

**“ON THE EIGHTIES”: A
LOOK AT THE NEW WAVE
OF THE 1980S**

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PARERGON AS PROLOGUE TO THE EIGHTIES

1 While elements presaging the art of the 1980s can be found in the work of other artists as well, the two names consistently cited as leaders of this trend in this writer's conversations with various artists were Hikosaka and Koshimizu.

A PORTRAIT OF THE CUBAN revolutionary Ernesto “Che” Guevara sits in a corner of the room, hidden away as if to avoid detection by the forces of law and order. When one visits the gallery, all that is apparent is a stone dropped on the floor. Ask the artist what this is and the reply is “Art.” This was a typical scene at an art gallery in the 1970s. Such was the preeminence of the massive movement known as Mono-ha [School of Things] in the early '70s that the prevailing mood seemed to be “If it's not Mono-ha, it's not art”—its influence on the art milieu of the day was that dominant. Few artists could avoid that influence, and the reductionist art it inspired, with its emphasis on cutting away, moved inexorably in the direction of not-making *mono* [“things”] at all. By the late '70s, an air of suffocation and entrapment pervaded Japan's art scene.

There were, however, some who sought to break out of this impasse from within. Two leaders in this regard were Hikosaka Naoyoshi and Koshimizu Susumu, who came up in the '70s but by the second half of the decade were creating work that emphatically foreshadowed the 1980s.¹ Koshimizu was frequently pigeonholed as a Mono-ha artist, but when he traveled to Europe to participate in the Biennale de Paris in the autumn of 1971, it struck him that European artists were acutely conscious of their own histories and cultures and treated them as familiars that formed the wellspring of their work. Koshimizu took this to heart as a stinging rebuke of contemporary Japanese art, which lacked this outlook, and began searching for a

solution. Through works he began producing around 1975, such as his Working Table pieces and a series of unglazed vessels filled with water with wooden objects floating on top, Koshimizu pioneered a new kind of artistic expression infused with the Japanese aesthetic of beauty in simplicity found in the arts of flower arrangement, tea ceremony, noh, and calligraphy. Hikosaka, in his Wood Painting series, which applied the 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic format of waka verse to arrangements of colored wood strips, may have been the first artist in Japan to insist on the reinstatement of production, color, and form to their rightful place.² The January 1978 *Bijutsu techō: Annual of Arts in Japan* carried a dialogue titled “Ima, aete ‘seisaku’ wo” [Daring to ‘make’ things now] in which the four participants—Suga Shōhatsu, Takagi Shū, Tani Arata, and Hikosaka—made that stance clear. In 1978 Hikosaka began teaching in the B-Semi Schooling System. Taking notice of the new directions being pursued by younger artists enrolled at B-Semi, Hikosaka produced exhibitions and in various ways served as a representative of the previous generation leading the way into the ’80s. Here is what he had to say about that period:

You might say the modern era came to a boil with the so-called May 1968 Revolution in Paris, and it was in the midst of that movement that the oppression of *le symbolique* rapidly diminished. This term *le symbolique* was coined by Jacques Lacan, the French structuralist, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. Lacan saw the human psyche as having three aspects or “orders”—the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. Because modern society was, in Michel Foucault’s words, a “disciplinary” society, each individual internalized this discipline, which manifested itself through the Symbolic order of the psyche. In other words, the modern age could be defined as one dominated by the Symbolic. But amid the intensification of the Vietnam War, the Symbolic order sustaining the disciplinary society that defined the modern age disintegrated, and with it discipline; with their liberation from discipline, people came to embrace a licentious lifestyle. The most salient “liberation” came in the realm of sexual repression. Pornography was decriminalized in Denmark

² An exhibition held at the Seibu Museum of Art from March 3 to 27, 1979, *art today* ’79: *Ki to no taiwa* [art today ’79: Conversations with wood] (featured artists: Koshimizu Susumu, Hikosaka Naoyoshi, Mogami Hisayuki; commissioner: Nakahara Yūsuke), was instrumental in triggering a “wood boom” of sorts. When a new generation of artists like Kawamata Tadashi and Hoshina Toyomi began working with wood, a full-fledged “wood boom” as well as a “plywood boom” ensued.

in 1967 and in Sweden in 1969. These developments had a tremendous impact on Japanese society as well. For example, in 1973, the fourteen-year-old singer Yamaguchi Momoe, still in middle school, was compelled to sing overtly sexual songs that were dubbed *seiten rosen* [“sexually suggestive”] songs. This kind of decadence, which contributed to Japan’s current epidemic of sex crimes and prostitution involving underage girls, was greeted with thoughtless praise. In parallel with this increase in sexual depravity, modern art saw a loosening of the ascetic precepts of high art. Modern art could be said to have gradually come to ban idol worship, eliminating the image in the pursuit of abstract art. But as the prohibitive power of the Symbolic weakened, the prevailing cultural current began to shift to the Imaginary, the affirmation of which triggered a loss of energy on the part of abstract art, the revival of the image, and the advent of idol-worshipping low art.

