In the period from the mid-1950s through the 1960s, Tokyo transformed itself from the capital of a war-torn nation into an international center for culture and commerce, home to some of the most important art being created at the time. Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde provides a focused look at the extraordinary convergence of creative individuals and practices in this dynamic city during these turbulent years. Featuring works of various mediums—including painting, sculpture, photography, performance, film, architecture, graphic design, music, and dance—this is the first publication in English to concentrate in depth on the avant-garde arts and cross-disciplinary connections that emerged from the incubator of Tokyo in these years, as artists drew on the energy of this rapidly growing and changing metropolis.
TOKYO 1955–1970

an exhibition co-organized by
The Museum of Modern Art and the Japan Foundation
< falling event >

1. Let something fall from a high place.

2. Let yourself fall from a high place using an elevator, parachute, rope, or anything else, or using nothing.

C. Skene 1963
TOKYO
1955–1970
A NEW AVANT-GARDE

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
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On October 18, 1962, Nakanishi Natsuyuki, Takamatsu Jirō, and their colleagues staged a guerrilla performance event on a train on the Yamanote loop line in central Tokyo. Captured in a handful of black-and-white photographs and in a retrospective description by their fellow artist Akasegawa Genpei, the event perplexed unwitting witnesses—mostly office workers in suits who were riding the train or waiting on the platform (fig. 1).

In one image we see Nakanishi standing in the train, his face painted white, seemingly absorbed in a book (fig. 2). Next to him, hanging from a strap-handle by a chain, is one of his Compact Objects (Konpakuto obuje)—transparent forms, each about the size and shape of an ostrich egg, in which sundry items, such as wristwatches, bits of rope, sunglasses, bottle caps, and human hair, are encased in resin (plate 5).

Then we see him on the platform squatting and licking another Object, as Takamatsu stands behind him holding (all too naturally) a newspaper and yet another Object, apparently oblivious to the bystanders gawking at his co-conspirator (fig. 3).

In 1965 Shigeko Kubota, who had moved from Japan to New York the year before to join the burgeoning Fluxus group, collaborated with artist George Maciunas to produce an illustrated map of the events organized by Hi red Center (Hai reddo Sentā), the artists’ collective formed in 1963 by Nakanishi, Takamatsu, and Akasegawa (plates 1, 2). The map, edited by Kubota and designed by Maciunas, shows on its recto side the heart of Tokyo ringed by the Yamanote line; this is overlaid with textual descriptions of Hi red Center’s events—twenty-one in all. Number 3, the Yamanote Line Incident (Yamanote-sen jiken), now considered part of the group’s pre-history, is located at two points: between the Ebisu and Meguro stations, and between the Tamachi and Shimbashi stations in the southern section of the loop line. The map provides further information about the event: “A continuous black string with various everyday objects attached to it at intervals was laid out on the street from a moving streetcar along [the train’s] circular route”; the Compact Objects hanging from the straps were “observed by performers at close range with battery lights”; and the newspapers they read had “holes burned in them.”

What might be the significance of this event, situated roughly at the midpoint of the timeframe of this exhibition and publication? By the early 1960s Japan was a relatively stable and increasingly prosperous country, having ostensibly shed the shadows of the defeat of World War II. The society and urban spaces had been reconstructed, and the citizens had been organized (to some extent) into an orderly collectivity under the solidifying power of the state. The Yamanote Line incident, like many other artistic gestures presented in this project, was a response to and constituent of the heady, chaotic, and altogether exhilarating span of years from 1955 to 1970. Japan’s wholesale reconstruction in the first postwar decade and the period that followed was so thorough that it had to be engaged not only on the social and spatial strata, but also on the subjective levels of the individual and of the body itself. Many artists found that images and objects were not enough to achieve such an engagement. They began to move their work beyond traditional institutional spaces—galleries and museums—and to make use of theaters, city streets and other public spaces, mass media, and more as new venues for their explosive experimentalism. In fact, the entire city became a multilayered matrix of avant-garde production and energy at this time. But before presenting this story of remarkable creative fertility, it is necessary to limn the space and the time: Tokyo in the 1950s and 1960s.

Plate 4
AKASEGAWA GENPEI
Sheets of Vagina (Second Present) (Vagina no shitsu [Nihon no nisshoku])
1961/1994
Vacuum tube, car-tire inner tube, hubcap, and wood
71 5/8 × 35 13/16” (182 × 91 cm)
Tokyo, the capital of Japan, is customarily touted as the largest city in the world. Though its sprawl is indeed mind-boggling, this characterization is somewhat misleading. The metropolitan government of Tokyo oversees twenty-three special wards (some-times called cities) as well as more than thirty municipalities, many of which lie west of the heart of the capital, thus creating an elongated terrain that merges with adjacent urban centers such as Yokohama to create an extraordinarily vast and dense megalopolis. But of course what most visitors, and even residents, consider Tokyo is a concentrated cluster of special wards, especially the handful that surround the Yamanote loop line. Tokyo’s well-known centers of artistic, cultural, political, and economic activities—such as Ginza, Shinjuku, and Ueno—are located on or near this train line, which was completed in 1925 by connecting preexisting railways and assumed its current form in 1956. The railway, the main organizing structure of the city, follows the center ring of the city concentrically around its nucleus—the imperial palace—famously described by Roland Barthes as “a void.”

The statistical data of Tokyo as the largest metropolitan economy with the largest population in the world are notable in their own right, but even more so when considering the rapidity with which the city attained this scale and status. The carpet bombings of the final years of the Asia-Pacific War razed the city almost to the ground. Tokyo lay in ruins in September 1945 when General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, moved into Tokyo’s Dai-ichi Seimei building, known as General Headquarters (or GHQ), initiating the occupation of Japan that would last until 1952. The Allied occupation signaled a radical time of political independence, Japan’s mood had changed considerably—so much so, indeed, that the government proclaimed that the postwar era was over. While Tokyo’s growing prosperity was without doubt the main motor behind the reconstruction boom of this period, a critical push was provided, within the international arena.

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I. Place/Time: Tokyo, Rising/A Decade and a Half

Tokyo, the capital of Japan, is customarily touted as the largest city in the world. Though its sprawl is indeed mind-boggling, this characterization is somewhat misleading. The metropolitan government of Tokyo oversees twenty-three special wards (some-times called cities) as well as more than thirty municipalities, many of which lie west of the heart of the capital, thus creating an elongated terrain that merges with adjacent urban centers such as Yokohama to create an extraordinarily vast and dense megalopolis. But of course what most visitors, and even residents, consider Tokyo is a concentrated cluster of special wards, especially the handful that surround the Yamanote loop line. Tokyo’s well-known centers of artistic, cultural, political, and economic activities—such as Ginza, Shinjuku, and Ueno—are located on or near this train line, which was completed in 1925 by connecting preexisting railways and assumed its current form in 1956. The railway, the main organizing structure of the city, follows the center ring of the city concentrically around its nucleus—the imperial palace—famously described by Roland Barthes as “a void.”

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It would be wrong, however, to characterize this as an era of uninterrupted growth, wealth, and...
stability: it is remembered also for periodic eruptions of protest and the subsequent repression of antigovernment movements. The 1960s opened with massive demonstrations against the renewal of the so-called Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States (known in Japan by the shorthand Anpo; see fig. 4). In the following years, Japan had its share of student uprisings and anti-Vietnam War rallies, but the decade closed with government crackdowns precluding any possibility of protests on the scale of those in 1960. The streets in Tokyo during this time were not only a site for political protest, which might be described as a form of public performance. Artists and architects also made use of the city’s public spaces as their own forum for radical actions and events, as in the case of the Yomonote Line incident. Such guerrilla-style events were responses to the wholesale spatial and topographic, and social reorganization of Tokyo, as events were responses to the wholesale spatial, topographic, and social reorganization of Tokyo, as well as to the city’s lack of infrastructure for art and artists.

Among the many great cities that have been devasted in times of violence, Tokyo has the distinction of having been rebuilt and subsequently expanded at a truly unprecedented pace and scale. The story of the city itself, in its role as a site of remarkable artistic flowering after the war, has not yet, however, been a subject of much focused study. It may certainly be said that Tokyo is less known for its experimental cultural productions than as a place of “exotic” popular culture, a subject of much focused study. Nonetheless, it may be said that these large-scale proposals rarely came into existence, although certain individual edifices were built. Tange’s Yoyogi National Stadium (Kokuritsu Yoyogi Kokuritsu Kōkōdō), completed in 1964 for the Olympics (plate 8), and Kurokawa’s Nakagin Capsule Tower Building (Nakagin Kapserutawā Biru), completed in 1972 (plate 9), are effective embodiments of the Metabolists’ organicist understanding of potential advancements in architecture.

The Metabolists were nothing if not big thinkers: Believing that “a radial centripetal city like Tokyo would inevitably reach a state of confusion and paralysis as the population grew” (Tokyo had close to ten million residents by this time), Tange and his team envisioned a “civic axis,” “a linear structure capable of growth like a vertebrate animal.” The Metabolists were nothing if not big thinkers: the three-level megastructure of A Plan for Tokyo combines transportation systems and offices, commercial and residential spaces that project into and span the Tokyo Bay. They made multiple designs for forests of vertical skyscrapers, horizontally linked to the city’s history by closely examining this particularly abiding interest to Western audiences.

In terms of being a site of remarkable artistic flowering after the war, has not yet, however, been a subject of much focused study. It may certainly be said that Tokyo is less known for its experimental cultural productions than as a place of “exotic” popular culture, a subject of much focused study. Nonetheless, it may be said that these two critical impulses served to contest the mainstream of modern art and institutional structures that upheld it, stirring up postwar Japanese art in general and transforming Tokyo itself into a hotbed of experimental artistic activities—which would collectively crystallize into a new avant-garde.
II. Artists, Collectives, Tendencies

The Figure in the Mid- to Late 1950s

Consider two paintings made in 1955, at the closing threshold of the “postwar” period: Okamoto Tarō’s *Men Aflame* (*Moeru hito*; fig. 5) and Nakamura Hiroshi’s *Sunagawa No. 5* (*Sunagawa goban*; see p. 113, fig. 14). Although Okamoto (1911–1996) and Nakamura (born 1932) are separated by a generation, the two works have much in common—both are enraged responses to continued victimization at the hands of a powerful oppressor. Men Aflame was made in reaction to the horrendous disaster that befell the Japanese fishing boat *Dai-Go Fukuryū-maru* the year before: the vessel was exposed to massive amounts of radiation when, on March 1, 1954, the U.S. military tested the hydrogen bomb on Bikini Atoll. The painting is a semiabstract allover composition of squiggly serpentine forms, flame motifs, and floating eyeballs, painted in a bright palette of yellow, red, and purple, which by then had become the artist’s signature hues. All elements in the painting allude to the disaster, which was deeply painful for the Japanese citizenry—the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were only a decade old—and the pain was undoubtedly worsened by the fact that the U.S. military was again the perpetrator. This theme was clearly a touchstone for some other Japanese artists as well; Ikeda Tatsuo addresses it, for example, in his 1954 *10,000 Count* (*10,000 kountō*; plate 10) from his series Anti-Atomic Bomb (*Han-genbaku*).

