

Shuzo Azuchi *Gulliver's Cinematic Illumination*



MoMA



About

Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver's *Cinematic Illumination* (1968–69) is the first historical moving-image work to be presented in the Marie-Josée and Henry Kravis Studio, which opened in 2019 as part of MoMA's expansion. While experimental cinema has a decades-long history at the Museum, the Studio—in its scale, technical capabilities, and position within the collection galleries—offers expanded approaches to the moving image an unrivaled new platform. Composed of slides, derived from filmmaking techniques, and originally staged as a one-time event in a nightclub, *Cinematic Illumination* is positioned at the intersection of histories of performance, technology, film, and alternative culture. The presentation of this work continues the Studio's inaugural program engaging time-based art of all forms, which began with David Tudor and Composers Inside Electronics Inc.'s *Rainforest V (variation 1)*.

To archive and exhibit expanded cinema is to contend with the physical properties of analog film alongside conceptual questions about restaging ephemeral, immersive, and site-specific works that frequently involve live performance. As a result of unprecedented scholarship by the curatorial organization Collaborative Cataloging Japan and the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, *Cinematic Illumination* was first reconstructed and exhibited as an installation in 2017. This presentation marks the recent acquisition of *Cinematic Illumination* by the Museum's Department of Media and Performance and results from extensive work done by its David Booth Conservation Department to realize and conserve the piece.

This is Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver's first solo institutional exhibition in the United States. It builds on MoMA's history of embracing Japanese video, expanded media, and avant-garde cinema, and highlights an international perspective within the Museum's singular engagement with Fluxus. The exhibition's launch and ambitious complementary projects organized across New York City by Collaborative Cataloging Japan, Pioneer Works, and Columbia University were impacted by the global coronavirus pandemic. At this time, we are pleased to be able to present Gulliver's work online and in person; the connections and synergies suggested by it are more powerful than ever.



← Sugiura Kohei. Announcement for the Intermedia Arts Festival, Nikkei Hall, Tokyo, January 18, 19, and 21, 1969. Letterpress and relief halftone, 30 3/4 × 17 1/16" (78.1 × 44.6 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection Gift

→ Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver. *Cinematic Illumination*. 1968–69. Installation view, *Japanese Expanded Cinema Revisited*, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, August 15–October 15, 2017

Cinematic Illumination

For the 1969 Intermedia Arts Festival, in Tokyo, Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver produced an immersive moving-image event by beaming images from eighteen slide projectors across the discotheque Killer Joe's. *Cinematic Illumination* disrupted conventional frame-by-frame film projection and transformed it into a 360-degree environment intended to meld with the sound, lights, and moving bodies in the underground venue. Composed of nearly 1,500 slides and a system of colored gels that heightened the revolving images' visual impact, the piece is one of the period's most ambitious examples of expanded cinema, an area of filmmaking that privileges multiple projections and performance, sometimes doing away with the cinema screen entirely. Originating from 16mm film footage of found mass-media imagery and everyday actions that was hand-cut and assembled into slides, *Cinematic Illumination* is also imbued with a do-it-yourself attitude characteristic of alternative scenes internationally at the time.

At twenty-one, Gulliver was one of the festival's youngest contributors, though he had been staging performances since his days as a secondary-school student in the Kansai region, where early encounters with experimental art included meeting the Beat poet Gary Snyder, then residing in the nearby city of Kyoto. As a teenager, Gulliver participated in outdoor Happenings and large-scale landscape interventions with the Play. The Osaka-based collective saw its activities as articulating a place for art outside institutions, and apart from tastemaking critics in the capital. In Kyoto, the long-haired youth acquired the nickname Gulliver, a moniker seized by the national press, which deemed the artist an emblem of Japan's booming postwar youth culture. In 1967, intending to pursue filmmaking, Gulliver hitchhiked to Tokyo, where he joined a vibrant scene in which underground film, avant-garde art, psychedelia, and political activism overlapped. The films he made between 1966 and 1968 were of a conceptual nature. Works like *Film* and *Screen* made aspects of film projection their very subject, while *Switch*

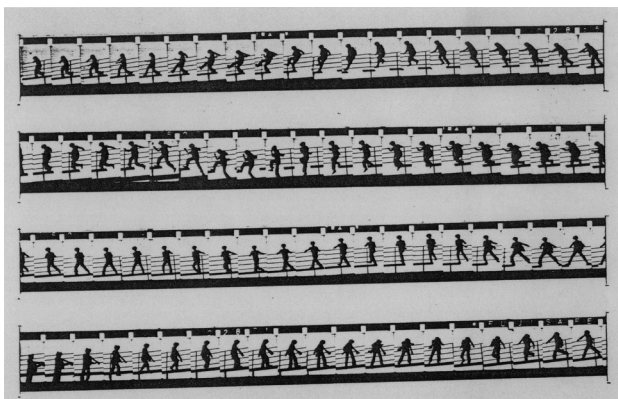
1. The idea of a shop window as rich in image-viewing possibilities goes back at least to Frederick Kiesler, the Austrian architect and theoretician, in the 1930s. Kiesler's ideas were featured in the influential art publication *Bijutsu Techo* in 1965, the year of his passing. *From Space to Environment*, a 1966 exhibition exploring environmental art, was held at the Matsuya Department Store in Tokyo, and drew 36,000 visitors in six days.

and *Box* incorporated performative elements when they were screened. Gulliver presented his films at discotheques and jazz clubs, often with polymath filmmaker-artist-critic Rikuro Miyai, and in more formal screenings put on by the Art Film Association in Kyoto and Osaka.