An oil shock hit Japan in 1973. Much like the jump in oil prices today, it got people to reassessing and seeking alternatives to modernity’s materialistic, petroleum-dependent civilization. One result was that galleries catering to young artists in Tokyo’s Kanda district that had seen a thousand visitors a week suddenly saw that number plunge to six hundred. Everyone remarked on how “cold” it felt. The art, too, seemed to stagnate. Neo Dada artists like Yoshimura Masunobu, who had been full of vigor until then, began to disappear from the scene. The original generation of Mono-ha artists, like Sekine Nobuo, also lost their vitality. Lee Ufan began painting, and the stage shifted to the second-generation Mono-ha, who were Mono-ha imitators following in Lee and Suga Kishio’s footsteps. This was the phase of imitation and appropriation spoken of by sociologists. Mono-ha was appropriated by the imitators who followed it.

The so-called New Wave movement, which erupted globally in the late 1970s, made its earliest appearance, I think, in 1973 at the Biennale de Paris. There were cross-dressers, things drawn on paper, Tarzan exposing his penis, arrays of tampons—various kinds of decadent body art, mostly from Switzerland. The suppression so rigorously maintained by art

up to that point was suddenly undone. After Kitatsuji Yoshihisa returned home from exhibiting at the 1973 Biennale, his work underwent a shift from conceptualism to more figurative and narrative forms, and I think that's because he very astutely picked up on this trend.³

When the United States lost the Vietnam War in 1975, this dispirited outlook became an undeniable current. In my personal view of history, 1975 signaled the end of what we call the modern era.⁴ With the end of that era, Japanese art lapsed into a state resembling national isolation, in which outside stimuli no longer found their way into the country. The American defeat in Vietnam altered the mood of the entire world—it precipitated the decline of the Left. While the US was at war in Vietnam, antiwar movements like Beheiren [the Citizen's Federation for Peace in Vietnam] and the New Left thrived, but with America's defeat, these movements ebbed away too. Americans like to refer to the twentieth century as the American Century, and it's true that America had been modernism's driving force. By the same token, American art had been the undisputed leader of the postwar art world. So modern art, culminating in the Minimal art pursued by American artists, had been a movement of considerable oppressive power. With the defeat in Vietnam there was a surge in criticism of art up to that point. Tom Wolfe's *The Painted Word*, which came out in 1975, was emblematic of that current. This book and its sequel, 1981's *From Bauhaus to Our House*, collectively form one of the definitive critiques of modernism. Perhaps it's an overstatement, but one could say that these two works by Wolfe ushered in the New Wave as well as Deconstructivist architecture.⁵ In any event they heralded the advent of a new era that rejected "suppression" per se. This was when visual works like those of Cindy Sherman and Robert Mapplethorpe appeared, and when the 1974 debut of Stephen King's novel *Carrie* signaled the arrival of the modern horror genre of literature. Behind the rise of modern horror lay the decay of American society, exemplified by the fact that in the 1970s, as many as a thousand children a year were being abducted, sending parents on searches across the country for

³ "Around this time, the era's mode of artistic expression shifted from the Symbolic to the Imaginary. But the utter dominance of Imaginary-order works led to the collapse of the New Wave, and from 1986 on there was yet another shift to works of the Real order. Thus the order of expression changed from the Symbolic, to the Imaginary, to the Real, which is where it stands today. The 1980s with which you [the writer] are concerned were, I think, a period when expression shifted from the Symbolic to the Imaginary, then disintegrated altogether." (Hikosaka Naoyoshi, in conversation with the writer.)

⁴ "Actually, there were two 'modern eras': one represented by the United States, and the other by the Soviet Union. This point is also made in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Empire*. The first modern era ended in 1975 with the US defeat in Vietnam, while the second one ended in 1991 with the collapse of the USSR. With that, the modern era ended once and for all." (Hikosaka Naoyoshi, in conversation with the writer.)

⁵ "Of course, Frank Gehry first drew attention in 1978 with his Gehry Residence, the inexpensive renovation of his home in Santa Monica, so it's a bit of an exaggeration to talk about Tom Wolfe's influence in this respect." (Hikosaka Naoyoshi, in conversation with the writer.)

their missing kids. In the past American children could walk around their neighborhoods on Halloween receiving candy from strangers, but now there were stories of candy with poison or razor blades hidden in it. American society was truly falling apart, and fear was now an everyday reality. The sadism that had driven attacks on a foreign country, Vietnam, now rebounded on American society in the wake of defeat. And the first to bear the brunt of it were children, the most vulnerable members of society. Now parents drove their kids to and from school. Police were stationed in every subway car due to an epidemic of subway rapes. From 1975 on, movies featuring ghosts became a Hollywood staple. Superstitions and prophecies flourished. In the 1980s magazines on such topics began to proliferate in Japan, too. People began acting on their superstitions, a trend that ultimately led to the mass killings by the Aum Shinrikyo cult. The lifting of suppression liberated even the ghosts! Anyway, that all served as background to the emergence of post-1975 American art.

One group of American politicians—members of the Democratic Party who had formerly been left-leaning reformists—were discouraged by the US defeat in Vietnam and switched to the Republican Party, where they formed the core of the neocon movement. With that, a certain malevolence came to the fore. The “make the world better” ethos vanished from American discourse as the country reassessed its global strategy. When Japan, for example, skillfully imitated and mass-produced goods initially developed in the US, the American side now asserted its intellectual property rights on the grounds that Japan’s success adversely affected the American economy.

