure requires an architect's utmost creativity, and it is in doing this that Tange most clearly expresses his creativity. Tange took as his starting point his direct emotional response to the very forms themselves in traditional Japanese architecture. In doing so, he was correct. . . .

SPACE

Western intellectualism, in its robustness, confronts nature by powerfully cutting through space to express human desire. For example, although they have similar conceptions of space, Mies van der Rohe used a solid iron framework in his glass house [Farnsworth House] many times greater than that which would be structurally necessary to demarcate space, while Le Corbusier cut through space with large stone blocks.

We Japanese, however, are conscious of nature, feeling that we are but ephemeral beings amid its greatness, and try to inhabit it in an unobtrusive and sensitive manner. The weakness of this Japanese character is that, while it allows us to sense the promise of extending space into nature, there is also the possibility of closing off this space through idealization. . . .

There is an intensity to Tange's tragic character, since his unyielding will to construct by cutting through space will always be canceled out by his prior conceptual grasp of space. . . .

OVERCOMING THE TRAGEDY

The tension in Tange Kenzō's work comes from his constant stretching to meet Western standards amid the various disadvantages inherent in Japanese architectural tradition. This pitiful resolve became evident in the obscure pathos of the Hiroshima museum. In the main hall, the "ephemeral nature of things" was realized in an expansive space where Tange, having eliminated all walls,

turned his attention to the area between pillar and pillar, focusing on the feeling of impermanence as put forth in Buddhism, which claims that “all form is emptiness.” And when this developed an affinity with contemporary decadence, it was revealed to have an unusual similarity to [the work of ikebana master] Teshigahara Sōfū. The black and white granite slabs at Shimizu City Hall appeared more like gravestones evoking the vanity of this world than like a garden, and from out of the glass encasement in the broad daylight rose a soaring nihilism—a symbol of the emptiness of mechanized culture.

It was the strength of French feudalism that intensified the forces of modernity and made the French Revolution possible. Since Japanese feudalism was weak, the Meiji Restoration ended in compromise, preventing the forces of modernity from becoming something strong and resilient. And because French tradition was strong, Le Corbusier was able to mature in stature, while in Japan modern architecture floated around without ever establishing any roots.

While the bourgeoisie was weak and on the verge of collapse before international capitalism, in Japan the potential for a popular front arose. This drew the attention of the modern architects, even though they were themselves dependent on capitalism. Meanwhile, there was a movement advocating national art and the reevaluation of tradition from the standpoint of the people.

As seen with the Shimizu City Hall and with the excessive self-importance he exhibited with the National Diet Library,⁶ where he looked down on the people as inferior beings, Tange considers the populace to be his audience and seems to seek their admiration. He has acted out a tragicomedy before the people, and his skillful performance in riding the fashion of the times, carried away by the rising tide of colonialism, paved the way once again for fascism or, perhaps, for a new form of Japonica. . . .

Although he is a man of exceptional individualism, Tange Kenzō is a child of his day, raised in the contemporary spirit. Unable to escape the limitations imposed by his times, he has come to exemplify the tragedy of Japan. However, we must remember that it is not Tange Kenzō who created these times. It is all of us.

Excerpted from a text originally published as “Tange Kenzō no nihonteki seikaku: Tokuni ramen kōzō no hatten o tōshite” in *Shin-kenchiku* [New architecture] 30, no. 1 (January 1955): 62–69.

Translated by Maiko Behr

Editor's Notes

- 1 A subtitle for the article, “Tokuni ramen kōzō no hatten o tōshite” [In particular, through the development of ramen construction], has not been included here, as it refers to portions of the text that have been omitted.
- 2 This Shintō shrine is one of the oldest shrines in Japan, dating back over two thousand years. It is completely rebuilt every two decades and thus has played a key role in the transmission of traditional construction practices.
- 3 *Kiwari* is a system of standardized construction proportions and assembly methods for architecture and statuary. It has been utilized since the Edo period (c. 1600–1868).
- 4 Ryōanji (Temple of the Peaceful Dragon) is a Zen temple famous for its *kare-sansui*, or rock garden.
- 5 The term “Japonica,” which echoes the exoticism of “Japonaiserie,” was widely used in the 1950s to refer to Japanese design and goods seen to be pandering to Western taste.
- 6 In 1953, a competition to design the National Diet Library was held. Controversy erupted over copyright issues concerning submitted designs. Tange led a protest in which he argued for the democratizing of architecture, and ultimately a compromise was reached. The design he then submitted, however, was generally seen to recall the Kyoto Imperial Palace and the monumental architecture he had designed during the fascist years. The author considers Tange's proposal to be a betrayal of his initial stance.

CALLIGRAPHY EAST AND WEST (1957)

● Takiguchi Shūzō

Takiguchi wrote this article in response to the second People of Ink Society (Bokujin-kai) exhibition, held at Matsuzakaya department store in Ueno, Tokyo (October 23–28, 1956). The show presented works by members of the avant-garde calligraphy group alongside abstract paintings from abroad that demonstrated stylistic similarities with calligraphy. —Ed.

Since ancient times, calligraphy has so deeply permeated our sensibilities as Japanese that, without our realizing it, certain conditions have arisen that have made it difficult to relate the practice to the concept of modern painting, in which those like myself have held a more direct interest. Also, in my view—and I believe I am not alone in thinking this—painting as art and calligraphy at some point shifted into different spheres, becoming like water and oil. In past eras, though they were independent of each other, painting and calligraphy could still reside naturally in the same dimension. There was not much of a difference between them with regard to their materials or their function in society. But when modern Western painting was introduced, a rapid separation began. The cause for this was not just in painting and calligraphy themselves. In all likelihood, it was related to broader social change, and this can be seen in the fact that while *nihonga* [Japanese-style painting] and *yōga* [Western-style painting] previously stood in opposition to each other in terms of materials and technique, they now also differ in their very conceptions of what painting should be. I am personally of the opinion that the majority of new *nihonga* even today is too tightly bound by fixed notions of tradition, while *yōga* might be ruled by patterns of painting in the West to an unnecessary degree. Surely this situation cannot be remedied simply by “modernizing *nihonga*” and making “*yōga* with a Japanese flavor,” as some curious catchphrases suggest. I believe, rather, that there will come a time when the two will be unified. For that to happen, however, these works must not be understood merely in terms of technique or style of expression, as they presently are; the fundamental attitude toward painting and the societal base that supports it must change. I point to the opposition between *nihonga* and *yōga* here because calligraphy is now finding itself in the very same position as *nihonga*. Ironically, it has become clear that the more it permeates our daily experience, the more distant it grows from our vibrant everyday emotions. Of course, there are probably many people who believe that neither *nihonga* nor calligraphy, with all their tradition, are in the least distanced from our everyday emotions, but I will not debate this issue here. At the very least, it is indisputable that calligraphy was pulled away from our daily lives, even if only temporarily, due to a shift in various social circumstances that supported it, changes in literature and philosophical ideologies that were closely tied to it, and a dissociation from the brush, washi paper, and sumi ink. Furthermore, I would argue that it was amid these very conditions, as we tried to preserve calligraphy as an art form, that the problems of separation and stagnation increasingly appeared. At any rate, by no means did the new calligraphy movement of the present day arise simply by chance. *Bokushō* [Avant-garde calligraphy] was a natural result of the pursuit of a calligraphy so pure that it rejected even the ideographs that were the precondition for its own conception. . . .

