

THE WORLD OF FUKUSHIMA HIDEKO: BREAKING AWAY, INTO IMAGES (1992)

Yamaguchi Katsuhiko

*For me, when one is right there, there's simply no
overcoming the temptation of reading the destiny of
painting into a work.¹*

—Takiguchi Shūzō

HELD AT SATANI GALLERY last July, *The 11th Exhibition Homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop* was the first exhibition to shed light on the existence of Jikken Kōbō/Experimental Workshop in the forty-odd years since the group were active.²

At a time in the early 1950s when painting and sculpture were still the dominant forms of artistic expression, Jikken Kōbō were distinguished by their being a collective of artists working across different fields and by their pursuit of intermedia projects, such as theatrical performances and automated slide projections, or autoslides.

As one of the core members of the group, Fukushima Hideko engaged in numerous projects beyond her primary practice of painting, ranging from the production of the autoslide piece *Foam is Created* (1953) to designing stage sets and costumes for ballet performances. Fukushima clearly took a great deal of interest in the kind of intermedia art that defined Jikken Kōbō.

Foam is Created was initially shown in 1953, but the original slides and tape comprising the piece were subsequently lost, along with those for Jikken Kōbō's other autoslide works. Three pieces were reconstructed in 1986 when the opportunity came to screen them as works by Jikken Kōbō in *Japon des avant gardes, 1910–1970* at the Centre Pompidou in Paris.³

When I took part in the reconstruction process, I was stunned anew not only by the individual slides but also by the sensuality of the poetic narration accompanying Fukushima's work. Upon viewing the slides, I also realized how extraordinary her radical designs of the costumes for Takechi Tetsuji's 1955 staging of the Arnold Schönberg melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire* are—rivaling the bold aesthetics of the attire of Edo-period *kyōgen*⁴ performers.

In parallel to this broad range of creative activity, Fukushima continued to evolve as a painter, and has kept producing work even after Jikken Kōbō's dissolution.

Fukushima showed her first abstract work as a painter in 1948 at an exhibition of the Shichiyōkai, the precursor to Jikken Kōbō. Later, after exploring formalized abstract painting, she came to perceive the picture plane itself as a kind of spatial site, and so found her own form of abstract composition.

Paintings such as 1952's *Human*⁵ or 1954's *Vegetation*⁶ can be

1 [Takiguchi Shūzō, “Gasō no aida” [Between Aspects of Painting], in *Fukushima Hideko ten / Hideko Fukushima: Gouaches from Blue into Blue*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Nantenshi Gallery, 1975). Reprinted in *Daijūni omāju Takiguchi Shūzō ten: Fukushima Hideko, 1948–1988 / 12th Exhibition Homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Hideko Fukushima, 1948–1988*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Satani Gallery, 1992), 44.

2 [Held July 8–31, 1991, at Satani Gallery, Tokyo. A bilingual catalogue was published by the gallery. See *Daijūichi omāju Takiguchi Shūzō ten: Jikken Kōbō to Takiguchi Shūzō / The 11th Exhibition Homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Satani Gallery, 1991).]

3 [Organized by the Centre Pompidou in conjunction with the Japan Foundation, *Japon des avant gardes, 1910–1970* was held from December 11, 1986, to March 2, 1987. It was a landmark in the international presentation of Japanese modern and contemporary art, and many artists remade historic works for the exhibition. The other two reconstructed autoslide works were *Adventure of the Eyes of Mr. W.S., a Test Pilot* (1953/86), made by Yamaguchi Katsuhiro with music by Suzuki Hiroyoshi and photography by Kitadai Shōzō, and *Tales of an Unknown World* (1953/86), made by Kitadai Shōzō with music by Suzuki Hiroyoshi and Yuasa Jōji.]

4 [A form of comic theater typically performed as an intermission at noh dramas.]

