Contemporary Japanese and Asian Art - A New Appreciation
Celebrating the launch of the Asia Contemporary Art Investment Fund

Jitsugyo no Nihon Sha, Ltd.

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An exhibition of 36 contemporary artists’ works

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Greetings

Turning on the television, it’s as if President’s Trump’s confidence-filled face appears daily. The poker face of China’s General Secretary Xi Jiping has a presence that is no less strong. China, the world’s major economic power second only to the USA, is advancing rapidly. Its GDP surpassed that of Japan ten-some years ago.
Next year, Japan will host the Tokyo Olympics, and many of the country’s athletes are engaging in training day in and out day out. The US has won 2,522 Olympic medals (the highest out of any country), China 546 (fourth), and Japan 439 (thirteenth). Ahead of Japan there are eight European countries, including France, from which Pierre de Coubertin, the father of the modern Olympic Games, hailed. (Summer Olympic Medals, up through the 301st 2016 games. Source: Wikipedia).

As is well-known, the Olympic rings represent the world’s five continents. The Asian continent occupies thirty-six percent of the world’s land mass, and has sixty percent of the world’s population.

The phrase “Asian Art” that appears in this book’s title is very vague, and readers might be confused. While at first we had asked learned individuals to offer reassessments primarily of Japanese artists, with the activities of those in China and other East Asian countries becoming pronounced, we realized that there is a large surging civilization that cannot be captured just within the framework of the single country of Japan. Therefore, taking into account the views of the publisher, we changed, on short notice, part of the title from “Japanese Art” to “Asian Art.”

I must note that it is for this reason there are many Asian artists left out of this book who deserve recognition.

This book was published fifty-five years after the Tokyo Olympics were held in 1964. While the transformation of a Japan that experienced quite rapid economic growth feels like a world away, it also shares the same track as the heightening economic and cultural prestige of Asian nations.

The main theme of this book is the flourishing of Asians in the international art market that was produced by modernism. We could compare it to the flourishing of Japanese and other Asian athletes in the Olympic system that was born in Europe.

Hegel, writing a philosophy of history at the beginning of the nineteenth century, said that world history had developed over thousands of years, beginning in Asia, then unfolding in the Greco-Roman world, and finally moving to the Germanic world. One cannot help but be surprised that the USA of his time is placed outside of this.

Today, with the US having a forty-two percent share in the international art market, it appears that there is immeasurable latent power in Asia’s artists. This book focuses in on part of this.

A much-awaited art fund was established in Hong Kong, the center of the Asian art market, as this book was being compiled. Surely this reflects a demand of our era.

Kazuo Ohi
Director, Karuizawa New Art Museum
July 2019

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From Japan to the World: Actively Broadcasting the Wonder of Contemporary Art from the Karuizawa New Art Museum

Ever since its 1967 opening of a gallery in Tokyo, Whitestone Gallery has continued to be one of the art industry’s few trailblazers. As of 2019, it has a total of eightfloors of exhibition space in Ginza: a six-floor main gallery and a two-floor new gallery.

In 2012, it opened the Karuizawa New Art Museum in Nagano’s scenic Karuizawa, and two galleries overseas in Hong Kong in 2015 and 2016. These galleries were the first step towards not only introducing Japanese artists to the international market but also bringing in overseas art developments into the Japanese art scene.
However, Whitestone’s two-year experience in Hong Kong also served as an opportunity to expand its perspective to include global spheres. This eventually led to the April 2017 opening of a gallery in Taipei. Its innovative contemporary art exhibition space, designed by Japanese architect Kengo Kuma, has captured the interest of many visitors.

In spring 2018, Whitestone’s new two-floor modern and contemporary art gallery opened in Hong Kong’s H Queen’s, an art complex filled with international galleries. With the international city of Hong Kong as a base, Whitestone is pushing forward with its project to re-assess artists from not only Japan but Asia as a whole.

The Karuizawa New Art Museum that opened in 2012.
1151-5 Karuizawa, Karuizawa-cho, Kitasaku-gun, Nagano

(1) Birch Moss Chapel
(2) Wild Birds’ Forest Villa
(1) and (2), located in the town of Karuizawa, were designed by Kengo Kuma & Associates

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Whitestone’s Art Museum, Galleries, and More

Whitestone Gallery New Gallery
6-4-16 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

Whitestone Gallery Tokyo
5-1-10 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

Whitestone Gallery Hong Kong H Queen’s
7-8/F, H Queen’s 80 Queen’s Road Central
Hong Kong
Whitestone has opened a two-floor gallery in Hong Kong at H Queen’s, an art complex filled with international galleries.
It holds individual and group exhibitions, primarily of contemporary art.

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Whitestone Gallery Taipei Neihu
1F, NO.1, Jihu Rd, Neihu Dist., Taipei City, 114
Opened in 2017. A collaboration between contemporary art and an innovative exhibition space designed by Japan’s architect Kengo Kuma.

The area leading from the entrance to the exhibition area at Whitestone Gallery Taipei

Whitestone Gallery Taipei’s exhibition area.

Hotel Royal Classic Osaka (Artist’s Rendering)
Opening in December 2019.
Ⓒ Solid Design Lab, Inc.

(Architectural Design: Kengo Kuma & Associates)
Architect Kengo Kuma’s Works

A Japanese-style modern sensibility shines out of Kengo Kuma’s wood material-based innovative architecture. His aesthetics pursue human scale—gentleness and soft design. The New National Stadium, which will serve as the main stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. The plan and design for this massive architectural structure were created by architect Kengo Kuma and other members of a joint-venture group (Taisei Corporation, Azusa Sekkei Co., Ltd. and Kengo Kuma and Associates JV).

This structure is notable for its use of domestic timber. The facade design consists of a large roof and overlapping, multi-layered eaves. It refines for contemporary times the beautiful eaves that have characterized Japanese architecture over the generations by covering the eaves' undersides with small wood louvers.

Here, we have selected works designed by Kengo Kuma found at the galleries and facilities of this publication’s parent organization, Whitestone Co., Ltd., hoping to give readers a taste of this architect’s world.


At a young age, having been inspired by Kenzo Tange’s Yoyogi National Gymnasium during the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, he decided to pursue architecture. At university, as an undergraduate he studied under Hiroshi Hara and Yoshichika Uchida. In graduate school, he traveled across the Sahara, exploring villages and settlements, and was struck by their beauty and power. After spending time as a visiting scholar at Columbia University, in 1990 he established Kengo Kuma & Associates. This office has designed architectural structures in over twenty countries and received domestic and international awards, including the Architectural Institute of Japan Award, the Spirit of Nature Wood Architecture Award (Finland), and the International Stone Architecture Award (Italy). Kuma aims to create gentle, human-scaled architectural structures that naturally merge with their local environment and culture. By constantly exploring new materials to replace concrete and steel, he is pursuing a new form for architecture in post-industrial society.

Full view of the New National Stadium (Artist’s rendering). The above is an architectural rendering for illustrative purposes. The completed stadium may differ in some ways. The greenery in the image is based on its expected state approximately ten years after stadium completion.

Copyright © Taisei Corporation, Azusa Sekkei Co., Ltd. and Kengo Kuma & Associates JV

Inside of the New National Stadium (Artist’s rendering). The above is an architectural rendering for illustrative purposes. The completed stadium may differ in some ways.

Copyright © Taisei Corporation, Azusa Sekkei Co., Ltd. and Kengo Kuma & Associates
Bird's-eye view of the New National Stadium (Artist's Rendering)
The above is an architectural rendering for illustrative purposes. The completed stadium may differ in some ways.
The greenery in the image is based on its expected state approximately ten years after stadium completion.
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The Museum

Tsuguharu Fujita
*Little Girl with Doll*
81.3×54.0cm
1954
© Fondation Foujita/ADAGP, Paris & JASPAR, Tokyo, 2019 E3419

Hisao Domoto
*Untitled*
27.5×35.2cm
1959

Jiro Yoshihara
*Circle 4*
5.5×53.0cm
1971

Sadamasa Motonaga
*Green Form white light*
193.0×130.8cm
1990

Toshimitsu Imai
*The Light of the Orient*
161.0×130.0cm
1971

Shiryu Morita
*Kanzan·Han·Shan*
78.5×143.8cm
1965

Kazuo Shiraga
*On kurodanau unjaku*
194.0×130.3cm
1994
Chiyu Uemae
Untitled
177.5×222.0×26.0cm
1960s

Takeo Yamaguchi
Work No.2
91.1×91.1cm
1955

Atsuko Tanaka
83G
229.2×183.9cm
1983
© Kanayama Akira and Tanaka Atsuko Association

Lee Ufan
From Line
129.5×193.6cm
1979

Jiro Takamatsu
Shadow
227.3×181.8cm
1997

Natsuyuki Nakanishi
I-Shape-Standstill at Right and Left X
194.0×162.0cm
1986

Tadaaki Kuwayama
RED GREEN & 4 SQUARES
244.1×244.1×10.8cm
1987

On Kawara
Friday July 14, 2000 (Today series no.26)
20.3×26.7cm
2000

Ay-O
Olympic Men's 100m
130.0×162.0cm
1992
Shuji Mukai
Untitled
163.0×266.0×4.5cm
2018

Tsuyoshi Maekawa
Untitled
290.0×490.0cm
2017

Makoto Saitou
Evening Newspaper
190.0×148.0cm
2006

Yuko Nasaka
Work
90.2×90.2cm
1967

Shozo Shimamoto
Untitled
160.1×196.3cm
1965

Yuichi Inoue
Mountain
114.5×141.5cm
1968
© UNAC TOKYO

Yasuho Sumi
Work
162.0×130.3cm
1997

Go Yayanagi
Sun Country
162.0×130.0cm
1983

Shinro Ohtake
SHIPHEAD 1
209.0×64.0×195.5cm
1988

Lou Zhenggang
Untitled
130.3×130.3cm
2018

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Ronald Ventura
Comic Lives 4
121.9×91.4cm
2018

Huang Yuxing
Land Of Growth
145.0×230.0cm
2015∼16

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Miwa Komatsu
Sky in Venice: Blue River
162.0×130.3cm
2019

Miwa Komatsu
Sky in Venice: Red Moment
162.0×130.3cm
2019

Kazuyuki Futagawa
Green Trees
112.0×162.0cm
2008

Yang Yonglin
Artificial Fairyland: Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains
199.6×97.3cm
2014

P23

Tetsuo Mizù
SUCU SUCU
162.0×162.0cm
1998
Part 1
Artists and Artworks Chosen by Today's Opinion Leaders

**Artist Hisao Domoto**

*Exquisite Order: The World of Hisao Domoto*

Shuji Takashina  
Art Historian, Director of the Ohara Museum of Art

Hisao Domoto gained international recognition in post-war Paris as a standard-bearer of the Art Informel avant-garde movement in the latter half of the 1950s. He had been well known and appreciated in Japan as a leading Nihonga artist for at least a decade before that. In fact, he was born into a family of artists in Kyoto, a city with a long artistic tradition, and had been honored with the
Based in Paris in the 1950s, Domoto distanced himself from traditional Japanese painting, focusing instead on the completely different techniques and style of Western painting and gaining attention as an abstract expressionist painter of the Art Informel movement. He visited major museums in Paris, London, Madrid and other cities with his uncle, Nihonga artist Domoto Insho, and was strongly moved by the experience of seeing Renaissance and later Western art masterpieces. The term “Western painting” however, is misleading because it obviously contains so many types of expression. For example, 20th century avant-garde movements such as Fauvism, Cubism, and Surrealism in Paris in the 1950s, when Domoto was resident there, were countering strong traditional academic tendencies and painters that still held sway. Even within abstract painting, defined as eschewing figurative expression, there were various movements such as Tachism, Abstract Expressionism, and Geometric Abstractionism. The most radical of these was Art Informel, the group Domoto associated with that included French artist Georges Mathieu, German artist Hans Hartung, and Antonio Tapies from Spain. As the names of the Art Informel painters reveal, there is great diversity even within a single group. Domoto’s solo exhibition at Galerie Stadler, a gallery specialized in Art Informel, established his position. This time might be called Domoto’s Art Informel period. It is characterized by his gravity defying dynamic upward brush strokes created through intense movement, and his suppression of a sense of material by eliminating colors such as white, blue, and green in favor of clear cool colors that achieved a feeling of free soaring in a clear and bright world. These paintings reflect Hisao Domoto’s superb expression.

Domoto’s Paintings and Exquisite Order

When Domoto moved from Paris to New York in the 1960s his style changed to a more static expression with solid overlapping forms in intense red and black. Reminiscent of bricks or stones, the forms governed by an architectural composition seem to represent the human psyche in opposition to the material world. This sense of spirituality is further heightened by liberal touches of gold in the color scheme.

Domoto continued his international activities when he later shifted his base to Japan and began completely filling his canvases with different abstract patterns. His did not limit his abstract expressionism, however, strictly to geometric forms. Some subtle variations suggesting possibly an undulating water surface in a gentle breeze are noted. His exquisite sense of order is undoubtedly particular to Domoto’s art but, at the same time, it is rooted in his foundation in Japanese traditional arts. The recognition of his exquisite sense of order secured his position and affirmation of the great achievement of his art.

(photo credits)
(p. 27)
Hisao Domoto (l.) and Shuji Takashina (r.) 1956 at Domoto’s room at Suresnes

(p.28)
Shuji Takashina
Shuji Takashina

Art historian and art critic. Born in 1932 in Tokyo. After graduating from the Tokyo University Faculty of Liberal Arts in 1953, he studied in France under a French government scholarship. In 1971, he became a professor of liberal arts at the University of Tokyo. Has been a professor at the University of Tokyo and, after his retirement became an emeritus professor there. He specializes in the theory of Western art, starting from the Renaissance, and in Modern Japanese art. He is Director of the Ohara Museum of Art, former Director-General of the National Museum of Western Art, and advisor to the Akita Museum of Art. Takashina is a member of the Japan Art Academy, recipient of the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France), designated as Person of Cultural Merit and recipient of the
Order of Culture (Japan). His publications include *The Japanese Sense of Beauty* and many others.

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**Artist Tsuguhara Foujita**

Foujita: A Celebrated *Wakon Yosai* (Japanese culture/Western technology) Painter

Nobuyuki Senzoku

Director, Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum

The Meiji Period (1868 – 1912) was a turbulent time in Western art, with the advent of Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, and Symbolism opening new directions. At the end of the 19th century, the Les Nabis movement and Art Nouveau ushered in currents of early 20th century avant-garde art such as Fauvism, Cubism, and Expressionism.

**Figurative Expression in the Midst of Paris Avant-Garde and Abstract Movements**

Kuroda Seiki and many other Japanese painters caught up in the Meiji passion for Westernization were eager to study oil painting in Europe and to establish a new field of ‘Western painting’ distinct from Japanese traditional *nihonga* painting. At the same time, it is well known that Japanese art seen overseas following the opening of Japanese diplomatic relations from the end of the Edo Period (1603 – 1868) created a stir among European artists, including the Impressionists.

Foujita went to Paris in 1913, one year after the end of the Meiji period, and stayed at the Odessa Hotel in Montparnasse. Twenty-seven year old Foujita seemed to have been more interested in immersing himself in Paris life than in study. Confident of his own distinctive style, he was not seduced by Fauvism that appeared at the 1905 Salon d’automne or Cubism that started around 1907. Although there were some changes in Foujita’s painting style, he basically took a distance from the avant-garde and abstract painting currents that held sway at the time in favor or pursuing his own style of figurative painting.

**Soaring Fame Following the 1919 Salon D’automne**

André Warnod coined the term École de Paris in 1920. Though difficult to define, it denoted an ambiguous group of expatriates in Paris including, famously, Modigliani from Italy, Soutine from Lithuania, Pascin from Bulgaria, Kisling from Poland, and Chagall from Russia. Foujita also became a central figure in this group. Although referred to as a ‘school’ or ‘movement,’ the École de Paris artists had little in common in terms of style except that they all were producing figurative paintings. Like Foujita, they were unconnected with the so-called avant-garde of the time, and they were not viewed as mainstream in art history. Despite the École de Paris appellation, with some exceptions for Foujita and Chagall, these artists rarely depicted scenes of Paris such as the Seine River, the Eiffel Tower, or Parisian cafes. Also, with the exception of Foujita, the École de Paris artists were all Jews. None had French nationality. The École de Paris artists could also be described as ‘foreign artists’ or ‘multinational artists.’ Foujita was the lone Asian of the group. His flashy fashion, thick-rimmed round glasses and bobbed hair made him, along with Kisling, who had the same hairstyle, a most popular figure of Montparnasse in the ‘roaring twenties.’

All six of Foujita’s paintings submitted to the 1919 Salon d’automne were selected for exhibition and he was also elected a judge of the Salon, the only Asian.

Foujita’s *Reclining Nude with Toile de Jouy* (Musée d'art moderne de la Ville de Paris), exhibited in the 1922 Salon d’automne was very well received and, according to Foujita, was pictured and
introduced in all the newspapers the following day. He had a congratulatory message from the Minister in the afternoon and in the evening the painting was bought by a major gallery for 8000 francs.

Eight thousand francs was quite a sum for a ‘new’ artist. His *Youki déesse de la neige* (Yuki, Goddess of Snow) (Foujita’s wife Fernande Barrey as model; Petit Palais Museum, Geneva) done two years later was also well received, securing his place as a highly regarded artist. His nudes, portraits, and still lifes, distinguished by Foujita’s milky white grounds and delicate lines in Japanese sumi ink applied with fine point brushes, established Foujita’s ‘brand.’

A Sensation of Japanese Culture/Western Technology

Japanese pre-Meiji old masters such as Hokusai, Hiroshige, Utamaro, Korin and Sotatsu continue to be admired on the world stage. Aside from contemporary Japanese artists such as Kusama Yayoi, Takashi Murakami, and the Gutai artists, the measure of the international evaluation for Japanese artists since the Meiji Period has been whether or not they were included in American and European art dictionaries and public market art encyclopedias. Foujita naturally appears in the most authoritative *Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists* (first edition, 1998). More recently, the re-evaluated Jiro Yoshihara, leader of the Gutai group who at one time studied with Foujita, has been added. The public market *Yale Dictionary of Art and Artists* included Yoshihara Jiro and Yasuo Kuniyoshi (who was active in the United States), in addition to Foujita though there is no entry for Gutai art. Kuniyoshi is included in the *Oxford Dictionary of 20th Century Art*.

No matter how locally acclaimed Japanese artists may have been from the Meiji Period to the present, it is clear that not many gained recognition on the world stage. Foujita is the exception. In his time and now he occupies a special position and has a strong presence as a world-class artist.

The above-mentioned encyclopedias and dictionaries consistently introduce Foujita as a ‘Japanese-French Painter.’ In other words, a Japan born France bred *wakon yosai* (Japanese culture/Western technology) painter. If misinterpreted, this could be viewed simply as eclecticism. Foujita, however, is among Japanese artists dating from the Meiji Period to the present who were able to retain a strong international reputation (along with the more recent Gutai artists). The reason may be that he was not overpowered by fame and popularity during his lifetime, and that he painted nudes, a genre absent from the traditional Japanese canon, with a heightened Japanese sensibility in France.

Detailed artist profiles are listed in the biography section at the back of this book.

(photocredits_ p. 31
Self Portrait (1929) depicting Foujita’s trademark hairstyle, round glasses, and gold pierced earring. (oil paint, Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art)

Nobuyuki Senzoku
Photographer Keiichi Tahara

Light’s Collaborator        Junji Ito
Professor, Tokyo University of the Arts Public Collaboration Center

I questioned whether embarking on a re-assessment of Keiichi Tahara’s work was necessary with his art still so fresh in our minds so soon after his death. In the end, I decided it would be better to do this now than to leave a gap in the understanding of photography in the future.

I visited Tahara in Paris around 40 years ago when I was an exchange student in Paris. With Oka Makoto’s introduction, I had started writing the ‘Paris Report’ column for the Geijutsu Shincho monthly art magazine. An acquaintance advised me that a Japanese photographer wanted me to take a look at his work.

Photos of Light in the City of Paris

Tahara and his wife welcomed me warmly into their somewhat forlorn apartment in an unfashionable part of town. His first solo exhibition in Japan had just ended and he showed me a small article that was not very favorable.

In a room with a single light bulb hanging down he showed me everything he had produced until then. There were photos of Min Tanaka, and photos from his Fenêtre series. Finally, he showed me photos of a subject elusive to me at first. These were from his Éclat (light) series and seemed to be of nothing in particular except light. That was startling. A photograph is obviously created by an optical reaction. The direct exposure photographs of Man Ray and Moholy-Nagy introduced a method that led to important expressive directions in 20th century contemporary art. Tahara’s photographs, however, were different from that. They were not documentations of light but rather reflections of light. I wrote about Tahara and became obsessed with this marvelous photographer, convinced he would have a great impact on the history of photography. When he was low on money, Tahara took photos of tourists, but Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto recognized his talent and helped him along on the road to recognition. Some years later, in 1985, when we both happened to be based in Japan, I curated the exhibition we called Architecture Fin-de-Siècle introducing Tahara’s photo record of turn of the century buildings. The exhibition space itself became an architectural environment and we struggled to accomplish this in a period of 21 days. Fortunately, the exhibition was very well received and became the basis for subsequent activities.

In a strange sense, artists and curators have a relationship similar to that of the members of a band. When there is a shared vision, teamwork creates energy. However, if the vector becomes slightly out of sync, the rhythm can never be recovered. Tahara and I were in sync because Tahara transformed his view from photograph production to object production. I understood that he was the singular photographer who had the ability to transition from ‘seeing’ to ‘feeling’ photos. He was a man of talent who could escape the obsession photography invited since the time of the camera obscura.

Tahara returned to France and successfully went on with his life as an artist, but we seem to have lost the desire to work together. When he passed away in 2017, regret naturally welled up inside me. This was for the loss of a dear friend and, more than my personal sorrow, for the loss his death represented to the future of photography.

(Photos)
(p. 34)
Keiichi Tahara photo from his Fenêtre series
Keiichi Tahara
Born in Kyoto in 1951. After moving to France in 1971, he was fascinated by the sharp European light and began taking photographs. Based in Paris until 2006, Tahara worked extensively on the theme of light in photography, sculpture, installations, and architecture. His Fenêtre series won the 1977 Grand Prix des Rencontres Arles Photographie, France and he received numerous other awards including the Kimura Ihei Award, Japan and the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, France. Garnering international attention, he had numerous exhibitions in Japan and Europe. In 2017, his Photosynthesis 1978-1980 exhibition with dancer Min Tanaka as subject was held. Tahara died in June 2017.

Junji Ito
Born in Nagasaki Prefecture. Graduated Waseda University, Faculty of French Literature in 1976 and completed his Master’s degree at the same university. Studied at the Universite de Paris as a French government scholarship recipient. After returning to Japan, engaged in a variety of interdisciplinary projects as art producer and project planner. Commissioner for the 1995 Venice Biennale Japan Pavilion. Awarded the Chevalier des Arts et des Lettres, France in 2002. Honorary Director of the Toyama Glass Art Museum, Professor, Tokyo University of the Arts.

Musée Soulages:
Exhibition “Gutai, l’espace et le temps” (Gutai, Space and Time) and its Significance

YUTAKA MINO
DIRECTOR OF HYOGO PREFECTURAL MUSEUM OF ART, KOBE

“Gutai” exhibition was fulfilled by aspiration of Pierre Soulages

Exhibition “Gutai, l’espace et le temps” (Gutai, Time and Space) was held at the Musée Soulages Rodez, Aveyron, in France from 7th July to 4th November, 2018. This exhibition was realized in accordance with strong request by Pierre Soulages, known as ‘painter of black’ and hailed from Rodez. Soulages visited Japan for the first time in 1958 and has since then visited Japan a number of times: it is safe to say that he is the artist who feels deep kinship with Japan. In addition, Aveyron has had a sister province relationship with Hyogo since 2000, developed exchanges in various fields including culture, education, and economics. As a part of cultural exchange, 16 representative works of Gutai was lent by Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art for this occasion. Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art has focused on “Gutai Art Association” as the important artist collective originated in Hyogo and has collected their exquisite works staging “Yamamura Collection” as its core, bearing the name of the famous collector from
Nishinomiya-city as well as the president and CEO of the company “Nihon Yamamura Glass Co., Ltd.”, Tokutaro Yamamura. Gutai activities, spanning 18 years from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, can generally be divided into three periods, the early, middle, and late periods, and works that we are exhibiting this time around come from each of those various periods and in various forms. Some highlighted the early period’s intense action and materialism, we also have works from the middle period, which emphasize painting quality, and lastly we have works based on geometric composition, from the later period. Through those wide range of the works, the exhibition “Gutai, l’espace et le temps” was able to trace successfully the expressional transition of “Gutai”. The inaugural party that I also attended was greatly broad up in the local medias. Regardless of its small population of Rodez, approximately 24,000, this exhibition recorded more than 60,000 visitors.

The year 1950, 9 years after the end of the war—Gutai Art Association: the innovative art collective originated in Ashiya-city

The “Gutai Art Association” was founded in Ashiya city, Hyogo Prefecture, in 1954, nine years after the war, when Japan was recovering its de facto sovereignty and finally emerging from post-war turmoil. With society showing signs of revival, new movements also arose one after the other in the field of the art. Among them, the “Gutai Art Association” which still attracts great interest both in Japan and overseas. In the magazine he launched the following year, “Gutai” Jiro Yoshihara, the spiritual of support of its members and leader of the Gutai association, posited “(...) contemporary art acts as a free space providing maximum release for people to survive the trying conditions of contemporary life. It is our deep-seated belief that creativity in a free space will truly contribute to the development of the human race.” as “Gutai’s” philosophy. Also, that, “It is our desire to embody the fact that our spirit is free.” in describing “Gutai” as the origin of the group’s name. Following from this principle, “Gutai” to encapsulate a place of creative freedom for its members.

Mentally based on “Don’t copy Anyone!”, the slogan by Jiro Yoshihara, theoretically on continuous evaluation by Michel Tapié

The slogan by Yoshihara, “Don’t copy anyone!” seems to have wings among researchers. In fact, radical and new attempts which broke the mold of art were frequently practiced on pictorial expression. Those attempts were based on the indication by Yoshihara, “think about your unique way of expression”. In 1957, a fortuitous encounter with French art critic Michel Tapié brought about great progress in “Gutai” creativity. Tapié’s praise of “Gutai” was not only theoretical support for the activity, but also gave great confidence to its members. Following that, “Gutai” expanded its activities to France,
Italy and the United States, eventually becoming internationally recognized. Later on, in the mid-1960s, Allan Kaprow labelled Gutai the precursor to Happenings, further pointing the spotlight on Gutai. The fact that activities from the art groups which were emerging from the area between Osaka and Hyogo, known as Hanshin-kan, were strangely keeping with trends in the world of art, speaks not only to the foresight Yoshihara and of the other members, but also of this region’s rich cultural roots (background) that foster these kinds of free art movements.

**Activities of Gutai---ongoing high-profiles worldwide**

On the article by Alfred Pacquement, in the exhibition catalogue “Gutai: l’extraordinaire Intuition” (held at Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1986), he states ‘As far as this exhibition goes, it is Westerners who copy the innovation from far east Japan without knowing its origin. How did Gutai generate this kind of brilliant innovation? Perhaps the atmosphere that was free from any occidental systems was absolutely essential.’ The reason why Gutai has been recognized and evaluated worldwide is in its originality, which is not under the influence of overseas. It is no doubt that the demand of Gutai will increase in the time to come. Gutai forms the core part of the collection of Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art. Together with ‘Ashiya City Museum of Art and History’ and ‘Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka’ which is under construction, three big hubs for Gutai research will be ready. By reinforcing of further collaboration, we continue to disseminate illustrious achievement of Gutai both at home and abroad.

**Yutaka MINO:**
Born in Kanazawa. After graduating from Keio University, completed doctoral program at Harvard University Graduate School of Art History (Ph.D in Literature). Successively held division head of Asian art at the museums in Montreal (Canada), Indianapolis and Chicago (USA). He assumed fist director of Osaka City Museum of Fine Art (1996) and The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2004), concurrently the deputy mayor of Kanazawa-city (2005). After holding senior positions like specially appointed founding director and committed to establishment of The 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; and director emeritus at Osaka City Museum of Fine Art simultaneously in April 2007, he assumed the position of Vice President of Sotheby’s North America Headquarters in May in the same year. Currently he is director of Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (since April, 2010). His main publications include “Hyper Revolution of Museum: Challenge of the 21st Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa”, “Hyper Revolution of Marketing: How Popular Museum increases visitors” (KADOKAWA Publishing), and many others.

**Artist Isobe Yukihisa**
Isobe Yukihisa and Echigo-Tsumari Kei Okuno

The 2018 Echigo-Tsumari Art Field: Inauguration of a Museum Dedicated to Isobe’s Art

It was my great pleasure to spend the summer of 2018 in the Tsumari region for the 7th Echigo-Tsumari
Art Trienniale. The Isobe Yukihisa Memorial Echigo-Tsumari Kiyotsu Soko Museum of Art (SOKO), an abandoned elementary school renovated to store and exhibit the artist’s works, was opened in Tokamachi City, Niigata Prefecture as a celebration of Isobe’s art with installations of new works outdoors and recreations of three previous installations. This provided an unprecedented opportunity to view the range of Isobe’s art from his early works to installations created for Satoyama.

Isobe’s Intention and Message

A path marked by yellow poles in a Nakazato Horinouchi rice field gives a sense of where a riverbed had once been. Following the poles is like being guided along the riverbank by the wind. The poles were removed after the Triennale and now exist only in photos, but I cannot forget the thrilling experience.

Contemporary Art and Town Revitalization: The 2000 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial

We became acquainted with Isobe in 1996 when Fram Kitagawa was appointed General Coordinator of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Necklace Project, the regional revitalization project proposed by Niigata Prefecture. Art Front Gallery was entrusted with its production and management. Kitagawa's suggested revitalization through contemporary art seemed rash at the time but resulted in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, an art festival held once in three years in the landscapes of Satoyama.

Isobe was legendary in the Japanese art world of the 1990s. A contemporary art prodigy in the 1960s, he abandoned art to study ecological planning in the United States and then set up a company to conduct environmental surveys when he returned to Japan. We heard that Isobe had returned to art making and his Art and Environment exhibition at the Meguro Museum of Art P3 Gallery was a startling comeback. Kitagawa later wrote, ‘I’m just grateful for having had the chance to know such an amazing person in contemporary Japan. He penetrated the earth and social fabric, allowing people to better understand the gentle possibilities art has to offer. ’ (Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo Isobe Yukihisa exhibition catalogue, 2007.)

Large-scale Installations Featuring the Shinano River

The Echigo-Tsumari Art Trienniale was launched in 2000 amidst difficulties of local village and administrative incomprehension and opposition. To understand the Echigo-Tsumari land configuration, we asked Isobe to carry out a 'regional planning' survey. His analysis of weather, climate, and social, geological and historical factors – his ecological planning inventory of ecological resources - became the indisputable manual of the area. At the same time, Isobe was drawn to the Shinano River that defines the region and developed his series of four artworks featuring the Shinano River and a total of six large-scale projects over 20 years: Where Has the River Gone (2000), The Shinano River Once Flowed 25 Meters Above Where It Presently Flows (2003), Agricultural Bugaku Corridor (2006), Natural Levee of Old Shinano River Has Excavated Here in This Area (2009), A Monument of Mudslide (2015), A Monument of Siphon (2018). His materials and methods are surprisingly simple: he installs 3 meter yellow poles along the old river bank and uses flags, phosphorescent light, logs, scaffolding, vinyl banners, and pipe. Realized by villagers and volunteers, the installations are lauded as good examples of local community collaborations.

Isobe visualizes the historical and environmental depths of the local people and land. Viewers experiencing his work have a sense of being enveloped in nature and understanding the fragile human condition vulnerable to natural disasters.
Wappen Series Brings International Attention

Isobe, born in 1935, had his debut as an artist in the 1950s, a period of avant-garde experimentation in the Japanese art world. As a student at Tokyo University of the Arts, he produced abstract oil paintings and prints on themes of repetition. Growing tired of the academic context, he immersed himself in avant-garde activities such as Ei-Q's Democratic Artists Association Group Exhibition and the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition. His Wappen series (based on emblem patches) eventually emerged and garnered attention of European art critics such as Pierre Restany.

From 1961 – 1965, Isobe created a voluminous number of his Wappen works. To produce these, he would nail emblem shapes cut out of cardboard to a board and paint over the surface of these with a mixture of plaster, pulverized marble and oil paint, creating a fresco-type relief texture. This kind of motif repetition became his signature style. Later, as a development, he started to focus on the wooden panels that held the attached emblems. He would affix a kind of door and insert everyday items such as an invitation letter, a magazine, or a garment price tag. Or he might create a collage by pasting the surface of a Japanese tansu cabinet with advertisements or Edo Period painting. This reflected his interest in urban ecology.

In the 1960s, Isobe gained international attention as a Japanese Pop-artist. Following his solo exhibitions in Europe and New York in 1965, he moved to the United States where he lived for ten years, working for the New York City Parks Department and studying ecological planning at the University of Pennsylvania. During this time he produced dynamic works on environmental themes using air and parachutes. Coming back to Japan, he managed a company and in 1990 returned to work as an artist.

Isobe is considered an artist of transitions. What I felt in the summer of 2008, however, was that as an artist he was consistent in his exploration of the sources of the earth and of society and that he imposed upon himself the task of ‘visualizing’ that through boundless curiosity.

Now over 80 years old, Isobe remains youthful and full of curiosity. With the 2018 Triennale still ongoing, he was already developing ideas for the next Triennale and guided me to the site he was envisioning for that.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)

(Photo captions)
(p.40) Yukihisa Isobe (r.) overseeing a large-scale monument construction.
(p.41) Yukihisa Isobe and local community volunteers who assisted installation.
(p. 42) Yukihisa Isobe Work, 157.0 x 112.5 x 6.0 cm, 1960.

Kei Okuno
Graduated the Art Faculty of Tokyo University of the Arts in 1974. Established “yuriape muperu kobo” workshop with classmates in 1971. In 1982, established Art Front Gallery where, after having served as representative director, she has been President and Chief Executive Officer since 2013. She has been involved in art planning for hotels and public spaces, including the Yokohama International Conference Hall (1999), the Akita Prefectural Government Office East Building (1999), the Chubu Centrair International Airport, Nagoya (since 2004), the Peninsula Hotel, Tokyo, the Park Hyatt Hotel, Shanghai, the Mandarin Oriental Hotel, Shanghai, the CCC Daikanyama T-Site, the Hyatt Regency Okinawa. She supervised the production and installation of Yukihisa Isobe’s art at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale from 2000 – 2018.
Artist Yayoi Kusama
Yayoi Kusama as I Know Her

Seiichi Yayanagi
Art Dealer, former Sotheby’s Japan Deputy Director

Yayoi Kusama Exhibition Launched My Career as an Art Dealer
I realized my long held dream to become an art dealer when I joined Fuji Television Gallery after my graduation in 1986. I was assigned to the team organizing Kusama’s June 1986 Infinity Explosion exhibition. It was her third exhibition at the gallery and consisted mainly of new works – 19 sculptures and 3 paintings ranging in price from 400 thousand yen to 1.3 million yen. Until closing in 2006, the gallery held a total of six large-scale exhibitions and carried out a large number of planning, promotion, and support activities in Japan and overseas. The gallery was located in Kawada-cho, near Tokyo Women’s Medical University, and within walking distance of where Kusama lived and had her studio. The gallery later moved to Odaiba and Yurakucho but shared location with Fuji Television at the time. Kusama would frequently visit the gallery when she was in good spirits, riding in the passenger seat of a station wagon driven by her secretary. She would chat good-naturedly with gallery clients and staff.

Various Experiences
I could easily integrate into the art field because I was born and raised in the household of an artist. However, I had no practical experience organizing exhibitions or creating promotional materials and catalogs. Late at night, when everything was removed from the walls in preparation for producing the exhibition catalog, we would have a party in the gallery, with catering from the cafeteria in Fuji Television’s basement next door. The gallery space was large but at openings many familiar faces would crowed in, including individual collectors, artists, art critics, curators, other gallerists, Kusama and her secretary. I was used to the atmosphere because I had attended my father’s solo exhibition at the Galerie Solstice in Paris and many others with my family since the time I was a child. However, when it came to socializing for business, I was a little uneasy. I didn’t know what to talk about with the guests. I felt anxious about having to do sales. Seeing me frozen in place, Kusama came up to me and said to me in a soft voice, “You’re under pressure to sell, aren’t you?” trying to encourage me. But I could not move. In the end, I did not manage to sell even one artwork at my debut exhibition. Prints were being sold in the back office to interested quests, and it was not easy at prices of around 20 thousand to 40 thousand yen.

My senior co-workers struggled during the period of the exhibition to sell larger works and sculptures. I was somehow relieved to see that only one work was on reserve for a public museum and that only a few works had been sold to a private collector. That was the situation at the time. I gradually became more confident after I sold my first piece and became more knowledgeable about sales techniques and successful in my approaches to private collectors and museums.

During my 20 and a half years at Fuji Television Gallery and 11 and a half years at Sotheby’s Japan, I was able to circulate many wonderful Kusama works. I have many stories to tell but will introduce just a few here having to do with my selling some of Kusama’s important works.

Conveying Kusama to Museums
One of the most important achievements in my life as an art dealer was the sale of Kusama’s No. A.B. (1959, oil on canvas, 210.3 x 414.4 cm) to the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art. Fuji Television Gallery had exhibited this indisputable masterpiece at the 45th Venice Biennale Japan Pavilion in 1993 and completed its sale for around 17 million yen the following year. From the perspective of today, that was a remarkably low price (it conceivably would command more than a billion yen were it on the market today). However, it was not easy to pass the approval of the city council collection committee. At the time, the office set up to prepare for the Museum opening was in the city office (later within the Museum building), and overseen initially by a single inexperienced woman curator. Several curators joined later but Mr. A from Gifu Prefecture was the only one with experience. Among many curators I have met so far, he was the most unusual and open-minded. Though they would sometimes argue for hours about the proposed work but, because they were of one mind in their
passion and ideas on its value, the piece eventually became part of the Museum collection. My maternal grandparents are from Gifu Prefecture and I have relatives in Nagoya. Maybe because of this, I have been able to cultivate very good relationships with museums, collectors, companies and art world people that continue until today in the Tokai region.

A Kusama Dream

I was asked by Mr. B, who was thinking about his legacy, for advice. Finally, his Kusama work sold at Sotheby’s Contemporary Art Evening Auction in New York on May 14th 2014 for 350 million yen, four times the lower estimate appraisal price. I was at the auction and immediately called him on my mobile phone to report. When I came back to Japan we had a very pleasant evening with delicious food and wine at a local French restaurant. The sale was not only an ‘American dream,’ it was a ‘Kusama dream.’

The Prices of Kusama’s Works

In my thirty-three years experience at Fuji Television Gallery and Sotheby’s, I have seen many Kusama works. I can think of only one other example of an artist whose prices soared to such an extent worldwide in such a short period. That artist is Zao Wou-ki (also a Fuji Television Gallery artist). During the time Kusama was represented by Fuji Television Gallery, her prints sold for between 20,000 to 40,000 yen, her plaster pumpkin objects for around 50,000 yen, shikishi boards for 3000 yen, SM size (90 x70 cm) for 100,000 yen, boxes for between 20,000 to 40,000 yen, 91.0x72.7cm tableau for 500,000. Large objects (over 162x130 cm) were mostly purchased by national and public museums and some private collectors. There were requests for SM size from other dealers, who would take 3 to 5 pieces. Kusama put some works aside for in-house purchase, but not many of our staff could afford these. The women staff found the yellow pumpkins cute and bought them in SM size or small objects and prints. One, seeing that Kusama was in a good mood ordered a box at a very cheap price. To everyone’s surprise, Kusama labeled the finished box with the name of the woman who ordered it, ‘so and so’s box.’

In today’s domestic and overseas secondary markets, Kusama’s prints command 1 to 10 million yen, the small pumpkins are around 5 million yen, shikishi boards 3 to 9 million yen, SM size works around 30 million yen, collage works have soared to 5 to 10 million yen. One of the small yellow pumpkins (of around 500) she gave away in front of the Japan Pavilion at the Venice Biennale vernissage recently garnered around 1 million yen at auction.

Creating a World Market

I experienced the Japanese ‘bubble’ economy of the 1980s, so I think I will be able to sense an overheated market about to break. I also know that value can be expected to come back, as in the case of Warhol. If you think only about the market during this time, then any artist’s work purchased in the past would appear underpriced. If someone bought a large quantity, because of the large margin of increase, that person could be a millionaire. Unfortunately, no one can imagine what would happen. Kusama continued her work every day, believing in herself. Not every artist works with such passion. Kusama’s success story during the artist’s lifetime is a very rare case in the art world. However, the art market of today is based on speed. With the spread of the Internet, information is close at hand and can be accessed twenty-four hours a day all over the world. Overseas auction houses have expanded to include gallery spaces and various other activities. Sotheby’s Hong Kong S2, for example, held a Kusama exhibition in 2012 that was a great success. In the past few years Japanese artists who had not had attention (because of a market lag) are attracting attention from all over the world. In order to create a world-class market, full participation of artists, dealers, auction houses, collectors, critics, museums, and companies is needed. I feel there will be opportunities for Japanese teams to create a number of cases like Kusama in the near future.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)

(Photo credit)

(p. 44)
Fuji Television Gallery June 1986 Kusama Yayoi exhibition

Kusama Yayoi Catalog cover

(p. 47)
Kusama Yayoi Pumpkin (47/50) 1988 (90.8x76.5cm)

Seiichi Yayanagi
Born in Tokyo in 1960. Son of an artist, he spent his childhood in Paris. He began working at Fuji Television Gallery after graduating university in 1986 and then joined Sotheby’s Japan, Ltd. in 2006. He retired as Deputy Director of Sotheby’s Japan in March 2017 and is now active as an independent art dealer.

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Artist Tetsuo Mizù

Mizù Blue and Joseon Porcelain

Haruki Sato
Director/Owner Gallery Cocon

The allure of Joseon porcelain ware is difficult to describe. Its white tones are myriad and of infinite depth and elegance. Similarly, Mizù’s ‘blue’ is anything but singular. For him, what we generally identify as black is actually blue. The color of Lake Tazawa, if objectified, for example, could be described emotionally as ‘Japan blue.’ A viewer is free to associate at will. Mizù blue and Joseon porcelain, though vastly separated by time and space, have in common an endless appeal and underlying pathos.

With his matted hair and shaggy beard, Tetsuo Mizù looks alternatively like an underclass rustic or an eccentric French gentleman. Constitutionally, he is open-minded and ever attentive to detail. Mizù is a free spirit whose charm is broadly alluring.

The color blue occupies an important position as foundation of Mizù’s Flag* series. Many possibilities are surely yet to emerge from this series. Transforming meaning (words) into art (symbols) is in itself an accomplishment but does not necessarily translate into art. It is the combination of Mizù’s craftsmanship and sensibility that creates a work of art. Though thinly painted, Mizù’s works nevertheless convey a rich materiality and dignity. The more paintings he produced in this series, the more sophisticated they became. The structure of combining flag details irrespective of conventional flag meaning representation is a contributing factor. Mizù’s selective inclusion of elements makes it impossible to discern what is from where, even with a conversion table. This is already evident in early examples from the series although Mizù constructed those intuitively while his later paintings are more deliberate. A more unconstrained, and perhaps more difficult, direction resulted in more masterful painting.

Mizù can be expected from now to produce less controlled signature pieces along with his Flag series. It is interesting to imagine how Mizù’s work might have developed had he continued to concentrate on the innovative semi-figurative works he produced in the 1970s and 1980s. It may be wishful thinking to imagine that Mizù, now in his 70s, might again create semi-figurative paintings.

A viewer’s perspective can influence how Mizù’s paintings appear. It is best to view Mizù’s paintings with as neutral, or vacant, a state of mind as possible. Depending on one’s mood, the same painting might appear subtly or completely different. Just as an answer might differ depending on how a question is asked, the experience of some types of art differs from time to time. Such art may be initially difficult to grasp, but one will never tire of new discoveries over time.
An outstanding artist (producer) is also generally an excellent observer (viewer). In other words, it is the artist who truly understands his own work. This is definitely true for Mizù who can declare at an early stage whether or not a work will turn out well. It is extraordinary to be able to envision the completed painting when the brush is first put to canvas but, as an admirer of Mizù, I hope that he will go on creating more of such paintings.

“Less is more” and “God is in the details,” two observations by architect and Barcelona Chair designer Mies van der Rohe, offer us a key principle for interfacing with art.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)

(photos)

Portrait photo of Tetsuo Mizù

_Fate_ (2014) 100x100cm

(p. 50)

Haruki Sato

Born in Tokyo in 1951. Currently in private practice (internal medicine, psychosomatic medicine) in Tokyo. His interest in contemporary art started when he was in his late 20s. He visited mainly rental galleries in the 1980s. In 1991 he published _something else 1_ about his personal collection and view on art. Opened Gallery Cocon in 2009 with the concept of juxtaposing contemporary and old works of art (mainly Buddhist art) and antique ceramics. The gallery produces exhibitions of new works and its permanent collection, and has presented solo exhibitions of Shigeo Kashiwagi, Mitsunori Kurashige, Kazuhiro Tadami, Tetsuo Mizù, and others. A sequel to _something else 1_ is forthcoming.

* The _Flag_ series is based on universally standardized international maritime signal flags used for communication at sea. Mizù has created a large number of works in this idiom since beginning the series in 1987. This is not necessarily because of simplicity of the color, line, and surface construction.

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**Miwa Komatsu: Art of spiritual flow**

Yuling Wang/independent curator and art critic

In 2017, I saw Miwa Komatsu’s artwork for the first time at Whitestone Gallery Taipei. I was blown away by her painting on the giant golden screen.

Soon, another encounter deepened my fondness for her art. In spring 2018, I visited Tsutaya Bookstore in Tokyo, which is known as one of the top twenty most beautiful bookstores in the world. I really enjoyed the bookstore’s relaxing atmosphere. After strolling and browsing books alone for a while, I entered the fourth floor and was immediately stunned by a huge painting. Mesmerized by the mighty and ferocious divine spirits, I recognized the artwork as one of Miwa Komatsu’s paintings. A bookstore is like a world of knowledge, while the divine spirits in Komatsu’s paintings lead me to a world of spirituality and give me a new perspective on art.

Life philosophy and the third eye

In _Bizarre Happenings Eyewitnessed over Two Decades_, Wu Jianren, a writer from late Qing period, used the expression “a stroke of god’s hand” to describe an amazing piece of art work or literature. A
true masterpiece with such an almost spontaneous nature must be the work of supernatural powers. After seeing Miwa Komatsu’s her live performance and her exhibits in Taipei and Tokyo, I can’t think of a better expression than “a stroke of god’s hand” to describe her artworks.

Born in Nagano, Komatsu had close contact with the nature. She often got lost in the countryside, but a Japanese wolf always led her way to her home. A few years later, as she was visiting a shrine with her family, she saw a stone-carved guardian beast that carried the exact resemblance of the wolf. She has been fascinated by statues of holy beasts from that moment. The experience of being present at the final moments of animals and her family members led the artist to form a unique view of life, death and spirituality. By creating different divine spirits, Komatsu has built an otherworldly spiritual universe. Mantra meditation before each painting helps Komatsu to channel the magical realm of sky and earth. After communicating with Komainu (guardian dogs) and supernatural beings, she uses her special power, the third eye, to create her own version of divine spirits. She always carries great respect for them.

Being the subject of Miwa Komatsu’s artworks, a divine spirit is the symbol of an enlightened and transcending self. Komatsu often describes the world of divine animals as an utterly pure space. She contacts god through creating divine spirits. When viewers look at her paintings, they are surrounded by an invisible and sacred energy of the universe.

Art Creation and Originality

The philosophy of Shamanism is a fundamental element in Komatsu’s work, which is to connect matters with non-matters, human beings with god, and objects with energy. Starting from copperplate engraving, Komatsu has enlarged her ways of expression to acrylic paintings. Her artworks are the combination of Japanese history, mythology and philosophy. By using the rich cultural background as the foundation, Komatsu has created an exquisite world with divine spirits from Japanese mythologies, such as Komainu (guardian dogs).

In today’s international art market, such style of art is extremely rare and original. At the first glance of these magnificent holy beasts, one might think they are created by a male artist. Surprised by her slender figure and her enigmatic beauty, the public has soon fallen in love with Komatsu’s charisma and talent. The intricate, colorful lines and layers in her paintings have taken us into an incredible dreamland, where mysterious spiritual spirits thrive. Her talent is clearly shown when her flying strokes recreate a flow of enigmatic supernatural powers.

Komatsu started exploring copperplate engraving when she was study at university of art and design. At the age of 20, the work “The Forty-Ninth Day” was appraised with its originality and led her way to becoming a professional painter. In 2014 the artist dedicated her work to Izumo Taisha Shrine (the oldest shrine in Japan, considered as where the deity strongly dwells). In 2015, Komatsu collaborated with landscape artist, Kazuyuki Ishihara, and exhibited her Arita-porcelain guardian dog at the Chelsea Flower Show in London; the work won the prize and accomplished the splendid feat of entering into the collection of The British Museum.

Komatsu’s artwork has a revolutionary impact on today’s Japanese art. has been active internationally versatile fields including addition of the work to World Trade Center in New York and appearance in TV advertisements. In 2017, she received the Young Artist of The Year Award and became the official ambassador for Maison Christine Dior. The number of visitors and sales from her Tokyo exhibition last year both set records.

Collectable artworks and future potentials

Collectors love Miwa Komatsu’s paintings for several reasons: her paintings are usually large in size,
her theme is unique, and her collections are limited. In 2015, Gatekeeper of The Ruins(1.3mX1.6m) was sold for 200 thousand HKD at Christie’s auction in Hong Kong, which was higher than estimated. This impressive achievement proves that the young artist has great potentials in the future.

In 2018, all Komatsu’s paintings were sold out at Whitestone Gallery in Taipei and Whitestone Gallery in Hong Kong. Popular among international collectors, Komatsu’s pieces have been sold out at all of her recent shows before their openings. Buyer have acknowledged her talent and her philosophy. I have great confidence in her future success.

I believe that Komatsu’s future is full of possibilities. I am touched by her full dedication to art. She strives to create divine spirits that protect the people, their surroundings and their belongings, away from all evilness and sins. What she creates are not just paintings, spiritual beings that offer blessings to humans.

I was deeply touched by what Komatsu said in a recent interview: “Different languages keep us from communicating with one another, but art carries no boundaries or discrimination. I want to save human souls by painting, which is the responsibility of an artist. When the aliens finally visit the earth, I would like to be the first artist to exchange art pieces with them, for them, money has no value, but a painting does.”

Through Komatsu’s art, we come to realize that true happiness only lies in our souls. When we encounter different life forms in nature, a great and invisible force makes us realize what love really is. As we grow spiritually, our hearts become more and more purified. We are moved by Komatsu’s paintings because we know that the true value of her art is priceless.

Wang Yuling
Wang is an independent curator and exhibition-maker based in Taipei, graduated from Fu Jen Catholic University (Major in German Literature) in Taiwan in 1986, and acquired a master's degree in French literature from the University of Montreal, Canada in 1989. After that, in 1992, she became a candidate for submitting a doctoral dissertation in visual history at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences, France. So far, Wang has published over hundred critiques of art and market analysis in Taiwanese artist magazine "ARTouch", “ARTnews” and the “Art Monthly”. In addition, she has translated multiple international publications about contemporary art. Furthermore, she became the chief editor of “ARTCO” and also founded the Blue Dragon Art Company in 2001. Wang has also been involved in over hundred public art installations in Taiwan as well as publishing related books. In fact, she has directed over 50 exhibitions at the National Palace Museum in Taipei, Taipei MOCA, Kaohsiung Museum of Art, and other major museums in China, Japan, Thailand, USA, Canada, France, Israel, and other countries.

Artist Yoichiro Kawaguchi
Rich Colors and Swirling Shapes: The World of Science Art  
Nobuko Nakano  
Brain Scientist

Kawaguchi’s art is distinguished by his frequent use of combinations of primary colors and forms resembling deep-sea creatures. These striking features may be related, consciously or unconsciously, to his having grown up in Tanegashima, a southern Japanese island with a particular evolutionary history. The color combinations differ from those in the natural world, giving the viewer a sense of exceeding human color perception limits.

The locus of human color perception is in the brain, rather than in external light. The brain has the
ability to identify wave lengths of light, in effect painting objects. Some animals do not have color vision and it is well known that dogs see a world of vision different from ours. Sea creatures do have color vision. Color vision present in animals from fish to primates is thought to be importantly related to our evolution from a common ancestor. Fish, reptiles, and birds have a four-color type of vision, while humans have a three-color type of vision, and other mammals have a two-color type of vision. Many species of fish, reptiles, and birds display vivid colors.

Paradise, The Universe, Futuristic Art *Space Bird Series*

Kawaguchi’s *Space Bird* series, featuring bird motifs, is a good example of his rich use of color. Projecting to a future time, he imagines creatures that could exist according to laws of nature hundreds of millions of years from now. This is a major aspect of Kawaguchi’s work.

Prominent color is advantageous for sexual selection and strategies for survival. Strong color combinations attract our attention, make us feel ill at ease, and fundamentally shake us from the human tendency to be at ease in comfortable environments. We are paradoxically reminded of the role of surging power in the need to hunt for prey and to accomplish sexual selection in the history of the past hundreds of millions of years.

A major feature of Kawaguchi’s work is his transformation of visual aspects of shape to a different modality. We can be deceived by the visual impression of a smooth surface, for example, made to appear rough through the effect of removing gloss. Given a physical visual stimulus, nerve cells react and change tactile perception before actually touching a surface.

Kawaguchi’s skillful incorporation of the phenomenon of pre-conscious sensation transformation allows him to create marine life with an effect similar to Satsuma cut glass art. Unique shapes enhanced with rich color give the feel of a texture smoother than glass and accentuate the viewer’s sense of a life-like surface.

Hints of Japanese Tradition and Free Movement in Time

Kawaguchi often takes inspiration from traditional Japanese culture and uses traditional techniques in his work. His images of the future world are enhanced by his thoughts on the relationship between the use of tools and a sense of time. Rather than simple attraction to the intuitive charm of traditional culture, Kawaguchi aims to share with his audience the transmission of diverse technology and culture through the long history of time.

A technically advanced work affects human cognition, allowing us to experience eternity for in an instant, for a moment, though we are mortal. It also gives us a feeling of free movement along the axis of time. Art allows us to go to a place far in the future, or to a past no longer in our reach.

Our brains work on two types of decision-making processes. One has to do with thought and is deliberative and more accurate than the second system that is quick, related to action and flight, and reflective of desire. There is a tendency in present day society to value quick-thinking and speed, but it is questionable that those qualities would be advantageous for survival over the long-term. Kawaguchi’s work seems to be reminding us that art is created on the premise of longevity and is instrumental in suppressing the human desire to act quickly to maximize immediate gain.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)

(p. 57)
Nobuko Nakano
Born in Tokyo. Completed the doctoral course at Tokyo University Graduate School of Medicine. Brian scientist, medical doctor, cognitive scientist, critic. Professor at East Japan International University. Active as commentator for media and television news programs. Publications include – Furin (adultery), Anata no no no shitsukekata (how to train your brain), Metaru no (metal brain), Shiawase wo tsukamu no no tsukaikata (how to use your brain to attain happiness).

(photo credits)
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Computer Graphics Artist Yoichiro Kawaguchi

Kawaguchi (l.) receiving the SIGGRAPH Award

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Yoichiro Kawaguchi exhibition at the Karuizawa New Art Museum

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Artist Kazuyuki Futagawa

The Beautiful Universe of Kazuyuki Futagawa: Portraying the Invisible

Sanae Nogami
Art Critic, Doctor of Philosophy

Before Dawn

The landscapes and scenery we encounter on journeys are specific to particular places and times, and ephemeral to us. They are forgotten in the darkness and confusion of memory. Kazuyuki Futagawa brings the landscape back to the horizon. Through his many sketches, he transforms what would be a fleeting travel memory into something lasting and universal. Entrusting himself annually to the deep forests of Yakushima, with its damp soil and 3000 year old Jomon cedar trees, he creates paintings that unify the space and give viewers a sense of vision.

Rather than a reflection of the world we actually see, Futagawa creates something that responds to our notion of our memories, filling out what is lacking in our memories. We become lost in the memories he creates.

Wild Landscapes

Since ancient times, trees have been believed to carry symbolic religious meaning and spiritual power. The 8th century Chronicles of Japan contains the passage: "In the Central Land of Reed Plains, the rocks, trees and herbs can speak." (Nihon shoki, vol. 1, book 2, tr. W.G. Aston, Cosimo Books, 2008, p. 64).

Trees and grass overflow with the vitality of nature. In the animistic view of nature, stones, trees, waterfalls, and animals such as bears and deer are all invested with Shinto 'kami' sacred spirits. The concept of the natural landscape as spiritual and sacred has long been the foundation of Japanese faith. This gives us the opportunity to open our eyes to the beauty of nature. Many of Futagawa's paintings allow us to grasp the aesthetics of spirituality, in other words a non-Western perspective and viewpoint. While intuitive, there is something spiritual about the rough texture of moss covering the ground surface, trunks, and protruding roots of old trees. Viewers get lost in the rich depth of sensual silence. The trees spread their roots vertically and horizontally on top of and to the depths of the earth in order to source water. The leaves and branches above rustle and robustly intertwine. Futagawa's paintings provide a context that
reveals the unnoticed pantheistic meaning of the relationship between humans and nature. He allows his paintbrush to pursue nature beyond the constraints of human life bound to instability and death. His paintings are based on an unshakable belief in the tremendous harmony of sensuality and dignity and the particular loneliness of the deceptively silent landscape.

Without doubt, a paradigm shift in the idea of beauty, like that engendered by Marcel Duchamp, has occurred. However, it does not reach the level of negating Baumgarten's idea of sense perception. Futagawa's expression of Yakushima extends beyond mimesis and depends greatly on the artist's advanced ability of description. Deeply carved surface ridges, undulating tree trunks and unexpected hollows stand for life itself. Branches exist as necessity, not as decoration. In this sense, its departure from clear norms of beauty is distinct from the pluralism of post-modernism that places value on originality. In a superficial comparison, what might be recognized as similar clearly differs from a photograph.

Brushstrokes Bold and Delicate

Futagawa's overwhelming descriptive power gives us the illusion of being lost. It is not true that the more accurate a sketch is the more it resembles a photograph. Futagawa's use of mineral pigments, the sensation of his Japanese brush on Japanese washi paper, these obviously result in something different from a photo. Approaching the painting, reconstructed from numerous drawings, one can hear the rough texture of the mineral pigments. All living things, whether trees, grass, or water, dance freely.

Whether his strokes are delicate or bold, Futagawa's paintings contain three characteristics. One has to do with his thoughts on landscape. Here there is a longing for a universal view of nature 'as is,' as inherited from ancient times. The second is an uncompromising belief in the pursuit of detail, wherein the kami dwell. The third is the belief that nature is at all times full of light and air. It must be added that the light he depicts achieves value through the nuance of shadow. Icarus fell to the ground when his wings were melted by the sun. Intense light is blinding. The soft compassionate light Futagawa depicts embraces us.