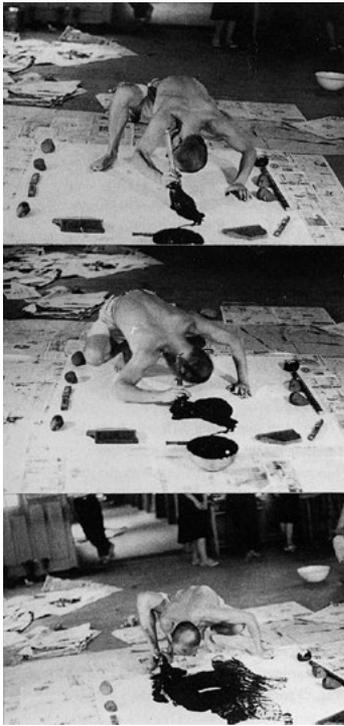
Today, Western artists are newly discovering Eastern calligraphy and trying to find in it something of deep significance. . . . I would like to posit here,



Morita Shiryū (1912–1998).
White Hot (Shakunetsu). 1956.
Sumi ink on paper, 37 × 64 $\frac{3}{16}$ "
(94 × 163 cm). The National
Museum of Art, Osaka

however, that although vigorous postwar cultural exchange constituted a major stimulus, Western artists' desire for calligraphy grew firmly out of their own modern painting. In the 1930s, Georges Duthuit called attention to Joan Miró's relationship to Eastern calligraphy in his *Mystique chinoise et peinture moderne* [*Chinese Mysticism and Modern Painting*]. (I translated this text in full during the war, but the translation was destroyed during the air raids before it could be published.) In this book, Duthuit touched on more than calligraphy, and did not discuss the relationship of calligraphy to modern painting simply in terms of influence. In short, he argued that the relationship indicated that elements of the subjectivity of expression underlying the Eastern arts had coincidentally now come close to the form of expression found in modern European painting. By the same token, we cannot simply say that Japan's new calligraphy movement is unconditionally motivated and influenced by Western abstract painting. I felt this particularly strongly when I recently had the opportunity to speak with Morita Shiryū and two or three other calligraphers. Now, we are aware that certain recent works by European and American artists come even closer to the world of calligraphy than the art made before the 1930s. In opposition to the representational and descriptive art that constitute the strong tradition on which Western painting is based, a totally nonrepresentational art notable for its proximity to calligraphic expression has emerged. . . . The so-called Art Informel has recently seen a sudden rise in influence. (Many of its best works were presented in the exhibition *Art of Today's World* [*Sekai konnichi no bijutsu*], held in Tokyo in November.¹ For more on this Art Informel, or, more precisely, the movement represented by *Signifiants de l'informel*,² please see the article by Tominaga Sōichi and my translation of excerpts from Michel Tapié's *Un art autre* in the December issue of *Mizue* [Watercolor], or my essay outlining the abovementioned exhibition in the December issue of *Geijutsu shinchō* [New trends in art].) Some artists in this group tend toward the figurative, but an overwhelming number would appear to be striving for something beyond the debate between the figurative and the nonfigurative; in other words, something of a calligraphic style. Among these are Americans such as Mark Tobey, the late Pollock, de Kooning, and Kline; artists active in Paris painting circles, including [Georges] Mathieu, [Jaroslav] Serpan, and others; and the Italian [Giuseppe] Capogrossi. These and other artists have completely separated themselves from objective representation and are venturing remarkably close to the territory of calligraphy.

I believe that, ultimately, the connection between Art Informel and calligraphy poses some extremely interesting questions. But now that painting in the West has distanced itself even from these schools, and, for the most part, freed itself from representational and figurative expression, what is left as its epistemological foundation? I would argue that it must be "the sign." In treatises



Inoue Yūichi writing the Japanese character for “bone,” Asahikawa High School, Hokkaidō, 1959

on modern painting, we frequently encounter the term “sign” and are perplexed by it. The nuance of the word is quite subtle and difficult to grasp. The fact remains, however, that a sign is a sign, and I believe it is important to note that we naturally look for signs within what at a glance appear to be automatic and abstract lines. In some cases, such as with Miró, the forms of people, birds, or stars pass through a unique kind of abstraction and become signs that are almost like primitive hieroglyphic characters. There is also a wide variety of other examples, such as that of Pollock, who creates his own unique sense of space through an almost mechanical movement of his brush, or Henri Michaux, whose so-called *exorcismes* present singular figures who appear to be seeking a kind of primitive catharsis. (A poet-painter, Michaux produced a collection of almost calligraphic sketches titled *Mouvements*. Selections of his poetry have been translated by Kokai Eiji and published by Yuriika.) Their styles of plastic expression are all the more richly varied. Taking everything into account, the calligraphic expressivity of each artist serves as his own

sign, or perhaps it could even be called a kind of signature. This modern-day Western “calligraphy” differs substantially from Chinese or Japanese calligraphy, which originated from a base of ideographic signs and has only recently developed into a form of expression that has abandoned the written word. Western calligraphy, as a form of artistic expression, does not develop out of writing technique but rather seeks out new or previously unknown signs from within the paintings themselves. While the interplay of these two opposing courses reveals agreement on various points, it is also not unheard of for them to clash.

One could surely say that this [difference in approach] is also apparent in the Western view of our calligraphic tradition. From the perspective of a Westerner who lacks the tradition of seeking out signs in calligraphy, the calligraphic tradition appears to have a remarkable continuous existence, and it is likely that he does not feel the necessity of renouncing the written word very keenly. In an article titled “Yoroppa ni okeru Nihon bijutsu” [Japanese art in Europe], which was recently published in the *Yomiuri* newspaper, Tapié comments on some of the avant-garde Japanese calligraphy being exhibited in Europe, opining that “because of the models of trifling Parisian *tachisme* and the unrestrained New York school of action painting, it appears that it is being assimilated as one international style of the avant-garde.” Needless to say, Tapié is a leading theorist of Art Informel, but of course his is only one critique and does not negate the avant-garde movement itself. And I cannot agree completely with his statement that “this new movement in calligraphy has been formed in opposition to a very strong living tradition”. . . . The views that Westerners hold of the Japanese traditional arts, from the sophisticated to simple Japonica, cover a wide range, yet naturally we, as Japanese, cannot accept them

unconditionally. Of course, criticism and appreciation are often achieved only by crossing national boundaries, and thus it cannot be denied that such exchanges are still greatly beneficial to us.