5 [*Hito* (人) in the Japanese. The English title of this work, which is held in the

seen as works from a transitional period for Fukushima, as she covers the entire surface in oil paint. But in 1955 she would leave behind oil painting and begin working in gouache. Concurrently, she devised a way to create forms not by delineating or filling in shapes with paint but by applying paint to the surfaces [*danmen*] of everyday objects that she then pressed onto the support. Most notable was her use of empty cans as templates to create numerous circular shapes.

This circular shape became an important element that would dominate her compositions for a long time thereafter. At first, however, the shapes were not only circular but also rectangular, while in some cases the original shape was indiscernible. I heard that one of these came from a bone Fukushima's pet dog was carrying in its mouth.

Fukushima was struggling to make paintings at the time, having distanced herself as far as possible from acts associated with the paintbrush, such as applying paint or drawing lines. Made in 1955, *The Reaction of the Red Wind*⁷ is one of her works from this period.

In works made between 1956 and 1957, namely, *Resonance Box and Visitor*, Fukushima has pressed, besides circles, many straight lines into the composition.⁸ Among the works created around then, *An Offering*⁹ of 1957 received great praise from the French critic and organizer of the Art Informel movement Michel Tapié, who was visiting Japan the same year.

Considering that Abstract Expressionism was the signature style of the 1950s, Tapié's praise for *An Offering* may seem rather odd. However, a passage from the essay "A Psychological Accounting of My First Trip to Japan," which Tapié submitted from New York after his Japan trip, explains why.¹⁰ Tapié had come across Fukushima's painting by chance at a gallery in Tokyo. A few hours later, he was already paying a visit to her studio. Now that's moving quickly!

Recollecting this encounter, Tapié writes, "She is a rare artist, and although her position is still hard to categorize, she should certainly be included among the painters to study in order to get a real sense of the cutting edge of painting right now and what it proposes for the future," before also listing the names of Alfonso Ossorio, Jose Luis Olea Cervan, Imai Toshimitsu, Claire Falkenstein, and Hans Hartung. He then adds the following important remark.

collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, has changed over the years. It is listed as *Man* in *The 11th Exhibition Homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop* catalogue, and *Person* in *Jikken Kōbō ten—Sengo geijutsu o kirihiraku / Jikken Kōbō—Experimental Workshop*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Yomiuri Shimbun-sha, 2013). *Human* is the title provided by the Tokyo Museum Collection online database. See <https://museumcollection.tokyo/en/works/59540/>.

6 [*Shokubutsu*. Information about this work's whereabouts or its official English title could not be found as of publication.]

7 [*Akai kaze no hannō*, held in the collection of the Chiba City Museum of Art.]

8 [The English titles for the two works mentioned here are as provided in *The 11th Exhibition Homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop*. The Japanese titles are *Kyōmeibako* and *Gairaisha*, respectively.]

9 [*Sasagemono*, held in the University of Tsukuba Ishii Collection.]

10 Michel Tapié, "Daiikkai Nihon ryokō no seishinteki kessaisho" [in Japanese], trans. Haga Tōru, *Bijutsu techō*, no. 134 (December 1957): 99. [In the essay, Tapié notes that he spent five weeks in Japan.]

As long as art continues to progress toward an “absolute” work as it ventures into the realm of “ideas” to overcome the threat of academicism in action painting, consideration of the works by such artists is the only possibility for the art to come to round the hazardous cape of lyrical or expressionistic abstraction—which ultimately only traps and suppresses new exploration—and continue moving forward.¹¹

Tapié had already acknowledged the academicism of action painting and was anticipating new developments in the Art Informel movement. Yet in the course of time action painting became synonymous with Art Informel in Japan, and this fervor of unrestrained expression spilled over into the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition. Takiguchi Shūzō sharply criticized this phenomenon in an essay he wrote in 1957.¹²

Meanwhile, in 1956, Fukushima presented *Brilliant Starvation* (1955),¹³ a masterpiece brimming with an exhilarating sense of speed, at the *Art of Today's World* exhibition.¹⁴ At the center of the painting is a large circle executed in expressive red brushstrokes, accompanied by pressed circles of differing sizes. From the speedy brushwork engulfing the composition, we can see that her abstraction bespeaks more of an Eastern sense of life and grace than a European sense of construction.