A landscape painting cannot be produced through the longing for nature and an ability to observe reality. To recognize and envision an object, it is necessary to grasp the atmosphere surrounding it, including even the moisture of the space in which it exists. This is not simply copying. Futagawa set himself the task of 'depicting the unseen.' He is able to do that, to acrobatically set space free, by taking full advantage of his unparalleled technique.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)

(p. 60)
Sanae Nogami
Born in Kawagawa prefecture. Graduated Musashino Academia Musicae; Masters Degree, Graduate School of Education, Tsukuba University. Masters Degree, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tsukuba University; Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Literature, specializations in Ethics, care, home schooling. Vice President of the Japan Society for Home Education; President of the Family Education Support Association. Home educator, home education advisor. Tsukuba University post-doctoral fellow. Art critic. Selected publications include, Tsukuba University Philosophy and Thought Series, Home Education Research, and others.

(photo credits)
Go Yayanagi presented me with an unexpected proposal when I was organizing his forty year retrospective at the Hokkaido Obihiro Museum of Art nearly thirty years ago. The museum had just opened a half year earlier, in September 1991. He proposed installation of a series of ‘Go Yayanagi Banners’ at 10 meter intervals along the three kilometer road leading from Obihiro Station, the main transportation hub of the city, to the Obihiro Museum. This was the kind of thing new shops did for grand opening sales, for example, or festival day displays at shrines, or yellow caution flags placed on highways. His idea was that the line of banners would culmination with a huge Yayanagi banner greeting guests at the front of the Museum.

The idea took me by surprise. The banners would have to be produced. A budget would be needed. We would have to get permissions from residents along the road and from the authorities managing the roads. Even if that could all be accomplished, there would also be the question and difficulties connected with installation and maintenance. Above all, the project seemed to be beneath the dignity of the Museum. Eventually, the plan was not realized. Yayanagi accepted the alternative of having his 5 meter long black and white striped Wave raised every morning, along with the national flag, on one of the flagpoles in the Museum’s Monument Square. Yayanagi’s flag, however, was not placed on the center pole.

There was criticism and controversy around the work, claims that it was commercial, like an advertisement signboard. As an art project, however, it was dynamic and fun and had a clear purpose. It may in fact have been more meaningful than the arrangement of the exhibition itself.

There was also another project that could not be realized at that time. The soon to be opened Hokkaido Obihiro Museum of Art had a clear vision of dedication to contemporary art. There were plans for an invitation program to allow artists to produce works at the museum, and for collaborations with local community. These kinds of programs are more common today as ‘artist in residency’ or ‘public outreach’ programs.

The Museum invited Yayanagi to the site for his exhibition preparations. In the middle of the Golden Week holidays, just before the opening, the Museum organized a public participation event to produce Go Yayanagi’s Homage to the Locus of the Universe of Beauty. Truckloads of bales of hay were delivered to the Museum’s Monument Square in front of the Museum entrance. The bales were stacked to become a huge six meter high installation. Objects shaped like human legs painted in ‘Yayanagi colors’ were placed at the very top. Visitors to the Museum during the spring holidays must have been totally surprised to see the local participants, all wearing matching parkas in Yayanagi colors,’ covered in hay.

As son of a rancher, Yayanagi was familiar with hay from the time he was a child. For what reason
was this natural material, common in Hokkaido, placed incongruously in a plaza surrounded by the architecture of a modern concrete building? No doubt Yayanagi found something inherently humorous about the juxtaposition of urban society and nature. The title also indicated his intention to emphasize the scale of the relationship between humans and the universe – though this interpretation may be overly romantic.

Yayanagi’s initial proposal was to cover Antoine Bourdelle’s *Victory*, a four meter tall bronze sculpture installed in the Museum’s Monument Square with firewood, leaving only the head of the sculpture exposed. This plan was a shock to me and also could not be realized. The Bourdelle sculpture was installed as a symbol of the newly inaugurated Museum. Yayanagi’s plan seemed intended to deny its existence. It may be true that the modern sculpture clashes with the streamline contemporary architecture. However, the sculpture is entrusted with the important role of welcoming visitors. Aside from the flag poles, there is nothing else in the courtyard. Above all, covering the sculpture with firewood was against the Museum’s idea of dignity.

Consistent Sense of Humor

Humor is a kind of lubricant. It is at the root of being human and of humanism. All of Yayanagi’s work is infused with humor.

Yayanagi’s two unrealized proposals described here are comical if seen through the filter of humor. It is important to face reality’s difficulties and issues head on. However, I can recall that whenever things get overly serious, a sense of humor allows a broader perspective.

Yayanagi’s art is immediately recognizable from his expression in simple forms and joyful colors. In addition to their beauty, his works reveal the profound sense of humor in his character. Humor and laughter can be shared with everyone and it is his sense of humor that defines Yayanagi as an artist.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)

Hiromichi Terasawa

Born in 1955 in Takikawa City, Hokkaido. Graduated Kanazawa College of Art in sculpture and went on to work as a curator, starting at the Hokkaido Prefectural Migishi Kotaro Museum of Art, and then Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art, Obihiro Museum of Art, Hokkaido Museum of Literature, Kushiro Art Museum, Hokkaido. Appointed curator at the Sapporo Museum of Modern Art in 2014 and in 2015 as Vice Director of Arts and Sciences. Currently Director of the Hongo Shin Memorial Museum of Sculpture, Sapporo. His activities have been broad, ranging from ancient to contemporary art.

(photo credits)
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*Homage to the Universe*, 1992, installation
*Nami*, 1991, installation

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Beautiful Nothing:

**The Work of Tadaaki Kuwayama**
Nothing has plagued the arts for centuries. What not to do, how not to represent, what is the art that can escape from the system within it produces, and how to reach the pure state of nirvana, of zen, of enlightenment, or of art itself—these have been issues central to the work of any artist wishing to establishing a critical practice that goes beyond communication their experience of reality. The reasons for this concern range from the philosophical (how to achieve to make the spirit, the holy, or the other present in art) to the practical (how to avoid having the work of art become a consumable, and thus the artist a worker whose efforts are alienated). They are also profoundly aesthetic, as many artists believe that only by not only not representing, but by not making at all, can they produce an art that would be truly autonomous and beautiful in and of itself. Few artists have spent longer and worked harder to achieve nothing in the last fifty years than Tadaaki Kuwayama.

What is ironic—or appropriate, if you follow the logic of the minimalists who are on this quest for nothing, is that what actually appears in the best work that approaches nothing—and this is certainly the case with Kuwayama’s production—is work whose intensity and effect on the viewer is all the greater because of its lack of most what we expect to see in art. Without representation, hierarchy, or materiality, Kuwayama’s paintings and objects become pure color, form, and presence in space. They

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1 The problem of nothing goes back, at least in the West, to the simultaneous emergences of the zero in algebra, one-point perspective, and the philosophical notion of nothingness or absence (see Brian Rotman, Signifying Nothing: The Semiotics of Zero (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991). Its development in Hegelian and Heideggerian thought as a positive “absence” stands in contrast to the lack created by alienation in Marxist thought. Perhaps the fullest philosophical description of the problem, however, is still Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, with its description of the spiral of alienation that is the very foundation of humanity (transl, by Hazel E. Barnes, New York: Philosophical Library, 1956, esp. pp. 21-46 and pp. 617ff.


3 Such theories are usually associated with Marxism and, in art, with the Postwar work Clement Greenberg. See his *Art and Culture* (New York: Beacon Press, 1961).
are luscious and deep in their hues and complete as things exactly because of their lack of reference, but they are also not focal or fetish points. This is exactly what Kuwayama desires to achieve. He believes that a space appears, a void or nothing that is the art he is making, exactly out of the relationship between the work he has so diligently denuded of any marks of making or art practice in the traditional sense.

Kuwayama embarked on his quest for this space at a moment of minimalism that had arisen in reaction to both previous attempts to find such a nothing and to a previous era in which it was the fulness of art, which is to say its abundance of meaning, gesture, layering, and materiality, that artists felt would allow it to conquer attempts to consume it too easily. He came to that time and place—New York in the late 1950s—with his own history, one that had taught him how to make art that was expressive and referential without being directly representational. Though Kuwayama rejected his training, coming to the United States exactly because he felt restricted by its traditions, the lessons he had learned in the nihonga school he attended in the end gave him the discipline, as well as the awareness of the artist as an active composer and maker, that let him work through his rejection of the known with success.

The line of minimalism he entered in New York reached back to the second decade of the 20th century. Although artists had sought to empty and refine their work before this, it was not until Kazimir Malevich and El Lissitzky and Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesburg, to name some of the most obvious progenitors of such a work, rejected direct representation with clarity and resolution, that minimalism appeared. These artists also can stand for the traditional two impulses leading to nothing.

4 All artist’s comments: conversation with the author, March 15, 2019
6 Generally, “minimalism” did emerge as a term for such reductive art until the 1960s. The term “non-objective” and “abstract” art (coined by the Russian painter Wassily Kandinsky) were used starting in the 1920s and 1930s to describe the general refusal at figuration. It is only in
While Malevich, for instance, saw his work as a revolution in practice and politics that was at least partially scientific, and which he related to the fundamental explosion of reality through the emergence of quantum physics and other such developments, Mondrian was driven by a belief in a spirit or oneness of the universe that could only descend on our world through a process of denial.

None of these artists or their compatriots ultimately held fast to this notion of making nothing. Their work still had a clear materiality and complex composition, even in Malevich’s twin *White on White* of 1918 and *Black Square* of 1915. Such a remainder became a recurring issue with minimalist art: artists always stepped back from the brink of whatever form of pure nothing they approached. This is perhaps not surprising. It is difficult for an artist to fully embrace doing nothing, and to deny their own authorship. It is a form of suicide, and it is perhaps not surprising that those artists who came closest to their goal—Ad Reinhardt and Mark Rothko come to mind—did so at the end of their life and in paintings whose blackness evokes an absence that is fully funereal.

The particular minimalist movement of which Kuwayama became, together with Donald Judd, Carl Andre, Anne Truitt, Robert Morris, Mark DiSuvero, and (somewhat later) Sol LeWitt, a founding member, was, even from the beginning, more expressive than many of its predecessors. It was a clear reaction to the macho primitivism and primal instincts of the Abstract Expressionists, but it also sought to offer an alternative to the emergence of a consumer culture that threatened to drown both the public and artists with a surfeit of meaning, materials, and just plain stuff. The minimalism of the early 1960s also evoked, certainly in relation to the writing of certain critics and to the work of movie makers such

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retrospect that we can understand the continuity of this tradition. See Edward Strickland, *Minimalism: Origins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993) and


as Alain Resnais, a sense of the existential meaningless of such a culture, especially as the threat of instant annihilation through the atomic bomb was a constant presence. Instead of the positive motivation of building a new, communal and communist reality, or working towards pure and final enlightenment, this was a minimalism of anger, rejection, and denial.9

Ironically, as James Meyer has pointed out, the particular movement that emerged with shows at the Green Gallery in 1963 and then the validating exhibitions of Primary Structures, at the Jewish Museum, and Systematic Painting at the Guggenheim in 1966, were as much part of a broader movements in political activism and consumer culture as they were a reaction against trends in the art world.10 The turn towards minimalism in couture and music marked the realization by a certain segment of the social and economic elite that the way in which they could set themselves apart was by joining artists in the rejection of popular culture whose mass production and elicitation of quick and emotional responses was seen as the antithesis of what those who truly understood current and future conditions thought was an appropriate art.

What marked Kuwayama apart from this movement was both the distance he kept from such debates, using his lack of fluency in English as a kind of buffer from the most intense debates and the selling of the work that soon became central to its production itself. Beyond that distance, however, what really marked his work was that he kept going. Though fissures soon appeared in the minimalist movement of the early 1960s, those divisions had to do with modes of expression and materiality: Morris’ expressive sculptures versus Truitt’s pure forms, for instance.11 Kuwayama was always the

most radical of the group and, when his friends and associates started developing other means to reject or challenge consumerism, he went in a different direction. He tried to find a way to be even more minimal.

The means he chose, however, were an adaptation of technologies that had been developed exactly for the production of large-run and high-affect objects. The first of these was spray paint. A technique that came out of the need for even and large surfaces for industrial and mass production purposes, it was soon adapted by artists involved in more popular forms of work, such as auto detailers and hot rodders (most famously Big Daddy Roth) and those doing illustrations for magazines architectural renderings. Later, it became the mainstay of the graffiti art movement. For Kuwayama, it was the first time he used material that thus resolutely did not come out of the high art tradition. He relished the absoluteness of its finish, produced not by stroke, but by the settling of an even mist on the canvas. Layering the colors in the manner in which he had his water-based paints, he was able to achieve the same depth and evenness of color, but without any mark whatsoever of the artist’s hand.

Not somebody to believe in a single-line progression, however, Kuwayama did not merely give up working with paints. He merely added spray paint to his arsenal. The same was true of the three-dimensional pieces with which he started experimenting shortly thereafter. It was here that he first used metal, and it was clear that the integrally colored, machined, and shiny surfaces he was able to achieve using this synthetic material allowed him to approach even closer to the notion of a neutral, high effect but low affect, material. Like a smith testing material at the point of state change to achieve the maximum strength of flexibility of metal result, Kuwayama pushed his bronze and aluminum to be as abstract as his layered paintings, but without their containment on the wall.

He also broke through the limitations of the single canvas by working in series. He had already divided

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his paintings into separate areas, often squares separated by the thinnest possible aluminum strip, so that they became both objects in themselves and compositions of several, completely equal elements whose uniqueness was in question by their simultaneous presence. Now he began to create works that were either completely the same in series, first of only two or three, but eventually in high numbers, or that exhibited slight differences in tonality. The difference of under painting that shown through in certain lighting conditions, or depending on how you moved past the painting, made the viewer an active participant in the work of art. You could no longer just contemplate the painting and thus have it remain a static, fetishized object. You had to move around, creating both space and time in the work of art.

Over time, some of these works became quite heroic in their ambitions, with one series of vertical members expanding to be well over fifty pieces. Once such multiples reached the scale that they began to extend beyond even your peripheral vision, or to even surround you, they took a new dimension. Kuwayama prefers the tall vertical pieces, for instance, to be installed in an L- or U-shape around you, so that the series overcomes any limitations of a single wall and forces you to abandon a purely frontal relation with any one of the pieces. While you at first might have a tendency to look for discrepancies or differences between the different members of the series, soon you find yourself realizing that the difference in shading and reflectivity that occur along their surfaces the artist has worked so hard to perfect are something that is the result of your different relationship to them as you move through the space. The retinal recall you experience then creates a barely perceptible cloud of color that hovers in space, only to dissipate any time you try to catch its existence.

In this, these sculptural works, as well as the lighter of Kuwayama’s single pieces, share a certain affinity (which he acknowledges) to the art produces to the “light and space artists” of Southern
California. 13 Whereas artists such as James Turrell, Robert Irwin, or Larry Bell sought to dematerialize the work so as to force you to become aware of your own perceptions (or so their most popular interpreter, Lawrence Wechsler, claimed14), Kuwayama wants the cloud to evaporate, forcing you not to come to terms with either yourself or the works, but the absence of effect—or at least your very inability to define it as such.

Unlike other pursuers of minimalism, moreover, Kuwayama has resolutely eschewed any tendency towards monumentality. When given the ability to install his pieces in site-specific ways in galleries that gave him the freedom to manipulate their spaces, he chose to let the existing conditions continue to exist and dominate, allowing his art to work its seeming magic through perfection, repetition, and lack of affect.15 He did not seek to overwhelm you, nor did he pursue the revelation (in the manner of Donald Judd or Richard Serra) of forces larger than you—although he admits that he would be happy to have his pieces exist in a post-human condition—but rather emphasized their presence in relationship to each other and you. Unlike Sol LeWitt, moreover, the series or the geometry never became either the point or the remainder of the work.16 For Kuwayama, who also made delicate pieces out of paper that remain in dialogue with the work of his fellow artist and wife, Rakuko Naito, each piece retained an individual presence and sense that it was an autonomous work that, paradoxically,

13 For the best compendium and analysis of the movement, see the catalog of the exhibition organized as part of the first Pacific Standard Time series: Robin Clark, ed., Phenomenal: California Light, Space, Surface (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
14 Lawrence Wechsler, Seeing is Forgetting the Name of the Thing One Sees: A Life of Contemporary Artist Robert Irwin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).
15 In fact, he feels strongly that both Serra’s heaviness and the attempts to create an “almost nothing” by groups such as Zero failed exactly because of their monumentality. Cf. Joseph D. Ketner, Witness to Phenomenon: Group Zero and the Development of New Media in Postwar European Art (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2017).
16 For the best discussion of the devolution of minimalism into conceptual work, see Lucy Lippard, Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977).
existed through its effect on you.

As Kuwayama has experimented with various techniques and processes, as well as formats, he has found one mode of making that is as close to not-making as he has come. Working with a factory in Japan, he supervises the process of the electrolysis of titanium by which it gains a particular color. His work consists of sitting with the operator and deciding the exact moment he wants the transformation to end, so that one particular hue emerges. Because the color is integral, but also because of the particular qualities of titanium (which architects such as Frank Gehry have also come to appreciate) he is able to achieve a particular iridescence that is all the more remarkable because of the solidity of the material. Cutting the metal into small blocks, he then arrays the pieces in precise grids on the wall, in pairs of closely matched color. Now even the slightest movement of the eye, let alone the head, or a change in the atmosphere of the room, causes the objects to change their aspect. Perhaps ironically, because of the minimalism of the production, these titanium pieces are about as baroque and luscious as Kuwayama has allowed his work to become.

It is in this manner that Kuwayama has perhaps comes closest to nothing. As he often points out, he sees his art as existing in thin air, as a kind of relational aura between the viewer, the work, and the space in which it occurs. The aim he pursues is to not so much make this aura, as to allow it to appear. To make things even more complicated, or closer to nothing, Kuwayama also believes that this particular nothing is both beautiful and valuable, and independent of perception or human beings. Out of the choices the artist makes, but perhaps also out of chance, and certainly out of taste and aesthetic enjoyment, that nothing just somehow, in the end, is.

To see this work, which dates from the last few years, as the endpoint or latest evolution of the artist’s body of work, however, is wrong. Kuwayama has refused to see his work as consisting of an evolution towards to any form or goal or ideal, even if that final end point would be pureness of nothing or the nothingness of purity. Instead, he keeps returning to previous modes of working, as well as rearranging
existing pieces. To discard any previous work or give favor to the latest production (though he admits to a fondness, which is common to any creator, for what he has done last), after all, would mean that there is an intrinsic value to the craft of the making, its presentation, or the artist’s other choices in the art making.

Instead, Kuwayama just keeps making. He has an obvious passion for his work, as well as a sense of aesthetics, particular of color and composition, that comes through exactly in the choices he continues to make. He also admits to destroying work that he feels does not live up to his standards. Furthermore, he remains fully committed to playing out all the possibilities of limited formats he has by now established, rather than broadening his body of work to include other media or techniques. However open to new technologies he might be, they must continue his experiments. All this would indicate that he sees value in each work that he makes, and that he uses standards of judgement that define him as the discriminating and privileged creator. Perhaps his most finely-honed art, then, lies in convincing us that all this is as if nothing, and that nothing comes out of it in such a way that it fills our eyes and our spirit with something that, in the end, we still might call art.

Aaron Betsky

Artist Ay-O

Ay-O – Why Rainbows?

Kunio Motoe
Professor Emeritus, Tama Art University; Art Critic

A Sixth Sense

An ‘evaluation’ is an arbitrary explanation or interpretation of a certain person or thing. It involves countless errors, omissions, and even intentional misrepresentation. Referring to Ay-O as ‘The Rainbow Man’ is not necessarily mistaken but it is important to understand that this gifted avant-garde artist who emerged from the chaos of post-war Japan as an avant-garde artist is not sufficiently defined by rainbows. It is important to consider when, why, and how Ay-O’s rainbow motif came into being. To understand that, and to appreciate this artist properly, it is necessary to explore Ayo’s starting point. Despite being well-known, Ay-O has not been given the legitimate evaluation and appraisal he deserves.
Ay-O (his real name is Takao Iijima) was born in Ibaraki prefecture in 1931. Given that he exhibited in the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, the most avant-garde venue of the time, and that he joined the Democratic Artists Association organized as a free and egalitarian movement by modernist Ei-Q, it was natural that Ay-O would abandon the stability of a career teaching junior high school and head for New York, the newly emerged center of the avant-garde at the time, in 1958.

Ay-O's initial works were influenced by Abstract Expressionism, a movement at its height in New York at the time, and gained some degree of recognition. Ay-O, however, was not satisfied and was more intent on expressing himself by whatever technique. He felt that the prevailing trends in painting were like jumping in a river and splashing around – 'splashes on canvas simply for emotional expression do not produce any sort of objective proof.' Ay-O was after something extraordinary in order to shake off conventions of the past. It became his mission to identify his own 'sixth sense,' beyond sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell. He later said that 'ready-made' objects inspired him. His pursuit was cutting-edge. This is clear from his involvement with the Fluxus movement and Lithuanian American artist George Maciunas.

Questioning Human and Social Fundamentals

Ay-O's developing inclination towards materiality overlapped with John Cage's 4'33. The idea of a pianist sitting at the piano without touching a key impressed Ay-O profoundly. He said he felt he was born at that moment. It is difficult to assess the intersection of Ay-O's 'concrete materiality' and the metaphorical presentation of emptiness as 'a pianist who doesn't play' (or, following author Atsushi Nakajima, an archer who forgets his bow). Materiality, emptiness, nothingness – how can these relate to each other if they refuse a Zen dialogue? The correct answer is elusive, but it is certain that Ay-O viewed the 'rainbow' impartially rather than as something awesome. This is at the root of his intuitive understanding of the question.

Materiality, emptiness, nothingness. When two things appear at first glance to differ, there are two possible disparate notions. The first is to deny connection. The second, and the position of Ay-O, is to find the relation at some deep level. Ay-O's highly regarded Rainbow No. 3 Venice Tactile Room illustrated this briefly at the 1966 Venice Biennale. There is a conflict in the coexistence of the visual sense of a 'rainbow' that fills and dominates a space and the tactile sense of sixty-five finger boxes with unknown contents attached to a wall. M.R. Sullivan's observation, in his Sculptural Materiality in the Age of Conceptualism (Routledge, 2016), that the amount of press coverage Ay-O's Tactile Room generated reflects just how controversial this work was. According to the New York Times (July 4, 1966) the mechanism inside the boxes, in particular, were problematic and security had to be placed around the installation.

Ay-O he felt nature, and the origin and infinity of the universe, in the rainbow that did not exist in artificial lines. This surprisingly resembles the concept of Yves Klein's monochromatic painting. Ay-O remarked, 'Lines travel through infinity but color is infinite. I experience the full alignment of the universe through color and feel truly free' (1958). His fundamental position applies also to objects. Ay-O noted that attaching personal objects, created by himself, to canvas, was about the starkness of death rather than about freedom. Even if not successful, Ay-O's placing of objects was a way for him to stimulate ideas. It was a stunning flight of artistic perception. The suspended objects existed in their ability to halt judgment. The depth of Ay-O's concept, his questioning of the nature of human life and human society, should be given more attention.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)
Kunio Motoe

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**Artist Chiyu Uemae**

The Art of Chiyu Uemae: Laborer, Dedicated Artist, Gutai Association Member

Kunio Motoe
Professor Emeritus, Tama Art University; Art Critic

Painting not to sell, but to live

Chiyu Uemae was one of the founding members of the Gutai Association established in Osaka in 1954 by avant-garde artist and cooking oil company president Jiro Yoshihara. He was one of the few members who remained in the group until its dissolution following Yoshihara’s death in 1972. Uemae was born in 1920 in a poor village in Kyoto Prefecture. Living in poverty at the lowest strata of society, he did physical labor and had little possibility of engaging in painting. He nevertheless gravitated to art, particularly cutting edge avant-garde art. Fate seems to have allowed him to find the path to art at an early age and to eventually realize his dream. The fact that Uemae never wanted to make a living by selling his paintings, despite being poor, is one of the most endearing qualities of this artist who continued to devote himself daily to the creation of his art.

Techniques Derived from Experience as a Laborer

Uemae’s 1947 journal entry: I have to work in order to eat but my drawing protects my life. (_Chiyu Uemae Chronology_, ed. Hiroyuki Nakatsuka). The greatest strength of Uemae’s art is the inextricable link between his life and labor experience that goes far beyond the universality of T.S. Elliot’s idea of the ‘objective correlative.’

When Uemae arrived at Yoshihara’s home in Ashiya in November 1953 requesting instruction, he could be described only as a self-taught painter/laborer. Though he got no particular assignments from Yoshihara, Uemae presented samples of his work every week for criticism and advice. Gutai art is generally thought of as spontaneous action. Chiyu Uemae’s painting is an exception to that. He emphasized the materiality of his paint by building up dense layers of abstract pointillist masses. It was an excellent example of Gutai art and a technique rooted, more than anything else, in Uemae’s
exacting foundry work experience. Uemae’s insistence on materiality was connected with his intuitive awareness of the relation between paint traces and living things. This is precisely the reason he rejected literary references. He said that each of his points was a direct metaphor for traces of existence. He would cut into surface lines of paint with a palette knife as if in a kind of spiritual endeavor or perhaps in order to infuse his own materialized existence into objects. Uemae is an artist who lived hard in his everyday life and whose points and lines are unparalleled in their artistic truth as signifiers of his breath and pulse.

In Praise of Michel Tapié and Freedom in Painting

Chiyu Uemae had endless praise for the freeing influence of critic and leading proponent of Art Informel Michel Tapié. At the International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai at Takashimaya Department Store, Osaka in April 1958, Tapié hung one of Uemae’s works between works by Yves Klein and Jean-Paul Riopelle, and he spoke enthusiastically about it in front of all the Gutai members. Later, in 1966, Uemae began to have solo exhibitions at Gallery Nippon. According to Shigeo Sasaki, Tapié introduced Uemae to the Gallery. In his Another Art (1952), regarded as Art Informel’s manifesto, Tapié lauded the essential freedom of painting, as opposed to sculpture that was dependent on shape. Painters, he said, can act at will, exclusive of shape, in a state of chaos with infinitely expanded techniques. Uemae created one artwork with an accumulation of 60 kilos of matchsticks, and his work that appeared in the latter half of the 1970s clearly reflected his early textile factory apprenticeship experience. These embodied Tapié’s philosophy of materialization and indeed far exceeded it. I believe that Uemae was the artist to restored order to Tapié’s disorder.

Uemae could not extract himself from the struggles of his personal reality. Instead, he used those struggles to establish himself as a self-sustaining artist. In 1994, he said, “With these 10 fingers, I engrave the images transmitted from my brain to my nerves into my selected material.” How wonderfully the brain (intellect) and hands (sensation) interact. The sensation in Uemae’s fingertips, his search for a ‘gutai’ (tangible) reality itself is art. Why have we overlooked such an exceptionally original artist for so long? The true image of Chiyo Uemae is only now coming into view.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)

(photo credits)
(p. 77) Chiyu Uemae, at his studio. Uemae was one of the few members active in the Gutai Association from its inception to its dissolution.

(p. 78) Kunio Motoe
Contemporary Japanese Painting (Misuzu Shobo, Inc.).

Note: Kunio Motoe passed away suddenly on June 3rd 2019 after returning from a trip to Seoul. The cause of death was myocardial infarction. Motoe was in the process of writing about Chiyu Uemae at the time. This manuscript is a reprint from “GUTAI STILL ALIVE,” published in 2015.

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Section 2
Interviews of Experts in the Art Industry

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Section 2
Interviews

Interviews of Experts in the Art Industry

The Current State of Japanese Art in the International Art Market

Yasuaki Ishizaka
President of Sotheby’s Japan

Junji Ito
Project Associate Professor of Public Collaboration Center, Tokyo University of the Arts

Post-war Japanese contemporary art centered on Gutai, have been in the spotlight in international auctions. As if responding to such a trend, Sotheby's London restarted its Japan art section that was discontinued.
Following this on-going trend, this section features a talk between Mr. Ishizaka and Mr. Ito regarding the current situation of Japanese galleries and museums. Their lively conversation touched on reconsidering the market of not only contemporary art, but also artists from the Meiji and Taisho periods, which is a great chance to show the attitude of “playing the game on our own ground” in the international business scene.

(p 80 photo)
From left: Junji Ito, Yasuaki Ishizaka
Evaluation and Credit-guarantee System of Artworks

Ito: I was watching TV the other day. The program featured the auctions, and the Sotheby’s repair factory was introduced. It was a classic car repair factory somewhere in the U.K.

Ishizaka: It must be RM Sotheby’s, the car auction dealer that Sotheby’s is affiliated with.

Ito: I see. Classic cars are in high demand lately. I think it was Sotheby’s that found a car buried in a storage at a farm in Japan.

Ishizaka: Yes, the Ferrari.

Ito: I heard that the car was sold for two hundred million yen. Does the auction work as a way of guaranteeing the quality of the item?

Ishizaka: If the item sold at the auction is found to be fake within five years, the auction house will return all the money.

Ito: While the price of contemporary artwork becomes higher, no one can guarantee the validity of the high price. It seems that the price-warranty relationship has been overly unbalanced. In other words, we do not know what determines the price. When I was having a meal with the director of a Dutch museum, he suddenly told me to have a toast after receiving a phone call. I asked, “For what are we toasting for?” and he replied “Our foreign minister is visiting Paris now. We finally made the deal with the French government about the sale of a pair of paintings by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn at the Rothschild’s house for tens of billions yen each. This case was a pending issue for a long time, and I am glad that we finally resolved it.”

While I was surprised at the price, the assessment value of the Jasper Johns’s painting when I was serving as the director of the Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum after its inauguration was also ten billion yen. We needed to fix the price for insurance purposes when loaning the painting for the exhibitions composed of the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art. While there is a considerable time-gap between Rembrandt and Johns, it was already assessed as worth one billion yen. While time and price had a certain balance in the old days, time cannot be used as an indicator of value anymore. Therefore, I think that the auctioning of a work has become a price-guarantee or credit-guarantee for it. What do you think?

Ishizaka: The auction does not provide a credit-guarantee. But, as I said before, since various things are traded in the auction, some say that there is no rule for the price of artworks. However, there is actually a solid singular standard of the price. Of course, like the stock market, the price of some artists’ work become higher or lower depending
on the speculation of the dealers, but the evaluation of the work is eventually fixed according to a historical judgement. Speaking of the market, the highest price of the Rembrandt at the auction now is about ten billion yen, while a top-class work of Andy Warhol will probably go beyond fifteen billion yen.

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This does not mean that the importance of Rembrandt as an artist has decreased. Rather, this is the result of a shrinking market of the old masters as their masterpieces are acquired by museums. When top-class works cannot be purchased, the collectors move to the market in which they can still purchase top-class works. Even the market of impressionists has become smaller lately. In terms of the size, the contemporary market is probably the largest one reflecting the demands.
Ito: It resembles the situation of the late 19th century when the impressionists came out. They appeared in the Salon, which was born against the world dominated by noble people in the old generation.
Ishizaka: Impressionism was contemporary art then.
Ito: It may also resemble the situation of the United States in the 1920s, 30s, or the 50s. The difference today is that such a trend is extended worldwide.
Ishizaka: It is true. Back in the old days, it was Europe, the United States, and Japan that participated in auctions, but today, we can find sixty to eighty countries participating the evening sales of contemporary art and Impressionism works. The world of auctions has become global.
Ito: While museums in Japan rarely participate auctions lately, foreign museums build their collections through auctions.
Ishizaka: It is still difficult for foreign museums to join in the auctioning of works whose evaluations have not been fixed. However, in the case of foreign museums, if the museum seeks a work in their collection, it may participate in the auction indirectly through the museum trustee, which makes a bid and later donates the work to the museum. When galleries in Japan were active in the 1990s, the museums asked the galleries to purchase the work, which the museum later purchased from the gallery. Currently, some private museums directly participate the auctions as well.
Ito: Private museums can use that method, but it would probably be difficult for public museums to do the same.
Ishizaka: I do not think public museums can either. However, I heard in the 1990s about a public museum that directly purchased a work through an auction.
Ito: I participated the founding of the Toyama Glass Art Museum and am currently serving as emeritus director. This is a special museum of contemporary glass art.

Ishizaka: I have been there.

Ito: The Toyama City government is in the midst of creating a systemic environment by building a school that teaches glass-making, managing a residence program for the glass artists, founding a glass museum, and introducing the works of contemporary artists so that the artists can live in Toyama.

Ishizaka: The level of the museum was very high. I was surprised when I visited it. The museum invites international artists as well.

Ito: We started the international Triennale, and an Icelandic artist won the prize. The artist’s work is linked to media art like glass and brain waves... Anyways, it is difficult to explain. But, I personally think that great artworks have been produced in the field of glass.

In Japan, however, the galleries for glass art is still premature. They do not handle glass artists. So, I was proposing the director to do the auction at the glass museum, since artists need to make a living first before we support their art. What I wanted to say is that the museum should support artists. While the activities of museums in Japan is limited to the acquisition and temporary exhibition of works, foreign museums seem to focus on nurturing artists and growing together with them.

Ishizaka: I do not think auctions should be done at museums. Museums have their functions. If the museum introduces great artists and if their works receive sympathy, the artist steps up domestically and internationally. Consequently, museums help establish the evaluation of the artist. However, I think it is difficult for the museum to bring economic success to any particular artist.

Ito: I see. So, the museum should not do the business.

Ishizaka: I think it is the role of the gallery. Galleries in Japan are, in general, divided into two: galleries that raise artists and secondary galleries. However, international-class big collectors cannot be born without comprehensive galleries that sell both young artists' works and the works of Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. I personally think that Japan needs galleries that can work internationally in various ways.
Ito: I am not necessarily saying that the museum should do the business, but a systemic approach is necessary for developing artists who can work internationally. We need that kind of concept to activate Japan as an art ground. It might be different from exchanging currency, but it can be considered as the museum’s social contribution.

**Galleries Are a Part of the Art World, and Museums Need to Open Their Activities Internationally.**

Ishizaka: I agree that museums should be more internationalized. I support the idea, for instance, of the government making programs to introduce Japanese artists abroad and providing funds for the exhibition of Japanese artists in foreign museums. I also think that more exhibitions in Japan should tour internationally, such as by going to New York and then Korea.

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Ito: Museums need to develop internationally.
Ishizaka: The principle of competition is also necessary, for instance, to seek sponsor B even if B is a competitor of the long-term domestic sponsor A, if A stops sponsoring.
Ito: I agree.
Ishizaka: Japanese galleries and museums seem to limit their activities inside Japan, but are more than capable of extending their activities beyond the boundaries. If Japanese galleries have strong power, foreign artists will probably approach them.
Ito: I think so, too. Museums should build international networks. For instance, the Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum had a Spanish art collection called the “Suma Collection.” Therefore, when I was serving as the director, we sought to build a cooperative relationship with the Museo del Prado in Spain to cultivate human resources together in addition to the exchanging curators and loaning the collection. Furthermore, the museum sought to build relationships with museums in Shanghai and Busan. A group of collectors from the Corning Museum of Glass in the United States will come to the Toyama Glass Art Museum in autumn. The standpoints that museums can take and the range of activities have become much wider now.

**Various Issues in Japanese Museums**

**Future Challenges—Human Resources in the Field of Museum Management**

Ishizaka: Museums currently lack management. The reasons vary, such as the curator
becoming the director. I think that the academic and management sides should be separated, and the director should be selected based on their management skills.

Ito: I completely agree.

Ishizaka: As for the financing, there is an increasing interest to donate money for good reasons. Therefore, professional directors who specialize in raising funds for the museum such as by collecting donations are necessary.

Ito: Some people overseas do think that the role of the director is collecting money. When I met a director from a museum in the United States, the person told me that the director’s role is fundraising. We talk about art, but it’s only in private.

Ishizaka: In Japan, some see the need for management; however, those with the management skills lack knowledge of art.

Overseas, the management staff has expert knowledge and understands how curators operate. After all, the work of the management and the curators cannot be completely separated.

Ito: I founded many museums as a producer. While the Nagasaki Prefectural Art Museum was the first museum where I actually served as the director, the museum then was very conservative. Although it must have changed a lot by now, people used to think that the museum is ran solely by the curators.

The museum curators are researchers, and museums purchase their research items. World art history is formed by each museum taking charge of a particular part in art history in relation to other museums. The role of museums increases as the value system of the art world widens. However, many museums in Japan are merely clone museums without originality, and there is no distinction among the works of curation, publicity, and management. It is like a hospital run by doctors.

Human resources are what is lacking. While museums have enough curators, the cultivation of human resources in management is delayed significantly. Museums need someone with a sense of business. When museums are occupied by curators without a sense of management, no artists can be cultivated.

Ishizaka: To do so, the salary of the museum director needs to be raised. The director of MoMA is about two hundred million yen. The director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art is about four hundred million yen, although these might be a little extreme.

Ito: That is why people think that serving as a director in Japan is worthless. Directors complain about building collections since museums need to raise money to purchase them.
Ishizaka: That is true.
Ito: Also, museums have become more exhibition-centered lately. Curators are those who plan exhibitions; however, the curatorial role has become stronger than the registrar’s role, and the curators are evaluated based on the exhibitions they planned while building the museum’s position with wider vision has become secondary. In other words, the collection-building in Japanese museums are very behind, and many lack a comprehensive vision to build collections based on their areas of specialization.
Ishizaka: Foreign museums have a comprehensive vision. Celebrating the vision of the museum, the director sometimes holds the exhibition of collections added during her or his term when they retire after serving as the director for two to three decades. In contrast, Japanese museums seek to hide who is responsible for purchasing specific pieces by involving many committees in the decision making process.

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Ito: I agree. Museums need to change first before making changes in surrounding environment. To make art in Japan internationalized, museums need to push their unique collections and how to do so based on the characteristic of the museum’s location.
Ishizaka: Museums should focus on the strong points of Japan. I was a gallerist for eighteen years before working for Sotheby’s in 2005. Surprisingly, Japan’s strong point is the teamwork of museums build their collections according to others. For example, if one museum has Paul Klee’s work from the 1920s, other museums purchase works from the 30s or 40s. If we see Japan as a whole as one museum, it has very rich collections. To make it work better, I think that museums need to be concentrated a little. One option would involve the central government managing the acquisition and storing of artworks and loaning them to museums throughout Japan, like what FNAC does in France.
Ito: As you said earlier, museums have their shared functions. On the other hand, each museum needs to work together and form its own base. But these have been uncertain among museums. It is partly because museums are built without visions, which in turn has been influencing art and its surroundings.

International Strategies of Artists and Galleries
The Importance of Appealing Individuals Independently from Works through Presentations

Editor: Let’s change the topic and talk about the artists. We as art dealers seek to support Japanese artists since they are behind in the international market, and thus, will be
recognized further in the future. What do you think of this? In the case of Gutai, which
gained attention quickly, their artworks are highly acclaimed in international auctions;
for instance, Kazuo Shiraga’s works are sold at six to seven hundred million yen. Still,
Japanese collectors do not buy their works—Either the Japanese care less about artists
from their country who are recognized internationally, or the information did not reach
Japanese collectors.

Ishizaka: Japan is not alone. When I was dealing with German contemporary art, Georg
Baselitz, Gerhard Richter, and Anselm Kiefer were all ignored in Germany. Only after
they were recognized internationally, they were recognized in their own country.
Today, Japanese contemporary art has received much attention internationally. When I
first visited a contemporary art auction in Hong Kong around 2006, ninety percent of
auctioned items were works of Chinese contemporary art. The auction was dominated
by Chinese contemporary art and it was as if their number doubled each time, while
works by Japanese artists were seldom found.

Ishizaka: Lack of promotion is one issue, but another issue is the Japanese artists
themselves. While artists with promotional skills are not necessarily equivalent to a good
artist, good works still need some promotion. One issue of the Japanese artists is that
they produce little. Artists need to have some amount of works before being introduced
in the world market. That is one. Another is that the artists need to present themselves
independently from their work while the work should stand by itself.

Ito: The same can be applied to not only the artists but also the supporting institutions.
When I was the advisor of Philip Morris International Inc., they started the “Philip
Morris Art Award.” When I was asked about the idea of CSR, I proposed to create an art
season since there is no such thing in Japan. The award recipients displayed their works
at Harajuku Quest Hall and Spiral as well as Yurakucho Hall. Seven artists’ works were
displayed. They were later taken to New York, and their works were displayed at the
Grey Art Gallery in New York University.
When promoting artists, Philip Morris had a clear vision that bringing artists success in the United States or international societies was the goal of the program. The corporation will provide a full support to achieve the program goal. There is no program with such a clear attitude in Japan.

Ishizaka: No, there is not. It might come across with the issue of professionalism and human resources. Additionally, artists are often required to paint in a smaller size to display them in the gallery. However, small works cannot be used when selling works abroad. In the field of Japanese or Western style painting, it is a problem that works for museum exhibitions and selling are different. They are required to paint something like roses or Mt. Fuji.

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Ito: That is a reality, too.

**Having the Guts to Play at Home on the International Stage**
**Great Chance to Excavate and Reconsider the Hidden Market Like that of Artists from the Meiji and Taisho Periods**

Ishizaka: In Japan, there are genres that are not well known. It is not about the contemporary art, but the market of the artists from the Meiji and Taisho periods. If these genres are activated, the Japanese market could be much better. In the past, art collectors collected these works but the price of their collections have fallen drastically. If they find a work that interests them, they cannot make money by selling existing works. Seeing the situation, their grand-children try to stop them from further building their collection. Therefore, it becomes important to activate these genres. Maybe they can be introduced in Asia. The works from these eras can be found at auctions in Hong Kong every once in a while, but it is not big enough to form a market. In a sense, Toji Fujita became the most international.

Ito: Ryuzaburo Umehara’s work came up for the Hong Kong auction two years ago but failed to sell.

Ishizaka: I tried to sell it in Japan before it went to Hong Kong.

Ito: As I said before, museums have a role to position the artist in history to build the value of the artist. To do so, it becomes important to share the background of how certain arts were born in this country. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports Anime only, it was born from picture scroll, which means that the technology used in Anime existed when Japanese art was born.
Japanese art has a unique sensitivity in its background. When we talk about Japanese contemporary art, the pre-modern elements need to be spotlighted to understand how it corresponds to the root after incorporating the masterpieces from the West. It is insufficient to think that the current art was technically completed by importing Western-style contemporary art. This is also work that museums need to maintain.

Ishizaka: While glass craft is not known much, there are interesting artists as well. Bamboo crafts have a great originality that is unique to Japan. The level of perfection is outstanding, too. About a couple years ago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art held an exhibition of bamboo crafts, and a well-known collector started buying the bamboo works, which created a boom in the market. Japan is quite strong in the field of crafts, I think. China is, without a doubt, strong with porcelain. Its tradition has been inherited in contemporary times much better in Japan. There are interesting works from contemporary perspectives and works unique to Japan. But first, these also need to be introduced properly.

And that is the role of museums and galleries.

Ito: I do think there is a lack of promotion, which is probably a result of museums lacking awareness.

Ishizaka: There is also how the state sees things, which can be reflected in the policies. The current way of thinking reflects that art, in principle, needs to be innovative. However, this is a quite western idea, which is not necessarily right. In the case of China, they try to show their attitude by pricing the porcelain pieces at billions of yen which is equal to the paintings of Impressionism or contemporary art. Pricing the crafts that high did not happen until very recently. But, for them, it makes perfect sense that the highest quality art that their ancestors created for the emperor has the same price as the western paintings. They see it as one independent market.

Japanese paintings, from the Meiji, Taisho, and contemporary periods, may not have much originality, but their technical level is very high. They do not need to be evaluated on a field set by others. It is important to compete on one’s own field. Galleries could take that kind of business attitude.

Ito: I see. As for the craft, contemporary crafts and Japanese paintings do not inherit the qualities of the past.

Ishizaka: There seems to be various reasons for it, like how there is no one making nikawa glue.

Ito: In the field of glass in craft, there are some like kiriko cut glass in the late Edo period.
that cannot be produced anymore. The elements are not known either. The only way to solve this kind of issue is by using technology. However, technology also has its limits. Therefore, highly sophisticated craft pieces from the past will be priced higher. If the old pieces become more expensive, that might help create an environment to educate younger artisans. In the current condition, artisans have no choice but to quit.

Ishizaka: Sotheby’s has about seventy sections, and closed its Japanese art section ten years ago. It could not make enough profit, which was as low as the booby prize in the seventy sections. However, when the Japanese art section was reopened in November last year, it marked a bidding rate of seventy-five percent. This number was quite remarkable for the Japanese art section. Sales also exceeded three hundred million yen.

Ito: Japanese paintings?

Ishizaka: No. It included ukiyo-e, porcelains, and armors. As the Japanese art section reopened, we now have a space in the London office. Auctions will be held in May and November. Experts of Japanese art are now visiting Japan, too.

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When the section closed in 2008, netsuke was at the center of Japanese art. From now on, we would like to deal with the masterpieces from various fields in Japanese art, like the highly sophisticated byobu folding screens. In the future, we also plan to handle contemporary porcelains from Japan. Contemporary art will be handled separately in the contemporary art section.

Ito: Contemporary art has much possibility. I have seen art students on a regular basis, and some are creating works with qualities completely different from that of older generations. However, teachers and universities need to develop further to create a system that accepts future values.

Ishizaka: I have also been teaching at Tokyo University of the Arts once a year for over ten years, and often talk about the relationship between art and the city.

Ito: I also lecture on the theme of art as a social infrastructure. I would like you to visit my lecture once. It talks about how society without art in its social infrastructure is not a forward thinking society. Painters have talents in addition to their painting skills. It is our responsibility to introduce them to society in an effective manner. By participating in society, the artists will be encouraged by people from various fields, which will also show them their direction and hope.

Ishizaka: The interests of the students have also shifted a little. Until a few years ago, most questions raised from students were how to get jobs or something along those lines. However, recent students ask me how to promote their work internationally.
Ito: That is true.
Ishizaka: While it was unreal to think of the future as an artist in the past, it has become a realistic option.
Ito: I hope that option expands in the future.
Ishizaka: I would like to support the development.

**Yasuaki Ishizaka**

Ishizaka was born in Tokyo in 1956 and currently serves as the Chairman and Managing Director of Sotheby’s Japan. After working for Mitsubishi Corporation for seven years, Ishizaka managed the gallery for eighteen years before serving as the Chairman of Sotheby’s Japan between 2005 and 2014. From 2014 and 2018, he provided art advisory to Sotheby’s. He has published *Background of the Art Business Empire—Who Won the Edvard Munch’s the Scream in 96 Hundred Million Yen* (Bunshu Shinsho, 2016). He is also a part-time lecturer at Tokyo University of the Arts.

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**Why Are Art Funds Needed in Asia?**

Yukio Shiraishi
Chairman, Whitestone

Edward J. Rogers
Rogers Investment Adviser

Similar to the Japanese who went to Paris, Italy, and the United States to study after the war, people from Asian countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia have chosen Japan as their destination. In that sense, Japan is an important reference, but Hong Kong has become increasingly important with the rise of China. Therefore, I started my art fund in Hong Kong. (Shiraishi)
An art fund for both collectors and painters.

Shiraishi: I have been thinking and preparing the art fund for about three years. I am looking forward to talking to Mr. Rogers today.

(P91photo)
Left: Yukio Shiraishi  Right: Edward J. Rogers
Talking passionately about the art fund

I was introduced to Mr. Rogers through a person affiliated with Nomura Securities Co., Ltd. I believe that working with you is an arrangement made by God, and thus, I would like to proceed with the project while fully trusting you.

Rogers: I am also thankful for being able to meet you. It is great to work with you on the art fund project. I do not work in the field of art where you are based in, but it is absolutely a great field in which many people have interest. I would like to do my best as a professional dealing with financial products. What I would like to ask first is: What made you plan the art fund three years ago?

Shiraishi: I started the actual process of the fund three years ago, but the preparation that went into it began a decade ago. I had a strong vision that a fund was needed for the future of the Japanese and Asian art world. If the fund had no benefits for society, I would not have planned it or participated in it.

I would like to start the fund because it is necessary for the current world of art in Japan and Asia. Today, painters can sell their own artworks and make a living. All the Chinese artists have lived that way, too. They painted and sold their artworks on their own before the economy was liberalized. In Japan, painters paint and galleries sell their works. That’s where auction houses come in. However, auction houses have become too powerful today, and Sotheby’s and Christie’s are bringing up their handling fee, which used to be ten percent, to twenty-five to thirty percent. If the handling fee becomes higher, all the profits are sucked into the auction houses each time a work is auctioned. Collectors need to cover the fee whenever they purchase the work through an auction. It then makes more sense to participate in an art fund. I want to make an art fund that benefits both collectors and painters.

Rogers: Let’s say, when a painting is sold at over one hundred million yen, how do the fees charged by auction houses like Sotheby’s and Christie’s compare to those of galleries?
Shiraishi: The handling fee of auction houses in Japan is about ten to twelve percent in Japan. Sotheby’s and Christies’ charges twenty to twenty-five. Those of galleries are unclear since they vary individually.

Rogers: Are these paintings sold through the auction route or the gallery route?

Shiraishi: Both. I visited a famous collector in Dallas the other day. He does not purchase paintings in auctions. He said he did not want to cover the handling fee. “It is cheaper to hire an art advisor than paying handling fees for the auction,” he said.

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That is how big collectors in the United States think. There are about fifty collectors like him, and the development of such collectors is linked to the museum managements today. They contribute to building collections at public and private museums. This episode is connected to Asia needing funds, since there are no such advisors in Asia. Even in the United States, Mr. Gagosian of G gallery probably runs some sort of fund in the back though it might not be open publicly. He purchases works displayed in his gallery exhibition using his group fund. When I asked him why he buys paintings from Asia, he said that they were still cheap. Buying artworks is an investment.

Rogers: As for the content of art funds, I would like to know how to make money using art pieces. I have heard of established Japanese artists like Yayoi Kusama. Are you planning to use masters like her to make money, cultivate the fund using younger and lesser known artists by promoting their works in various exhibitions, or use both methods?

Post-war Japanese Art Is Still Cheap

Shiraishi: I wish you would have studied our materials better in advance. Our work is primarily to cultivate the artists, but there are two ways to do so. While we help the young artists to develop, we also work on increasing the value of the established artists’ works. What is important is that we do not sell the works of the fund artists for five years. For instance, Tadaaki Kuwayama is eighty-eight years old now. He studied Japanese Painting at Tokyo University of the Arts but moved to the United States while doubting his future in Japan. [Showing the work list] This is the work produced when he first developed from Japanese painting to abstract ones. This, of course, did not sell then. It was a time when minimal art was expanding in the United States. The trend changed from minimal art to pop art. While Kuwayama continued pursuing the world of abstract, he never considered himself as a minimal artist. In Singapore, a new national
museum was recently opened. They recently had a very successful Yayoi Kusama exhibition, and did an exhibition from minimal art to contemporary art in the United States. In the exhibition, they had a section called black room where Kuwayama’s black painting is displayed with Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and other masters of Abstract Expressionism.

Kuwayama’s work is currently between fifteen to twenty-five million yen while those of Rothko and Newman are between five to ten billion yen. A VIP collector who owns buildings and even his own museum in Jakarta came to the museum to see the exhibition. I told him about the fund and explained him that this price difference is the reason why I created a fund for Kuwayama’s work. He told me that he really wants two of Kuwayama’s works and one work by Kusama exhibited at the museum. I told him that I could not give him an answer until the exhibition ended, and he then called me every day. I, therefore, received the permission from the artists to sell the works to me. I then told him that the works will go to either this museum or his museum. I also asked him to promise to prioritize the group or solo exhibition of the artist. That was the time I told him about the fund. I would like to sell the fund to those who I trust since I do not know corporate investors.

Rogers: I truly respect people like you who have a wide network of trusted individuals. Although I do not specialize in art, my work is to create funds. I have created eight hedge funds in the past and turned them into funds worth fifty million to a hundred billion dollars. Although I have no knowledge of art that you have accumulated in fifty years, I can work in my field with confidence.

Shiraishi: Post-war Japanese artworks are still cheap. The Dallas collector whom I mentioned earlier buys the works of Japanese and Asian artists whose values are expected to increase and donates them to museums in Dallas. Both the collector and museum are pleased if I inform them about the increasing value of the works. They showed me the displayed works the other day and told me that he would purchase more works that are missing from the exhibition.

He is a financial dealer. He introduced me to several people on the west coast, and they have bought works from me. Although I would like to sell the fund to different people in the future, I would like those who are close to me to join the fund now to please them. I have sold the work by Gutai’s Chiyu Uemae for seven million yen. The work is now worth eighty to one hundred million yen. I have bought the instrument funds for the sake of good relations, but they have never been profitable. I, however, have made profit from
paintings. I would like the other people who buy my fund to experience the same. However, our fund is small. Therefore, after managing the first one, if I start, let’s say, a thirty billion yen fund, I need to spend time to collect the paintings and money.

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In order to bring in corporate investors, I need to show how much has increased between the first and second fund. I want to show them the data so that I can earn their trust.

Rogers: To do so, track record and data are very important. The verification of the process behind the fund by an independent third party like an administrator will become very important.

Shiraishi: For instance, I will create the first and second fund on my own and create the fifth one right after selling the third and fourth. At that point, I would like to make the fund larger. Data focuses on works that increase their value. Therefore, the future of the fund will be created based on the data, that is, the track record of the second fund. Then, financial investors who see not only the paintings, but also the data, will intervene. Working on the next fund will increase the value of the previous fund.

The market will move, so it is important to start buying the works as quickly as possible. If possible, I would like to do so by working with supporters. If supporting investors cannot be found, I will purchase artworks in the free art fund style like what we do now. We need to continue buying to maintain the promised return rate. If we continue buying, the return rate will become better. Therefore, I recommend you buy the first and second funds if you have enough savings. They are that type of fund.

If these funds go down and the dividend becomes zero, my fifty year-career will be eliminated. It will never go down in my lifetime. Even with my own fund, I have always increased the value of Japanese paintings. Contemporary art has increased its value, too. However, since the field becomes larger at the international level, my personal fund is not enough. The financial power determines the success of the fund. That is why I am working on the fund. Since Japan has no art funds, artworks are not bankable. No banks in Japan can take artworks, even those by Impressionists like Renoir and Picasso, as collateral. It is very rare in developed countries. Therefore, the first fund needs to be set up to turn the existing system and make it equivalent to that of Europe or the United States. Since it cannot be done in Japan, I am doing this in Asia based in Hong Kong.

Today’s talk was arranged since the people from Nomura Securities, the number one investment office in Japan, said the art fund should be created by me and Mr. Rogers. Why did you want to do an art fund in Japan?
Past, Present, and Future Will Be Packaged under the Name of the Fund.

Rogers: I came to Japan thirty years ago. I came here to know how Japan changed through influences from the West, and I was fascinated by the transformation of the country. What surprised me was that Japan did not even have railroads when it opened the door to other countries in 1868 after a long period of closure.

Within thirty some years later, Japan beat Russia in the Russo-Japanese War between 1903 and 1905. It was the first time in the five hundred years since Genghis Khan that an Asian country beat the Western countries. While I grew up in the United States in the 1970s and 80s, there were corporations like Toyota, Honda, Nippon Steel, and Sony that were stronger than U.S. corporations.

I wanted to know why the Japanese could realize such exceptional and unique achievements. I came here to see the difference between Japan and other counties and sought to confirm whether the Japanese can continue its prosperity. The answer I found was that Japan has a very different culture compared to that of the West. I thought that the Japanese behaviors could be understood by learning its culture. Art is a great media that represents cultures. I am hoping the people abroad understand the Japanese culture better.

Since my work is to help investors understand their investments better, I think that the foreign investors can make better investments in Japan by understanding its culture better. However, it is very difficult to understand Japan from a foreigner’s perspective. While I have been here for thirty years, it is very difficult for the Westerners to understand Asian cultures including the Japanese. Art is important in connecting both sides and improving the mutual understanding of cultures.

Shiraishi: Mr. Rogers truly understands art. People’s lives themselves are a form of art. I was born in 1944 and lived through the post-war era. Since I was small, various cultures came to Japan, which may have blinded some Japanese. However, artworks still reflect the times.

Art is a mirror that reflect the times. Japan became a developed nation in Asia and is considered an economic superpower. But that is because we lost the war. While many people were killed in the war, no Japanese express hatred against the United States. It is because the United States brought more to Japan including a democratic lifestyle, freedom, peace, and a form of love that did not exist before.

I have introduced artists from these times and created a fund as a package of their works.
Past, present, and future are packaged under the name of the fund. Its economic value may increase ten, twenty, and even one hundred times. However, packaging the trace of individual lives that art has actualized is more important than making profits. While we wanted to create an art fund in Japan, Japan has become a country where many people from Asian countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia visit, just as the Japanese visited Paris, Italy, and the United States after the war.

For people in Asia, Japan today is equal to Paris and New York. In that sense, Japan is an important reference country, but Hong Kong’s position has become much more important with the rise of China. I therefore decided to start the art fund in Hong Kong. As part of the project, I am planning to publish the book, Contemporary Japanese and Asian Art - A New Appreciation. We need to go beyond national boundaries to contribute to the further prosperity of Asia. Based on my experience of holding art fairs and exhibitions throughout the world including Europe, the United States, and South America, I think that we should focus on Asia. This time, the fund is not to make profits for Mr. Rogers’s company or my company. We should not start a war from Asia. Art is the message of peace. Therefore, we would like to give this fund as a gift to the cultural leaders of Asia. This is not high-sounding talk; I really think that this will be my last job after fifty years of experience as a gallerist.

Rogers: I am very honored to be a part of this project. It seems that the current Japan is facing a similar situation that it faced in the past with its relationship with foreign countries. When Japan opened its doors in 1868, Japanese culture like ukiyo-e brought a huge impact to Impressionism. While Japan is seen as experiencing economic difficulties throughout the 1990s and 2000s after the bubble burst, which is often referred to as the lost decades, I believe that there are investors abroad who are expecting the restoration of Japanese economy. Therefore, I think that the current situation is similar to that of the Meiji Restoration. Just as ukiyo-e influenced Impressionism, I hope to create a similar impact through supporting the fund as well as other challenges that you are doing in the field of art. I also think that the publication of the book will be quite effective in promoting the art fund.

Shiraishi: I truly respect all of the people who appear in the book. It includes artists and Japanese and Asian curators who have supported them. This art fund packages the will of all these people. We need to move to the next step after completing the publication. My business partner, Ohji, who is in charge of publication, and I have worked together for forty-five years. Our hair has become thinner through the years, but this kind of
project cannot be done without a relationship built on mutual trust.

Ohi: That is why I am working on the publication of the book. The book features Japanese and Asian artists who have not been properly valued yet. If we invest in these artists, their price will go up in the future. I am not sure if you are aware of this, but the size of the international art market is eight trillion yen. The Japanese market is, according to the research, two hundred forty billion yen, which is about three percent of the total market.