There have been various changes in the new movements in calligraphy in Japan as well, so I cannot make sweeping generalizations. However, after seeing the most recent People of Ink Society exhibition, I did feel that the calligraphers, in spite of giving the appearance of having distanced themselves completely from calligraphic tradition, had in fact not strayed so far, and were still attempting to preserve the boundaries of brush and ink calligraphy in conscious response to the world of painting. Inoue Yūichi and a few others use enamel, but their expressive style still conforms to the effects of ink. More importantly, what particularly drew my interest was the movement of the brush. As I also mentioned in my conversation with Morita, all the brushwork seemed to have what I would call a centripetal feel, seemingly based on vertical motion rather than spatial expansion. This stands in contrast to most Western artists, although even Western artists exhibit differences among themselves, as can be seen with Pollock's spreading outward to fill space versus Mathieu's centripetal tendency toward a convergence of lines. Conversely, the majority of works by People of Ink Society members are based on a primarily vertical impact—rather than horizontal line—which creates powerful ink traces that implode with energy. . . . What I found odd about the exhibition was that so many artists' works looked so similar to one another. Of course, when multiple works by any one of these calligraphers are viewed as a series, the characteristics of that individual become distinctly evident. But here the differences among artists seemed rather weak. Perhaps one could think about it in the following way. In calligraphy, the combination of the three elements—paper, brush, and ink—produces ideographs. Though calligraphic styles may vary, ideographs retain a particular type of movement and spatiality. As a result, variations in calligraphic style are naturally quite a different thing from variations in painting style. This being the case, it further appears evident that calligraphers are essentially delineating a distinction between calligraphy and painting. This implies that even if they abandon the written word or ideograph (although in this case they may not actually be doing so), one cannot simplistically and immediately conclude that their work then becomes painting. . . .

Although various styles are found in new calligraphy today, to my eyes this exhibition only gave the impression, quite unexpectedly, of rather rigid adherence to a traditional formalistic framework. While this is an attempt to utilize the art of calligraphy as a vehicle for change, originality, and Eastern-style individuality, it would still, even after eliminating the ideograph, appear to be preserving a traditional standard for calligraphy. I try to think about this in various ways, though I can't help wondering if a greater sense of freedom in calligraphy, now that it has freed itself from the restrictions of the ideograph, might not be possible. I worry that the avant-garde calligraphers will end up merely foregrounding calligraphy's generic conditions in attempting only to extract its pure essence. I imagine that this is perhaps the type of thing that Tapié is pointing out as well. The boundary between painting and calligraphy is a difficult problem, but to concern oneself too much with that boundary, just at the moment when calligraphy is released from the ideograph, can be further confining to the world of calligraphy. To put it in more extreme terms, the potential for Japanese calligraphy cannot be located solely in its relationship with traditional paper, brush, and ink, and even questions of space and form can and must be

freely expressed in terms of our experience in the present. Ultimately, calligraphy that rejects the ideograph is a paradox, which, to put it in Western terms, can only result in another kind of sign.

Excerpted from a text originally published as “Higashi to nishi no sho” in *Bokubi* [The beauty of ink], no. 62 (January 1957): 33–35.
Translated by Maiko Behr

Editor's Notes

- 1 Organized by the critics Segi Shin'ichi and Michel Tapié, the exhibition *Art of Today's World* (*Sekai konnichi no bijutsu*, also known by the French title *Exposition internationale de l'art actuel*) brought together contemporary abstract paintings by artists including Jean Fautrier, Karel Appel, Georges Mathieu, Willem de Kooning, and Sam Francis. Known as the first major presentation of Art Informel in Japan, it was held at Takashimaya department store in Nihonbashi, Tokyo, in 1956, and traveled to Osaka, Kyoto, and Fukuoka the following year.
- 2 Tapié presented the exhibition *Signifiants de l'Informel* (Signifiers of Informel) at Studio Facchetti in Paris in November 1951. Featuring Dubuffet, Fautrier, Mathieu, Henri Michaux, Jean-Paul Riopelle, and Jaroslav Serpan, the show was important in establishing Art Informel as a new art.

DISFIGURED CORPSES OR THE CRITIQUE OF HUMANISM

LOCKED-ROOM PAINTING (1956)

● Nakahara Yūsuke

I. LOCKED-ROOM PAINTING

Some believe that the highest form of detective novel is the one involving the perfect crime, and the locked-room mystery is considered the classic example of this genre. Needless to say, locked-room mysteries involve a murder that takes place in an isolated room that initially appears as though its temporal and spatial connections to the outside world have been severed. Typically, a great detective puts the puzzle together piece by piece through careful observation and astute deduction, and finally the case is solved.

In many instances, the first person to discover the scene of the murder in the locked room is somebody like the hotel bellhop, who encounters only the young woman's half-naked body with a knife stuck in her chest. Then a cop (in most detective novels, cops are depicted as being thickheaded) tends to note details like the time the wristwatch stopped or the torn handkerchief clutched in the hand. And in the end, it is the great detective who carefully studies faint dirt tracks on the floor or slight scratches on the wall. Unlike mediocre writers who spend a good deal of energy describing the grotesqueries of the murder scene, the best writers do not put too much stress on the body itself, but rather explore how the locked room is essentially an endless space that contains infinite clues that could lead to solving the case.

Regardless of how realistically the event is described or in how everyday a manner, the readers of detective novels, essentially mystery fans, are observers who rest secure, believing that such things do not actually happen. They derive pleasure from being in a position of control, as unrelated spectators of the crime who can enjoy “the victory of knowledge.”

In recent art exhibitions, what we see most prominently is the theme of the human, or works that take up the human as a motif. For example, looking at the photos in “Modan āto 1956” [Modern art 1956] (*Geijutsu shinchō* [New trends in art], May 1956), one is left with an impression that paintings these days are mainly of the human figure. Of course, it may be crude and dangerous to stray too far from discussing each work in terms of its individual content, but I feel that there is a general tendency well deserving of the label “locked-room painting.” These are paintings that depict a kind of locked-room murder scene.

There are human figures shaped like sharp needles, or rearranged into strange colorful forms, their flesh deformed like that of a drowned corpse, or whose bodies have been dismembered. Some figures are crouching, some are prostrate, and some have pointed gazes. One artist tries to ferment meaning from a combination of such human forms, and shows us the unbridgeable gap between the ideal and the real human images. Another artist offers an image, featuring a human form disfigured as though by disease, that prompts us to *interpret* his society. Still another adopts the position of a bystander in order to convey his distanced view of the human in disassembled form.

In referring to this as a locked room, I am not saying that the world these artists depict is similar to some creepy, tragic scene. What I’m trying to say is that the artists behind this truly wide range of human images, despite facing a corpse in a locked room and being fed up with the limitations of three-dimensional space, are no different from witnesses such as the bellhop and the cop who do little more than turn over the dead body and peer pitifully at the wound. What they have in common is a fascination focused solely on the dead body, with no attention paid to the surrounding conditions of the room. To put it differently, they sympathize only with the tragic deformation inflicted on the body, and in so doing they cast only a sideways glance at the *social* mechanisms that are thought to be the culprit. In a way, this extreme obsession with the human body indicates the capacity and the limitation of a humanism whose vision is fixated on human fate alone.

To cite some examples, I recognize this in Yamanaka Haruo’s human figures, feel it in Oyamada Jirō’s human expressions, and discover it in Tsuruoka Masao’s dismembered human bodies.

Of course, unlike mystery fans, we are turned into more than just onlookers by what is depicted. We are ourselves implicated in the crime, and are more than mere witnesses. We are the corpse that lies in front of us, while also being asked to find out how we were killed in order to catch the criminal.

“Locked-room painting” does not mean that the painting is closed in on itself, that it lacks a social component, or that it has no actuality. On the contrary, it is an accurate reflection of the minds of artists who have a humanist perspective, serving as a convincing psychiatric report.

This painting can also be considered a “crime report” detailing our efforts to establish a new human perspective and to recuperate the human in the face of the social mechanisms that today force us into self-alienation and objectification. But does this report help us to solve the problem? Does it not distance us from the actual crime, leading us into a labyrinth instead?