Fukushima's paintings since then have also often been compared to Eastern paintings or viewed in close connection to the world of ink painting.

This perspective should certainly not be dismissed as a superficial view of her work. It is evident that her thoughts on painting incorporate the musical world to which John Cage aspired, as well as the Japanese notion of the relationship between space and sound that is ingrained in the works of the Jikken Kōbō composers.

And Fukushima's interests in Zen and *noh* pertain to issues that are fundamental to her painting practice.

The encounter with Tapié led to Fukushima being shown in Europe alongside the Gutai group,¹⁵ while in Japan she took second place at the 4th Shell Art Award and first place at the Mizue Award, both in 1960. In 1961, Fukushima was invited to participate in the 2nd Biennale de Paris and set out for Europe on this occasion. Also making his debut in Paris was Itō Takayasu, who exhibited works featuring conglomerations

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹² Takiguchi Shūzō, “Hyōgen no kiki: dai 9 kai Yomiuri Andependan ten” [Crisis of Expression: The 9th Yomiuri Independent Exhibition], *Yomiuri Shimbun*, March 11, 1957.

¹³ [*Sanzentaru kiga*. This work also appears as an illustration in Tapié's article, in which it is erroneously dated 1956. It is now held in the collection of the Toyama Prefectural Museum of Art & Design.]

¹⁴ [*Sekai konnichi no bijutsu ten*, held November 13–25, 1956, at Nihombashi Takashimaya in Tokyo before touring to Osaka, Kyoto, and Fukuoka through the following year. Organized by the critics Segi Shin'ichi and Michel Tapié, and sponsored by the *Asahi Shimbun*, the exhibition featured over a hundred Japanese and international artists, and was one of the events that triggered Japan's “Informel whirlwind.” It is also known by the French title *Exposition internationale de l'art actuel*.]

¹⁵ [A reference to Fukushima's participation in 1959 in *Arte Nuova. Esposizione Internazionale di pittura e scultura*, held at Circolo degli Artisti, Palazzo Graneri, Turin, and the 11th Premio Lissone, held in Milan.]

of hemispheres reminiscent of Fukushima's circle paintings.

In 1962, Fukushima returned to Japan for the first time in a year and four months. In 1963 she held her first solo exhibition since her return at Tokyo's Minami Gallery, *Arc* [Ko]. Starting from this period, Fukushima rejects the assumption of the picture plane as a singular space. The works feature a more or less monochrome color field with arc-like sections "sliced" out of it, so that the field becomes a part of a space that extends infinitely beyond the border of the painting, while the white canvas of the arc-like sections is more insignificant remainder than ground as such. And yet the bold cropping and presentation of the arc-enclosed, infinitely extending field serves to further accentuate its infinite continuity and movement. Again, the white sections here are not blank spaces; what the blank space signifies has been pushed out of the cropped, painted segment and eliminated. In so doing, the painting even succeeds in expelling all sense of the Japanese notion of blank space, which is prone to being lyrically interpreted.

On the occasion of the Minami Gallery exhibition *Bijutsu techō* published a special feature on Fukushima with a text by the critic Miyakawa Atsushi that concludes with the following words on her use of pressed circles.

This form of expression will take her someplace even further. Modernism deemed the artwork to be the ultimate purpose, a self-sufficient entity in itself. In the wake of this arrogance, we must now forget that it was once possible for painting to be the sole purpose and remind ourselves that it is above all a single act.¹⁶

I think Miyakawa's comment is apt, and warrants further consideration. I also want to acknowledge once again how far Fukushima had come in her practice by 1963. I say this because I think that many of us have overlooked this artist who has been so deeply committed to pursuing the meaning and essence of painting.