Despite Okamoto’s central, influential place in the Japanese art world in the immediate postwar years, and perhaps because his identity and philosophy were shaped by his experiences while living in Paris before the war, he was distanced from the emerging generation of young Turks, including Nakamura. Painting *Sunagawa No. 5* while still in his early twenties, Nakamura did not shy away from realistically depicting a contemporary event: the forceful displacement of local residents for the construction of an American air base. On either side of the midsection of the horizontally elongated, almost cinematic picture, a group of downtrodden but defiant farmers face off with smug lawmen—a standoff that will have a predetermined outcome. Both Okamoto and Nakamura address pressing contemporary events, and bring suffering or struggling human figures to the center of attention. Their figures serve as signs of the times in which the artists lived and worked; they also signify what was at stake artistically in Japan.

In the mid-1950s, the Japanese art world witnessed significant shifts in terms of generation, ideological stance with regard to art’s connection to politics and society, Japanese art’s relations to the outside world, and the formal languages of visual expression. These changes did not signify a complete break from the past: links existed naturally between the older generation of artists, who had participated in the war, and the younger generation, who had experienced the war in some manner, but were too young to have participated. And importantly, pre-war avant-garde movements—Japanese schools of...
Constructivism and especially Surrealism—had been rediscovered and revived, providing a crucial impetus for budding vanguard artists. The decade immediately following the war had also generated several important artistic movements. The established hierarchical system of guildlike artists’ associations and exhibitions, which dominated the art world in prewar years (and with which Okamoto was associated), rebuilt itself, while the younger, socially conscious—even activist—artists (Nakamura among them) underwent continuous changes of course. A central question that was on the minds of the younger generation was whether artists and their works can have a truly participatory relationship with reality.

The generation of artists who had experienced the war—including Yamashita Kikuji, Hamada Chimei, Katsuragawa Hiroshi, and Ikeda—did not have the kind of international experiences Okamoto had; their worldviews and early artistic motivations were very much shaped by what they had been through and seen during World War II—whether they fought on the battlefield or simply felt the pain of the country hurtling down the road to defeat.

Hamada’s series of etchings (at times mixed with aquatint) Elegy for a New Conscript (Shonenhei aika; plates 11–14), which he began showing in 1951 and continued to augment over the following years, is a group of melancholic images of brutality and desolation. At times, harrowing visions of bodies—part-bodies, to be more precise—appear on a bleak plain. One of the most famous images in the group, Elegy for a New Conscript (Landscape) (Shonenhei aika [Fūkei]), shows a naked and pregnant female body, her legs spread apart, with a stick emerging from her genitalia. Furthermore, the extreme foreshortening obscures the head—is the head even there? What happened to this poor body? It is perhaps too horrifying to even wonder. When visages are shown in Hamada’s series, they are highly abstracted, as in one 1954 image, in which the figure is seen at the moment of committing suicide with a rifle (plate 13), or another from the same year, which shows decapitated heads impaled on stakes in a ruined landscape dotted with Chinese brick buildings (plate 14).

Memories of past war traumas were not the only fuel for artistic creation during this period. Yamashita Kikuji was one of the main figures in what was known as reportage painting (Rupurutāju kaiga) in the 1950s, a movement led by socially committed artists who often observed or participated in proletarian struggles through their artistic endeavors. The “conversion” to reportage was particularly trenchant for Yamashita, who had formerly been mobilized to serve as a war painter, producing propaganda glorifying imperialistic militarism.

Strikingly, just a few years after the war, he painted Totems (Oto otemu, 1951; plate 15), which clearly exhibits the influence of the Surrealistic style and visual vocabulary that had been so influential before the war (though its rather subdued, even drab palette is distinct from Okamoto’s vibrant primary, primitive hues).
the growing importance of activist politics and proletarian sympathy through the first half of the 1950s. Yamashita made one of his best-known works, *The Tale of Akebono Village* (*Akebono mura monogatari*, 1953; fig. 6), a painting based on a real-life incident of two deaths that were caused by social injustice in a town in northern Yamagata Prefecture. While ostensibly “reporting” on the event (in fact Yamashita was working from second-hand information), the painting, though figurative, is far from a naturalistic account; rather, it is a morbid, fabulike tableau populated by anthropomorphic animals alongside the human corpses. The work also exemplifies the significant theoretical and critical thrust of reportage painting: the reportage artist must find a form that connects external reality with inner subjectivity. The movement flourished in the first half of the 1950s; by the time Katsuragawa, also active in reportage, painted *Rooster and Steel Construction* (*Ondori to tekkotsu*, 1957; plate 16), it was already on the wane. Contrasting a caged black bird against a new steel structure being built in front of Tokyo Station (close to the imperial palace), this painting questions the progress and reconstruction that were driven by economic growth and touted by the government, which turned a blind eye to unresolved remnants of the past. The floating red sun—a turgid national symbol—adds to the ambivalence of this portrait of the time. A desire for a new artistic language was clearly stirring by the second half of the 1950s. The figure—no longer merely the medium for conveying war violence or proletarian struggles—seemed to be moving toward a more complex relationship with social concerns and image making, mutating into bizarre, fantastical, and even abstract forms. Both Ikeda and Nakamura, who had been young Reportage painters in the early 1950s, underwent a metamorphosis in their ideology as well as work. Ikeda’s early painting *Arm* (*Ude*, 1953; plate 17) — with its bizarrely absent head behind a fist holding the handle of a shovel — arose from his sympathy for the working class but already suggests a direction away from the naturalistic depiction of their toil. In the following year, he would make drawings that announce an irrefutable transition. *Big Street* (*Ōdōri*, 1954; plate 18) shows the impoverishment that many still suffered at this time, encapsulated in a simplified composition inhabited by stick figures rendered in an intentionally childlike manner. The same year’s *10,000 Count*, from the Anti-Atomic Bomb series, exhibits an increasingly allegorical style that diverges from realism and anticipates a remarkable body of work Ikeda would soon develop: meticulously rendered pen (and sometimes
pencil) drawings of monstrous, often humorous human and animal figures—which can be seen both as a parody of the illogical human life and as partly derived from the rich panoply of spirits and demons in Japan’s animistic religion. The beginning of Ikeda’s Chronicle of Birds and Beasts (Kinjūki; plate 19), Genealogy of Monsters (Bakemono no keifu; plate 20), and other series, begun in 1955 and ongoing until the end of the decade, coincided with his membership in what was known as the Seisakusha Kondankai (Producers’ discussion group). This consortium, which also included slightly younger artists Ishii Shigeo and On Kawara, made the point that it was “concerned with the creation of a new realism which did not owe its concept and pictorial vocabulary to the leg- acy of Social realism,” and thus clearly expressed a shift away from the aesthetics and strategies of reportage painting.

Two works from Ishii’s Violence (Bōryoku) series, Acrobatics (Kyokugei; plate 21) and Under Martial Law IV (Kaigen jōtai IV; plate 22), both 1956, could not be more distinct: the former is a tightly woven tapestry of human figures, whereas the latter is a disquieting urban landscape invaded by mysterious spheres, from which panicked minuscule human figures vainly seek shelter. As different as these works are, however, both render a sense of claustrophobia through their almost horror vacui compositions. In its intentional lack of specificity and visual mayhem, Under Martial Law IV is a clear ideological departure from Reportage painting as well as from the Socialist Realist school that was encouraged and supported by the Japanese Communist Party (although the work’s title is of course a clear reference to the country’s early postwar years). Ishii himself stated: “For an artist to witness the struggle around the base of the foreign military force and to report the incident by means of painting is to remain totally passive against reality.” For him, the engineered “peaceful, democratic look” of Japan’s postwar society was the “perfect crime committed by contemporary Imperialism.”

Even Nakamura, a contemporary of Ishii and Kawara and a onetime enthusiastic participant in reportage activism, moved toward the metaphorical and allegorical, as seen in his 1958 trilogy Period of War (Sensōki; plate 23), Period of Peace (Heiwaki; plate 24), and Upheaval (Nairanki; plate 25).
Although the art world at this time was dominated by male artists (this is true for the whole period concerned here), there were important contributions from women—possibly due to the radically changed social climate and structure in postwar years, in no small measure affected by the American-led reconstruction effort. Madokoro (Akutagawa) Saori, whose career was cut short by her death at forty-two in 1966, was closely associated with Ishii, Ikeda, and Kawara. In the mid-1950s she made paintings that are notable for their unique dyeing technique and for their mythological and primitive iconography, as seen in *Myth, Birth of Gods* (*Shinwa, kamigami no tanjō*, 1956; plate 26). In contrast, Yayoi Kusama’s connections with the Tokyo scene, though significant, were few, and this separation from her contemporaries was made even wider with her departure from Japan in 1957. Kusama’s drawings from the years leading up to her emigration to the United States presage what would become her signature stylistic languages—obsessional accumulation and what she would dub “Infinity Nets”—which might be characterized as a sublimation of figuration. These elements can be seen in such works as *Infinity Nets* (1953; plate 27); *Untitled* (1952; plate 28); and *Untitled* (1954; plate 29). While her abstraction distinguishes Kusama’s work from the styles of her contemporaries, the organismic and sense of proliferation in her paintings closely resonate with the work of her male cohorts, in particular Ishii.

Another resonance is evident with abstract paintings by Maeda Jōsaku and Nakanishi Natsuyuki. The former’s *Garden of Earthly Delights* (Jardin des Delice [*sic*]; Kairaku no sono, 1959; plate 30).
features a humanoid form in innumerable repetitions (again reminiscent of Ishii’s work), tightly overlapping one another and seemingly swirling toward a central void. Other works, such as Nakanishi’s Map of Human (Ningen no chizu, 1959; plate 31) and Rhyme ’60 (In, 1960; plate 32), not only evoke a similar logic of proliferation but are instructive to consider in relation to the artist’s production as part of Hi Red Center. While these abstract paintings may be seen as a subsuming of the human figure under a language of abstraction, during the brief period of 1962–64, Nakanishi would powerfully foreground his own body as the central medium and subject of his practice.