It is no longer strange to see paintings with human bodies suspended in the air, dismembered and deformed, or given some kind of grotesque appearance. These images of the human are, first of all, the artists' perceptions and emotions from life experience attached to the outward appearance of the human as it is. This is a method of naturalism that has severed itself from the outside world and fixates on the objectified body; not only does the method not facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the human being in its social relations, but its assessment of the situation even hinders and prevents this possibility. Second, this phenomenon shows that to ignore the internal image—a tendency that in this century has been established as one method of painting—results in an incomplete grasp of the object, and throws into high relief the urgent need to investigate the irrational world of interiority, and to actualize it in art. Despite all this, locked-room painting asserts that it is a manifestation in plastic form of the historical and social conditions of human beings today.

These images are not simply realistic, nor simply an eclectic combination of existing styles, but they don't go far enough in investigating the irrationality of the inner world. Surrealism, unlike the schools of abstraction that pursued only the internal rationality of the framed picture plane, offered a realism of the latent inner world. It provided a method of cognition and an approach to unconscious reality through the mediation of automatic writing or—in explorations of the irrationality of things themselves—of *objets*. But the artists in question consciously or unconsciously ignored this possibility. And even though Surrealism was inseparable from the emancipation of the irrational human interior—and therein could be found the paths leading to a transformation of the outside world—didn't it render the internal struggle abstract?

It may sound surprising, but the displays of grotesque human figures are not a manifestation of the analysis of interior irrationality. This is because the works fail to precisely discern the relationship between internal strife and the external antihumanist forces, thereby shutting down human expression and cutting away the bonds between human beings and the society and nature in which they live. It is possible to *hypothesize* about the assailant, but there is no concrete evidence. And because of the mutilated corpse, the witness proudly pronounces the scene tragic and, hence, the criminal monstrous in such and such a way. While this may first appear well intended, in actuality it serves to conceal the *modus operandi*, and the witness inadvertently becomes an accomplice in league with the despicable criminal. As a matter of fact, in the paintings of grotesque human figures, there appear to be a number of such unknowing accomplices.

Tagiguchi Shūzō once wrote of Kawara On's Events in a Warehouse [Monookigoya no Dekigoto] series:

This time, humans have left the scene and machines have propagated like germs. In the strange interlude without man in the silent theater of humanity, machines have now become human. This is because humans have been objectified despite their humanity, and the objective machines are now in turn beginning to act as subjects. . . . We were tricked into sentimental illusion in an effort to grasp humanness! (*Bijutsu techō* [Art notebook], March 1955)

In contrast to Tagiguchi's discovery of the transformation of matter into something organic, Sasaki Kiichi wrote with regard to Kawara's Bathroom

[Yokushitsu] series, “At the abyss of loneliness, humans are cut up mercilessly and dumped in a closet like junked machines, and in this way are turned completely into things. But then they come back to life by becoming homogeneous inorganic matter” (“Busshitsuka kara ningenka e” [From materialization to humanization], *Bijutsu techō*, May 1955). He saw evidence of human beings becoming inorganic matter in the images. In addition, touching upon Ikeda Tatsuo, he wrote: “Human beings begin to be objectified when the given living environment becomes an environment that is totally alien to them, or when a violent mechanism like war reduces them to a mere abstraction. At that moment, the existing humanism becomes an illusion, without much to offer.”

When the question of the human and inorganic matter becoming equivalent was raised, I thought the problem should have been pursued further in terms of method and practice, for there were some aspects that were unclear to me. But now, as I look at many of the “locked-room paintings,” what appears necessary in order to accurately depict the objectification of the human is, on the contrary, the perspective of inorganic matter becoming organic. The objectification of the human has been a frequent recurrence, and today it is plainly evident that it acts on us as a suppressive reflex, but it is nevertheless impossible to stop. To put it metaphorically, it is not about placing oneself in the perspective of witnesses and cops or mediocre detective fiction writers who only see the corpse. Rather, it is about shifting into the perspective of a detective who incessantly analyzes the materials contained in the locked room, and analyzes the corpse through them in order to expose the bizarre way in which the crime was committed. Just as presupposition interferes with reason, tepid humanism prevents that shift in thinking.

Needless to say, the external matter exists in opposition to us, as it simultaneously regulates us as an entangled totality of social and natural elements. To put it differently, the outside world enters us as a relation between human and matter in the form of conscious recognition. Therefore, when we talk about matter becoming organic, it is, of course, related to the question of the human and the *struggle within our inner world*. Surrealism is not simply a manifestation of an interior idea or fantasy, but its essence is the surfacing of suppressed discord and the multiple confrontations and conflicts—carried out only as a means to individual liberation, not to any social emancipation. Therefore, the internal struggles derived from the contradictions of the external world contain the possibility of affecting change in the external world. There is no room for humanism to intervene here.

What characterizes “locked-room painting” is that it does not take the external world as its starting point. And concentrating on the internal world only as a typical Surrealist does, it cannot dissect the essential problem. Like the detective whose experienced analysis sheds light on the cause of death, one must reach the external world through the physical struggle in the internal world and then come back to further dissect the internal conflict. (Unfortunately, I did not have enough time to analyze the transformation in Kawara and Ikeda on this score). . . .

III. LOCKED-ROOM PAINTING

. . .

The locked-room murder takes place where humans are objectified as inert matter; or to put it more concretely, the location is the rupture between the endlessly changing and developing exterior world and the conscious interior world—the gap. Analyzing the external drama of human and material resistance

by filling in that gap is the method of a great detective, which is the persistent investigation into the equivalence of the human and matter. But the police work that tries to fill in the gap with delusions and that fixates on conventional thoughts and feelings inevitably comes up with locked-room painting. Humanism takes over the investigative method that does not bother to measure the slippage between the outside and the inside.

The reason that humanism must be rejected, and that focusing a scientific gaze on external reality more than internal reality is stressed, is that the rupture engenders the bizarre and complex force that warps the internal space, which humanism tries to recuperate through normal means. In turn, Surrealism uses as its guide the deformation of the internal space—for example, the strange images that are elaborated in the world of the subconscious—in order to hint at the complete detachment from the external world. But this suggests its inability to distinguish the internal world's static fantasy or metaphysical image, and the ways in which these are in fact the images of the internal struggle generated by the external contradictions and hence are capable of altering the reality outside.

The only positive aspect of expressionistic abstract painting is that it is a manifestation of a painful scream. In terms of theater, it can be classified as tragedy. The danger is not this tragedy per se; instead, it lies in the artists' unconscious casting of themselves as the main characters of the play.

In our country, Surrealism was cut according to the humanist measure, and this resulted in many of its human figures being suspended in the gap between the external, fluctuating world and human consciousness.

Our interiority is not static. And if we ignore its dynamic conflict and struggles (of course, these should never be ignored, but humanism tends to obscure them with palatable illusions), then we certainly stand on the side of the spectator, thereby establishing the human as an abstraction. The internal struggle contains within it the necessary desire to change the world that surrounds us and to obtain a profound understanding of it.

