

HOW TO UNLOCK THE OUTDOORS (1992)

Masaki Motoi

*To expose oneself to the outdoors and to question
the nature of one's own individual activities—these
endeavors in another “place” can create an opening into
the current state of art.*

A LATENT, SURGING IMPULSE TO MOVE OUTDOORS

THIS YEAR'S SCHEDULE at the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History consists of two exhibitions each divided into two periods: *Yoshihara Jirō* in the spring and autumn, and *Gutai*, a retrospective of the Gutai Art Association that Yoshihara led, in the summer and winter. In addition, *Gutai I* in July featured restagings of *Experimental Outdoor Exhibition of Modern Art to Challenge the Midsummer Sun* (1955) and *Gutai Outdoor Art Exhibition* (1956) in the pine forest by the banks of the Ashiya River, the original venue of the exhibitions, as a kind of “resurgence of outdoor exhibitions.”¹

Although none of these works seem to have been shackled to the genres of painting or sculpture, each of the artists must have paid attention to how to make their art interfere with the park-like space of the pine forest. The use of red and white in the works in contrast to the green space, and the prioritization of an attention paid to colored surfaces rather than the presentation of three-dimensional objects, suggest that these works were an extension of painterly thinking and sensibilities. Despite the painterly nature of these works, however, many of them are driven by a *genba shugi*² of creating in a pine forest, with some of them being imbued with a kind of solicitous spirit that encourages the participation of the viewer, and a freewheeling creative impulse akin to that found in handicraft. Although there was a certain indifference on the part of these artists to the artistic nature of paintings and sculptures, these works also seemed to demonstrate some primordial aspects of contemporary installation art.

¹ [“Outdoor” is adopted throughout as a translation of the term *yagai* 野外, which is central to this text. In Japan, “open-air” is often used for this purpose (for example, in The Hakone Open-Air Museum), but the expression is strongly associated with the French *en plein air* painting movement. To avoid such associations that do not exist in the original Japanese, the term outdoor was preferred in this context.]

² [*Genba* means “on-site” or “on-the-scene,” while *shugi* is the equivalent of the suffix “ism.” The term therefore refers to the privileging of hands-on engagement in a particular situation, and is often used in other contexts, for example in business. The English expression “site specific” is similar in meaning, but the original Japanese was adopted to make a clear distinction from “site specific art,” a concept with its own specific context and history.]

If we recognize in this exhibition, even in a latent sense, a skepticism over a certain cultural purification of art and a questioning of artistic expression, these are precisely the pertinent issues that underlie the outdoor exhibition today. In addition, although the museum's decision to hold this "resurgence of the outdoor exhibitions" outside the museum was likely based on the fact that the exhibition was a restaging, the choice also seemed to be a way for the museum to question its own stance of presenting artworks while comfortably remaining in its artistic context.

3 *Kyūshū-ha* exhibition catalogue, Fukuoka Art Museum, September 1988.

An important impetus that led to the formation of Kyūshū-ha came in 1956, when Sakurai Takami, Ochi Osamu, and two others, together with a group of poets, held an outdoor exhibition of paintings called *Persona* on the walls of the Fukuoka Prefectural Government building. The following year, Kikuhata Mokuma and others joined the group, and the *Gurūpu Q / shika: inforumeru yagai-ten* [Group Q / Shika: Informel outdoors exhibition] was held at the same place as the second *Kyūshū-ha gaitō-ten* [Kyūshū-ha street exhibition]. In 1962, the legendary *Eiyū-tachi no dai-shūkai* [Great meeting of heroes] exhibition was held at Momochi Beach, showcasing portable artworks and happenings.³ Even if it seems natural that an ardent artist group like the Kyūshū-ha would escape being absorbed into the existing institution of art, the format of the outdoor exhibition may have functioned to support such impulses.