Shiraishi: That is another reason why this art fund needs to succeed, and this success will contribute to the politics, economics, and cultures of Asia taking leadership in the world. I am seeing this as the first step. The 2020 Summer Olympics will be held in Tokyo next year. Under the upsurge of the event, something big in art may start in Asia.

Rogers: I am very glad to be able to work on such an important project with you during a time of such big transformation. Thank you very much for your time today.

Shiraishi: This is just the beginning. Let’s fulfill our responsibilities.

Section 2
Tree-way conversation

Interviews of Experts in the Art industry

**Powerlong Art Museum, Post-War Japanese Art, and Gutai Art**

**At Powerlong Art Museum**

Yukio Shiraishi
Chairman, Whitestone

Wendy Xu
Operating Officer, Powerlong Art Museum, Shanghai

Yuhzou Hua
Art Collector

Recently, post-war Asian contemporary art is receiving international attention and is
being highly acclaimed. What is the background of such situation and what is the reality of the situation? Three people active in the front lines as art dealers and curators gathered for the talk.

Yukio Shiraishi, CEO of Whitestone Gallery, Yuhzou Hua from HWA’s Gallery in Shanghai, which focuses on introducing post-war Japanese art, and Wendy Xu from the Powerlong Art Museum with in-depth understanding of Chinese and Japanese art, reflect on the paths of Chinese and Japanese art, especially post-war art around the Gutai as well as the current situation of the international art market and their challenges in it.

(P99 photo)
From left to right: Yuhzou Hua, Yukio Shiraishi, and Wendy Xu

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**Powerlong Art Museum: Passionate Glances over Contemporary Asian Art**

Xu: First, I would like to thank Mr. Shiraishi for visiting the Powerlong Art Museum again. I am honored to be introduced to Mr. Shiraishi through Ms. Yuhzou Hua. To understand this museum as best as possible, I toured Mr. Shiraishi throughout the museum. We are a very young museum that opened its doors just one year ago, and this is the first time our collection was displayed. As you can see from the exhibition, our collection consists of modern and contemporary calligraphy works and the works of artists like Baishi Qi whose name uses the same Chinese characters as that of Mr. Shiraishi, in addition to works by Daqian Zhang, Beihong Xu, and Zhou Huang. This museum is designed in a round-shaped hall. We would like to display “small yet sensitive works” in this space. We will build our collection slowly and little by little and would like people to see the masterpieces from all over the world, including the works of Japanese artists. That is why we started collecting the works of Japanese artists.

Since last year, we planned to start our collection from traditional modern and contemporary artists and have acquired the works of important Chinese artists like Xiaogang Zhang. Following Chinese artists, we felt we should acquire the works of non-Chinese artists, and thus, set up the concept and started contacting international artists through friends, galleries, and various art institutions. As expected, we often learn about the situation through auction houses as well.

Post-war art or Japanese artists are a big stream in art. There is continuity and an eternal history in it. Thus, we learned the history and sought to find the artists we
liked. Through that process, with regards to overseas artworks other than those originating in China, we found it necessary to start with East Asia. Japan is among the most important. Japan is, of course, a representative country of the Eastern art world. We acquired works by Yayoi Kusama and Yoshitomo Nara. Their expression styles attract people to their works. Their works not only have the characteristics of the East, but are also filled with international elements. Our collection has just started, and we are hoping to acquire more works by important Japanese artists.

I am very honored that Mr. Shiraishi found our collection valuable. The Powerlong Art Museum was founded with the mission of enhancing the spirit of traditional cultures and promoting the development of contemporary art. To fulfill the social responsibility of art education, the collection needs to be selected based on the contexts and dimensions. Our calligraphy collection exhibition systematically arranges the masterpieces from modern to contemporary from various perspectives.

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We hope that this exhibition serves its role in the continuous development of art. Mr. Shiraishi may feel a deep impression, especially to the Japanese artists like Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara, and Atsuko Tanaka. After World War II, Japanese society was full of desperation and loss of hope. As the militarist ideology disappeared, many artists started to pursue individuality and self-autonomy, which resulted in denial of blinded worship of western art. Under such historic background, artists with innovative minds were born one after another in Japan. Gutai, a representative school in Japan, was born under such circumstances. Yayoi Kusama, the queen of dots, is a symbol that fully expresses her ego. Yayoi Kusama stayed in the United States when she was young and started exploring her own avant-gardeness to build her own style. Japanese post-war artists are worthy of attention, so it is worth digging deeper. They have created a cultural phenomenon and have become a target of research.

Hua: Mr. Shiraishi has fifty years of experience in the art world. Mr. Shiraishi sought to work in the field of art when he was around twenty. At that time, the center of art was in Europe, especially Paris, France. Accordingly, Mr. Shiraishi introduced major European paintings, such as Impressionism and École de Paris, to Japan. Was it through that process that you find the need to deepen your understanding of Japanese art?

Considerable Influence of Traditional Chinese Art to Japan

Shiraishi: Although I mainly handled European paintings then, I was hoping to further
study the art of my own country. By learning Japanese art, I understood that Japanese culture was influenced by Chinese culture throughout the times.

I saw the Powerlong Art Museum under the guidance of Ms. Yuhzou Hua.

(P101 Photo)
Exhibition space of the Powerlong Art Museum where the works by Gutai-style artists can be seen.

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In the massive museum, I enjoyed an ink-painting collection that had been collected since her grand-father’s generation. I could also see the works of representative Chinese paintings.

For instance, the ink-painting by Baishi Qi. My sir name uses the same Chinese characters, and I have seen many works by Baishi Qi in Japan. When I was younger, I was thinking that there were also Japanese artists who depict nature, figures, and still objects like Baishi Qi. But I now feel that these artists were influenced by the masters of Chinese ink-painters like Baishi Qi. Japanese art has developed its culture unique to island countries, such as ukiyo-e; however, many of them have arrived from mainland China. In fact, more than seventy percent of the culture came from China and spread throughout Japan via the Korean peninsula.

This insight struck me. There are countries on the Earth that have long histories and unique cultures. Between China and Japan, there is a relationship that is inseparable and difficult to straighten out. However, there is also a mutual respect between us that was cultivated throughout the times.

This mutual respect is an important legacy that history and culture left to us, and will be a bridge between China and Japan. Long time ago, I had a several chances to stay in China with a master Japanese artist, Ikuo Hirayama, when he attended Japan-China cultural exchange events. I remember Mr. Hirayama visiting China for a lecture saying that there is so much to learn about Chinese culture.

Post-war Japanese art, that is, contemporary Japanese art, is a cultural system formed under the influence of post-WWII Europe. However, when we look at Japanese art in a longer span, it is China that influenced Japanese culture the most. Chinese culture has a significant impact over us and is becoming an underlying source of energy for us. Artists like Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara, and Miwa Komatsu, who have been very active lately, will probably put the focus of their business in China.

Whitestone Gallery will also bring great works of Yayoi Kusama and Gutai Art to do
exhibitions in China. One more thing, after I visited the Powerlong Art Museum last time, I came up with another way to deepen China-Japan cultural exchanges. I would like to recommend the Japanese tourists to visit the Powerlong Art Museum in Shanghai. Hua: I am very honored to have such a recognition and high evaluation. Japan’s Gutai Art was started by Jiro Yoshihara in 1954, ten years after the end of WWII and the beginning of Japan’s economic growth. Could you explain how it was developed?

Shiraishi: When the war ended in 1945, Japan was devastated. By watching the aftermath, we realized the wrongness of war and started rebuilding the country. From there, Japan started seeking the means for survival in international society. Social transformation from militarism to democracy brought freedom and peace in art. Japanese paintings flipped 180 degrees to innovation, concept, and creativity, and the painters sought to pursue their originality. Its pioneer was Jiro Yoshihara, the founder of the Gutai Art Association. Under the motto of “Never imitate others: make something that has never existed before,” Kazuo Shiraga fought with mud in the corner of a park and Atsuko Tanaka created her one and only performance wearing an electric dress. The Gutai Art Association conducted exhibitions in galleries and museums throughout the world in places including the United States, Paris, Italy, and Germany between 1952 and 1972, when Jiro Yoshihara passed away. Their works from this time period have been collected in museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Centre Pompidou in France. I am grateful for that and was moved by seeing the Gutai works collected in the Powerlong Art Museum.

Hua: Recently, collectors in the west and China are very much interested in post-war Japanese artists like Gutai and Mono-nya. Why is that?

Shiraishi: Achieving economic growth, Germany and Italy looked at post-war art and started reevaluating it. The works by Heinz Mack from Group Zero, Otto Piene, Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein and so on were being sold at galleries and auctions at high prices, and post-war Japanese art was also starting to receive attention. The recognition and market of the Gutai Art Association gained attention after the 2013 exhibition Gutai: Splendid Playground at the Guggenheim Museum. This exhibition became an important point in re-evaluation of the Gutai. However, the value of post-war Japanese art is only one one-hundredth of that of American art, and one-tenth of that of European art. Since the fundamental philosophy of post-war art in defeated countries
like Germany, Italy, and Japan are the same, there has to be more potential for re-evaluation and market expansion of post-war Japanese art. Using this opportunity, I would like to briefly summarize the relationship between post-war Japanese art and international art. As I said before, I first worked in the field of Impressionism, École de Paris, and so on.

Upon participating the Armory Show in New York, I was dealing with the organizers to participate the art fair with the works of Japanese artists like Taikan Yokoyama and Higashiyama Kaii, who were high in demand domestically. However, I was asked from the organizer to bring the Gutai artists’ works that were receiving much attention in the United States. That made me to realize that New York and world market were focusing on Gutai. I therefore brought the works of four artists, Kazuo Shiraga, Atsuko Tanaka, Shozo Shimamoto, and Sadamasa Motonaga.

Surprisingly, at the art fair, local museum curators and collectors from all over the world rushed to our booth for the artist’s portfolios. I never expected such a high response. I was also moved by the fact that Gutai was well-received in New York, the center of contemporary art. Through the art fair, I came to know the then-largest collector and was able to build a good relationship with western collectors for the first time through Gutai.

There is a very famous painter called Jackson Pollock in the United States yet he died at early age. When people related to him cleaned up his studio, they found a lot of journals published by the Gutai Art Association. That was how we knew that Pollock was obtaining inspiration from Gutai. It goes without saying how much shock and impact it gave to the world of art in the United States.

Furthermore, it was also found that Pollock introduced to the media that Gutai artists was also doing the same dripping method, his unique style, which creates dynamism using extensive amount of paint. Also, Pollocks’ abstract expressionist style that creates multiple perspectives on the seemingly homogeneous surface and his all-over style greatly influenced Kazuo Shiraga and other Gutai artists.

**From Learning to Creating Individual Originalities**

Shiraishi: Japan lost WWII and the whole country was devastated with atomic bombs dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. All the Gutai artists experienced the war. Through their experiences, they felt that freedom and peace are needed to revitalize the country. With the belief that art should be that way as well, they learned the creative spirit from the Gutai leader, Jiro Yoshihara.
Until then, art in Japan and China was something to learn from teachers and masters. However, post-war art after the drastic social change transformed into artworks full of originality. For instance, Jiro Yoshihara did an exhibition of Gutai artists not in a gallery or museum, but outdoors (in a park).

It was based on the Gutai philosophy: “Never imitate others; make something that has never existed before.” Sadamasa Motonaga created his “water sculpture” by filling a bottle with colored water. Kazuo Shiraga created his work using his body by fighting with the mud in the park. Michel Tapié, a French art critic and advocate of Arte Informale, later said that their works were quite avant-garde and radical compared to the international history of art.

There is another story. Jiro Yoshihara completely disapproved many of the works that Shozo Shimamoto created then. Shozo Shimamoto had no clue what to do. In one morning, Shimamoto found a hole on the newspaper as he touched it with his wet hand. Shimamoto felt that this was what happened for the first time in the world and showed Yoshihara the result. Yoshihara responded, “This is truly the first” and highly praised Shimamoto’s action, and thus, this became his first work.

Lucio Fontana in Italy also created a series of works, *Concetto Spaziale*, which was made by cutting the center of the canvas. However, according to the date on the newspaper that Shimamoto cut, his work was created before Fontana. Since Shimamoto did not have money to buy canvases, he used layered newspapers as a canvas. Therefore, the date the work was created was very precise. Later on, there was a big debate that received international attention in the field of art over who started this style.

Hua: How was it when the Whitestone Gallery first endeavored abroad?

Shiraishi: The first exhibition we did was in Moscow. Later, I brought Japanese contemporary art to Moscow to do an exhibition at the national art museum. There was an artistic creativity in Moscow then, which sought to connect to international art. It was the first time I touched the world outside of Japan.

In the United States, the trends of the 1950s was continuing, which was the interest to have exchanges with modern paintings in Japan. It was much later that they started worshipping Gutai Art. Through these exchanges in art, I came to think that competition in art creates exchanges and mutual inheritances while political conflicts result in war. Therefore, I believe that art has no boundary and can create mutual exchanges.

Speaking of Japan, the post-war art as I understand is a new philosophy to restructure society in the ruins of the defeat and to propose it to the world through art. By losing the
war, we learned the importance of peace, realized what to proceed in art, opened art internationally, and filled the world with peace and freedom.

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**Founding the Art Fund as the Engine to the International Market**

Hua: Fifty years have passed since you started working in the world of art. As I understand, you are hoping to leave a universal art filled with love and peace. To do so, you have been making endless efforts by founding a new system, establishing an art fund in Japan, and seeking to extend the post-war art to the whole world.

Shiraishi: Yes. The art fund that I am about to start will feature post-war Asian art that is valued internationally. The first fund features post-war art like Gutai and Yayoi Kusama. The second and third funds will include post-war artists throughout Asia. Hopefully, the investment effect can be seen within a few years.

For instance, if the value of the work of Japanese or Asian artists becomes ten times higher, the evaluation of these artists will drastically change. There is a tenfold difference between the price of works by Fontana or post-war German artists whose name came up earlier, and that of post-war Japanese artists. The gap increases to a hundredfold when comparing them with Pollock and other American Abstract Expressionists. I believe that this art fund will act as a catalyst for the contemporary art market and bring further evaluations for the growing Japanese and Asian artists to build their firm positions in the world.

You have consistently introduced post-war Japanese art for the past decade in Shanghai. I appreciate it very much. Could you tell us how you encountered Japanese art?

Hua: I studied in Japan during my schooldays and majored in art history. I am very aware of the culture and economic development of Japan and am thinking seriously of how to proceed with the friendly exchanges between China and Japan, especially in the field of art. In November last year, the solo exhibition of Tsuyoshi Maehara, a second generation Gutai artist, was held at the HWA's Gallery in the Powerlong Art Museum, and many of his works were acquired by collectors in Shanghai including the Powerlong Art Museum.

Seventy years since the end of the war, the international art market has reevaluating post-war art. What kind of reevaluation do you hope for post-war art?

Shiraishi: Whitestone Gallery seeks to introduce specifically post-war Japanese art and Gutai among various art activities in the world. Through collaborations with auction houses and museums, we seek to further expand the market of these groups. Since 2010,
the evaluation of Gutai and Yayoi Kusama has been continuously increasing.
I especially remember Kazuo Shiraga’s work from the 1960s that was auctioned at over ten million dollars at Sotheby’s, Paris.

Also, Yayoi Kusama’s work was used to decorate the cover of the auction at Hong Kong. These show that the market is focusing on Japanese artists. This year, the works of post-war Japanese artists will be included in the art fund, which will further activate the market.

Hua: Art is an important industry for the country. In addition to respect for the history and culture of the country, it is necessary to pursue new forms of art. What do you see in the future of the art market in Japan and China? Also, what will be needed to develop the art market?

Shiraishi: To activate the art market, cooperation among galleries, museums, auction houses, and art funds is very important. The galleries in international cities such as Hong Kong especially reflect the direction of the market very strongly. As for the activation of the market, we are planning a series of art events during the 2020 Olympic season at the museum in Karuizawa that Whitestone manages. We would like to introduce Japanese and international artists to people all over from the world during this occasion when they visit Japan.

There are no borders in art. We hope that the tourists who may not have many opportunities to see art will feel the power of art through these events.

Hua: Currently, forty-two percent of the international art market is occupied by the United States, while China occupies twenty-one percent, which is more than the share of Europe. China has become the second largest presence in the art market. In China, we can see that the masterpieces are bought back through the auctions, and the evaluation of local art is becoming higher. At the same time, to better understand the culture of other countries, Chinese collectors collect Japanese art or contemporary art from the west. What do you think of this phenomenon?

Xu: It is certainly true that a circulation of artworks has been happening over the last two years or so. After WWII, the world became unified and diversified. In Japan, exchanges and unification with western culture was accelerated. Artists studied traditional art while understanding the core of western contemporary art and created works with completely new vocabulary. In China, the importance of cultural programs has been recognized, and museums have been built. All of these are pushing the
circulation of artworks in China. Many museum founders are also showing their collections to the public, which is a very meaningful thing to art lovers. Such changes created chances for us to explore the artworks from different countries.

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It is natural for us to preserve artistic treasures for China as a means to develop art in China.

Hua: Today, we have talked a lot about Gutai and other post-war Japanese art. I would like to ask Ms. Wendy Xu about plans in the Powerlong Art Museum. I have great expectations.

Xu: I am thinking a lot from our conversation today. Mr. Shiraishi has very rich experience and respects the history of art he experienced in the last fifty years and the relationship with the artists. As a museum, we worked together with the Samsung Museum and the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea for organizing *Korean Abstract Art: Kim Whanki and Dansaekhwa*. The newly opened *500 Years of Western Painting* is a collaboration with the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in Tokyo. I am hoping to further develop collaborative relationships with many more art institutions.

Mr. Shiraishi’s gallery is also one of them. It has a lot of important works that are worth displaying and carries many works from emerging artists. Through the Powerlong Art Museum, I am hoping to provide great exhibitions to Chinese people. I am, therefore, very glad to have Ms. Hua and Mr. Shiraishi here today to have a chance to have this conversation.

Shiraishi: Art is what needs to be studied by everyone. From our conversation today, I could see that you have many great friends and networks with great art institutions. With the potential that the Powerlong Art Museum has, we can move towards a better future. Thank you very much.
Learning from the Collectors: How to Deal with and Enjoy Art

Yuichi Kawasaki
Art Collector

Koei Shiraishi
Chief Executive Officer, Whitestone

(P109 photo)
Koei Shiraishi

Shiraishi: Mr. Kawasaki receives much attention as a rising young entrepreneur in the internet and advertisement business. On the other hand, Mr. Kawasaki is a great art collector (mainly contemporary art of domestic and international artists). He is also unique since he is a collector from the young generation. He is promising for us gallerists as well. I would like to focus on the collector side of him today.

Kawasaki: Please do not go too hard on me.

Encounter the Unknown World under the Rain in Karuizawa

Shiraishi: Let’s start with the episode of why you started collecting art.
Kawasaki: It was about seven to eight years ago when I was working on establishing my own company. I traveled to Karuizawa with my wife. We had a plan to cycle or drive around Kumobaike pond, a famous sightseeing spot. However, as soon as we arrived at Karuizawa, we were met by heavy rain. As we wondered around the rainy town without any purpose, we found a building that looked like a museum with the sign that read
“Yayoi Kusama exhibition.”
And my wife insisted, “I really want to see this exhibition. We can’t do anything in this rain anyway.” On the contrary, I thought, “Spending time in a museum in Karuizawa is just a waste of time.”

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We argued a little and I agreed to accompany her to the museum for just one hour.

**Completely Struck by the World of Kusama!**
**Spending Most of the Startup Funds for the First Collection**

Shiraishi: It is the Karuizawa New Art Museum that opened in 2012 under the management of our foundation. You saw the Yayoi Kusama exhibition in the opening year as a result of your wife’s forceful invitation. You intended to kill a little time before the rain stopped (laugh).

Kawasaki: Yes, I had no expectations (laugh).

My knowledge on Ms. Kusama was so limited then, that she seemed like a famous artist since she collaborated with Louis Vuitton. My wife knew her better.

However, as I entered the museum and walked around the exhibition, I was completely taken by the world of Kusama. The works were sending something like the artist’s power or impact to the viewers.

It was the first time that I ever encountered art in such a shocking way. As I walked through the exhibition, I wanted to own one of her works no matter what. After dithering over the print (one million yen), or the painting (actually priced at eleven million yen), I decided to buy the pumpkin painting (canvas size 3) according to the advice of Mr. Nakashima, a senior managing director of your company.

Shiraishi: What a surprise to purchase a work on the day you encountered it!

It is also very rare to meet a young collector like you, Mr. Kawasaki.

You must be in your late twenties then. How did you finance the purchase?

Kawasaki: I was twenty-seven years old and had just quit my job to start my own company.

(P110 photo)
Yuichi Kawasaki standing in front of his favorite work.

Mr. Kawasaki enjoys art in the president’s office.
To start my own company, I had approximately fifteen million yen in savings. I spent eleven millions of it on one of Kusama’s works that I saw for the first time. Looking back, it was a very brave decision.

Shiraishi: Your wife was OK with it, right?
Kawasaki: My wife then did not know anything about the amount of my savings and how I spent money. I did not allow her to say anything about my decision to purchase Kusama’s work (laugh).

Centering on Contemporary Art, the Collection Grew to over Five Hundred

Shiraishi: By the way, was there any change in your mind or business after purchasing the first art work?
Kawasaki: Yes, after hanging Kusama’s work in our living room, the space came to be vitalized. And the Kusama power flies from the painting on the wall to us every day. The conversation with the painting energized me and made me want to do my best in my business. Since I was just starting up, the message the painting conveys inspired my motivation.

I then wanted to have something on the other side of the wall. I did my research by searching and reading magazines to see what kind of paintings are worth having. Then, I purchased a print by Yoshitomo Nara for my second collection. It was about three million yen at that time.

Just like that, I was gradually addicted to art (laugh). Luckily, the price of their works in the global market have become unexpectedly high.
Shiraishi: Yes, we were surprised, too. Since Karuizawa, you have built a collection of over five hundred works within a decade.
Kawasaki: Yes, I believe the number is about right. Since then, I have collected artworks through domestic and international art fairs, exhibitions, and solo exhibitions based on my own research.
My collection concept is contemporary art regardless of the nationality of the artist. I see the actual work and purchase the works according to my intuition.

Enjoy Art in the Living Space

Shiraishi: You have focused on the works of younger artists.
Kawasaki: I follow the work of artists like Yukimasa Ida, KYNE, Shozo Taniguchi, Yu
Kawashima, and Miwa Komatsu.
Oh, and I have been collecting the works of Ayako Rokkaku and purchased her work (size 150 canvas) when I first met her at Art Fair Tokyo a few years ago.

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I was planning on a new house at that time and was looking for a work that would be a symbol of my house. Her work was exactly the one I was looking for.
Shiraishi: It was a fortunate encounter. It is like an order-made piece that is designed to fit in the planned space. Where in the house do you display the work?
Kawasaki: Since it is a large piece, it is on the wall of a big room located at the center of my house. The room has a glass window through which the sky appears in full scale. Ms. Rokkaku's unique colorful painting reflects on the window, creates a mixed landscape, and becomes a mysterious and interesting asset of the space. The way the painting appears changes depending on the time of the day or the reflection of the light, which never bores me.
Ms. Rokkaku visited my house one time and was very glad and said, “Thank you for placing my painting in the best position.”
Shiraishi: It is a nice story for the artist.
It is my ideal, too, to bring art into my own life space and enjoy it in our daily lives as interior art.
Kawasaki: It is a pity to keep the works in storage spaces like a treasure.
Therefore, my home, including the rooms, corridors, and even the bathroom, are decorated with artworks that I selected on my own. The bedroom is decorated at my wife's discretion, but I don't let her make decisions for any other room (laugh).
Also, the bathroom to me is the best place to enjoy art in a relaxed mode although I will not reveal the artist's name since they might not appreciate their work to be displayed there (laugh).
Shiraishi: How do your wife and children respond to the artworks?
Kawasaki: It is a great comfort to live with paintings, not only for me, but for anyone.
Since my children were about three-months old, I was carrying them to the painting. Gradually, the eyes of a child start to follow colors. From their facial expressions or the movement of their eyes, I can tell that their brains are activated. When I show them the works, I talk to them and say something like “This is the painting by Yoshitomo Nara,” and “Isn’t this beautiful?” They came to point to the work when I tell them the artist's name. They have become aware of the differences in colors and forms of each artist.
Shiraishi: That is a great way of educating children.
According to an education expert, the kind of paintings that surround children as they grow greatly affect the development of their sensitivities and emotions.

Kawasaki: I see. Since my company centers on creative works, I put up artworks on the office walls as interior art so that anyone can enjoy art. Lately, my staff have been taking art breaks, as opposed to coffee break, to discuss which painting they like and which one they want to have.

For me, the unknown world of art became something familiar through mere chance. The reason I display contemporary art both in my house and office is with the hope that, one day, someone from work or a visitor comes to my house and becomes an art lover by encountering art through a little twist of fate.

Shiraishi: I would really like to see how you bring art not only into your home, but also your working environment.

Kawasaki: You're welcome to at any time.

Shiraishi: You have mentioned the names of young artists in your focus. If you were asked to select an artist either in the past or present who deserves to be reevaluated, who would you choose?

Kawasaki: From the perspective of reevaluation, I choose Ay-O, Tadaaki Kuwayama, and Kiyomi Mishima. Ay-O has achieved the unique style of rainbow colors such that anyone can recognize his works. Mr. Kuwayama and Ms. Mishima also deepened their art with their unique styles.

Shiraishi: The exhibition of Tadaaki Kuwayama will tour from Singapore to Taiwan, Japan, and Hong Kong. The Ay-O exhibition will also tour from spring to summer this year.

Kawasaki: I am looking forward to it.

**Learning from the Ways of the Collector**

**Investing on Contemporary Art today is Interesting!**

Shiraishi: You have entered the collector’s path and are going deeper down the road. What is so attractive about being a collector?

Kawasaki: I was investing in stocks since I was a university student. The appraised value of Kusama’s work that I encountered in my Karuizawa trip for the first time and Nara's work kept increasing. Thus, I realized that artworks are valuable assets that can
be profitable. I recently came to think that investing in art is interesting. As a collector, there is nothing happier than seeing the value of the works that I own increase. If the value decreases, I can still enjoy the work by hanging it in the living room or office.

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Just like that, I am relaxed when I collect works.
Shiraishi: There are only a few young collectors in Japan with a firm collection concept like Mr. Kawasaki. I cannot believe this is the reality of the country with the third highest GDP in the world. There are more powerful young collectors in Taiwan or China. I wish us Japanese would begin investments in the field of art.
Kawasaki: I think so, too. I would like young entrepreneurs to have more interest in art. Internationally, about ten to twenty percent of assets consists of art, but that is not the case in Japan. I feel the big difference.
However, young people in Japan are beginning to buy art lately. I think there is a bright future over the horizon.
Shiraishi: Do you really think so?
Kawasaki: I am often asked at young entrepreneurs’ meetings what painting to buy, who might be popular, and what will increase in value. What I always tell them is to buy works they really like. It is the basic principle. Whenever I have an opportunity, I also tell those who are about to start collecting art to find young artists with potential and to grow with them.
Shiraishi: For the collectors early in their careers, the words of experienced collectors like Mr. Kawasaki must be very convincing. I hope you will pursue your own style of collecting art as a leader of young entrepreneurs. We the gallerists will support you with everything we have.
Kawasaki: Without more young collectors, the art market in Japan has no future. To increase the art population, opportunities like how my collector life started are needed. There should be more opportunities that catch young people’s attention and allow them to feel art anywhere and anytime.
Shiraishi: Shall we plan a cross-industrial meeting of young entrepreneurs as my gallery’s project?
Kawasaki: That is a great idea! I will support it. Let’s make it happen (both of them smile).
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Purpose of Issuing the Book Contemporary Japanese and Asian Art - A New
**Appreciation**

Shiraishi: For more than half a century, Whitestone has worked to “establish the worldly evaluation of great Japanese artists and to find and cultivate artists with hidden talents.” In accordance with this mission, we started a series of exhibitions with the same title as the book at museums including the Karuizawa New Art Museum and our galleries in Ginza, Tokyo as well as in Hong Kong and Taiwan. The exhibition has toured various places with additions of select Asian artists.

Kawasaki: Publishing the book is a project that stemmed out of the same mission.

Shiraishi: Yes. Let me summarize the book. The book features the opinions of leaders in the field of art criticism and management. They provide their unique painting theories or essays from their standpoint or attend interviews. The book also contains the history of my company and more.

I would like you to appear as a representative of young collectors and would like to have your collector theory on the book.

Kawasaki: It is a great honor to be a part of such a project. I look forward to the completion of the book.

Shiraishi: As a gallery owner, I constantly think that the mission of the gallery is not merely to find talented artists and introduce them to the world. Another important mission is to make Japan cool. Therefore, it is my hope to raise and increase the number of art collectors like you.

I believe that the accumulation of such powers will one day be a catalyst in propelling the stylishness of the country. Art is the only field that can be enjoyed without national, religious, ideological, sexual, or linguistic boundaries. I think it is a universal communication tool.

(P115 photo)
Ayako Rokkaku
*Untitled*
192.0x140.0cm
Oil on canvas

Kawasaki: I completely agree with you. I also can communicate with anyone regardless of my social status because of art. I would like to expand these positive sides of art from now on.
Shiraishi: I really appreciate your time today.

**Yuichi Kawasaki**

Born in 1984 in Kanagawa Prefecture. President of the Rincrew Inc. an internet advertising agency. An affiliate professor at Kyoto University of Arts and Design. Kawasaki achieved the Guinness World Record as the top sales person at Recruit Holdings Co., Ltd. He is a contemporary art collector with over five hundred artworks including David Hockney, Gerhard Richter, Cy Twombly, George Condo, Jasper Johns, Yoshitomo Nara, Takashi Murakami, and Yayoi Kusama. Kawasaki releases information regarding art on his Instagram on a daily basis.

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Section 2

Interviews

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**The World is Full of Cultures that Inspire Me**

Ronald Ventura

Artist

Kunio Motoe

Professor Emeritus, Tama Art University, Art Critic

Ronald Ventura, a Filipino contemporary artist, ranks as one of the most acclaimed artists of his generation in Southeast Asia. He cultivated his creative passion from Michael Jackson and Japanese animations that he encountered in his young days in the 1980s and 90s. Later, he traveled around the world and was inspired by the various contemporary cultures he encountered. Ventura continues his art in the international stage by saying, “The world is full of cultures that inspire me. My job is to turn them into art.”

(P117 photo)

From left: Kunio Motoe, Ronald Ventura (artist)
Inspiration from Michael Jackson and Japanese Film and Animations

Motoe: I first saw your work at the Whitestone Gallery in Ginza in the end of 2018. I received a fashionable and elegant impression from the work. While it appeared to be an image consisting of photorealism and pop art, layers of cultures behind the work add something very deep to it.

Today, I would like to interview the globally active Mr. Ventura on his roots up to the present.

Ventura: Thank you very much for coming all the way to Manila. I am very honored to meet Mr. Motoe, a renowned art critic in Japan.

Motoe: I am very honored to meet you, too. I so looked forward to this opportunity. While I was waiting for you, Mr. Egan (a journalist who knows Ventura’s childhood) told me that you were extremely talented in drawing since you were young. When did you start thinking about being an artist?

Ventura: I liked drawing since I was a child. I mastered drawing before I mastered all the alphabets. When I was five or six, a Japanese animation, *Chodenji Machine Voltes V*, was so popular, so I often drew its characters. One day in high school, I returned home after a long absence and found my Voltes V drawing still put up on the door (laugh). Maybe that was when I started thinking about being an artist.

Motoe: According to Mr. Egan, your Michael Jackson portrait was displayed in the school.

Ventura: Michael Jackson was the most influential artist to me in the 1980s and 90s. At that time, popular music videos were being played in the Philippines, and Western music including that of Michael Jackson fascinated the young generation. I was especially influenced by Michael since he was great not only in his music, but also in his dance. He was like my hero.

Motoe: You probably drew Michael Jackson since you felt Michael dancing was beautiful.

Ventura: Probably. His music, dance, video, and artworks were all so great, and he represented the perfect person to me then. His power may have raised my creative passion.

Motoe: Did you receive more influence from his videos and artworks rather than his songs?

Ventura: I think so. Rock and Heavy Metal were booming then, and various images were brought to the Philippines with the music. The most recent example is probably Hip Hop.
I was always influenced by these images. On the other hand, animations like *Dragon Ball*, *Mobile Suit Gundam*, and *Mazinger Z* were brought from Japan. It was a very exciting period of time.

Motoe: Were you influenced by so-called Fine Arts like important artists in art history or post-war American arts?

**Being Stateless and the Importance of Freedom in Expression**

Ventura: I was familiar with the work of Juan Luna\(^{(1)}\) since my childhood because his works were in the museum, and thus, he may have influenced me a little. I began studying Western and Eastern art history seriously only after entering art school.

Motoe: What is most important for you when making artworks?

Ventura: I think it is important to learn histories, not only that of the Philippines but that of different countries. What I feel as similarities or differences often become the basis of the work. It can be said that the artist’s role is to connect the histories of past and present. I always think that way.

Motoe: I first noticed Filipino contemporary art about twenty-five years ago. The Japan Foundation organized a group exhibition of contemporary Asian art, and some Filipino artists were included in the show. I remember seeing a very political piece placing a figure in front of the wire fence, which was not very popular among the Japanese journalists. They wrote articles saying something along the lines of it “mocking contemporary art where it does not exist.”

The article had a tone that suggested Japanese contemporary art was more progressed, so I wrote a counter article since I completely disagreed with that notion. But, I also think this cannot be understood without asking Filipino artists.

Ventura: Do you mean if it is realistic to do contemporary art in the Philippines?

(P119 photo)

*Comic Lives 3*

121.9×182.9cm

Oil on canvas

2018

*Comic Lives 11*

40.6×30.5cm
Oil on canvas
2018

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Motoe: Yes.
Ventura: I personally think that art has no nationality. I was born in Manila but do not bear Manila. I create art by traveling around and experiencing various contemporary cultures.
This might be like Paul Gauguin, who traveled throughout the world. Our thoughts and creativities need to be free from any constraints. As a Filipino artist, being stateless and free in my expressions is more important than the sense of reality.
Motoe: Does it mean that Filipinoness or cultures and traditions unique to the Philippines are not that important?
Ventura: Maybe so. But there is probably a gap between how you and I define “Filipinoness.” As you know, the Philippines has a history of colonization by Spain, the United States, and Japan. The majority of the population is Catholic and many attend church services on Sunday. While the economic gap is huge, there is an openness to accept any culture from any country. Both in a good way and a bad way, they’re always welcome (laugh)!

Christianity as a Root and the History of “Passion” in the Philippines

Motoe: It is probably true. Even on the trip from the airport, I could feel the chaotic atmosphere where various cultures coexist along with the old and modern buildings. I thought it was a unique Asian scenery, but many people were playing basketball in the park. Some spoke in English and others spoke in Tagalog. And unlike Japan, there were many young people. This is the energy of a growing country.
By the way, why do you think Christianity became ingrained in this country?
Ventura: It is probably because we are a poor country. People needed God as a symbol of salvation.
Motoe: It is said that close to ninety percent of the people in the Philippines are Catholic. There is a complexity in its history when considering its background of being colonized by Spain, the United States, and Japan. There are countries who cannot get away from the victim mentality from the colonial times. But the Filipino people seem very nice, although it has only been a few hours since I arrived here.
Ventura: The service mentality and hospitality might be considered as something
Filipino-like. As are the acceptance and mixture of cultures from various countries.

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Motoe: My impression of your work was quite similar. In your work, Japanese anime and cosplay, as well as American pop arts, are mixed together on top of Super Realism. There seems to be some link to the formation of the Philippines and its national identity.
I also heard from Mr. Egan that the image of Holy Week\textsuperscript{2} is also used in the background. There are metaphorical elements as well, and I feel that contemporary Filipino art needs to be studied further.

Ventura: Contemporary society is full of information and images. For instance, when we walk while talking over our smartphone, new images appear one after another. I think I see Shibuya and Harajuku through a different perspective. Similarly, wherever I visit, I find cultures that give me strong inspirations. It is my job to take them in and transform them into art.

Motoe: In a sense, your work itself is the Philippines. My last question is about your group show in Venice in May.

Ventura: I will participate the exhibition “Diversity for Peace!” at the Procuratie Vecchie in Piazza San Marco during the Venice Biennale. I would like you to write some texts about my art, and so hope to see you in Venice or Tokyo.

Thank you for coming here today.

Motoe: Thank you for your time, too. It was worth traveling here for this short interview. I am glad to have a chance to introduce your works to art fans in Japan.
I hope to see you again somewhere. Thank you so much.

\textit{1) Juan Luna}
Juan Luna\textsuperscript{y Novicio (1857-99) is a Filipino painter and a political activist who lived through the Philippine Revolution. He studied under a Spanish painter and studied in Spain as well. As a political activist, he became a part of the Philippine delegation at the Treaty of Paris, ending the Spanish-American War.

\textit{2) Holy Week}
Holy Week is a week-long religious observance to reflect on sins as a preparation for Easter, reflecting on the Passion and imprisonment of Christ.

\textbf{Ronald Ventura}
Born in 1973 in Manila, the Philippines, Ronald Ventura is a contemporary
artist based in Manila who expands his art globally. He ranks as one of the most acclaimed artists of his generation in Southeast Asia. He has done his solo exhibition Comic Lives at the Ginza Whitestone Gallery in 2018 and participated in “Diversity for Peace” (organized by Karuizawa New Art Museum Venice Branch at the Procuratie Vecchie in Piazza San Marco) and received attention through his innovative artworks.

Section 2
Interviews

Section 2 / Interviews of Experts in the Art Industry

The Connection between Nature and Humans as the Starting Point

Yuxing Huang
Artist

Kunio Motoe
Professor Emeritus, Tama Art University, Art Critic

Yuxing Huang is a Beijing-based budding painter. He debuted soon after graduating from the renowned Central Academy of Fine Arts, and is now internationally active. His work is characterized by its color and composition that leave strong impressions on the viewer. The work reflects the Western and Eastern views of nature and his unique interpretation of life, which delivers its strong energy. Motoe visited his first solo exhibition in Japan.

Struggling with a lack of understanding during his youth

Motoe: Nice to meet you. I saw your work in this gallery for the first time. I heard that this is your first exhibition in Japan, the sensitive and delicate impression struck me first. The composition is very contemporary, and I felt like I was seeing a new painting by Peter Doig(1).
Although this is my personal impression, I also find the feeling and spirituality similar to that of Japanese contemporary artists. Furthermore, a certain sense of life and death can also be found in your painting. Where are they coming from? I would like to learn from you. To begin with, could you tell me about your background before becoming an artist?

Huang: I was born in 1975 in Beijing. My father was working at a science research center operated by the government and my mother was working at a computer-related facility, and thus, I grew up in a family that had no link to art. I think I was introverted. Ever since I was in preschool, I preferred drawing alone than playing with other kids. I even appealed to my mother that I wanted to quit preschool.

Motoe: Do you think the one-child policy had an influence?

Huang: I actually have a sister who is six years older. At that time, a family could have two children if the conditions were met.

Motoe: 1975 is more than forty years ago. China has accomplished drastic economic growth since then, and Beijing has probably changed a lot, too.

Huang: The old town scenery cannot be found anywhere now. It is like another world, since everything including the buildings has changed. I feel very sad.

Motoe: Did you have good grades in art class?

Huang: I put all my energy into painting throughout elementary and junior high school, but my art teachers always told me that my paintings were not good. Since then, I had a sense that I was creating unique paintings, but my parents never expected me to go down the path of art. They brought my landscape paintings to experts without telling me, but it was severely criticized once more. I heard about it much later.
Motoe: When did you decide to go down the path of becoming a painter?
Huang: When I was a junior high school student. However, I was told by my school teacher that I have no talent in painting. Furthermore, China then was based on family genealogy, and thus, people said, “Unless your father is a well-known painter, it is impossible to become a successful artist.” It goes without saying that none of the teachers understood contemporary art.

Motoe: Under such circumstances, it seems very unusual for you to manage to enter the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the most prestigious art university in China.
Huang: It was not easy. Like other countries, entering art school in China requires training to realistically depict objects by repeatedly drawing plaster figures. For someone like me who wanted to create paintings based on my imagination, it was nothing other than pain.

Motoe: Did you go to preparatory school?
Huang: I went to technical school to study the basics of art. It was my mother’s recommendation, but the classes to learn techniques to enter art school was very painful.

Motoe: Did you study hard at the technical school?
Huang: No. Again, I did not listen to the teachers, which made them angry. I came to hate it after being told “You have no talent” in front of other students and skipped classes by lying to my mother. Of course, because of this, it did not go well in the beginning. I promised to go to a regular school if I failed to enter art school, but I skipped the exam by pretending I was sick...I was so depressed for a while but, after all, art was the only thing that interested me. So, I returned to the technical school and studied hard to be at the top of the class. I then entered the Central Academy of Fine Arts after entering a craft school.

Pursuing the View of Nature and Life Unique to the East

Motoe: What did you do after graduating?
Huang: I had no job and no income for a while. Since my parents worked at government
Institutions, they tried to find me a proper job. They recommended me to work in the army and introduced me to office work at museums. But I did not want to do any of those.

Motoe: You were very stubborn (laugh).

Huang: Yes. But my parents finally changed their mind and told me to go to France if I really want to be a famous painter. So, I studied French for one year, but could not get a visa and failed to study in France.

Motoe: You could not find a way to live as a painter. What did you do after that?

Huang: I did not go through the galleries. Instead, I borrowed money and participated an art fair as an individual to show my art. It was 2002. I remember bringing my works to the art fair site, which took three hours from Beijing by train. Since it was at my own expense, I was relieved when the works were sold.

Motoe: Did it result in immediate responses?

Huang: Tang Contemporary Art Center in Bangkok and Soka Art Center in Beijing who saw my works at the art fair invited me to have a solo show in 2003. These became my first solo exhibitions.

Motoe: I see. Things moved fast after the first art fair. Since then, you have done solo and group shows in Shanghai, Taiwan, France, and the Netherlands. Your works are auctioned at Christie’s, and the first solo exhibition in Japan was realized. By the way, what concept do you put in the works displayed in this exhibition?

Huang: I was most conscious on how to express Eastern cultures. There are series on rivers and forests as well as series that depict minerals in my work. All of these are connected under the theme of the “link between nature and humans.”

Motoe: I see. That might be the similarity with Japanese contemporary artists. Do you think there is a difference in how nature is viewed in the East and West?

Huang: Western cultures place humans on top of nature. Human beings are the master of nature. On the other hand, in Eastern cultures, humans serve for nature. It is a big difference, and I have continued creating my art with a special care for this view of nature that is unique to the East.

Expressing Things that Are Not Opposing Each Other, but Circulating within the Same Ring

Motoe: That is very interesting. I would like to ask a little more about the work. What is the process of art making? Do you have a firm concept before you begin drawing?
Huang: No. I start sketching without thinking. When I start working on canvas, I have a rough sense of direction, but the concept becomes clearer as I add colors and depict details. As for the title, I like to select one that does not limit, but instead expands the viewer’s imagination.

Motoe: I see. You develop your work as you paint. When I see your exhibition today, I strongly felt the image of “death.”

However, the painting is composed of various colors like neon, which made me wonder why I felt death from your work.

Huang: Death is often attached to black or dark colors, but I like to express death using bright colors. I want to deliver the dual nature of things—good and evil, life and death, peace and war, nature and humans, etc.—through my art. What appears to be opposite does not exist separately but is connected to one another. They exist within the same ring and are circulating, and it is my theme to express that in my art.

Motoe: I see. Using bright colors to depict death originated from that philosophy. I am glad I was able to learn a lot from you, like the Eastern view of humans serving nature and the bilateral character of apparently opposing things. I wish you further success in Japan. Thank you very much.

Huang: Thank you very much. I hope to see you again in the future.

(1) Peter Doig
Peter Doig was born in 1958 in Scotland and spent his childhood in Trinidad and Tobago and Canada before studying art in London. He is known as a painter of New Figurative Painting that started after the 1990s following the line of New Painting. In 1993, Doig won first prize at the John Moore exhibition and was nominated for the 1994 Turner Prize.

Huang Yuxing
Born in 1975 in Beijing, Huang Yuxing graduated from the Department of Mural Painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in 2000. Huang Yuxing’s work is not limited to the standard of a certain ideal image, but also grows naturally from within the painting. From the beginning of his career, water, whirlpools, forests, minerals, crystals and even architecture have been consistently his favorite motifs. Although never tries to precisely represent these objects naturalistically, he has neither completely abandoned their
shape in the real world. Moreover, he even attempts to reconstruct the impression of these objects. For example, when standing in front of a river, people usually tend to stare blankly without realizing it. The colors that Huang Yuxing loads onto the canvas immerse the audience in the same emptiness. But different from the Pointillism of Post-Impressionists, Huang never passively waits for the audience's eyes to mix the solid colors, but overlaps the colors and adjusts them over and over to finally reach his point of satisfaction; he intends to evoke the energy within his paintings by abiding this creative process. The modification of colors, shapes and compositions have taken control of the artist and kept him busy. It is during this process that the painting gains for itself a life of freshness and self-sufficiency, as well as the motivation for continuous growth.

Yuxing is currently based in Beijing. Since 2008, he has done his solo exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Los Angeles, Bangkok, Paris, and so on. In 2019, he did his solo exhibition at Whitestone Gallery Ginza.

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Interview

Gutai: Proposal for a New Way to Live

Shuji Mukai
Artist

Kunio Motoe
Professor Emeritus, Tama Art University; Art Critic

Shuji Mukai was among the second generation of Gutai artists, along with Takesada Matsutani and Tsuyoshi Maekawa. He is well-known in Japan and abroad for his room-filling installations made up of unintelligible symbols. In 1998, his installation featured in the opening of the remodeled Louis Vuitton store in Soho, Manhattan and his 2013 performance at the Guggenheim Museum in New York gained much attention. What does ‘Gutai’ mean for Mukai who remained a member of the Gutai Association until its dissolution?

Entering a Painting
Motoe
I’ve recently been thinking about how truly remarkable the Gutai artists have been.

Mukai
Jiro Yoshihara, founder of the Gutai Art Association, gave us the idea of being unbothered to shape and he created this kind of free atmosphere. Anyone who couldn’t go along with that left, and the members who stayed were, as you point out, special and diverse. Specifically, we can think of the key members Shozo Shimamoto and others from the Modern Art Association, and Atsuko Tanaka, Saburo Murakami, Akira Kanayama, and Kazuo Shiraga who came following the dissolution of Zero-kai group. They added intelligence and elevated the level of the Gutai Association.

Motoe
I see. Did those who quit disagree with aesthetic concept?

Mukai
Maybe they wanted to have more personal freedom. Yoshihara was particular about smell and being clean and such things. He insisted that the artists wear neckties and have good manners like that even for our own gatherings. He was that kind of person. A bit fussy.

Motoe
Really? I hadn’t heard that before.

Mukai
The Gutai Pinacotheca museum, named by Michel Tapié, was located in the Yoshihara family storehouse dating from the Edo period. He came from a privileged family and when things didn't go well with the Nika-kai association, he could do whatever he wanted. Gutai members would bring their works to Yoshihara's residence in Ashiya. The ones that passed inspection would be kept there for something like an opening party around twice a year. In eighteen years though, there was only one time that all the members gathered for a meal together. It wasn't a place we could get together to talk about art theory and such because that was not related to management (membership fees were cheap, thanks to Yoshihara's cooking oil family business). Since more money was needed than Yoshihara expected, and more members were recruited. As members increased, and sculpture was accepted... many things changed....

Motoe
Did you identify as a Gutai Association member? Or perhaps you did not think of yourself as belonging?
Mukai

With Tapié's promotion overseas, Gutai became more recognized. We were in the shadow of something powerful. Tapié was an art producer and held successful exhibitions of our work around the world, with famous artists such as Jasper Johns and others taking an interest in our Gutai Pinacotheca*. People in Japan would recognize us if we had a good reputation abroad.

Motoe

I saw reporting on the Tokyo exhibition, in the Yomiuri Shimbun I think that seemed to be making fun of Shiraga.

Mukai

Yes, we were ridiculed here.

Motoe

Gutai has a very important position in post-war Japanese art. The overseas reaction also ignited the market. How did you get involved with the Gutai Association?

Mukai

I learned about it from Kazuo Shiraga. At the exhibition in Kyoto in 1959 I saw eight of his very large paintings and wondered what kind of person he could be. He is usually identified as the artist who paints with his feet, but for me it was more that he had physically entered the paintings. He rejected the traditional culture until then of facing a painting. He also rejected paint and brush, used sand. For my own Symbol Room, I tried to emulate Shiraga, using the room as frame and myself penetrated the room as a symbol.

Kanayama's Remote-Controlled Painting Machine was also influenced by Shiraga's idea. He asked me at what point to stop to complete the automatic painting. I enjoyed and was much influenced by these methods.

Motoe

It is rare that an artist would so clearly identify influences. Is that because you are confident?

Mukai

Do you mean that I am special? (laughs)

Motoe
You surprise me! (laughs)

Mukai
I know people, and people and the works they produce are not related.

Motoe
That’s right. But I thought there would be a more striking reason.

Mukai
Striking? What do you mean?

Motoe
Well, maybe something about rivalries, or overflowing emotions, or determination and discipline.

Mukai
Everyone worked hard. There were no secrets or rumors, and no meanness. When I was in my 20s, Tapié would buy my paintings whenever he came to Japan. He included me, with Domoto Insho, Sofu Teshigahara, and Jiro Yoshihara, in the Repetitive Structure exhibition he organized at the Galerie Stadler in Paris. They must not have been too happy about it. For Tapié, more than trying to sell at high prices, it was rather for his reputation in the gallery business.

Motoe
Did Tapié pay cash for the paintings?

Mukai
It varied. For Fontana, he would barter with the Japanese galleries. In any case, to promote Gutai it would be necessary to use philosophical words, but this went against the Gutai philosophy. The Gutai artists were indifferent and I think that was a good thing. If the viewer thinks it is good and feels good seeing a painting, that’s fine. Once someone starts to give explanations about an abstract painting, it loses its attraction.

Jiro Yoshihara and the Foundation of Gutai

Motoe
What is your concept of Gutai?
Mukai

No rules. Do whatever you want. Rejecting all existing concepts of art.

Motoe

Isn't that Dada?

Mukai

Gutai has none of the ideological background of Dada. The biggest disadvantage was that the paintings sold. At the time, it was a hassle to go to the bathroom that was far away, so I would just pee on the painting I was doing.

Motoe

That's a famous story.

Mukai

It was a case of ‘anything goes.’ After that, I took a break. (laughs)
When I didn’t have enough pieces for an exhibition, I would draw whatever I had – a bookcase, chairs; I would even remove the screens and paint those.
It was interesting that this kind of free flow is what Gutai was about but it was ironic to see that anything displayed in a frame would be considered a painting, thanks to Tapie’s promotion. In the United States, Gutai is considered a ‘social movement’ but I don’t think there was any such social background to it.

Motoe

Really? Not at all? How about World War II?

Mukai

Everyone wants to find a connection. (laughs) But there is none. It is not necessary for creating art. I won’t say that we were completely detached but the extent of our freedom was a bit different. Assuming that there was a production concept, it might be something like a treasure a child cherishes and then puts aside over time. We were bewildered by suddenly taking on something outside of art conventions.
In the early stages, before Pinacotheca, everyone talked about technique and that was the most interesting time. It is difficult for one person to declare something as art or as a painting. It would become ‘expression’ when it involves several people.
Saburo Murakami's bursting through paper performances actually date to the Edo Period. Sadamasa Motonaga's nagashi technique comes from the world of traditional textile dyeing. Shiraga's mud performance can be seen in traditional festivals.

Motoe
It might be an exaggeration, but do you mean that Gutai had no concept or ideology?

Mukai
It was what was the idea and sensibility of Jiro Yoshihara.

Motoe
Sensibility? Was that an absolute standard?

Mukai
It was his philosophy and sensibility.... Everything was filtered through his ideas. It was more like a design company supervisor, accepting or rejecting things, without any particular guidelines. Only Shiraga had permission to choose a title. On the other hand, he would say ‘Absolutely use words that no one will understand.’ It was ambiguous. It started out with a sense of playfulness and no Gutai members were speaking rationally. There was also nothing in writing from Yoshihara.

Motoe
There was the Gutai Manifesto published in the journal Geijutsu Shincho.

Mukai
I especially like the phrase – ‘Let’s reject tokonoma art.’
There are more researchers overseas than in Japan. Although there is much analysis of Yoshihara’s works, there is a lack of research on his concepts.
Goro Yoshida photographed Gutai activities, but he died early and the unfortunately the chronicle was not continued. I am wondering how to manage with computer graphics....

Motoe
You stayed as a Gutai member until the end, until it dissolved.

Mukai
Right. However, towards the end I followed Yoshihara’s orders to work to ‘expand the limits of
art’. *Jazz Café Check* was at around that time. Tapie was surprised. The base for the installation is still in place. When Tapie took Gutai art overseas, because of transportation constraints, it was mostly two dimensional works. Motonaga’s water and Shiraga’s mud paintings. These were not so well received. There is an art photo of it.

Motoe
From another point of view, Gutai is recognized today because of those flat paintings were preserved.

Mukai
That’s right. Maybe because Jiro Yoshihara who had commercial sense was in charge of management. Now with the internet, something is old as soon as it is completed. I want to emphasize that Gutai has to deal with how to use the net, how to keep up with computer graphics and new visual expressions.

Motoe
Is Gutai obsolete? Has it run its course?

Mukai
I do not think so. Everything continues. The Gutai artists who have died will, of course, not produce anything more. Many things have been tried, but there are many more possibilities for expression. For the surviving artists, we would not like to think that there are no new possibilities for Gutai.

Motoe
Each member has their own version of Gutai.

Mukai
That’s right. You can ask each on about their concept, but it is too early to answer. I think Akira Kanayaa and I basically agree on this.

Motoe
What are you aiming for now?

Mukai
A mirror. I am interested in doing something that allows viewers to see themselves. Something
with viewer participation using a curved mirror for a new experience of ‘seeing.’ For me, Gutai has been a proposal for a new way of life. More than a newspaper’s cultural section, it is the society section these days that is in real time. Gutai would have been regarded as a social experiment. One might question if the Gutai movement was art or not, but I’m sure it expanded the limits of art.

Motoe
That is Gutai. A deep insight. Thank you very much for this interesting discussion.

* Gutai Pinacotheca – Jiro Yoshihara renovated the storehouse of his family home in Nakanoshima, Osaka to build a museum. French art critic Michel Tapié gave the Museum its name. It became the Gutai base presenting Gutai group exhibitions and solo exhibitions of many artists from Japan and overseas. The Museum closed in 1970 and the building has been destroyed. (Gekkan Bijutsu, November 2014)

(Detailed artist profiles can be found in the biography section at the end of this book.)

(Photo credits)

Mukai in front of his installation of a room covered in unintelligible symbols

Symbol covered bathroom

Mukai’s installation for a Louis Vuitton shop

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Section 2
Interviews

Section 2 / Interviews of Experts in the Art Industry

Being Gutai Is All About Myself
Tsuyoshi Maekawa
Artist

Kunio Motoe
Professor Emeritus, Tama Art University, Art Critic

Gutai is receiving attention again lately. As museums within and beyond Japan introduce Gutai artists, their works are being sold at high prices in auctions. Pioneer artists like Jiro Yoshihara, Kazuo Shiraga, Atsuko Tanaka, and Chiyu Uemae have already passed away, but artists inheriting Gutai’s energy and philosophy even after the breakup of the association are receiving much attention. Tsuyoshi Maekawa is a representative artist in the so-called “second generation” of Gutai.

Encountering Gutai

Motoe: You are very fashionable. You look more like a designer than painter.
Maekawa: I actually worked as a graphic designer once.
Motoe: I knew it! You have participated in the exhibition of Gutai Art Association since their eighth exhibition. Could you start from how you entered Gutai?

(P133 photo)
Tsuyoshi Maekawa standing in front of his work at his solo exhibition

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Maekawa: I was a fan of Modern Art (Association) and participated in their exhibitions a few times. My high school seniors included Yoshio Hayakawa and Makoto Nakamura, and I visited their studios and homes as well. Gradually, I became acquainted with Shozo Shimamoto, Chiyu Uemae, and Yasuo Sumi who were also participating in Modern Art. I came to know Gutai since they participated in Gutai exhibitions. They told me to show my works to Mr. Yoshihara once.
Motoe: What was the impression of the Gutai exhibition when you first saw it?
Maekawa: I found it interesting. It was completely different from other groups.
Motoe: Could anyone participate?
Maekawa: Yes, but informally. You need to bring your work to Mr. Yoshihara and if he says “Good,” you could formally participate.
Motoe: I see. By the way, I heard that you broke the gate of Jiro Yoshihara’s house when
you brought your works on your truck to his place. Is that true?
Maekawa: It surely happened, but his house was so old that a little bit of damage was unnoticeable (laugh).
Motoe: How old were you then?
Maekawa: I was nineteen years old, fresh out of high school.
Motoe: You were very precocious. Gutai was founded in 1954 and you (born in 1936) became a member in 1961. According to documents, you belong to the second-generation of Gutai along with Takesada Matsutani (born in 1937) and Shuji Mukai (born in 1939). Jiro Yoshihara was about fifty years old when you joined the association.
Maekawa: It seems that Michel Tapié (a French art critic) who first recognized Gutai was telling Mr. Yoshihara not to increase its membership. Yoshihara found the group to be in a rut, and thus decided to bring in young people. It took me four to five years before I became a member.
Motoe: You stayed in Gutai since then?
Maekawa: I devoted myself to Gutai until it broke up.

**Competition between the Gutai Pioneer Jiro Yoshihara and Other Members**

Motoe: Could you tell me what the Gutai was like then?
Maekawa: When I started participating, Gutai was featured in a design magazine called *Idea*. I felt that Gutai was something beyond art. Gutai was a very strange and unique group. Before encountering Gutai, I visited many galleries and independent exhibitions, which I stopped completely after joining Gutai. There was something in Gutai that made it completely different.

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Motoe: What was so different?
Maekawa: The group itself was unique. Each member had their own colors and talents. Shiraga's work had Shiraga's characteristics while Motonaga's had his own. There are no other groups except Gutai that have such radical differences among its members.
Motoe: Did you stay in the group until the end?
Maekawa: Yes, since I was in my twenties.
Motoe: Were there other members like you?
Maekawa: There were probably fewer people who quit partway through. Ms. Atsuko Tanaka and Mr. Akira Kanayama quit in 1965, and Mr. Motonaga and Mr. Saburo Murakami quit after disputes over the Osaka Expo. About two years after the Expo was
over, Mr. Yoshihara died, which made the dismantling of the association inevitable.

Motoe: Was Mr. Yoshihara charismatic in the group?

Maekawa: He had a strong charisma. He was older and already famous then.

Motoe: So, it was not a case for you to have a passionate discussion with Mr. Yoshihara?

Maekawa: There were no passionate discussions. To him, I was like a child (laugh) although I was never treated like a child. If I asked him to see my work, he gave his time even if he was in the midst of doing something else.