It is also in this light—with the fate of the figure in mind—that one may consider Kawara’s masterful Stones Thrown (Tsubute, 1956). In the upper register of a strangely shaped canvas, he paints a row of tires rolling away—or barreling down toward us?—leaving a trail of crushed stones and sticks strewn across an unfolding reddish brickscape. The artist had been recently celebrated as a young prodigy with his alternately fascinating and terrifying Bathroom (Yokushitsu) series of drawings of 1953–54, in which apparently placid figures seem to be involved in an ultimately incomprehensible drama of butchery and mutation. In the drawings Kawara abstracts and fragments human bodies into dismembered limbs, or, even more disturbingly, plumbing pipes. It is as if the frightening, impassive appendages, rendered in thick outlines, have finished the job of depopulation.23 Made in the same year, Ay-O’s Pastoral (Den’en, 1956; plate 33) shares unexpected qualities with Kawara’s work of this period. Here, too, torsos and limbs of the figures seem pneumatic, and the simplified palette is dominated by yellow, as if giving form to the homogenizing, dehumanizing force of standardization that turns individuals into an army of workers, undifferentiated except by gender, toiling for prosperity in the postwar brave new world.
Plate 31
NAKANISHI NATSUYUKI
Map of Heaven (Ningen no chizu) 1959
Paint, enamel, and sand on plywood
47 5/8 x 63 1/2” (121 x 161 cm)

Plate 32
NAKANISHI NATSUYUKI
Rhyme ‘60 (No)
1960
Paint, enamel, and sand on iron
32 7/8 x 39 1/2” (83 x 99.8 cm)

Plate 33
AY-O
Pastoral (Zaeru) 1956
Oil on panel
72 1/8 x 42 3/4” (183 x 211.6 cm)
THE DAWN OF CROSS-GENRE: JIKKEN KÔBÔ AND GUTAI

While the struggle around the figure was unfolding in the 1950s, another important tendency — cross-genre or interdisciplinary and intermedia work — was coalescing in postwar Japanese art. The chief proponents of these movements were two artists’ collectives, Jikken Kôbô/Experimental Workshop and Gutai Bijutsu Kyôkai (Gutai art association) in the Kansai (Osaka-Kobe) region. In addition to their cross-genre orientation, Jikken Kôbô and Gutai had two other important things in common. First, both were groups of young, enterprising artists who came under the leadership of an older and charismatic leader — poet and critic Takiguchi Shizō and artist Yoshiihara Jirō, respectively — who had established vanguard credentials in prewar Japan. And second: unlike the numerous artists’ societies and collectives that flourished from the immediate postwar years into the early 1950s, these two groups enjoyed a measure of longevity; Jikken Kôbô existed from the early 1950s nearly to the end of the decade, and Gutai from 1954 to 1972. The similarities, however, more or less end there.

Based in Kansai (second only to Tokyo and its surrounding region in size and significance), from where most of its members hailed, Gutai took care from the beginning to present itself outside its immediate environs. The sporadically published Gutai journal — tightly edited and designed and generously filled with reproductions and writings by group members and occasional outside contributions — was distributed both in Japan and overseas. Influential French critic and curator Michel Tapié visited Japan in 1953 and 1955 and subsequently promoted the Gutai group in Europe and America, securing them much tribulation both in Japan and overseas. Gutai Bijutsu-ten), Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo, October 1955 (Gutai bijutsu-ten), Ohara Kaikan, Tokyo, October 1955

Influential French critic and curator Michel Tapié visited Japan in 1953 and 1955 and subsequently promoted the group in Europe and America, securing them much-desired recognition in the international scene.

Within Japan, Gutai had begun its campaign of self-promotion early on, and in its first years members organized group exhibitions and stage performances in Tokyo as often as in Kansai. In fact, some of the most iconic early performative actions were carried out in Tokyo. The first Gutai exhibition in Tokyo was presented at Ohara Kaikan; there, Shiraga Kazuo, dressed in white boxer shorts, dove into and wrestled with a pile of mud in Challenging Mud (Doro ni idomu, 1955; fig. 7), and Murakami Saburō broke through multiple screens of Kraft paper in violent movements in Six Holes (Mutsu no ana, 1955; fig. 8), from Paper-Breaking (Kami yaburi). In the Gutai Art on the Stage (Butai o shiyō suru Gutai bijutsu) event held at Sankei Kaikan, Tokyo, in October 1957, Shiraga and two male performers walked onstage wearing different versions of Tanaka Electric Dress (Denki-fuku, 1956; see p. 115, fig. 117), an elaborate contraption made of light bulbs and tangles of electric cords.

Interestingly, although Gutai may today be best remembered for these groundbreaking performance-based innovations, and their performances continued into their later years, the artists regarded themselves primarily as painters. Shiraga, Murakami, Tanaka, and others developed their own unique painterly vocabularies and practices, to which they adhered throughout the Gutai years and afterward. Shiraga painted with his feet on canvases laid horizontally on the floor (plate 34). Tanaka made numerous paintings and drawings featuring her signature repeating circles and tangled lines derived from Electric Dress (plates 33, 36). In Work Painted by Throwing a Ball (Tōkyū kaiga, 1954; plate 37), Murakami hurled an ink-soaked ball onto a pictorial surface, leaving traces of a forceful registration of the moving object — anticipating his plunges through paper surfaces with his own body. But not all Gutai paintings were performatively inspired, nor were all engaged in a direct relationship between action and picture. Motonaga Sadamasa’s Work (Water) (Sakuhin [Mizu], 1955; fig. 9) consists of teardrop-like transparent plastic bags filled with water tinted with a range of bright hues. Motonaga hung this work at Gutai’s first exhibition in Tokyo, amid his own paintings as well as a group of brightly colored stones, and remnants of other artists’ actions and interactive works — a truly cross-genre event. His work underscores Gutai’s contribution to art not only in the realm of performance but also in that of installation.
Plate 35
TANAKA ATSUKO
Drawing after “Electric Dress” (Denki-fuku no tame no sobyō)
1956
Crayon on paper
42 3/4 × 29 15/16" (108.6 × 76 cm)

Plate 37
MURAMATSU SAJIRŌ
Work (Stone) (Ishi), in front of him, at the first Gutai Art Exhibition (Gutai bijutsu-ten), Ohara Kikan, Tokyo, October 1955
Photographs unknown

Plate 36
TANAKA ATSUKO
Work (Stones) (Sakuhin [Ishi]), in front of him, at the first Gutai Art Exhibition (Gutai bijutsu-ten), Ohara Kikan, Tokyo, October 1955
Photographs unknown

Plate 38
MURAMATSU SAJIRŌ
Work (Painted by Throwing a Ball) (Tōkyū kaiga), 1954
Ink on paper
41 5/8 × 29 3/4" (105.7 × 75.6 cm)

Fig. 9
Motomaga Sadamasa with his 1955 pieces Work (Water) (Sakuhin [Mizu], hanging from the ceiling on the right); Liquid Red (Ekitai, aka), suspended above the artist; and Work (Stone) (Ishi), in front of him, at the first Gutai Art Exhibition (Gutai bijutsu-ten), Ohara Kikan, Tokyo, October 1955

Plate 39
TANAKA ATSUKO
Work (Sakuhin)
1957
Permanent marker and oil on paper
43 1/2 × 30 1/4" (110.5 × 77.2 cm)

Opposite:
Plate 36
MURAMATSU SAJIRÔ
Work (Painted by Throwing a Ball) (Tōkyū kaiga)
1954
Ink on paper
41 5/8 × 29 3/4" (105.7 × 75.6 cm)

Top left:
Plate 35
TANAKA ATSUKO
Drawing after “Electric Dress” (Denki-fuku no tame no sobyō)
1956
Crayon on paper
42 3/4 × 29 15/16" (108.6 × 76 cm)

Opposite:
Plate 36
MURAMATSU SAJIRÔ
Work (Stones) (Sakuhin [Ishi]), in front of him, at the first Gutai Art Exhibition (Gutai bijutsu-ten), Ohara Kikan, Tokyo, October 1955
Photographs unknown

Top right:
Plate 37
MURAMATSU SAJIRÔ
Work (Stone) (Ishi), in front of him, at the first Gutai Art Exhibition (Gutai bijutsu-ten), Ohara Kikan, Tokyo, October 1955
Photographs unknown
Gutai worked as a tight-knit group, its members devoting their energies solely to Gutai projects; this contrasted with a certain looseness that characterized the collaborations of Jikken Kōbō, whose members’ activities were somewhat more diffused. This Tokyo collective—made up of visual artists, musical composers, photographers, and an engineer—first came together in 1951 on the occasion of a Pablo Picasso retrospective, specifically, the performance of the ballet *Joy of Life* (*Joie de vivre; Ikiru yorokobi*), the first Jikken Kōbō event, produced as part of the Picasso Festival, Hibiya Kōkaidō Hall, Tokyo, November 16, 1951 (Photograph by Kitadai Shōzō).

Many of them already knew one another as members of artists’ societies and study groups. Takiguchi, a mentor to many of them, christened the group. The works of the visual artists of the group—Fukushima Hideko, Kitadai Shōzō, and Yamaguchi Katsuhiro—had few obvious commonalities. Fukushima, the only female member, could be described as the most “classical” visual artist in the group; her principal mediums were painting and drawing, and her gestural brushstrokes and drips on canvas and gouache on paper were in many ways in line with gestural abstraction, which was becoming an important trend in painting. One particularly distinguishing factor in Fukushima’s pictures is her use of stamps made of cans—circular forms that contrast with the supposedly intentional incorporation of not-wholly-controllable material qualities and physical forces, as seen in *Visitor* (*Gairaisha*, 1956; plate 38) and Work 109 (*Sakuhin 109*, 1959; plate 39). Having both studied engineering, Kitadai and Yamaguchi were naturally interested in science and technology and in their interface with art. While Kitadai’s painting *Egg of Oedipus: Wish to Return to the Womb* (*Oidipusu no tamago: Shikyō koki gōmō*, 1952/1988; plate 40) features forms that are Surrealist-inflected, around the same time he was also beginning to explore a Constructivist formal language in paintings such as *Composition of Rotary Panels* (*Kōten suru men ni yoru kōsei*, c. 1952; plate 41). Furthermore, having seen Alexander Calder’s works in reproduction, Kitadai was engaged in figuring out the construction of mobiles—an experiment that began as emulation but soon evolved into its own distinctive artistic statement, using wood and washi (*Japanese paper*). His mobiles and stabiles recall shoji, the sliding screens that are characteristic of Japanese architecture (*Mobā [Mōbā]*, 1956/1992; plate 42). Particularly interested in movement of pictorial space, Yamaguchi, after many experiments, arrived at his first major artistic series, *Vitrine* (*Vitorīnu*, plates 113, 132). The series utilizes corrugated glass that diffuses light and causes the image behind...
it to change depending on the position of the viewer. Takiguchi, always adept at naming, offered the French word for the series, as well as additional poetic appellations such as “music box for the eye” (me no orugōru) and “moving relief” (ugoku rerīfu).\(^{31}\) Yamaguchi was an indefatigable explorer of new materials and forms. His investigations would continue after the dissolution of Jikken Kōbō, as exemplified by his Wire Mesh Sculpture (Konsomi chōkoku, 1961; plates 43, 112) and Untitled (1962–63; plate 44).