In the late 1960s, Tokyo was a center of experimental, interdisciplinary approaches to art that reflected both domestic influences and international exchanges. The Intermedia Arts Festival, which prompted Gulliver to create *Cinematic Illumination*, came out of the international synergy within the Fluxus group, of which Japan was a major hub. Japanese artists affiliated with the group, including Yoko Ono, Toshi Ichiyanagi, Shigeo Kubota, and Mieko Shiomi (who organized the festival, along with Takehisa Kosugi and Yasunao Tone), had paid extensive visits to New York City, where Fluxus was headquartered under the leadership of George Maciunas, over the course of the decade. Fluxus artists' propensity for scores and instruction-based works was perfectly suited to the exchange of ideas across an intercontinental network. Indeed, the multiday festival mainly featured performances by Japanese artists of score-based works by their American peers; *Cinematic Illumination* shared the bill with pieces by George Brecht, Dick Higgins, and John Cage, whose *45' for a Speaker* Gulliver also performed.

While *Cinematic Illumination* can be understood in relation to roughly contemporary stateside multimedia events like Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable and the Joshua Light Show, it also captures artistic developments in the Japanese context. In the 1960s, in alternative spaces like the Sogetsu Art Center and in the pages of local journals, Japanese artists, architects, filmmakers, and critics debated the relationship between art and technology, their exchanges coalescing in notions of immersive, interactive environments and participatory spectatorship. In the realm of film, that discourse fueled experiments that included multiple projections and pushed images off screens entirely, onto mirrored surfaces, inflated structures, and bodies. Midway between a live event and an all-encompassing image-scape, *Cinematic Illumination* embodies two intersecting impulses that took hold of film at the turn of the 1970s: its moves toward performance and installation. In 1972, the exhibition *Equivalent Cinema*, in Kyoto, fully encapsulated the medium's new spatial strategies. Intentionally staged to overwhelm the viewer, the show included slide and film projectors across every floor, window, and wall of the gallery, as well as a novel format that would soon ignite its own radical experiments—video.

Artists benefitted from opportunities to develop their ideas in unconventional sites. Department stores hosted art shows to heighten the retail experience,¹ while nightclubs embraced artistic collaboration and edgy design. Killer Joe's was one of several Tokyo discotheques designed by Miyai, who, with designer Yasuhiro Hayata, commissioned flamboyant wall projections by animator Keiichi Tanaami, inflatable



→
16mm source imagery,
shot by Shuzo Azuchi
Gulliver for *Cinematic
Illumination*, 1968–69

2. Kisho Kurokawa, Ichiyanagi, Kiyoshi Awazu, Tadanori Yokoo, and Shuji Terayama were also involved in the design of nightlife spaces. In an example of cultural crossover, architect Arata Isozaki, who played a major role in designing the 1970 Osaka World Exposition, was one of the designers of the Palladium, the Manhattan techno-futurist nightclub, in 1985.

3. Up to 80 percent of pavilions included projection, according to texts by Yasuyuki Nakai and Masanori Hata in a 2011 issue of *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* dedicated to the legacies of Expo '70 (see note 4). Experimental filmmakers had previously seized the expansive possibilities of the exposition format at the Brussels (1958) and Montreal (1967) editions.

4. Ichiro Haryu, "Expo '70 as the Ruins of Culture (1970)," trans. Ignacio Adriasola, *Review of Japanese Culture and Society* (Josai University, Tokyo) 23 (December 2011): 47.

moving structures designed by Gutai artist Minoru Yoshida, sound design overseen by Tone, and elaborate sensors that choreographed light shows and projections to the movement of bodies in the space.² It is within this vivid convergence of sensory and artistic experiences that Gulliver's evocative sequence of images—Marilyn Monroe, close-ups of Japanese youths, political imagery, cartoons, geometric shapes, and the repeated outline of a man walking among the visuals flitting through the psychedelic extravaganza—most fully resonated.