If we consider these events as part of the pre-history of outdoor exhibitions in postwar Japan, the *Independent Art Festival* held in August 1965 on the banks of the Nagara River as well as the Gifu City Citizen Center [now Gifu City Cultural Center] might be positioned as the last of them. *Ana o horu* [Digging a hole] by Kawaguchi Tatsuo and his Group "I", which was presented at this festival, is well known today. The act of persistently digging a hole in the riverbed of the Nagara River before finally filling it back up had to take place where it did: by making use of the site, it became a way to interrogate the existence of art through the practice of collaborative production. This work thus became an example of how the outdoors is incorporated into a work of art, but it should be noted that it also served to question the origin and practice of art.



fig. 1

Murakami Makoto & Murakami Wataru

Amatsuchi Kōsaku I: *Yamada*

/ *Rice Field in the Mountain*

1988–1989

Looking back on these pioneering outdoor exhibitions, their origins might be traced to a skepticism about the institution of museums and art galleries, a desire to display paintings in an outdoor setting, and an impulse to use artworks to infiltrate spaces of everyday life, including the latent audience in them. It was also during this period that the urge to displace the context in which artists created their works led them to question the notion of art itself.

ESCAPING THE SUFFOCATION OF OUTDOOR SCULPTURE EXHIBITIONS

WHEN SPEAKING OF outdoor exhibitions, one cannot help but think of the Contemporary Japanese Sculpture Exhibition held since 1965 in Tokiwa Park, in the city of Ube, Yamaguchi Prefecture, the Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition held since 1968 in Suma Rikyu Park, Hyogo Prefecture, and the Sculpture Symposium, which started in Japan during the 1960s and which is still being held frequently today.

If outdoor exhibitions by the Gutai Art Association and Kyūshū-ha were premised on the autonomy of the artists (not in terms of how they were managed, but the artists' artistic impulses), then these early outdoor sculpture exhibitions were initiated and organized under the management of the cultural administration. These outdoor exhibitions partitioned off spaces, say the space of a park if held in one, and were held through competitions premised on achieving a state of harmony

with the urban environment. This exposed them to the danger that art, and in this case sculpture, whose urban character was strengthened from the modern through contemporary era, would be discussed solely from the perspective of monumentality and harmony in urban space, leaving aside its own inherent problematics and artistic qualities. The management and maintenance of these outdoor works was also an unavoidable issue, which posed the question of how one might work with and strike a harmonious balance with the outdoor environment while remaining within the framework of sculptural art, and had a profound effect on the work of the artists.

These works seek to establish a permanent tension or harmony between the artwork as artifice and the urban space that is also artificial. To achieve this, materials are used that present both differences and similarities to the urban space, and the works become massive, further encouraging a tendency towards outsourcing the production of artworks.⁴ The use of new materials like stainless steel and aluminum that reflect the spaces around them, and iron and steel, which stand in a state of tension with the architecture, inevitably replaces the concerns of on-site production with that of installation.

Writing about the tendencies in these outdoor exhibitions, Sakai Tadayasu pointed out that the fact that sculpture “moved out of spaces set up for displaying and appreciating art” has brought about a “separation into two positions: one that seeks to resolve the relationship between sculpture and the external world as a problem that is internal to the sculptural format, and another that progresses to a more expansive act of artistic expression that attempts to break the boundaries of sculpture by extending it to various external systems.” Sakai felt obliged to note that “when sculpture becomes urbanized, it can lead to a state of suffocation.” From this point on, sculptural works in outdoor exhibitions came to be questioned in terms of the nature of sculpture itself.⁵

However, it should not be overlooked that Sekine Nobuo “created” *Phase—Mother Earth* at one of these outdoor exhibitions, namely the 1st Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition at Suma Rikyu. The work is often

⁴ [The term used here is *hacchū geijutsu*. Composed of *hacchū*, order or commission, and *geijutsu*, art, it refers to forms of art where the artist prioritizes concept making and orders or outsources the production of a work to a third party.]