While the spirit of experimentation is evident in their shape-shifting practices, it is important to note that what constituted the truly collective work of Jikken Kōbō was in other mediums. Yamaguchi encapsulated this well in an essay he wrote some years later: “The energy of [Jikken Kōbō] always radiated in both centripetal and centrifugal directions. By centripetal I mean an inward movement away from the outer directed teamwork of the group, a return to individual work. By centrifugal I mean the attempt to combine work in the various fields of art, music, and literature through logically necessary ideas.”\(^{32}\) In 1953 photographer Ōtsuji Kiyoji was added to the roster when the group was commissioned to contribute photography to the Asahi Picture News (APN) section of the newly launched magazine Asahi Graph (Asahi gurafu), as seen in the Compositions for APN (APN no tame no kōsei, 1953–54; plates 45–48). The photographs, most by Ōtsuji with Kitadai and Yamaguchi, were of sculptural constructions made by the latter two, as well as by a number of unofficial members who were invited to contribute for the occasion.\(^{33}\)

The photographs (almost all of which feature the letters APN) appeared—at times unexpectedly and in no relation to the texts around them—in seventy-one issues of Asahi Graph, from January 1953 until May 1954.\(^{34}\) The sculptural constructions, made exclusively for the purpose of photography, did not survive, but the images reveal that they were made from a wide range of easily available materials, such as acrylic panels, wood, paper, pins, and so on. Though mostly abstract, the
images overall convey a certain sci-fi sensibility and humor, and hearken back to the Bauhaus photographs of Naum Gabo or László Moholy-Nagy (fig. 11).

At the same time that the APN photographs were being conceived and made, Jikken Kōbō members were engaged in another project, utilizing the “auto-slide”—an automated combination tape recorder and slide projector. This device had been developed for educational purposes by Tōkyō Tsūshin Kōgyō, the Tokyo telecommunications engineering company (later renamed Sony), which also sponsored the project.

Each auto-slide show brought together a visual artist in the group with a composer or two: Yamaguchi was paired with Suzuki Hiroyoshi in *Adventure of the Eyes of Mr. W.S., a Test Pilot* (Shiken hikōka W.S.-shi no me no bōken, 1953; plates 123–25); Fukushima Hideko with her younger brother, Kazuo, in *Foam Is Created* (Minawa wa tsukurareru, 1953; plates 126–28); and Kitadai with Yuasa Jōji in *Another World* (Mishiranu sekai no hanashi, 1953; plates 129–31). These collaborations were presented in the Fifth Experimental Workshop Presentation (Jikken Kōbō dai-gokai happyōkai) at Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, an event that also included music and sound compositions by the members. Seen together, these auto-slide works, mixing still images, music, and spoken narrations, are strikingly imaginative and original, situated somewhere between composed still images, illustrated literature, and cinema. The futuristic and Constructivist aesthetics, suffused with a surreal air of the auto-slide works, culminate in a spectacular way in *Bicycle in Dream* (Ginrin, 1955; plates 133–35), a collaboration of Kitadai and Yamaguchi, with film-maker Matsumoto Toshio and with special effects by Tsuburaya Eiji (of *Godzilla* fame).

From the time of the group’s founding, Jikken Kōbō’s work was inherently collaborative, cross-genre, and multidisciplinary. Music played a significant part in this mix (by sheer number, there were more composers/musicians in the group than visual artists). In addition to Fukushima Kazuo, Yuasa, and Suzuki, the collective also included Satō Meijirō, musicologist and critic Akiyama Kuniharu, and pianist Sonoda Takahiro, as well as Takemitsu Tōru, arguably the most celebrated composer to emerge from postwar Japan. A large number of their official public presentations were musical concerts—featuring the members’ compositions and also music by European contemporaries or predecessors, including Arnold Schoenberg, Erik Satie, and Olivier Messiaen. More experimental music was presented in February 1956 at the *Musique Concrète/Electronic Music Audition* (Myūjikku konkureto/Denshi ongaku ōdishon) at Yamaha Hall. Two members of the group, Takemitsu and Suzuki, were joined by the members of the so-called Sanrin no Kai (Society of three, made up of composers Akutagawa Yasushi, Mutsuomi Toshirō, and Tsuchiya Kōki) to present *Compositions and Experiments*. This event was a turning point in the development of Jikken Kōbō, as it marked the beginning of the group’s transition from a primarily visual arts-focused organization to a more multidisciplinary and collaborative entity.
and Shibata Namio). Notable also was Yamaguchi’s dynamic spatial installation of ropes tautly stretched between the audience area and the ceiling, like vertical hammocks (fig. 12)—a precedent to environmental art, which would become an important trend in Japan a decade later.

Ultimately it was Jikken Kōbō’s dance and stage performances that utilized the members’ wide-ranging skills most successfully. All participated in these projects, also collaborating with outside dancers and choreographers, dramaturges and directors. In 1955, Jikken Kōbō organized two stage performances—L’Ève future (Future Eve, or Mirai no Ivu; fig. 13), a ballet; and Pierrot Lunaire (Tsuki ni tsukareta Piero; fig. 14), Schoenberg’s Sprechstimme (spoken-voice) musical cycle of poems from 1912—in March and December, respectively. Although both are preserved only in documentary photographs and preparatory drawings, and scant written information survives, one can nonetheless glean from what documentation remains an air of invigorating experimentalism. Kitadai’s stage sets—massive, metal, anthropomorphic constructions for L’Ève future and Japanese-style wood-and-paper folding screens for Pierrot Lunaire—not only attest to his long-standing dialogue with Western precedents such as Alexander Calder, Jean Tinguely, and Isamu Noguchi, but also demonstrate his success in personalizing them in his own practice and naturalizing them in the milieu of postwar Japan. While L’Ève future evoked an air of a futuristic (as suggested by the title) society of mechanization, Pierrot Lunaire was a reinterpretation of a benchmark work in early twentieth-century European avant-garde music.

Working with Takechi Tetsuji, a radical theater director, Jikken Kōbō engaged three actors from three different genres/traditions (Shingeki or “new Western-style theater,” Noh, and Kyōgen), each to play one of the three characters of Columbine, Harlequin, and Pierrot. The final result was a realization of a Gesamtkunstwerk, the defining ethos of Jikken Kōbō.

The efforts of both Gutai and Jikken Kōbō serve as reminders of what was at stake at this purported end of the postwar years. As much as young artists could construct new milieus for experimentation, their work was also a salvaging operation in search of the legacy of prewar avant-gardes, both Western and Japanese, and the relevance of their work vis-à-vis the larger culture.
By the turn of the decade, the stage was set for an efflorescence of almost anarchistic creative energies. As we have seen, in the late 1950s “traditional” mediums such as painting, drawing, and print constituted the principal arena in which the figure was explored artistically. This investigation might very well be understood as a response to the actual fate suffered by countless human bodies in the violence of war, as well as to the subsequent breakneck reconstruction and modernization and the deluge of foreign cultures and influences. Concurrently, less concerned with questions of reality and representation, Jikken Kōbō and Gutai artists utilized the performing body as a critical motor and locus of creative production. As groundbreaking as their experiments were, however, they unfolded in more or less pre-defined realms: on the pictorial surface or on the stage. In contrast, new tendencies emerging in the late 1950s and early 1960s staked out different spaces—private as well as public, often blurring the boundaries between the two.

The most important of these tendencies was played out at an “official” venue and with a new generation of artists. The Yomiuri Indépendant (“Yomiuri Anpan” for short)—named after the newspaper company that sponsored it—was held at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum every February or March from 1949 through 1963, over the course of about two weeks. The tenth edition, in 1958, was a turning point, featuring core members of the new generation—including Akasegawa Genpei, Arakawa Shūsaku, Shinohara Ushio, Yoshimura Masunobu, Miki Tomio, and Kudō Tetsumi. Many of these artists would be associated with groups such as Neo Dada—originally known as Neo Dadaism Organizer(s) [Neo Dadaizumu Oruganaizā[zu]]—and—Hi Red Center, and these collectives were part of a larger tendency known as “Anti-Art.”