I have been referring to "locked-room painting." That does not, however, simply mean that the artist is closeted within the space of introspective mental imagery. With regard to all these human figures variously depicted, I wish to point out only the narrowness of the gaze that is fixed on the all-too-human human. In order to break through the finite conditions of the locked room and discover a passage leading to the external world, we must turn away from the fate of the corpse and from our sorrow for the human, and must face the unfeeling world around us. What is seen there is not just any specter of the human being itself but a strange world in which external matter enters the gaps within human consciousness and emotion, resulting in a strange mixture of this external matter and *the human interiority which it surrounds*. And the energy generated by and made visible in this mixture—the external matter surrounding the human interiority that includes consciousness, sensibility, and thought—is nothing other than the internal contradiction and conflict engendered through the ruptures between the interior and exterior worlds. This is what it most likely means for the internal image to be intertwined with external reality. Such an image will never be born unless one is conscious of this rupture. The humanization of materials suggests this type of drama. (It makes apparent *the internal deformation*.) Only when one exposes the grotesque mask that conceals the site where matter and humans commingle—the concentration of social contradictions—can the expression of reality, including the internal images (engaged in praxis), become possible. The humans depicted on paintings are nothing

more than monologues that give plastic form to the artist's interpretation of the human and the human figure. It is the artists' confession of love for humanity using the canvas as medium. What is shown there is the size of their wound, with the painting surface serving as their medical chart. The transition from paintings that tell stories to paintings that exhibit corresponds to the shift from accusing humans to accusing matter.

The locked-room mystery is solved the moment that one's eyes are averted from the corpse. Goodwill and sympathy for the human necessarily create a blind spot. Only when analyzing the seemingly infinite room, giving the corpse a cold, hard look, and determining the *modus operandi* can we come to determine who or what the criminal is. It is important not to presume we know the criminal, and to ascertain each and every step of the crime. That is the only way in which we can establish an autonomous self.

A great detective would classify outmoded humanism as a crime weapon in league with the knife.

Excerpted from a text originally published as "Misshitsu no kaiga" in *Bijutsu hihyō* [Art criticism], no. 56 (June 1956): 20–30.
Translated by Ken Yoshida

IN FOCUS

THE BIRTH OF NEW ART CRITICISM

• Michio Hayashi

In the decade immediately following the end of World War II, Japanese art criticism underwent a significant transformation. In the prewar years, the majority of art criticism belonged to either the "humanist" type, which tended to interpret artworks from a moralistic perspective, or the connoisseur type, which focused on the question of authenticity and relied on intuitive stylistic analysis. Both looked at artworks through excessively romantic and often metaphysical lenses and employed impressionistic language, which was in most cases very ambiguous. The writers were often literary intellectuals, elite dilettantes/collectors, or artists themselves. This discursive formation changed radically in the late 1940s to the early '50s, due to a series of important infrastructural changes as well as a general shift in the intellectual climate.

A proliferation of art magazines created a demand for new writers and had major effects on the field. Publications like *Bijutsu techō* (Art notebook, 1948–), *Geijutsu shinchō* (New trends in art, 1950–), and *Bijutsu hihyō* (Art criticism, 1952–57) emerged, providing venues for writers such as the future "three greats": Hariu Ichirō, Nakahara Yūsuke, and Tōno Yoshiaki. *Bijutsu hihyō* played a particularly decisive role in transforming the nature of art criticism. The magazine quickly became a privileged site for ambitious theoretical claims—Marxist, existentialist, modernist—and heated discussions. (Further, a famous "roundtable" section appeared in every issue, allowing readers to participate in ongoing conversations by sending letters to the magazine.) In the mid-1950s, for instance, critics including Hariu, Nakahara, Hanada Kiyoteru, Nakamura Masayoshi, and Segi Shin'ichi carried out a prolonged debate on the nature and function of art criticism. While the writers argued from diverse theoretical positions, they all shared the conviction that the discourse on art should be redefined. They believed it should more actively illuminate the future direction of contemporary art so

that it could have a critical and productive relationship to society.

The opening of three modern art museums between 1951 and 1952—the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Modern Art in Kamakura and, in Tokyo, the Bridgestone Museum of Art and the National Museum of Modern Art—also contributed to the transformation of art criticism. These public institutions brought wider social recognition to contemporary art in general, and a greater demand for related discourse, ranging from exhibition reviews to institutional critique, naturally followed. In fact, the very first issue of *Bijutsu hihyō* featured a photograph of the Kanagawa museum, which was designed by the architect Sakakura Junzō, a disciple of Le Corbusier, on its cover.

A third important factor in this shift in criticism was an increase in annual exhibitions, including the Japan Independent (1947–) and the Yomiuri Independent (1949–63). A wide range of avant-garde practices that emerged around 1950 in the context of these seasonal exhibitions exceeded or deviated from the dilettantism or romanticism that was the purview of traditional art criticism, and thus demanded a completely different form of



Cover of *Bijutsu hihyō* (Art criticism), no. 1 (January 1952), featuring an image of the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura

theoretical mediation. A new generation of critics, including the aforementioned “three greats” and Segi, gradually replaced the previous generation (except for a handful of highly sophisticated figures, such as Hanada, Okamoto Tarō, and Takiguchi Shūzō). The new critics, unlike their versatile yet amateurish forerunners, published almost solely on contemporary art, thereby helping to establish art criticism as a specialized professional field.

IVAN THE FOOL (1955)

● Kusama Yayoi (pls. 8, 17)

As a child, I was stingy and vain, with a scrawny body and a flat nose, fickle in my interests and unpredictable in my moods, and on top of that, deeply suspicious. My mother had a violent temper and would scold me just for playing, and when I couldn't take it anymore, I would run out into the fields, crying insensibly, where I would then pull up every leek flower in sight until not a single one was left. I was the kind of child who had an inordinate fascination with catching and crushing goldfish and squeezing a cat's neck with my hands, and would do so without provocation. My family ran a seed business, and the store was a dark, disordered mess, and every day I would crawl under a desk in the corner and fold pieces of paper into little bags. Sitting in the shabby store, I gazed at the surrounding Japanese Alps, wondering intently if there were black cliffs beyond the mountains or the sea, as I had been told. When a circus passed through, I dreamed of becoming a dancer and following it out of town. Naked, I would stick lots of

flowers in my hair, powder my face white, and dance in my own performance. In a secret spot in one corner of the garden, I made a small hole that I covered with a piece of glass as a lid, and there I hid flower buds, glass beads, beetles, and butterfly wings, and when I peered in occasionally I felt happy and reassured.

These are hardly the kinds of episodes that one would read in an autobiography of the dashing Dalí. But I also sense that in these somewhat extreme memories there are several factors that continue to affect my life greatly, even now.