Motoe: What was it like to show your work to Mr. Yoshihara?

Maekawa: We often gathered at his home in Nakanoshima or his second home in Ashiya. We all sat on the tatami floor to listen to what he said. There was a storage shed in the garden of the main house. We stored the representative works of the members and showed them to the guests when they visited from abroad.

Motoe: What about the relationship among members? Did the members mutually stimulate one another?

Maekawa: We used to talk about who was the best in the exhibition or something like that, but it was not like stimulating each other all the time. Compared to other groups, the members of Gutai did not talk amongst themselves about the works. People were in the group to show their work to Mr. Yoshihara… In fact, we kept the works secret from one another until the exhibition. I think the members had a very strong sense of competition.

Motoe: When Gutai became popular in Europe, many performance artists went there, which created the impression that Gutai is equal to performance artists. What do you think of that kind of reception of the group?

Maekawa: Since I personally had intentions of focusing on painting, I was looking at the boom with cold eyes. Around the time I joined Gutai, members already stopped doing performance and came back to painting.

Motoe: A lot happened in the beginning, but ultimately, the painting became the focus of the group.

Maekawa: Outdoor exhibitions were stopped by then. At the eleventh Gutai exhibition, we displayed Card Box, which was reproduced at the Gutai exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum.

Motoe: Card box?

Maekawa: A person hid inside the box and put out a card when the visitor put ten yen into the box. On the last day of the exhibition, we, the members, were told to try, and I
got this card.

Motoe: Is this the writing of Mr. Yoshihara?

Maekawa: He tried his best to surprise me… No one else got this kind of recommendation. Only I got it (laugh).

Motoe: That is an episode only the members can talk about. It is a good story that reflects the personality of Mr. Yoshihara.

Pursuing the Method and Expression Using Dungarees

Motoe: I would like to ask about your work now. You use dungarees, a coarse hemp cloth in your work. When did you start using this as a material?

Maekawa: I liked its rough texture since the early stages and displayed similar works at Modern Art exhibitions. But it was around 1962 when I started cutting dungarees in layers. However, there were artists using the same material, so I tried hard to do something different.

Motoe: Are these sewed to the canvas?

Maekawa: I sew them using a futon needle. But I later found that they can easily be glued to the board (laugh).

Motoe: How do you do the pinched sewing?

Maekawa: I pinch the cloth and sew it using sewing machine. The edge of the pinched part will remain. I then stretch them along a flat surface. You might get a better understanding if I show you this work.

Motoe: Where are the sewed parts? Ah, I got it. They are really sewed.

Maekawa: They shrink after a while. But the creases disappear as I stretch the cloth further. It is hard but interesting work.

Motoe: It is, in fact, a lot of work. By the way, you received a lot of awards during the eighties.

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Maekawa: I received a lot of awards in this series. This method of making the creases disappear by pushing them to the edge received attention. Another type of work is made by placing a lot of paint on top of a folded canvas. After mixing the paint, I pull the canvas to make it flat. The folds create gaps between the paints, which create an interesting space.

Motoe: I see. Were these done after Gutai?

Maekawa: Yes, after Gutai was over, I started these because I had to choose what to do
on my own. I continued these since they were well received, but I could not just keep using the same methods, so I gradually changed styles.

Motoe: Thoughts put into individual works may lead to the reevaluation of Gutai. Why do you want to create a texture on the canvas when it takes so much work?

Maekawa: I wanted to be different from other dungaree artists. There are artists who paint, curve, and show the creases. In my case, I soak glue to dungarees. It creates really weird shapes. This was the result of pursuing a style that best expresses material characteristics.

Motoe: Do you buy dungarees?

Maekawa: I do buy them now, but I could not when I was young. So I used empty rice bags and so on that I got from other people. Used dungarees also created interesting works. There was a work that involved simply inflating the dungarees, but I felt like it resembled someone else’s work and ended up leaving in the storage for a while. One day, I pulled it out and broke it, which made an interesting shape. That was when I started making holes in dungarees.

Motoe: I see.

Maekawa: For this one, I connected a net together and dyed it myself. Isn’t is a nice color?

Motoe: Where does this shape come from?

Maekawa: Simplification was the theme when I made this—Making it simple until an unusual shape appears.

Motoe: Do you start from any specific things and simplify them to the level of abstraction?

Maekawa: I don’t do that, although there are times when the work looks like a mountain in the end.

Motoe: Mr. Shinichi Segi referred to your work in his essay by saying, “Humans are skins, the world is the epidermis, and paintings are also the surface. That is the concept of this painter.” I liked this phrase. Are these your words?

Maekawa: No, Mr. Segi understood my art that way. I am very honored.

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**Spirit and Concept of Gutai Artists**

Motoe: Gutai is once again receiving attention. What do you think of it?

Maekawa: It is like a dream. Mr. Yoshihara used to say as a joke that we would be famous one day. After so many decades, it’s really happening (laugh).
Motoe: Have you thought of quitting?
Maekawa: Never. I do not know why, but being rejected at the competition is disappointing but energizing at the same time.
Motoe: Do you also have pride as a Gutai artist?
Maekawa: Of course I do. I would still have it even if I was alone. Being Gutai is almost all of who I am.
Motoe: You must have a very high level of spirit as an artist.
Maekawa: Being recognized abroad gave us a lot of confidence. People abroad often tell us that the magnitude of the impact is on the scale of what was felt during the ukiyo-e era. They also told us that Gutai is art since it has originality. Others are mere imitation of someone else—this looks like Renoir, this one is Utrillo, and so on.
Motoe: Gutai is received well abroad.
Maekawa: Arte Informale artists who started at around the same time used to say that Gutai was copying them. But they finally recognized Gutai. When someone asks if the work is an homage of Arte Informale, oftentimes the Gutai work is actually older. That kind of thing gives us pride. Even if it is not my work, it is great that works by the Gutai members are highly acclaimed, and I would like to stay within the scene.
Motoe: Gutai's work remains very valid even today. It might be due to the originality of Gutai.
Maekawa: I was once told, “How do you know what you do is original? The world is big. There might be someone who has already done it.” These people have given it up before doing anything. If there is someone doing the same thing, we can compete. That is the spirit and principle I share with the Gutai artists.
Motoe: I see. Such spirit in individual works may lead to a reevaluation. I really want young painters to hear our conversation today. I wish you further success. Thank you very much.

(Reprinted from *Gekkan Bijutsu (Monthly Art)*, August 2013)
For the artist’s biography, see the Overviews of Included Artists’ Careers in the end of the book.

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Section 2
Interviews
Katsuyoshi Inokuma is a painter based in Koriyama, Fukushima, who creates his artworks and releases them mainly at his solo exhibitions. He says, “(I want to make) works that enter people’s minds as deep as possible to the bottom layer.” Inokuma explores his artistic practice with spirit, “not pushing what I want to say, but pursuing the expression on which the viewer’s memory resonates with the work.” He has achieved mysterious and lyrical art composed of simple space composition and layers of forms colored in black and blue. This is Inokuma at his best. At his solo exhibition (Whitestone Gallery Ginza, 2019), Mr. Motoe interviewed the artist focusing on him and his art. (P139 photo)
Katsuyoshi Inokuma, an artist based in Koriyama, Fukushima

Motoe: You received the grand prix at the Memorial of Aoki Shigeru Art Biennale in 1996. Since then, you have been based in Koriyama and continue your practice through solo exhibitions. When did you first think of becoming an artist?

Inokuma: I decided to be one very late, probably after I turned forty. My turning point was being laid off from the company I was working for.

Motoe: You had gone through such hardships. Didn’t you want to be a painter when you were in your twenties?

Inokuma: I never expected to make a living by painting. I at least had a little common sense (laugh). But I still wanted to go to the Tokyo University of the Arts. My parents
did not allow us to go to private schools. So, I attended a preparatory school while working. I tried the exam five times and still could not make it.

Motoe: After being laid off, did you think of finding another job?

Inokuma: I was not good at working in an organization. And finding a company that hires someone over forty years old as a full-time permanent employee was very difficult. After all, painting was the only thing I could do.

Motoe: That must have been a very difficult situation.

Inokuma: Yes. Although my wife worked and supported me, we went through very difficult times economically since we had three school-age children. I tried to run painting lessons, which only made me realize that I have no talent in teaching.

Motoe: Have you ever thought of quitting painting?

Inokuma: Several times until I received the award at the Memorial of Aoki Shigeru Art Biennale. The award came when I was going through the worst times. When I did not have work, I started drinking in daytime. I was very lost. That was when I obtained the news that I had received the award.

Motoe: I am glad.

Inokuma: Yes, our savings were about to run out, too.

Motoe: Did your condition as a painter become better?

Inokuma: Yes. The newspaper featured the award news. No galleries dealt with me until that point, but they became approachable, which made it easier to do solo exhibitions. While the award added one line to my resume, it caused a drastic change. Although I was treated like nobody, I actually visited the galleries in Tokyo to promote myself....

Motoe: Have you ever thought of making figurative paintings like landscapes and flowers?

Inokuma: Never. There are many high-level figurative painters with whom I have no way to compete. I also wanted to create something only I can paint.

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Motoe: Your current situation was made possible with the support of your family.

Inokuma: I owe them much and am truly thankful. I really feel that I am blessed with people like the collectors who continue to buy my works and the supporters who help me with the publications and websites.

Motoe: It must be because you have continued without giving up. Only a few continue painting even if they manage to graduate from art school. It is a very tough challenge. Furthermore, even if you are not famous, you will still find your supporters if you create inspirational works. It is a great thing.
Inokuma: Yes. Talking with you today was also made possible with the help of supporters. It is really like a dream.

**Blue, Space, and Smoke from Oven**

Motoe: Have you been painting abstract since the beginning?
Inokuma: There was a time when I tried portraits, but the human face changes if the tail of eyes move even one millimeter. I just got tired of it one day.
Motoe: Does it mean you wanted to be free from objects?
Inokuma: Yes, and I gradually moved to abstract. But abstract painting is hard to sell. Therefore, I seriously strategized the sale of my works. After all, painting was the only future for me.
Motoe: That sounds interesting. What did you decide on?
Inokuma: My conclusion was that people will not spend their money unless the work touches their heart and enters the deepest layer of their heart.
Motoe: The work needs to move people’s heart.
Inokuma: Yes. To do so, I must achieve an expression that resonates with the viewer’s memory, instead of delivering what I want to say.
Motoe: I see. When you are painting, what is the most important thing to you? For instance, is there something you devise?
Inokuma: It is the treatment of the edges, that is, how to treat the boundary between forms and colors. I intuitively found it important and thought a lot on whether to make the edge as sharp as if it were cut with a knife, or to make it blurry like Mark Rothko.
Motoe: In fact, your work does feel emotional. Both the forms and colors are touching and comforting. By the way, you just mentioned the name, Mark Rothko. Do you have any other favorite artists?

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Inokuma: I like Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. I also like Odilon Redon.
Motoe: What of Redon do you like?
Inokuma: I like his black and cerulean blue, and the feeling attached to the space. It is naïve and mysterious at the same time.
Motoe: I have seen some of your works. Many of your works use blue.
Inokuma: Blue, black, and white are colors that give us a sense of space that expands far away. I like Redon’s black and white margin of the ink-painting. But blue has been my favorite. It adds depth to the space.
Motoe: Why do you think the space matters so much in your work?
Inokuma: I hated walls since I was small. I did not like having my vision blocked. On the contrary, my favorite space was what I found in the scenery that I saw from the nearby mountain-top.
Motoe: It sounds interesting. What kind of scenery was it?
Inokuma: It was back when rice was still cooked in a cooking stove. In the evening, smoke rose from every home and drifted away. I really liked that scenery. I think it surely influenced my art, which led me to pastel and acrylic works.
Motoe: In terms of numbers, you use limited number of colors. What is the process of painting?
Inokuma: There are two types of works: acrylic and pastel. When making acrylic paintings, I start by making a colored foundation.
Motoe: You add more colors on the foundation, correct?
Inokuma: Yes. I then scrape the top layers. In my work, this act of scraping is very important.
Motoe: How do you scrape?
Inokuma: I use sanded papers. And, I paint again. My art is made through repeating these processes.
Motoe: I see... that process creates a unique color.
Inokuma: I used to use canvas as the support medium. However, the canvas stretches as I scrape the paint, which deforms the work. Therefore, I now use veneer plywood as the supporting medium and apply gesso on the surface.
Motoe: You also scrape your pastel works.
Inokuma: Yes, I scrape the paper to create a rough surface.
Motoe: I see. It is obvious when the work is under a light. Some parts are thinner than others. What effect does creating a rough surface have?

Inokuma: Pastels stay on the paper much better.
Motoe: How do you make your pastel works?
Inokuma: I grind pastels in a mortar and use my fingers to draw.
Motoe: You do not use brushes. Interesting....
Inokuma: I wanted to use my own method and create my own painting that does not look like anybody else's. That was the only reason.
Motoe: Since acrylic takes a little while to dry, the process must be different from that of pastel works.
Inokuma: Yes. Pastels can be worked on without a break. But since I keep touching the rough surface of the paper with my fingers, my fingers eventually get burnt if I work too long (laugh).

Motoe: Do you spend long hours painting?
Inokuma: I do not think I spend that much time working with paints. I may be spending more time looking at the works. In my case, I tend to feel motivated around four o’clock in the afternoon.
Motoe: Why is that?
Inokuma: The routine of “starting to drink at six” is in my bones. But this does not happen all the time if I start self-criticizing my work (laugh).
Motoe: Do you have any living artists from whom you received any influence?
Inokuma: There is no one close to Rembrandt or Rothko, but I was inspired by Chiyu Uemae whom I recently found out about. His works are great.
Motoe: Mr. Uemae’s works are, in fact, very unique in the Gutai Art Association. I, too, found out about him recently.
Inokuma: While many Gutai artists have energetic styles, Mr. Uemae stands as a “silent” existence. It can be said that he is a pure artist who understands what it means to subtract. His use of materials is also great.
Motoe: I agree completely. Seeing your actual works today allowed me to experience your unique abstract expression with high spirituality that is reflected in the unique colors and sensitive surface textures. I also felt, once again, the importance of seeing the actual works. I look forward to your solo exhibition in autumn. Thank you very much.
Inokuma: Thank you very much. I am very glad to have been able to talk with you on various topics.

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For the artist’s biography, see the Overviews of Included Artists’ Careers in the end of the book.

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Artist Tadaaki Kuwayama
Art Critic Aaron Betsky

Art is Beauty Produced by Humans
You can feel something from good art. It might be something spiritual. You may not be able to recognize it but you can feel it. That is the most important aspect of art. If a work is excellent, observers can feel it.

Tadaaki Kuwayama

The Viewer is More Important than the Artist

Aaron Betsky
I would like to ask you a few questions about how you make your art and what it means.
My first question is a very simple one: How do you begin?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I’m not sure. I start a painting, for example, and in the middle of it I think about how it should be. Then I won’t change it until I finish it. The next painting is another idea.

Aaron Betsky
Do you ever destroy any of your works?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I do, yes. Maybe some years later. Sometimes I can’t stand my own work. When that happens, I destroy it.

Aaron Betsky
On the question of how you begin, it seems as if you’ve always had a plan, something you’re trying to achieve. And that each painting is a way to get closer to that.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
That’s true. And I did make a statement, I think for the journal *Art in America* in 1964, and that is what supports my idea.

Aaron Betsky
Can you describe that idea in some detail?
You were trained in *nihonga* Japanese traditional paintings and made some very beautifully crafted paintings. After you came to America, you started to move to Minimalist art.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Not immediately.

Aaron Betsky
But you saw the traditions of modern art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes, sure. I learned a lot from the Museum of Modern Art.

Aaron Betsky
And you started making art that became ever less and less. Some of your colleagues who also moved in this direction eventually did more and more and more. But you keep going for less. Why?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I have not reached the final point yet, inside myself. I am still trying new things. New creation is so important for an artist. And when I finish one work, the next one is another creation. I am moved by my own creation.

Aaron Betsky
It is interesting that your creation is also a kind of erasure, because you don’t want any evidence of your craft or your personality. In your early work, you would layer very thin
washes of color one upon another until the object of the painting disappeared. And now you have gone even further, because now you very precisely dye color in titanium.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
That’s correct.

Aaron Betsky
So what are you erasing?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
For instance, to select the titanium, I go to the factory to see the color gradations of their titanium. And I ask the factory for a certain size and to see how they make it. It might take a week or so to decide. I so many times watch and ask about the character of the titanium. It’s not there right away. It takes time to decide. Once decided, I am satisfied. That has to do with the way the color changes with the angle of view, light, and distance. So when you walk in front of the titanium and see the color changing, that means that the atmosphere is involved. That’s why I covered all the walls instead of one or two.

Aaron Betsky
Can you tell us a little bit more about the effect of the atmosphere, the air? You speak a great deal about your paintings and the space around them.

**Interaction of Art and Exhibition Space**

Tadaaki Kuwayama
It starts once the artwork is hung on the wall. There is interaction between the space and how the work looks, and also the reaction of the viewer’s own thoughts or perception. Distance is also relevant. If there are numbers, they also make an atmosphere. I thought this was wonderful.
But at the same time, because you use very intense colors, and very precisely, your objects command our attention and draw us to them. Doesn’t the space then disappear?

No. For instance, the works I did with sticks. The first exhibition of this was in 1996 at a large museum in Japan. I hung 136 works, I mean sticks, and I covered three walls. And the remaining wall was all white. There was a feeling of intimacy. I was there on the opening day, after working for a few days for the installation. Many of the people who came were ordinary people who may have been enjoying the park-like grounds around that museum. Those people looked at those sticks and said "Wow, is this art?" Somehow, they were impressed and wanted to know more. I was just watching their reactions as they stood and gazed. Different people said different things about what they saw. Because the angle is different. Distance is different. They knew it was the same but looked different depending on the angle of view and their distance from the work. That means they feel the atmosphere of the room and the air itself. I thought, this what art is. To feel the atmosphere, the object and distance.

The way you describe it, the implication is that you disappear as an artist and maybe even the work of art disappears or recedes and the art comes out by the action of the viewers.

The viewers, yes. So the artist isn’t very important, not the artist himself. How the viewers react is so important.

So your art is like a trigger? Something like taking LSD and looking at your art.

Tadaaki Kuwayama: 
It is difficult to explain.

Aaron Betsky
Maybe a better comparison would be with some form of meditation where you center yourself and something triggers that, like the ringing of a bell. That seems to be part of what you’re after.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Maybe. And I thought that this is the definition of art. First, I say that art is spiritual. Nothing else. But art is what the observers feel and if what they feel is close to my thought, I’m lucky. That’s about it.

Aaron Betsky
Is there a craft to evoking that and, if so, how did you develop that craft?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
For instance, if you think of metallic doors, the surfaces are all different. And the jointing, the color...such as the primary colors in the early works. I started in 1965 with metallic spray paint on 4 or 5 works. One was selected by the Guggenheim. The biggest one. It was pink and the blue. In those days, I didn’t care for painting. I just wanted something that was nothing. But it still feels like something, right? That is art, I thought.

Aaron Betsky
But it’s interesting that when people ask you about color, you’re very tricky about it. You seem to be very conscious of how certain colors not only behave, but how they trigger, how they evoke a particular reaction from the viewer. And it seems like you’ve been working on that for a very long time.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes. So some people say that I’m still doing same thing. That may be true. I’m not tired of that. I find it really exciting.
Aaron Betsky
But you never made something that was pure black or pure white?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Some of my early works.

Aaron Betsky
Very early. That’s right. But why not since then?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I don’t really know.

Aaron Betsky
I think you know what you’re doing with the colors though maybe not consciously. We have many clichés about color - that black is death and white is something new or virginal, but also that red comes forward, blue recedes. When you use red, you either seem to try to find a red that doesn’t do that, or you use it in combination with other colors as a set.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Not really. I see each color as having same quality. Some people like red, some people like blue, but red or blue, they are not different. That’s my thought.

Aaron Betsky
But to achieve that, to make that clear, you manipulate the colors so they don’t behave in the way that we’re used to them behaving. Blue, for instance, is also supposed to be very luscious.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
There are many kinds of blue. For me it’s same.
Commitment to Color

Aaron Betsky
But back to the original question, how do you begin? I asked about colors because that’s the last thing that remains in many of your paintings - very intense and often very changeable colors. For a metallic piece, if your move around it slightly you see a little bit of yellow, that’s inherent in it or maybe under it. So you worked very hard at this and yet you deny that you’re making any choices or that there’s a plan with it. I have a hard time believing that.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
In the middle of the 1960’s, I made a 7 foot square piece of 4 joined panels in 5 different colors - blue, of course red, yellow, brown, and gold. There was no reason for the placement. My dealer said that it was a whole with the 5 different colors. About 5 or 6 curators get together and were talking. I didn't know that they were talking about which one to take. One said they should take the red one. Another said the yellow one was better. I said that the color qualities are all the same. Each one has a different quality according to the light. One is not better than another.

Aaron Betsky
So you throw it back again on the viewer? It’s what the viewer finds in it?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes. And then they said, ok we will take everything. The next question was how to arrange them for hanging. I said it doesn’t matter and you can do it differently each time.

Aaron Betsky
So it leads me to two questions. One is that it would be a natural progression for you to start to make architecture, to start to make buildings. Your daughter became an architect. And since so much of what you do is about establishing those colors in space, why not do that literally? Why stick with painting. Why not paint a wall and then paint another wall in a different color?
Tadaaki Kuwayama
I did that, too. I started out studying *nihonga* and I learned about color and paper. *Nihonga* is paint on paper. It is the technique rather than the materials that matters. I’m not professional in the way architects are.

Aaron Betsky
Let me ask it the other way. A few years after you made your first mature works, you showed them at the Green Gallery and at the Guggenheim. There was a moment when people observed you and the early Frank Stella, Carl Andre, and other people who were trying to erase art in a similar way. A few years later, on the west coast, a number of artists took that to a logical next step of making pure light or pure space. James Turrell is the most famous but there was Irwin about 5 or 6 people working in this mode and some of them went towards pure color. Some went to pure light. Did you know about that work? Did it interest you? Were you tempted to go in that direction?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I was interested in what was happening in California.

Aaron Betsky
And why was it only California?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I don’t know.

Aaron Betsky
You moved to New York in 1958?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
1958, yes.
Aaron Betsky
And have stayed there ever since. Is there something about New York your art? Or how did time and in this place affect your art?

Being an Artist in New York

Tadaaki Kuwayama
At that time, we had to have an interview at the American Embassy and be approved before going overseas. It was not possible to travel freely in those days after Japan lost the war. We also were not allowed to use airplanes. We had to travel by boat. I was asked why I wanted to go to the United States. You know, artists should’ve been interested in going to Paris. I said that Paris was destroyed by war. Germany was occupied and economically a poor country after the war. Art cannot grow without financial support. I said I thought the United State could support art. I also thought that new things were happening in art in New York and that was why it was the only city I was interested in.

Aaron Betsky
Were you aware of what was going on in New York - the action painters, the early Combines, all those kinds of things. Did you know about this?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Not really. I knew the names of Jackson Pollock and Alexander Calder. That's about it. I liked Calder’s floating sculpture invention.

Aaron Betsky
When you arrived as an artist trained in nihonga, everywhere around you, people were throwing paint and making very heavy objects. Claes Oldenburg and Rauschenberg. There have been interviews with Carl Andre and people like that who said they very consciously did not want to this. Was it a conscious decision for you that you did not want to continue what you had learned to do, but that you wanted to react against what was being made in New York?
Tadaaki Kuwayama
I really liked Barnett Newman and Rothko and those types of artists at that time that I saw for the first time. I was also impressed by the large scale that I never seen before. But I didn't want do that. I thought I should find my own way.

Aaron Betsky
And when you encountered some of the other people at the Green Gallery and other venues, was there a sense of recognition? Did you talk about work together?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Not much. My English was bad.

Aaron Betsky
But Donald Judd reviewed your work very early on. Was that inspiring to you?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I must say that I didn't properly understand it.

Aaron Betsky
So you're in New York, a big city with all these things going on, and you find a way to work. You show your work with other people. Those are the people going in different directions and their work becomes more and more complicated, either as a system, like Andre or Sol Le Witt, or in expressiveness like Stella.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I didn’t follow them.

Aaron Betsky
Did you ever feel like they were betraying something?
Tadaaki Kuwayama
No. I thought art should be an artist’s own creation, not following someone else. Creativity is more important.

Aaron Betsky
It’s so interesting that, with all the things going on around you, you describe your work as a very inward search towards a kind of spirituality. Yet you remain in New York and you remain very engaged. Did you ever feel that you needed or wanted to retreat to be able to concentrate?

Spirituality

Tadaaki Kuwayama
In the mid 1960s I had a first show, and it was outside United States at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. It was a big show of mainly artists from New York. Almost 80% were American artists.

Aaron Betsky
That was when Sandberg was running the museum, I think

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I had been picked that time, and I sent out three paintings, all about 6 feet square. One was 4 triangles joined together. The others were squares, or something. In Europe, people had never seen such things before. My work was featured in a big local article. After that, I had an exhibition in Zurich. Bischofberger called me on the opening night. Of course, I didn't know him but he said he wanted to see me. A few days later, he came to my place and we talked. He said he liked my work and that he would give me a monthly stipend. At that time, nobody was buying our work. It meant that I could have a contract for two years and would be able to live. He gave me a studio, an apartment, and an assistant. That was the beginning of Europe. In the US, nobody was buying my kind of work.
Aaron Betsky
Well that was true for many people and that's why a lot of the museums in the Netherlands, Germany, and Denmark have excellent collections of works from the 1960's.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
That's right! They supported young American artists.

Aaron Betsky
That's very true. One of the questions that people were fighting about at that time was indeed what art meant, and if we had moved beyond representation and were not making pictures of the world anymore, but we also moved beyond the artist being something in itself. Some people experimenting with systems, Judd and Le Witt. And it's not about the work, but about creating social relations in a system. Other people were trying to get to absolute nothingness, maybe just light. What were you trying to do? And are you still trying to do it? How do you describe what you started out doing then and what you're still doing now?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
What I want is very difficult to describe. If I knew, I would tell you.

Aaron Betsky
I was very happy that you don't feel embarrassed to use the word 'spiritual,' to say that you're after something spiritual. Can you talk a little bit of what that means to you?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Art is man-made, right? Some part of you cannot express or explain it, but you can feel it, right? With good art, you feel something you cannot see. That is the most important part for art, I think.
It's interesting that you take it immediately to emotion, to feeling. Usually we associate emotion with something much more expressive. And your work is the opposite in many ways, not in all ways, but in many ways. Can you perhaps describe emotion or feeling a little bit more?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Everyone has different feelings. That's what I mean by spiritual.

Aaron Betsky
There is a very famous quote from van Doesburg who said that as art develops, first architecture disappears and dissolves and then sculpture will dissolve, and we will be left with painting and then painting will dissolve, and pure spirit will descend. But that pure spirit is very like a blinding white light and the self disappears. In your model, the self of the artist disappears, but the artwork is still there. And what's more important is that it actually becomes alive. You keep emphasizing that each and every individual person is different. And most of the models I know of spirituality of the 20th or 21st century in relationship to art are about personality, individuality disappearing. Maybe even humanity disappearing. But you don't seem to believe that.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I believe that art carries us on.

Changing with Different Materials

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Humans will disappear. But artwork remains, right? When someone sees an artwork, they will feel something they cannot explain. That is a very important point. It's very hard to explain what it is, but they are.

Aaron Betsky
If humans disappear, who is there to experience the art? Does it matter?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
It doesn’t matter.

Aaron Betsky
Okay. I wonder how you feel when you speak this way. The first thing that comes to my mind is Soto Zen or some of the other schools of Japanese spirituality. And I wonder whether you ever feel ‘yes this is what I mean,’ or if you are instead being pigeonholed as being a Japanese artist.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
This is my own way. Nothing to do with so called spiritual philosophy. I am not involved in Zen or something else.

Aaron Betsky
It's your own quest.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
For art. So simple.

Aaron Betsky
Over the years, your work has become...as a series of different technologies, and each of those technologies gets further away from the hand. First, it's brushes and then it's layers, and then it's spray paint, and then it's metal and now it's the electrolysis of titanium. What's next?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I don't know. You tell me.

Aaron Betsky
Can you imagine getting even further removed?
Tadaaki Kuwayama
Maybe. If I find something and ... maybe I'll try.

(photo credits p. 155)
Tadaaki Kuwayama exhibition installation, Whitestone Gallery, Taipei

Tadaaki Kuwayama exhibition installation, Whitestone Gallery, Taipei

Aaron Betsky
For all these decades you have worked with your studio right next to that of your wife who's also a very good artist. And she makes work that is very different from yours, and yet you can see certain reverberations, so do you feel that you have had a dialogue with each other, that you've consciously or unconsciously influenced each other.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Maybe somewhat, of course. We are in the same house and living together. But we don't talk about technology or art. She is paper cutting and I've been doing something different. But you know we can help each other, of course.

Aaron Betsky
She speaks about your work very eloquently as well. Do you always agree with what she says?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Sometimes not. Well, she knows what I'm thinking. Also it's true that I am changing a lot and use different materials.

Aaron Betsky
And she stays with paper?
Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes.

Aaron Betsky
Not always. She sometimes uses metal.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
That’s right.

Aaron Betsky
But you have used paper too.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Japanese paper, yes.

Aaron Betsky
But that was a long time ago. Have you ever gone back to it?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes, I did, a long time ago. I feel something. I like those paper works and once the National Museum in Japan asked me for a big show in a really big space. Perhaps 100 square feet. Usually they divided that space into many rooms to make a show.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
When I went to see the space, I was so surprised. It was a huge and nice space. I asked to make a wall in the center and make 2 rooms. One white wall was about 25 feet wide. And I used only this wall. On one side, just 2 plain rectangle shapes, and both jointed together in maybe a 4’x4’ square. Just I pasting paper and just joining together. This size, with just one line, a joining line. The show was just like that, and I really liked it. But some people could never understand.
The Effect of White Space

Aaron Betsky
That's interesting. So you were very much working with the space. You don't do that very often, you put your things in the space. But you would like to do that again?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes.

Aaron Betsky
We will have to find an opportunity for you. So in this exhibition, you're working with a variety of different spaces, but there is also a character that has been set to this place by architect Kuma Kengo and he has made a very strong entrance and this very strong space where we are sitting. How do you feel about that?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
It hurt me, my work. Actually yes, honestly.

Aaron Betsky
So you had to screen it out. But doesn't it also give you something to react against?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Not really.

Aaron Betsky
You want pure white?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes.

Aaron Betsky
The time you began making your art coincided with the emergence of the ‘white box,’ and your work has always occurred or almost always occurred in that kind of white box environment. And the white box stands for a whole attitude towards art, not just philosophically but also towards the place that art has in our economy and everything else. I was reading a book about those early exhibitions and the early artwork. And they very explicitly made the relationship to the fashion of that time, to the kind of people that were buying art, and the political movements. But you’ve tried to divorce yourself from them. Do you think you really can divorce yourself from all those implications?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
It is very hard. Sometimes I cannot say no. And for the museum shows I am doing these days, the curators agree to completely change the space.

Aaron Betsky
One way to think of your work is very much within the flow of art history itself. And you can say there’s a progression from Malevich at the beginning of the century doing white on white and then black on black and then Ad Reinhardt doing almost black and people making white paintings. Robert Ryman making white paintings but there’s still always something about the brush stroke. Then Group Zero saying no art. Do you see yourself as part of that progression?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
No. I don’t think so. I know them. Yes, but I want to be on my own.

Aaron Betsky:
Most people who say they want to be on their own, retreat. But you yet are very engaged, and you still work in New York and with a gallery system. Your work is for sale. How do you be by yourself and be alone and yet be part of this larger social economic physical system? How do you do that?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I’m doing it. I’ve been showing all over the world.
Exhibitions as Career Retrospectives

Aaron Betsky
You talked just now about how you found a much more receptive audience in Europe and I would say especially in Northern Europe. Now it seems you were finding a receptive audience in Asia and specifically in Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, and maybe China. How do you explain that?

Tadaaki Kuwayama:
I don't know. The museums in Japan were sleeping. Doing nothing. And the artists were always in groups. That's why I left Japan. I guess the system has improved.

Aaron Betsky
Maybe a dangerous question. We were joking yesterday about not having a work on hand to show, and I made the joke that you could do like de Chirico and remake a painting. But seriously, since your work is very much about choice of a particular color format and removing the hand, the craft from it, why not make the same piece again?

Tadaaki Kuwayama:
I’m not interested in doing that.

Aaron Betsky
Why?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
As an artist, I am just not interested in repeating something.

Aaron Betsky
In a sense, you do keep repeating, not exactly the same thing but trying over and over again. But somehow not doing exactly the same thing.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
That’s true. Material wise I’m changing. If i see something, interesting material, I like to use it.

Aaron Betsky
Perhaps I’ve pushed this too far, this notion that you are on a quest and that you’re progressing and the work goes ever more abstract. At the same time, you will go back and use material but when you have an exhibition, you want to show your latest work, but also representation from almost all the periods.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Actually, I was asked to do that.

Aaron Betsky
Okay. But I noticed that you do this in a lot of your exhibitions. it must be something you also like to do. No? Or would you rather show only your latest work?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Many times people ask about my early work from the 1960s. That's my work, too.

Aaron Betsky
And you still believe in it.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
For me art is endless.

Aaron Betsky
It’s endless as an activity but it's also endless in its purpose. It has no end.
Tadaaki Kuwayama
We don't see the end.

Aaron Betsky
But it's also endless in the work itself.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Some work gets old, it's finished. I don't want those.

Aaron Betsky
When I asked you how you begin, I thought you would say, I don't begin. I proceed or I keep working.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Everyone has a beginning.

Aaron Betsky
But you don't make sketches, you don't wake up in the morning and say I want to do blue. So in a way there is no beginning.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
That's right. I keep continuing.

Aaron Betsky
So there is also no end?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
No end, that's right.

Aaron Betsky
This is also maybe dangerous question. You have worked for many years. At some point there would be an end, there will be an end to all of us.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
Yes.

Aaron Betsky
And your work will remain.

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I hope so.

Aaron Betsky
How do you hope it will remain? When you are no longer here to install it and to guide it?

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I don’t know. Maybe that time is when there is no art in the world. People become not interested in seeing a wall or perhaps they don’ need it but maybe then they need the art. That means art is endless.

Aaron Betsky
Thank you so much. I’m very grateful to hear your thoughts and for your art. Thank you!

Tadaaki Kuwayama
I enjoyed the interview.

Aaron Betsky
I also enjoyed it.

(Detailed artist profiles are in the biography section at the end of this book.)
Tadaaki Kuwayama
Artist: painting, sculpture, installation

Kengo Kuma
Architect, University of Tokyo Professor

**Life in New York as an Artist: Harmony of Art, People, and Space**

The Art Scene in New York: Choosing New York Instead of Paris

Kuma
I’ve heard that your work is currently in a Minimalist exhibition at the Singapore National Museum and that your solo exhibition will be held in Taiwan next month. I am glad to have the opportunity to meet with you in Japan during this busy period in Asia for you. It is our first time to meet each other.

Kuwayama
I spend most of my time in New York, coming back to Japan only for exhibitions.

Kuma
When did you move to New York?

Kuwayama
In 1958.

Kuma
More than 60 years ago. What motivated you to go to New York?

Kuwayama
I was studying painting at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music and I hated the Japanese system there. For example, for the *nihonga* (Japanese traditional painting) section, everyone had to act together as a group under a director. This happened in the other departments as well. For me, art was more personal and I needed to be creative. Two years
after graduating, I went to New York.

Kuma
In Japan, even leading artists have little freedom.

Kuwayama
That’s right.

Kuma
Of all the cities in the world, what was it about New York that attracted you?

Kuwayama
When I decided to go to the United States, I had an interview at the American Consulate. It was required at that time. Also, airplane travel was only allowed for politicians. We had to go by boat.

Kuma
Right, travel was by boat at that time.

Kuwayama
That’s what they told me at the Consulate.
Why did I choose New York?
It might have been better to go to Paris, but my thinking was that art could only move forward with financial support. America had won the war and was the richest nation on earth at the time. The only place that interested me in the United States was New York. Looking back, I really thought America was the place for me. It was the center of the post-war world, and action painting and the like were concentrated in New York in 1958. The Consulate was not aware of that, and most of my contemporaries were still looking to Europe.

Kuma
There was not much information about the United States at that time. It was good foresight on your part.

Kuwayama
I was surprised at first by action painting when I arrived in New York. Actually, action painting
was beginning to wind down and it was time for a new movement to appear. Minimalism, and a bit later, Pop Art. The works in New York were larger in scale than anything I had ever seen before. It was amazing to me. As it was already happening, though, it was not for me. That was at the end of the 1950s, beginning of the 1960s. Thinking about it, my timing was good. It was a turning point in the art scene.

Kuma
In architecture, too, everything in Japan was oriented towards groups. I was suffocating. That’s why I went to New York in 1985. It was a kind of ‘in-between’ time for architecture. Post-Modernism was in its last stages and everyone was wondering what to do next. 1985 was actually really a good time in that sense. Was that your experience as well?

Kuwayama
Yes, 1985 was a good time. There were many new galleries and young curators starting to be active at MoMA, the Guggenheim, and the Metropolitan - William Sites, Henry Geldzahler. They would go around on Mondays, when the museums were closed, searching for new talent. The director of the Leo Castelli Gallery told me that, and he said he would bring them to my studio. I thought it was a joke but he really did bring them and that’s how I got picked up. I don’t know if it was because of the timing, or because the next generation of artists had not yet emerged.

Kuma
In 1985, I was also set on New York (laughs). I went with an Rockefeller American Cultural Council grant. Until then, no architect had received the ACC grant. The artist Tadashi Kawamata had been awarded the year before me, and Kenjiro Okazaki a year later. There was a similar consciousness, thinking of connections between art and architecture, space and architecture. I felt really changed in New York. I was registered at Columbia University as a visiting researcher. Basically, I just used the library.

Kuwayama
We also had to be registered as students.

Kuma
Where were you affiliated?
Kuwayama
Most of the artists were connected with the Art Students League. Anyone can be admitted, but you have to sign in for attendance every day for immigration. So it was not much use as a school. We would just sign in and go home.

Kuma
That’s funny. However, maybe the curators you mentioned might have frequented the school…

Green Gallery
Kuwayama
Have you heard of the Green Gallery? I hadn’t, but the owner asked me to take a look. He was young, maybe three or four years older than me. Henry Geldzahler and others often visited his gallery. When I went, there was an open-plan Mark di Suvero exhibition going on. After looking around, I said ‘goodbye.’ The owner took that to mean I had no interest. My English wasn’t very good and I was simply saying ‘goodbye.’ Then Leo Castelli got in touch with me. He started out with “Don’t jump to ‘no.’ I’d like to organize an exhibition of your work.”

Kuma
So, did you have an exhibition at Leo Castelli Gallery?

Kuwayama
I had a solo exhibition there in 1966. I’ve been working with them ever since.

Kuma
You were very fortunate to have the opportunity to present your work like that just two years after arriving in New York.

Kuwayama
Yes, of course. Luckily, they approached me and wanted my work.

Kuma
What kind of artists did Green Gallery represent at the time?
Kuwayama
George Segal, Dan Flavin, Lucas Samaras, and then Tom Wesselmann and Pop Artists. It was much later, but Kusama Yayoi took part in a group show there as well.

Kuma
Green Gallery was a respected gallery at the time. You were lucky to start out that way and to continue selling your works.

Kuwayama
Well, the works sold for only around 100 to 200 dollars.

Kuma
Still, it is amazing that you were able to do that, to be able to support yourself in New York. I heard stories about difficulties of surviving in New York from Tadashi Kawamata and Kenjiro Okazaki.

Kuwayama
The work we were doing in the 1960s was not understood generally by local Americans. Most of my support came from Switzerland and German.

Kuma
Really?

Kuwayama
Yes. I would not have been able to manage only on American support. In terms of museums and galleries, most of my support was in Europe. My first museum show was at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam for the *Color of Shape* exhibition. I was entered as an American. That was in 1966. But I did not have any solo shows at the time and was in bad shape financially. My first solo show was at the Museum Folkwang in Germany in 1974. That gave me some recognition, but almost entirely in Germany. The other artists I knew also had more chances in Germany. Minimalist art was not popular in the US. Nobody bought it. It really didn’t sell in the 1960s. Even Barnett Newman couldn’t sell his works. Ivan Carp who later founded the OK Harris Gallery said it would be ridiculous to ask $1500 for a large work when Marc Rothko could not sell for $1000. That is how it was at that time. Prices started to go up with Pop Art.
Disaster: Everything Lost

Kuma
For me, the medium and materials of drawing are extremely important. You studied *nihonga* when you were in Japan. How did your materials and medium change when you started producing art in New York?

Kuwayama
I had never used any materials other than those for *nihonga*. I had never used oil paints. When I went to New York, I brought Japanese pigments with me. However, those pigments need to be suspended in glue and it was too dry in New York for that. Acrylic paints had just come on the market. Sam Francis, who was a neighbor, suggested that I use those. So I made my own emulsion and suspended the powder pigments in that to make my own paint.

Kuma
Did that create a big shift for you?

Kuwayama
Yes, of course.

Kuma
We can see some of the early works by Kazuo Shiraga for example, who had also been working in *nihonga* but switched to contemporary art. I am interested in knowing what kind of *nihonga* painting you were doing.

Kuwayama
All of my early paintings were lost in the disastrous September 1959 Isewan Typhoon, also known as Typhoon Vera. There is nothing left. My whole past was washed away.

Kuma
That stage of your life disappeared.
Was Sam Francis an influence on your development?

Kuwayama
No, we were just friends. He also helped us find a place to live. It was a loft that he thought was a little small for himself but just right for us. We lived there until 1976 when we moved
to our current location.

Kuma
So, New York was a place for new works. In a way, there was also a feeling of dryness.

Kuwayama
I would add to that the feeling of freedom. I was doing nihonga in my first year there and then gave it up in the second year. (He points to a catalog photo) This work marked my beginning in what I now call Minimalism.

Kuma
How did you change your style? Did it happen right away?

Kuwayama
I started to make pieces with three-dimensional sculptural elements.

Kuma
Your work seems very architectural to me. In architecture, we think about finalizing materials, color scheme, how corners will be - the balance of these. Perhaps you are thinking about similar issues. In architecture, I don’t think it is anymore about grasping the entire silhouette. It is rather more a question of what to do in terms of materials and texture, how to handle the corners, in other words spatial management. I feel much in common with you when I see your work.

Kuwayama
I am working mostly with metallics, a dialogue with inorganic metal.

Kuma
What is the undercoat?

Kuwayama
It is Bakelite.

Kuma
What is the advantage of Bakelite?
Kuwayama
It is a very hard material and does not warp. Originally, a family friend specializing in plywood was making special boards for pianos with an underlayer of Bakelite. When I was in Japan, I went to see what he was doing and that’s how I started to use Bakelite.

Kuma
So it is based on piano making technology.

Kuwayama
I used a metallic spray. I repeated two colors – pink and yellow.

Kuma
Two colors? I find that surprising. It seems to be more colors than that.

Kuwayama
I repeated the two colors and filled the exhibition space.

Kuma
When making such a work, might you change to different colors after checking the actual exhibition space?

Kuwayama
With metallic, the color looks different depending on the angle and distance from the work it is viewed. If someone stands in front of the work, they see various colors and have a sense of the space.

Kuma
I see.

Kuwayama
It is an interesting and unusual material. I also work with aluminum. It is strongly affected by the reflection of light and gives a feeling like it is popping out. Bakelite is very calm as an undercoat. Depending on the material, even the same design can come out differently.

Kuma
Bakelite and aluminum are inorganic metallic materials and it is interesting that their
appearance is subject to change as we face them.

Kuwayama
As soon as the works are hung on the wall, the atmosphere of the space takes over. I am very conscious of the effect of the space.

Kuma
The demarcation of organic and inorganic materials is vague, actually kind of random. So-called inorganic metals contain within them a kind of amazing dialogue with viewers. It is a basic of architecture that whether stone or metal, inorganic materials change when humans come on the scene.
There are not many architects who create architecture with that in mind. But the era of the building silhouette, how to make a building look attractive, has been going on for a long time and this kind of architecture quickly becomes boring.

Kuwayama
That is interesting to me and I feel something in common with my Minimalist work. I’m looking forward to seeing the space you designed for the gallery in Taiwan where I will have my next solo exhibition.

Kuma
Thank you. There are many more things to talk about but I’m afraid our time has unfortunately run out. I hope we will have a chance meet again.

Kuwayama
Please visit me next time you are in New York.

(Detailed artist profiles can be found in the biography section at the end of this book.)
Part 3

The Whitestone's Adventure
By Kazuo Ohi

Introduction

“Whitestone aspires to be an art dealer accessing markets throughout the world.” The Chairman of Whitestone Gallery, Yukio Shiraishi, made this remark during my job interview. This was 45 years ago, and the long hair I had then has retreated, leaving behind the bare landscape of a “karesansui” (Japanese rock garden).

In the late 80s, when Japan was experiencing an economic bubble, I flew to New York with Chairman Shiraishi, to develop a new sales channel for the works of Taikan Yokoyama, a prominent Japanese artist whom we represented as our flagship artist. A local gallerist, who was guiding our visit, gave her view as to which artist was producing the highest quality of painting: “Mark Rothko is the best!” Refusing to be outdone, I responded, “Taikan Yokoyama demonstrates high spirituality.” She and I never agreed on our views of other artists, and 30 years have passed. Today, I am pondering over the fact that the price of works by Taikan has declined to one tenth its previous level while the price of Rothko’s works has multiplied dozens of times. I have never questioned Taikan’s high spirituality.

The variability of art prices stems from the way in which the art market operates. Nevertheless, it is an irreversible fact that human minds are strongly influenced by economic values.

＜画像キャプション＞
Mark Rothko (Fig. 1)
Taikan Yokoyama (Fig. 2)

Kazuo Ohi Biography
Born in 1952 in Bizen City, Okayama Prefecture. He received a B.A. in Philosophy at Okayama University Faculty of Letters in 1976 and in 1977, joined Shiraishi Trading Co., Ltd. (which later became Whitestone Co., Ltd). After being appointed Director of Shiraishi Art Gallery in 1980, he became the Director of Gallery Shiraishi (present-day Whitestone Gallery) in 2007. He also assumed the post of President of Tenshin Co., Ltd. in 2007, and became Vice President and Director of Overseas Business at Whitestone Co., Ltd. in 2011. In 2012, he became the Director of General Incorporated Foundation Karuizawa New Art Museum and Deputy Director of the museum. Since 2018, he has been serving as Vice President of Whitestone Co., Ltd., after resigning from his post as...

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Part 1. An Awakening in Russia

1. A Visit to a “Village of the New Rich” in Russia

   On the outskirts of Moscow, there is a district commonly called “Village of the New Rich” where only the super-rich live. In the spring of 2010, guided by personnel from a local construction company, I had the privilege of visiting a mansion there which the company was building. On the property, which was about 9,900 m², a two-story stone house with a basement was being built. Winter in Russia is extremely cold and the temperature can go down to -20°C, so there was a boiler room in the basement to keep the temperature of the entire house at a comfortable level all year round. There was also a heated swimming pool, a sauna, and rooms for entertainment. A corner room on the second floor containing a billiard table was 100 m² — equivalent to the floor space of my entire house.

   The reason for my visit to the home was to strategize ways that I could sell paintings by Japanese artists to millionaires in Russia.

   After graduating from university at age 22, I joined a company which later became Whitestone Gallery, and have been devoting myself to selling Japanese paintings ever since. After 30 years in the business, I launched a new department dedicated to overseas sales.

   At the time, Whitestone mainly sold modern and contemporary works by Japanese artists to the Japanese, and my new mission was to develop overseas markets. These works included both *nihonga* (Japanese-style paintings), which use mineral pigments, and *yoga* (Western-style paintings), which use acrylic or oil.

   *Nihonga* use traditional techniques, whereas *yoga* are oil paintings whose techniques were imported from Western countries and modified to meet Japanese tastes. Both styles are reflective of the unique aesthetic sense of the Japanese.

   In trying to develop a sales channel for these paintings, I needed to identify which country would most favorably respond to the Japanese aesthetic. After considering the people of Europe and the U.S., whose tastes differ from the Japanese, and those of China, where some might still harbor anti-Japanese sentiment, I thought that Russia, which lies between Asia and Europe, might be a good choice.

   By chance, we had had an opportunity to take part in an art fair in Moscow a few years back, where we successfully sold a *yoga* by Masataka Oyabu. Some *nihonga* painted by Masaaki Miyasako also received a great response from the visitors.

   I was very encouraged when a wealthy Russian, who had visited that art fair, came to Whitestone Gallery in Japan to buy a painting by Miyasako. My marketing activities were also informed by the fact that there are Russians who are unimaginably wealthy.

   I therefore decided to target wealthy Russians as a market for Japanese paintings and began doing research with the help of a Russian guide/interpreter, Irina.
My research was focused firstly on whether Japanese paintings would be a good fit for local residences, and secondly on whether or not the paintings could withstand Russia’s temperature fluctuations and dry climate.

The second challenge was immediately resolved. I learned that the room temperature and humidity in the homes of Russian millionaires are well maintained by their air-conditioners/heaters. The large mansion that I had visited was going to be a home for the owner’s family of three and five domestic workers, which included a boiler manager and cooks.

Because construction of walls and other parts of the house were incomplete then, I could only imagine what kind of ambiance the finished space would have. However, using my Japanese common sense, it was sure to be one of grandeur and robustness, so the paintings to be hung there would have to be full of strength or they would be overpowered.

My conclusion was that they need to be massive and powerful and, of course, appeal strongly to the Russian sense of aesthetics. Whitestone Gallery therefore made a plan to hold an exhibition in Russia featuring paintings by highly-acclaimed Japanese artists whose works were presumed to appeal to Russian aesthetics.

2. Holding a Self-Funded Show, “The Beauty of Japan” Exhibition, in Russia

My strategy for holding a Japanese exhibition in a way that would appeal to and attract many Russian visitors was to bring top-class paintings and exhibit them at top-class venues.

I decided on two national museums in the two largest cities in Russia — the Russian Academy of Arts in Moscow and the State Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg.

The Russian Academy of Arts is an educational institution with a history that dates back to the period of Imperial Russia, and it owns a museum. The president of the Academy, Zurab Tsereteli, is an artist who was acquainted with Marc Chagall and other notable artists. It was by introduction of our guide/interpreter, Irina, who originally came from Georgia, that I was able to meet Mr. Tsereteli, who also comes from Georgia and is a central figure in Russian art circles. He is favorably inclined toward the Japanese and told me that he had once created a statue for a Japanese politician. Thanks to him, I was able to secure those venues at the national museums in Russia’s two largest cities.

For exhibits, I chose paintings of the flagship artists of Whitestone Gallery at that time, such as Hiroshi Senju (based in New York), Masataka Oyabu (professor at Tokyo University of the Arts), and Masaaki Miyasako (a popular artist who is a member of the
Japan Fine Arts Institute Exhibition (Inten). Works of Yayoi Kusama, who was active internationally, were also included. The exhibition, which featured about 100 large works by 12 prominent artists, was entitled “Nihon no Bi Ten” (“The Beauty of Japan” exhibition).

Holding a show overseas is a very pricey undertaking, owing to expenses for renting venues, logistics, publicity, etc. I contacted private companies which were committed to supporting the arts. However, they had been downsizing such projects after the collapse of the bubble economy in Japan. In an attempt to reduce at least the logistical expenses, I tried bargaining with the Russian airline company Aeroflot, but it was reluctant to support a project of a private company like ours.

Then I turned to the Russian Embassy in Japan, which said that Whitestone could list the Embassy as a supporting entity, but that funding would be difficult to obtain.

Since the exhibition was a means of spreading Japanese culture overseas, I contacted the Japan Foundation, which is affiliated with the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Foundation promised up to 1 million yen in support, an amount equivalent to a subsidy granted to a new artist to hold a show in Russia. Although it was far from enough, we decided to apply for it because the Japan Foundation said that the grant would be approved if the organizer submitted an application. I then requested that the State Russian Museum apply for the subsidy on our behalf, but the museum was too proud to accommodate such a request.

After realizing that the exhibition would have to be self-funded, I decided to collaborate with local art galleries and companies in Moscow and Saint Petersburg in selling Japanese paintings to wealthy Russians.

Tolstoy Square is a facility in Saint Petersburg equivalent to what we might call a shopping mall in Japan. I negotiated with the owner of the facility to rent a 330-m² space there for a month while we held “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition. I decided to display about 100 small paintings of the artists whose works would be shown at the exhibition, and sell them directly to Russian clients.

For the show in Moscow, I decided to link up with Triumph Gallery, which is located in front of the Grand Kremlin Palace, and invite VIPs to the gallery to sell paintings, just before “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition at the Russian Academy of Arts.

Mr. Dmitry Khankin, owner of the Triumph Gallery in Moscow (Fig. 7)

3. The Challenge of Logistics, Payment Collections, and Tariffs

I have had a lot of experience linking up with Japanese department stores and have organized many exhibitions. Each time, we had to transport 100 to 200 works of art to the department store. Even if the venue were in Kagoshima, Sapporo, or another remote city, chartering a 2-ton truck in Japan would only cost up to 300,000 yen each way. However, the cost becomes exponential when transporting more than 200 works, including large ones, to be displayed at museums in Saint Petersburg and Moscow, which are located a third of the way around the globe.
Since air cargo is too expensive, a natural alternative would be marine transport. However, there are downsides to shipping by sea — it takes about three months and there is a risk of oil paints melting due to high temperatures near the equator. I considered using the Trans-Siberian Railway, but was informed that theft was rampant when goods were being loaded/unloaded.

Finally, I decided to ship the works by sea and handed them over to a shipping company three months before the exhibition. The works were placed in air-conditioned containers, protected by strong wood frames. The cargo ship loaded with these containers departed Yokohama Port, sailed through the Indian Ocean, passed around South Africa's coastline, went through the Baltic Sea, and then arrived at the Port of Kotka in Finland. After that, land transport of all the paintings was entrusted to a German forwarding service provider, Hasenkamp Logistics, which was asked to deliver the paintings to two separate venues — the State Russian Museum and Tolstoy Square. (Hasenkamp was a designated freight company of the State Russian Museum and had a huge warehouse adjacent to the museum.)

Because a high tariff of 19% was imposed on imported paintings to be sold in the country, I decided to use the “ATA Carnet” (which allows temporary admission of goods into a customs territory with relief from duties and taxes), and send all the paintings back to Japan following the exhibitions. That meant that if a painting were purchased, it would be sent back to Japan first and then re-exported to Russia.

Whitestone also needed some means of receiving payments, and contacted a bank in order to open a bank account, only to be refused on grounds that foreigners are not allowed to open one unless their company is located within Russia. So with the help of a Russian lawyer, we established a subsidiary of Whitestone — Whitestone Russia. Because the company was required to have an office, we rented a space near a Russian subsidiary of Nissin Corporation, a Japanese freight company. Irina was appointed president of Whitestone's subsidiary.

The price tag that came with this undertaking was high, but I was thinking that, by holding back-to-back, full-scale exhibitions of representative Japanese artists at two state museums, we would be able to let many Russian people know how wonderful Japanese art is. I was convinced that Japanese art would capture Russians’ hearts. However, I must say that I was too optimistic in thinking that visitors who were greatly moved by the paintings at the museums would naturally come to Tolstoy Square and Triumph Gallery to buy them.

<画像キャプション>
The building in Moscow where Whitestone Russia is located (Fig. 8)

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4. “Russians Have Unrequited Feelings for the Japanese People”

I had full confidence in the quality of paintings by Japan's prominent artists, and after observing the mansion of a wealthy Russian, I was convinced that the paintings would sell well if the works suited their tastes. For the opening ceremony of the exhibition at
the State Russian Museum, many distinguished guests attended, including the Consul of the Consulate-General of Japan in Saint Petersburg; the director of the museum; and Mr. Alexander Borovsky, the most influential art critic in Russia, while three master painters — Masaaki Miyasako, Kazuyuki Futagawa, and Hanako Kunishi — flew in from Japan. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was packed with a large crowd, even filling up the staircases on the first to the third floors. Television stations, newspapers, and other media also came to cover the ceremony.

The exhibition at the State Russian Museum was from September 2-27, and the one at the Russian Academy of Arts was from October 8-31. More than 10,000 visitors came to each venue. Many also crowded Tolstoy Square, which was a commercial facility. The visitors all praised the beauty of Japanese art.

Mr. Yukio Asazuma, the head of the Japan Center in Saint Petersburg, who had lived in Russia for more than 30 years, often said to me, “Russians have unrequited feelings for Japanese people.”

Even during my short visit, I was able to sense that Russians admire the Japanese, but they were not getting the same level of attention in return.

<画像キャプション>
Opening ceremony of “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition (Fig. 9)

The venue packed with visitors (Fig. 10)

A scene from the exhibition (Fig. 11)

Reception at Tolstoy Square (Fig. 12)

Autograph event (Fig. 13)

A scene from the gallery talk at Tolstoy Square (Fig. 14)

While “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition was being held at the State Russian Museum, a show featuring Japanese culture, organized by Russian artists, was concurrently being held in the same venue on the floor below.

In WWII, the Japanese army was defeated by the Allied Forces, which included Russia (then part of the Soviet Union), but Japanese history textbooks taught us that Japan had beaten powerful Russia during the Russo-Japanese War. However, among Russians, such recognition was non-existent, and some might even think that they had been the victors.

The reason for this may be that because of the Russian Revolution of 1905, which was taking place at the same time, most people’s focus was shifted completely away from the war with Japan. (The war formally came to an end with the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth, thanks to then U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who acted as the intermediary.) It often happens that history is rewritten in a way that is convenient to those in authority.
In any case, I thought that the pro-Japanese sentiment of the Russians should work in favor of “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition project.

5. Works of Prominent Japanese Artists Do Not Sell in Overseas Markets

Many visitors crowded Tolstoy Square but none of the paintings sold. This commercial venue was designed for selling luxury products, but wealthy Russians seldom shop there. The income divide is large in Russia, with the average household earning about 60% of its counterpart in Japan. We hired Miss Saint Petersburg for a month as sales staff at Tolstoy Square. I remember paying this beautiful lady a remuneration of a mere 140,000 yen for the month, which included a bonus for her experience as a beauty pageant winner.

That being said, there are rich people like the famous Roman Abramovich who bought a British football team, paid 530 billion yen to divorce his wife and marry his mistress Daria, and reportedly has a net worth of more than 2 trillion yen.

Even if finding a client of that caliber was not possible, I was hoping that the residents of the Village of the New Rich or equally wealthy people would come to see the exhibition. So, in Moscow, I persuaded the owner of the Triumph Gallery, Mr. Dmitry Khankin, to invite as many as possible of the rich people he knew, with the understanding that all paintings would be sold through the gallery and a large profit margin would be guaranteed.

This tactic worked, and for the opening ceremony of “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition at the Russian Academy of Arts, which began at 6 p.m. on October 6 — two days before the actual exhibition — we saw many celebrated guests arriving in their luxury cars. Everyone at the show was complimentary about the beauty of the paintings.