Though they had few stylistic or formal commonalities, the works by these artists were aligned in that most were sculptural (many of them verging on installation) and they were often related to—as representations of, allusions to, or substitutions for—the body. Miki Tomio sculpted the human ear, a seldom-observed human feature, almost exclusively and obsessively throughout his short life and career (plates 49, 50). Appearing in various sizes, the ear was sometimes accompanied disquietingly by its inner canal, like a bizarre appendage, as if it had been violently pulled intact out of a head. In most cases, Miki’s ears were made in cast aluminum, but in a few instances they were made out of fired clay or plaster, and in one case painted with vibrantly hued roses. Arakawa Shūsaku was known for a series of “coffins” (kan’oke), wooden casket-shaped containers lined with plush fabric and holding carcaslike forms made of cement with cotton and gauze (see Untitled Endurance, 1958; plate 114). These works were made in a variety of sizes, the smaller pieces hearkening back to the strange erotics of Surrealist objects, and the larger versions towering like colossi over the viewer. The combination of overwhelming scale and sexual allusion are even more confrontational in Kikuhata Mokuma’s Slave Genealogy (By Coins) (Dorei keizu [Kahei ni yoru]), 1961/1983; plate 51), which consists of two large wooden logs—telephone poles, in fact—lifted on the far end and sitting atop a platform of bricks, which is draped with a white fabric and strewn with coins. From one pole, studded with hundreds of five-yen coins, emerges an erect phallus (hand-carved and painted black), while the other features a vulvalike form with shreds of fabric tied all over it. Both logs are wrapped with ropes, and candles are placed in front of these totems, as if a vigil is being held. Some aspects of the sculpture’s iconography—such as the ropes and tied knots—clearly allude to the Shinto religion, but the work can also be seen as a commentary on the rise of contemporary materialism.
If Kikuhata’s work may be seen as still harboring a possibility of wholeness in its combination of male and female dimensions, Akasegawa Genpei and Kudō Tetsumi’s works convey a debilitating sense of “impotence” (to borrow a term from Kudō) that belies the sculptures’ provocative forms and titles and their impressive scales. Akasegawa’s Sheets of Vagina (Second Present) (Yamusa no shītsu [Nibanme no purezento], 1961/1994; plate 4) is a relief made of reddish-brown inner tubes cut open, folded and pleated, and sewn together, on top of which are affixed a hubcap and clusters of vacuum tubes. The strategy of evoking the corporeal through a combination of salvaged refuse of industrial, mechanized civilization was an outgrowth of the society of prosperity and abundance in which Akasegawa’s generation found itself. At the same time, the work is the artist’s version of the mechanistic woman and the erotic machine, explored by Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp earlier in the century. This theme also appears in the artist’s work in photo-montage (see Ambivalent Sea II [Aimai na umi II, 1961; plate 4]), a technique he investigated with much success (Ambivalent Sea 12 [Aimai na umi 12, 1961; plate 53]). Kudō scoured wholesale markets to procure materials like scrubbing pads, electric cords, and discarded lightbulbs. In 1962, at the penultimate Yomiuri Indépendant exhibition, he managed to secure a whole gallery for his audacious installation Philosophy of Impotence, or Distribution Map of Impotence and the Appearance of Protective Domes at the Points of Saturation (Inpo tetsugaku: Inpo bunbuzu to sono hōwa bubun ni okeru hogo dōmu no hassei), 1961–62. From the net stretched across the ceiling and on the peg-boards lining the walls hung hundreds of oblong forms, made out of coiled electric cords held in place with thick duct tape, each with a used lightbulb at the tip. Kudō characterized these as phallic-chrysalis hybrids—a symbol of sexuality or its inverse, impotence, fused with the notion of metamorphosis. The installation also featured two large elements—strings of these phallic-chrysalises, with clear plastic bowls put together to form science-fiction-esque spheres here and there—hanging from the ceiling net and reaching the floor like monstrous stalactites. He incorporated pages torn from popular magazines and reproductions of artworks (mostly American), as well as foodstuffs such as baguettes and fresh udon noodles for good measure. The incorporation of parts of bodies comes up again in Yoshimura Masunobu’s plaster sculptures Two Columns (1964; plate 55): two square columns featuring semispherical forms. On the one hand, despite the rather rigid and simple geometries, their verticality recalls a standing human form, and smaller additional elements operate as proxies for anatomical details—breasts and vulvas, to be precise—in a way echoing Kikuhata’s work. On the other hand, the repetition of those features also evokes the notion of proliferation, recalling aspects of Kudō’s work. Altogether, Kikuhata, Akasegawa, Kudō, and Yoshimura’s works speak to the time in which they lived, as well as their search for strategies for destabilizing the materiality, form, and ethos of art itself. At the threshold of a new decade, the figure as image, which had previously undergone extensions and mutations in pictorial mediums, was reified into the body as agent—at once less and more than whole, substituted by or fusing with detritus of industrial-consumerist society. Catching a whiff of this shift, critic Tōno Yoshiaki dubbed the tendency “Anti-Art” (Han-geijutsu). The term, of course, had been in existence virtually throughout the history of modern...
art, but it touched a nerve in the Tokyo art scene of the early 1960s. Tono’s appellation, first applied specifically to the work of Kudō, caught on and became the subject of intense critical debates for several years. Even as young artists planned long in advance for the “carnivalesque” each February/March, they were gathering into somewhat different forms of artists’ collectives than before. Around 1960 Yoshimura and Shinohara, along with Akasegawa, Arakawa, and others, assembled under the rubric Neo Dadaism (Organizer[s]). The group’s network included a constellation of associates, among them Kudō, Miki, and the architect Isozaki Arata. Their usual gathering place was the White House (Howaito Hausu), designed by Isozaki and built by Yoshimura in Shinjuku in 1958; this would serve as their base until 1962. Soon renamed Neo Dada, the group arranged a rapid-fire series of exhibitions in 1960, at times accompanied by guerrilla actions on the street (figs. 15, 16; and see p. 124, fig. 1). They also organized performances—cum-parties at the White House, which included such events as Shinohara, with his trademark high-energy masculinity, creating “Action” sculptures out of strips of wood, or making “Boxing Paintings” (Bokusuhingu peintingu), performances that were captured by visiting American photographer William Klein. The brief, combustible life of Neo Dada coincided with—and no doubt contributed to—the eruption of Anti-Art, and perhaps also to the demise of the Yomiuri Indépendant. The organizers of the exhibition, pressed by increasing challenges from young artists who might, for example, incorporate foodstuffs or stage performances in exhibitions without warning, abruptly canceled the event in January 1964, shocking and disappointing the art community. In retrospect, the Tokyo art world was clearly on the verge of a fundamental shift; many artists, including Arakawa and Kudō, opted to leave Japan around this time. One figure from the Neo Dada circle who chose to remain was Akasegawa (who did not have the financial means to go abroad anyway). He joined forces with Takamatsu Jirō and Nakanishi Natsuyuki to form Hi Red Center, and together they continued agitating the Tokyo art scene.44 Not unlike Neo Dada, Hi Red Center had a relatively open approach to membership; other artists often joined in their actions and events.45 Even though their official history was short—barely spanning two years—the group’s activities were many and diverse, and all are relatively well documented. Without exception, the many short-term events and actions staged by Hi Red Center relied on the body as a primary artistic tool: specifically, the body as a nonconformist subject. For instance, one action consisted of Nakanishi walking around the city with his head obscured by hundreds of clothespins (Clothespins Assert Churning Action [Sentaku basami wa kakuhan kōdō o shuchō suru], 1963; fig. 17) — and a tandem presentation of clothespin-studded

Plate 55
YOSHIMURA MASUNOBU
Two Columns
1964
Construction of plaster on wood and composition board, recessed in wood base, one column in Plexiglas vitrine
79 1/4 × 36 1/4 × 18" (198.4 × 91.4 × 45.6 cm)
canvases hung on the wall (plate 56; p. 169, fig. 5), in another, group members dressed in white uniforms cleaned a street in the posh Ginza district with toothbrushes and other small tools (see p. 103, fig. 5). In the invitation-only event Shelter Plan (Shenotu puraen, 1964), the artists performed an unorthodox anthropometry on participants with the stated purpose of building tailor-made one-person bomb shelters (plates 57, 58, 99, 100, 138–44). The option to purchase half-size, quarter-size, one-tenth-size, or full-size shelters, depending on one’s financial means, and the mementos offered to participants (sealed cans, never to be opened) served as reminders of the futurity of preparing to survive total destruction. In a more general sense, Hi Red Center’s work could be read as a brilliant, absurdist parody of the control inherently exercised by the state on the citizenry in an increasingly controlled society. The year 1964 marked a critical turning point on the image of the thousand-yen note, including Akasegawa ordering one-sided copies of a thousand-yen bill for the purpose of his solo exhibition at Daiichi Gallery in Shinjuku, in January 1963. The ersatz money was ridiculously large, and each bill was printed with a “0” and a faceless figure on the front, with the kanji word honmono and its English translation, “the real thing,” on the back. This unquestionably fake money was proffered to the public for exchange (three hundred yen) via advertisements in various periodicals. The rationale was as follows: if this exchange could theoretically go on until all currencies in Japan (if not the whole world) had disappeared, circulation of money would be short-circuited and currency would lose its exchange value—that is, its only and true meaning. What remains from this conceptual provocation, which went on from 1967 into the 1980s, are two bodies of “evidence”: the first are the money sent in by people—testament to the compromised exchange value—and the second are hanger, a spoon and knife, scissors, and a plaster death mask), which he wrapped in uncut sheets of “model” banknotes (see plates 60–63). Soon after Shelter Plan in January 1964, Akasegawa was visited by police detectives; he was investigated for copying the bills, and his wrapped objects and other money-based works were confiscated as evidence. The following year he was indicted and found himself embroiled in a trial that would last through the rest of the decade, until he was finally convicted. His subsequent appeals were in vain. Throughout the process, Akasegawa was supported by a community of artists and thinkers, and a number of publications documented and debated the undue procedures of prosecution.

As his trial dragged on, Akasegawa seemed anything but contrite. After a regional court reached a verdict of guilty in 1967, he embarked on another provocation, Greater Japan Zero-Yen Note (Dai nippon zero-en-satsu, 1967). Here, the fabricated money was ridiculously large, and each bill was printed with a “0” and a faceless figure on the front, with the kanji word honmono and its English translation, “the real thing,” on the back. This unquestionably fake money was proffered to the public for exchange (three hundred yen) via advertisements in various periodicals. The rationale was as follows: if this exchange could theoretically go on until all currencies in Japan (if not the whole world) had disappeared, circulation of money would be short-circuited and currency would lose its exchange value—that is, its only and true meaning. What remains from this conceptual provocation, which went on from 1967 into the 1980s, are two bodies of “evidence”: the first are the money sent in by people—testament to the compromised exchange value—and the second are
Opposite:
Plate 59
AKASEGAWA GENPEI
Morphology of Revenge (Look Him in the Eye Before Killing Him) (Fukushū no keitaigaku [Korosu maetre i aite o yoku miru])
1963
Gouache on paper, mounted on panel
35 7/16 ≈ 70 7/8" (90 ≈ 180 cm)

Plate 60
AKASEGAWA GENPEI
“1,000-Yen Note Trial”
Impounded Objects:
Works Wrapped in Model 1,000-Yen Notes (Mask) (Sen-en-satsu saiban ōshūhin: Mokei sen-en-satsu konpō sakuhin [Masuku])
1963
Sheets of model one-thousand-yen notes, string, wire, paper tags, and plaster mask
14 9/16 ≈ 9 13/16 ≈ 7 1/2" (37 ≈ 25 ≈ 19 cm)