With so many factors at work it’s hard to pinpoint the cause, but around this time I became acutely aware that the world’s prevailing social structure was rapidly changing. It was in the midst of this, in 1975, that I attended the Biennale de Paris⁶ and presented *Floor Event*. For the two months I was in Paris I shared a room with Takubo Kyōji. I was deeply affected by our conversations, which often revolved around our sense of crisis over the absence of Tokyo art anywhere. When we returned

⁶ The 9th Biennale de Paris took place from September 19 to November 2, 1975. The commissioner of the Japan contingent was Minemura Toshiaki, and the participating artists were Hikosaka, Takubo Kyōji, Nomura Hitoshi, and Fujiwara Kazumichi.

home we recruited Hori Kōsai and Takamizawa Fumio and put together the exhibition *Tokyo Geijutsu 4*, in which we explicitly proclaimed the demise of the avant-garde. Very intentionally. That's the story behind my transition into an '80s-type artist.

In 1970, the hijacking of Japan Airlines Flight 351 (a.k.a. the Yodo-gō) by members of the radical Red Army Faction occurred right in the midst of the hubbub surrounding the Osaka World Expo. This was followed in 1972 by the Asama Sansō hostage incident involving the United Red Army. Events like these served to plunge Japanese society into a dark, depressive mindset, one that was shared by the contemporary art milieu. Instead of confronting their materials and making things, artists aimed 8mm cameras at their feet and filmed them for several hours, or produced works in which they merely observed changes in the objects around them.⁷ The festive uproar sustained by the Expo and the anti-Expo movement was suddenly doused with cold water, and it became the norm for artists to question the perceptions they had taken for granted until then. Everyone began looking askance at the views of society and art that they had indulged without question for so long.

The contemporary art scene of the late 1970s that followed several years of this state of affairs might be described as one in which the reductionism, exemplified by Minimal art, that emerged from the Western modernist movement had reached a dead end and was now on its last legs. Those who sought to prolong its life and those who viewed such attempts with skepticism clashed with one another, but were unable to free themselves from the psychic bind they were in. This bleak mood had already reached its saturation point. Yet in the galleries, works that might consist of nothing more than a stone dropped on the floor still held currency. So did works that resembled perfectly constructed boxes and therefore, because they were too perfect to function as boxes, must be art. Aficionados with the eyes to appreciate such works as art continued to flock to the galleries. The age of oppressive modernism was not yet over.

During this period, leading art critics of the day launched a “painting rehabilitation” campaign in which they declared that artists must begin painting again, notably in two dialogues featured in *Bijutsu*

⁷ During the late '60s and early '70s it seemed that every artist had picked up an 8mm or 16mm camera and begun making films, which they presented at venues like *Gendai no zōkei: Eizō hyōgen* [The Exhibition of Contemporary Plastic Art: Expression in Film], sponsored by the *Kyoto Shimbun* newspaper. Two major impetuses were the Single-8 camera that went on the market in 1966, simplifying the use of 8mm film, and the influence of underground cinema and films like Andy Warhol's *Empire*. The book *Bijutsushi tansakugaku nyūmon: Bijutsukan jidai ga horiokoshita sakkatachi* [Introduction to art history: Artists unearthed by the era of art museums] (Meguro Museum of Art, 1988) contains extensive data on artist films, and the writer is currently researching this period as well.

techō magazine: “Kaiga no heimen to heimen no kaiga: Heimen ga kaiga ni naru toki” [The plane of the painting and the painting of the plane: When a plane becomes a painting] (April 1977 issue; participants Hirano Shigemitsu, Nakahara Yūsuke, Minemura Toshiaki, Tani Arata, and Fujieda Teruo) and “Kaiga to heimen no sōkoku: Kaiga jishin ni mukatte” [The conflict between painting and plane: Toward the painting itself] (February 1978 issue; participants Fujieda Teruo, Lee Ufan, and Yamada Masaaki).⁸ This campaign and the efforts of Hikosaka and Koshimizu failed to generate any sustained movement, and essentially came to naught. Nonetheless, these two special features, in their explicit acknowledgement of the transition to a new era and the need to adapt to the change, did demonstrate that artists and critics of the previous generation were searching for a new direction—albeit by the methods of their generation—as a prelude to the birth of the New Wave in the 1980s, when a subsequent generation of artists would bond together in a network that crossed over the old boundaries.

Meanwhile, society saw a proliferation of interest in occultism, the prophecies of Nostradamus, and other examples of *fin de siècle* thinking that reflected the terminal stages of an era when all forms of ideology had reached a dead end. The entire world seemed to suffer from the same malaise. In music, the Sex Pistols and other exponents of punk rock gave vent to frustrations with the status quo, while reggae arrived from the Third World, signaling a transition from the age of Western hegemony and the dawning of an age of multiethnicity, pluralism, and diversity: polyphony in place of a symphony. This new outlook rapidly began to permeate society.