Fukushima went on to hold solo shows at Nantenshi Gallery and other venues. In the 1970s, she began to use a transparent, pure blue in most of her works. Here again, Fukushima treats the white canvas as a kind of provisional setting for colors and fleeting forms. I don't

¹⁶ Miyakawa Atsushi, "Onkyōteki na kūkan" [Acoustic space], *Bijutsu Techo*, no. 224 (August 1963): 26. [In the article, Miyakawa provides an in-depth description and analysis of the *Arc* works in relation to Fukushima's recurring use of pressed circle motifs. In his essay, Yamaguchi cites the overall title of the special feature, "Atorie de no taiwa: Fukushima Hideko" (Conversation in the studio: Fukushima Hideko).]



fig. 1

Ōtsuji Kiyoji, *Portrait of an Artist* (1950 / 1987), gelatin silver print, 266 × 212cm.

Fukushima Hideko on the left. ©Ōtsuji Tet-suo. Collection of Musashino Art University Museum & Library.



fig. 2

Fukushima Hideko, *Human* (1952), oil on canvas, 41 x 32 cm. ©Fukushima Kazuo. Collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.



fig. 3

Fukushima Hideko, *Birth* (1957), oil on paper, 130.5 x 97.5 cm. ©Fukushima Kazuo. Collection of the Miyagi Museum of Art.

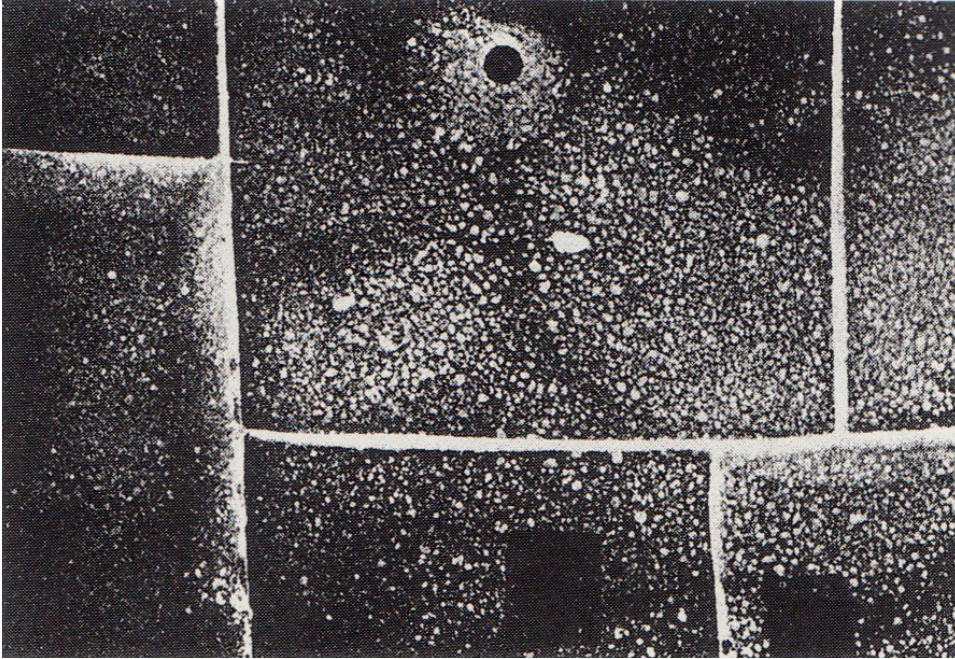


fig. 4

Fukushima Hideko, from the autoslide work *Suihō wa tsukurareru* (1953). Music by Fukushima Kazuo. ©Fukushima Kazuo.



fig. 5

Costume design for *Pierrot Lunaire* (1955).
Photo by Ōtsuji Kiyoji. ©Fukushima Kazuo.
©Ōtsuji Tetsuo. Collection of Musashino
Art University Museum & Library.