Opening reception at the Russian Academy of Arts (Fig. 15)

VIPs at the Triumph Gallery (Fig. 16)

A work by Yayoi Kusama on display (Fig. 17)

In terms of Russian paintings, realist paintings by master artists such as Ilya Repin emerged in the 19th century. In terms of abstract works, genius Russian constructivism painters such as Vladimir Tatlin and suprematist painters like Kazimir Malevich led those movements, which are said to have been the harbingers of contemporary art in post-war America. I sensed in local Russian artists a feeling of supremacy over Americans when it came to abstract paintings.

Against such a backdrop, Russians, particularly celebrities, showed strong interest in Japanese paintings, which are neither realistic nor abstract.

Summarizing the meaning of nihonga, Taikan Yokoyama said, “It expresses an intangible spirituality via a tangible object.” According to Taikan, nihonga is therefore characterized by the expression of spirituality within subjects, such as flowers and birds, through paintings, which is based on the concept that animistic spirituality dwells in all
things. I thought that this idea would resonate in the hearts of Russians, because shamanism was the dominant tradition in Russia until Christianity was introduced in the 11th century. At the State Historical Museum, located in front of the Grand Kremlin Palace, we found many Christianity-related exhibits from the 11th century and onwards. However, the artifacts that belonged to the 10th century and earlier were all purely archaeological. I assumed this was because either the pre-Christianity history of Russia fell into the category of undocumented oral tradition or that the relics belonging to the period of the Mongol Empire’s invasion had been rejected as exhibits. Descendants of the Mongolian people still live in the area around Lake Baikal and still practice shamanism, which is closely related to animism.

The form of Christianity brought to Russia via the Byzantine Empire is now known as the Russian Orthodox Church. I personally think that the Russian Orthodox Church earned the support of the people by accepting indigenous deities, just as many in Japan believe that *yaoyorozu-no-kami* (lit. eight million deities, or “an infinite number of deities”) exist in all things in nature. The Russians’ sensitivity and that of the Japanese to finding holiness in nature is somewhat related.

The remarks made by Taikan regarding *nihonga* are applicable to other Japanese paintings in general. That “intangible spirituality” can be sensed also in the works of Masataka Oyabu and Kazuyuki Futagawa.

The VIPs who came to Triumph Gallery praised the Japanese paintings. Watching them, I was recalling the mansion that I had previously checked out. One visitor, who was riveted by a large *nihonga*, began negotiating prices with the gallery staff, as were other clients who were interested in different works. In any country, clients never buy works at the listed price. They always bargain.

With Irina as my interpreter, I explained to the clients notable aspects of the artists. These included points that I normally communicate to Japanese clients, such as the artist being a recipient of the Order of Cultural Merit, a member of the Japan Art Academy, a professor of the Tokyo University of the Arts, etc.

There was one question that all clients asked at the end of our conversation — whether the artist’s works were traded at Sotheby’s or Christie’s.

In the final stage of price negotiations, what they want to know about is the work’s liquidity.

If the works of the artist in question are traded at these international auction houses, they can be liquefied there. Because these auctions are open to collectors globally, the works are sold expeditiously and at the fairest prices. And because commission rates charged by these auction houses are fixed, payments are transparent as well.

This means that artworks serve as financial commodities just like stock and real estate. They can be enjoyed at home and help improve the owner’s social status, which makes the purchase a viable option for buyers despite the high price tags. This also means that, when making a purchase, buyers are also considering the possibility of selling the works, and the global benchmark for assessing their salability would be the artist’s trading history at Sotheby’s or Christie’s — the two dominant auction houses which together hold
80% of the market share.

The global art market was worth around 8 trillion yen as of 2018, of which half was attributed to international auction houses, and the sales of Sotheby’s and Christie’s accounted for 80% of that or around 3 trillion yen. Wealthy people in the U.S. and Europe tend to keep part their assets in the form of artwork.

For them, it is a common practice to purchase artwork not only for enjoyment but also as a financial asset.

That was why VIPs at Triumph Gallery always asked whether the works of the artists they were interested in were traded at Sotheby’s or Christie’s. If the answer was negative, they immediately turned cold.

In most cases, they would put the purchase on hold, saying, “The painting is wonderful, but I have to see whether I’d like to buy it or not,” and we would never hear from them again. There was one work which was successfully sold at Triumph Gallery—a painting by Yayoi Kusama, whose works are often traded at international auction houses.

Expenses for “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition totaled almost 100 million yen. Sales from the exhibitions, which we held in conjunction with local entities in hopes of covering those expenses, were only 30 million yen, which was from selling that single work by Yayoi Kusama. This was the outcome of bringing about 200 works to Russia.

Kusama had been active in New York in the 1960s before returning to Japan in 1972. Her avant-garde style was not regarded favorably in Japan, but in the 1990s, her works began receiving higher acclaim in the U.S. After exhibiting at the Biennale in Venice, her works became popular listed items at international auction houses.

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It was only the work of Kusama, who was still not part of the mainstream in Japan, that sold in Russia. “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition project was therefore a total failure and resulted in a large loss.

As the project leader, I was feeling cornered and hoping to sell more paintings somehow to reduce the amount of loss.

I thought of visiting homes in the Village of the New Rich, which was the type of sales call I had been practicing for 30 years in Japan. Japanese department stores hire sales reps dedicated to out-of-store sales, and through the introduction of these reps, art dealers often make sales calls to private residences to sell works of art. If such introductions are not possible, they occasionally make cold calls.

I asked Irina if we could visit mansions at the Village one by one to make sales calls.

She said, “That’s outrageous! You will be shot and buried on the premises and be forgotten.” As an art dealer, I thought being shot to death while making a sales call for paintings was a suitable way to end my life, but decided not to.

The most fascinating fact that I learned from the Russia project was that no matter how big-name an artist may be in Japan, his or her works will not sell overseas unless they are traded at international auction houses.
Part 2. The Japanese Art Industry

6. Experiences at International Auctions and the Dual Structure of Japan’s Art Industry

International auction houses Christie’s and Sotheby’s both have a history that spans more than 250 years. They have been in existence longer than the Bank of Japan. They initially served as agents for European nobles who needed to liquefy the personal belongings left by their predecessors: books, jewelry, furniture, wines, artworks, etc., when they succeeded to the headship of the family. In recent years, these auction houses have expanded to handling real estate as well.

As I mentioned earlier, the global art market is worth about 8 trillion yen, of which around half comes from international auction houses. Moreover, 80% of that is attributed to sales at Christie’s and Sotheby’s.

In the fall of 2016, I had a chance to visit an auction session at Christie’s Hong Kong. Adjacent to the salesroom, there was a preview gallery exhibiting the lots to be auctioned. The auction lasted for several days. Because the theme was Asian contemporary art, most of the lots were works by Chinese artists, with some from Southeast Asia. Works of Japanese artists were present as well. The artists who were still active then included Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara, and Takashi Murakami. Late artists included Kazuo Shiraga (a member of the Gutai Art Association), Sadamasa Motonaga, and Atsuko Tanaka. A nude work by Leonard Foujita, who was active in France, was also included. I was surprised to see a landscape painting by Ryuzaburo Umehara of a size around 100 go (units of a painting’s size; 100 go is approximately 1,620 x 1,300 mm). He was the top master of Japan’s modern Western-style painting and his work was presented in a distinguished way that truly stood out.

Also, as a special project in celebration of Christie’s 250th anniversary, featured items that had been entrusted to Christie’s by its clients from around the world were on display. Works by Andy Warhol and other contemporary star artists were exhibited in a very refined way, on par with the displays in noted museums.

Because Hong Kong is a tax haven, billionaire buyers from around the world often leave their purchased lots in Christie’s storage space. That way, tariffs are not levied, the lots are kept safe, and it is convenient should the owners decide to sell them later.

In front of my eyes, a negotiation was taking place over an artwork, whose market price could reach more than 1 billion yen. This was a so-called “private sale.” In recent
years, it is said that private sales account for 20 to 30% of the total sales at auction houses.

After about an hour, the lot disappeared from where it was on the wall, replaced by a new work. The sale had probably been concluded.

Thanks to an increasing number of Chinese buyers, sales at Christie's Hong Kong make up around 30% of the total sales of Christie's worldwide.

I had reserved seats for an Evening Sale at Christie's Hong Kong and was planning to take a few Japanese clients with me. At an Evening Sale, only high-priced paintings are auctioned, while drawings and other lower-priced lots are auctioned at a Day Sale, held the following day.

The session began, and the atmosphere became strangely tense when the auctioneer came up to the podium. A large screen was placed at the center, and an image of the lot was displayed. This first item was an artwork by a Chinese artist with a starting price of slightly over 10 million yen. The price kept rising, and eventually the hammer price reached several times the starting price. The auctioneer was conducting the auction in English, but the currency was Hong Kong dollars. On the electronic display board, other currencies including US dollars, Chinese yuan, Euros, Japanese yen, pounds, and Korean won, were also displayed.

Many works by Chinese artists followed, and most of them sold for more than 100 million yen, with many reaching 1 billion yen or higher.

As for Japanese artists, works by Yayoi Kusama and Yoshitomo Nara were sold for several hundred million yen. The expected hammer price of the nude painting by Leonard Foujita was 28 to 42 million yen, but it sold for more than 100 million yen.

I was shocked to find that the large masterpiece by Umehara, the top painter in Japan, failed to sell.

The buyers in the salesroom raising the paddles were mostly Chinese. There were only a few Japanese participants — myself, my guests, and Chairman Shiraishi, the owner of Whitestone Gallery. Many telephone bid specialists were taking calls from bidders around the world. Some of the callers could have been Japanese, but when the auctioneer presented the starting price for the Umehara, only a few bids came in. Because further bids were not arriving, the auctioneer predicted that they would not reach the minimum price set by the seller, and quickly switched to the next lot. The auctioneer seemed to be avoiding spending too much time on lots with low bids so that the atmosphere would not be dampened. He moved on to the next lot in an attempt to enliven the salesroom. It was a discreet act of shifting focus without leaving an unfavorable impression from the unsold lot.

<画像キャプション>
Inside the salesroom at Christie's Hong Kong (Fig. 18)

The work of Umehara that did not sell (Fig. 19)

The nude work of Foujita sold for a high price (Fig. 20)
In the two-hour session, sales reached 9.6 billion yen, attributable mostly to Chinese artists. Works by Zao Wou-Ki and Sanyu mostly sold for over 1 billion yen.

The starting price of Umehara’s work was less than one-tenth those of the Chinese works, but nobody purchased it. The reason was clear as daylight: there were no Japanese buyers. Chinese buyers were present, and many were bidding by telephone, but buyers from Japan were not there, nor were they bidding actively via telephone. Chairman Shiraishi might have placed bids for works by Kusama or Nara, but not Umehara, because even though he was the top-ranking Japanese painter, the value of his works on the international art market has been too volatile.

Foujita is also an established master in the Japanese art world, but his work did sell, because he was active in Paris and his works are owned by many collectors outside Japan. His works therefore can garner bids from non-Japanese buyers at international auction houses.

The value of Umehara’s works, on the other hand, has been established within the Japanese art world, and virtually only Japanese collectors buy his works. Therefore, unless Japanese buy them, his works remain unsold.

This indicates a polarization between “domestic artists” whose values have been set inside Japan, and “international artists” with values set by the international markets.

The costly failure of “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition in Russia, even with the help of a selling event held concurrently, is therefore attributed to the lineup of artists composed of these “domestic artists” (with the exception of Yayoi Kusama).

What caused this polarization? Some attribute it to the dual structure of the Japanese art industry. If so, when did it start?

7. The Frenzied Bubble Era

Allow me to repeat that the global art market is worth around 8 trillion yen, as of 2018. When Japan was experiencing its economic bubble 30 years ago, the global art market was worth around 7 trillion yen, of which 30 percent was from Japanese buyers. This means Japanese buyers were purchasing more than 2 trillion yen worth of art. Today, that has shrunk to one-tenth of that amount.

The works that Japanese bought during the economic bubble were firstly those of Ryuzaburo Umehara and other “domestic artists.” They included Sotaro Yasui, Takeshi Hayashi, Zenzaburo Kojima, and nihonga (Japanese-style painting) artists such as Taikan Yokoyama, Gyokudo Kawai, Kaii Higashiyama, Yasushi Sugiyama, Ikuo Hirayama, and Matazo Kayama.

A work by Sanyu (910 × 727 mm) sold for 1.5 billion yen (Fig. 21)

Japanese were also buying works by “international artists.” Popular artists included...
French Impressionists and post Impressionists such as Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, and Vincent van Gogh; Pablo Picasso; and the École de Paris painters such as Marc Chagall, Moïse Kisling, Leonard Foujita, and Maurice Utrillo.

Japanese art dealers rushed to New York and London to buy these works at international auction houses, because they already had end buyers in mind.

At the peak of the economic bubble, around 1990, the Nikkei Stock Average reached close to 40,000 yen, the real estate market was booming, and the values of paintings skyrocketed.

During this time, I was organizing art shows at department stores and selling paintings there. At many events, total sales amounted to more than 1 billion yen.

One show left a deep impression on me: an exhibition of Ryushi Kawabata at Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Department Store.

Ryushi Kawabata was a prominent modern nihonga (Japanese-style painting) artist on par with Taikan Yokoyama and Gyokudo Kawai. His works sold for more than 10 million yen at that time. This was when a 10 go (530 × 455 mm) work by Taikan Yokoyama, depicting Mt. Fuji, cost 200 million yen. The catalog that I created contained all 70 works of Ryushi Kawabata that I had collected over a few years through closed auctions of art dealers called “kokankai,” (lit. exchange meeting). Ryushi was no longer alive. I printed 3,000 copies of a gorgeous, hardbound color catalog, generously placing only one work on each page.

I delivered this large number of catalogs to Mitsukoshi around two weeks before the show.

The following day, I received a phone call from one of the personnel in charge of the show at Mitsukoshi who said, “One of our clients wants to buy all the works in the catalog. How much would that be?” The total was over 2 billion yen.

I replied, “If you are going to pay it in a lump-sum, I would like to offer a discount of (undisclosed) million yen” and he said “Fine.” Then I asked, “Would the client like to see the works first?” and he said there was no need.

And so it happened that, before the show even began, all the works were bought up by one client, and we had to exhibit the works with “Sold” tags on all of them. It was important for that client that all the works in the catalog were bought together, so that later reselling of the works could be done easily using the existing catalog I had created.

There were many companies that gained exponential profits from the real estate market. It was a time when the price of land inside the Yamanote loop line in Tokyo was said to exceed the total property value of the United States. Buying and selling real estate provided profits of tens of billions of yen to investors.

When stock prices and real estate values were peaking, excess “bubble money” had nowhere else to be invested but the art market. Investing in a single painting worth a few 100 million yen was not sufficient, and the approach of buying a few dozen paintings together was getting popular as a way to make an investment that was on par with buying real estate. It was convenient for the buyer and the seller to have all the works included in one catalog, because that way they could conclude a deal just by looking through the catalog.
It was even more convenient if the paintings were small in size but high in price, so Japanese companies began to import many Impressionist paintings worth a few billion yen each. This trend was facilitated by loan products launched by Japanese major banks using artworks as collateral.

Banks also desperately needed to find more borrowers in order to put their excess funds to work, so they decided to lend up to 50% of the value of an artwork. That meant, using a painting worth 10 billion yen as collateral, 5 billion yen could be borrowed, and that 5 billion yen could then be invested in a second painting that could be used to borrow an additional 2.5 billion yen.

It is unbelievable that such a scheme existed, but the frenzied economy allowed these extreme practices.

Japanese art dealers were profitable customers for Sotheby's and Christie's. End users almost never flew to New York or London themselves to be present at the salesroom. Even if they did, they were accompanied by their art dealers. For a non-professional, it is extremely hard to handle a bid involving a painting worth a few billion yen, as it compels him or her to make sound judgments instantly, without being overwhelmed by the highly-charged atmosphere. That is where the art dealers come in. Dealers, of course, charge hefty commissions. During the economic bubble, it is said that many of the first-class seats on the flights between Narita and New York were occupied by Japanese art dealers.

If Japan was such a lucrative market, holding a 30% share of international auction sales, why didn't international auction houses conduct auctions in Japan? The reason lies in how the art industry was structured in Japan.

8. International Auction Houses’ Attempts to Conduct Auctions in Japan

I visited Christie’s Hong Kong in November 2016.

Around 30 years ago, Japanese buyers had a 30% share of the global art auction market in terms of value. As of 2017, their share had dropped drastically to 3%, owing mainly, but not limited to, the collapse of the economic bubble in the 1990s. At the outset of the economic bubble, the Japanese art industry made a serious blunder.

Starting in the latter half of the 1970s, Japan saw rapid economic growth, which naturally encouraged international auction houses — Christie’s and Sotheby’s — to enter the Japanese market. London and New York were their two major bases, and as a new prospective base in Asia, they chose Tokyo, the capital city of fast-growing Japan. Hong Kong at that time was still under British rule, and political volatility was a concern.

They thus decided to contact Tokyo Art Club Co., Ltd., a representative trade organization in Japan, to seek opportunities to hold auctions in Tokyo. Shareholders of Tokyo Art Club were prominent Japanese art dealers, and being a member (shareholder) of the company was quite a status symbol.

Tokyo Art Club, however, rejected the proposal in order to protect the distinctive art market system in Japan. For them, the international auction houses were nothing but a threat, much like the kurofune (lit. “black ships”), the Western ships that came to Japan
in the 19th century, demanding that Japan enter into international trade. In the magazine *Gekkan Bijutsu* (Art Monthly) issued around the time the auction houses had contacted Tokyo Art Club, there is a story about this, actually referring to the auction houses as “*kurofune*.”

At the end of the Edo period, U.S. Navy Commodore Matthew C. Perry and his fleet of warships arrived at the Port of Uraga, and demanded that the Tokugawa Government terminate Japan's self-isolation and open up the country. Because the ships were tar-coated, they were called “black ships.” Later, the term came to describe any external forces that demand a major change in Japan's social order.

The Tokugawa Government initially showed reluctance, but complied with the pressure imposed by the warships, which led to the opening up of the country and subsequently the Meiji Restoration. The shogunate system was abolished and the new Meiji Government introduced Western-style liberal democracy, which continues today.

During the 150-year period after the opening of the country, Japan interacted with other countries in many different ways — some through war, and others through cultural exchange. Through these experiences, distinctive political and cultural systems were established and then evolved.

9. Withdrawal of International Auction Houses from Japan

When international auction houses contacted Tokyo Art Club regarding the possibility of holding auctions in Tokyo, around 1980, the Japanese economy was booming. The bursting of the economic bubble was yet to happen, and Japan's unique market system was functioning relatively well.

What art dealers fear most are their clients discovering the cost (source price) of the artworks they sell. Many long-time Japanese art dealers were formerly antique dealers, who were known to take pride in their connoisseurship, and it was not rare for them to sell an artwork at ten times their cost. They felt they deserved the hefty commissions because they were the ones who discovered the hidden values of the works.

Art dealers apply a markup to artworks they source from a closed auction called “*kokankai*.” The markup percentage is never disclosed to purchasers.

On the other hand, international auctions are open to anyone who registers with the auction houses in advance. Everything is disclosed: the artwork's image, background, hammer price, etc.

The commissions the auction houses take are set at 12% to 25% of the hammer price. The winning buyer therefore pays the sum of the hammer price and the commission.

When a client is interested in buying a work that an art dealer had sourced through an international auction, the potential owner can search online for the cost price. This means it would not be possible for the art dealer to add such large markups, because clients who were aware of the practice could go straight to the auction houses to buy artworks. However, for a non-professional, bidding by raising a paddle in a salesroom is challenging. Unless the bidder is capable of making quick, sound judgments about the price, he could end up paying too much. If the bidder keeps raising the paddle with his/her adrenaline pumping, the price can easily shoot up 20 or 30%. Considering such risks, some bidders might resort to asking art dealers to bid on their behalf, paying the 10% commission.
To meet such needs, after forming a tie-up with Sotheby’s, Seibu Department Store set up a customer service counter within the store, dedicated to Sotheby’s auction business. The store received a commission of 10% from Sotheby’s for both selling and buying. Even though the percentage was a meager 10%, because this was at a time when wealthy people were buying many Impressionist paintings worth several hundred million yen, the store earned tens of millions of yen on each sale.

Christie’s, the other auction giant, decided to hold auctions on its own at a hotel, the Okura Tokyo, without the full support of Tokyo Art Club. They conducted three auctions there, but withdrew from the Japanese market after that. On the outside, Tokyo Art Club was supportive of Christie’s, but in reality, not welcoming it, because its officials were afraid of seeing the collapse of the established art market system in Japan and their interests encroached upon.

The first auction of Christie’s in Tokyo was held for two days on February 14 and 15, 1980, at the Akebono Room of the hotel, and reportedly 71% of the lots was sold, garnering 1.5 billion yen in sales. Their oriental ceramics session went relatively well, but as a whole, the auction fell short of success

Analysts have various theories as to why, but it was mainly due to sluggish sales of the works of École de Paris painters. Since Japanese buyers were not used to bidding in the salesroom, it was desirable for art dealers to bid on their behalf. However, the poor outcome was a natural result, because inwardly the dealers were objecting to the activities of international auction houses in Japan.

Then President of Tokyo Art Club, Kazuo Fujii, commenting on their entry into the Japanese market, said it was “a good stimulant to the industry,” but I am sure it was a great challenge for them to remedy the conflict of interest between the auction houses and the Japanese art market system that Tokyo Art Club had established. The top priority for Tokyo Art Club was to protect the system from which it had long been profiting.

Prominent art dealers attributed the sluggish sales to the low quality of the lots Christie’s had offered, saying they were second-rate leftovers from the European market. They also criticized the poor customer service offered by Dodwell & Company Limited, which was entrusted by Christie’s to organize the auction in Japan.

It is understandable that, from the perspective of Christie’s, Impressionist painting and other first-rate artworks could be sold easily in Europe, but bringing many of them to an unknown market like Japan would have been too risky.

If the two auction houses were to fully implement auctions in Japan, they needed to overturn the existing mechanism of the local market, but that was deemed as challenging as mixing oil and water. As a middle-ground solution, Sotheby’s decided to work with Seibu Department Store and Christie’s chose to try to customize its auction style to suit the Japanese market.

Sotheby’s made a concession to allow Seibu to act as a broker between its auctions in
London and New York and the Japanese buyers. Seibu doubled the floor space dedicated to selling art on the sixth floor of its Ikebukuro branch, from 530 m$^2$ to 1,060 m$^2$, of which 70 m$^2$ was allocated to Sotheby’s customer service counter. It also opened dedicated sections for Sotheby’s in its Yurakucho branch and in the Tokyo Prince Hotel. These outlets, however, disappeared in the 1990s in the wake of the bursting of the economic bubble.

Christie’s, however, took on a new strategy: changing the types of lots to be auctioned. Their concession was to cater to the Japanese clients by incorporating paintings that were popular in the Japanese art market. With this new approach, however, Christie’s lost much of its distinctiveness as an international auction house, resulting in a termination of local auctions after the three occasions at the Okura Tokyo. After that, Christie’s kept an office in Japan just to focus on liaising between full-fledged international auctions outside Japan and Japanese clients.

So, how did the Japanese art market — which rejected the entry of kurofune — work?

10. The Mechanism of Japan’s Art Industry in the Past

Tokyo Art Club is a key organization, central to the art market system in Japan. It was originally a corporation founded mainly by antique dealers, but many “new art dealers,” which sold contemporary works, eventually became a part of it.

During the bubble, the new art dealers were organizing “Goto Ten” (lit. five-city exhibitions) that traveled to five major cities in Japan. As an artist, taking part in these shows was an honor, and it meant he or she has been officially recognized as a commercially viable artist by the Japanese art market.

Then, as now, artists were often ranked by the yardsticks of the art industry, and the ranks served as the basis for determining the value of their works. These yardsticks include annual publications such as Bijutsu Nenkan (Art Annual), Bijutsu Meiten (Who’s Who in Art), and Bijutsu Shijo (Market Price of Art).

These thick books contain the rankings of artists in major categories, such as nihonga (Japanese-style paintings), yoga (Western-style paintings), and sculptures. Names of top-ranking artists are in larger fonts than lower-ranking artists, accompanied by their short biographies and go-tanka (unit price). Go-tanka is the price of a painting per go (unit of size) that is calculated by dividing the price of the artist’s representative 10-go painting (530 x 455 mm) by 10. When the artist holds a show for his/her new works, his/her updated go-tanka is used to set the price of the works at the show. For example, if the artist’s 10-go painting was valued at 1 million yen, the go-tanka would be 100,000 yen.

Clients interested in buying the works refer to the go-tanka to assess the justifiability of the price. The go-tanka are revised each year when new editions of these benchmark publications are issued. Publishers contact art galleries handling many works of the artist in question to find out how well his/her works are selling.

A typical response by a gallerist would be, “Since his works sold well with the go-tanka at 100,000 yen, we will raise it to 120,000 yen this year.” For these publishers, art
galleries are the most profitable clients, and therefore, the galleries’ updated prices are usually used for the publications. Galleries buy many copies of these publications, which also run their advertisements, and distribute them to the clients who previously bought works from them. The clients are delighted to see the gotanka of the artist they purchased go up, and feel that it was a “good buy.”

Those who come first in the ranking are the honorees of the Order of Cultural Merit, followed by the recipients of the Person of Cultural Merit and members of the Japan Art Academy. Artists who are kaiin (members) of the Nitten (The Japan Fine Arts Exhibition) and dojin (members) of the Inten (The Japan Fine Arts Institute Exhibition) come after that. To be a member of the Nitten or the Inten means the artist has been socially recognized as legitimate. When an artist is not yet a member, his/her short biography might include a description such as “Awarded a special prize at Nitten three times,” which suggests that the artist is a strong candidate for membership.

For sellers, this hierarchical system is very convenient, as it makes it easy to explain to clients how good a work is by showing the ranking. When the seller tells the client that the work is excellent because the artist is an honoree of the Order of Cultural Merit, it translates in the client’s mind that all the works of the honoree are excellent, and therefore this particular work must also be excellent.

This logic works especially well when the client is not too confident about his/her own taste in choosing the right work.

Although I would very much like to, I will not talk about art education in Japan here, because the space is limited. At the time, this unique art market system was working fine in Japan, and precisely because it was working well, the kurofune forces failed to “disembark” in Japan successfully.

However, this solid system was shaken when the Japanese economic bubble burst in the 1990s.

11. Japan’s Post-Bubble Era Art Market and the Role of Department Stores

As the post-war economic boom continued, the Japanese people became affluent in many aspects of life. Wealthy Japanese began buying paintings to decorate the walls of their new homes. Their friends would say to themselves, “My friend has a painting by an artist who is an honoree of the Order of Cultural Merit. I want to see one of those on my wall, too.”

The first place they would go would be a department store.

Department stores Mitsukoshi and Takashimaya set up art galleries within their stores and began selling artworks about 90 years ago, targeting upscale customers. In fact, during the period of rapid economic growth in Japan, most of the department stores in Japan launched art businesses. Even if they did not have in-store art galleries, they used event spaces (multi-purpose halls) for art exhibitions, in order to sell artworks directly to clients, supplemented by private sales led by the division in charge of out-of-store sales.

For staff that were not familiar with selling artworks, the Bijutsu Nenkan (Art
Annual) providing artist rankings was the most useful sales tool.
By this time, sales of artworks at department stores accounted for 70% of total art sales in Japan. In the peak period, they sold more than 1 trillion yen out of Japan’s total art market sales of 2 trillion yen.
The buyers were mainly medical doctors and other wealthy individuals, and companies with good financial standing. These buyers judged whether the price was fair based on the artist’s go-tanka listed in the *Bijutsu Nenkan*.
As long as the go-tanka was rising, clients were happy and would buy more works. With this good cycle in place, the size of the art market in Japan gradually expanded.
The number of art dealers at this time was estimated at 10,000, and most of them were micro enterprises that did not have ample funds to maintain a large inventory. Suppose one such art dealer had 50 paintings, and sold half of them in one year to its private clients and other individuals through shows at department stores. Since the art dealer cannot sell the unsold set of paintings to the same clients, he needs to replace the existing paintings with new ones. *Kokankai*, a closed auction system, comes into play in resolving this dilemma. This auction is not open to the public and the “hammer prices” are never disclosed. There, the art dealers sell their unsold paintings to other dealers, and buy new ones.
The payment for the paintings bought by other dealers is made on the spot using a check, so the dealer only needs to pay for the newly-purchased paintings one month later. This was so arranged by *kokankai* to help each other. This way, even without ample funds, since the payment for the new works can wait until a month later, they can use that time to sell the works to clients, especially if they have good sales skill. To participate in a *kokankai*, however, one needs to be a professional art dealer and have a guarantor ready.
Because the prices of paintings at *kokankai* are undisclosed, the information in the *Bijutsu Nenkan* is the only useful way for clients to assess value.
If a client wishes to sell a painting he bought at a department store, normally the “going price” at the *kokankai* is used (by the dealer) to determine the selling price. When art prices are rising rapidly in general, the client may be able to sell a painting (through the dealer) at a higher price than his purchase price. However, the “going prices” at the *kokankai* suffered a sharp decline after the collapse of the economic bubble in the 1990s, of one-fifth to one-tenth. But this was not communicated to the general clients.

It is rational to think that if a significant devaluation was occurring at the *kokankai*, the art dealer would sell the painting at the current “going rate” (e.g., one-tenth of 1 million yen if the value before was 1 million yen). However, this did not happen, because the dealers thought the clients would be shocked to find out such a huge devaluation was happening. They were afraid of client complaints. The clients were aware of the drop in prices after the bursting of the economic bubble, but not to what extent. So, to soften the impact and still make a profit, the dealers took a strategy of selling paintings at a reduced price that was partly reflective of the devaluation.
For example, I heard a story from a client that recently an art dealer offered to sell a work by Ikuo Hirayama, saying that it was reasonably priced at 20 million yen. The
client said jokingly that if the dealer could mark down the price by 50%, he would buy it. The following day, the dealer agreed to sell it at half the price, and the client ended up buying it.

For the art dealer, it was still profitable to sell the work at half the original price because the sourcing price at the kokankai had dropped to one-fifth.

If the art market were an open market, similar to the stock market, where prices are fully disclosed to investors, when a stock price drops, it will usually recover once investors start buying the stock again. The Japanese art market was so self-enclosed that such a recovery mechanism was not in place.

Clients became increasingly skeptical about the legitimacy of art prices that the dealers would drop whenever they were asked to. As a result, department stores stopped telling clients about the asset value of artworks. This led to the prevailing idea in Japan that art is merely a decoration, with no value as an asset, and could only be resold at a fraction of what you paid for it. Because of this, client skepticism toward the asset value of artworks deepened even further, resulting in a significantly shrunken art market. The peculiarity of the Japanese art market was the fundamental reason why the market, which at one time had boasted more than 2 trillion yen in sales, has now shrunk to one-tenth of that value.

12. The Taikan Yokoyama and Hiroshi Senju Exhibitions

The post-war Japanese art market grew rapidly as the domestic economy boomed. Soaring prices for works by Taikan Yokoyama demonstrate that trend. Paintings depicting Mt. Fuji are his representative works, and those in 10 go (around 530 × 455 mm) were valued at 200,000 yen in the late 50s to early 60s, but rose to 2 million yen 10 years later, then to 20 million yen, and then to 200 million yen over the next two decades. This means the price increased 10-fold every ten years. However, the value of his works began to drop after the bursting of the economic bubble, starting around 1991. The effect of the burst first showed in stock prices, then in land prices, and finally after a year or so, in the art market.

As I mentioned earlier, because the pricing at the kokankai is undisclosed, even when it was dropping, the lower rate was not necessarily applied to the retail prices. And even though the art dealer’s total sales were dropping, profitability was increasing because of the low sourcing prices, which helped art dealers with small inventories to survive. However, those with large inventories of unsold artworks suffered massive latent losses. Many of them had taken bank loans to source the artworks, then went bankrupt after experiencing a deterioration of cash flow.

At that time, Whitestone Gallery was known for representing prominent Japanese artists. At department stores across Japan, the gallery sold works by late artists such as Taikan Yokoyama, Gyokudo Kawai, Ryushi Kawabata, Seison Maeda, and other honorees of the Order of Cultural Merit. In particular, we held many shows featuring Taikan Yokoyama, Gyokudo Kawai, Ryushi Kawabata, Seison Maeda, and Yoson Ikeda. The exhibition of Ryushi Kawabata at the main store of Mitsukoshi that I mentioned earlier is one example.
We also represented living artists, including Kaii Higashiyama, Yasushi Sugiyama, Tatsuo Takayama, Ikuo Hirayama, Matazo Kato, and other great masters.

In 1988, the late art critic Susumu Suzuki published a collection of dialogs with nihonga (Japanese-style painting) artists called “Sansen Soumoku” (lit. Mountains and rivers, and plants and trees). The publication was produced and published by Whitestone Gallery. This book was completed thanks to arduous efforts made by Ms. Shizuka Yamauchi of Art Global Co., Ltd. Because of this book, our gallery was privileged to represent top-class Japanese painters. In one of our shows, entitled “Gendai Nihonga Setsu-Getsu-Ka Ten” (lit. Exhibition of Contemporary Japanese-style Paintings with Snow, the Moon, and Flowers), we exhibited paintings themed on snow, the moon, and flowers that we commissioned from 20 popular nihonga painters. Under the supervision of Mr. Suzuki, the exhibition traveled to Tokyo, Nagoya, and Osaka over a three-year period and attracted many visitors. This project is still continuing, under a new title, “Nihon-no-Bi Ten” (“The Beauty of Japan” exhibition). The show with the same title conducted in Russia was part of this project. However, after the Russian show, we completely renewed the lineup of artists and are currently featuring more painters whose works are traded at international art markets.

Whitestone Gallery has also been focusing on developing new artists, in addition to representing master painters. Even when the bursting of the economic bubble in the 1990s was adversely affecting the value of works by prominent painters such as Taikan Yokoyama, there were some young artists defying the downward trend. One of them was Hiroshi Senju, who was making a mark for himself after completing a Ph.D. program at Tokyo University of the Arts. Chairman Shiraishi of Whitestone Gallery recognized Senju’s gifts early in his career and began exhibiting his works at “Shuka-no-Kai” and other group shows. After he received an individual fine arts award at the Biennale in Venice — the so-called “Olympics of the Art World” — in 1995, we embarked on full-scale marketing activities for Senju.

Since I was organizing art shows at department stores, I consulted with Senju and proposed holding a series of exhibitions entitled “Japan Tour 1996: Hiroshi Senju Exhibition” to my client department stores across Japan. The show featured his Waterfall work that had garnered the said award at the Biennale in Venice. Sixteen department stores across Japan — from Hokkaido in the north to Kagoshima in the south — decided to participate in the 18-month traveling exhibition. We formed a tie-up agreement with local TV stations and newspapers under the Fujisankei Communications Group and promoted media coverage. Taikan Yokoyama and Ryuzaburo Umehara had previously exhibited at the Biennale in Venice but failed to win any awards. Senju therefore attracted much media attention for being the first Asian artist to receive a Venice Biennale award.

Senju, who had moved to New York, came to Japan for each exhibition, to take part in symposiums and gallery talks where meals were served. Intrigued by his extensive knowledge, his handsome looks, and attractive speaking skills, many attended the events, making them very successful.

His go-tanka gradually rose to 300,000 yen (i.e., a 10-go painting was valued at 3 million yen).
After the Hiroshi Senju Exhibition completed its tour around Japan, we organized another traveling exhibition entitled “World Artists Tour.” For this show, we asked the late art critic Mamoru Yonekura to select Japanese artists, and another art critic Junji Ito to recommend non-Japanese artists. Japanese artists chosen by Yonekura included Hiroshi Senju, Atsushi Uemura, Teruo Oonuma, Masataka Oyabu, Koji Kinuta, Kojiro Kosugi, Chinami Nakajima, and Reiji Hiramatsu. The non-Japanese artists included Alex Katz, Sandro Chia, Robert Kushner, Ross Bleckner, George Segal, Tom Wesselmann, and David Salle.

For a few years, starting in 1999, the show toured 23 places across Japan. All the non-Japanese artists were great masters, but were not well known in Japan, and as a result, 70% of the paintings sold were by Japanese artists. The works of Hiroshi Senju performed exceptionally well. We held dinner/talk shows at each venue, but most of them turned out to be fan meetings for Senju. This project demonstrated that the artistry of Senju was as competitive as that of prominent non-Japanese artists internationally, and as a result, the value of his works was elevated even further.

Since I was passionate about assisting Japanese artists in going global, I expected Senju to be at the vanguard of this advancement. I have told partnering department stores in Japan and local media that Senju has the potential to become another Picasso. I was hoping that if Senju’s artistry was recognized in the global arena, many Japanese artists would also get a chance to be known internationally.

Senju has been inspired by Japan’s classical literature in producing works, such as his Waterfall, Mumyosho, and Cliffs series.

At talk shows and other occasions, Senju often quoted and touched on the words and ideas of Japanese authors and poets. For example, he referred to the perception of zoka (nature/god) by quoting the words of Basho Matsuo (17th-century poet) who said that a haikai (a genre of Japanese poetry that Basho was known for) is a Japanese aesthetic that is all about submitting yourself to nature and making the transitions of the four seasons your friends. He also often talked about the idea of “Kajitsu Soken” by Tsurayuki Kino (9-10th century noble, author, and poet) that suggests that true art is born when expressive techniques and the content of the work come into one accord. Both of these ideas are deeply rooted in Japanese traditional cultures, with the former recommending an exclusion of artificiality in literary expressions, and the latter suggesting that in creating true art, the means and objectives should be in harmony. I was convinced that Japanese culture would become widely known in the world if Senju’s artistry spreads globally.

That was why I filled so many pages of the catalog for “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition in Russia with Senju’s works. His works were widely known in Russia along with Yayoi Kusama, probably because of the effect of media coverage of his work at the Biennale in Venice. Unfortunately, because his works have never been auctioned at Christie’s and Sotheby’s, his works failed to sell in Russia.

To be put on auction at international auction houses, works needed to be included in the collections of noted museums in the world or of individual collectors in multiple
In terms of museum collections, Senju's works have been purchased by the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum (Taiwan) in 2015 and by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 2016.

As for private collectors across the world, the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in New York, a gallery representing Senju for overseas markets, has been trying to sell his paintings to private collectors. I think it is time for the gallery and the artist to modify this strategy regarding his works.

As a gallery representing Senju in Japan, Whitestone Gallery must fulfill its responsibility in promoting his works.

Public art project commissioned by the Southern Branch of the National Palace Museum in Taiwan (Fig. 22)

Part 3.
Disseminating New Art from Karuizawa

13. How Art Museums Buy Artwork

More than 20 years ago, Japan’s economic bubble burst. As a result, sales in the Japanese art market shrunk to one-tenth their previous level, or around 200 billion yen. Sales two decades ago amounted to more than 2 trillion yen, of which a large portion came from the sales of artwork imported from international markets. Expensive works by van Gogh, Renoir, and other masters, worth tens of billions of yen, were being imported.

As I mentioned earlier, the Japanese art world is characterized by its dual structure, where the distinctive domestic and international market systems co-exist. Pricing benchmarks in the domestic market are set at closed auctions of art dealers called kokankai, while the international markets operate on an open pricing system employed by international auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s. The primary clients who purchased from international markets were a small number of very wealthy people, who were quite insightful about the global art market, as well as large museums.

In post-war Japan, a number of museums were established successively, and the criterion they set for buying a piece of art was the work’s significance in the history of art. A work was deemed “worth buying” when a museum’s gakugeiin (academic staff) were able to discuss the work in their dissertations in the context of art history.

Therefore, whether or not the work appealed to visitors was of secondary importance. Since the justifiability of the price would be reviewed upon purchase by the owners of the museums, the works were mostly acquired from international auctions. Past
purchases of such works include “Girl with Hair Ribbon” by Roy Lichtenstein, acquired by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government for 700 million yen, and “Sunflowers” by Vincent van Gogh, which Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Co., Ltd. (present-day Sompo Japan Nipponkoa Insurance Inc.) purchased for 5.3 billion yen. Other non-museum owners include Dainippon Showa Paper Co., Ltd. (present-day Nippon Paper Industries Co., Ltd.), which obtained “Portrait of Doctor Gachet” by van Gogh for 12.5 billion yen and “Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette” by Renoir for 11.9 billion yen. The purchases made headlines in the media.

These expensive purchases by museums and well-to-do companies expanded art sales to a level exceeding 2 trillion yen.

While going domestic market prices at the kokankai were dropping to one-tenth of their peak value, those in the international markets were rising. It is said that “Girl with Hair Ribbon” by Lichtenstein, which was acquired at 700 million yen by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, would be worth ten-fold that price or better if it were to be sold at an international auction house today.

Then why did the overall Japanese art market shrink to one-tenth its previous level? It was simply because funds available for museums to purchase artwork began to dissipate. Today, most public museums are financially in the red, surviving only with the help of government funding. Since both national and local governments are also experiencing a financial crunch, for them to reserve funds for purchasing new artwork would not be easy.

Private companies are also increasingly reluctant to buy artwork, except for a few high-earning ones. The situation would have been better had there been a system whereby the donation of artwork by private companies to public museums was accompanied by major tax breaks — a system popular in some European countries and the U.S.

In any case, the two main reasons for the shrinkage of the Japanese art market were a major drop in the going rate at the kokankai and the dissipation of purchasing funds at museums.

What should be noted here is that, in contrast to prices of paintings traded during the economic boom in Japan being reduced to one-tenth, the overall value of those traded in international markets has been rising significantly. When the Tokyo Metropolitan Government bought the 700-million-yen Lichtenstein, the media severely criticized the decision as a “waste of tax money.” Today, however, the work is valued ten times higher, and recorded as “unrealized gain” in the government’s financial statements. If it were put on sale at an auction house, it would garner 7 billion yen or more, and the gain would become a shared asset of Tokyo’s residents.

In the 1990s, museums were not the only groups acquiring paintings traded at international auctions. Many individual collectors were also buying ones the value of which has now risen a few times to a few dozen times, unaffected by the sharp dip in the domestic art market.

A typical example of works that multiplied in value would be those of Yayoi Kusama, which have jumped a few dozen times in 20 years. Her piece that we sold for 30 million yen eight years ago at “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition in Russia would surely be worth at least 200 million yen if sold today.
When a public museum buys an artwork, it requires approval by the CEO of the museum, or by the director, if the museum operates as a “general incorporated foundation.” However, the decision as to which artwork will be purchased is often at the discretion of the museum’s art experts — the gakugeiin (academic staff). Gakugeiin select prospective artwork based on their museum’s policy on collections. In these policies, it is common to find an article regarding the collection of works of regional artists. When artists pass away, their families often sell or donate their works to the artist’s hometown. Because managing such collections is one of a museum’s primary responsibilities, they conduct careful appraisals of the works from the perspective of art history before they make the decision to buy them or even accept them as donations.

No one at a public museum is held accountable for plummeting asset values of works of domestic artists in their collections, because the pieces were not bought for resale purposes. That being said, Matsumoto City Museum of Art in Nagano Prefecture, the hometown of Yayoi Kusama, owns about 340 pieces of her art, some of which were donated by the artist herself, and with the soaring value of her work in the international art market, the museum’s collection is currently valued at more than 10 billion yen. With her popularity continuing to rise, more visitors are coming to the museum as well, which also works in the museum’s favor financially.

I mentioned earlier that Seibu Department Store used to be in partnership with Sotheby’s. Seibu’s former owner, the late Seiji Tsutsumi, was an avid collector of contemporary art and his extensive collection is found at Sezon Museum of Modern Art in Karuizawa. In the eyes of art collectors, this is an impressive collection, the total value of which is estimated to be tens of billions of yen.

14. Opening an Art Museum in Karuizawa in Sixth Months

“The Beauty of Japan” exhibition that I organized in Russia was a complete failure, incurring a loss close to 100 million yen. My assumption that the works of prominent artists popularly sold in the Japanese art market would also sell well in Russia led to the adverse outcome. The only painting sold was that of Yayoi Kusama.

Up to then, for 30 years I had been organizing exhibitions to sell the works of Japanese artists traded only in the domestic market at department stores across Japan. Around the year 2000, however, I launched a “World Artists Tour,” as a means of selling some works in department stores by artists traded in international markets as well. Unfortunately, sales were sluggish, which led Whitestone to offer only a few of them.

Looking back, I feel terrible that the value of works by artists in the domestic market, which I sold to many clients, plummeted after the economic bubble burst.

On the other hand, clients who bought the works of Alex Katz, Ross Bleckner, Sandro Chia, and others from us must be happy because of their increased value.

Even when clients buy works for pleasure, they still hope that their value will go up.
Witnessing the value of their collections drop continually each year, their confidence in the asset value of artworks diminished and was replaced by growing skepticism. At department store shows, it became a rule not to mention the asset value of artwork. If it was even implied by art dealers to clients, they would be barred from the store.

Learning lessons from the bursting of the bubble, Whitestone Gallery decided to completely change the lineup of artists it had represented for the previous ten years. Seeing the failure in Russia reinforced our decision. As our new strategy, our inventory of works traded only in the domestic market was reduced, and that of works traded in international markets was expanded. At the same time, we became more committed to supporting Japanese artists in going global. We hoped that selling works traded in international markets, such as those by Yayoi Kusama and Leonard Foujita, would make our clients happy in the future.

As a base for implementing this new strategy, we decided to launch a museum in Karuizawa, to be opened in April 2012, with this mission statement: “This museum will be a hub for bringing world-class Japanese art to the international art market.” We initially planned a museum that would focus on works of contemporary art that would be tradable at international auctions, but decided to expand the scope to include classic works such as ukiyo-e woodblock prints from the Edo period because they had previously been traded in international art markets. We named the museum “Karuizawa New Art Museum,” based on the idea that all works of art, both contemporary and classic, considered to be tradable in international markets, could be defined as “new art.” We also decided to use “KaNAM” as the museum’s acronym.

After that long business trip to Russia, I returned to Japan in November 2010. Around September of the following year, still in pain over the business failure in Russia, I was given the next mission by Whitestone Gallery: “Open a museum in Karuizawa in six months.”

There is a glass-walled building in the city which can be reached by walking from Japan Railway line’s Karuizawa Station northward for 10 minutes along a large street. The building was originally intended to be a multi-purpose commercial facility, but right after it was completed its developer went bankrupt, leaving the building unused for the next five years. Whitestone Gallery later acquired it and that was the venue I was to use.

By then, I had had 30 years of experience as an art dealer but had never been involved in launching a museum. Art critic Keinosuke Murata, who was then director of the Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, told me that it had taken 10 years for that museum’s operator, Kawasaki City, to launch the museum after they first announced the plan. (Osaka Nakanoshima Museum, which Osaka City has been trying to open for the last 30 years, had not been completed as of 2018.)

Although this building in Karuizawa had already been constructed, a major renovation was required as its design had been tailored to luxury boutiques and other retailers. Inside, it was still one big empty space.

When the project began, we still hadn’t even decided what our opening show would be. Because it was a private museum, we also had the challenge of self-procuring funds for
Because of my failure in Russia which had incurred huge losses, I made it my first priority to make the museum profitable. It was a way for me to redeem myself from that blunder. I therefore searched for museums in good financial standing out of over 1,000 museums in Japan, only to find that they were nearly non-existent. All public museums were in the red.

There were fewer than 10 exceptions, which included Adachi Museum of Art in Shimane Prefecture, Otsuka Museum of Art in Tokushima Prefecture, and Hakone Glass no Mori Venetian Glass Museum in Kanagawa Prefecture. The first two museums are incorporated into local tourism operations, achieving success by charging high admission fees while providing exhibits that achieve high visitor satisfaction. Tourist agencies organize tours and bring both museums large chartered buses full of visitors. The Hakone Glass no Mori Venetian Glass Museum reaps its profits from restaurants and museum shops whose income far exceeds that of admission fees.

Upon launching KaNAM, I thought that admission fees would not be reliable sources of income, because Karuizawa is a summer resort and empties out in the winter. At an elevation of 1,000 meters, Karuizawa enjoys cool, pleasant weather in the summer and no air-conditioning is required. Attracted to such an environment, beginning in the Meiji period, Europeans had moved to Karuizawa and developed the area.

In the winter, however, temperatures can get down to -10°C (14°F) and all existing museums in Karuizawa are closed from December to March. Despite the norm, we announced that KaNAM would be open all year round.

Karuizawa is also known as a luxury resort with a posh atmosphere. There are elegant hotels and it is a popular wedding destination for young people.

Next we decided that our opening exhibition would be a group showing of artists whose works are already being traded in international markets and those who have the potential to reach that status. We decided to name the show “Karuizawa no Kaze Ten” (“The Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition”).

We owe much to support from experts in museum operations, as the Whitestone side was comprised of gallerists, including myself, who had no experience in running a museum. We received a great deal of help, especially from Mr. Keinosuke Murata, Mr. Masanori Aoyagi (then Director of the National Museum of Western Art), and Ms. Yuko Hasegawa (then chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo). I was greatly encouraged when Mr. Aoyagi said, “Give us a good example of a profitable museum.”

In preparing for the first show, we initially negotiated with various museums to loan us works of art to exhibit, but in many cases we were rejected on the grounds that making such a request only six months in advance was unacceptable. We were told that such loan requests normally needed to be made two years in advance, and accompanied by documents of proposal. After realizing that we had no time to collect works from other museums, we decided to borrow or purchase works from galleries and artists that we knew.

Because I knew that the income from admission fees would not be sufficient to run the museum, I planned to launch two supplementary business operations: a service to hold “museum weddings” and a gallery for selling artwork.
The former had already been implemented by other museums. Nakamura Keith Haring Collection in Nagano Prefecture has conducted such weddings several times. The latter – selling works at museums – had generally been considered unacceptable in the art world. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Karuizawa is another museum in the area, which is operated by Umi Gallery, and which sells and buys artwork. Because of this, the museum was not a member of the Karuizawa Museum of Art Council, as there was an unwritten rule – not only in Karuizawa but everywhere in Japan – that museums which sell artwork are not deemed legitimate.

I had an opportunity to attend a meeting of the Japanese Council of Art Museums, which is comprised of many of the museums in Japan. Looking at the faces of the several hundred attendees, I felt a strange sense of supremacy over them, thinking, “Most of the museums these people represent are financially in the red and dependent on tax money and donations,” because, albeit by a narrow margin, KaNAM was realizing profits. Their excuse was that it was permissible for educational institutions to be in the red. I am not sure if tax payers agree with this self-serving concept, that because museums are public institutions, it is fine to use tax money to cover any losses.

Because private museums are not dependent on tax money or donations, they need to find a way to generate revenues. Museum weddings and sales of artwork were our strategic plans to meet funding needs.

The norm was that it was fine to sell reproductions of paintings and prints at museum shops, but not expensive original paintings. The gakugeiin at KaNAM were strongly opposed to the idea of holding weddings and selling art at the museum. I told them that I was trying to distinguish weddings at KaNAM from those at other museums by positioning the event as a “collaborative ARTWORK of two people.”

Highly-acclaimed architect Kengo Kuma had designed the glass-walled chapel for the museum to be used for weddings. But before it was completed, some highly-educated gakugeiin submitted letters of resignation and left.

To obtain national licensure as a gakugeiin, one must earn the required number of credits at a university. I spent a year taking a distant learning course to obtain the license because I was skeptical about whether or not gakugeiin were taught properly about museum management. I found out that there were almost no lessons on management. What shocked me most was that gakugeiin are not expected to put up the exhibit themselves. They plan how the works should be displayed, but the actual implementation is done by logistics service providers, such as Nippon Express, which naturally results in outsourcing expenses.

<画像キャプション>

The Kokoro no Mon (lit. “Heart Gate”), by Jean-Michel Othoniel, placed on the path leading to the glass chapel (upper right). (Fig. 23)

Education for gakugeiin has two emphases: “management and preservation of artwork”
and “research studies,” and apparently no thought is given as to how to run a museum profitably.

The honorary director of KaNAM, the late Mr. Keinosuke Murata, often said to us, “It’s wrong to call gakugeiin ‘curators.’ Curators are people who are capable of managing museums.”

The second floor of KaNAM is dedicated to themed exhibitions, and the works exhibited there are not for sale. There are six rooms, with a combined space of 700 m². On the first floor, however, there are three galleries where shows for new artists are held and the works of the artists related to the themed exhibition are sold.

So, what is the difference between income earned through admission fees for the themed exhibitions and that gained via selling works of art in galleries? The difference is that selling results in a transfer of ownership to the buyer whereas paying admission fees to view the art does not. A buyer controls who can view the painting he/she has bought, but a visitor only has an opportunity to view a painting temporarily. In my opinion, aside from the transfer of ownership, the only difference is the amount of money gained.

Visitors who are touched by particular works at a themed exhibition can buy reproductions and posters in a museum shop to relive at home the impression they experienced at the show. If someone is not satisfied with a mere reproduction, however, it would be a natural course of action for them to buy instead the actual work of the artist featured in the themed exhibition and enjoy that at home.

Some private museums in Japan sell and/or buy works in order to renew their collections. I was told that this is quite a common practice outside Japan.

In March 2017, Fujita Museum in Osaka Prefecture sold 31 pieces of art for 30 billion yen through Christie’s. Most of them were Chinese antiques which garnered far more than their expected hammer price of 5 billion yen. In 2013, Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art sold a work by Barnett Newman for 10.3 billion yen, which made headlines in the media. This was a work the museum had purchased for only 100 million yen more than 20 years earlier.

Private museums such as these sell artwork to cover expenses of renovation or the running of the museum. However, this practice is extremely difficult for public museums to implement, as such decisions require approval from local government assemblies and involve other red tape.

However, according to the report, “Toward Revitalization of the Arts Market,” published by the Agency for Cultural Affairs on April 17, 2018, the Japanese government has decided to sell parts of the collections of public museums in order to revitalize the Japanese art market. It is said that tens of thousands of artworks at Tokyo National Museum fail to get routine maintenance because of insufficient budgets. For the sake of the artwork, their care should be carried out by the private sector.

<画像キャプション>
Karuizawa New Art Museum (Fig. 24)
Because KaNAM is a general incorporated foundation, we are not to pursue profits. Our mission is to make the museum a center for disseminating world-class Japanese art to the world. We are hoping that by being open all year round, the museum will become one of Karuizawa’s landmarks and attract visitors from all over the world. We place top priority on keeping the museum’s operation independent and sustainable.

It is imperative for us to operate the wedding business and to sell works of art in order to fulfill this priority. For that purpose, on the first floor we have three galleries and a banquet room for wedding receptions. We also have an Italian restaurant and a museum shop. Another feature of our premises is a guest house – “Yacho no Mori Sanso” (lit. “Wild Bird Forest Mountain Lodge”), designed by Kengo Kuma – which is located in the woods from which one can see Mt. Asama in the distance.

We aimed at establishing a financial foundation for the running of the museum and these are the means we utilized to achieve our mission statement.

15. Karuizawa: A Base for Disseminating Japanese Culture Overseas

Karuizawa New Art Museum is a museum launched with the objective of becoming a center for taking Japanese culture to the global arena.

What led to Karuizawa becoming home to various museums, including ours, was the “Act on Construction of Karuizawa as a Town of International Goodwill, Culture, and Tourism” enacted in 1951\(^{\text{xxvi}}\). Shortly after WWII, the Japanese government decided to make Karuizawa a town for promoting international goodwill and culture because of its background as a resort town developed by non-Japanese residents. The Act stipulates that public funds may be used for this purpose.

Establishing a center for disseminating Japanese culture to the world is not an undertaking that can be achieved by a single private museum. It’s something that both the public and private sectors must work on collaboratively.

Along with the launch of KaNAM, I had been working on forming the “Promotional Council for Karuizawa, International City of Arts and Culture” (KIAC), at the direction of Whitestone Gallery owner Yukio Shiraishi. We asked Mr. Masanori Aoyagi (then Director of the National Museum of Western Art) and Mr. Ryohei Miyata (then President of Tokyo University of the Arts) to be on the list of supporters for establishing KIAC. We also contacted the then mayor of Karuizawa. He said he would offer help but requested not to be listed as a supporter.

KaNAM was actually launched as the first project for achieving KIAC’s goal. Unfortunately, however, KIAC is no longer active. The town of Karuizawa still maintains a neutral approach, not getting actively involved in the projects of private museums, although it is willing to track our progress. As a public entity, the town’s approach is perhaps the norm and we probably cannot expect more. I concluded that we must carry on by finding ways to support ourselves as a private entity.

<画像キャプション>
Yacho no Mori Sanso (guest house) (Fig. 25)
Many visitors from other countries choose to visit the city of Kyoto to know more about Japanese culture. It is said that among these visitors, art fans head for Naoshima Island in the Seto Inland Sea after visiting Kyoto.

Their destination is the Benesse Art Site, a facility created by a private entity over the course of 20 plus years, where one can enjoy the works of major contemporary Japanese artists. The artworks are exhibited mainly on Naoshima Island, but can be found at facilities on Teshima Island and Inujima Island as well.

One of our initial goals in establishing a museum in Karuizawa was to be a facility similar to the Art Site where visitors can enjoy contemporary Japanese art, but with easier access from Tokyo. (It takes only one hour from Tokyo using the shinkansen – “bullet train”.) Establishing KaNAM was the first step toward achieving that goal.

While we were developing KaNAM, we saw the Benesse Art Site grow significantly. Starting in 2010, in conjunction with Kagawa Prefecture, it has put on the Setouchi Triennale, attracting more than a million visitors each time.

From the outset of the KaNAM project, I have dreamed of holding an international art festival in Karuizawa, with guest artists from all over the world. The mayor of Karuizawa has expressed his personal support for the idea. Kusatsu Town in Gunma Prefecture, which is located an hour’s drive north of Karuizawa, holds an annual international music festival. Emperor Akihito (now Emperor Emeritus Akihito) and Empress Michiko (now Empress Emerita Michiko) visit Kusatsu via Karuizawa every summer to enjoy the music festival.

I think it’s a wonderful idea to hold music and art festivals with artists from all over the world both to the north (Kusatsu) and to the south (Karuizawa) of Mt. Asama.

If an art festival could serve as a medium for Karuizawa to gain global recognition as a center for disseminating contemporary Japanese art to the world, we might be able to hold an international art fair in the future. Art Basel is an annual art fair held in Basel, Switzerland, which attracts notable art galleries and collectors from around the world. If we follow suit, we would need an international airport nearby, since super VIPs arrive on private jets. And, needless to say, we would also need large hotels and conference facilities.

If Karuizawa gains such global status, hosting international auctions by Sotheby’s, Christie’s, and other auction houses would be not too far-fetched a dream. The *kurofune* (lit. black ship, indicating “foreign forces”) that the Japanese art industry repulsed in the past would be a welcome guest this time as a force to unlock the future for the Japanese art world. As a prerequisite to all this, we need a consensus between local residents of Karuizawa and the owners of the 20,000 vacation cottages in town. More importantly, we must get support from the authorities of cultural affairs in Japan.

If international auctions were to be held in Japan, the “domestic artist” in Japan would also get a chance to be recognized globally.