⁵ “Yagai chōkoku; Ori kara kankyō kūkan e,” [Outdoor sculpture: From cages to environmental spaces], *Bijutsu Techō zōkan: Nihon no gendai bijutsu 30-nen* [Bijutsu Techō supplementary issue: 30 Years of Contemporary Art in Japan], Bijutsu Shuppansha, July 1978.

discussed from the perspective of the establishment of the Mono-ha school by Lee Ufan and others, but the question it raised regarding how to present a work in the setting of an outdoor exhibition continues to be pertinent, given that it was not influenced by the context surrounding the idea of tension and harmony with the urban space, and that its production was impactful in and of itself.

6 Takinoshiroato kōen chōkoku-ten catalogue, 1975

7 Tokorozawa Open-air Exhibition catalogue, 1982.

It was during the 1970s and 1980s that artists began to hold frequent self-organized outdoor exhibitions in order to create works in spaces that were not as strictly administered, using what was at hand, and without being bound to the idea of harmonizing with the public environment. For example, the Seibuen chōkoku-ten [Seibuen sculpture exhibition], the Takinoshiroato kōen chōkoku-ten [Takinoshiroato park sculpture exhibition] series, and the Tokorozawa Open-air Exhibition were all outdoor sculpture exhibitions held in parks during the 1970s. Unlike the outdoor exhibitions in Ube and Suma, however, these exhibitions were “based on the independent organization and management of the artists.”⁶

Although these exhibitions professed to allow artists to “discover their own potential in the outdoor space and showcase their work at the same time,”⁷ records from the time suggest that there were still many works that were produced in the studio and simply taken outdoors, with the sole expectation of being seen in an artistic context detached from that of a museum or gallery. Of course, there were also artists like Kitazawa Kazunori, who created installations with an awareness of the site that tackled the question of how to respond to a specific place and incorporate its spaces into the work. Yet, many of the outdoor exhibitions that were supposed to have been organized by the artists themselves in opposition to those planned by local public organizations would later become stagnant as an institution for showing art, with artists becoming absorbed by the sense of self-fulfillment that came from producing and showing their own work.

IN SEARCH OF AN OPEN MIND AND SPACE

THIS LINEAGE CONTINUED with the Hamamatsu Open-air Exhibition (1980-1987, Nakatajima Sand Dunes, Hamamatsu), The Ōya Underground Arts Exhibition (1984-1989, Ōya Stone Underground Quarry, Tochigi), and Tamagawa Fussa Yagai Chōkoku-ten [Tama-river Fussa outdoor sculpture exhibition] (1988-[1991], Tamagawa Riverbed, Tokyo), which moved away from the urban space of the park.

The Hamamatsu Open-Air Exhibition challenged artists to think about how to confront the infinitely vast expanse of the dunes that extended far beyond the limitations of a park, and more importantly how to carry through the production of their work in such an environment. It was when I saw this exhibition in Hamamatsu that I realized how vague the pursuit of artworks at outdoor exhibitions in parks seemed to be. In my view, no other exhibition in Japan has prompted artists to reconsider to such an extent what it means to create art as an individual activity, in the context of the perpetual relationship between the boundlessness of nature and human artifice (in this case, contemporary art).

The artist Mizutome Shūji, organizer of the Ōya Chika Bijutsu-ten, which was held in a majestic, man-made underground space created by mining operations, was dissatisfied with the “neutral spaces cut off from the real world” of art galleries and museums, writing that the event sought to “reconfirm the possibility that works of art can have a direct relation to people who live in the here and now and the real world they operate in, not just art lovers.” At the same time, it

bears mentioning that Tateno Yasuo, who provided the venue for the exhibition, noted that “one of the things that hinders our ‘free spirit’ is the everyday (living) space that surrounds us . . . By intentionally deploying everyday means of expression found in an artist’s own practice within the extraordinary space of this massive underground expanse . . . I believe this exhibition will provide an opportunity where artists can offer . . . hints to how we might be able to arrive at an internal awareness of this ‘free spirit’ and what it means for humans to exist.”⁸ Just as artists felt trapped in an artistic context, viewers of their work felt similarly trapped in the spaces of their everyday lives. Tateno’s statement, then, can be read as a response that also sought out a more open mind and space. This is the point where outdoor exhibitions departed from the exhibitions of the 1970s, which were increasingly preoccupied with the self-fulfillment of the artists. It was also around the time that works were produced for the Hamamatsu and Ōya exhibitions that a *genba shugi* approach to production, which sought to incorporate the relationship with the site into the work, became mainstream.