Plate 61
AKASEGAWA GENPEI
“1,000-Yen Note Trial”
Impounded Objects:
Works Wrapped in Model 1,000-Yen Notes (Panel I) (Sen-en-satsu saiban ōshūhin: Mokei sen-en-satsu konpō sakuhin [Paneru I])
1963
Sheets of model one-thousand-yen notes, string, wire, paper tags, and bolts on panel
32 5/16 ≈ 31 1/8" (82 ≈ 79 cm)

Plate 62
AKASEGAWA GENPEI
“1,000-Yen Note Trial”
Impounded Objects:
Works Wrapped in Model 1,000-Yen Notes (Panel II) (Sen-en-satsu saiban ōshūhin: Mokei sen-en-satsu konpō sakuhin [Paneru II])
1963
Sheets of model one-thousand-yen notes, string, wire, paper tags, and bolts on panel
70 7/8 ≈ 31 15/16" (180 ≈ 81.2 cm)

Plate 63
AKASEGAWA GENPEI
“1,000-Yen Note Trial”
Impounded Objects:
WorksWrapped In Model 1,000-Yen Notes (Bottle, can, knife, spoon) (Sen-en-satsu saiban ōshūhin: Mokei sen-en-satsu konpō sakuhin [Bin, kan, naifu, supun])
1963
Sheets of model one-thousand-yen notes, string, wire, paper tags, bottle, can, knife, and spoon
Bottle: 9 3/16 ≈ 3 15/16 ≈ 2 3/8" (25 ≈ 10 ≈ 6 cm); can: 3 3/16 ≈ 3 3/16 ≈ 5 1/2" (8 ≈ 8 ≈ 14 cm); knife: 8 11/16" (22 cm) long; spoon: 5 1/2" (14 cm) long
(Only the bottle is presented in this exhibition)
the envelopes in which the money was sent, some of which were accompanied with personal notes. The first collection of mailed money in envelopes is preserved in a sealed jar, while the second jar, though almost full, is left unsealed, as if suggesting the possibility of ongoing trade (plate 64). The example of Akasegawa—or the example made out of Akasegawa—and his progress over the course of the 1960s, from Anti-Art sculpture and performance/body art to his incrimination by the body politic, speak not only to the trajectory of art but also to the metamorphosis of the Japanese state during this period. And it is with this view of art, as a counterhegemonic gesture, that we may consider the work of another artists’ collective, Zero Jigen (Zero dimension). Initiated in 1963 by Katō Yoshihira, Iwata Shin’ichi, and others, the group formed in Nagoya but by 1964 had shifted their base to Tokyo. Zero Jigen was infamous for what they called “rituals” (gishiki) in public spaces. Their sudden eruptions into the “normal” fabric of the city, via outstandingly unsocialized behaviors (such as rolling on the ground), the use of props (such as gasmasks), and often nudity, destabilized the regulated codes of propriety and shocked unwitting witnesses (figs. 18–20). The bodies of group members materializing among the complacent populace were at once scandalous and familiar on the most primal level. Responding to the tectonic forces that moved and shaped Japanese society at the time—economic “high growth,” urban transformation, and political protests—which affected and motivated many other artists of the day, Zero Jigen’s “rituals” on the one hand provided a temporary means of return to a presocialized state, and on the other had the effect of eroding or banishing the normalizing structure of social values. One scholar has characterized the group’s work as creating “non-hierarchical self-reflection of vulgarism,” where “multiple events and works [. . .] looked strange when reflected against each other” and “the sacred seemed vulgar to others while the vulgar transformed into something sacred.” For Zero Jigen, the staging of their actions in unsuspecting urban contexts was as important as the return to the “normal state.” Katō, customarily seen as the chief representative of the group, was by no means a cult leader: he was a businessman and family man. As the air of explosive avant-garde experimentalism was dissipating, it seemed to settle, almost like a virus, into the very fabric of the everyday: the bodies of certain ordinary citizens could at any point be transformed into states of infantile vulgarity, even while continuing to function “normally” in the increasingly orderly social machine.
SōGETSU ART CENTER: A CRITICAl NODE of INTERNATIONAL ExCHANGES

In 1958, the year of Jikken Kōbō’s dissolution and just on the threshold of Anti-Art’s emergence, the Sōgetsu Art Center (Sōgetsu Āto Sentā) opened its doors. Branching out of the Sōgetsu school of ikebana, founded and headed by Teshigahara Sōfū, the center was housed in a Tange Kenzō–designed building (fig. 21) and directed by Sōfū’s son, Hiroshi. The younger Teshigahara was close to many avant-garde artists and writers in the 1950s and would later become well known as an experimental filmmaker in his own right; he was the director of, among other films, the landmark 1964 Woman in the Dunes (Suna no onna). Under his leadership, the center became an extraordinary hub where all forms of avant-garde experimentation were staged and experienced.

Several surveys of the Sōgetsu Art Center’s rich history have been organized in Japan50 in the present context, let us consider only some of the important moments in the history of this epicenter of the 1960s avant-garde arts.

In the center’s concert hall, the audience seats were flanked by large paintings by Georges Mathieu and Sam Francis—respectively representing European Art Informel and American Abstract Expressionism—emblematic of the center’s internationalist ambition and orientation (fig. 22).

In the early years, programs were divided into three categories: the first two (titled in English) were focused on music: the Sōgetsu Contemporary Series (avant-garde classical music) and the Sōgetsu Music Inn (jazz); and the third, the Sōgetsu Cinemathèque (Sōgetsu shinematēku), was primarily about film. In addition, the center presented experimental animations, published a periodical (SAC, later renamed SAC jānaru [SAC journal]), and also occasionally rented its space for more mainstream performances. The Sōgetsu Contemporary Series in particular was closely related to the wider art world, and during the first few years, its programs were dominated by members of the Sakkýokuka Shūdan (Composers’ group). Among them were the celebrated composer Takemitsu Tōru (formerly of JikKen Kōbō), and another giant in the field, Mayuzumi Tooru. In the years from 1961 to 1964 the center established its place in the history of the arts in Japan as an unparalleled nucleus of experimental as well as popular forms, practices, and ideas from home and abroad. On September 15, 1961, Group Ongaku (Group music), headed by Murotsu Sōkō and including Tone Yasunao, Kosugi Takehisa, Shōmi Mieko, and others, presented their Concert of Improvisational Music and Acoustic Objets (Sōkkyō ongaku to onkyō obuje no konsāto; fig. 23). Their work involved simple gestures, open to chance in resonance with the aesthetics of John Cage and the Fluxus group, in which several would soon participate. For instance, Kosugi’s Micro I of the same year involved “wrapping up a microphone in paper and amplifying the crumpled sounds as the paper is gradually removed.” After attending the group’s concerts, Ichiyanagi Toshi, who had recently returned to Japan from New York, invited the Group Ongaku artists to his solo recital (Sōgetsu Contemporary Series 10), which included a performance of IBM Happening and Musique Concrète (IBM hapuningu to myūjikku konkurēto; fig. 24).

A truly monumental event for the Tokyo art scene was a visit from John Cage and David Tudor in October 1962. The impact of their visit on the Japanese scene was so powerful that it was dubbed “Kēji shokku,” or “Cage shock.” Their almost month-long stay in Japan included a lecture and performances in Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka, and Sapporo—six concerts in all. Each concert presented a different combination of Cage’s work, along with pieces by other contemporary composers, such as Christian Wolff, Morton Feldman, Karlheinz Stockhausen, and

Fig. 21 Exterior of Sōgetsu Kaikan, Sōgetsu Art Center, Tokyo (Photograph by Murosawa Fumio (c. 1957)

Fig. 22 Interior of Sōgetsu Kaikan, Sōgetsu Art Center, Tokyo (Photograph by Kawasumi Akio (c. 1957)

Fig. 23 Program designed by Akio Kanda for Concert of Improvisational Music and Acoustic Objets (Sōkkyō ongaku to onkyō obuje no konsāto) by Group Ongaku at Sōgetsu Art Center, Tokyo, September 15, 1961
Sylvano Bussotti, as well as performances of graphic scores by Ichiyanagi (Music for Piano #4, 1960) and Takemitsu (Corona for Pianists [Pianistoto no tame no korona, 1962; see p. 112, fig. 12]). To coincide with this important event, Ichiyanagi and Akiyama Kuniharu also organized An Exhibition of World Graphic Scores (Sekai no otarashii gakufu-ten) at Minami Gallery, featuring a range of ingenious works by dozens of artists from around the world, including George Brecht, Dick Higgins, La Monte Young, and Iannis Xenakis (figs. 25, 26).

The energy of the Sōgetsu Art Center showed no sign of flagging in the following two years, and their roster of events and activities continued to showcase major international artists. In early 1963 a Bauhaus exhibition was mounted, and in 1964 there were performances by Nam June Paik, returning from Germany and soon en route to New York (fig. 27), and again by Yoko Ono, who gave a farewell concert that summer before her return to New York. This impressive and frenetic lineup reached an apogee in November, with the appearance of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company. In addition to the performances (held at Tokyo's Sankei Art Center), the center hosted a workshop with Cunningham, another concert by Cage and Tudor, and a public lecture by Robert Rauschenberg (fig. 28).

Although the Sōgetsu Art Center continued to exist until 1972, its character changed significantly after 1964. The programs of the earlier years came to an end (with the exception of the animation series), and the center's lineup was subsequently dominated by film and other cinema events, with some critical exceptions; for example, in 1968 the center hosted the seminal five-day event Expose 68: Say Something Now, I Am Searching for Something to Say (Expose 68: Nanika ittekure, ima, sagasu), which featured both performances and cross-disciplinary works, serving as an important fulcrum for “intermedia,” the critical keyword and tendency in the second half of the 1960s. While the Sōgetsu Art Center played an important role for the rest of its run, the confluence of presences—of critical figures in postwar American music, dance, and visual arts and Japanese creators with international purviews—during the first half of its life, especially between 1961 and 1964, cemented its reputation as an incomparable venue for interdisciplinary experiments and international exchanges. Figures such as Ichiyanagi, Ono, and Paik, not to mention the visiting luminaries of the American avant-garde, brought contemporaneity to the art scene in Tokyo, and the center served in effect as a springboard for those with no previous international exposure to expand their horizons.
A decade is not a short time, especially in such a turbulent context as Tokyo of the 1950s and 1960s. But it is still astounding to see how Nakamura Hiroshi’s work transformed from his 1958 triptych (plates 23–25) to 1968’s Circular Train A (Telescope Train) (Enkan ressha A [Bōenkyō ressha]; plate 66). In the later painting, the artist has abandoned the horizontally elongated format he often employed in his early years for a more conventionally proportioned canvas. More strikingly, the viewer sees little of the anxiety-ridden landscapes or figures that characterized his work of the 1950s. The center of the canvas is occupied by a circle that shows a marine landscape as viewed through a telescope (as suggested in the title), which intrudes, like a collaged cutout, upon the image of the interior of a train car. The picture is populated by teenage girls, dressed in conventional sailor-style school uniforms and with pigtails. Each of their faces is dominated by a large, cyclopean eye in lieu of all other features. One of the most vulnerable figures in society, the adolescent girl has been transformed into a cipher of sexual fetishism and made all the more monstrous here. Nakamura’s painting has always been figurative, and the locomotive was a favorite subject from early on. Around the mid-1960s, however, his work began to take on illustration or manga-like characteristics.