If part of the 1,800 trillion yen representing the personal financial assets of the Japanese population were to be invested in art, it would also no longer be a dream for the works of Ryuzaburo Umehara and Taikan Yokoyama — which have been reduced to one-tenth over 20 some years — to regain their previous value, or even more.
The grounds for presuming such an outcome are the rapid rate at which the price of contemporary Chinese art is rising. China has made it a state policy to use international auction houses in Hong Kong to elevate the prices of contemporary Chinese art.

Humans are programmed to think that a painting worth one billion yen is better than one valued at 100 million yen, regardless of the quality. Foolish, but it is also human nature to think that the culture of one country is superior than that of others if the former is home to artists who sell their work for more than one billion yen while the others are populated only by 100-million-yen-rated artists.

Are my fellow Japanese aware that annual sales at the top gallery in the U.S., Gagosian, far exceed the annual budget of the Japanese Cultural Affairs Agency (108 billion yen, as of 2018)?

Annual auction sales of works by America’s top artist, Jeff Koons, amount to 10 billion yen. Considering the income he garners in addition to auctions, he must earn more than double that amount. This means that if Japan had five Jeff Koons, the sales of art in Japan could reach the level of the entire annual budget of the Cultural Affairs Agency.

16. Collecting Gutai Artists’ Works

The mission of the Karuizawa New Art Museum (KaNAM) is to introduce to the general public world-class artworks, or simply-put, those traded at international auctions. We decided to call these works “new art” which became part of the name of the museum.

For the Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition, our opening show, works that fell into this “new art” category were collected. We were able to get the support for our founding philosophy from many art-related people, and the collection of works went surprisingly well after we overcame the initial problem of not being able to borrow works from museums. We owe this to many notable individuals who agreed to join the show’s executive committee.

In addition to Yayoi Kusama’s works, whose value has been rising at international auctions, we included many works by artists of the Gutai group. Officially called the “Gutai Art Association,” the Gutai was an art group established in 1953 by Jiro Yoshihara and others under Yoshihara’s leadership. The appellation “Gutai” is used globally today.

After Yoshihara passed away in 1972, the group was disbanded. However, when KaNAM was launched, a few of the Gutai artists were still active, including Shozo Shimamoto, Chiyu Uemae, Tsuruko Yamazaki, and Yasuo Sumi. Shimamoto, Sumi, and Uemae passed away before 2018, the year I am writing this book. (Editor’s note: Yamazaki passed away in June 2019.)

In preparation for the Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition, I visited the studio of Shozo Shimamoto in Amagasaki, to ask him to conduct a “bottle-throwing performance” at the museum’s opening event.

Shimamoto was known globally for his distinctive style of painting: he threw wine bottles filled with paint from an elevated position onto a canvas laid on the floor. He invented this method to be in line with the Gutai leader Yoshihara’s teaching to do what has never been done before. Using a crane, he lifted himself 30 meters above the floor and threw the bottles forcefully onto the canvas. The bottles broke into pieces, splashing
paint all over, creating a dynamic work of art.

It is said that he often complained about museums in general, saying, “Japanese museums seldom allow me to conduct bottle-throwing, thinking that it will damage the floor.” When he performed at the Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, he had to use paper cups filled with paint, instead of glass bottles.

When he was asked to do the bottle-throwing at KaNAM this time, it was probably when his frustration for not being able to throw bottles was peaking. Although he was 83 years old, he willingly accepted our offer. KaNAM is a two-story building with a foyer in the middle that is open up to the roof, providing an ideal setting for Shimamoto to throw bottles from the second floor down to the hallway on the first floor. I remember vividly the time I visited Shimamoto at his studio and invited him to do the bottle-throwing event, his eyes lit up, despite his ailing condition that required frequent hospitalizations.

Also, when I visited Uemae at his studio in Maikozawa in Hyogo Prefecture, he was past 90 years of age and had a slight hearing problem. However, he was still actively producing his art and his recent works were hung on the studio walls. They were elegant works and I could not believe they were created by a 90-year-old. He also accepted our request to take part in the Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition and offered to exhibit a few pieces of his precious works from the 1960s.

While I was writing this portion of the book in mid-April, 2018, I received the news of his passing. He was 98 and had lived a full life.

I also have another memory of Uemae.

Back when I visited his studio for the first time, I tried to find it based on the street address I had. When I arrived at the area with many posh residences, I asked some of the neighbors where I could find Chiyu Uemae’s residence. All of them shook their heads. Even when I explained that he was a world-renown painter, none of them knew him.

The rain began to fall, and I wandered around the area for an hour or so. Unable to spot the house, I decided to go home, but just then, I found a worn-out row house without a doorplate.

I said to myself, “this can’t be the house of a world-renown painter,” but just to make sure I entered the place, and there he was.

After this interesting encounter, I was able to get his permission to exhibit some of his works at one of KaNAM’s exhibition rooms. The strong matière (texture features) of his works stood out even among the works we had collected for the opening show. It left a strong impression on the art critic Kunio Motoe, which led to a plan to exhibit Uemae’s
works at the Amory Show, an art fair held in New York. Coincidentally, the Guggenheim Museum was holding an exhibition on the Gutai at that time, so the New York Times ran a story about Uemae with images of his works.

Uemae, therefore, made his global debut at age 90 after being oblivious for many years. Uemae is one of the founding members of the Gutai when the group was formed in 1953. Compared to eye-catching action painting performances by Kazuo Shiraga and Shozo Shimamoto, Uemae was rather inconspicuous because of his time-consuming style of painting, using matchsticks and sewing techniques, to produce mostly wall paintings. He believed in his own style and continued to paint that way, while he worked as a crane operator at a steel mill to earn his living.

At the end of March 2018, the large work he produced in the 1960s was auctioned at Sotheby’s in Hong Kong and sold for more than 100 million yen. Two weeks later, he passed away. I haven’t checked on whether he heard this news before passing.

Early works of the Gutai are traded at international auction houses, which is proof that the values of their works are internationally recognized. In particular, the works produced in the 1960s (before the group was disbanded) sell for high prices. For example, in 2013, *GEKIDOU SURU AKA* (lit. Dynamic of Red) by Kazuo Shiraga was sold at Sotheby’s Paris for 550 million yen and made headlines in the media.

In addition to Shiraga, works by Sadamasa Motonaga, Shozo Shimamoto, and Atsuko Tanaka can garner more than 10,000 U.S. dollars. Other living artists whose works are sold for relatively high prices include Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara, and Takashi Murakami, but the prices are about one-tenth those of the world-renown masters.

While most Japanese domestic artists struggle to sell their works in the international markets, why are the Gutai artists free from the same struggle? Let’s look at the strategy that the Gutai, with Yoshihara as their leader, took in the 1960s to expand globally.

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*New York Times, dated March 9, 2013 (Fig. 27)*

Shiraga’s work on the wall at Sotheby’s Paris in 2013 (Fig. 28)

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17. Gutai, Informalism, and Abstract Expressionism

“Gutai: Splendid Playground” was an exhibition held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from February 15 through May 8, 2013. In the spiraling exhibition space of the atrium, a sculptural installation entitled *Work (Water)* by Sadamasa Motonaga was exhibited. Tubes filled with water of different colors were hung across the atrium, catching the visitors’ attention.

*Work (Water)* has become one of Motonaga’s signature works, and was first exhibited at the Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition in the 1950s, with plastic bags filled with colored water hanging between trees.

The Guggenheim’s Gutai exhibition was significant in the sense that it was a reassessment of the Gutai’s position in the art world. The overall number of Gutai Art Association member artists totaled 60, including those who were involved only briefly.
The selection of works and the production of the Guggenheim show implemented by Senior Curator Alexandra Munroe and Assistant Curator Ming Tiampo were brilliant.

In the Gutai’s early years, there were only 11 members, including Motonaga, but most of them have passed away. The reason the Guggenheim featured Motonaga’s works in a more conspicuous way is presumably because Motonaga had held more shows in the U.S. than other Gutai artists. Kazuo Shiraga was also active outside Japan, but under the influence of the art critic/dealer Michel Tapié, he often exhibited his works in Paris and Milan. In the case of Motonaga, he contracted with the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York and lived in New York for nearly a year, which helped him earn high recognition in the U.S.

By the time this exhibition was held at the Guggenheim, Motonaga had already passed away.

His wife, artist Etsuko Nakatsuji, told me how much he had been looking forward to the show. A large model of the Guggenheim Museum was placed in his studio in Takarazuka — now missing the master — and a reproduction of *Work (Water)* was added to it. I was also told then that his daughter, also an artist, led the installation project at the Guggenheim in order to carry out Motonaga’s will.

As a long-time partner of Motonaga, Nakatsuji has witnessed how the Gutai’s activities evolved.

Their activities in the 1960s were often described as a movement corresponding to Informalism (Art Informel) in France and Abstract Expressionism in the U.S.

The media outside Japan tends to view the Gutai as a substream of the art movements in Europe and the U.S., and historically speaking, Informalism and Abstract Expressionism began in the 1940s, shortly after WWII, while the Gutai commenced its activities with the establishment of the Gutai Art Association in the 1950s. The fact that the movements in Europe and the U.S. preceded the Gutai supports the theory that the Gutai was under the influence of the new art movements in Europe and the U.S.

<画像キャプション>

*Work (Water)* by Sadamasa Motonaga, Guggenheim Museum (Fig. 29)

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Art critic/dealer Michel Tapié, who coined the term “Informalism,” tried to correlate the Gutai with Informalism, presumably in an attempt to secure the supremacy of the movement over American Abstract Expressionism.

I asked Nakatsuji, “Were Yoshihara and other Gutai artists influenced by European and American artists in producing their works?”

She replied, “These movements occurred concurrently, without influencing each other.” Her view was that these movements coincidentally emerged around the same time in Europe, the U.S., and Japan.

Assistant Curator for the Gutai exhibition at the Guggenheim, Ming Tiampo, has discussed this point, based on an extensive amount of documents, in her recent book, *Gutai: Decentering Modernism*. She suggests that the Gutai was a unique movement
that emerged in the periphery of Europe and the U.S., and not as a result of the “propagation” of movements in Europe and the U.S. She says, such “peripheries” exist in a decentralized manner in the world today, which indicates that the era centered on Europe and the U.S. has ended. Tapié, finding affinity between the Gutai and Informalism, visited Japan accompanied by the yoga painter Hisao Domoto who was based in France at that time. This was the beginning of Tapié’s association with Yoshihara and other Gutai artists.

Interactions with Tapié prompted Yoshihara to lead his students in shifting from performance-centered art as a means of expression, to a style that centered on tableaus (flat paintings). It is understandable why this shift was promoted. For Tapié, who was an art dealer, this was because of tableaus’ ease of distribution as compared with performance art. Also, it was due to the fundamental approach toward artworks of the Informalist artists, such as Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet, that the process of producing art was simply a means, and the act and the art were in the means–goal relationship.

The act of dripping paint by the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock was the means, and not the artwork itself, but for the Gutai artists, it was the other way around. Kazuo Shiraga initially conducted a performance of physically rolling himself in the mud, and he defined the act itself as his artwork. Shiraga’s focus for this artwork was on the “oneness” between flesh and mud—a substance.

An art-making scene by Kazuo Shiraga (Fig. 30)

However, the only thing that’s left after the performance is a sea of mud, which is not a distributable product. Shiraga therefore devised a style of clinging to a hanging rope and painting with his feet on a canvas. The act of descending onto the canvas using the rope was not a tangible artwork, but the paint that was spread using his feet became a dynamic expression of art on the canvas.

Because the work remains in the form of a tableau, it now trades at more than 500 million yen at international auctions.

In any case, the theory provided by Nakatsuji and Tiampo that the new art movements concurrently took place in Japan, the U.S., and Europe is an innovative one, because it overturns the established historical theory that Europe/U.S. was at the center of the art movements, with Asia and Africa on the periphery, forming a mainstream–substream relationship.

However, I am trying to establish an even more radical theory that, comparing Informalism, Gutai, and Abstract Expressionisms, Gutai’s distinctiveness lies fundamentally in its definition of “act ≈ (nearly-equal) artwork.” However, that definition was altered under the influence of Tapié to something close to Informalism.

What was absolutely original about the Gutai was making the “act” itself a form of art, which I think is rooted in the Japanese traditional culture (see Section 19 for details).

Let’s go back to the main subject, after my detour.
The Gutai made its European debut in the disguise of Informalism under the influence of Tapié. Investing his personal funds, Yoshihara held exhibitions in France, Italy, and Germany. Next, I’d like to follow his journey in Europe.

18. Jiro Yoshihara’s International Promotional Work

Jiro Yoshihara was very knowledgeable about artistic trends outside Japan, as he has had foreign art magazines sent to him for research purposes since the pre-war period. His early works exhibited at the Nika Art Exhibitions show the obvious influence of Giorgio de Chirico and other Surrealist artists.

Leonard Foujita moved to France in 1913 and became active as an École de Paris artist, but he also began exhibiting at the Nika Art Exhibitions. Foujita became the advisor to Kyu-shitsu Kai, which was a group of avant-garde artists from among the members of the Nika Association, when it was established, and there he shared his knowledge on the European avant-garde movement. Yoshihara was one of the Kyu-shitsu Kai members, and in order to practice what was taught by Foujita, he formed the Gutai Art Association.

The idea “Never imitate others” found in the Gutai manifesto was in fact Foujita’s remark. Reflective of such an approach, the Gutai’s teaching of “making what has never been made before” became the principle of the members’ activities.

The Gutai’s activities, led by Yoshihara, only lasted for 18 years, starting in 1954 and ending in 1972. I think what Yoshihara attempted to do during that period was to help Japanese artists enter the global arena.

He had three strategies.

One was to hold exhibitions across Japan to spread the Gutai movement, which meant selling the works to devotees of the Gutai. However, the conservative Japanese art market gave them the cold shoulder. Except to a few supporters such as Mr. Tokutaro Yamamura of Nihon Yamamura Glass Co., Ltd., almost no works sold.

French art critic/dealer Michel Tapié came in contact with the Gutai around this time and suggested that the members, who had been mainly conducting performance art, should produce tableaux (flat paintings) instead. Tapié was trying to sell these works under the category of Informalism.

Until then, because of sluggish sales, the Gutai exhibitions were incurring huge losses. Expenses for holding the exhibitions should have been covered by membership fees and sales from works, but they ended up being personally paid for by Yoshihara, who was the president of Yoshihara Oil Mill.

Eventually, Yoshihara agreed to seek sales channels in the overseas markets under the guidance of Tapié. Tapié held Gutai exhibitions at the Stadler Gallery in Paris, with which he had a close connection, and other galleries in Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany. The Gutai exhibitions also traveled to some major cities in the U.S. Holding these international exhibitions was another strategy Yoshihara took to help the artists go global. In the appendix section (History of Gutai by Jiro Yoshihara), I listed Yoshihara’s international activities, focusing mainly on exhibitions.

I assume that the international transportation system in the 1960s was not so
advanced, and holding this many exhibitions overseas must have cost a fortune. Unless Yoshihara was able to achieve a certain amount of sales in each country and find a reliable local supporter, it would have been impossible to carry on.

At the invitation of the Dutch Nul group, Yoshihara sent the works of eight Gutai artists to the Netherlands in 1965. All 34 pieces were tableaus that suited the taste of Tapié.

However, the organizer of the Nul group was expecting the Gutai installations in the pre-tableau style. As soon as Yoshihara realized that, he and his son, Michio, who were in the Netherlands at that time, quickly decided to present installations instead, and completed them in few days with the help of local workers. I asked Michio’s wife, Naomi, who was there with them at that time, to give me the details of this incident, as it proved that the Gutai was highly-acclaimed internationally because of their installations from the early period. So, the tableaus that had been transported to the Netherlands were not exhibited, but were moved to France to be exhibited at the Stadler Gallery in Paris in November the same year.xxiii

It is notable that Yoshihara implemented a brilliant, forward-looking media strategy then, which was the global distribution of a newsletter called “Gutai Journal.” Maybe it was something equivalent to SNS media today, and this contributed greatly to the effort to help the Gutai earn global recognition. Yoshihara also opened a private museum, “Gutai Pinacotheca,” in Osaka to hold private shows of Gutai artists. The museum also became an exhibition space for overseas artists whom Yoshihara had been interacting with.

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Jackson Pollock of the U.S. is said to have subscribed to Gutai Journal. Works of Jackson Pollock (who had personal contact with the Gutai), Sam Francis, Georges Mathieu, Franco Garelli, and other Expressionists/Informalists are now being traded at a few 10s of million yen to a few billion yen at international auctions.

So, the three strategies that Yoshihara had implemented were all effective, and the Gutai was able to make a mark in art history. That is certainly why their works are traded at high prices at international auctions today.

Let me add that the aforementioned YAKUDO SURU AKA by Shiraga, that sold for 550 million yen at an international auction, was a work first exhibited at the Gutai Group Exhibition in Expo ’70 in Osaka.

19. Gutai’s Originality

Thanks to the advice from Michel Tapié, Shiraga’s works were left in the form of tableaus, achieving high prices at international auctions. People tend to judge the value of a work by its price. If Shiraga had only rolled over in the mud and failed to produce tableaus, his performance might have left an impression in the viewers’ minds but be forgotten in the history of art. Having said that, people rate Shiraga’s artistry highly today, remembering his mud performance rather than how expensive his tableaus have become.

Saburo Murakami was an early Gutai member. His legendary kami’yaburi (paper
breakthrough) performance is now carried out by his son, Kazuhiko. However, because Murakami did not leave many tableaus, only a few of his works have been traded in the international markets, making their prices not notably high.

In the performance, Murakami would dash through layers of paper mounted on square wooden frames. These live performances were conducted at Gutai exhibitions around the world.

In the 2012 exhibition at the National Art Center Tokyo, “GUTAI: The Spirit of an Era,” Kazuhiko performed the paper breakthrough performance, because his father had passed away in 1996. This time, one frame was set at the entrance to the show, and Kazuhiko broke through the paper to enter the venue, with the visitors following him and applauding.

<画像キャプション>
After the paper breakthrough performance (Fig. 31)

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The broken paper was hanging from the frame and swinging in the air. It was hard to call it an artwork, and was later removed from the entrance.

Ripping paper on shoji sliding doors or breaking glass gives the performers an emotional catharsis, but the viewers can only experience it second-hand.

In one of Saburo Murakami’s performances, he placed two buckets (A and B) in separate locations, and had a third bucket (C) in his hand. He poured water from C to A, A to C, then walked over to B to pour the water in from C to B then back to C, and then went back to the beginning and repeated the cycle. Viewers passing by thought the museum staff was working on something and occasionally ignored the act. Murakami, however, nonchalantly kept on performing.

According to Murakami, this “meaningless act” had meaning.

Such implication can also be found in Shiraga’s mud performance.

In the early period of the Gutai, there was an exhibition called “Gutai Art Using the Stage.” Yoshihara had been involved in scenography for dance performances and had a strong interest in stage performances. Dancing is a bodily expression and a primitive form of art. People in the Jomon prehistoric period in Japan danced to communicate with deities, demons, and other transcendent beings. Perhaps it was accompanied by music using primitive musical instruments.

I think dancing is related to the acts of shamans that have been practiced for the last few thousand years of human history.

Through producing a stage performance, Yoshihara apparently attempted to revisit the “point of origin” of art.

In the performing arts, two groups are expected to be there: the performers and the audience. The audience empathizes with the performers on the stage and can have second-hand experiences of what the performers go through. However, it is still second-hand, and what the performers and the audience experience are not the same.

Unless the audience watching Shiraga rolling in the mud does the same, they will not get the first-hand experience of what Shiraga had undergone. If Shiraga says “take off your clothes and come into the mud with me,” and someone responds, he or she might be
able to get closer to what Shiraga experiences.

A performance by the Gutai artists, in principle, develops in the way it attempts to achieve the audience's involvement. For them, in a way, the audience is also a group of artists.

The tea ceremony is at the heart of Japanese culture. During the ceremony, the master of ceremonies and the guests share the space and time, and stage a performance together. In the process of just drinking a cup of tea, communication between the master and the guests takes place, transcending the master-guest relationship. This relationship can also be described as the subjectivity-objectivity relationship.

John Cage and Allan Kaprow are considered the founders of the art of Happenings, but chronologically, the Gutai's early performances precede them. Kaprow admits this.

Kaprow also evolved in a way to “blur” the border between the performer and the audience, to expand the domain of art and turn daily life into art. The activities of Fluxus, Japan's Hi-Red Center, and Mono-pha can be positioned as movements following this trend.

A performance involving the Yamanote Loop Line by the Hi-Red Center, Nobuo Sekine's Mono-pha movement, and Lee U-Fan's environmental art can be considered the evolved versions of this trend.

Needless to say, these hypotheses have to be verified through a more thorough study.

What I'd like to emphasize here is that, although the view held by Nakatsuji and Ming Tiampo, that the Gutai was a movement akin to Informalism in France and Abstract Expressionism in the U.S. that happened coincidentally and concurrently, is in principle not wrong, but they are overlooking the distinctively revolutionary thought presented by the Gutai.

That thought is that art and the daily lives of people are inseparable.

Kaprow said that after Marcel Duchamp emerged, the traditional expression of Western paintings underwent a revolutionary change, allowing everything to be material for expression. He said, “Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, and a thousand other things” and suggested that not only paint (substance) but many other things can be used for artistic expression. In other words, the living environment itself is material for the art. This concept gives a close resemblance to the idea behind performances by early Gutai members using mud, paper, water, electric lights, and so on.

Jackson Pollock dripped paint to perform an action painting, but the action itself was not the art for him. The action was just a means to complete a work with dripped paint.

As I mentioned earlier, the Gutai is different from Pollock in the way that it perceived the act as the art. I also mentioned that this is rooted in Japanese traditional culture.

Because Tapié introduced the Gutai to Europe and the U.S. in the framework of Informalism, the progressiveness of the early Gutai was watered down, although the Gutai's shift to making tableaus contributed to making their works tradable in the international art markets at high prices, resulting in the heightening of the Gutai's
However, we must not forget that the originality of the Gutai artists is found in their performances. Nor should we forget that Atsuko Tanaka made her work out of her performance using her own body decorated with electric lights.

The paper-breakthrough performance by Saburo Murakami explicitly illustrates that the act itself is the art. And, I think the origin of all these is found in the tea ceremony, Noh drama, and other bits of Japanese traditional culture.

20. **Holding International Art Fairs and Opening Galleries in Hong Kong and Taipei**

For five years from the launch of the Karuizawa New Art Museum in 2012, Karuizawa had been my business base. In order for Japanese art to be permeated throughout the world, works must be purchased by art collectors around the world through international art fairs.

Around 2008, Whitestone Gallery began exhibiting at art fairs in Moscow, Hong Kong, Seoul, and other places. After that, while I was in Karuizawa, President Koei Shiraishi, the son of Chairman Shiraishi, led projects to exhibit at art fairs in New York, Dallas, Los Angeles, Chicago, Rio de Janeiro, London, Köln, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Macao, Jakarta, Singapore, and Abu Dhabi, and tried expanding the gallery’s overseas business using more staff.

There is a globe on the president’s desk that shows how extensively he has traveled to fulfill his passion for overseas business. Exhibiting at art fairs in different countries is an expensive undertaking, but we are achieving sales that more than cover the expenses. Works of the Gutai and other Japanese avant-garde artists, and also of young artists, such as Miwa Komatsu, are being introduced at art fairs around the world.

Concurrently, Whitestone Gallery has opened three art galleries in Hong Kong and one in Taipei, which is one of the largest in Taiwan. It is an exquisite wooden gallery designed by the Japanese architect, Kengo Kuma. Because of its high ceiling, it can house massive works. For the opening show entitled “I LOVE TAIWAN,” we exhibited works by prominent Japanese artists. The show, I was told, attracted more than 10,000 visitors. It was a great success in terms of business as well.

In April 2018, we opened a new gallery in the 25-story H Queen’s building in the Central district of Hong Kong\textsuperscript{xxvii}. This building houses many art galleries, including David Zwirner on the fifth and sixth floors, Whitestone Gallery on the seventh and eighth floors, Pace Gallery on the 12th floor, and Hauser & Wirth on the 15th and 16th floors.

For the opening show, we exhibited works of Japan’s contemporary artists and held a solo show by Dale Chihuly, an American glass artist. Because the opening show was held concurrently with an art fair in Hong Kong, art collectors from around the world came to see the opening show and we achieved record-high sales. Works of Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara, Lee U-Fan, and other living artists sold well, as well as those of Kazuo Shiraga, Sadamasa Motonaga, and other Gutai artists.

\textless 画像ギャラリー\textgreater
Whitestone Gallery in Taipei (Fig. 32)

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Sales of works by Kazuo Shiraga, Chiyu Uemae, Shozo Shimamoto, and others, for more than 100 million yen at an international auction in Hong Kong at the end of March, had a good effect on the sales at the opening show.

I feel that the dreams of the Gutai leader Jiro Yoshihara, who passed away half a century ago, are gradually coming true.

Part 3.
Disseminating New Art from Karuizawa

13. How Art Museums Buy Artwork

More than 20 years ago, Japan’s economic bubble burst. As a result, sales in the Japanese art market shrank to one-tenth their previous level, or around 200 billion yen. Sales two decades ago amounted to more than 2 trillion yen, of which a large portion came from the sales of artwork imported from international markets. Expensive works by van Gogh, Renoir, and other masters, worth tens of billions of yen, were being imported.

As I mentioned earlier, the Japanese art world is characterized by its dual structure, where the distinctive domestic and international market systems co-exist. Pricing benchmarks in the domestic market are set at closed auctions of art dealers called kokankai, while the international markets operate on an open pricing system employed by international auction houses such as Christie’s and Sotheby’s. The primary clients who purchased from international markets were a small number of very wealthy people, who were quite insightful about the global art market, as well as large museums.

In post-war Japan, a number of museums were established successively, and the criterion they set for buying a piece of art was the work’s significance in the history of art. A work was deemed “worth buying” when a museum’s gakugeiin (academic staff) were able to discuss the work in their dissertations in the context of art history.

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Therefore, whether or not the work appealed to visitors was of secondary importance. Since the justifiability of the price would be reviewed upon purchase by the owners of the museums, the works were mostly acquired from international auctions. Past purchases of such works include “Girl with Hair Ribbon” by Roy Lichtenstein, acquired by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government for 700 million yen, and “Sunflowers” by Vincent van Gogh, which Yasuda Fire and Marine Insurance Co., Ltd. (present-day Sompo Japan Nipponkoa Insurance Inc.) purchased for 5.3 billion yen. Other non-museum owners include Dainippon Showa Paper Co., Ltd. (present-day Nippon Paper Industries Co., Ltd.), which obtained “Portrait of Doctor Gachet” by van Gogh for 12.5 billion yen and
“Dance at Le Moulin de la Galette” by Renoir for 11.9 billion yen. The purchases made headlines in the media.

These expensive purchases by museums and well-to-do companies expanded art sales to a level exceeding 2 trillion yen.

While going domestic market prices at the kokankai were dropping to one-tenth of their peak value, those in the international markets were rising. It is said that “Girl with Hair Ribbon” by Lichtenstein, which was acquired at 700 million yen by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, would be worth ten-fold that price or better if it were to be sold at an international auction house today.

Then why did the overall Japanese art market shrink to one-tenth its previous level? It was simply because funds available for museums to purchase artwork began to dissipate. Today, most public museums are financially in the red, surviving only with the help of government funding. Since both national and local governments are also experiencing a financial crunch, for them to reserve funds for purchasing new artwork would not be easy.

Private companies are also increasingly reluctant to buy artwork, except for a few high-earning ones. The situation would have been better had there been a system whereby the donation of artwork by private companies to public museums was accompanied by major tax breaks — a system popular in some European countries and the U.S.

In any case, the two main reasons for the shrinkage of the Japanese art market were a major drop in the going rate at the kokankai and the dissipation of purchasing funds at museums.

What should be noted here is that, in contrast to prices of paintings traded during the economic boom in Japan being reduced to one-tenth, the overall value of those traded in international markets has been rising significantly. When the Tokyo Metropolitan Government bought the 700-million-yen Lichtenstein, the media severely criticized the decision as a “waste of tax money.” Today, however, the work is valued ten times higher, and recorded as “unrealized gain” in the government’s financial statements. If it were put on sale at an auction house, it would garner 7 billion yen or more, and the gain would become a shared asset of Tokyo's residents.

In the 1990s, museums were not the only groups acquiring paintings traded at international auctions. Many individual collectors were also buying ones the value of which has now risen a few times to a few dozen times, unaffected by the sharp dip in the domestic art market.

A typical example of works that multiplied in value would be those of Yayoi Kusama, which have jumped a few dozen times in 20 years²⁸⁸. Her piece that we sold for 30 million yen eight years ago at “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition in Russia would surely be worth at least 200 million yen if sold today.

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When a public museum buys an artwork, it requires approval by the CEO of the museum, or by the director, if the museum operates as a “general incorporated foundation.” However, the decision as to which artwork will be purchased is often at the
discretion of the museum’s art experts — the *gakugeiin* (academic staff). *Gakugeiin* select prospective artwork based on their museum’s policy on collections. In these policies, it is common to find an article regarding the collection of works of regional artists. When artists pass away, their families often sell or donate their works to the artist’s hometown. Because managing such collections is one of a museum’s primary responsibilities, they conduct careful appraisals of the works from the perspective of art history before they make the decision to buy them or even accept them as donations.

No one at a public museum is held accountable for plummeting asset values of works of domestic artists in their collections, because the pieces were not bought for resale purposes. That being said, Matsumoto City Museum of Art in Nagano Prefecture, the hometown of Yayoi Kusama, owns about 340 pieces of her art, some of which were donated by the artist herself, and with the soaring value of her work in the international art market, the museum’s collection is currently valued at more than 10 billion yen. With her popularity continuing to rise, more visitors are coming to the museum as well, which also works in the museum’s favor financially.

I mentioned earlier that Seibu Department Store used to be in partnership with Sotheby’s. Seibu’s former owner, the late Seiji Tsutsumi, was an avid collector of contemporary art and his extensive collection is found at Sezon Museum of Modern Art in Karuizawa. In the eyes of art collectors, this is an impressive collection, the total value of which is estimated to be tens of billions of yen.

14. Opening an Art Museum in Karuizawa in Sixth Months

“The Beauty of Japan” exhibition that I organized in Russia was a complete failure, incurring a loss close to 100 million yen. My assumption that the works of prominent artists popularly sold in the Japanese art market would also sell well in Russia led to the adverse outcome. The only painting sold was that of Yayoi Kusama.

Up to then, for 30 years I had been organizing exhibitions to sell the works of Japanese artists traded only in the domestic market at department stores across Japan. Around the year 2000, however, I launched a “World Artists Tour,” as a means of selling some works in department stores by artists traded in international markets as well. Unfortunately, sales were sluggish, which led Whitestone to offer only a few of them.

Looking back, I feel terrible that the value of works by artists in the domestic market, which I sold to many clients, plummeted after the economic bubble burst.

On the other hand, clients who bought the works of Alex Katz, Ross Bleckner, Sandro Chia, and others from us must be happy because of their increased value.

Even when clients buy works for pleasure, they still hope that their value will go up. Witnessing the value of their collections drop continually each year, their confidence in the asset value of artworks diminished and was replaced by growing skepticism.

At department store shows, it became a rule not to mention the asset value of artwork. If it was even implied by art dealers to clients, they would be barred from the store.

Learning lessons from the bursting of the bubble, Whitestone Gallery decided to completely change the lineup of artists it had represented for the previous ten years.
Seeing the failure in Russia reinforced our decision. As our new strategy, our inventory of works traded only in the domestic market was reduced, and that of works traded in international markets was expanded. At the same time, we became more committed to supporting Japanese artists in going global. We hoped that selling works traded in international markets, such as those by Yayoi Kusama and Leonard Foujita, would make our clients happy in the future.

As a base for implementing this new strategy, we decided to launch a museum in Karuizawa, to be opened in April 2012, with this mission statement: “This museum will be a hub for bringing world-class Japanese art to the international art market.” We initially planned a museum that would focus on works of contemporary art that would be tradable at international auctions, but decided to expand the scope to include classic works such as *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints from the Edo period because they had previously been traded in international art markets. We named the museum “Karuizawa New Art Museum,” based on the idea that all works of art, both contemporary and classic, considered to be tradable in international markets, could be defined as “new art.” We also decided to use “KaNAM” as the museum’s acronym.

After that long business trip to Russia, I returned to Japan in November 2010. Around September of the following year, still in pain over the business failure in Russia, I was given the next mission by Whitestone Gallery: “Open a museum in Karuizawa in six months.”

There is a glass-walled building in the city which can be reached by walking from Japan Railway line’s Karuizawa Station northward for 10 minutes along a large street. The building was originally intended to be a multi-purpose commercial facility, but right after it was completed its developer went bankrupt, leaving the building unused for the next five years. Whitestone Gallery later acquired it and that was the venue I was to use.

By then, I had had 30 years of experience as an art dealer but had never been involved in launching a museum. Art critic Keinosuke Murata, who was then director of the Taro Okamoto Museum of Art, told me that it had taken 10 years for that museum’s operator, Kawasaki City, to launch the museum after they first announced the plan. (Osaka Nakanoshima Museum, which Osaka City has been trying to open for the last 30 years, had not been completed as of 2018.)

Although this building in Karuizawa had already been constructed, a major renovation was required as its design had been tailored to luxury boutiques and other retailers. Inside, it was still one big empty space.

When the project began, we still hadn’t even decided what our opening show would be. Because it was a private museum, we also had the challenge of self-procuring funds for running it.

Because of my failure in Russia which had incurred huge losses, I made it my first priority to make the museum profitable. It was a way for me to redeem myself from that blunder. I therefore searched for museums in good financial standing out of over 1,000 museums in Japan, only to find that they were nearly non-existent. All public museums were in the red.
There were fewer than 10 exceptions, which included Adachi Museum of Art in Shimane Prefecture, Otsuka Museum of Art in Tokushima Prefecture, and Hakone Glass no Mori Venetian Glass Museum in Kanagawa Prefecture. The first two museums are incorporated into local tourism operations, achieving success by charging high admission fees while providing exhibits that achieve high visitor satisfaction. Tourist agencies organize tours and bring both museums large chartered buses full of visitors. The Hakone Glass no Mori Venetian Glass Museum reaps its profits from restaurants and museum shops whose income far exceeds that of admission fees.

Upon launching KaNAM, I thought that admission fees would not be reliable sources of income, because Karuizawa is a summer resort and empties out in the winter. At an elevation of 1,000 meters, Karuizawa enjoys cool, pleasant weather in the summer and no air-conditioning is required. Attracted to such an environment, beginning in the Meiji period, Europeans had moved to Karuizawa and developed the area.

In the winter, however, temperatures can get down to -10°C (14°F) and all existing museums in Karuizawa are closed from December to March. Despite the norm, we announced that KaNAM would be open all year round.

Karuizawa is also known as a luxury resort with a posh atmosphere. There are elegant hotels and it is a popular wedding destination for young people.

Next we decided that our opening exhibition would be a group showing of artists whose works are already being traded in international markets and those who have the potential to reach that status. We decided to name the show “Karuizawa no Kaze Ten” (“The Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition”).

We owe much to support from experts in museum operations, as the Whitestone side was comprised of gallerists, including myself, who had no experience in running a museum. We received a great deal of help, especially from Mr. Keinosuke Murata, Mr. Masanori Aoyagi (then Director of the National Museum of Western Art), and Ms. Yuko Hasegawa (then chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo). I was greatly encouraged when Mr. Aoyagi said, “Give us a good example of a profitable museum.”

In preparing for the first show, we initially negotiated with various museums to loan us works of art to exhibit, but in many cases we were rejected on the grounds that making such a request only six months in advance was unacceptable. We were told that such loan requests normally needed to be made two years in advance, and accompanied by documents of proposal. After realizing that we had no time to collect works from other museums, we decided to borrow or purchase works from galleries and artists that we knew.

Because I knew that the income from admission fees would not be sufficient to run the museum, I planned to launch two supplementary business operations: a service to hold “museum weddings” and a gallery for selling artwork.

The former had already been implemented by other museums. Nakamura Keith Haring Collection in Nagano Prefecture has conducted such weddings several times.

The latter – selling works at museums – had generally been considered unacceptable in the art world. The Museum of Contemporary Art, Karuizawa is another museum in
the area, which is operated by Umi Gallery, and which sells and buys artwork. Because of this, the museum was not a member of the Karuizawa Museum of Art Council, as there was an unwritten rule – not only in Karuizawa but everywhere in Japan – that museums which sell artwork are not deemed legitimate.

I had an opportunity to attend a meeting of the Japanese Council of Art Museums, which is comprised of many of the museums in Japan. Looking at the faces of the several hundred attendees, I felt a strange sense of supremacy over them, thinking, “Most of the museums these people represent are financially in the red and dependent on tax money and donations,” because, albeit by a narrow margin, KaNAM was realizing profits. Their excuse was that it was permissible for educational institutions to be in the red. I am not sure if taxpayers agree with this self-serving concept, that because museums are public institutions, it is fine to use tax money to cover any losses.

Because private museums are not dependent on tax money or donations, they need to find a way to generate revenues. Museum weddings and sales of artwork were our strategic plans to meet funding needs.

The norm was that it was fine to sell reproductions of paintings and prints at museum shops, but not expensive original paintings. The gakugeiin at KaNAM were strongly opposed to the idea of holding weddings and selling art at the museum. I told them that I was trying to distinguish weddings at KaNAM from those at other museums by positioning the event as a “collaborative ARTWORK of two people.”

Highly-acclaimed architect Kengo Kuma had designed the glass-walled chapel for the museum to be used for weddings. But before it was completed, some highly-educated gakugeiin submitted letters of resignation and left.

To obtain national licensure as a gakugeiin, one must earn the required number of credits at a university. I spent a year taking a distant learning course to obtain the license because I was skeptical about whether or not gakugeiin were taught properly about museum management. I found out that there were almost no lessons on management. What shocked me most was that gakugeiin are not expected to put up the exhibit themselves. They plan how the works should be displayed, but the actual implementation is done by logistics service providers, such as Nippo Express, which naturally results in outsourcing expenses.

<画像キャプション>

The Kokoro no Mon (lit. “Heart Gate”), by Jean-Michel Othoniel, placed on the path leading to the glass chapel (upper right). (Fig. 23)

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Education for gakugeiin has two emphases: “management and preservation of artwork” and “research studies,” and apparently no thought is given as to how to run a museum profitably.

The honorary director of KaNAM, the late Mr. Keinosuke Murata, often said to us, “It’s wrong to call gakugeiin ‘curators.’ Curators are people who are capable of managing museums.”

The second floor of KaNAM is dedicated to themed exhibitions, and the works
exhibited there are not for sale. There are six rooms, with a combined space of 700 m². On the first floor, however, there are three galleries where shows for new artists are held and the works of the artists related to the themed exhibition are sold.

So, what is the difference between income earned through admission fees for the themed exhibitions and that gained via selling works of art in galleries? The difference is that selling results in a transfer of ownership to the buyer whereas paying admission fees to view the art does not. A buyer controls who can view the painting he/she has bought, but a visitor only has an opportunity to view a painting temporarily. In my opinion, aside from the transfer of ownership, the only difference is the amount of money gained.

Visitors who are touched by particular works at a themed exhibition can buy reproductions and posters in a museum shop to relive at home the impression they experienced at the show. If someone is not satisfied with a mere reproduction, however, it would be a natural course of action for them to buy instead the actual work of the artist featured in the themed exhibition and enjoy that at home.

Some private museums in Japan sell and/or buy works in order to renew their collections. I was told that this is quite a common practice outside Japan.

In March 2017, Fujita Museum in Osaka Prefecture sold 31 pieces of art for 30 billion yen through Christie’s. Most of them were Chinese antiques which garnered far more than their expected hammer price of 5 billion yen. In 2013, Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art sold a work by Barnett Newman for 10.3 billion yen, which made headlines in the media. This was a work the museum had purchased for only 100 million yen more than 20 years earlier.

Private museums such as these sell artwork to cover expenses of renovation or the running of the museum. However, this practice is extremely difficult for public museums to implement, as such decisions require approval from local government assemblies and involve other red tape.

However, according to the report, “Toward Revitalization of the Arts Market,” published by the Agency for Cultural Affairs on April 17, 2018, the Japanese government has decided to sell parts of the collections of public museums in order to revitalize the Japanese art market. It is said that tens of thousands of artworks at Tokyo National Museum fail to get routine maintenance because of insufficient budgets. For the sake of the artwork, their care should be carried out by the private sector.

Because KaNAM is a general incorporated foundation, we are not to pursue profits. Our mission is to make the museum a center for disseminating world-class Japanese art to the world. We are hoping that by being open all year round, the museum will become one of Karuizawa’s landmarks and attract visitors from all over the world. We place top priority on keeping the museum’s operation independent and sustainable.

It is imperative for us to operate the wedding business and to sell works of art in order
to fulfill this priority. For that purpose, on the first floor we have three galleries and a banquet room for wedding receptions. We also have an Italian restaurant and a museum shop. Another feature of our premises is a guest house – “Yacho no Mori Sanso” (lit. “Wild Bird Forest Mountain Lodge”), designed by Kengo Kuma – which is located in the woods from which one can see Mt. Asama in the distance.

We aimed at establishing a financial foundation for the running of the museum and these are the means we utilized to achieve our mission statement.

15. Karuizawa: A Base for Disseminating Japanese Culture Overseas

Karuizawa New Art Museum is a museum launched with the objective of becoming a center for taking Japanese culture to the global arena.

What led to Karuizawa becoming home to various museums, including ours, was the “Act on Construction of Karuizawa as a Town of International Goodwill, Culture, and Tourism” enacted in 1951. Shortly after WWII, the Japanese government decided to make Karuizawa a town for promoting international goodwill and culture because of its background as a resort town developed by non-Japanese residents. The Act stipulates that public funds may be used for this purpose.

Establishing a center for disseminating Japanese culture to the world is not an undertaking that can be achieved by a single private museum. It’s something that both the public and private sectors must work on collaboratively.

Along with the launch of KaNAM, I had been working on forming the “Promotional Council for Karuizawa, International City of Arts and Culture” (KIAC), at the direction of Whitestone Gallery owner Yukio Shiraishi. We asked Mr. Masanori Aoyagi (then Director of the National Museum of Western Art) and Mr. Ryohei Miyata (then President of Tokyo University of the Arts) to be on the list of supporters for establishing KIAC. We also contacted the then mayor of Karuizawa. He said he would offer help but requested not to be listed as a supporter.

KaNAM was actually launched as the first project for achieving KIAC’s goal. Unfortunately, however, KIAC is no longer active. The town of Karuizawa still maintains a neutral approach, not getting actively involved in the projects of private museums, although it is willing to track our progress. As a public entity, the town’s approach is perhaps the norm and we probably cannot expect more. I concluded that we must carry on by finding ways to support ourselves as a private entity.

<画像キャプション>
Yacho no Mori Sanso (guest house) (Fig. 25)

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Many visitors from other countries choose to visit the city of Kyoto to know more about Japanese culture. It is said that among these visitors, art fans head for Naoshima Island in the Seto Inland Sea after visiting Kyoto.

Their destination is the Benesse Art Site, a facility created by a private entity over the course of 20 plus years, where one can enjoy the works of major contemporary Japanese artists. The artworks are exhibited mainly on Naoshima Island, but can be found at
facilities on Teshima Island and Inujima Island as well.

One of our initial goals in establishing a museum in Karuizawa was to be a facility similar to the Art Site where visitors can enjoy contemporary Japanese art, but with easier access from Tokyo. (It takes only one hour from Tokyo using the shinkansen—“bullet train.”) Establishing KaNAM was the first step toward achieving that goal.

While we were developing KaNAM, we saw the Benesse Art Site grow significantly. Starting in 2010, in conjunction with Kagawa Prefecture, it has put on the Setouchi Triennale, attracting more than a million visitors each time.

From the outset of the KaNAM project, I have dreamed of holding an international art festival in Karuizawa, with guest artists from all over the world. The mayor of Karuizawa has expressed his personal support for the idea. Kusatsu Town in Gunma Prefecture, which is located an hour’s drive north of Karuizawa, holds an annual international music festival. Emperor Akihito (now Emperor Emeritus Akihito) and Empress Michiko (now Empress Emerita Michiko) visit Kusatsu via Karuizawa every summer to enjoy the music festival.

I think it’s a wonderful idea to hold music and art festivals with artists from all over the world both to the north (Kusatsu) and to the south (Karuizawa) of Mt. Asama.

If an art festival could serve as a medium for Karuizawa to gain global recognition as a center for disseminating contemporary Japanese art to the world, we might be able to hold an international art fair in the future. Art Basel is an annual art fair held in Basel, Switzerland, which attracts notable art galleries and collectors from around the world. If we follow suit, we would need an international airport nearby, since super VIPs arrive on private jets. And, needless to say, we would also need large hotels and conference facilities.

If Karuizawa gains such global status, hosting international auctions by Sotheby’s, Christie’s, and other auction houses would be not too far-fetched a dream. The kurofune (lit. black ship, indicating “foreign forces”) that the Japanese art industry repulsed in the past would be a welcome guest this time as a force to unlock the future for the Japanese art world. As a prerequisite to all this, we need a consensus between local residents of Karuizawa and the owners of the 20,000 vacation cottages in town. More importantly, we must get support from the authorities of cultural affairs in Japan.

If international auctions were to be held in Japan, the “domestic artist” in Japan would also get a chance to be recognized globally.

If part of the 1,800 trillion yen representing the personal financial assets of the Japanese population were to be invested in art, it would also no longer be a dream for the works of Ryuzaburo Umehara and Taikan Yokoyama — which have been reduced to one-tenth over 20 some years — to regain their previous value, or even more.

The grounds for presuming such an outcome are the rapid rate at which the price of contemporary Chinese art is rising. China has made it a state policy to use international auction houses in Hong Kong to elevate the prices of contemporary Chinese art.

Humans are programmed to think that a painting worth one billion yen is better than one valued at 100 million yen, regardless of the quality. Foolish, but it is also human
Are my fellow Japanese aware that annual sales at the top gallery in the U.S., Gagosian, far exceed the annual budget of the Japanese Cultural Affairs Agency (108 billion yen, as of 2018)?

Annual auction sales of works by America’s top artist, Jeff Koons, amount to 10 billion yen. Considering the income he garners in addition to auctions, he must earn more than double that amount. This means that if Japan had five Jeff Koons, the sales of art in Japan could reach the level of the entire annual budget of the Cultural Affairs Agency.

16. Collecting Gutai Artists’ Works

The mission of the Karuizawa New Art Museum (KaNAM) is to introduce to the general public world-class artworks, or simply-put, those traded at international auctions. We decided to call these works “new art” which became part of the name of the museum.

For the Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition, our opening show, works that fell into this “new art” category were collected. We were able to get the support for our founding philosophy from many art-related people, and the collection of works went surprisingly well after we overcame the initial problem of not being able to borrow works from museums. We owe this to many notable individuals who agreed to join the show’s executive committeexxi.

In addition to Yayoi Kusama’s works, whose value has been rising at international auctions, we included many works by artists of the Gutai group. Officially called the “Gutai Art Association,” the Gutai was an art group established in 1953 by Jiro Yoshihara and others under Yoshihara’s leadership. The appellation “Gutai” is used globally today.

After Yoshihara passed away in 1972, the group was disbanded. However, when KaNAM was launched, a few of the Gutai artists were still active, including Shozo Shimamoto, Chiyu Uemae, Tsuruko Yamazaki, and Yasuo Sumi. Shimamoto, Sumi, and Uemae passed away before 2018, the year I am writing this book. (Editor’s note: Yamazaki passed away in June 2019.)

In preparation for the Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition, I visited the studio of Shozo Shimamoto in Amagasaki, to ask him to conduct a “bottle-throwing performance” at the museum’s opening event.

Shimamoto was known globally for his distinctive style of painting; he threw wine bottles filled with paint from an elevated position onto a canvas laid on the floor. He invented this method to be in line with the Gutai leader Yoshihara’s teaching to do what has never been done before. Using a crane, he lifted himself 30 meters above the floor and threw the bottles forcefully onto the canvas. The bottles broke into pieces, splashing paint all over, creating a dynamic work of art.
floor.” When he performed at the Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, he had to use paper cups filled with paint, instead of glass bottles.

When he was asked to do the bottle-throwing at KaNAM this time, it was probably when his frustration for not being able to throw bottles was peaking. Although he was 83 years old, he willingly accepted our offer. KaNAM is a two-story building with a foyer in the middle that is open up to the roof, providing an ideal setting for Shimamoto to throw bottles from the second floor down to the hallway on the first floor. I remember vividly the time I visited Shimamoto at his studio and invited him to do the bottle-throwing event, his eyes lit up, despite his ailing condition that required frequent hospitalizations.

Also, when I visited Uemae at his studio in Maikozawa in Hyogo Prefecture, he was past 90 years of age and had a slight hearing problem. However, he was still actively producing his art and his recent works were hung on the studio walls. They were elegant works and I could not believe they were created by a 90-year-old. He also accepted our request to take part in the Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition and offered to exhibit a few pieces of his precious works from the 1960s.

While I was writing this portion of the book in mid-April, 2018, I received the news of his passing. He was 98 and had lived a full life.

I also have another memory of Uemae.

Back when I visited his studio for the first time, I tried to find it based on the street address I had. When I arrived at the area with many posh residences, I asked some of the neighbors where I could find Chiyu Uemae’s residence. All of them shook their heads. Even when I explained that he was a world-renown painter, none of them knew him.

The rain began to fall, and I wandered around the area for an hour or so. Unable to spot the house, I decided to go home, but just then, I found a worn-out row house without a doorplate.

I said to myself, “this can’t be the house of a world-renown painter,” but just to make sure I entered the place, and there he was.
Shozo Shimamoto, Uemae was rather inconspicuous because of his time-consuming style of painting, using matchsticks and sewing techniques, to produce mostly wall paintings. He believed in his own style and continued to paint that way, while he worked as a crane operator at a steel mill to earn his living.

At the end of March 2018, the large work he produced in the 1960s was auctioned at Sotheby’s in Hong Kong and sold for more than 100 million yen. Two weeks later, he passed away. I haven’t checked on whether he heard this news before passing.

Early works of the Gutai are traded at international auction houses, which is proof that the values of their works are internationally recognized. In particular, the works produced in the 1960s (before the group was disbanded) sell for high prices. For example, in 2013, GEKIDOU SURU AKA (lit. Dynamic of Red) by Kazuo Shiraga was sold at Sotheby’s Paris for 550 million yen and made headlines in the media.

In addition to Shiraga, works by Sadamasa Motonaga, Shozo Shimamoto, and Atsuko Tanaka can garner more than 10,000 U.S. dollars. Other living artists whose works are sold for relatively high prices include Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara, and Takashi Murakami, but the prices are about one-tenth those of the world-renown masters.

While most Japanese domestic artists struggle to sell their works in the international markets, why are the Gutai artists free from the same struggle? Let’s look at the strategy that the Gutai, with Yoshihara as their leader, took in the 1960s to expand globally.

<画像キャプション>
New York Times, dated March 9, 2013 (Fig. 27)

Shiraga’s work on the wall at Sotheby’s Paris in 2013 (Fig. 28)

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**17. Gutai, Informalism, and Abstract Expressionism**

“Gutai: Splendid Playground” was an exhibition held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York from February 15 through May 8, 2013. In the spiraling exhibition space of the atrium, a sculptural installation entitled Work (Water) by Sadamasa Motonaga was exhibited. Tubes filled with water of different colors were hung across the atrium, catching the visitors’ attention.

*Work (Water)* has become one of Motonaga’s signature works, and was first exhibited at the Outdoor Gutai Art Exhibition in the 1950s, with plastic bags filled with colored water hanging between trees.

The Guggenheim’s Gutai exhibition was significant in the sense that it was a reassessment of the Gutai’s position in the art world. The overall number of Gutai Art Association member artists totaled 60, including those who were involved only briefly. The selection of works and the production of the Guggenheim show implemented by Senior Curator Alexandra Munroe and Assistant Curator Ming Tiampo were brilliant.

In the Gutai’s early years, there were only 11 members, including Motonaga, but most of them have passed away. The reason the Guggenheim featured Motonaga’s works in a more conspicuous way is presumably because Motonaga had held more shows in the U.S. than other Gutai artists. Kazuo Shiraga was also active outside Japan, but under the
influence of the art critic/dealer Michel Tapié, he often exhibited his works in Paris and Milan. In the case of Motonaga, he contracted with the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York and lived in New York for nearly a year, which helped him earn high recognition in the U.S.

By the time this exhibition was held at the Guggenheim, Motonaga had already passed away.

His wife, artist Etsuko Nakatsuji, told me how much he had been looking forward to the show. A large model of the Guggenheim Museum was placed in his studio in Takarazuka — now missing the master — and a reproduction of Work (Water) was added to it. I was also told then that his daughter, also an artist, led the installation project at the Guggenheim in order to carry out Motonaga’s will.

As a long-time partner of Motonaga, Nakatsuji has witnessed how the Gutai’s activities evolved.

Their activities in the 1960s were often described as a movement corresponding to Informalism (Art Informel) in France and Abstract Expressionism in the U.S.

The media outside Japan tends to view the Gutai as a substream of the art movements in Europe and the U.S., and historically speaking, Informalism and Abstract Expressionism began in the 1940s, shortly after WWII, while the Gutai commenced its activities with the establishment of the Gutai Art Association in the 1950s. The fact that the movements in Europe and the U.S. preceded the Gutai supports the theory that the Gutai was under the influence of the new art movements in Europe and the U.S.

<画像キャプション>

Work (Water) by Sadamasa Motonaga, Guggenheim Museum (Fig. 29)

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Art critic/dealer Michel Tapié, who coined the term “Informalism,” tried to correlate the Gutai with Informalism, presumably in an attempt to secure the supremacy of the movement over American Abstract Expressionism.

I asked Nakatsuji, “Were Yoshihara and other Gutai artists influenced by European and American artists in producing their works?”

She replied, “These movements occurred concurrently, without influencing each other.” Her view was that these movements coincidentally emerged around the same time in Europe, the U.S., and Japan.

Assistant Curator for the Gutai exhibition at the Guggenheim, Ming Tiampo, has discussed this point, based on an extensive amount of documents, in her recent book, Gutai: Decentering Modernism. She suggests that the Gutai was a unique movement that emerged in the periphery of Europe and the U.S., and not as a result of the “propagation” of movements in Europe and the U.S. She says, such “peripheries” exist in a decentralized manner in the world today, which indicates that the era centered on Europe and the U.S. has ended. Tapié, finding affinity between the Gutai and Informalism, visited Japan accompanied by the yoga painter Hisao Domoto who was based in France at that time. This was the beginning of Tapié’s association with...
Yoshihara and other Gutai artists.

Interactions with Tapié prompted Yoshihara to lead his students in shifting from performance-centered art as a means of expression, to a style that centered on tableaus (flat paintings). It is understandable why this shift was promoted. For Tapié, who was an art dealer, this was because of tableaus’ ease of distribution as compared with performance art. Also, it was due to the fundamental approach toward artworks of the Informalist artists, such as Jean Fautrier and Jean Dubuffet, that the process of producing art was simply a means, and the act and the art were in the means–goal relationship.

The act of dripping paint by the Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock was the means, and not the artwork itself, but for the Gutai artists, it was the other way around. Kazuo Shiraga initially conducted a performance of physically rolling himself in the mud, and he defined the act itself as his artwork. Shiraga’s focus for this artwork was on the “oneness” between flesh and mud — a substance.

<画像キャプション>
An art-making scene by Kazuo Shiraga (Fig. 30)

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However, the only thing that’s left after the performance is a sea of mud, which is not a distributable product. Shiraga therefore devised a style of clinging to a hanging rope and painting with his feet on a canvas. The act of descending onto the canvas using the rope was not a tangible artwork, but the paint that was spread using his feet became a dynamic expression of art on the canvas.

Because the work remains in the form of a tableau, it now trades at more than 500 million yen at international auctions.

In any case, the theory provided by Nakatsuji and Tiampo that the new art movements concurrently took place in Japan, the U.S., and Europe is an innovative one, because it overturns the established historical theory that Europe/U.S. was at the center of the art movements, with Asia and Africa on the periphery, forming a mainstream-substream relationship.

However, I am trying to establish an even more radical theory that, comparing Informalism, Gutai, and Abstract Expressionisms, Gutai’s distinctiveness lies fundamentally in its definition of “act ≈ (nearly-equal) artwork.” However, that definition was altered under the influence of Tapié to something close to Informalism.

What was absolutely original about the Gutai was making the “act” itself a form of art, which I think is rooted in the Japanese traditional culture (see Section 19 for details).

Let’s go back to the main subject, after my detour.

The Gutai made its European debut in the disguise of Informalism under the influence of Tapié. Investing his personal funds, Yoshihara held exhibitions in France, Italy, and Germany. Next, I’d like to follow his journey in Europe.

18. Jiro Yoshihara’s International Promotional Work

Jiro Yoshihara was very knowledgeable about artistic trends outside Japan, as he has
had foreign art magazines sent to him for research purposes since the pre-war period. His early works exhibited at the Nika Art Exhibitions show the obvious influence of Giorgio de Chirico and other Surrealist artists.

Leonard Foujita moved to France in 1913 and became active as an École de Paris artist, but he also began exhibiting at the Nika Art Exhibitions. Foujita became the advisor to Kyu-shitsu Kai, which was a group of avant-garde artists from among the members of the Nika Association, when it was established, and there he shared his knowledge on the European avant-garde movement. Yoshihara was one of the Kyu-shitsu Kai members, and in order to practice what was taught by Foujita, he formed the Gutai Art Association.

The idea “Never imitate others” found in the Gutai manifesto was in fact Foujita’s remark. Reflective of such an approach, the Gutai’s teaching of “making what has never been made before” became the principle of the members’ activities.

The Gutai’s activities, led by Yoshihara, only lasted for 18 years, starting in 1954 and ending in 1972. I think what Yoshihara attempted to do during that period was to help Japanese artists enter the global arena.

He had three strategies.

One was to hold exhibitions across Japan to spread the Gutai movement, which meant selling the works to devotees of the Gutai. However, the conservative Japanese art market gave them the cold shoulder. Except to a few supporters such as Mr. Tokutaro Yamamura of Nihon Yamamura Glass Co., Ltd., almost no works sold.

French art critic/dealer Michel Tapié came in contact with the Gutai around this time and suggested that the members, who had been mainly conducting performance art, should produce tableaus (flat paintings) instead. Tapié was trying to sell these works under the category of Informalism.

Until then, because of sluggish sales, the Gutai exhibitions were incurring huge losses. Expenses for holding the exhibitions should have been covered by membership fees and sales from works, but they ended up being personally paid for by Yoshihara, who was the president of Yoshihara Oil Mill.

Eventually, Yoshihara agreed to seek sales channels in the overseas markets under the guidance of Tapié. Tapié held Gutai exhibitions at the Stadler Gallery in Paris, with which he had a close connection, and other galleries in Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany. The Gutai exhibitions also traveled to some major cities in the U.S. Holding these international exhibitions was another strategy Yoshihara took to help the artists go global. In the appendix section (History of Gutai by Jiro Yoshihara), I listed Yoshihara’s international activities, focusing mainly on exhibitions.