I don't have a single novel viewpoint or exceptional position that would be typical of new artists. Nor do I have the slightest intention of challenging this small Japanese art world, much less Picasso. Being more of a painter than an artist, I want to keep going, flapping my wings and chirping nonstop until the very end, so even if I am told that painting should be made in the manner of Socialist Realism, existentialism, or what have you, you might as well say that has absolutely no meaning for me. I am bothered, like everyone else, by the puffed-up critics who look down on art from a place so high they can't even see the work, and by the journalists who are trying to drag the art world as far away from art as possible. But when I stand in front of a canvas and immerse myself in my work, all of that disperses like mist. Everyday life is rich enough to enliven the content of my work, and art changes me before I even realize what has happened. I listen to the undercurrent of life and in my own way feel its grand flow. My mind now seeks out all the alluring splendor that unfolds in the shadows of obscured worlds. A faint, threatening beauty, a hidden strength that is delicate and fragile, but does not belittle itself for what it is—how enchanting a world would be where wild beasts nibbled on flower petals. I sing that part of darkness that lives covered up here on earth, always revealing it as part of a whole. All of this points to an unnoticed wound where everything has been gathered up. Just as the act of obscuring reveals all, and tiny wormholes in a peach are really signs of life, this is the way that I want to reveal mystery. I want to wedge myself into the world that lies between mystery and symbol and live there. Storms and flower buds and open wounds and genitals—these are the kinds of things that scratch and tear at my melancholy. Who can deny that this is a fierce human resistance to that which would violate the mystery?

I continue, as always, to live my own confusion. All around me, so much daily life bubbles up and flows away. People draw near me and move away. All of this is connected to my painting. The connection between the self and the world is not just something that should be pursued through what the eye sees or what the hand can grasp. In Egyptian pottery and sculpture, we feel the quiet, steady breathing of pristine nature, but did the age that produced this marvelous work not have a single event that disturbed the peace of mind? Surely it was a time colored, in large measure, by illicit love, bloodshed, and savagery. Art is always born from darkness and blossoms through the work of the devil.

There is a children's tale by Tolstoy called "Ivan the Fool," and like the protagonist in that, I will keep on working until the devil's patience is worn down. This is because the devil is an enemy of art, and even more than that a comrade in arms . . .

In other words, the devil lives only within freedom. He disappears in a flash from everything that is fixed. In every era, the devil appears in a different form, and the Mephistopheles of the twentieth century does not reside in whatever earlier incarnations we know from the past. Instead, he is at work in Léger's forms and raucous colors, inside the geometric compositions of

Mondrian or [Ben] Nicholson, in [Henry] Moore's pieces of stone, and in the tips of Calder's wings. If I may add some artists I like, he also lives inside such American artists as [Morris] Graves, [Mark] Tobey, [Georgia] O'Keeffe, and the young [Theodoros] Stamos, who, like myself, explore the world of mystery and symbols. What these works have is precisely the power to stir the earnest desire for eternal freedom of the spirit. The emergence of the strange and mysterious shows us "the other side of the river of death," and then moves us to seek spiritual freedom on this shore. The peculiar colors and anomalous forms are concrete expressions of this, but, as Romain Rolland said, wherever the *anormal* is the principle of power and the source of creation, what is really at work is the *supranormal*, not the *anormal*.

The art world in Japan, however, shows little interest in this aspect of the *anormal*. Because of these devil-like devils (which are so normal they scare no one at all) or the fact that whatever is called art has not even a place for them, it is hard for real-life devils to appear. In its haste to advance a hundred steps, the art world fails to make one concrete step, so even if it gives itself over to the temptations of the devil, the two will never end up working together. The inner devil comes in to create a new truth and a form for this truth, and it never rests comfortably, even for an instant, in established forms and concepts or what are copies of art. Let me cite Gide, who stresses the necessity of constant cooperation with the devil for the full development and expression of creative powers. "Great creators never start out from existing art theories, but rather they arrive at art, without knowing it or wanting it, through their own creation. And when that happens, their art is marked by individuality, and moreover, something new."

Flowers bloom like this.

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Translated by Sarah Allen

THE EXPERIMENTAL WORKSHOP AND THE GUTAI ART ASSOCIATION

THE EXPERIMENTAL WORKSHOP: OUR CONTENTION (1953)

● Kitadai Shōzō

It was several years ago now. Every month, we would get together at one of our homes, where we'd bring records and hold small, intimate "concerts." As I recall, nearly all the music we selected was work by new composers like Schoenberg, Bartók, Copland, and Bernstein. We were a rather diverse group that included, among others, composers, painters, and poets. Most were young people who either had just started doing their own work or were burning with the desire to



Programs and brochures by the Experimental Workshop (Jikken Kōbō). 1951–56

get started. After the concert, it was customary for our conversation to extend to all matters of art. The topics for discussion weren't necessarily decided in advance, but we seriously addressed such issues as “the place of performance in music,” “plastic form in music,” and “the problem of automatism” in a casual atmosphere that never took the form of confrontational debate.

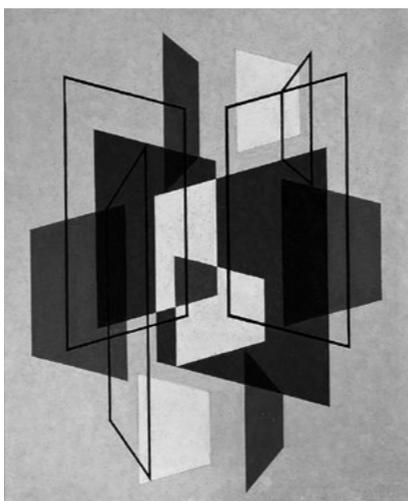
We kept this up for about a year and a half, meeting regularly with practically no break. During this time, the makeup of the group changed a bit, but we became friends and developed a deep understanding of one another's work. Out of this spontaneously grew the desire: we want an occasion to work in collaboration! This is how we were feeling when the *Yomiuri* newspaper approached us about presenting a ballet at an event to commemorate the Picasso exhibition they were sponsoring, and the *Joie de vivre* ballet was thus performed as the Experimental Workshop's first work.

We were fortunate that our first project was one that allowed the entire group to collaborate in the creation of a ballet. For this first work, we experimented with all sorts of possibilities.

In any case, we succeeded in experimenting. That was what we accomplished the most. We gained the confidence that we could bring work to completion, and learned many things from the new experiment.

Having taken this first step, we came up with one new project after another, starting out with the Contemporary Music Concert, which introduced the works of new composers from abroad. Olivier Messiaen's “Quartet for the End of Time” was the centerpiece of this program featuring works only by foreign composers, including Bartók and Copland; we did not perform any pieces by members of our group. The music world in this country accepts as music only those classics that are cut off from the living breath of the world today, so if the event managed to convey even a little something of the fresh international atmosphere, then we fully achieved our goal. In the plastic arts presentation that was held next, we discovered the immense richness of Yamaguchi's work *Vitrine* [*Vitorīnu*, pl. 6]. The vertically and horizontally assembled corrugated glass panes turn into countless concave and convex lenses, subjecting the viewed image to deformation and movement that defy imagination. This effect was meticulously calculated, taking the work beyond the realm of the experimental and brilliantly making it into an artwork. *Vitrine* shows much potential for the future.

For the fourth presentation, the program again featured a work by Messiaen, “Visions de l'Amen,” together with pieces by members of the group. The performances by Matsuura [Toyoaki] and Sonoda [Takahiro] surpassed our greatest expectations of what was possible in Japan at the time. The pieces



Kitadai Shōzō (1921–2001). *Composition of Rotary Panels* (*Kaiten suru men ni yoru kōsei*). c. 1952. Oil on cardboard, 28 $\frac{3}{16}$ × 23 $\frac{7}{8}$ " (72.3 × 60.6 cm). Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

by the group, despite their daring experimentation, also drew considerable response. Aside from the kind of issues mentioned already, we began to criticize the concert form that we had tended to accept without question, as if its very dullness made it all the more worthy of appreciation. And so, we positioned *objets* in the venue and put them under lighting. We used a moving spotlight, and modulated the space with a mobile the first time and with a *stabile* the second time. The problem of integrating music and plastic form in this series of experiments still has not been definitively resolved. A number of issues must be dealt with before we can arrive at a solution, and we intend to continue our experiments with more detailed planning.