8 Press material from the executive office of the 1978 Ōya Underground Arts Exhibition.

The Tamagawa Fussa Yagai Chōkoku-ten, aimed at an audience of local residents, sought to further the relationship between the world of contemporary art and the local community and its spaces of everyday life, and to promote the involvement of artworks in nurturing the limitless potential of children against the setting of the park along the Tamagawa River, a space both mundane and extraordinary. It also aspired to create an opening for a contemporary art fenced in by the “art world,” and the society that enjoyed it as a commodity (in 1992, the exhibition was developed into the *Ōmachi yagai bijutsu-ten ’92 natsu arupusu WA myūjiamu* [Ōmachi outdoor art exhibition ‘92 summer alps WA museum]). It is evident that the exhibition incorporated society’s interest in today’s art into the format of the outdoor exhibition of the 1970s.

Other exhibitions, such as the *Haramura yagai chōkoku-ten* [Haramura outdoor sculpture exhibition] (Yatsugatake Natural Culture Park), which focused on how to maintain a creative balance between the vast natural beauty of the Yatsugatake foothills, the uniqueness of the local

area, and urban culture, make a strong social statement by examining the conflict between nature and art, between the natural and man-made environment (urbanization) on a global scale, and the status of contemporary art in terms of how it contributes to the culture of contemporary society. Elsewhere, the *Lake Naguri International Open-air Art Exhibition*, held in the village of Naguri, Saitama Prefecture, in 1990 to commemorate the centennial of the founding of its municipal government, sought to revitalize the village and boost its public image.

As can be seen from these examples, recent outdoor exhibitions have not just been a matter of seeking financial support or named sponsorships: they have become viable targets for subsidies from regional development funds or the Japan Arts Council. Today, local governments find themselves obligated to seek out ways to engage with arts administration.

A SUSPICION OF INSTITUTIONS, OR INCURSIONS INTO THE EVERYDAY

IN ADDITION TO those by Kyūshū-ha, there were other attempts to set up encounters between paintings and their viewers without being bound to art institutions such as art galleries, museums, or even publicly managed parks. Before World War II, in 1924, for example, the Western-style painter Fukui Ichirō held the Dai-ikkai Rinkan Yōga-ten [1st Western-style paintings in the forest exhibition] at Kagura Shinden [now Kaguracho] in Ashiya (according to Kawasaki Kōichi of the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History). The phrase “in the forest” recalls

Gutai's outdoor exhibitions in pine forests.

Meanwhile, in the Kansai region, an attempt was made to create a “tent museum for communicating the imagination” by pitching a hundred-meter-long temporary tent along the riverbank of Shukugawa Park in Nishinomiya in 1980. Although this was not strictly speaking an “outdoor exhibition,” the fact that 160 artists came together to exhibit some 200 works indicates that many artists shared the same doubts about the institution of art. The impetus for this exhibition came from the organizer Tsutaka Waichi, who had been holding “exhibitions for dialogues” in his garden and studio for twenty years. The tent exhibition built on Tsutaka's past endeavors in an effort “to confirm that the seemingly authoritative museums and galleries are not the only places to have a relationship with art.” According to Tsutaka, the exhibition was based on the recognition that “places of everyday life are places where one can come into immediate contact with art, and true art should allow one to freely interact and have a dialogue with it.”