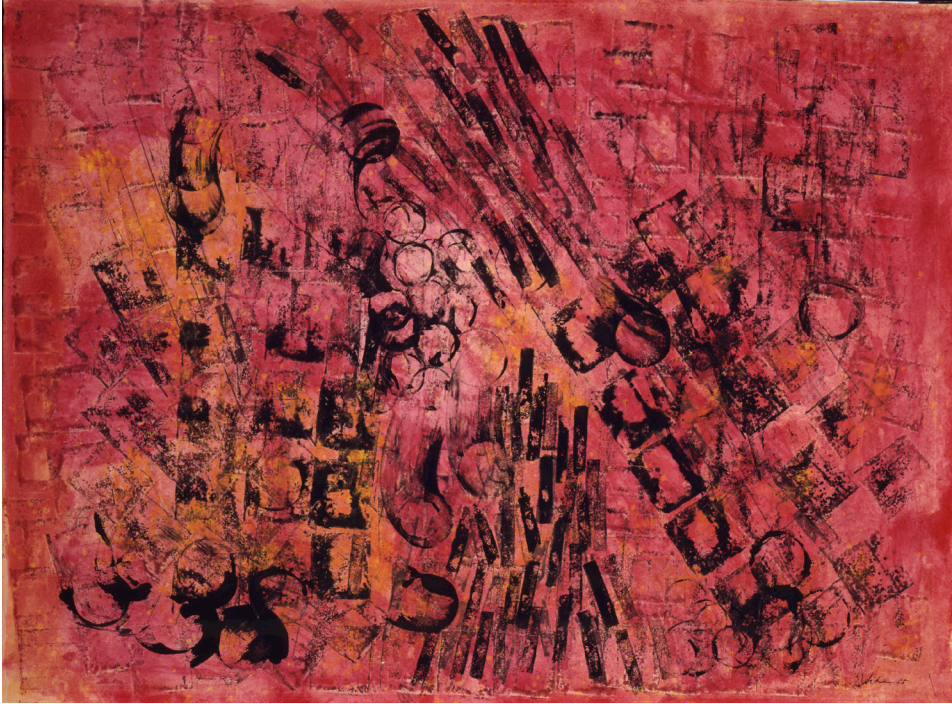


fig. 6

Fukushima Hideko, *Response of the Red Wind* (1955), gouache on paper, 56.5 x 75.3 cm. ©Fukushima Kazuo. Collection of the Chiba City Museum of Art.



fig. 7

Fukushima Hideko, *An Offering* (1957), oil on canvas, 72.7 x 60.6 cm. ©Fukushima Kazuo / University of Tsukuba Art Collection (Gift of Mr. Ishii Akira).



fig. 8

Fukushima Hideko, *Brilliant Starvation* (1955), oil on canvas, 118 x 93 cm.
©Fukushima Kazuo. Collection of the Toyama Prefectural Museum of Art & Design.