I assume that the international transportation system in the 1960s was not so advanced, and holding this many exhibitions overseas must have cost a fortune. Unless Yoshihara was able to achieve a certain amount of sales in each country and find a reliable local supporter, it would have been impossible to carry on.

At the invitation of the Dutch Nul group, Yoshihara sent the works of eight Gutai artists to the Netherlands in 1965. All 34 pieces were tableaus that suited the taste of Tapié.
However, the organizer of the Nul group was expecting the Gutai installations in the pre-tableau style. As soon as Yoshihara realized that, he and his son, Michio, who were in the Netherlands at that time, quickly decided to present installations instead, and completed them in few days with the help of local workers. I asked Michio’s wife, Naomi, who was there with them at that time, to give me the details of this incident, as it proved that the Gutai was highly-acclaimed internationally because of their installations from the early period. So, the tableaus that had been transported to the Netherlands were not exhibited, but were moved to France to be exhibited at the Stadler Gallery in Paris in November the same year xxiii.

It is notable that Yoshihara implemented a brilliant, forward-looking media strategy then, which was the global distribution of a newsletter called “Gutai Journal.” Maybe it was something equivalent to SNS media today, and this contributed greatly to the effort to help the Gutai earn global recognition. Yoshihara also opened a private museum, “Gutai Pinacotheca,” in Osaka to hold private shows of Gutai artists. The museum also became an exhibition space for overseas artists whom Yoshihara had been interacting with.

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Jackson Pollock of the U.S. is said to have subscribed to Gutai Journal. Works of Jackson Pollock (who had personal contact with the Gutai), Sam Francis, Georges Mathieu, Franco Garelli, and other Expressionists/Informalists are now being traded at a few 10s of million yen to a few billion yen at international auctions.

So, the three strategies that Yoshihara had implemented were all effective, and the Gutai was able to make a mark in art history. That is certainly why their works are traded at high prices at international auctions today.

Let me add that the aforementioned YAKUDO SURU AKA by Shiraga, that sold for 550 million yen at an international auction, was a work first exhibited at the Gutai Group Exhibition in Expo ’70 in Osaka.

19. Gutai’s Originality

Thanks to the advice from Michel Tapié, Shiraga’s works were left in the form of tableaus, achieving high prices at international auctions. People tend to judge the value of a work by its price. If Shiraga had only rolled over in the mud and failed to produce tableaus, his performance might have left an impression in the viewers’ minds but be forgotten in the history of art. Having said that, people rate Shiraga’s artistry highly today, remembering his mud performance rather than how expensive his tableaus have become.

Saburo Murakami was an early Gutai member. His legendary kami’yaburi (paper breakthrough) performance is now carried out by his son, Kazuhiko. However, because Murakami did not leave many tableaus, only a few of his works have been traded in the international markets, making their prices not notably high.

In the performance, Murakami would dash through layers of paper mounted on square wooden frames. These live performances were conducted at Gutai exhibitions around the world.
In the 2012 exhibition at the National Art Center Tokyo, “GUTAI: The Spirit of an Era,” Kazuhiko performed the paper breakthrough performance, because his father had passed away in 1996. This time, one frame was set at the entrance to the show, and Kazuhiko broke through the paper to enter the venue, with the visitors following him and applauding.

After the paper breakthrough performance (Fig. 31)

The broken paper was hanging from the frame and swinging in the air. It was hard to call it an artwork, and was later removed from the entrance.

Ripping paper on shoji sliding doors or breaking glass gives the performers an emotional catharsis, but the viewers can only experience it second-hand.

In one of Saburo Murakami’s performances, he placed two buckets (A and B) in separate locations, and had a third bucket (C) in his hand. He poured water from C to A, A to C, then walked over to B to pour the water in from C to B then back to C, and then went back to the beginning and repeated the cycle. Viewers passing by thought the museum staff was working on something and occasionally ignored the act. Murakami, however, nonchalantly kept on performing.

According to Murakami, this “meaningless act” had meaning.

Such implication can also be found in Shiraga’s mud performance.

In the early period of the Gutai, there was an exhibition called “Gutai Art Using the Stage.” Yoshihara had been involved in scenography for dance performances and had a strong interest in stage performances. Dancing is a bodily expression and a primitive form of art. People in the Jomon prehistoric period in Japan danced to communicate with deities, demons, and other transcendent beings. Perhaps it was accompanied by music using primitive musical instruments.

I think dancing is related to the acts of shamans that have been practiced for the last few thousand years of human history.

Through producing a stage performance, Yoshihara apparently attempted to revisit the “point of origin” of art.

In the performing arts, two groups are expected to be there: the performers and the audience. The audience empathizes with the performers on the stage and can have second-hand experiences of what the performers go through. However, it is still second-hand, and what the performers and the audience experience are not the same.

Unless the audience watching Shiraga rolling in the mud does the same, they will not get the first-hand experience of what Shiraga had undergone. If Shiraga says “take off your clothes and come into the mud with me,” and someone responds, he or she might be able to get closer to what Shiraga experiences.

A performance by the Gutai artists, in principle, develops in the way it attempts to achieve the audience’s involvement. For them, in a way, the audience is also a group of artists.

The tea ceremony is at the heart of Japanese culture. During the ceremony, the master of ceremonies and the guests share the space and time, and stage a performance together.
In the process of just drinking a cup of tea, communication between the master and the guests takes place, transcending the master-guest relationship. This relationship can also be described as the subjectivity-objectivity relationship.

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John Cage and Allan Kaprow are considered the founders of the art of Happenings, but chronologically, the Gutai’s early performances precede them. Kaprow admits this.

Kaprow also evolved in a way to “blur” the border between the performer and the audience, to expand the domain of art and turn daily life into art. The activities of Fluxus, Japan’s Hi-Red Center, and Mono-ha can be positioned as movements following this trend.

A performance involving the Yamanote Loop Line by the Hi-Red Center, Nobuo Sekine’s Mono-ha movement, and Lee U-Fan’s environmental art can be considered the evolved versions of this trend.

Needless to say, these hypotheses have to be verified through a more thorough study.

What I’d like to emphasize here is that, although the view held by Nakatsuji and Ming Tiampo, that the Gutai was a movement akin to Informalism in France and Abstract Expressionism in the U.S. that happened coincidentally and concurrently, is in principle not wrong, but they are overlooking the distinctively revolutionary thought presented by the Gutai.

That thought is that art and the daily lives of people are inseparable.

Kaprow said that after Marcel Duchamp emerged, the traditional expression of Western paintings underwent a revolutionary change, allowing everything to be material for expression. He said, “Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, and a thousand other things” and suggested that not only paint (substance) but many other things can be used for artistic expression. In other words, the living environment itself is material for the art. This concept gives a close resemblance to the idea behind performances by early Gutai members using mud, paper, water, electric lights, and so on.

Jackson Pollock dripped paint to perform an action painting, but the action itself was not the art for him. The action was just a means to complete a work with dripped paint.

As I mentioned earlier, the Gutai is different from Pollock in the way that it perceived the act as the art. I also mentioned that this is rooted in Japanese traditional culture.

Because Tapié introduced the Gutai to Europe and the U.S. in the framework of Informalism, the progressiveness of the early Gutai was watered down, although the Gutai’s shift to making tableaus contributed to making their works tradable in the international art markets at high prices, resulting in the heightening of the Gutai’s global recognition.

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However, we must not forget that the originality of the Gutai artists is found in their performances. Nor should we forget that Atsuko Tanaka made her work out of her
performance using her own body decorated with electric lights.

The paper-breakthrough performance by Saburo Murakami explicitly illustrates that the act itself is the art. And, I think the origin of all these is found in the tea ceremony, Noh drama, and other bits of Japanese traditional culture.

20. Holding International Art Fairs and Opening Galleries in Hong Kong and Taipei

For five years from the launch of the Karuizawa New Art Museum in 2012, Karuizawa had been my business base. In order for Japanese art to be permeated throughout the world, works must be purchased by art collectors around the world through international art fairs.

Around 2008, Whitestone Gallery began exhibiting at art fairs in Moscow, Hong Kong, Seoul, and other places. After that, while I was in Karuizawa, President Koei Shiraishi, the son of Chairman Shiraishi, led projects to exhibit at art fairs in New York, Dallas, Los Angeles, Chicago, Rio de Janeiro, London, Köln, Beijing, Shanghai, Taipei, Kaohsiung, Macao, Jakarta, Singapore, and Abu Dhabi, and tried expanding the gallery's overseas business using more staff.

There is a globe on the president’s desk that shows how extensively he has traveled to fulfill his passion for overseas business. Exhibiting at art fairs in different countries is an expensive undertaking, but we are achieving sales that more than cover the expenses. Works of the Gutai and other Japanese avant-garde artists, and also of young artists, such as Miwa Komatsu, are being introduced at art fairs around the world.

Concurrently, Whitestone Gallery has opened three art galleries in Hong Kong and one in Taipei, which is one of the largest in Taiwan. It is an exquisite wooden gallery designed by the Japanese architect, Kengo Kuma. Because of its high ceiling, it can house massive works. For the opening show entitled “I LOVE TAIWAN,” we exhibited works by prominent Japanese artists. The show, I was told, attracted more than 10,000 visitors. It was a great success in terms of business as well.

In April 2018, we opened a new gallery in the 25-story H Queen’s building in the Central district of Hong Kong. This building houses many art galleries, including David Zwirner on the fifth and sixth floors, Whitestone Gallery on the seventh and eighth floors, Pace Gallery on the 12th floor, and Hauser & Wirth on the 15th and 16th floors.

For the opening show, we exhibited works of Japan’s contemporary artists and held a solo show by Dale Chihuly, an American glass artist. Because the opening show was held concurrently with an art fair in Hong Kong, art collectors from around the world came to see the opening show and we achieved record-high sales. Works of Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara, Lee U-Fan, and other living artists sold well, as well as those of Kazuo Shiraga, Sadamasa Motonaga, and other Gutai artists.

Whitestone Gallery in Taipei (Fig. 32)

Sales of works by Kazuo Shiraga, Chiyu Uemae, Shozo Shimamoto, and others, for more than 100 million yen at an international auction in Hong Kong at the end of March,
had a good effect on the sales at the opening show.

I feel that the dreams of the Gutai leader Jiro Yoshihara, who passed away half a century ago, are gradually coming true.


21. Jiro Yoshihara’s Regrets

Jiro Yoshihara died by subarachnoid hemorrhage at age 67 in February 1972. It was during the time he was preparing for a show outside Japan. It was also when he was just about to rebuild the private museum “Gutai Pinacotheca” after it was demolished due to renovation of the Hanshin Expressway. The architectural model for the new museum was already completed.

As a result of Yoshihara’s passing, Gutai artists lost a unifying force, and each had to individually find a new platform for artistic pursuit. While Yoshihara was alive, when an artist’s works were sold, the payment was made to the Gutai and used for the running of the group and the remunerations for the artists, all at Yoshihara’s discretion.

The artists whose works were selling well, such as Atsuko Tanaka, were not happy about the share of remuneration they were receiving. As a result, Tanaka left the group in 1965. Tanaka already had an established sales channel for her works, but most of the other artists were not so fortunate and their works almost never sold in Japan.

<画像キャプション>

Work by Chiyu Uemae that sold for 130 million yen (Fig. 33)

Work by Shozo Shimamoto that sold for 140 million yen (Fig. 34)

H Queen’s building in Hong Kong (Fig. 35)

Artist’s rendition of the new Gutai Pinacotheca (Fig. 36)

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Some Gutai artists whose works were traded at the Stadler Gallery in Paris, the Martha Jackson Gallery in New York, the Tokyo Gallery in Tokyo, and other outlets, were able to survive. But many of them carried on with their careers by working part time, such as Chiyu Uemae, who worked as a crane operator at a steel mill.

Had Yoshihara lived for another 10 years, the values of these artists’ works in both the domestic and international markets would surely have become drastically higher, and the Japanese art market system could have become more open to the outside world.

I say this because the renewed Gutai Pinacotheca could have served as a platform for introducing quality works from overseas artists to Japan, and for sending Japanese artists’ works to art fairs around the world. This could have helped the Japanese become more interested in the international art market trends and acquire a better eye for art.

As I discussed in the previous sections, Japan became affluent in the 1980s because of
the booming economy, holding a 30% share of worldwide art sales.

However, the Japanese exclusive art market system revolving around the “kokankai” (closed auction system) was mainly used for buying and selling works of the artists who belonged to the Japanese “gadan” (artistic establishment). The Japanese used to have an aesthetic preference for representational paintings and had stayed away from abstract paintings, just as the French reacted against the Impressionists when they first emerged a century ago. For them, works of the Salon artists, such as Jean-Léon Gérôme, were legitimate art, and those by Auguste Renoir and Paul Cézanne were worthless. During the Franco-Prussian War, German soldiers who came to Camille Pissarro's residence, which had become a military dorm, were said to have used Pissarro's paintings as doormats.

The paintings which had been regarded as worthless at the end of the 19th century in France are now valued at a few billion yen each. In the 1980s, during the economic bubble, the Japanese hunted for these Impressionist paintings.

The works themselves remained unchanged, but our perspective towards them had been altered. About 120 years ago, the painter and art collector Gustave Caillebotte expressed in his will his desire to bequeath a large collection of Impressionist paintings to the French government. This collection included the works of Claude Monet and Camille Pissarro. A French art magazine L'Artistes published around that time described his donation as “a heap of excrement whose exhibition in a national museum publicly dishonours French art”xxviii.

<画像キャプション>
Jean-Léon Gérôme, 1896 (Fig. 37)
Auguste Renoir, 1892 (Fig. 38)

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How people viewed the works of the Gutai in the 1960s was close to how the Impressionist paintings, which were considered “avant-garde” at that time, were treated 120 years ago. After Yoshihara's passing, Gutai artists must have faced rejection and disdain beyond description. I have enormous respect for the artists who carried on with their careers, without making concessions to the artistic establishment. Just as the Impressionists at the end of the 19th century struggled against the old art system, Gutai artists, after the group's disbandment, faced hardships, but nevertheless went on pursuing their artistry.

22. Yoshihara's Predecessor: Tenshin Okakura
The Impressionism that emerged at the end of the 19th century began to gain acceptance in the 20th century. Around the same time, one Japanese man was working hard to sell Japanese art to Europe and the U.S., as Yoshihara did in later years. Tenshin Okakura was a poet, art critic, and thinker, who contributed greatly to introducing Western museums and art school systems to Japan at the request of the Meiji Government. He made an arduous effort in establishing the Tokyo School of Fine Arts
The new government was trying to catch up with the West under the slogan *fukoku kyohei* (a wealthy nation and a strong army) and was implementing a policy of increasing exports. To that end, the spinning industry was launched and many art and craft products were produced for export purposes. The Tokyo School of Fine Arts was originally established as an educational institution for craftsmen to produce export art products. Okakura was the head of the school for a while but resigned due to a conspiracy instigated by a conservative group of people at the school. He then established the Japan Fine Arts Institute with a circle of artists who admired Okakura as their mentor.

In 1904, Okakura organized art exhibitions in New York and Boston in which the works by Taikan Yokoyama, Shunso Hishida, and other artists who belonged to the Institute were exhibited. They were successful and achieved good sales, proving that Japanese artists were capable of earning foreign currency through export of artworks. Some shows were also held in Europe, and achieved a certain amount of sales. Personally, 10 years ago, I published a book themed on the life of Okakura as an art dealer, called “*Bijutsu-sho Okakura Tenshin*” (Art Dealer Tenshin Okakura).

After Okakura’s passing, some of his students, such as Taikan Yokohama, carried on with Okakura’s passion for spreading Japanese art overseas, but these efforts came to a complete halt because of WWII. Japan fought against the Allied Powers, including the U.S. and Britain, and was defeated.

For the victors, the art of the vanquished nation was something to be disregarded.

In 1952, the Treaty of Peace with Japan came into force, officially ending the American-led Allied occupation of Japan. In the same year, the works of Ryuzaburo Umehara, Taikan Yokoyama, and other prominent artists were exhibited at the Biennale in Venice — the so-called “Olympics of the Art World.” However, almost no work received notable recognition. The Japanese government officially participated in the Biennale in Venice for the first time that year (1952), and in 1955 decided to construct a Japanese Pavilion for which the then president of Bridgestone Corporation, Shojiro Ishibashi, provided a large donation. At the 1956 Biennale, Japanese prestige was on the line, but despite the energy and efforts invested in the art exhibition, the works of the Japanese artists failed to receive attention.

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Learning lessons from these failures, the government decided to change the lineup of featured artists, and exhibit the works of Japanese avant-garde artists. The government officials realized that only the artists active internationally were viable exhibitors at the Biennale in Venice, and those traded solely in the domestic market were not.

Although works of Taikan Yokoyama and other members of the Japan Fine Arts Institute sold well in New York when the Russo-Japanese war was taking place, this presumably was an American way of honoring Japan’s victory. However, with Japan’s defeat in WWII, such “achievements” went up in smoke.

Artists to exhibit at the Japanese Pavilion are selected according to the plan of the pavilion commissioner, which is a post often assumed by art critics. Many of these critics were in Tokyo, and because the Gutai group, led by Yoshihara in partnership with Tapié,
was making Osaka its base for global expansion, the critics seemed to distance themselves from the Gutai.

Works of the Gutai appear in the Biennale for the first time in 1993, but they had to wait another 16 years for their second appearance in 2009. Moreover, both of these appearances were not part of the Japanese Pavilion, but were projects under the Italian organizer of the art exhibition.

23. The New Wave Gutai-jin Conference Established to Carry on the Group Ideals

Although discussing what would have happened had Yoshihara lived for another 10 years is futile, carrying on what he intended to achieve is something left for us to pursue.

When the Guggenheim Museum organized the Gutai exhibition in 2013, the representative second-generation Gutai artist Shuji Mukai was in charge of the opening performance. He is known for performances of filling spaces with painted symbols. He was one of the closest followers of Yoshihara and worked in the Advertising Department of Yoshihara Oil Mill together with Yoshihara’s son, Michio.

Karuizawa New Art Museum was launched with the mission of bringing world-class works of Japanese artists (those tradable at international auctions) to the international art market. Collecting the works of Gutai artists, who were the pioneers in this regard, is one of the museum’s main activities.

In the opening show of the museum in 2012 entitled “The Wind of Karuizawa Exhibition,” we therefore exhibited the works of the main members of the Gutai. A few years later, in 2015 and 2016, we organized the “Gutai-jin in Karuizawa,” a series of solo and group shows of Gutai artists. “Gutai-jin” (“Gutai people”) is a term coined by us under the advice of Mr. Mukai to mean the “heirs” of the Gutai ideals.

There are six exhibition rooms at KaNAM, which coincides with the number of rooms at the Gutai Pinacotheca, the private Gutai museum established by Yoshihara. These two museums also share the mission of bringing Japanese artists to the global arena. Moreover, Mr. Mukai pointed out that Whitestone’s approach of selling the works of performance artists in the form of tableaus (flat paintings) resembles that of Michel Tapié. Visitors who use the restroom on the second floor of KaNAM can experience an installation of symbols by Mr. Mukai.

Upon holding the show “Gutai-jin in Karuizawa” at KaNAM, we decided to establish the “New Wave Gutai-jin Conference,” dedicated to the mission of continuing with the legacy of Jiro Yoshihara.

Its first general meeting was held in April 2015 in Kobe City, Hyogo, the prefecture where the Gutai is based. The members included Junji Ito, the late Yoshiaki Inui, the late Chiyu Uemae, Yoshi Kato, the late Shigenobu Kimura, Koei Shiraishi, Yukio Shiraishi, Nobuyuki Senzoku, Toru Takahashi, Hideyoshi Nakajima, Tsuyoshi Maekawa, Yutaka Mino, Shuji Mukai, and Kunio Motoe. (Editor’s note: Motoe passed away on June 3, 2019.)

The objective of the Conference is to assist excellent Japanese artists in going global, just as Yoshihara and Tenshin Okakura had done. These two men made exhibiting
abroad their highest priority, and organized many shows in Europe and the U.S. that helped many understand the excellence of Japanese art. In order to cover expenses, they needed to sell works at the shows. It is only when works are purchased by locals with their own money, can these works be considered “highly rated.”

24. Discovering Outstanding Artists and Assisting Them in Going Global

Noted members of the artistic establishment in Japan have exhibited overseas and made headlines in the media for attracting many visitors. Although a high number of visitors at exhibitions abroad may serve the self-esteem of the Japanese, the volume of visitors and the financial value of the works do not go hand-in-hand. In the same way, even if a Japanese artist holds a solo show at a well-known department store in Paris and brings back his works to Japan to sell, thinking they would go quickly because of his garnered prestige, he will not see the volume of his inventory changed.

Curiosity in exotic products does not lead to sales. This was a painful lesson I learned in Russia.

In 2007, in celebration of the 120th anniversary of the Tokyo University of the Arts, many exhibitions and a symposium featuring its founder, Tenshin Okakura, took place at various venues on the campus over a one-year period. At the symposium, the master painter Ikuo Hirayama, who was then the director of the Japan Fine Arts Institute, said he would like to see the Inten (the exhibitions of the Institute’s artists) tour the world in the future. This was the long-standing dream of Okakura, who passed away a century ago.

<画像キャプション>
The first “New Wave Gutai-jin Conference” (Fig. 39)

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How is the Institute planning to cover the expenses for the future tour? In the past, when Okakura sold works by Taikan Yokoyama and Shunso Hishida in New York and Boston in 1904, he must have acknowledged the economic viability of the works. However, faced with financial difficulties, the Institute later went bankrupt. After Okakura’s passing, Taikan Yokoyama and others reestablished the Institute, but with the breakout of WWII, the overseas Inten exhibition became an impossible dream.

I mentioned earlier that the works of Taikan Yokoyama and other prominent Japanese artists received no attention at the Biennale in Venice held a few years after the end of the war.

Many years have passed since then. If the Inten were to travel around the world, how should the Institute cover the expenses?

The first thing that comes to my mind would be to hold shows in Japan with smaller works of Inten artists to source funds for overseas tours, which is a method used by the Institute in funding the traveling shows in Japan.

As of 2018, this project that Hirayama dreamed of still has not taken off, primarily because the works of Inten artists would not sell overseas.

Hirayama, who was then positioned as the top artist of the Institute, had been holding exhibitions at many museums abroad, including the Guimet Museum in Paris, but the
value of his works on the international art market has been volatile.

If works of the Inten artists could sell overseas, the Institute could source funds for overseas exhibitions at each site. If traveling shows were held in New York, London, and Paris, with some works available for sale, there would be more international collectors, potentially leading to active trading at international auctions. Presently, the works of Inten artists are only traded domestically, so they are not yet tradable on the international market.

As I have discussed earlier, the Japanese art industry is characterized by its exclusiveness and dual structure, where the distinctive domestic and international market systems co-exist, and this has been hampering Japanese artists from going global. To prove this, we note that there are only a handful of Japanese artists who are internationally active, including Yayoi Kusama, Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, and Hiroshi Sugimoto.

What is common about them is that they are contracted with galleries abroad and not with those in Japan.

Kusama moved to New York in 1957 and became active there, winning the appellation “the queen of avant-garde.” She came back to Japan 16 years later, only to find her artistry rejected by the Japanese art industry. What revived her acclaim as an international artist was American museums and an influential art gallery in the U.S., the Gagosian. Starting with the 1989 show “Yayoi Kusama: A Retrospective” curated by Alexandra Munroe, she has exhibited her works at the Biennale in Venice, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Guggenheim Museum, which helped her gain recognition back in Japan. Fuji Television Gallery and some art experts in Japan contributed greatly to her earning domestic recognition.

She became an honoree of the Order of Cultural Merit in 2016, securing her stature as one of the master artists. The value of her works increased by a factor of ten in the last decade, which, in terms of the rate of increase, is higher than that of Jeff Koons or Damien Hirst.

Another Japanese artist whose activities span the world, Takashi Murakami, writes in his book Geijutsu Kigyo-ron (A Theory on Art Entrepreneurship, 2006) that competing in the international art market with strategies built on Japanese rules is a losing game. He contracted with the Gagosian Gallery in New York, and true to his theory, has been competing under the rules of the international market, garnering 1.6 billion yen for one work at an auction.

Murakami is also contracted with the Perrotin Gallery based in Paris. Kusama is now contracted with the David Zwirner Gallery, Nara with the Pace Gallery, and Sugimoto with the Gagosian.

I question the soundness of the current situation in which Japanese artists must sever themselves from the Japanese art industry and contract with galleries outside Japan in order to get their works sold overseas.

One way to discover good artists is to hold an open call international art competition for rookie artists. In 2017, just such a competition was held, called “ART OLYMPIA,” with the director of the Living National Treasure Museum as the head of its Executive
Committee. I have yet to check whether or not the award winners have already become viable on the international art market.

Tenshin Okakura assisted the students at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (present-day Tokyo University of the Arts) in expanding internationally, and Jiro Yoshihara established the “Gutai Art Association,” which was basically his personal art school, in order to promote the artists who became its members in expanding globally. I’d like to discuss a strategy suitable for the current circumstances, based on the achievements of these pioneers.

25. Strategy to Sell in the Global Marketplace

Both Tenshin Okakura and Jiro Yoshihara attempted to help Japanese artists earn global recognition by launching private organizations — the Japan Fine Arts Institute and the Gutai Art Association, respectively. They shared two strategies. One was to hold exhibitions at major cities outside Japan and another was to make publicity efforts targeted at overseas markets.

Okakura held shows of the artists who belonged to the Institute in New York, Boston, Washington, D.C., and London. His high English proficiency allowed him to be befriended by Isabella Stewart Gardner — the queen of Boston’s social circle — and also by Indian personnel connected to the Tagore family who virtually acted as agents for international publicity for the Japanese artists.

Graph showing the value increase of Yayoi Kusama’s works (bold line) (Fig. 40)

Yoshihara, with the help of Michel Tapié, also organized Gutai exhibitions in major cities in the U.S. and Europe. Distributing its Gutai Journal newsletter worldwide served as the group’s international publicity tool.

These undertakings, however, had to be self-funded because they were without public financial assistance. Both Okakura and Yoshihara sold works and solicited donations, but ended up personally covering the expenses. The main reasons for the collapse of the Japan Fine Arts Institute and the Gutai group were the deaths of these two leaders, which caused a dissipation of funds.

Holding a show outside the country costs a few times more than a domestic show. Because of differences in language and customs, publicity bills are higher than one expects. I personally experienced this in Russia.

The New Wave Gutai-jin Conference was established to continue with the legacy of Jiro Yoshihara, and its objective is to assist Japanese artists in going global and to promote Japanese culture.

To meet that goal, we must build a unique platform in Japan whereby excellent artists can sell their works overseas without depending on art galleries outside Japan. Public funds are not a reliable financial source. I would also say, if we depend too much on public funds, there is a risk of the platform becoming something other than what the public wants. Aren’t the current activities of public museums self-serving and inattentive to
what the public hopes them to be? Also, public entities tend to strongly avoid anything that benefits private groups, even if it potentially contributes greatly to the public good.

We therefore need a global and universal architecture that transcends existing systems, including national borders.

The New Wave Gutai-jin Conference aims to hold open call international competitions in order to identify excellent undiscovered artists and sell their works internationally. What “excellent artist” implies at these competitions is an artist who produces works which notable museums and collectors would buy with their own money. It means finding artists who are creating works that are worth the financial investment of the buyer.

This also means deciding on who should be the judges for selecting these artists is an important decision. The easiest choices would be those at notable museums who make purchasing decisions, or well-known art collectors, because they will certainly select artists with works that can sell.

A common objection to this is that there are artists who produce great works but who are commercially unviable. Let’s look at an example in history. The works of Claude Monet, which did not sell well at the end of the 19th century, became popular in the 20th century, and eventually sold for high prices. Yes, they were “excellent works” that had to wait until their excellence was recognized. So, in order to discover these artists while they are still unrecognized, the aesthetic eye of museum decision-makers and art collectors is critically important.

There are so many art collectors and highly acclaimed museums in the world. How are we to choose appropriate judges from among them? A realistic strategy would be to contact the top 20 art collectors and museums, and form a group of judges from those who are in favor of our proposed objectives. They will certainly choose works that they are interested in buying, and their selections therefore will definitely sell.

Holding shows in major cities in the world with these “viable works” should garner enough funds to make the shows profitable. Profitable shows are sustainable. Sustainable shows will help the artists earn global recognition and improve their recognition, and their works will be actively traded at international auctions.

Many exhibitions featuring Yayoi Kusama are being held worldwide. The exhibitions showing her expensive works attract many visitors, supplying museums with income from admission fees and selling related goods. Even if the displayed works cannot be sold at the museums, other income makes the exhibitions profitable.

The more exhibitions are held, the more media exposure there is, which should realize a favorable cycle in which her works are sold for high prices at commercial galleries and raise the hammer prices at international auctions.

So, the objective of an open call international competition is to spot the artists who are capable of producing works that can potentially sell for high prices.

I think I can summarize the global expansion strategies for Japanese artists implemented by Tenshin Okakura and Jiro Yoshihara, as follows:

The first is to find and develop artists; the second is to implement worldwide publicity.
(i.e., make marketing efforts); and the third is to procure operational funds. Open international competitions should serve the first strategy.

It is said that a Jewish art network that spans the globe is what underpins the international art market. There are many Jewish artists and art dealers, including prominent art galleries such as the Gagosian, David Zwirner, and Hauser & Wirth. Leo Castelli and the Sidney Janis also belong to this category, but are of the former generation. The Triumph Gallery, with which I worked in partnership in Russia, is also a Jewish gallery.

When it comes to Jewish artists, there are so many famous ones: Marc Chagall, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, George Segal, etc. École de Paris artists include Jules Pascin, Moïse Kisling, Amedeo Modigliani, etc.

The influential critic and theorist of contemporary art Clement Greenberg is also Jewish.

Those who fled their home country — Israel — 2,000 years ago became a diaspora. We can think that the wise lifestyle they developed over the course of history to survive in the world was an early form of globalization, since what underlies globalism is the people’s determination to survive after losing their homeland by saving and multiplying what they earn by investing in “things” that can be easily liquidated wherever they are in the world.

International auctions can be seen as one of the byproducts of globalism.

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Riding on the coattails of this “survival system” is a shortcut for Japanese artists to expand internationally. The economy that is the second largest in the world by nominal GDP, China, has utilized this system, and has made it a state policy to use international auction houses to put Chinese artists on the international art market. Hozu Yamamoto, who runs an art gallery in Beijing, comments that because the traditional works of art that were in the Forbidden City were all taken to Taiwan by Chiang Kai-shek, China is trying to form a new cultural core with contemporary art. Mr. Yamamoto is the first son of Takashi Yamamoto, the founder of the Tokyo Gallery, a pioneer in Japan in trading contemporary art.

Takashi Murakami, who got fed up with the Japanese art industry, seems to be strategically using this system as well.

However, coattailing on the system alone would make us mere followers of the main drivers of the system. Although coattailing itself is not necessarily easy, it is best for us to design a system that we can call our own.

To that end, the latest information technology (IT) could be utilized to accommodate all three strategies mentioned earlier (find and develop artists; international marketing; and fund procurement). Let’s look at our vision in detail.


The most common way of finding good artists is to hold an open call competition, judge them fairly, and provide the winners with recognition. Nitten and Inten are both intended for similar purposes.

In an open call art competition, works are first screened normally by their images and
application forms, and the short-listed works are gathered in one place and judged one by one in the presence of all judges.

In the case of international competitions, judges are mostly likely scattered around the world.

It is no longer customary to impose restrictions on sizes or materials, and this could result in receiving submissions of two-dimensional works, three-dimensional works, movies, installations, and other styles of art. Since we are thinking of requesting decision makers at museums to serve as the judges, it will probably be extremely difficult to ask them to be in one place at the same time due to their other responsibilities.

In his book *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), Walter Benjamin said that an image of work (i.e., reproduction) lacks the “aura” that the work inherently has. However, I think evaluating works using IT, or to be more specific, virtual reality technology, in order to achieve “very realistic” reproductions of the works, could make it possible to conduct online, international reviews.

When presenting these virtually real works, a work must be seen in its entirety first and then in detail. Some judges may want to look at the work in close proximity or from a distance, or check the reverse side. If we could move around the work freely using VR over the Internet, we might be able to better feel the realness of the work.

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Okakura and Yoshihara spent a fortune traveling overseas and shipping artworks in order to hold exhibitions outside the country. Yoshihara used the group’s newsletter, *Gutai Journal*, and other analog media for publicity.

We are now in the digital era. Movies are all digitized and instantly distributed globally.

Allow me to detour. About 20 years ago, the American master painter/sculptor George Segal came to Whitestone Gallery in Ginza with his wife. This was when his show was being held in Japan, and they arrived in a car owned by Fuji Television, after attending an award ceremony of the Praemium Imperiale in Honour of Prince Takamatsu. I was the one who received these guests, and I asked Mr. Segal if I could take a picture with him and his wife with his works. Without hesitation, he accepted the request of this junior art dealer (I was in my 40s).

After that, we had a chat in the reception room. When I ran out of topics for conversation, I showed them the personal electronic organizer called “Zaurus” that I had just bought. Because he looked interested, I demonstrated its communication functions and planner features. He said, “Wonderful” and seemed interested in buying one, so I started telling him where he could get one. Then, he shook his head and said, looking at his wife sitting next to him, “She is my Zaurus.”

Twenty years have passed since, and the Zaurus has been replaced by the iPhone, which has become an indispensable tool for many, offering telephone, email, the Internet, and electronic payment functions.

If technology could advance this much in 20 years, in the next 20, VR technology might be able to achieve a “truly real” VR world of a level that could astound Walter Benjamin.

A system that allows people to visit art galleries in Hong Kong, Taipei, and Tokyo online, and get the real feel of these places, might be developed in the future.
Moreover, if we could connect that system with blockchain technology, I think it is feasible to integrate all the art trading processes into one platform. These include screening for open call art exhibitions, buying/selling of artworks, payment, etc. Although application of blockchain technology in the financial sector is now being actively discussed, I think it is the most useful technology for any kind of international trading.

Looking back at human history, a power would emerge as a result of a war, conquering others to form a master-servant relationship, and eventually become a despotic state. There were times these states controlled parts of the world, but that led to a heightened awareness of human rights, then to civil rights movements, and eventually to movements toward democracy.

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Up to now, governments have been controlling currency systems. The Japanese government issues the ‘yen’ currency, and by controlling the monetary system, it governs the country. Currency is the lifeblood of every nation, and when a country disappears, so does its currency.

A blockchain can be described as a chain of ledgers in which all transactions of a group can be verified by all the members of the group.

Suppose we call a transaction between two members “α · 1.” “α · 1” is verified by all members. Members continue to make transactions: “α · 2,” “α · 3,” etc. Records of these transactions are grouped into one block, and these blocks are continually added to the blockchain. The transaction information can be viewed by any member of the group. Because everyone is verifying the blocks, they cannot be altered fraudulently. Everyone is equally involved because it is a decentralized system, not owned by a single entity. Even if a country collapses, the blockchain remains.

If history is moving toward democratization, the blockchain technology can contribute to realizing an ultimately democratized society. Since it is not owned by any single entity and verified by all members, isn’t it the most democratized system?

New systems always clash with the existing ones. It will take some time for the existing state systems to come to terms with blockchain technology, particularly the centrally-controlled financial systems. However, if democratization is the direction human history is heading toward, then just as water flows from high to low places, this new technology will gain support and will be applied to various areas.

Having said that, we must remember that the advancement of technology always has two sides — good and bad.

For example, the Internet-based society seems to be making the world flat, eliminating diversity in values throughout the world.

At “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition that we held eight years ago in Russia, we exhibited works that were highly acclaimed in the Japanese market. However, because they had not been traded internationally before, except for the works of Yayoi Kusama, they failed to sell in Russia. It doesn’t mean that the quality of works was low. They were not economically viable just because they lacked a trading history on the international market.

The entrepreneur and animation producer Nobuo Kawakami, who is knowledgeable
about computer systems, shows concern over the future of the Internet-based society, saying that logically-speaking, cutting-edge technology can lead to elimination of many things, even national borders, and flatten the world, eventually driving each country's unique culture into extinction.

If, driven by rationalistic thinking, humans promote the expansion of the Internet-based society too rapidly, our human emotions would scream, “No!” There are myriads of people who are fine without the Internet. Three years after visiting Japan, George Segal passed away, but he was happy living with his wife, and without the Internet. Human history spans a couple hundred thousand years, but the Internet was invented only about 50 years ago.

Because humans need a good balance between mind and body, IT must evolve gradually and harmoniously with human emotions (and bodies).

27 Whitestone’s Adventure

Whitestone Gallery has opened actual galleries in Tokyo, Hong Kong, Taiwan and elsewhere while seeking the formulation of a system that connects these museums online with other galleries, museums, collectors, artists, auction houses and so on and enables interactive communication using VR technology.

As shown in the conceptual diagram below, it is assumed that they will be connected on the Internet with the provision of an international trading system using blockchain technology. Consideration is also being given to the idea of using existing cryptocurrencies such as bitcoin and Ethereum as currencies for payment on the system.

The system will be called the WHS Art Trading Platform.

(Art is a tool that enriches our lives through communication using imagination, and it is desirable for as many people as possible to benefit from it. However, since many people do not have enough opportunities to come into contact with art, it may not fully be appreciated.

It is said that presently over 1.4 billion people in the world are using devices such as smartphones. We are living in an era where many people have easy access to the Internet.

I would like to talk about an exhibition inviting applicants from the public with reference to the conceptual diagram.

In such a scenario, artists from around the world apply online on the WHS Art Trading Platform. Judges from around the world (museum purchasers and collectors) perform initial and secondary screenings on the same platform to determine winners. The winners are granted a privilege of holding a solo exhibition on the platform. Viewers can
enjoy their works using VR technology and order their favorite pieces. After the completion of payment using cryptocurrency, the actual work is delivered to the designated location.

Works of art, unlike stocks and real estate, require a platform, that is, an exhibition, where user can select the piece that suits their taste. Generally, at an exhibition venue, visitors compare many works and listen to what artists say before selecting and purchasing works that suit their taste.

However, holding an actual exhibition involves significant costs covering items such as the venue, preparing the exhibition site, logistics for the works of art, insurance, public relations, employment of service staff, and so on. All of these items are added to the price of artwork in the form of the distribution margin.

Using WHS Art Trading Platform, however, the main part of the costs will be only the delivery cost for a work already purchased. Granted, this may sound like an extremely idealistic theory, but if this were to actually come true, the world would need only producers, consumers and delivery companies – merchants will not be needed any more!

If this happens, the distribution margin will be greatly reduced.

In the case of assets such as stocks, gold, and real estate, the distribution margin ratio is normally a few percent; however, in the case of artwork, for the reasons outlined above, it reaches several tens of percent. In the case of international auctions such as Sotheby's and Christie's, distribution margin ratios are, depending on contract prices, between 12 and 25 percent for a piece that is sold and between 5 and 15 percent for a piece that is bought, which means that distribution margin ratios for a round trip will reach as high as 17 to 40 percent.

The fact is, the total personal financial assets in the world reach 20 quadrillion yen (20,000 trillion yen), only 0.4%, or 8 trillion yen, of which is spent on artwork. It is expected that if distribution margin ratios fall, the amount of financial assets flowing into the international art market will significantly increase. If 10 times the current amount, which accounts for 4%, were to flow into the market, the size of the worldwide art market will reach 80 trillion yen. Presently, the size of the art market in Japan is only 240 billion yen.

Calculated simply, it will reach 10 times the amount: 2.4 trillion yen. This figure is comparable to the market size during the bubble economy period of Japan.

In those days, the Japanese art market accounted for 30% of the worldwide market. As we have seen, however, that market has shrunk down to what it is due to the double structure of the Japanese art industry.

It is believed that if this platform becomes common, the double structure will disappear.
If Japan’s art market comes to occupy 30% of the world market, 80 trillion yen, as it did in the past, it will have the size of 24 trillion yen. The total personal financial assets of the Japanese people are estimated to be 1,800 trillion yen, so this accounts for only 1.3% of that amount. Since the total sales of department stores in Japan are 6 trillion yen per year, 24 trillion yen is comparable to four years of combined annual sales. Currently, sales of artwork account for less than 2% of department stores’ total sales.

With the WHS Art Trading Platform, it will become possible to conduct screenings at international exhibitions, inviting applicants from the public, as well as to hold various exhibitions such as solo exhibitions and group exhibitions. This enables visitors not only to appreciate works of art but also to purchase pieces and make payment.

In addition, it will become possible to hold international auctions. Some art auction houses such as Christie’s have already held online auctions, increasing their sales. According to the TEFAF Art Market Report, the ratio of sales from Internet auctions to the total sales of Christie’s is 5% and that of Sotheby’s is 4%. The ratio of the entire sales from all Internet auctions to the total sales of art auctions is 8%.

Bidders bear some risks since they have to determine bidding prices based only on images of actual artwork and textual information provided online. Therefore, relatively inexpensive works come up for Internet auctions.

If it becomes possible to check more details using VR technology, buyers will be likely to place bids for fairly expensive works. And if fully-fledged auctions can be executed online, conventional fees for selling and buying works will be dramatically reduced.

Major international auction houses have accumulated a great deal of information on works and collectors. Having more than 250 years of accumulated know-how, they possess great ability to investigate and appraise artworks.

When you visit a site called Maecenas, you can find an art trading platform using blockchain technology that has already been established. A cryptocurrency called ART Coin has already been issued. This site has a system that allows investors not only to jointly purchase investable paintings on the Internet, but also to distribute the proceeds from the sale of the painting among the investors a few years later. It is kind of an investment fund using blockchain technology.

Elsewhere, a site called Fimart implements an initial coin offering (ICO) to build an art trading platform using blockchain. In an ICO, tokens are sold to collect business funds from many investors. Tokens listed on an online exchange go into circulation as cryptocurrency.

Meanwhile, a company affiliated with Whitestone is developing an investment trust fund (art fund) for artwork. This art fund is considering circulation not only in the
securities market but also on the same platform.

In addition, the platform can connect domestic and foreign museums to each other and link them to the market. Museums can disclose information on their collections on the platform, which facilitates the borrowing and lending of artwork and trading between museums. Also, it may be possible to release to the market works requiring high management cost that have not been used for a long period of time, or for a museum to purchase works of art that have been owned by collectors.

As an aside, I heard from Shinichiro Yoshihara, Jiro Yoshihara's son, that a large number of works created by Jiro Yoshihara, founder of Gutai, presented to Osaka City Museum of Modern Art were stored in its Planning Office. Among the 5,600 pieces stored in the Planning Office, 4,600 pieces are donated items and about 800 of these pieces were presented by Jiro Yoshihara; they are valuable materials on Yoshihara, who played an active role in the world in the 1960s (Refer to [Appendix]). Images of only 43 pieces are posted on the website of the Planning Office; using the platform to publish more materials would seem to be in accordance with the will of Yoshihara, who passed away in 1972.

In addition, if a department store uses the platform, it will become unnecessary to hold expensive actual exhibitions at an in-store art gallery or exhibition space. Customers can visit art galleries around the world and artists' ateliers in a VR audio-visual room provided in the department stores, where they can appreciate works of art and purchase them while communicating with artists. After making payment with cryptocurrency, all they need to do is to wait until the actual works are delivered.

Also, authenticity is the most important issue in artwork trading. Efforts have been made to develop a method of embedding an artist's fingerprint in a work by using a biometric authentication system for the WHS Art Trading Platform. Furthermore, there is a system in which all the transaction histories are written on the blockchain and this can be viewed by everyone, enabling conventional appraisal costs to be reduced.

The following is a summary of the points so far:

The WHS Art Trading Platform will be developed in order to reduce distribution cost. At the above-mentioned international exhibitions inviting applicants from the public, the distribution process will follow the steps outlined below.

1st step: Artists create works at their ateliers.

2nd step: Those works are exhibited at actual galleries.

3rd step: The exhibited works are posted on the Internet by using VR technology to be viewed on terminals.
4th step: Judges, collectors from around the world, perform screenings and determine winning entries on the platform.

5th step: Exhibitions of the winners’ works are held at actual galleries and they are sold on the platform.

6th: Payment is made with cryptocurrency.

7th step: Purchased works are delivered to their designated location.

With this process, distribution costs can be greatly reduced, but compared with stock trading or real estate trading there is still much to be desired.

In order to further reduce distribution costs, it is necessary to omit the 2nd and 4th steps and to jump from the 1st step to the 5th step. In other words, the ateliers of artists who want to apply for an exhibition inviting applicants from the public should be connected on the platform. All the participants on the platform will become judges. (This also can solve the problem of how to choose judges.)

Each artist will display their works and present them at their own ateliers. After conducting a vote for the most popular artists, winners will be determined in descending order of popularity. The winners will hold actual exhibitions and sell their works on the platform. After payment is made in cryptocurrency, delivery will be made.

In order to further reduce costs, it is possible to omit the 5th step and directly buy and sell works at an artist's atelier on the platform. In this case, it is only the transportation expense for sending a work from the artist's atelier to a user's house that is involved in distribution costs. This has already been attempted on a site called Startbahn, launched by students at the University of Tokyo. However, it seems to be struggling due to absence of communications with actual galleries and the art industry.

If distribution costs for artwork can be reduced to almost the same level as those for stocks, the market size for artwork will expand dramatically. Presently, stocks are digitized and they are being traded mainly online, which contributes to a significant decline in distribution costs.

Incidentally, there is an artistic practice called “digital art” and digital artwork can be distributed on the Internet at a very low cost. On February 14th, 2008, a digital work of art called Forever Rose was sold for 100 million yen, which created a sensation.

(P226 photo)
Digital artwork: Forever Rose

The artwork that can be distributed at the lowest cost on the WHS Art Trading Platform is digital artwork. If it becomes possible to issue a limited number of digital
works of art, and to sell and trade them on the platform, they will become pieces that have unlimited mobility.

Bitcoin is in circulation all over the world, but it is not an artwork in itself. Digital artwork has the potential to become an ideal cryptocurrency that can be appreciated in an artistic sense.

This may sound like a leap in logic, but as discussed, it can be said that the art trading platform has unlimited possibilities as a system for trading actual artwork.

Recently, there has been remarkable progress in technology, and now it seems that technology could make our dreams come true. However, that will be achieved gradually through trial and error.

In the past, Tenshin Okakura and Jiro Yoshihara made efforts to promote the international exchange of artists using analog methods and to dispatch excellent Japanese artists to the world, with the aim of spreading Japanese culture. Surely now the time is approaching for us to realize that by means of IT.

In Japan, personal financial assets totaling 1,800 trillion yen are looking for advantageous investment opportunities. Investments in real estate and stocks are typical options. The data on the first quarter of 2017 shows that cash and bank deposits amounted to 931.6 trillion yen, stocks and other capital investments 180.9 trillion yen, insurance and annuity reserves 521 trillion yen, claims 25.3 trillion yen, investment trust funds 97.7 trillion yen, and others 52.5 trillion yen. Artwork, whose market size is only 240 billion yen, seems to be a part of the "Others" category that accounts for only 0.013% of the total personal financial assets.

(P227 figure)
Trends in household financial asset structure in Japan (Trillion yen)

As mentioned above, distribution costs for artwork are very high compared with those of other financial assets, their mobility is more limited, and thus, they receive extremely low evaluations as financial assets. However, since the WHS Art Trading Platform can dramatically reduce distribution costs by combining VR technology and blockchain technology, it is expected that increasing numbers of people will view artwork with increased mobility as investment destinations.

In that case, it is strongly hoped that an art fund will be established to enable investors to invest in a number of artworks or artists, like an investment trust fund for stocks and claims. They say that art funds are already booming in the West.
Now, if it becomes possible to incorporate artworks with increased mobility into a fund by utilizing the WHS Art Trading Platform and to circulate the fund itself on the platform, it is expected that a considerable amount of money will flow into the art market in Japan alone.

Let’s say that you established an art fund, Fund for Brilliant Asian Artists in Their 30s, and incorporated artists such as Miwa Komatsu, Yuuna Okanishi and Yang Yong Liang into the fund, and then, after collecting 1 million yen from each of 100 investors, you invested 100 million yen to support the artists with the money, and 5 years later, you earned the profit of 1 billion yen. In that case, those who invested in the fund would be able to expect considerable returns.

(P228 photo)
Miwa Komatsu, giving a live performance

An alternative possibility is to set up a fund for artists who have won awards at an exhibition inviting applicants from the public, and to share profits with the growth of those artists. This approach seems to be highly effective in making it possible for excellent artists in Japan to go overseas.

It is also possible to set up funds, such as a Gutai fund, for works that are yet to receive the appraisals they deserve despite reaching an international level (such as those from Gutai), hold exhibitions in various parts of the world, sell them after their stock rises, and then share the profits. Setting up art funds is one of the solutions to the third challenge of how to procure capital.

As described above, we have paved the way for solving the first, second and third challenges, and we are now delving deeply into these challenges.

In 2018, Whitestone is celebrating its 50th anniversary. Over the course of half a century, we have overcome various challenges, and today, our activities are gradually attracting attention worldwide. What I have experienced is just a glimpse of things to come.

Now we have entered into the age of generational change. Inheriting the will of the founder, the second president is flying around the world and moving ahead right at this moment. He has started to spread his wings around the world.

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In Closing

I have been visiting the homes of customers for the last 45 years, carrying a few paintings wrapped in a furoshiki (wrapping cloth). Countless times, I communicated to
my customers “the heart of the painting” on behalf of the artist.

It gives me the greatest joy to see a painting sold. That joy sustains me to this day.

I believe that a deal is closed when the hearts of the seller and buyer connect by means of the work (goods).

World-class art galleries and auction houses have established strong international networks and are in possession of extensive business know-how that they have accumulated over the last few hundred years.

One might think an attempt by a Japanese gallery to gain a foothold in the international art scene, relying only on its bravery and IT skills, too ambitious an adventure.

Already realizing the potential of applying IT to the art business, Christie’s has organized the “Art + Tech Summit” in order to explore the possibility of using blockchain technology in the industry.

At the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games, Japanese athletes are expected to perform brilliantly, on par with their counterparts from other countries. I am sure Japan’s science and technology are also at the global forefront.

The area in which Japan, which ranks third in nominal GDP, is significantly lagging behind is the size of its art market (accounting only for 3% of the global market), which often serves as a yardstick for a country’s level of culture. It is embarrassing to admit that for an excellent Japanese artist to make an international debut, he/she must leave Japan and enter into a contractual relationship with an overseas art gallery.

Recently, works by Japanese artists have been regaining global recognition. It is our responsibility as fellow Japanese to encourage this trend.

For half a century, Whitestone Gallery has been pursuing its dream of selling Japanese paintings in the global market. Now, the time has come to pass the baton on to the next generation.

I wrote this book in hopes that my experience, though limited, would in some way help people who are involved in the art world. I’d very much appreciate feedback from my respected readers.

Postscript

On June 1, 2019, I received an email saying “I’m in Seoul. I’ll be back in three days.”

It was from Mr. Kunio Motoe. Two days later, he died from a myocardial infarction immediately after landing at Haneda Airport.

When I had seen him in January, he had told me rather nonchalantly that his blood pressure was unusually high, and I was shocked to hear that his lowest blood pressure was around my highest. We talked about my father who has been bedridden for the last eight years and agreed that we wanted our deaths to be a pin-pin-korori death (dying suddenly after a lifetime of good health).

Who could have known that Mr. Motoe was going to fulfill that wish?

I had asked him to write many pages of this book. Because of his passing, I was not able to receive the section on Chiyu Uemae.

He was actually the first person I told 18 months ago that I was writing this book. He had replied, “I look forward to reading it.”

I humbly dedicate this book to Mr. Motoe in heaven. (June 20, 2019)
Notes:
i Village of the New Rich: In 1992, as part of its democratization efforts, the Russian government launched a program to distribute free vouchers with which any Russian 12 years or older could purchase shares in state-owned enterprises. Some forward-thinking wealthy people decided to buy these vouchers from ordinary people at low prices and made a fortune. These “oligarchs” (a small group of people in power) built mansions in certain residential areas. People who belong to the class below the oligarchs also chose to live in specific residential districts. My Russian interpreter Irina called them “Villages of the New Rich” and took me to one of them. The term is not necessarily derogatory. In fact, there is a street called “Нувориш (New Rich) Street.”

ii In 2006, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the resumption of diplomatic relations between Japan and Russia, Zurab Tsereteli sculpted a statue of Ichiro Hatoyama, the Japanese Prime Minister 50 years ago.

iii Masaaki Miyasako, Yayoi Kusama, Hiroshi Senju, Hanako Kunishi, Chinami Nakajima, Masatake Oyabu, Kei Shibusawa, Kazuyuki Futaagawa, Yuji Sasaki, Teisuke Narita, Tadahiko Nakayama, and Misaki Ando. Ando’s participation was specially arranged because he was acquainted with President Putin.

iv The artists group “Tanatos Banionis” was holding a show entitled “Kamikaze.” For details, access http://www.triumph-gallery.ru/en/artists/tanatos_banionis.html


vi Actually, in the same year as “The Beauty of Japan” exhibition, a solo show by Masaaki Miyasako was held at the Moscow Art Fair and a 100-go (approximately 1,620 x 1,300 mm) painting was sold for more than 10 million yen. The buyer was a wealthy Russian who came to the Art Fair through the introduction of the owner of the Triumph Gallery. Miyasako’s works had not yet been traded at international auctions, but his works had been well received at a previous Moscow Art Fair. At this fair, I told visitors that Miyasako’s works could potentially be traded at international auctions.

vii Sotheby’s was founded in 1744 and Christie’s in 1766.


x Retrieved from
The late Kunio Yaguchi, former chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, talked about this dual structure 30 years ago.


In 1981, the buyer’s premium charged by Christie’s was 10%.


Sotheby’s and Seibu formed a partnership in 1979.


Retrieved from https://news.artnet.com/market/once-again-where-are-all-the-women-artists-49720

Retrieved from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OuFSTdWhhhop5AkRtlDn8UB_F9htOGBF/view

Article 1: The purpose of this Act is, in light of the outstanding highland beauty that Karuizawa Town possesses, of its stature as an excellent resort, and of its past contribution to international goodwill, to shape the town as a place for international goodwill and international cultural exchange, thereby contributing to the promotion of international goodwill and international cultural exchange, to the achievement of perpetual peace in the world, to the attraction of foreign visitors by improving the Town’s cultural and tourist facilities, and to the economic recovery of the country.
Executive Committee of the “Wind of Karuizawa” Exhibition: Masanori Aoyagi, Keinosuke Murata, Nobuyuki Senzoku, Kunio Motoe, Yuko Hasegawa, Masaomi Unagami, Kei Matsushita, and Yoshiki Kaneko.


For details, please see Bijutsusho Okakura Tenshin by Kazuo Ooi (published by Bungei-sha).

In 2008, MY LONESOME COWBOY (1998) was sold for 1.6 billion yen at Sotheby’s New York.


Hozu Yamamoto, Art Wa Shihon Shugi No Yukue Wo Yogen Suru (Art’s Prophesy Regarding the Future of Capitalism) (Kyoto and Tokyo: PHP Institute, 2015), 147.