After the fourth presentation, we had a quiet period of over a year. But those of us in the plastic arts held solo shows, the composers got involved in broadcasting, and others took up magazine editing—and through these practices, each of us was carrying out a part of the group's activities. This doesn't mean that we weren't able to hold joint exhibitions or concerts, but we did not attempt to put on any presentations during this time.

With the end of the fourth presentation, we reflected. Hadn't we come together because we wanted to create occasions to work together? But, with the exception of the ballet, hadn't collaboration been superficial or something that could be done by others, not necessarily by us?

We spent one year making various plans and studying their pros and cons. There was even a proposal to make a film, but the film never materialized, because of the considerable time and money needed to produce it. It was then that we discovered the auto-slide projector. With an auto-slide projector, the music and narration are recorded on tape, which is then marked in specific places so that it is synchronized with each slide in the projection. Moreover, this projector has the advantage of a single-frame format like conventional film, unlike the double-frame of 35mm film, the size used in conventional projectors and one that was inconvenient for our use. Even before we discovered the auto-slide projector, we had given much thought to using slides. But there were drawbacks: several projectors were needed to compensate for the imprecision of the advancing slide frames in relation to the recorded tape, resulting in an inconsistency that resists close editing, and we had to depend on a spontaneous "automatic" effect that just happened on the spot and couldn't be calculated in advance. These drawbacks were the reasons that slides had been rejected for the project, but the auto-slide projector resolved almost all of them.

We conceived our projects for the auto-slide projector. Depending on the viewpoint, this may seem like a very childish method. Today, when the techniques of cinema are all too common, people may understandably see it as something pre-cinematic. But in the skillful integration of a series of still images and music, isn't it possible to discover a new language that doesn't exist in cin-

ema? We also thought about having the entire group collaborate on one work, but, to generate as much of this language as possible, we decided that each member would create a work based on his or her conception, and four people in the plastic arts section were given that task.

In one work, images and music were interwoven with a soprano voice, creating one synthetic poem. The next experiment embellished a collection of poetry with illustrations. In another piece, abstract images and music clashed with documentary-style narration and concrete sounds to arouse a strong emotional reaction along with a strange sense of realness. My piece was an attempt to create a farce by synthesizing three elements: allegorical images, lyrical narration, and, through the filter of recorded manipulation, descriptive sound.

In this experiment, the composers in our group also demonstrated a bold handling of the recording. They sped up the recorded tape or slowed it down, or cut off the pounding piano audio and then replayed it with another sound recorded over it. The sound of one piano changed to the sound of a cello, and then to the sound of an organ and then to that of a music box. The work tried out different onomatopoeia, to which was added the vibrato of the oscillator.

The same method was also repeated for *Poems for Tape-Recorder* [*Tēpurekōdā no tame no shi*], in which a tape with recorded words was replayed. This was similar to the three-dimensional method used in the plastic arts.

It was an experiment to replace the printed poem and its visual effect with a powerful sound image by means of a reconstructed new “mechanism” that takes words, a means of poetic expression, and pursues their aspect as sound, breaking them down into the most basic elements. We don’t know yet whether this was successful or not. But even if we learn that it ended in failure, we won’t be that disappointed, because, in any case, we succeeded in experimenting.

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Translated by Sarah Allen

GUTAI ART MANIFESTO (1956)

- **Yoshihara Jirō** (pl. 10)

To today’s consciousness, the art of the past, which on the whole presents an alluring appearance, seems fraudulent.

Let’s bid farewell to the hoaxes piled up on the altars and in the palaces, the drawing rooms and the antique shops.

They are monsters made of the matter called paint, of cloth, metals, earth, and marble, which, through a meaningless act of signification by humans, through the magic of material, were made to fraudulently assume appearances other than their own. Slaughtered under the pretense of production by the mind, matter [*busshitsu*] can now say nothing.

Lock up these corpses in the graveyard.

Gutai Art does not alter matter. Gutai Art imparts life to matter. Gutai Art does not distort matter.

In Gutai Art, the human spirit and matter shake hands with each other while keeping their distance. Matter never compromises itself with the spirit; the

spirit never dominates matter. When matter remains intact and exposes its characteristics, it starts telling a story and even cries out. To make the fullest use of matter is to make use of the spirit. By enhancing the spirit, matter is brought to the height of the spirit.

Art is a site where creation occurs; however, the spirit has never created matter before. The spirit has only created spirit. Throughout history, the spirit has given birth to life in art. Yet the life thus born always changes and perishes. To us today, the great lives of the Renaissance are nothing more than archaeological relics.

Today, it is only primitive art and various art movements after Impressionism that manage to convey to us a feeling of life, however inert. These movements extensively used matter—that is, paint—without distorting or killing it, even when using it for the purpose of naturalism, as in Pointillism and Fauvism. In any case, these styles no longer move us; they are things of the past.

Now, interestingly, we find a contemporary beauty in the art and architecture of the past ravaged by the passage of time or natural disasters. Although such beauty is considered decadent, it may be the innate beauty of matter reemerging from behind the mask of artificial embellishment. Ruins unexpectedly welcome us with warmth and friendliness; they speak to us though their beautiful cracks and rubble—which might be a revenge of matter that has regained its innate life. In this sense, we highly regard the works of [Jackson] Pollock and [Georges] Mathieu. Their works reveal the scream of matter itself, cries of the paint and enamel. These two artists confront matter in a way that aptly corresponds to their individual discoveries. Or rather, they even seem to serve matter. Astonishing effects of differentiation and integration take place.

In recent years, [critic] Tominaga Sōichi and [artist] Dōmoto Hisao introduced the activities of Art Informel by Mathieu and [Michel] Tapié. We found them quite interesting; although our knowledge is limited, we feel sympathetic to their ideas as have so far been introduced. Their art is free from conventional formalism, demanding something fresh and newborn. We were surprised to learn our aspiration for something vital resonated with theirs, although our expressions differed. We do not know how they understood their colors, lines, and forms—namely, the units of abstract art—in relation to the characteristics of matter. We do not understand the reason behind their rejection of abstraction. We have certainly lost interest in clichéd abstract art, however. Three years ago, when we established the Gutai Art Association, one of our goals was to go beyond abstraction. We thus chose the word *gutai* [concreteness] for our group's name. We especially sought a centrifugal departure in light of the centripetal origin of abstraction.

We thought at the time—and still do—that the greatest legacy of abstract art is the opening of an opportunity to depart from naturalistic and illusionistic art and create a new autonomous space, a space that truly deserves the name of creativity.

We have decided to pursue enthusiastically the possibilities of pure creativity. We believe that by merging human qualities and material properties, we can grasp abstract space in concrete terms.

When the individual's character and the selected materiality meld together in the furnace of automatism, we are surprised to see the emergence of a space previously unknown, unseen, and unexperienced. Automatism inevitably transcends the artist's own image. We endeavor to achieve our own method of creating space rather than relying on our own images.