The philosopher Michel Foucault defined episteme as a “complex relationship of successive displacements”—in other words, not a single slice or cross-section of history, but a multifarious relationship in which multiple modes exist in parallel.⁹ The term, which represented a new value system, was appropriated as the title of a magazine launched in 1975 as a “theater of play among the arts, science, and philosophy” (from the postscript in the preliminary issue of *Episteme*).¹⁰ *Episteme* was a serious journal that carried essays on contemporary philosophy and thought, but its issues were designed by Sugiura Kohei, who also designed the covers of the magazine *Yū*¹¹ published by Kousakusha and whose ability to present recondite content in a trendy package

⁸ A timeline distributed at the symposium “Avant-Garde Contemporary Art of the Eighties: Focusing on the Activities of Gallery Parergon,” held by Genba Kenkyūkai on July 6, 2008, at Kyobashi Civic Hall in Tokyo, listed the following sources in addition to the two issues of *Bijutsu techō*:
- Marcelin Pleyne, *L'enseignement de la peinture*, trans. Iwasaki Tsutomu (Asahi Press, 1976)
- Fujieda Teruo, *Gendai bijutsu no tenkai* [The development of contemporary art] (Bijutsu Shuppansha, 1977)
- Akita Yuri, “Bijutsu ni okeru shūen to jiyū: Kōzōshugi irai no chihei kara” [The demise and freedom of art: A post-structuralist perspective], in *8th Bijutsu Techō Art Critique Competition*, 1979

⁹ “Michel Foucault . . . ‘The episteme is not a slice of history common to all the sciences: it is a simultaneous play of specific remanences. . . . The episteme is not a general developmental stage of reason, it is a complex relationship of successive displacements.’” (Quote from Foucault on the cover of the preliminary issue of *Episteme*; Fujii Masami provided assistance with the explanation of “episteme.”)

¹⁰ Published by Asahi Press. Its final issue was in 1979.

¹¹ Published by Kousakusha as a monthly from 1971 to 1982.

made *Episteme* a fashion item. Art students in the late '70s could be seen promenading with the magazine tucked under their arms. With this melding of erudite thought with the design and fashion sense of the younger generation, the last vestiges of formalistic art and values—already on a respirator at this point—fell away, setting the stage for the '80s.

On February 16, 1981, Gallery Parergon opened in Kanda, Tokyo. During the first half of the '80s this gallery would serve as the showcase for young artists of the New Wave—most of them born in the late '50s and early '60s. The name derived from an essay of the same title by Jacques Derrida, which appeared in translation in *Episteme*. “Parergon” combines the prefix *par-*, meaning “beside,” with *ergon*, meaning “work”; hence it refers to something on the margins of or supplemental to a work—a frame or pedestal, for example, which exists next to a work of art but is not part of it. Fujii Masami, the proprietor of the gallery, says he chose the name to connote the gallery itself as a frame or border around frameless, pedestal-less works of contemporary art. Indeed, there was something parergon-like about how art of the early '80s was perceived in comparison with art of the '70s and earlier. The term perfectly expresses the status of these early-'80s artworks, which have rarely been acknowledged until now as “ergons” of the dramatic period of transition from modern to postmodern. Representative artists of this period include Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Okazaki Kenjirō, Miyajima Tatsuo, Ōmura Masumi, Yoshikawa Yōichirō, Ogino Hiromasa, and Maemoto Shōko in the Kanto region including Tokyo, and Nakahara Kōdai, Ishihara Tomoaki, Yamabe Yasushi, Sugiyama Tomoko, and Matsui Chie in the Kansai region including Osaka, Kobe, and Kyoto. The fact that so little has been written about the activities and works of these artists—still on the front lines of Japan's art scene today—during their incubation period in the early '80s is another reason why art of that era has been treated as a sort of parergon.

FROM PROTOTYPES AND PHENOMENA TO UENO '80

AROUND THIS TIME INTEREST was growing in Third World cultures, and Western artists also began to assert aspects of their own national or ethnic identity. In Japan, meanwhile, the virtually unrecorded New Wave of the eighties was in the midst of what I view as a period during which the previous generation took the lead in making it visible. I say this because, just as many of the Mono-ha artists emerged from a group centered around Saitō Yoshishige, a professor at Tama Art University, most of the artists who defined the early '80s came out of certain academic classrooms. Among the instructors were Enokura Kōji at Tokyo University of the Arts; Hikosaka, Usami Keiji, and Kashihara Etsutomu at the B-Semi Schooling System; three critics at Tama Art University: Tōno Yoshiaki, Minemura Toshiaki, and Lee Ufan; and Wakabayashi Isamu at Musashino Art University.

As for the Japanese art scene, the earliest example I can find of '80s New Wave-style art in an actual gallery is the *Genkei to Genshō* [Prototypes and phenomena] exhibition, which ran from August 7 to 12, 1978, at the Muramatsu Gallery in Ginza, Tokyo. With a very '70s-esque title, the show was organized by Taki Kōji and Hikosaka, both instructors at B-Semi at the time, and the five featured artists were all B-Semi students: Akuta Tetsuya, Inoue Kiyohito, Ogino Hiromasa, Kaneyasu Michiko, and Kitamura Yoshihiro. The following "Project Summary" explains why this exhibition was organized.