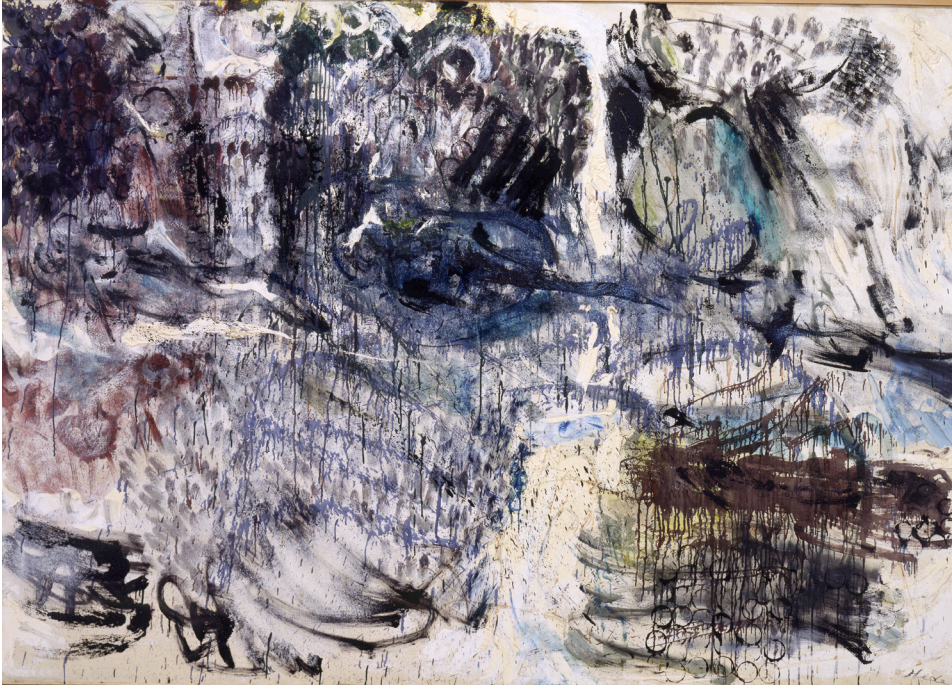


fig. 9

Fukushima Hideko, *Work No. 5* (1959), oil on canvas, 182.4 x 259.3 cm. ©Fukushima Kazuo. Collection of the Chiba City Museum of Art.



fig. 10

Fukushima Hideko, *Work No. 10* (1961), oil on canvas, 163.5 x 114 cm. ©Fukushima Kazuo. Collection of Sezon Museum of Modern Art.



fig. 11

Fukushima Hideko, *Ko B* (1963), oil on canvas, 97 x 97 cm. ©Fukushima Kazuo.



fig. 12

Fukushima Hideko, *Whiter Blue* (1982),
acrylic on canvas, 101 x 101 cm. ©Fukushi-
ma Kazuo.

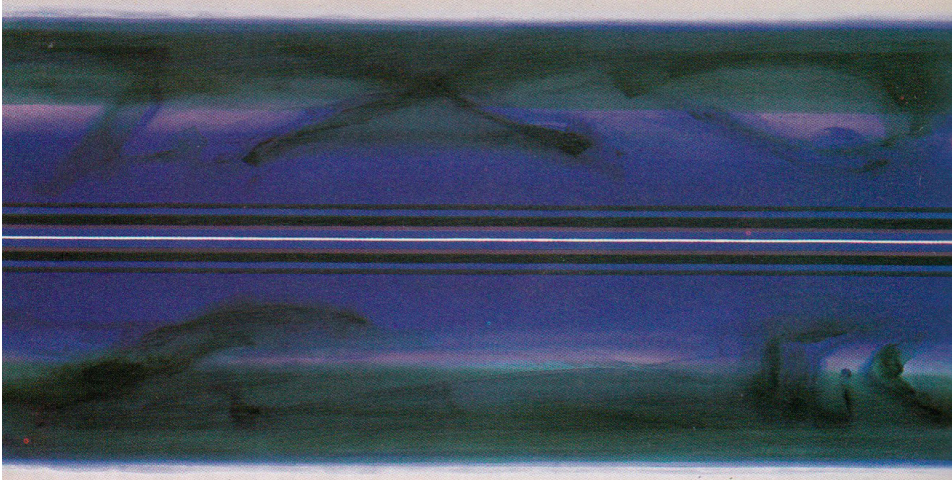


fig. 13

Fukushima Hideko, *Suiheisen ni sotto*
(1988), acrylic on canvas, 97.5 x 194 cm.

©Fukushima Kazuo.

think many people realize from looking at these paintings how much invention Fukushima has continuously applied to experimenting with different techniques for extracting the utmost materiality from the paint.