Discotheques in particular provided a testing ground for artists and engineers to work side by side in the lead-up to the 1970 Osaka World Exposition, known as Expo '70. A major cultural event with unprecedented inclusion of film and media,³ Expo '70 was the subject of political debate and protest for its alignment with the postwar United States–Japan security treaty renewal being negotiated concurrently. Within artistic circles, involvement in the Expo was divisive (Gulliver did not participate), with critics claiming that Expo '70 amounted to a technological spectacle without the potential for meaningful visitor interaction. In this context, *Cinematic Illumination* gestured to an alternative vision for society's use of technology at the onset of the Information Age. Clubs like Killer Joe's, despite being commercial enterprises, provided unique possibilities for the melding of mediums, experiences, and identities in a freewheeling social setting. Though Gulliver did not profess any political motivations, his work's open-endedness invites a broader social reading. If, as the art critic Haryu Ichiro argued, the Expo was a homogenizing event meant to "condense the future into a single point,"⁴ the kaleidoscopic dispersion of images in *Cinematic Illumination* takes on a radical dimension.



Bio

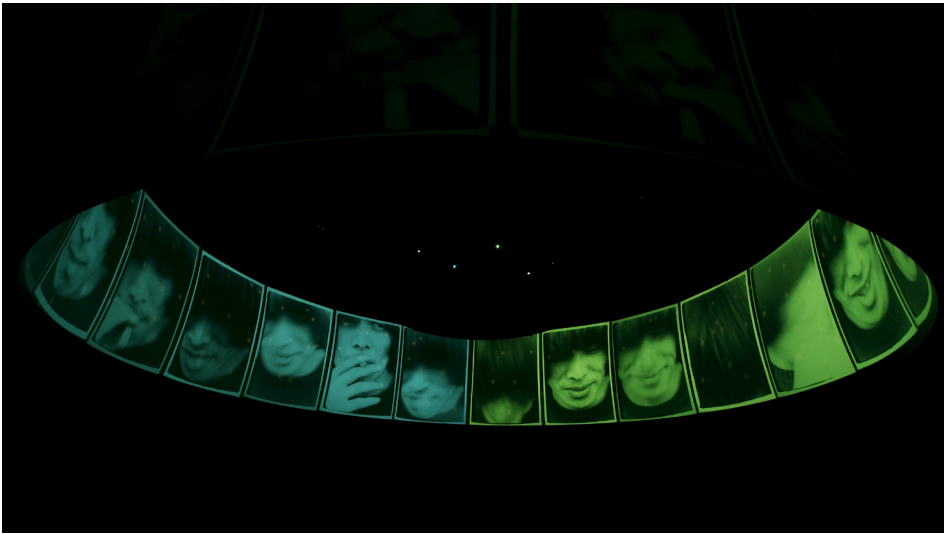
Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver was born in 1947 in the Japanese prefecture of Shiga and began staging conceptual performances as a schoolboy, and subsequently with collectives the Play and Remandaran. Living between Tokyo and the Kansai region in the 1960s, he became a representative of the booming postwar hippie (fūten) phenomenon, and adopted the moniker Gulliver, which he has used professionally ever since. In that decade, he presented his films in discotheques and jazz clubs and at events organized by the Art Film Association, and staged two of his significant expanded-cinema works: *Cinematic Illumination* (1968–69), shown as part of the Fluxus-affiliated Intermedia Arts Festival, and the outdoor performance *Flying Focus* (1969). A retrospective of his work, titled *Ex-Sign*, was organized by the Shiga Prefectural Museum of Modern Art in 2010. Gulliver remains active in the fields of sculpture, performance, and new media. Recently his performances and projects have been presented at Tate Modern and at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, which reconstructed *Cinematic Illumination* for the first time, in 2017.



←
Tokyo discotheque Killer Joe's, 1968. Detail from the journal *Shoten Kenchiku*, special issue on nightclubs, November 1968. Photograph by Shuji Yamada

→
Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver performing John Cage's *45' for a Speaker* at the Intermedia Arts Festival, 1969

**The Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53 Street**



Organized by Sophie Cavoulacos,
Assistant Curator, Department of Film

Hyundai Card

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Images are courtesy the artist unless
otherwise noted: Sugiura Kohei.
Announcement for the Intermedia
Arts Festival, Nikkei Hall, Tokyo,
January 18, 19, and 21, 1969. Image
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Photo: Robert Gerhardt; Shuzo Azuchi
Gulliver. *Cinematic Illumination*.
1968–69. Installation view, *Japanese
Expanded Cinema Revisited*. Courtesy
the artist and Tokyo Photographic Art
Museum; Tokyo discotheque Killer
Joe's, 1968. Photograph by Shuji
Yamada. Courtesy Shinkenchiku-Sha
Co. Ltd.

Above: Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver.
Cinematic Illumination. 1968–69.
1,350 black-and-white slides, 108
color gels, disco ball, and sound,
114:45 min., looped. The Museum
of Modern Art, New York. Acquired
through the generosity of Marie-
Josée and Henry Kravis. Video still,
installation view, The Museum of
Modern Art, August 27, 2020–February
2021. Video: Oresti Tsonopoulos.
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