Project Summary

Hikosaka Naoyoshi and I planned this exhibition of work by B-Semi students and graduates after viewing this year's B-Semi exhibition. The works selected there could not be said to establish a new style that departs from past art, nor could they be said to feel "complete." If anything, they are somewhat the opposite, yet something in them mysteriously catches the eye more than works that abide by the norms of contemporary art. There is no denying that some are reminiscent of art of the 1950s, or have an unnameable primitive aspect, but it is clear that they are not attempting to return to past styles. What sort of phenomenon might come into view if a number of these works were gathered together? If left alone, it might vanish like foam on the ocean. Or might it be a sign of fundamental changes to come? Either way, these are not works of a character that can be judged so simply. At the very least, one can say that these young artists are not driven by some primitive urge to ignore or destroy the forms and qualities associated with painting. They may lack sufficient skills or harbor eccentric ideas, but they have something inside them that works to delay the establishment of a "style," if we choose to use that word. Their work is full of contradictions and paradoxes. On the one hand, for example, each has a strong integrative core, yet this integration coexists with an intention to rewrite the concepts or autonomous formats of art from as broad a perspective as possible. Instead of trying to find themselves amid a sequence of succession from one style to another, they live in relation to something that cannot be articulated within that framework. Thus diverse elements are simultaneously apparent here: forgotten aspects of history, an interest in the interaction between art's internal structure and its cultural value, the subjectivity and passion of expression. This is no doubt why the work of these artists contains something that draws one's interest to deeper layers below their surface format. That said, these are compositional works, not simply reductionist efforts to return to something primordial or prototypical. Do these gestures not seek, each from its own peculiar standpoint, to explode in the face of the present age? (Taki Kōji)

Toward the end of the 1970s, most art was of the sort I described at the beginning of this essay: a stone dropped on the floor of the gallery or the like. It was the peak of the shut down, aphasia-like state symptomized by the inability to paint a picture, to use color—even a picture of something as simple as an apple. In his book *Kaigaron: Egaku koto no fukken* [On pictures: Rehabilitating painting] (Chikuma Shobo, 1980), Usami Keiji, a fellow instructor of Taki and Hikosaka at B-Semi, coined the term *shitsugashō* [lit. “picture loss syndrome,” a play on the Japanese word for aphasia, *shitsugoshō*] to describe this condition. The *Prototypes and Phenomena* exhibition was actually planned by Hikosaka, who had become an instructor at B-Semi in 1978 (he had taught there part-time before that).¹² The listing of art critic Taki Kōji as its organizer was a strategy typical of the '70s, following the modern convention of attaching art critics' names to exhibitions.¹³ Hikosaka praised works like Akuta Tetsuya's glossy surfaces and Kaneyasu Michiko's self-portraits in pencil or some other medium as genuine, not fabricated, expressions of psychological distress.¹⁴

Evaluations of the art aside, one can find virtually no other examples in 1978 or 1979 of exhibitions that heralded the arrival of a new, “'80s-style” era. In 1978, however, Enokura Kōji became a temporary instructor at Tokyo University of the Arts and Tokyo Zokei University, among other places, and in 1979 students successfully petitioned to have him hired as an instructor in the oil painting department at Tokyo University of the Arts [a.k.a. Tokyo Geidai]. Enokura was instrumental in introducing young art students to the new trends overseas known as the New Wave. Slowly but surely, tectonic movements were occurring just under the surface.¹⁵

A student-organized exhibition, *Ueno '80*, took place from January 8 to 30, 1980 in a gallery in Tokyo Geidai's University Hall.¹⁶ The exhibiting artists were Akiyama Takashi, Kanuma Ryōsuke, Kobayashi Ryōsuke, Sagawa Kōji, Tashiro Mutsumi, Tsubo Ryōichi, Hoshina Toyomi, Chikuse Hiroyuki, Sugimata Tadashi, Ikeda Masafumi, Kashiwai Yoshitomo, Kawamata Tadashi, Senzaki Chieo, Furukawa Haruo, Miyake Yasuo, Enokura Kōji, Ebisawa Isao, Kurobe Kōichi, Konishi Shū, Sakai Shin'ichi, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Tanaka Mutsuji, and Nakamura Kazumi. Kawamata, Sagawa, Hoshina, and Nakamura, who were two to three years older than the New Wave generation, recruited contemporary

12 In those days B-Semi would invite popular artists and critics to teach there. Kashihara Etsutomu was particularly influential in this position, we are told. B-Semi garnered notice as a source of “interesting” art of the early '80s.

13 Hikosaka and Taki had been close ever since the formation in 1969 of Bikyōtō [Artists Joint-Struggle Council], which used Taki's office. The same office was used by *Provoke* magazine, and Hikosaka also used Taki's darkroom.

14 From the writer's conversation with Hikosaka Naoyoshi.

15 The following are among the 1979 entries on the timeline “Tokyo new wave to sono shūhen” [Tokyo new wave and its periphery] in *Profile of Contemporary Art* (International Art Center of Kyoto, 1987) (editorial supervisor: Tani Arata; production: Yamakura Kenshi and Sekiguchi Atsuhito):

- Enokura Kōji becomes an instructor in the oil painting department of Tokyo University of the Arts after a petition drive by Tsubo Ryōichi, Tashiro Mutsumi, Kawamata Tadashi, Miyake Yasuo, and other students at the university.