The tent exhibition included two- and three-dimensional works, events and performances, and three-dimensional outdoor works with no restrictions on size. Inui Yoshiaki, while approving of the endeavor, complained that the exhibition “gave the impression of being rather unadventurous with the majority of the works being small,” and suggested the construction of a “small contemporary art museum,” which was not Tsutaka's intention. The initiative, however, raised questions not only regarding sculpture, but also about the adherence to the institution of art in general, composed of museums and galleries.⁹

In connection with the aforementioned exhibitions held in Tsutaka's own garden, I would like to briefly mention *Space Totsuka 70* and Ten-ten [Point exhibition]. *Space Totsuka 70* was held in December 1970 at what was referred to as Totsuka Space, a vacant lot near the Shimeidō Apartments in Totsuka-ku, Kanagawa Prefecture, where Takayama Noboru lived. The Ten-ten exhibition included four artists: Enokura Kōji, Habu Makoto, Fujii Hiroshi, and Takayama. *The Ten-ten exhibition* started in May 1973 with the four members of Space Totsuka 70, joined by Shima Kuniichi, Chō Shigeyuki, Haraguchi Noriyuki, Hatta

⁹ Catalogue of the Dai-ikkai Kakū Tsūshin Tenta Bijutsukan-ten [1st Tent museum for communicating the imagination exhibition], August 1981.

Jun, Naitō Haruhisa, and Fujiwara Kazumichi. It was held again in May 1975 and February 1976, with some changes in the participating artists. The idea was to present artworks or events in and around their own homes or those of other members.

In addition to casting doubt on the institution of administered art spaces, these exhibitions were also attempts to combine the production of the works, which took place in the artists' own living spaces and everyday time, with the exhibiting of the works, thereby questioning the distance between them. It goes without saying, however, that the viewing of this form of exhibition would be limited to those in the art world, or those related to the individual artists. If this was intentional, it would seem that this format was a condemnation of the state of the art world, in other words, of artists who could only create and present their works in accordance with the institution of art. In addition, if Space Totsuka 70 and the Ten-ten exhibition can be understood as attempts to “turn art into daily life” and “daily life into art” limited to the artists' own spheres of daily life, then this approach was carried over to the subsequent Summer Art Festival in Hakushū.

INTERACTING WITH PLACE AS A MATERIAL

THE OUTDOOR EXHIBITIONS that have attracted the most attention in recent years are perhaps the Summer Art Festival in Hakushū, the Japan Ushimado International Art Festival, and the Amatsuchi Kōsaku exhibition.

The Summer Art Festival in Hakushū, which began in 1988, was subtitled “Traditional Performing Arts, and Crafts/Coexistence with the Earth: Butoh, Theater, Sound, Art, Architecture, Film, and Farmwork.” The festival is not just an outdoor art exhibition, but also includes workshops, concerts, butoh dances, symposia, and street performances that are held frequently at different locations and times. The various events that take place around a shrine in a farming village surrounded by mountains eschew the stilted atmosphere of “art,” allowing viewers to experience an “art” that exists alongside people and their daily lives.

This year’s event, which, for example, featured a piano solo by Cecil Taylor, who slowly emerged onto the stage performing a butoh dance that called to mind Tanaka Min, exuded an artistic pathos. There was an uplifting sense of exuberance worthy of a traditional Japanese village festival. Naturally, works of art also echoed such attitudes. Participants of the Ten-ten exhibition, such as Takayama Noboru, Enokura Kōji, Haraguchi Noriyuki, Chō Shigeyuki, and Naitō Haruhisa, made up a loose core of exhibiting artists, while many young and mid-career contemporary artists also participated. Instead of installing works in a pre-allocated area, artists find a place for the works themselves in the fields, forests, and other places where Hakushū residents work on a daily basis, producing the works as if they were farmers, with the consent of the landowners. The audience walks around the village with a map of the layout of the works in hand, just like an orienteer. This process also becomes a form of fieldwork in the farming village that is Hakushū. The works are exposed to the rain and wind, left to the workings of nature without any assumption of permanent or temporary installation. Some of them, decaying, appear before the viewer the following year as a kind of co-production between the artist and nature.