Retrieved from https://www.maeceenas.co/how-it-works/


Retrieved from https://www.cnn.co.jp/tech/35114766.html


Retrieved from https://www.christies.com/features/Feature-Video-9318-1.aspx

[Appendix] History of Gutai by Jiro Yoshihara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Domestic exhibition</th>
<th>International exhibition</th>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>August: Gutai Art</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Publication Details</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Zero Society invited to join Gutai</td>
<td>January: <em>Gutai</em> 1, the first issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October: 1st Exhibition of Gutai held at Ohara Kaikan in Tokyo</td>
<td>October: <em>Gutai 2</em> and 3, the second and third issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>January: <em>Gutai</em> 1,</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>published</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>October: <em>Gutai 2</em> and 3, published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1956</td>
<td>July–August: Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Mid-summer Burning Sun at Ashiya Park</td>
<td>July: <em>Gutai</em> 4, the fourth issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>October: 2nd Exhibition of Gutai held at Ohara Kaikan in Tokyo</td>
<td>October: <em>Gutai 5</em>, the fifth issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>December: &quot;Gutai Art Manifesto&quot; issue of <em>Geijutsu Shincho</em>, published</td>
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<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td>April: 3rd Exhibition of Gutai Art held at Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art.</td>
<td>April: <em>Gutai</em> 6, the sixth issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May: Gutai Art Using the Stage held at Sankei Hall in Osaka (also held at Sankei Hall in Tokyo in July)</td>
<td>July: <em>Gutai</em> 7, the seventh issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September: Michel Tapié visits Osaka and forms close ties with Gutai</td>
<td>August: <em>Gutai</em> 8 (Adventure of Art)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September: Georges Mathieu Exhibition organized at Shirokiya Department Store in Tokyo and Daimaru Department Store in Osaka</td>
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<td></td>
<td>October: Contemporary World</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Details</td>
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<tr>
<td>October: 4th</td>
<td>Exhibition of Gutai held at Ohara Kaikan in Tokyo</td>
<td>Art, an international exhibition of Art Informel works organized by Tapié, held at the Bridgestone Museum of Art in Tokyo. December: The same exhibition also held at Daimaru Department Store in Osaka.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October-November</td>
<td>Sam Francis and Toshimitsu Imai Exhibition organized at Toyoko Department Store in Tokyo and Kintetsu Department Store in Osaka</td>
<td>Informel) jointly edited with Tapié [50 copies (sold at Martha Jackson Gallery in New York), 50 copies (Tapié), 50 copies (Galerie Stadler in Paris) and 50 copies (for artists)].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958 April: 2nd</td>
<td>Gutai Art Using the Stage, held at Asahi Kaikan in Osaka</td>
<td>April: Contract concluded with Tapié to send artwork by Gutai artists to Europe. April: International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai, jointly organized with Tapié and held in Osaka, Nagasaki, Hiroshima, Tokyo, and Kyoto.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958 April: 2nd</td>
<td>Gutai Small Works Exhibition held at Ohara Kaikan Hall in Tokyo (later designated as the 5th Exhibition of Gutai)</td>
<td>September-October: Gutai Group exhibition (later known as the 6th Exhibition of Gutai) held at Martha Jackson Gallery in New York. Later, traveling exhibitions held at Bennington College in Vermont, Oakland Museum of California, University of Minnesota’s gallery in Minneapolis and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston in Texas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1958 April: 9</td>
<td>Gutai 9, the 9th issue of Gutai journal, published</td>
<td>April: 9, the 9th issue of Gutai journal, published [Among the 500 copies, 100 copies for important members of the press, 100 copies for other media outlets and important museums, 100 copies for sale or presented to purchasers, and others used in the traveling exhibitions in the US].</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1959 | August: 8th Exhibition of Gutai held at Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art (also held at Ohara Kaikan in Tokyo in September)  
February: BBC television crew films Gutai artists at work  
June: Group exhibition held at Galleria Notizie:Arti Figurative in Turin (later designated as the 7th Exhibition of Gutai)  
September: Franco Garelli and Franco Assetto Exhibition organized at Takashimaya Department Store in Osaka  
October: 11th Premio Risone International Art Exhibition in Italy  
November: Works of Yoshihara and Shiraga exhibited at Metamorphisms held at Galerie Stadler in Paris |
| 1960 | The International Sky Festival, an international Art Informel exhibition displaying works using advertising balloons, held on rooftop of the Takashimaya Department Store, Namba in Osaka, with 9th Exhibition of Gutai held at the same time on third floor of same store  
January: Christo Coetzee Exhibition organized at Takashimaya Department Store  
September: Works of Yoshihara and Motonaga exhibited at Four Japanese Artists Exhibition held at Martha Jackson Gallery in New York |
<p>|      | November: <em>Gutai 11</em>, the 11th issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published <em>Gutai 10</em> unpublished |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>January / February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April / May</th>
<th>June / July</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>January-February: Works of Kazuo Shiraga exhibited at Galerie Stadler in Paris</td>
<td>March: Works of 10 artists exhibited at Japanese Traditions and Avant-Garde Exhibition held at International Center of Aesthetic Research in Turin</td>
<td>April: 10th Exhibition of Gutai held at the Takashimaya Department Store, Namba in Osaka featuring Elaine Hamilton (also held at Takashimaya Department Store, Nihombashi in Tokyo)</td>
<td>May: <em>Gutai</em> 12, the 12th issue of <em>Gutai</em> journal, published</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>January: 12th Exhibition of Gutai held at Takashimaya Department Store, Nihombashi in Tokyo. April: 13th Exhibition of Gutai held at</td>
<td></td>
<td>February: A solo exhibition by Atsuko Tanaka held at GP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>March: 14th Exhibition of Gutai held at the Takashimaya Department Store, Namba in Osaka</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>January-March: Works by Tanaka and Jiro Yoshihara exhibited at the Guggenheim International Award held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>August: Intuition and Realization Exhibition held at the Centro de Artes Visuales Instituto Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>October-November: Works by Sadamasa Motonaga and Jiro Yoshihara exhibited at Contemporary Japanese Art</td>
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<td>1964</td>
<td>June: Works by Lucio Fontana and Giuseppe Capogrossi exhibited at GP</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>November: A solo exhibition by Yuko Nasaka held at GP</td>
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<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>December: Small Works Exhibition held at GP, with Paul Jenkins and Alice Baber as guest participants</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Takashimaya Department Store, Namba in Osaka held at GP

May: A solo exhibition by Shuji Mukai held at GP

July: A solo exhibition by Tsuruko Yamazaki held at GP

October: A solo exhibition by Takesada Matsutani held at GP

November: A solo exhibition by Tsuyoshi Maekawa held at GP

December: A solo exhibition by Michio Yoshihara held at GP
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1965 | October: 16th Exhibition of Gutai held at Keio Department Store in Shinjuku, Tokyo | February: Works of Kazuo Shiraga exhibited at Contemporary Art from Japan held in Zurich  
April: Works by eight artists exhibited at the "Nul" exhibition held in Amsterdam.  
April: New Japanese Painting and Sculpture Exhibition started  
November-January: Gutai Group exhibition, Gutai Art Exhibition in Paris, held at Galerie Stadler in Paris, |
|      |                                                                      | March: A solo exhibition by Masatoshi Masanobu held at GP  
April: 15th Gutai Art Exhibition held at Gutai Pinacotheca  
October: *Gutai* 14, the 14th and final issue of *Gutai* journal, published |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>September: 17th Exhibition of Gutai held at Takashimaya Department Store, Yokohama (also held at Gutai Pinacotheca in October)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>March-April: 1st Japan Art Festival held at the Union Carbide Building in New York</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>December: A traveling exhibition held at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, where works of four members of Gutai exhibited</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The same festival held in 1967, 1968 and 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>June: Gutai Pinacotheca introduced, with works of all members of Gutai exhibited, at the 2ème Salon International des Galeries Pilotes Lausanne held at the Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Art Palais de Rumine in Lausanne, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gutai dealt with in Assemblage, and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>February: A solo exhibition by Chiyu Uemae held at GP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June: Three-Person exhibition (Matsutani, Maekawa and Mukai) held at GP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>July: A solo exhibition by Norio Imai held at GP</td>
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<td></td>
<td>November: A solo exhibition by Minoru Yoshida held at GP</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>April: Gutai Art for the Space Age held in Hanshin Park in Nishinomiya</td>
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<td></td>
<td>May: Gutai Art Association awarded Kobe Shimbun Peace Prize (culture prize)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>August: 4th Summer Festival held at Festival Hall in Osaka, with stage design by Kansai</td>
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<td>October: 19th Exhibition of Gutai held at Tokyo Central Museum</td>
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<tr>
<td>1968</td>
<td>April: Milliorama Exhibition held at Family Land, Takarazuka, with collaborative kinetic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>installation by Toshio Yoshida and Senkichiro Nasaka</td>
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<td></td>
<td>June: Works of six members of Gutai exhibited at Contemporary Space 1968: Light and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Environment held at</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1969</td>
<td>April: Works by Joji Kikunami, Senkichiros, Nasaka and Minoru Yoshida exhibited at International Exhibition of Psycho-technological Art held at Sonny Building in Tokyo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April: Works by five members of Gutai exhibited at Abstract Spaces: From Intuition to Conceptualization held at Galleria D’Arte Cortina in Milan</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Works by two members of Gutai exhibited at Exhibition on Silence held at Tyrol Kunst Pavilion in Innsbruck</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>March-September: Gutai artists participate in Expo ’70 in Osaka, Japan, exhibiting at Expo Art Exhibitions, including Gutai Group exhibition held in Midori Pavilion entrance hall and Gutai Art Festival at Festival Plaza from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April: A solo exhibition by Jiro Yoshihara held at GP</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 15: Final Party of Gutai Pinacotheca held</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Jean Clay's special feature on Gutai published in <em>Robho</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1972</td>
<td>February 10: Yoshiihara Jiro dies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>March 31: Gutai Art Association disbanded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Image Source:
(Fig. 1) Retrieved from a website.
(Fig. 2) Retrieved from a website.
(Fig. 3) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 4) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 5) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 6) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 7) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 8) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 9) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 10) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 11) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 12) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 13) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 14) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 15) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 16) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 17) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 18) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 19) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 20) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 21) Retrieved from artist.christies.com/Sanyu--43033.aspx
(Fig. 22) Retrieved from https://www.tripadvisor.jp/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g13806906-d9740922-i214022182-
Southern_Branch_of_the_National_Palace_Museum-Taibao_Chiayi_County.html
(Fig. 23) Photo taken by the author
(Fig. 24) Retrieved from the KaNAM website: http://knam.jp/
(Fig. 25) Courtesy of Kengo Kuma and Associates
Biographies of Artists (In the order of the Japanese syllabary)

Ay·O 1931-
Born in Ibaraki Prefecture. In 1953, he joined the Demokrato Artists Association led by artist Ei·Q. In 1954, he graduated from the Department of Art and Design, Faculty of Education, Tokyo University of Education (present the University of Tsukuba) a year later. In 1958, Ay·O moved to the United States. He settled in New York then worked as an artist for 50 years, frequently traveling between the United States and Japan. The artist
eventually returned to Japan in 2008. During the 1960s Ay-O was a part of the avant-garde art movement Fluxus. The movement’s participants, such as George Maciunas and Yoko Ono, were from various countries. Also, the members of Fluxus ignored the existing boundaries and created or engaged in art that belong to a wide range of genres, such as visual art, music, poetry, and dance. Ay-O created "environments" (environmental art) and many other works as a Fluxus artist. In 1966, the artist represented Japan at the Venice Biennale. He represented Japan again at the São Paulo Biennial in 1971 and won the Banco do Brasil Prize. In 1987, Ay-O undertook a project where he hung a 300 m rainbow-colored banner from the Eiffel Tower. He was awarded the Medal with Purple Ribbon by the Japanese government in 1995. In 2006, a retrospective exhibition took place at the Fukui Fine Arts Museum and the Miyazaki Prefectural Art Museum. In 2012, the artist presented “Ay-O: Over the Rainbow Once More”, a solo exhibition (Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Niigata City Art Museum, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art). “AY-O: RAINBOW-88” (Karuizawa New Art Museum) took place in 2019.

The rainbow, synonymous with Ay-O, first appeared during a performance in 1964. During the performance series, the colors of the visible light spectrum—red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet, in that order—covered every sort of thing found in an everyday environment. From the sequence of the colors of the visible light spectrum, Ay-O created gradations consisting of six to 192 colors, the latter being the upper limit of the number of colors humans can see. When you cover with a rainbow the environment around you, your three-dimensional existence, your four-dimensional existence, and your emotions disappear. You next begin to exist in a new dimension. According to Ay-O, the rainbows are "new objects" and an “evolution.” The artist has also stated, "Evolution through the rainbow has nothing to do with creating new things. Instead, it announces the importance of bringing back to life many realities by devising new interpretations.”

Yukihisa Isobe 1935-
Yukihisa Isobe is recognized as an artist who links together the abstraction of the 1950s and the pop art in the 1960s. He started off as an artist, then went into architecture and ecological planning. In recent years he has become an environmental artist. Isobe began making prints during the 1950s. In the early 1960s he attracted attention when he presented works involving
repeating motifs resembling emblems. These creations possessed a fresco-like texture and a three-dimensional structure. The manner the colors were used—the same colors were repeatedly used but no pattern existed—was different from the mechanical repetition and multiplying seen in pop art, which was a symbol of the decade. In short, these works were abstract repeating structures unique to Isobe. The artist took up the symbolism of materials, repetition, and mass producibility observed in pop art and then reconstructed them beyond pop art’s boundaries. He thus ventured into a new abstract expression, a fusion of abstraction and pop art. Isobe began to produce artistic works again during the 1990s. From then to the present, he has worked as an environmental artist that creates land art whose themes are local communities and the natural environment. He has continued to incorporate the land itself in his works and in his presentations. Isobe is deeply involved in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, which opened in 2000. As a piece for the Art Field, the artist used poles to express the Shinano River of the past. Furthermore, in 2015, he made into an installation the effects of a mud slide. The artist presented “World of Yukihisa Isobe: sign, environment” (Echigo-Tsumari Kiyotsu Warehouse Museum, Niigata) in 2018. Collection: Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; National Museum of Art, Osaka; Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art; Ohara Museum of Art (Commissioned work, mural); etc.

Yuichi Inoue 1916-1985
Born in downtown Tokyo, in Shitaya. After graduating from normal school, Inoue produced pictures and calligraphy while working as an elementary and junior high school teacher. When he was 25, he became a student of calligrapher Sokyu Ueda. After some time he began to question the state of the calligraphy world and ultimately left Sokyu’s school. Inoue then formed Bokujin-kai (Ink People’s Society) and forged the path for calligraphy as art. Rebelling against the insular, elitist calligraphy world, Inoue insisted that "calligraphy is all people’s art." After abstract expressionism spread globally Inoue embraced it, and Tapié and Kline applauded his works. Acclaim for the artist grew through his experimental single character calligraphies where he wrote one huge kanji character on the calligraphy paper. Notably, during his lifetime Inoue created 64 works containing the single kanji hin (poverty).
They became his emblematic works. In recent years, extraordinary admiration for Inoue’s works has emerged in China, the birthplace of calligraphy.

Collection: National Museum of Art, Osaka; Chiba City Museum of Art; Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art; Department of Art, Carnegie Institution for Science; Museum of Modern Art, Gunma; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; Today Art Museum (Beijing); Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York); Museum for East Asian Art (Cologne); Museum Angewandte Kunst (Frankfurt); Museum Rietberg (Zurich); Portland Art Museum (USA); Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (USA); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (USA); M+ (Hong Kong); Powerlong Museum (Shanghai); Long Museum (Shanghai); etc.

Katsuyoshi Inokuma 1951-
After studying at an art school in Yokohama, Inokuma continued to create art in his hometown in Fukushima Prefecture. He was over 40 when he became a full-time artist. Inokuma won the grand prize at the Aoki Shigeru Memorial Prize Competition in 1996 and the runner-up prize at the Fukushima Prefectural Art Exhibition in 1998. The unique texture found in the Inokuma’s paintings was developed by him and is produced using materials such as coffee grounds. Also, the atmospheric blur he creates by sanding down the colored surface is simultaneously exceedingly contemporary and distinctly Japanese. In particular, a series of ultramarine blue-themed works called Inokuma Blue is highly acclaimed domestically and internationally. When Whitestone Gallery Hong Kong Hollywood Road opened in 2016, the gallery’s inaugural exhibition was a solo exhibition by Inokuma. The power and the maturity of the blue-themed works shown in the exhibition resonated deeply with the exhibition’s visitors.

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Toshimitsu Imai 1928-2002
In 1952, amid the post-war turmoil, Imai set out for Paris. While living in France he joined Michel Tapié’s Art informel movement. In 1957, Imai temporarily returned to Japan. Tapié, Georges Mathieu, and Sam Francis consequently arrived in Japan, and they and Imai took by storm the Japanese
art world, causing an "Art informel whirlwind." Art informel sought to overturn the rational beauty that Europe had created and maintained through the ages. Hence, the shock that Imai’s group caused greatly affected Japanese art: until then, it was simply continually imitating the norms of beauty developed by Western art. On the other hand, after objectifying and examining Japan and the Japanese, Imai understood clearly that the traditional Japanese sense of beauty was his foundation. He then used it as a weapon to shatter European fixed notions. After Imai recognized his own Japanese-ness, he incorporated into his works the Japanese sense of beauty which thinks of art and nature as being intertwined. Western art, which was separated from life, had fallen into an impasse. When Imai broke the standstill, it was the Japanese sense of beauty he reclaimed that let him do so.

Chiyu Uemae 1920-2018

Uemae was born in 1920, in Okuono, Naka County, Kyoto. In 1947, he was selected for the first Niki Exhibition. In the same year he began studying under painter Jyutaro Kuroda. In 1954, Uemae participated in the formation of the avant-garde art group Gutai Art Association. He showed his work in all Gutai exhibitions until the group dissolved in 1972. He joined the Modern Art Association of Japan (he left the group in 1971). In 1958, he exhibited his work in International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai (Takashimaya Osaka Store).

Shinro Ohtake 1955-
Painter. Born in Meguro City, Tokyo, in 1955. From 1974 to 1980, he lived in Hokkaido, the United Kingdom, and Hong Kong. After Ohtake exhibited his first work in 1979, he moved to Tokyo and continued his work there. In 1988, he moved his base of creation from Tokyo to Uwajima, Ehime Prefecture. Ohtake’s first retrospective exhibition, “Shinro Ohtake Zen-Kei: Retrospective 1955–2006”, took place at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo in 2006. Since then, he has had solo exhibitions in Tokyo, Kagawa, Seoul, London, and Singapore. The artist has also shown his works in various domestic and international group exhibitions, such as the Gwangju Biennale (South Korea), documenta (Kassel), Venice Biennale (Venice), Yokohama Triennale, and Setouchi Triennale. In 1986, Ohtake published his first artist’s book LONDON/HONCONG 1980 (Yobisha, UCA). He has thereafter released more artist’s books as well as other publications and CDs. The artist’s most comprehensive catalogues include Works of Shinro Ohtake 1955–91 (UCA) and Shinro Ohtake Zen-kei: Retrospective 1955–2006 (grambooks). His major essay collections are Mienai oto, kikoenai e (Invisible sounds, inaudible pictures), Bi (both Shinchosha), Sudeni sokoni arumono (What’s already there), Neon to enogubako (Neon and paint box) (both Chikuma Bunko), and Monsieur Jarry (Fukuinkan Shoten). Between 2004 and November 2018, the artist wrote a series of essays Mienai oto, kikoenai e for the monthly literary magazine Shincho.

Yoichiro Kawaguchi 1952-
Born in Tanegashima, Kagoshima, in 1952. In 1975, while Kawaguchi was a student of the Department of Visual Communication Design, School of Design, Kyushu Institute of Design (present Kyushu University), he started a
modeling experiment using the CTR graphic display and created *Pollen*, his first animated film. He began researching the Growth Model in 1976 and produced *Shell*, his maiden work. Since then, Kawaguchi’s works have consistently explored the theme of self-organizing growth model. When Kawaguchi uses the word “growth” he is literally talking about growth. As his creation grows by cell proliferation, its growth can be viscerally experienced through CG images. The sense of entering the body of an outer-space life form is what you feel when you watch a work by Kawaguchi. In 1982, he presented *The GROWTH Model* at SIGGRAPH ’82 (USA), the world’s most prestigious computer graphics conference. He was awarded the best artist award at EUROGRAPHICS ’84 held in Demark in 1984. In 1986, he was invited to participate in the 42nd Venice Biennale. In 1995, at the 46th Venice Biennale, he represented the Japan Pavilion. Due to the pioneering nature of the artist’s exhibitions and installations, they continue to attract international attention. Since 2000, Kawaguchi has taught at the University of Tokyo as a professor of Interfaculty Initiative in Information Studies. He was awarded the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology’s Art Encouragement Prize and the Medal with Purple Ribbon in 2013. In 2017, he presented *Zero-Gravity Paradise: Kawaguchi Yoichiro’s Algorithmic Evolution* (Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei [MOCA Taipei]). In 2018, he held a solo exhibition at the museum of CDA Enghien-les-Bains. In the same year, Kawaguchi was given the Prix D'Honneur at Prix Bains Numériques in France and was inducted into the Hall of SIGGRAPH Academy.

**On Kawara 1932-2014**

Born in Aichi in 1932. Kawara is one of the most famous Japanese conceptual artists. In 1953, he showed *Bathroom*, a series of pencil drawings, at the First Nippon Exhibition (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum). He attracted attention through the work which depicted tiled bathrooms containing pregnant women and floating truncated humans. In 1959 he advocated "print painting," then traveled to Mexico later in the same year. Subsequently, after settling in New York, in 1965, he began working as an artist. On January 4, 1966, he started producing *Date Paintings*, a series of works where he painted the canvas a single color then painted in white the date he made the painting. Kawara
created the date paintings according to a rule: he began painting at midnight and had to complete the piece on the same day. A completed painting was placed in a box lined with newspaper published on the day it was made. The date painting series became Kawara’s most well-known work. The artist has many other representative works, including the series I AM STILL ALIVE, in which from all over the world he sent people telegrams containing the words "I am still alive." Between 1970 to 1971, the artist used a typewriter to type a list containing one million years and produced One Million Years (Past), a book. In 1980, he presented One Million Years (Future) which was produced in limited numbers. In 2015, a large retrospective took place at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

Yayoi Kusama 1929-
A Japanese treasure who is one of the world’s greatest contemporary artists. From an early age Kusama suffered from hallucinations, and she began to draw as a means of overcoming them. After studying Japanese-style painting in Kyoto, in 1957, she moved to the United States. Working mainly in New York, she created net paintings, soft sculptures, and staged happenings, all of which later became her signature work. Until she returned to Japan in 1973 she remained a pioneering presence in New York’s art scene. After her return, the artist became well-known to the public through her exposure to the media by way of her novels and films. Then, in 1993, Kusama’s solo exhibition at the 53rd Venice Biennale triggered a global critical re-evaluation of Kusama as a painter. In 1993, when the artist installed a huge pumpkin on Naoshima (Benesse House), the open-air sculpture drew attention as a new tourist attraction. Kusama has had numerous solo exhibitions at the world’s foremost art museums, including MoMA (NY), Whitney Museum of American Art, Centre Pompidou, and Tate Modern. She has received the French Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (Officier) and the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette. Also, she was selected as an Honorary Citizen of Matsumoto and a Person of Cultural Merit. In 2016, the artist was given the Order of Culture. The Yayoi Kusama Museum opened in 2017. The pumpkin became Kusama’s signature motif because her family were seed and seedling sellers.

Collection:
Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Modern Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Whitney Museum of American Art; National Gallery of Art;
Amsterdam Museum; Tate Modern; Museum Ludwig (Cologne); Neue Nationalgalerie (Berlin); Centre Pompidou; Queensland Art Gallery; Taipei Fine Arts Museum; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; Towada Art Center; Matsumoto City Museum of Art; Benesse House Museum; etc.

Tadaaki Kuwayama 1932-
Kuwayama left Japan for the United States in 1958. Based in New York, he continues to create minimalistic works. After the artist parted ways with the avant-garde painters of post-World War Two Japan, he became one of the leading American painters. Early on, he used pigments used in Japanese paintings and Japanese paper to create works that were radically different from Japanese paintings. In time, his focus shifted to artificial shapes and colors, and his expressions changed accordingly. To completely eliminate from his works all expressions found in paintings, the artist mechanically arranged flat monochromatic colored surfaces which had no traces of the artist’s hand and painted with metallic colors using an airbrush. Kuwayama, by emphasizing the materiality of the paints and the materials themselves, created paintings that transcended artificial materials. Donald Judd and Frank Stella are credited as having led American Minimalism during the 1960s, and Kuwayama is starting to be recognized as a fellow pioneer. The artist himself, however, does not position his works as minimalist art. "Art is a beauty created by human beings. That is why it has to be artificial," is Kuwayama’s own words. In 2019, the artist and Rakuko Naito presented “Beautiful Nothing” at Whitestone Gallery Taipei.

Miwa Komatsu 1984-
Born in Nagano in 1984. Miwa Komatsu spent her childhood interacting with various animals in a rich natural environment, and she stayed beside many of these creatures as they died. These experiences caused Komatsu to develop a distinct view of life and death. That view then compelled her to attempt to express the beauty of death. She started making copperplate engraving while attending the Joshibi University of Art and Design Junior College. When she was around 20, her work 49 Day’s was lauded for the remarkable techniques
she used and for her artistic style. The event made her decide to become a professional artist. In recent years, the artist has created not only copperplate engravings but also acrylic paintings and Arita ware. Komatu’s expressions are powerful and highly performative. She has created works whose themes are death, deities who rule death, divine creatures, and mononoke (supernatural beings). She has put on solo exhibitions in Nagano where she was born, at the Museum of Tetsu, the Kitano Cultural Center, and the Ueda City Museum of Art. In 2014, she contributed her work to the Izumotaisha Shrine and further sublimated the theme that drives her. That same year, she used her koma inu (lion dog) Arita porcelain figures in an exhibit she and a collaborator, landscape designer Kazuyuki Ishihara, showed at the Chelsea Flower Garden Show in London. The pair’s exhibit won an award, and the British Museum added to its collection her koma inu figures. In 2017, 30,000 people visited her solo show that took place at Tokyo Garden Terrace Kioicho. She is internationally active, including having her work be included in the collection of the World Trade Center (New York), having solo shows in Taiwan and Hong Kong, and appearing in films and TV commercials. In 2019 she showed her work in the exhibition “Diversity for Peace” at the Venice Biennale 2019.

Collection:
British Museum (London), World Trade Center (New York), Izumotaisha Shrine (Shimane), etc.

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Makoto Saito 1952-
During the 1970s Makoto Saito became known as a cutting-edge graphic designer. His collage techniques broke new grounds, and the innovative works he produced garnered attention in and outside Japan. As a contemporary artist, since 1979 Saito has shown his works in many contemporary art exhibitions. After 2008’s major retrospective “Makoto Saito: Scene [0]” at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, he stopped doing graphic design. Since then Saito has worked full-time as an artist. He will hold a solo exhibition at the Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art in the fall of 2019. Original methods and astounding meticulousness make up Saito’s creation process. For example, using a computer and special digital
technology, he dissembles a movie scene that affected him when he was young then reconstructs it. To depict microscopic details he creates several hundred layers. Eventually, out from the layers an image a person materializes. The presence of the depicted person and the power of chaos batter the image’s viewers, overwhelming them.

Shozo Shimamoto 1928-2013

Shozo Shimamoto, a founding member of the Gutai Art Association, stood out from the rest due to his large-scale works that were performances first and foremost. His methods included “cannon painting” and “bottle throwing”: he packed paint into a handmade cannon then fired it using gas, and he threw bottles packed with paint from an elevated place. Such works helped him become a popular artist in Europe and the United States. Because Shimamoto’s works are precisely marks the body’s actions leave behind, his pieces embody the spirit of Gutai. His creations contributed to the internationalization of contemporary Japanese art. In 1957, at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, as a Gutai Art Using the Stage he presented a musical work which was a pioneering work of Japanese musique concrète. Shimamoto’s solo show at Gutai Pinacotheca in 1962 was the first in the series of solo exhibitions by Gutai artists. In 1970, he produced the 1,000 brides project which took place in the Festival Plaza at Expo ’70. In 1975, he joined the Artists’ Union (present AU). The following year he took the post of secretary general of the Artists’ Union’s national committee. In 1976, Shimamoto became seriously committed to mail art. Each year afterward he exchanged artworks with a network of mail artists who resided in 60 different countries. In 1998, along with Jackson Pollock, John Cage, Lucio Fontana, he was selected as one of the world’s four greatest artists for the exhibition “Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979” by MOCA (Los Angeles). He was given the Medal with Dark Blue Ribbon in 1999. In the same year, David Bowie, Yoko Ono, and he were invited to participate in the Venice Biennale. In 2000, he read a manifesto for artistic collaboration at a castle in France during an art performance sponsored by Japan UNESCO and the Felissimo Museum. He also presented a work where he lined up the New Year’s Day edition of the various newspapers of the world. His piece was exhibited at UNESCO in Paris. In 2005, he unveiled the world’s smallest nano art. He had used nanotechnology to draw on the tips of a toothbrush. He died
Kazuo Shiraga 1924-2008

Considered the pioneer of Japanese action painting, Kazuo Shiraga is one of the most well-known Gutai artists overseas. His style of clinging to a rope suspended from the ceiling and painting with his feet and the thick build-up of oil paint he left on the sheet of paper laid out on the floor were dynamic, but always stoic. Before joining the Gutai Art Association in 1955 he was active as a member of Zero-kai (Zero Society), which he formed with artists such as Atsuko Tanaka, Akira Kanayama, and Saburo Murakami. Michel Tapié, the originator of the Art Informel movement which was then sweeping through Europe, enthusiastically reviewed his works. In 1958, his work appeared in “The Gutai Group Exhibition” (Martha Jackson Gallery, New York). In 1959, he exhibited his work at the XI Premio Lissone-internazional par la Pittura and received the buyer’s prize. “SHIRAGA” (Galerie Stadler, Paris) and “Kazuo Shiraga Solo Exhibition” (Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka) took place in 1962. He showed his work in “Trends in Contemporary Painting: The West and Japan” (Kyoto Annex Museum of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo) in 1963, in “Nul” in 1965 (Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam) and “Trends in Contemporary Art: Paintings and Sculptures” (Kyoto Annex Museum of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo) in 1965, and in the exhibition “Contemporary Dynamism” at Expo’ 70 (Expo Museum of Fine Arts, Osaka) in 1970. In 1971, he entered the Buddhist priesthood at Enryaku-ji Temple and took the Buddhist name of Sodo Shiraga. He held “Sadamasa Motonaga and Kazuo Shiraga” (Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama) in 1984 and “Kazuo Shiraga: The Dynamism of the Abstraction” (Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art) in 1985. In 1987, he received the Hyogo Prefectural Cultural Prize. He presented “The Encounter Between the Body and Matière: Kazuo Shiraga” (Amagasaki Cultural Center) in 1989, “Kazuo Shiraga” (Fukuoka Art Museum) in 1997, and “Action Painter Kazuo
Shiraga” (Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art) in 2001. He died of sepsis in 2008 at the age of 84.

Collection:
Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art, Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Centre Pompidou (Paris), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Musée Cantini (Marseille), etc.

Yasuo Sumi 1925-2015
While teaching junior high and high school Yasuo Sumi began to paint, after Shozo Shimamoto, a colleague of his, urged him to do so. Sumi, a math teacher, discovered by chance the beauty of the tracks made by an abacus. From then on, along with the vibrator and the bangasa (Japanese umbrella), the abacus became a signature tool he painted with. He joined the Gutai Art Association in 1955 and showed his work in every Gutai exhibition until the group disbanded. When creating his works Sumi adhered to the principle of “Yakekuso, fumajime, chanporan” (Desperation, absence of seriousness, irresponsibility). Inspiration and extemporaneity fill his paintings, and Haruyoshi Yoshiwawra admired his creations. As with Shozo Shimamoto Sumi exhibited extensively in Europe and the United States and is particularly well-known in Italy.

Collection:
National Museum of Art, Osaka; Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art; Miyagi Museum of Art; Ashiya City Museum of Art & History; the Rachofsky Collection (Dallas), etc.

Jiro Takamatsu 1936-1998
Jiro Takamatsu sees in the unfinished possibilities and the future. He views the unfinished as an eternal absence; his thinking process about the unfinished as he defines it is the subject of his works. In 1961 he began to show works belonging to the series Point, then in the following year works that are part of the series String. Takamatsu’s point is comparable to the elementary particle in physics and the vanishing point in perspective drawing. He examined the point as the absence that is the foundation of all existing values, in the process overturning the conventional concept of space.
Furthermore, Takamatsu explained that the point is zero dimensional and the point’s path in the first dimension is the string. He then made the point and the string catalysts that brought to light the unevenness of ordinary space-time so that it could be investigated. After this fundamental series on absence, he commenced creating the series *Shadow* which became his best-known post-1964 work. By artificially creating only shadows, the world of substance is erased, or absence is created. The viewer notes just the shadow and becomes conversely aware of the subject’s absence. Thus, the imagination of the viewer becomes free of the constraints of the real world. It can fly unbound and the viewers attain a purer awareness. Through *Shadow*, Takamatsu was exploring the possibilities that the "purer perception of absence" offered.

Collection:
An installation in the Sunday Plaza at Expo ’70, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art, National Museum of Art, Osaka

Atsuko Tanaka 1932-2005
Atsuko Tanaka joined the Gutai Art Association in 1955. She received attention for her work involving 20 bells connected at two-meter intervals and for *Electric Dress*, wherein she created a costume made out of light bulbs and fluorescent tubes and then wore it. Afterward, devices with an electric system became an important motif to her. She obtained ideas by drawing electrical wiring and created two-dimensional works featuring a complex interplay between circles and curves. She used synthetic resin enamel paint as the medium and her works emphasize smooth texture and vivid colors. These characteristics give her works a distinctive presence. Along with Kazuo Shiraga and Sadamasu Motonaga Tanka is a representative artist of early Gutai. She showed her works numerous times in Europe and the United States.

Collection:
Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art, Ashiya City Museum of Art & History, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, etc.

Hisao Domoto 1928-2013
In 1952, with Insho Domoto, his artist uncle who was staying in Europe for a
spell, Hisao Domoto visited Paris for the first time. He soon traveled to Paris again by himself and began living there. Before long the artist switched from Japanese-style Painting to oil painting and befriended painters Toshimitsu Imai and Kumi Sugai. In 1956 Domoto threw himself into Michel Tapié’s Art Informel movement. He created a new painting featuring thickly applied oil paint and dynamic, swirling form and moved into the limelight as a principal figure in Art Informel which aimed to produce unprecedented abstract expressions. In addition, he introduced Japanese Gutai art to Tapié. After 1962 Domoto broke with Tapié and began exploring new expressions. He then depicted repeating splatters and drips, his signature effects, in his Ensembles Binaires series and emphasized materiality in his Solution de Continuité series. These pieces were seen as works that showed abstract painting’s post-Art Informel possibilities. Domoto's style further changed between the late 1960s and late 2000s. He took up compositions in which circles and ripples continuously crisscrossed one another and paintings with dream-like colors, while his series Between Unconsciousness and Consciousness involved automatism which employs blurs and bleeding colors. He thus continued to produce experimental works.

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Naoko Tosa 1961-  
Born in Fukuoka in 1961. Lamenting the accelerating tendency towards intolerant societies in an information age, she is driven to create what she calls “sacred spots that restore and awaken to the individual,” and believes that this is what makes artworks inevitable in this world. In the small universes (box gardens) that she creates, she positions ancient Japanese aesthetics, such as wabi·sabi, as small bits of matter. By adding external pressures like vibrations, air pressure, and media conversion, this matter undergoes change. One is reflected in matter, and the nostalgic sensations that form one’s core are stimulated by this changing matter/self. In this way, Tosa’s artworks, which are sometimes described as “Zen-like,” are self-liberation that also aspire, at the same time, to the liberation of one’s surroundings and the world. In 1999 she received a Ph.D. from the University of Tokyo’s School of Engineering, and was then a fellow artist at the Center
for Advanced Visual Studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 2002 to 2004. From 2005 to 2010 she was a program-specific professor at Kyoto University's Academic Center for Computing and Media Studies, and from 2011 to 2018 a professor at Kyoto University's Institute for Information Management and Communication. Since 2018, she has been a program-specific professor at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Advanced Integrated Studies in Human Survivability. She has received many awards both in Japan and abroad. Her genre-transcending collaborations—with the likes of Ippei Shigeyama (kyogen theater), Misho-ryu Sasaoka's Ryuho Sasaoka (ikebana flower arrangement), and Toshinori Kondo (trumpeter)—have received high acclaim. In 2015, she presented the Rimpa 400 Anniversary Projection Mapping Tosa Rimpa, a project of Kyoto Prefecture. She is the chair of the International Conference on Culture and Computing. In addition to being invited to exhibit her work at the New York Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum, in Japan her works are held by the National Museum of Art (Osaka), O Museum (Tokyo), Toyama Prefectural Museum of Art and Design, Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, and Takamatsu Art Museum.

Natsuyuki Nakanishi 1935-2016

Born in 1935 in Tokyo. Graduated from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1958. In 1959, he received the Shell Art Award (Honorable Mention). In 1963, he founded the Hi Red Center along with Jiro Takamatsu and Genpei Akasegawa. Being seen as an anti-art happening group that transcended the existing frameworks of art production, it gave rise to controversy. However, it is clear that Nakanishi's true interest was in the relationship between artwork and light/coloring. This can be seen from the fact that already around this time he had begun exploring his own coloring plans. His collaborative stage art with the Butoh dancer Tatsumi Hijikata led him to deeply consider the relationship between space, the body, and painting. In the 1990s, he began presenting, in a way connected with his painting production, installation-format works that were closely linked to the spaces in which they appeared. These endeavors were related to his own concept of kaigajo, or painting space. Nakanishi’s “paintings” did not create self-contained words. He made paintings be cross-sections that stand perpendicular to the spaces in which we live. These are partial spaces,
without surface areas or even outlines, born time and time again in the places that brushes pass through and leave their mark. Nakanishi’s paintings are thus series of membranes. In a time in which the act of painting itself had been annihilated after the anti-art of the late 1950s thoroughly destroyed painting’s self-evident “tableauism,” Nakanishi did not return to older forms but instead opened up new spheres.

Yuko Nasaka 1938-  
Receiving prizes one after another at the Nika Exhibition and the Ashiya City Art Exhibition in 1962, Yuko Nasaka caught the eye of Jiro Yoshihara, and joined the Gutai Art Association in the following year. Due to her family’s business having been ship meter manufacturing, since her childhood Nasaka was familiar with circles, and these became her lifelong creative motif. The space of her first solo exhibition at Gutai Pinacoteca in 1964 was filled entirely with concentric circles. It drew much attention, and visitors included Robert Rauschenberg, John Cage, and Merce Cunningham. After a taking a break from her career, she returned to her work and today still continues to present series of circles and large pieces. The world of Nasaka knows no bounds—like her circular motifs. Recently, her popularity has grown in Europe as well.  
Collection: Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts, and Miyagi Museum of Art (Miyagi, Japan)

Tsuguharu Foujita 1886-1968  
Born in Tokyo in 1886. In 1910, he graduated from the Tokyo Fine Arts School (present Tokyo University of Arts) , where he studied Western painting. In 1913, he went to France, and, becoming acquainted with Picasso and Modigliani, studied intensively as an artist. He then came up with his own style: painting lines onto creamy white surfaces. In 1919, he became a Salon d’Automne member, and was shortly thereafter recommended for its jury. In this way, he quickly rose to be the darling of the School of Paris. From the 1920s to the 1930s, he created artworks such as My Room, Still Life with Alarm Clock (1921 Paris; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo), and My Room, Still Life with Accordion (1922; National Museum of Modern Art,
Tokyo). After temporarily returning to Japan in 1929, from 1930 to 1933, while basing himself out of Paris, he created artworks throughout Central and South America. From 1939 to 1940, he resided in France for the third time. During this time he became a member of the Nika Association in Japan. In 1937, he created a mural in Akita. In 1941, he became a member of the Japan Art Academy, and in 1943, received the Asahi Culture Prize for his war paintings. After World War II, he went to France via the US. In 1955, he acquired French citizenship. In 1959, he was baptized as a Catholic and changed his name to Léonard Foujita. In his later years he immersed himself in painting frescoes in the Notre-Dame-de-la-Paix Chapel. He is notable for his outstanding sketching abilities as well as his unique lines. Many of his artworks are held by major art museums outside of Japan. In Japan, the Masakichi Hirano Art Foundation (Akita) holds many of his pieces. In 1957, he was awarded the Legion of Honor, and in 1969 became a member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts Antwerp. He passed away in Zurich in 1968.
Kazuyuki Futagawa 1954-
Born in Takamatsu (Kagawa). He graduated from Kanazawa College of Art (Japanese-style painting) in 1976 and from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music Graduate School in 1978. In his mid-thirties, he began focusing on landscape paintings. His many artworks present vivid spaces filled with a feeling of reality, and they have received high acclaim at exhibitions in Russia and other overseas countries. While carrying on traditional Japanese-style painting techniques, he depicts with care the firm presence of subjects using layered mineral pigment paints. In order to fully create depth in quiet landscapes, he unaffectedly expresses perspective, texture, and the presence of physical objects. These artworks go beyond realism to rise to the level of beautifully glimmering mental landscapes. In recent years, he also has been working on figure paintings. The *A few seconds’ gesture* series, which depicts on the same painting surface the same model in two poses seconds apart, is attracting attention as a form of realism in which the traditional techniques of Japanese-style painting and modern sensibilities co-exist.

Tsuyoshi Maekawa 1936-
Born in Osaka Prefecture in 1936. Graduate of Osaka City Kogei Senior High School, where he studied drafting. In 1959, he began studying under Jiro Yoshiharu. He participated in all Gutai art exhibitions from the eighth onwards. In 1962, he became a member of the Gutai Art Association and was awarded the Kansai Comprehensive Art Exhibition Grand Prize (Osaka City Museum of Fine Arts). In 1966, he participated in Gutai’s Netherlands Exhibition (Gallery Olez, The Hague) and an international exhibition in Lausanne (Musée Cantonal Des Beaux-Art). In 1967, he participated in the Gutai’s small works exhibition in the Netherlands (Design House, Rotterdam) and Gutai’s Austrian Exhibition (Heide Hildebrand Gallery, Klagenfurt). In 1982, he received Japanese Contemporary Art Exhibition’s Grand Prize.

In 1970, he participated in the Gutai Japan Expo (Osaka Expo Midori Pavilion). In 1971, he went to study in the US and Europe. In 1975, he participated in the 10th Japan Art Festival (Australia and elsewhere), and
held a solo exhibition at Osaka Prefecture Residents' Gallery. In 1979, he participated in “Jiro Yoshihara and Contemporary Aspects of Gutai” (Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art). In 1981 he participated in “Japan Art Festival ‘81” (London, Tokyo, Osaka), received the 15th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan’s Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum Award (Tokyo, Kyoto), and participated in the Jiro Yoshihara Award Exhibition (Contemporary Art Center, Osaka). In 1972, he received the 4th Japan Emba Prize Exhibition's Osaka National Museum of Art Award (Emba Museum of Chinese Modern Art, Ashiya), and came in second place in the Japan-France Contemporary Art Exhibition (Paris, Tokyo, Kyoto). In 1985, he participated in the “Gutai: Painting and Action Exhibition” (Spain) and the “Contemporary Japan Painting Exhibition” (India, Tokyo). In 1986, he participated in the “Gutai: Painting and Action Exhibition” (Spain, Yugoslavia), as well as the Japanese artists exhibition (Stalder Gallery, Paris). In 1999, he participated in Gutai’s Paris Exhibition (Jeu de Paume National Gallery). In 2012, his work appeared in Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art’s inaugural exhibition, and he held solo exhibitions at ABC Gallery, LAD Gallery, and Gallery Blanche (all in Osaka).

Collection: National Museum of Modern Art (Kyoto), National Museum of Art (Osaka), Museum of Contemporary Art (Tokyo), Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art (Wakayama), Miyagi Museum of Art, Ashiya City Museum of Art and History (Hyogo), Takamatsu Art Museum (Kagawa), Artrip Museum Preparatory Office, Tanba City Ueno Memorial Museum (Hyogo), Ube City (Yamaguchi), Tate Modern (London), Art Institute of Chicago, M+ (Hong Kong), Long Museum (Shanghai), and Axel & May Vervoort Foundation (Belgium)

Takesada Matsutani 1937-
Born in Abeno Ward, Osaka City in 1937. In 1960, he participated in Gutai's ninth exhibition at the introduction of Sadamasa Motonaga, and joined the Gutai Art Association three years later. In 1966, he received the Grand Prize at the First Mainichi Art Competition (Kyoto City Museum of Art), which resulted in a French government grant to study in France. In 1967, he entered Atelier 17, the engraving studio of Stanley William Hayter, and in 1969 became his assistant. Since then, he has been based out of Paris. During the Gutai movement’s middle period, Matsutani, Shuji Mukai, and Tsuyoshi
Maekawa—referred to as “3M”—were core members of the Gutai’s second generation. Matsutani then began using vinyl wood glue, which was developed soon after World War II, as material, constructing a unique style. The fascinatingly elegant and sticky texture of this glue, as well as the alternately puffy and sagging organic and sensual film formed by this material itself, were seen as presenting entirely new possibilities for painting. He received high acclaim for his photoengraving prints of his glue artworks, and receiving awards at international print exhibitions and the like. From the 1970s onwards, he incorporated into his artworks a bewitching blackness created by coloring, with pencils and ink, bulges created from glue. With Paris and Japan as his stage, he would continue to construct his monochrome world while describing his own sphere of expression as being in between the East and the West. In 2015, he put on the exhibition “Matsutani Currents” at the Otani Memorial Art Museum, Nishinomiya City (Hyogo). In 2019, he held an individual exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.

Tetsuo Mizū 1944-
In the 1980s, Mizū’s Flag series put him in the limelight. In it, he designs titles by combining international maritime signal flags. He has resided for extended periods and exhibited his works in Italy, France and Spain. In 1987, he was invited to display his work and won special prize at the First Representational Art Concours in Anzio (outside of Rome), and was asked to create stained glass for St. Anna Church. Mizū has received quite high acclaim in the European painting world. He has displayed his work at “Chagall, Dali, Picasso, Melois and Mizū” (1989, Barcelona), and held a joint Dali exhibition in 1990 (Beane, France). Although his matte, full-brimmed textures divided by extra-fine lines are symbols the modern abstract, it is sometimes pointed out that they have an affinity with ukiyo-e. He has displayed many works at Art Fairs, including Art Basel (Switzerland), FIAC (Paris), and Art Rio (Brazil). In 2018, he held an individual exhibition at Whitestone Gallery’s Hong Kong location.

Collection: St. Anna Church (Lavino, Italy), the Toda Boat Race Circuit’s event hall floor and monument hall, the entrance hall of the Nagano Olympics’ figure skating rink entrance hall, the Karuizawa New Art Museumelsewhere, etc.
Shuji Mukai 1940-

In 1959, Mukai participated in the Gutai’s group’s eighth exhibition while he was still enrolled at Osaka University of Arts. Until its dissolution, he belonged to the Jiro Yoshihara-led Gutai Art Association. Mukai also was part of the advertising division at Yoshihara’s Yoshihara Oil Mill, Ltd., where he learned about advertising in various media, including television. Art critic Michel Tapié enthusiastically praised Mukai’s early period works when he came to Japan, purchasing all of them and bringing them to Italy. During Mukai’s Gutai years, he presented a room covered with symbols (including himself) at department stores in eastern and western Japan (1961). In 1962, he presented the stage performance *Faces and Symbols*, which consisted of him painting symbols on thirteen people’s faces. It is said that this is where the term “happening” came from. He held his first solo exhibition at Gutai’s private art museum Gutai Pinacotheca in 1963. At the jazz cafe Check, Mukai created environmental art, covering the entirety of its interior with symbols. It became a gathering place for young people. After the Gutai group disbanded, he was active as an art image producer for large companies in the fields of clothing, food, housing, and medicine. In 1990, he began painting as part of a plan to cover The Great Pyramid of Giza in symbols. In 2012, he participated in “Gutai: The Spirit of an Era” at the National Art Center, Tokyo. At the 2013 “Gutai: Splendid Playground” exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, he was in charge of the opening performance along with fifteen young people, and covered the bathroom, elevator, and elsewhere in symbols. In 2014, he collaborated with the architect Tadao Ando to create an installation in which a total of over five hundred people helped cover the outside circular stage of the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art with symbols. In 2015, at the Venice Biennale he presented a mirror room filled with symbols. In 2016, at the request of the world-renown architect Peter Marino, he covered the interior of Louis Vuitton’s Soho store (New York) with symbols, and in the following year did the same to the outside of the new Chanel building in Ginza, Tokyo. In 2018, Mukai participated in the Musée Soulages’ Gutai exhibition (France), and in 2019 had a feature display at the “Gutai-jin in Hong Kong” exhibition that was held at Whitestone Gallery Hong Kong. His works are held by institutions such as the National Museum of Art (Osaka), Museum of

Ryotaro Muramatsu 1971-
Movie director / art director / creative director. CEO of Naked Inc. Born in Osaka in 1971. After building a career as an actor in commercials and television dramas, in 1997 he founded Naked Inc. His work covers diverse spheres, including music videos, advertising videos, and television drama title sequences. In 2002, he began creating movies, and from 2006 to 2010 presented four long-form films at theaters. His films have received fifty nominations at international film festivals, and won four awards. He received much attention for his 2012 projection mapping show at Tokyo Station entitled Tokyo Hikari Vision. Since then he has engaged in a variety of creative endeavors, including spatial presentations. In 2019 he participated in the exhibition “Diversity for Peace” during the Venice Biennale.

Sadamasa Motonaga 1922-2011
Born in Mie in 1922. Motonaga belonged to the Gutai Art Association from 1955 to 1971. During this time, he presented large three-dimensional works that made use of the nature of water and gravity, as well as performances that used smoke. In 1957, he met his future wife Etsuko Nakatsuji at a Nishinomiya art school. Around 1958, after noticing paint run beyond the contours of forms that appear in art, he created works that used the fluidity of paint and colors’ erosive effects in a way that was inspired by the Japanese-style painting technique of tarashikomi. In 1959, he participated in the “Arte Nuova” exhibition (Circolo degli Artisti, Palazzo Graneri, Torino). In 1961, he held a solo exhibition at and entered into a contract with the Martha Jackson Gallery (New York). In 1963, he participated in the “Contemporary Trend of Paintings: Occident and Japan” exhibition (National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto). In 1965 he participated in the international exhibition “Nul”
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam), as well as the “Contemporary Trend of Art: Painting and the Plastic Arts” (National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto). His time spent in New York in 1966 and 1967 led him to break new ground with a technique that used an airbrush and acrylic paint. He thereby created a unique world, referred to as “funny art” due to its light colors and humorous abstract forms. In 1971, he participated in the “10th Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition” (Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art and elsewhere), and received the Purchase Award from the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto. In 1972, he participated in the “Bird’s Eye View of Contemporary Japanese Art” exhibition (National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto). In 1980, he participated in the “Artists Today 2: Jiro Takamatsu, Sadamasa Motonaga” exhibition (National Museum of Art, Osaka). In 1983, he received the 2nd Japan Arts Council Award and the 15th Japan Art Grand Prize. In 1984, he participated in the “Samadasa Motonaga and Kazuo Shiraga” exhibition” (Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama). In 1986, he received the Hyogo Prefecture Culture Award. In 1988, he was conferred the Chevalier de la Légion d’Honneur by the French government. In 1991, he was awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, 4th class. In 1993, he participated in the 45th Venice Biennale. In 1996, he became a professor of art and design at Seijo University. In 1999, he participated in Gutai’s Paris Exhibition held at the Jeu de Paume. In 2002, he held the “Sadamasa Motonaga Exhibition” (Nishinomiya Otani Memorial Museum), which was followed by the 2003 “Sadamasa Motonaga: Exhibition of Overflowing Colors and Forms” (Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art). In 2009 he held the exhibition “Motonaga Sadamasa” (Mie Prefectural Art Museum). In 2011, he passed away at the age of 88.

Shiryu Morita 1912-1998
Born in the city of Toyooka, Hyogo in 1912. Student of Sokyu Ueda. At the 2nd Japan Calligraphy Institute Exhibition in 1937, his *rinsho* (free-hand copy) of *Kanjoki* received the Commendation Gold Prize (top prize), and his *jiun* (freely written) Chinese poem received Special Silver (1) Prize. Designated as Japan Calligraphy Institute reference works by the screening of Tenrai Hidai, a calligrapher who broke new ground in the world of modern Japanese calligraphy, these two works received much attention. In 1947, he established the Shodo Geijutsuin (Calligraphy Art Institute) and began publishing the journals *Sho no bi* (The Beauty of Calligraphy) and *Bokubi* (The Beauty of Ink). These journals actively introduced to Japan avant-garde art from overseas and greatly influenced Kansai area abstract painters such as Waichi Tsutaka and Jiro Yoshihara. Also, they become a vehicle for overseas painters to find out about Japan's avant-garde. In 1952, he established Bokujin-kai, and, developing relationships with domestic and overseas abstract painters and critics, established a position for *bokusho* (avant-garde calligraphy) as a form of abstract painting. He participated in the “Carnegie International” exhibition (1958) and the fifth and sixth São Paulo Biennial (1959, 1961), which led to him being widely known overseas. Bokujin-kai was a major post-World War II Kansai area avant-garde art movement along with the Gutai Art Association. While Morita’s work existed in the realm of so-called avant-garde calligraphy, at a base level he pursued the fundamental tradition of calligraphy, learned from the classics, and possessed an outstanding spirituality inherited from the likes of Wang Zizhi and Daito Kokushi.

Masaaki Yamada 1930-2010
Born in Tokyo in 1930. In 1950 he graduated from Tokyo Technical High School. Participant in the “Association of Free Artists’ Exhibition.” In 1953 began studying under Saburo Hasegawa. In the same year he participated in the “Yomiuri Independent” exhibition. While he had done previously created still life paintings as a devotee of Morandi and Cezanne, from around 1956 he developed an awareness of the planarity of painting, and shifted from irregular abstract patterns to rectangle and square-based works. In 1958, he
held his first solo exhibition at Kyobunkan Gallery. Around 1960, he shifted to striped artworks that featured reds, blues, yellows, blacks, and greys. While his artistic production had been consistently supported by his drive to make his paintings autonomous by disassembling painting, around 1975 he shifted to neutral color-based rectangular grid artworks, and then subsequently paintings with boisterous strokes repeatedly applied to grids. In 1974, he participated in the “Contemporary Japanese Art: Tradition and Present” exhibition in Düsseldorf. In 1980, he participated in the Yokohama Civic Art Gallery exhibition “Artists Today: Emotion and Composition.” In the following year, he participated in the National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo) exhibition entitled “The 1960s: A Decade of Change in Contemporary Japanese Art.” In 1987, he participated in the 19th São Paulo Biennial. In 1990, he participated in the “Minimal Art” exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art, Osaka. In 1995 he participated in the “A Perspective on Contemporary Art” exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo). In 2005, the exhibition “The Paintings of Masaaki Yamada: From ‘Still Life’ to ‘Work’ to ‘Color’” was held at the Fuchu Art Museum, and he was recognized by the Commissioner of the Agency for Cultural Affairs for his artwork. He passed away in 2010 in Tokyo.


Go Yayanagi 1933-
After dropping out of university, Yayanagi moved to São Paulo, Brazil, where he engaged in a variety of artistic activities. After traveling around the world, he moved to Paris, where he started studying under the copperplate printing master S.W. Hayter. Yayanagi’s works have been presented at many international exhibitions, including the 11th São Paulo Biennial (1957), the
2nd Frechen International Print Biennial (West Germany, 1972), and the 5th British International Print Biennale (1976). Yayanagi sees art as something that should casually exist in all kinds of living spaces rather than be displayed ostentatiously. He creates works in a wide range of formats—spanning from prints, oil paintings, mosaic murals, and stained glass to textiles, and fashion design—and visually renders, like a puzzle, the times in which he lives by combining boldly composed color planes, vivid colors produced by removing unnecessary shadows, cheerful eroticism, and humor. His abundant exoticism, imprinted on him during his younger days, embodies a borderless art beyond logic existing at a place far ahead of the world’s trends. In 2018, he held a solo exhibition at Whitestone Gallery’s Ginza location.


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Yang Yongliang 1980-
Born in Shanghai in 1980. In 2003 he graduated from the China Academy of Art, where he majored in Visual Communication. In 2005, he began working on experimental artworks that make use of a variety of mediums, such as photographs, paintings, and video installations. Yang creates new points of contact between the traditional and the contemporary by combining ancient Eastern aesthetics and the principles of literati (wenren) with contemporary language and digital technology. His artworks meta-narrate stories extracted from history, myth, society, and culture that unfold in the context of cities and continually changing landscapes. Yang is known for his bare rock depictions that use architectural images as brushstrokes and intricate details that faithfully follow Song dynasty landscape paintings. While on the one hand, the development of urban areas makes life more convenient, on the other hand, it has sealed off many things. In the same way, while cultural traditions that have developed in China over centuries maintain their grandeur, they
continually face the crisis of stagnation. Ancient Chinese people depicted landscapes to praise nature’s magnificence, and Yang’s artworks push us to reconsider contemporary realities in the midst of crisis. In his connections between media and content, a strong postmodern sensibility joins with traditional aesthetics. His artworks are held at famous public institutions worldwide such as the British Museum and Metropolitan Museum of Art. He currently works out of Shanghai and New York.

Lee Ufan 1936- 
Born in Gyeongsangnam, South Korea. Today, while being based in Japan and France, he is active around the globe. After dropping out of Seoul National University’s College of Fine Arts, he graduated from Nihon University’s Department of Philosophy (College of Letters) in 1961. In the latter half of the 1960s, he was a major figure in the Mono-ha (School of Things), a movement centered on Yoshishige Saito at Tama Art University, and played a particularly important role in its theoretical development. His style, which he continues to use today, pushes to the fore the simplicity of materials themselves, such as wood, stone, and iron plates. Representative works include *From Point* and *From Line*, in which points and lines are depicted in a simple fashion. In 2010, the Tadao Ando–designed Lee Ufan Museum opened on Naoshima. In 2014, Ufan was welcomed as a guest artist for the Palace of Versailles’ contemporary art program. He has received many awards, including the Order of Cultural Merit (South Korea), Legion of Honour (France), Shanghai Bienniale UNESCO Prize, and Mainichi Art Award. Collection: New York Museum of Contemporary Art, Guggenheim Museum, Pompidou Center, Tate Modern, Kröller-Müller Museum (the Netherlands), National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka), and Benesse Art Site Naoshima.

Lou Zhenggang 1966- 
Born in Heilongjiang and officially domiciled in Jiangsu. From a very young age, she studied calligraphy under her father Lou Deping and became a legend in the painting and calligraphy world in 1970s and 1980s China. In 1986, Lou came to Japan, and started working in the international art world while based in Tokyo. Since then, for over thirty years she has held twenty-seven solo exhibitions and three art tours in Asia, the Middle East, North
America, and elsewhere. Her calligraphy artworks are filled with Asia’s contemporary art spirit, and are held by many famous art museums and collectors around the world. For decades, while pursuing the path of art, she has continually transcended herself and explored more creative and expressively rich subject matter and materials. With advanced calligraphy and painting skills, unique insight into beauty, and profound human qualities, she has created series such as *Life and Love, Sun and Moon, Heart, Peace and Harmony, Life and Life*, and *Nature*. Her artworks, which completely fuse the Chinese ink and wash painting tradition and contemporary art, have distinct qualities that are abstract and contemporary. They use ink as a medium and the universe as imaginative power, as well as acquire creative inspiration from love.

Jiro Yoshihara 1905-1972
Born in Ogawa-cho, Higashi Ward, Osaka City in 1905 as the second son of Sadajiro Yoshihara, who ran the vegetable oil business Yoshihara Shoten.

Around 1919, when he was 14 years old, he became more interested in oil painting and began to study it on his own. In 1924, he enrolled in Kwansei Gakuin’s Business College, and in 1927 met Jiro Kamiyama, thereby coming into contact with European culture and new trends in art. In 1928, he held a solo oil painting exhibition at Osaka Asahi Kaikan. In the following year, he went to the Port of Kobe with Gakuso Inoue to greet Tsuguharu Foujita, who was coming back to Japan after spending seventeen years overseas. He had brought his artworks, and asked for Foujita’s thoughts. Foujita criticized them for demonstrating the influence of others, strongly impressing upon Yoshida the importance of originality. In 1938, he formed the Kyushitsu-kai along with abstract painting arts from the Seiji Togo-led Nikakai. In 1948, he established and became the representative of the Ashiya City Art Association. In 1952, he formed “Genbi,” the Contemporary Art Discussion Group. In 1954, he launched and became the representative of the Gutai Art Association. In 1955, Yoshihara held the 1st Exhibition of Gutai (Ohara Kaikan, Aoyama, 19–28), and also becomes the CEO of Yoshihara Oil Mill, Ltd. In December 1956 he published the “Gutai Art Manifesto” in *Geijutsu Shincho*. In 1957, a
group that included the Informel advocate Michel Tapié and painters Georges Mathie and Toshimitsu Imai stayed at Yoshihara’s home in Nakanoshima. In 1962, he renovated his storehouse in Nakanoshima and turned it into “Gutai Pinacotheca,” a gallery that would serve as the base for the Gutai Art Association. From around this time he began painting circles with thick paint against monochrome backgrounds. In 1965, he turned sixty years old and held a birthday exhibition at Gutai Pinacotheca, bringing together many of his major works from both prewar and postwar times. In the same year, the Gutai Art Association was invited to participate in the international exhibition “Nul.” He 1969, he became a judge for the Japan World Exposition. In 1971 he exhibited White Circle on Black and Black Circle on White at the 2nd India Triennale. In February 1972, he passed away at the age of sixty-seven due a subarachnoid hemorrhage. On March 31st of the same year, the Gutai Art Association disbanded. Yoshihara was then posthumously awarded the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette. In 1973, the exhibition “Jiro Yoshihara: The Man Who Made Tomorrow” was held, presenting 131 works from his early period to later years (The Museum of Modern Art, Kanagawa; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto). In 1983, the exhibition “The Unknown Yoshihara Jiro” was held at the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art. In 1992, “Jiro Yoshihara: 20 Years After His Death” was held at the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History.

From 2005 to 2006 “Jiro Yoshihara: A Centenary Retrospective” was held at various museums to mark the one-hundred-year anniversary of his birth (ATC Museum, Osaka; Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art; National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; Miyagi Museum of Art). In 2012, “Jiro Yoshihara: 40 Years After His Death” was held at the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History, and “Gutai: The Spirit of an Era” was held at the National Art Center, Tokyo. In 2013, “Gutai: Splendid Playground” was held at the Guggenheim Museum (New York).
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