- Anzai Shigeo shows slides of New York's current art scene at B-Semi and various universities, with hundreds of students filling the auditoriums at Tokyo University of the Arts and Tokyo Zokei University. Most of the student body at B-Semi attends.

art students at the university as well as instructor Enokura and held the exhibition in a gallery they constructed themselves. The show was praised as a new type of exhibition that departed from the old-fashioned style of “Geidai academism.” However (according to Sekiguchi Atsuhito’s account), most of the works were Mono-ha-esque, or figurative, or Geidai-style abstracts, or constructions of plywood, with only a couple of artists offering painterly contemporary art. The most notable thing about this exhibition is the participation of Sekiguchi, then a third-year student. One of the leading lights of the ’80s New Wave, he would go on to become an important mover and shaker in that movement.

Of a number of significant exhibitions that took place that same year, the following merit special mention:

Art Today ’80: Kaiga no mondai [Art Today ’80: The problem of painting], at Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo, November 15–December 17, 1980. Planning: Fujieda Teruo. Exhibiting artists: Tatsuno Toeko, Negishi Yoshirō, Yoda Toshihisa.

Konnichi no sakka ’80: Kanjō to kōsei [Today’s artists ’80: Emotion and Composition], at Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, November 16–30, 1980. Planning: Fujieda Teruo. Exhibiting artists: Kawamata Tadashi, Suga Shōhatsu, Nakagami Kiyoshi, Nakamura Isao, Negishi Yoshirō, Fukushima Noriyasu, Yamada Masaaki.

Tatsuno Toeko, who had been known in the 1970s for Minimalist works comprising stripes, rows of dots, and the like, began painting in a more “expressionist” style that featured S-shaped motifs in multicolored, multilayered compositions. The change, which critics sarcastically labeled her “transformation,” sent off shockwaves when the first such work appeared in 1980, then was included the following year in a special feature, “80 nendai bijutsu: Ugokidasu new wave” [Art in the ’80s: New wave on the move],¹⁷ in the January 1981 issue of *Bijutsu techō*, along with reproductions of numerous other works by artists all over the world who had begun painting in a richly emotional style freed of previous constraints. The contributing writers were Fujieda Teruo, Minemura Toshiaki, Hirai Ryōichi, and Naka Yūko+Sadahiko. The illustrations were of works by Elizabeth Murray, Negishi Yoshirō, Dennis Ashbaugh, Pete Omlow,¹⁸ John Zorn, Ron Gorchov, Yamada Masaaki, Anna Bialobroda, Katherine Warren, Edward

- Around the same time, Enokura Kōji shows slides of innovative works from the Venice Biennale at B-Semi and various universities.

- Photographs by Anzai Shigeo and Kondō Tatsuo introduce Jonathan Borofsky and other New Wave artists in the Japanese mass media for the first time in the special feature “Art and Illusion,” *Bijutsu techō*, January 1980 issue.

16 *Ueno ’80* was followed by *Ueno ’82* and *Ueno ’85*.

- *Ueno ’82*, at Tokyo University of the Arts, University Hall, 2nd floor gallery, July 7–14, 15–22, and 23–30, 1982. Exhibiting artists: (July 7–14) Okuno Kanmei, Konishi Shū, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Tashiro Mutsumi, Tsubo Ryōichi, Nomura Kazuhiro, Hoshina Toyomi, Miyajima Tatsuo; (July 15–22) Iga-wa Seiryō, Idei Shigeru, Kurashige Noriko, Takeda Yasuhiro, Tanaka Mutsuji, Tsuchiya Yutaka, Hayakawa Tetsuri, Furui Satoshi, Arimura Morifumi; (July 23–30) Enokura Kōji, Kitagawa Kazuo, Kurobe Kōichi, Kobayashi Ryōsuke, Satō Tokihiro, Nitta Kazunari, Maruyama Hiroshi, Yoshimura Akira. A symposium was held every week. Catalogue roundtable participants were Matsuura Hisao, Hosokawa Shūhei, Matsueda Itaru, Yamamura Hitoshi, Fujii Masami, and Sekiguchi Atsuhito.