Through these works, we are forced to reconsider the modest scale of human activities and the vitality of nature—or rather, it is precisely because we recognize this modesty that the activity of the artist becomes evident. Even the artists’ humble attitude toward nature is discernible. As Kobata Kazue, one of the festival organizers, has noted, Hakushū “turns the landscape into a theater, or a museum without a roof.” The production and installation of works here reminds us that the

institution of museums and galleries is only a highly limited matter of concern for art.

The Japan Ushimado International Art Festival was launched in 1984 as an art festival held on an international scale with a view to revitalizing “culture and art” among the vast olive groves of the town of Ushimado, Okayama Prefecture. Since the second edition, the festival has been held under the themes “The Origin of Artistic Acts and Attitudes,” “Theater and Space,” “Sculpture and Space,” “Butoh and Space,” “Developments in Young Asia,” “Space of Light,” and “In Search of Invisible Space,” and this year [1992] marks the ninth edition. In the art section, the Biennale and Bijustu no Jikken [Experiments in art] exhibition are held in alternate years, with the likes of Anish Kapoor, Gottfried Bechtold, Kawamata Tadashi, and Nomura Hitoshi exhibiting in 1991. Similar to Hakushū, Ushimado showcases not only art, but also an annual Sound and Light Festival based on the notions of tradition and internationalism. The fact that traditional performing art forms such as the local vernacular *bicchū kagura* dance are highlighted in addition to *madan nori* Korean folk performance and contemporary music suggests that this is another attempt to determine the nature of the contemporary relationships between tradition and modernity, art and traditional performing arts, and art and life.

There is some anxiety that contemporary art as urban art will become weak and diluted due to the self-imposed question of what art is. I mentioned that, as a clue to breaking free of this dilemma, increasing attention is being paid to the vitality of the traditional performing arts of people living in rural areas. If this is the case, then I must also mention the Amatsuchi Kōsaku exhibition, presented by the brothers Murakami Makoto and Wataru as well as Yamamoto Yūji in March 1989 and September 1991, which I have not been able to see. The production of work on their own estates and the production in the mountains bears a certain affinity with, respectively, the Ten-ten exhibition and Hakushū. However, what makes these three artists entirely different is how they create works based on a suspicion of the framework of art as a whole. Amatsuchi Kōsaku eschews art that has become more pure and austere, but also attenuated in the midst of urbanization. In this sense,

the three artists seem to be focusing on the vitality of folk art to carry out speculative activities that are different from art and traditional craft in order to detach themselves from the domain of fine art. As such, they consciously seek to avoid their work being seen as art. Unlike Hakushū and Ushimado, moreover, they only seek a limited number of viewers. The catalogues and other reports sent to me detailing how the works were produced have piqued my imagination to no end.

What's more, how magical and grandiose are the works shown in these images! One could venture the argument that the solitude involved in creating such works in the mountains, a process akin to working on a farm for several months, is similar to the solitude in the artist's studio. In this sense, the approach taken by these artists is consistent with the stance adopted by art since the modern era, which has been promoted in terms of individual activity. It is as if they are trying to create another kind of "contemporary art" that differs from the current "contemporary art," one that is imbued with the vitality of vernacular and folk culture. If so, this may represent a kind of contemporary art that could only be created outdoors.

*I should also mention the Shibukawa Gendai-chōkoku Toriennāre [Shibukawa triennial of contemporary sculpture] as an outdoor art exhibition that questions the qualities of orthodox "contemporary art." Due to limitations of space, however, I was unable to discuss it in the above context.

(Masaki Motoi, Curator, Meguro Museum of Art, Tokyo)

This text was originally published as "No o hiraku kagi" in *Bijutsu Techō*, no. 661 (November 1992): 89–97. Translated by Darryl Jingwen Wee.

© 2021 Motoi Masaki + Bunka-cho Art Platform Japan

artplatform.go.jp/resources/readings/
R202114