In this graphic quality, Nakamura has a number of affinities with Tateishi Kōichi (Tiger Tateishi). In his painting Samurai, the Watcher (Kōya no Yōjinbō, 1965; plate 67), Tateishi presents a samurai standing with his back to the viewer, on top of a bluff in a sunset landscape that is obviously not Japanese; it more closely resembles that of the American West. The samurai is one of the best-known, even clichéd stereotypes of Japan, but here, as the title suggests, he is a specific character made popular through the work of filmmaker Kurosawa Akira (in the 1961 film Yojimbo). If the incongruous combination—a of a Japanese swordsman in a bleak American desert were not bizarre enough, Tateishi inserts minuscule supporting characters in this story painting: on one side, a troop of what appear to be Ku Klux Klan members bearing rifles and torches and a burning flag; on the other, an ambush of green tigers holding swords and raising a flag emblazoned with the visage of Mao Zedong. We assume, from this cinematic vantage point, that a bloody battle between humans and animals—and between irreconcilable ideologies—is about to take place.

These paintings by Nakamura and Tateishi exemplify a shift in approach with regard to the figure and representation. They depart from the kinds of figural metamorphosis, fragmentation, and distortion found in much of 1950s painting and other two-dimensional mediums. While one may safely posit that the human subjects in earlier works stood for both a specific and a general populace, struggling with the memories of wartime and the hardships of the immediate postwar years, the figures in these two artists’ works are inhabitants of a wholly different social and cultural space. The paintings zoom in on discomfiting subcultural fetishes and zoom out to cast a wide-angled view of an improbable clash of elements circulating in popular media and cultures. These are outlandish, humorous, and confounding visions of imaginary worlds. Perhaps these worlds could only have taken shape here at this point, in a politically stabilized, economically confident, and culturally vibrant metropolis of Tokyo.

That Nakamura and Tateishi did not uphold painting as an elitist medium is evident in a 1964 performance they staged as a two-person collective dubbed Kankō Geijutsu Kenkyūjo (Sightseeing art research institute). Holding up their own paintings for the benefit of all to appreciate, they walked down a street near Tokyo Station, with the Shinkansen “bullet train”—completed just in time for that year’s Olympics—passing behind them (fig. 29). This gesture of literally relocating paintings outside of the
the course of his long and illustrious career. In 1965, he made Tadanori Yokoo (Matsumo) (1965; plate 71), the text of which reads (in English): “Made in Japan, Tadanori Yokoo, Having Reached a Climax at the Age of 29, I Was Dead.” In this early work, Yokoo set down some of the main characteristics that would continue to define his graphic composition, such as the use of well-known and even hackneyed motifs (the rising sun and Mount Fuji in this case); bold typography (focused on his own name); and photomontage (a picture of himself as a baby). Quickly recognized for his talent and for coining a visual language very much engaged with the era, Yokoo soon found himself gainfully employed in a wide range of projects, from commercial posters (for Asahi Beer, for example) to works commissioned for significant cultural figures and events.

Yokoo’s œuvre may be observed as a kind of topographical map of the art and cultural world of Tokyo at the time. This topography includes the author Mishima Yukio, a deeply polarizing figure who sanctified sites of the artist’s studio and rarefied exhibition spaces—so that they are no more exalted than the numerous signboards and billboards of the city—situates the work in an ambiguous zone where art and popular culture are open and porous to one another. Indeed, both artists were active producers of commercial illustrations, posters, and book covers, and the iconographic and stylistic similarities between their commercial work and their art served to challenge the “high art” status of painting itself (plates 68–70).

No one represented this flattened cultural landscape, where the highbrow and the lowbrow liberally mingle, better than Yokoo Tadanori. An artist, designer, and all-around cultural figure extraordinaire, Yokoo emerged as an enfant terrible in graphic design around this time, with an inimitable style that combines brilliant, even gaudy palettes and ingenious techniques, and juxtaposes strikingly incongruous iconographies. As if giving a paradoxical foretaste of the cultural prominence he would capture over
represented a very different, though equally radical, avant-garde approach; and also Hijkata Tatsumi, progenitor of the Ankoku Butō (Dance of utter darkness, widely known as Butō) dance/performance genre, a figure who was at once mysterious and omnipresent in the Tokyo scene.

Hijkata made a sensational debut in 1959 with Forbidden Colors (Kiyikki), the story of a hedonistic homosexual youth based on the 1953 novel of the same title by Mishima (who, along with Jean Genet and Surrealist literature, would provide much inspiration to the choreographer). Just as Yokoo was a ubiquitous presence in the cultural landscape of Tokyo beginning in the mid-1960s and for many decades to come, Hijkata too was a magnet exerting strong forces of attraction across the fields through the 1960s. Nakashima was a particularly close collaborator, art-directing several pieces by the choreographer. For Hijkata’s final solo performance, Hijkato Tottsumi and the Japanese: Revel of the Fūshū (Hijkato Tottsumi to Nihonjin: Nikkutsu no honron, 1968; p. 109, fig. 10), the painter conceived reflective copper panels that were hung in the air above the stage; this notion inspired his 1965–71 series of semi-abstract paintings Hopscotch at the Summit (Sancho no isshiken), which are structured and composed around gravitational centers (plates 72, 73). Each of the ten works that constitute the series is structured around a heart shape supported by two equilateral triangles and features an unusual figurative motif, such as a flower or animal. The perceived images do not seem to have literary or allegorical meanings, however. Rather, the brilliantly colored works are ultimately concerned with the process of painting per se, laying bare the innumerable steps and decisions that go into creating a painting: for instance, making use of the back of the canvas but leaving it half-unfinished. In this sense, Nakashima’s Hopscotch paintings, made in the wake of the artist’s collaboration with Hijkata, may be said to function as “anti-paintings,” paralleling Hijkata’s Ankoku Butō, which likewise defied the conventions of medium.

Hijikata, who was always at the center of the Tokyo art community, was a subject of many photographic ventures in these spaces, other photographers were confronting the reality of the street full-on at this time. Moriyama Daidō’s Tokyo is populated by another society altogether, as seen in his Japan Theater Photo Album (Nippon geki shashinshū, 1965; plate 77) and Botton Twiler (Botton tornow, 1967; plate 78). This is a city of Americanized culture as well as of lingering impoverishment, which the quickly amassed prosperity of the 1960s could not completely erase or hide. But Tokyo is not all about the gritty and the glittering. Ichimura Tetsuya reminds us of the contrast between the preserved-traditional and the modern-industrial — the old and the new — in Hijkatabashi, Imperial Palace, Tokyo, 1965 (Nijūbashi, Tōkyō, 1965-nen; plate 79). Fukase Masahisa evokes the sense of humanity through the figure of his subject “Yoriko” and the often desolate urban landscapes she traverses (plates 80, 81). And Tōmatsu Shōmei brings us face to face with the painful and difficult truths of a postwar nation, where the wounds of the conflict and nuclear massacres were still evident (plate 95), and where young people reveled in the “cool” American culture that was invading Japan, brought in on the heels of the occupying Allied forces (plate 82).
Plate 74
HOSOE EIKO–
Sickle-Toothed Weasel, No. 5
(Kamaitachi sakuhin 5)
1968
Gelatin silver print
9 7/8 × 8 1/4" (25.1 × 20.9 cm)

Bottom left:
Plate 75
HOSOE EIKO–
Sickle-Toothed Weasel, No. 28
(Kamaitachi sakuhin 28)
1968
Gelatin silver print
11 7/16 × 9 1/16" (29 × 23 cm)

Bottom right:
Plate 76
HOSOE EIKO–
Ordeal by Roses, No. 29
(Barakkei sakuhin 29)
1961
Gelatin silver print
21 5/8 × 16 1/2" (55 × 41.9 cm)

Plate 77
MORIYAMA DAIÐO–
Japan Theater Photo Album
(Nippon gekijô shashinchô)
1965
Gelatin silver print
13 × 18 1/4" (33.1 × 46.3 cm)

Bottom left:
Plate 78
MORIYAMA DAIÐO–
Baton Twirler (Baton towarâ)
1967
Gelatin silver print
18 7/8 × 14 11/16" (48.1 × 37.4 cm)

Bottom right:
Plate 79
ICHIMURA TETSUYA–
Nijûbashi, Imperial Palace, Tokyo, 1965
(Nijûbashi, Tôkyô, 1965-nen)
1965
Gelatin silver print
13 × 9 1/2" (33 × 24 cm)
direct way as miniature paper battleships, which he made as a boy and which were clearly a point of departure for his later art (his Ship 4, 1963–65 [plate 83] was made when the artist was in his late teens). More than just adolescent fancies, these works speak to Japan’s implication in the U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War, which would escalate in the later 1960s. They also evoke the American “black ships” and the gunboat diplomacy that opened the long-isolated nation in the 1850s. Further evincing his straightforward, unmanipulative approach to the reality surrounding him, Haraguchi’s early painting Tsumu 147 (1966; plate 84) employs a Pop art–like strategy: reproducing almost photo-realistically the wooden door of a freight train wagon.

In 1969 he was attending Nihon University, which was one of the fulcrums of student protest first ignited by the school administration’s financial mismanagement, and soon expanding to broader political causes, including the renewal of the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty. That year, Haraguchi constructed a handmade, full-scale replica of the tail of the Douglas A-4E Skyhawk, a fighter aircraft that played a key role in the Vietnam War (fig. 30). Soon Haraguchi’s work would transition away from figure toward a unique, material-oriented Minimalist impulse, without relinquishing the significance of his approach from these formative years. Not long after, he would become associated with the Mono-ha (School of things) movement, which was just coming into existence and whose concerns, like his, were very much focused on materiality.