For example, Kinoshita Yoshiko, who teaches chemistry at a girls' school, has created a marvelous space by mixing chemicals on filter paper. Even though the effect of chemical manipulation may be predicted to some degree, it cannot be seen until the next day. Still, the wondrous state of matter thus realized is her doing. No matter how many Pollocks have emerged after Pollock, his glory will not diminish. We must respect new discoveries.

Shiraga Kazuo placed a mass of paint on a huge sheet of paper and started violently spreading it with his feet. His method, unprecedented in the history of art, has been a subject of journalism for the past two years. However, what he presented was not a merely peculiar technique but a means he developed to confront the matter chosen by his personal quality with the dynamism of his own mind and synthesize them in an extremely positive way.

In contrast to Shiraga's organic method, Shimamoto Shōzō has focused on mechanistic methods for the past several years. When he threw a glass bottle filled with lacquer, the result was flying splashes of paint on canvas. When he packed the paint into a small handmade cannon and ignited it with an acetylene torch, the result was an instant explosion of paint in a huge pictorial space. Both works demonstrate a breathtaking freshness.

Among other members, Sumi Yasuo deployed a vibrating device, while Yoshida Toshio created a lump of monochrome paint. It should be noted that all these activities are informed by serious and solemn intentions.

Our exploration into the unknown and original world bore numerous fruits in the form of *objets*, in part inspired by the annual outdoor exhibitions held in Ashiya. Above all, Gutai's *objets* differ from those of the Surrealists in that they eschew titles and significations. Gutai's *objets* included a bent and painted sheet of iron (Tanaka Atsuko) and a hanging box like a mosquito net made of red plastic (Yamazaki Tsuruko). Their appeal lies solely in the strength of their material properties, their colors and forms.

As a group, however, we impose no rules. Ours is a free site of creation wherein we have actively pursued diverse experimentations, ranging from art to be appreciated with the whole body to tactile art to Gutai music (an interesting enterprise that has occupied Shimamoto Shōzō for the past few years).

A bridge-like work by Shimamoto Shōzō, on which the viewer walks to sense its collapse. A telescope-like work by Murakami Saburō, into which the viewer must enter to see the sky. A balloon-like vinyl work by Kanayama Akira, equipped with an organic elasticity. A so-called dress by Tanaka Atsuko, made of blinking electric bulbs [pl. 11]. Productions by Motonaga Sadamasa, who uses water and smoke. These are Gutai's most recent works.

Gutai places an utmost premium on daring advance into the unknown world. Granted, our works have frequently been mistaken for Dadaist gestures. And we certainly acknowledge the achievements of Dada. But unlike Dadaism, Gutai Art is the product that has arisen from the pursuit of possibilities. Gutai aspires to present exhibitions filled with vibrant spirit, exhibitions in which an intense cry accompanies the discovery of the new life of matter.

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Translated by Reiko Tomii

THE IDEA OF EXECUTING THE PAINTBRUSH (1957)

● Shimamoto Shōzō (pl. 9)

It is perfectly obvious that paint and the paintbrush are indispensable in painting pictures. However the circumstances may change in the future, there are hardly any paintings made so far in which paint and the paintbrush were not used. As a chisel goes with a hammer, so paint and the paintbrush are inseparable. It may seem as though the relationship between these two is like that of better halves. And it might sound like an exaggeration if I say that it is actually like that of cat and dog, or is even more conflicting than the ancient Chinese rival states Wu and Yueh or the Genji and Heike clans. However, it is no overstatement at all.

Although it may appear as if paint has been able to fulfill its mission thanks to the paintbrush, if you give it a thought, the way paint has come along is none other than a long history of challenging the paintbrush, like the tragic story of factory girls being dragged around by machines and wearing out their youth. The history of paint begins with the paintbrush. When paint and the paintbrush began to be used, paint was not necessarily obligatory for anyone who wanted to do a picture. What they needed were color and tone. As long as color and tone could be achieved, the purpose of painting would be fulfilled. When dealing with a solid line in mathematics, the solid line itself has no width. However, a line drawn on paper has a width, and a dot, which is not supposed to cover any area, is always accompanied by area when it is made on paper. Likewise, there is no color that exists without being accompanied by *matière*. Consequently, as you know, materials such as tempera and gouache were devised and brought into service as a means to express color and the paintbrush was invented as a medium. And here the tragic history of paint began.

In order to carry out the original intention of producing color and tone by means of gouache and tempera, the paintbrush gradually became more flexible and subtle. When it came to the submissive oil paint, the paintbrush showed itself at its best and adapted itself perfectly to the intention of the oil paint. That is to say, what was most humiliating in the history of paint as its real nature was ignored were the works by Poussin and Leonardo da Vinci.

I do not know the details of the first paintbrushes or those used in the Renaissance. But I am sure that, in both the East and the West, the tool was intended as a medium for color itself. Ignoring the true nature of the paint, the paintbrush was designed with a false show of power. The Japanese *mokkotsufude* and *mensōfude* are the most eminent examples in which the paintbrush tried to wield its power over the paint. However, just as a line without width does not exist, a color without *matière* cannot exist. The paint resisted the brush everywhere, in all opportunities. Signs of texture are identifiable with all artists up to Utrillo—be it Rembrandt, Pissarro, van Gogh, or Soutine. In all paintings, despite the brush becoming finer to an extent that the essence of the paint is suppressed, there are often fragments of the texture of the paint to be seen. It rebels suddenly in a location the brush is unable to reach. Through a crack, peeling, or unexpected discoloring, we find the essential beauty of the paint. In the works by the Romantics or the Surrealists of Dalí's school, the paintbrush exercised overwhelming influence so that the paint was regarded completely as a medium under its literary intent.

Utrillo and Vlaminck are precious monuments in the history of the rebellion of the paint. Their touches applied with a knife clearly set forth the

essence of the paint. Yet that was not a complete liberation. Despite the great accomplishments by Manet and van Gogh, the subject depicted changed merely from a reproduction of nature to the artist's subjective image, and the paint was still no more than a medium to express their images. Therefore, even if Utrillo put down his brush and used a knife, the paint would still be no more than a medium to express his image on the canvas. However, the one point that differed from Poussin was that there was a beauty deriving from the quality of the paint. In any case, at this stage, the paintbrush failed to erase the texture of the paint and conceded toward a compromising painting, which led to the present day.

Today, we do not want to employ paint (be it oil paint or enamel) in a way that distorts its quality. The reason is that, as I have already repeated over and over again, no color exists without texture, and the paint in all paintings—despite having faced a false show of power from the paintbrush—has maintained its beauty regardless of whether nature is reproduced or how the image is expressed. I believe that the first thing we should do is to set paint free from the paintbrush. Before beginning to work on a picture, the paint can never be set free unless the paintbrush is broken and thrown away. It is only once the paintbrush has been discarded that the paint can be revived.

All kinds of tools should be brought in enthusiastically in place of the paintbrush. Think of what members of the Gutai group are using. Beginning with a painting knife and hands, there are endless examples such as a watering can, vibrator, abacus, oil-paper umbrella, roller, toys, bare feet, and a cannon. Paintbrushes are included, too. Some are newly devised and others are no doubt not at all different from the conventional brushes. However, by now, they are used not as something that kills the texture of the paint but as a tool that takes advantage of the texture of the paint and gives it a lively feeling.

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