- *Ueno ’85*, at Tokyo University of the Arts, University Hall gallery, August 8–27, 1985. Planning: Kumagai Yūko. Exhibiting artists: Kakizaki Takayuki, Egashira Shin, Shigei Kenji, Hirabayashi Kaoru, Watanabe Rin-

Youkilis, Louis Kahn, Douglas Abercrombie, Darryl Hutt, Carol Sutton, Tatsuno Toeko, Paul Fonie, Vered Leave, Joseph Drapell, Jennifer Duran, Kikuo Saitō, John McLean, Gottfried Mailweger, Meredith Johnson, Sandi Slone, Nancy Graves, Sam Gilliam, Pierre Haubensak, Nakagami Kiyoshi, Frances Barth, Suga Shōhatsu, Stephen Buckley, Kawamata Tadashi, Kurioka Takao, Ōmura Masumi, Fukushima Noriyasu, Kamo Hiroshi, Ikegaya Hajime, Yoda Toshihisa, Nakamura Isao, John Greenfen, Sakurai Chiaki, Oki Keisuke, Miyazaki Toyoharu, Toya Shigeo, Susan Rothenberg, Edwin EZDosik, Holtos Glaskar, Dominique Gauthier, Rodney Ripps, Brice Marden, Isabelle Champion-Métadier, Claude Viallat, Lynda Benglis, Jennifer Bartlett, Deborah Butterfield, Wade Saunders, Ald Spordy, Dan Player, Jonathan Borofsky, Jackie Winsor, Alice Aycock, Jinsik Yun, Dennis Oppenheim, Martin Puryear, Joel Shapiro, Dennis Evans, Jody Pinto, James Surls, Luciano Bartolini, Alice Adams, Jackie Ferrara, Harriet Feigenbaum, Marianne Heske, Brenda Goodman, Charles Simonds, Catherine Skolnikoff, Siah Armajani, Thornton Willis, and Harold Feist. The numerous concerns reflected in the works of these artists as well as those of Julian Schnabel, Frank Stella, and others, enjoyed a highly sympathetic response from young artists in Japan who had begun addressing many of the same issues. Enokura Kōji, Wakabayashi Isamu, and Koshimizu Susumu were chosen to represent Japan at the 1980 Venice Biennale, whose participants also included such leading '80s artists as Jonathan Borofsky, Anselm Kiefer, Sigmar Polke, Magdalena Abakanowicz, Georg Baselitz, Nicola De Maria, and Claude Viallat. An account of these developments by Enokura Kōji, “Kaigai sokuhō: Venice Biennale” [Overseas bulletin: Venice Biennale], appeared in the September 1980 issue of *Bijutsu techō*. Kawamata Tadashi and other young artists in Enokura’s circle at Tokyo Geidai were also beginning to earn recognition. However, even younger artists in their early twenties at the time viewed this as an event confined within the framework of the old order. This “new breed,” who wished to be independent of any existing framework, had already begun to build a new kind of network outside of that order.

tarō, Nagata Norihiko, WAY-PRO (Amako Yasushi, Kobatake Yasuaki, Itō Nobuaki, and Watanabe Rintarō), Hosoki Yoshinori, Sasaki Junko, Kumagai Yūko, Esashi Tomoko, Satō Tomonori, Fukaya Norio, Kagesato Jurō, Ōsugi Tomomi, Endō Akiko, Yamaguchi Yasuhiro, Ueno Hitoshi, Watanabe Shinji, Nomura Kazuhiro, Kondō Masami, Masukawa Juichi, Tanji Yoshihiko, Tsuchiya Yutaka, Kobayashi Akira, Kurashige Noriko, Yanagi Kenji, Morie Hideo, Inoue Yōko, Kondō Katsuyoshi, Iijima Yōko, Suzuki Sumio, Tsubo Ryōichi. The exhibition was divided into three groups over three weeks.

17 Here, “New Wave” referred not to the avant-garde of the '80s that is the subject of this essay, but to new developments at the time of the exhibition.

18 [This and some other artist names in this list are spelled as given in the author’s sources but could not be confirmed.]

THE '80S NEW WAVE AS AVANT-GARDE

“Suppose I’m watching a movie and a hole suddenly appears in the screen, or it catches on fire. I am reminded in that instant that the screen is a physical substance. We all believed in trying to nail down that sudden instant, in the realness of capturing the moment of the disparity itself.”

“It was a time when one could believe in the possibility of the power of the image to create structure itself. In that sense we thought we could apply to paintings what we had done by projecting images onto ‘things’ to eliminate their substantiality. But when we awakened from the dream we realized that things are, after all, just things, so there was a subtle disparity there. However, there were also subtle disparities in the character of expression, depending on the artist. If one’s perception of space or color preceded perception of the ‘thing,’ that substantiality would disappear. Though I don’t want to call that an illusion, there were artists who were trying to foreground both things at once, and others who managed to balance them. The tendency at the time was to simply pile on whatever images bubbled up, without any intent. Everyone was trying to do that straight up. I actively supported any artists I thought had some of those elements in their work, or who were painting what seemed to be attempts to nail down images they couldn’t suppress in themselves. There were quite a few of them in my generation at the time. They were a rather sensitive

bunch—the type who watched *Akira* and related to it. I wouldn't go so far as to call it an occult phenomenon, but they had images they couldn't suppress; wherever they came from and whatever form they might appear in, they had to be expressed. There was a prevailing state of mind in those days that didn't allow for just creating coolly objective, reductionist works. We felt we had to accept that and produce works that expressed something real.”