The turn of the decade witnessed not only the emergence of a new generation of artists such as Haraguchi, but also a shift in the work of a number of older artists. Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, for example, continued to experiment with different materials in the years after the dissolution of Jikken Kōbō in 1958. In 1961, using wire mesh planes, he produced a series of fascinatingly unidentifiable forms that constantly change depending on the viewpoint of the observer.

III. Toward a Conclusion

CIRCA 1970

Zushi, in Kanagawa Prefecture, on the west side of Tokyo Bay, is a beach resort that was popular for fashionable Tokyoites in the 1960s. It is not far from Yokosuka, the home of a U.S. naval base. For Haraguchi Noriyuki, who is originally from Zushi (and still lives there), the experience of residing in the shadow of the American military presence was embodied in a...
the viewer (plates 43, 112), and in 1962–63 he transformed salvaged fabrics into sometimes humorous sculptures by stretching them over wire constructions (plate 44). Takamatsu Jirō, post–Hi Red Center, produced a wide-ranging and constantly morphing œuvre, including conceptually oriented works and photographs, which formed a major contribution during the late 1960s. Among his works of this period are the Shadow (Kage) painting series, begun in 1965, in which double shadows of an object or person overlap, decentering and confusing the viewer’s relationship to the pictorial surface and space (fig. 31). Takamatsu’s interest in visual trickery also took three-dimensional form, as in his Slack of Net (Netto no yurumi, 1969; plate 85), in which the artist appropriates the Minimalist grid, but the squares within the perimeter of right angles droop into unstable catenaries pulled down by gravitational force.

A distance had been traveled since sculpture was undeniably corporeal and the body often “became” sculpture and vice versa. Vision was now a dominant concern. The figure-as-subject was no longer so energetically engaged, and the body-as-agent was deployed with less frequency as the decade drew to a close. Instead, artists began to turn with increasing focus to issues of perception. As vanguard artistic practices became with time increasingly mainstream and even institutionalized—or were abandoned altogether—multisensory, technologically mediated “environments” overtook exhibition spaces and the streets that had formerly been the sites of guerrilla-like events and strategies.
Significant artistic, cultural, and social events seemed to culminate in 1970, just as 1964, the year of the Olympics in Japan, had been a moment of almost uncanny convergences and transitions. The 1970 Tokyo Biennale, titled *Between Man and Matter* (*Ningen to busshitsu*), brought together many important American and European artists working in the schools of (post-)Minimalism, Arte Povera, Conceptual art, and Process art, along with a group of groundbreaking Japanese artists, and showcased Tokyo as a viable node in the network of international art.

In the same year Osaka, the nation’s second-largest city, hosted Expo ’70, which drew Metabolist architects and numerous artists—including Okamoto, Ichiyanagi, and Yamaguchi, as well as Yokoo, Yoshimura, and many Anti-Art proponents as well. Their creative outputs were bolstered with corporate sponsorships and national promotions.

At the same time, despite crackdowns, Japan witnessed a flare-up of anti-government protests, incited in part by the second renewal of the Anpo agreement, as evocatively captured by photographer Tōmatsu Shōmei in the series *Protest, Tokyo* (*Purotesuto Tōkyō*, 1969; plate 88).

On November 25, 1970, Mishima and four members of his private militia Tate no Kai (Shield society) entered the headquarters of the Eastern Command of the Self-Defense Forces in Ichigaya, central Tokyo. Throughout the previous decade, Mishima had increasingly embraced radically right-wing ideologies, openly advocating emperor-worship and expressing a desire to return Japan to its prewar glory. His plan on that fateful day was to incite the Japanese soldiers into a coup d’état and restore military imperialism (fig. 32). When his speech was met with contemptuous jeers, Mishima retreated with his cohort of young cadets and committed suicide by seppuku, ritual self-disembowelment. Thus concluded the turbulent 1960s of Japan, spectacularly, with the death of this literary and cultural phenomenon and social maverick par excellence.
By 1966, after viewing Twenty Years of American Painting, an exhibition organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and presented at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo, Shinohara had lost much of his enthusiasm for American art. Just a few years earlier, American art had seemed to him to be “marching toward the glorious prairie of the rainbow and oasis of the future, carrying all the world’s expectations of modern painting”; now, however, seeing the works of his former idols such as Jasper Johns and James Rosenquist, he felt “their glory [had] receded into the distance.”

This disillusionment was perhaps exacerbated by his disappointment at being excluded from the earlier MoMA exhibition The New Japanese Painting and Sculpture, which toured to nine North American venues in 1965–66. William S. Lieberman, the exhibition curator, had asked to include Shinohara’s Duchamp Thinking, but the plan was thwarted because the work was too fragile to travel. Only a print based on the sculpture now remains of the piece (plate 90). That print and a print version of his Coca-Cola Plan “imitation,” now both part of the Museum’s collection, serve as reminders of this charged period of the artist’s life and the encounter and discourse between the Tokyo avant-garde and its New York counterpart.

A NEW AVANT-GARDE?
Back in the pivotal year 1964, no one anticipated the visit of the American triumvirate of Cage, Cunningham, and Rauschenberg with more eagerness than Shinohara Ushio, former member of the Neo Dada group. Known throughout the Tokyo art scene for his outrageous proclamations as much as for his signature Mohawk haircut, Shinohara declared—perhaps in an echo of Akasegawa’s Model 1,000-Yen Note—that imitating the work of other artists (in his case mostly American artists) was far more interesting, and even revolutionary, than creating original works.

Soon Shinohara’s theory would be tested, as he was visited in 1964 by none other than Rauschenberg himself—an artist whose work he had been assiduously mimicking at the time. At their first meeting the young Japanese provocateur presented his imitations of works by the well-established American artist, who reacted positively to them (fig. 33 and plate 89). Upon subsequent interactions, however, and after learning that Shinohara had created multiple copies of his own artistic efforts, Rauschenberg was clearly disenchanted, perhaps sensing the danger of his works’ commodification.

When the American artist presented a public lecture titled “Twenty Questions to Bob Rauschenberg” on November 28, 1964, at the Sōgetsu Art Center, his interlocutors were art critic Tōno Yoshiaki, along with Shinohara and Kojima Nobuaki. The two artists brought onto the stage their own works—Shinohara’s no-longer-extant Marcel Duchamp Thinking (Shikō suru Maruseru Dyushan, 1963) and Kojima’s signature figures draped with flags: Untitled (Figure) (1964; see p. 224). Instead of answering the questions of his Japanese interviewers, however, Rauschenberg spent the lecture time silently creating a Combine, Gold Standard (1964; fig. 34), using detritus he had collected from the streets of Tokyo. At one point he took Shinohara’s written English questionnaire and pasted it into the work he was creating on the spot.
Kawara and Yayoi Kusama, had already been in New York. Several figures whose names are now well known to U.S. audiences, such as On Kawara and Yayoi Kusama, had already been in New York for some time, as was Yoko Ono, whose principal residence was Tokyo. Seven figures whose names are now well known to U.S. audiences, such as On Kawara and Yayoi Kusama, had already been in New York for some time, as was Yoko Ono, whose principal residence was Tokyo. Seven figures whose names are now well known to U.S. audiences, such as On Kawara and Yayoi Kusama, had already been in New York for some time, as was Yoko Ono, whose principal residence was Tokyo. Seven figures whose names are now well known to U.S. audiences, such as On Kawara and Yayoi Kusama, had already been in New York for some time, as was Yoko Ono, whose principal residence was Tokyo. 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Seven figures whose names are now well known to U.S. audiences, such as On Kawai...
North Vietnam. There, he witnessed atrocities committed by the Japanese, which deeply impacted him. After being discharged in 1945 and returning to Japan, Yamashita resumed his artistic work. He was a member of the Gutai Group, and his work was featured in the 1954 World Art Culture Show in Tokyo. 

In the 1950s, he was one of the artists who participated in the Gutai Group exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum in 1955. That exhibition, including Kawara's work, was notable for its avant-garde approach and exploration of new artistic forms. 

In the final years of World War II, he created war paintings—his involvement was comparatively brief and limited. For the most comprehensive records of Neo Dada and its members' activities, see r eiko Tomii, “Geijutsu on Their Minds: Memorable Anti-Art, 1950-1970” (Tokyo: Dōka, 2002). For further discussion of Richard Artschwager’s Shelter Plan, see Sas, “Intermedia,” pp. 105–107. See also: Akasegawa, “Tokyo Nikkei kekkō chabō,” p. 8. “Ikibunōki hôshi no rûkō” (The Brutal ‘60s: Complete records of the Sōgetsu Art Center; Tokyo: Japan Association of Art Museums, 2006). 

Kawara’s work, in addition to Yamaguchi and Kitadai. At a later stage, Teshigahara Medium Space,” pp. 141–172; and William Marotti, “The printed works of the Gutai Art Group,” in Sōgetsu and its era, 1945–1970, ed. Tōkyō mikisā keikaku “Intermedia,” pp. 150–52. See also Akasegawa, Komai Tetsurō (printmaker and a member of Jikken Kōbō) and another frequent collaborator. See also the discussion of Participate in the ART Campaign... In Hayagi, “The Graphic,” in the project, p. 103, fig. 16, 35, 107. 


For more on Expo ‘70, see Sas, “Intermedia,” pp. 141–145, 175. For more on Tanuki, see “Tanuki” (photograph on cover) in Film Theatre: “Transcript of a Documentary Film Directed by Nagare Chak,” Review of Japanese Culture and Society 3 (1975), pp. 46–61. 

Hiroshi Begnis notes that upon learning that there were multiple copies of his work, he turned the original—his involvement was comparatively brief and limited. For the most comprehensive records of Neo Dada and its members’ activities, see r eiko Tomii, “Geijutsu on Their Minds: Memorable Anti-Art, 1950-1970” (Tokyo: Dōka, 2002). For further discussion of Richard Artschwager’s Shelter Plan, see Sas, “Intermedia,” pp. 105–107. See also: Akasegawa, “Tokyo Nikkei kekkō chabō,” p. 8. “Ikibunōki hôshi no rûkō” (The Brutal ‘60s: Complete records of the Sōgetsu Art Center; Tokyo: Japan Association of Art Museums, 2006). For more on the project, see Sas, “Intermedia,” pp. 141–145, 175. For more on Tanuki, see “Tanuki” (photograph on cover) in Film Theatre: “Transcript of a Documentary Film Directed by Nagare Chak,” Review of Japanese Culture and Society 3 (1975), pp. 46–61. 

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