In the 1982 solo exhibition *Whiter Blue* at Nantenshi Gallery, we no longer see circles and arcs. Appearing on the surfaces of these paintings are not pictures per se, but something closer to *moving images* [eizō]. With their sharp horizon lines, Fukushima's most recent works suggest to me the opening up of an illusory world in which all acts of painting vanish. It almost seems like the art of Fukushima Hideko is breaking free from the very realm of painting. If there were someone who could look down from where she stands, they would be taken by the thought that painting still appears to be as tumultuous as ever.

Abridged Chronology

1927 Born in Tokyo.

1943 Graduates from Bunka Gakuin.

1948 Forms the Shichiyōkai with Kitadai Shōzō, Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, Yanagida Miyoko, and Tsukatani Masayoshi. Participates in groups such as the Avant-Garde Art Study Group, Night Society, and Century Society.

1949 Joins the Century Society.

1951 Forms the art collective Jikken Kōbō/Experimental Workshop with Akiyama Kuniharu, Fukushima Kazuo, Kitadai Shōzō, Suzuki Hiroyoshi, Takemitsu Tōru, Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, and Yuasa Jōji. (Takiguchi Shūzō gives the group its name.) Jikken Kōbō's first collaborative work is the production of the ballet *Joie de Vivre* as part of events surrounding the Yomiuri Shimbun-sponsored Picasso retrospective at the Nihombashi Takashimaya department store in Tokyo. Fukushima designs the costumes. Thereafter, she participates in various Jikken Kōbō exhibitions.

- 1955 Participates in International Watercolor Exhibition: 18th Biennial at the Brooklyn Museum, New York.¹⁷ 17 [The original erroneously dates this to 1954. The exhibition was held from May 4 to June 12, 1955.]
- 1955 Produces the artwork and set design for Experimental Ballet Theatre: *The Beggar Prince*, and designs the costumes for the melodrama *Pierrot Lunaire*.
- 1956 Holds a two-artist show with Enomoto Kazuko at Yōseidō Gallery, Tokyo. Participates in *Art of Today's World*.
- 1957 Participates in *15 Vanguard Artists* at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo. French art critic Michel Tapié visits Fukushima's studio.
- 1958 Participates in *International Art of a New Era: Informel and Gutai*.
- 1959 Participates in *Arte Nuova. Esposizione Internazionale di pittura e scultura*, Turin, and the 11th Premio Lissone, Milan.
- 1960 Receives first place for the Mizue Award, second place for the Shell Art Award.
- 1961 Participates in the 2nd Biennale de Paris.
- 1965 Participates in *Moderne Malerei aus Japan*, Kunsthaus Zürich.
- 1979 Participates in *Shimizu Kusuo and Artists*.
- 1981 Participates in *Trends in Contemporary Art: The Light and Darkness of the 1950s* [Gendai bijutsu no dōkō: 1950 nendai sono ankoku to kōbō] at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.
- 1982 Participates in the 1st Modern Art Festival: *Shūzō Takiguchi and Postwar Art* at the Museum of Modern Art, Toyama [now the Toyama Prefectural Museum of Art and Design].

1988 Participates in *Advanced Technology and Art of Japan* [Nippon sentan kagi geijutsu ten] at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung.¹⁸

1990 Participates in *Tokyo Avant-Garde no Mori, 1946–1956* at the Itabashi Art Museum, Tokyo.

1991 Participates in *The 11th Exhibition Homage to Shūzō Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop* at the Satani Gallery, Tokyo.

Fukushima also held solo exhibitions at other venues, beginning with Takemiya Gallery (1954), followed by Muramatsu Gallery (1959), Minami Gallery (1963), Nantenshi Gallery (1975, 1979, 1986), Ao Gallery (1976), and Garō Bunka Gakuin (1987, 1988). She engaged in numerous theatrical productions over the course of her career.

18 [The original erroneously refers to this venue as the Tainan Shōritsu Bijutsukan. It should have read Taiwan Shōritsu Bijutsukan, for the Chinese Taiwan Shengli Meishuguan. The museum is now known in Chinese as the Guoli Taiwan Meishuguan.]

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