These are the words of Sekiguchi Atsuhito, one of the seminal artists of the '80s New Wave, in reply to my queries about the reality of those days. “New Wave” is a term applied to artists who were in their twenties at the time, primarily those who associated early in their careers with Gallery Parergon. The owner of the gallery, which opened in Kanda on February 16, 1981, was Fujii Masami, a researcher and translator in the field of aesthetics. Parergon served as a crossroads for the new sensibilities being expressed then by artists who were mostly Tokyo-area art school students or recent graduates. At a time when there were virtually no other venues that accepted this so-called “new breed,” Parergon attracted a core of young artists who casually gathered there, but this did not make it economically viable as a business. In 1983 it became a gallery self-managed by a group consisting mainly of graduates of Tokyo Geidai or its graduate program, and continued like that until 1987.

In this writer's view, 1981, the year that Parergon opened, may be considered the inaugural year of the '80s New Wave.

The year 1981 was one that saw a sudden proliferation of art exhibitions self-produced by artists in their twenties. Based just on the documents I have in hand, there were over one hundred such exhibitions every year from 1982 to 1985, testimony to the explosive energy of those years. Besides Parergon, two other venues frequently used for these self-organized shows were the Kanagawa Kenmin Hall Gallery and the Yokohama Civic Art Gallery. The primary criterion for selecting exhibitors was that the artists feel “empathy” [*kyōkan*] for each other, and this became the watchword for artists recruiting one another to participate in these shows. Fujii Masami, along with Okazaki Kenjirō, who made Parergon his turf, became known as polemicists

during this period, but more importantly, the artists displayed a mutual understanding as they exchanged views that did not rely on conventional rhetoric, but expressed their own perceptions in their own words. The crucial factor in making art became the act of “winning over art to your side”—by rejecting the formal elements and tropes of art production fostered by the modern era, telling stories that emerged from within, and incorporating into your work the familiar objects and events that felt most real to you. Works ranged from the direct—a man burning up in a fire, inspired by the suicide of the artist’s brother; the insertion of the artist in the canvas to form part of a work; images reminiscent of body organs and blood, created by an extension of handicraft techniques the artist learned as a young girl—to those incorporating traditional Japanese elements, like the work of Suwa Naoki. Each artist began experimenting with his or her own mode of expression. Even if the results sometimes had an infantile narrative aspect, the means and methods were the product of each artist’s fledgling trial-and-error efforts and represented the first baby steps of a newborn generation. The format of artwork was being altered, too, as artists transformed the external structure of paintings, not just what was inside the rectangular frame. Pieces of cardboard or cloth might protrude from the canvas, conveying an image of foreign matter running amok; a wall installation might overtly reject the very notion of a framing canvas. Imposing an awareness of foreign matter and dragging the image of the painting closer to reality—i.e., closer to oneself—so as to “open a hole in reality” became an important element of art. Consequently few if any works of the time were the sort one would hang in one’s home, and virtually none could be said to evoke feelings of tranquility when put on display. Nor was there any coverage of the New Wave to speak of in *Bijutsu techō* or the newspapers of the day. It would appear that writers were at a loss as to how to critique or otherwise respond to this energy. In many cases no one except the artists themselves seemed capable of talking about the work. And while they might be able to discuss work they had a direct hand in, they tended to be lacking in social skills and had to search on their own for the words to explain their work, much as they had had to search for the means of creating it. Symposia were popular at the time, usually with art critics as well as artists participating; after each artist had spoken

about their work, it was not uncommon for a critic to say “Even after hearing from the artist, we still haven’t gotten a clear answer, so allow me to try”—followed by an explication full of the latest buzzwords, which were things like *toransu* [“trans” as in “transcendent”] or *kōtsū* [“communication” or “exchange,” e.g., across genres]. Rarely was there a gallery curator or critic in a position to translate the abstractions of the artist’s clumsy explanation into more concrete terms; most of the time the critics present merely caused further confusion by replacing these abstractions with entirely different ones. Up until the 1970s, at least, critics and artists had been able to speak the same language, and artistic expression developed within the single vast framework of modernist art. Now, however, with the concepts and language cultivated up to this point no longer sufficient to describe what was currently happening in art, critics who attempted to respond to it with conventional rhetoric alone began to find themselves at a loss for words. Criticism was conspicuous in its absence.

Most of the group exhibitions of the day were self-organized. Among these, the following three shows stand out for an all-embracing stance transcending the cliques of academe:

The Front-Line of Contemporary Art, at Gallery Parergon, Tokyo, May 10–24, 1982. Exhibiting artists: Ilene Krug, Iwasaki Moto’o, Sakai Shin’ichi, Tamaki Hitoshi, Miyake Yasuo, Kamo Hiroshi, Suzaki Takafumi, Takeda Yasuhiro, Numajiri Akiko, Hanai Shigenobu, Iguchi Daisuke, Okada Masashi, Kaihatsu Jun’ichi, Kawashima Kiyoshi, Takagi Hideaki, Ikegaya Hajime, Takahashi Yūji, Tashiro Mutsumi, Hirahara Masaaki, Yamamoto Yūko, Imai Ryō, Ōmura Masumi, Kobayashi Ryōsuke, Sasaki Etsuhiro, Sone Natsuki, Itō Makoto, Okazaki Kenjirō, Sagawa Kōji, Shima Hisayuki, Yoshikawa Yōichirō, Kaneko Yasunori, Kikuchi Toshinao, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Matsui Eiki, Matsuura Hisao, Akuta Tetsuya, Ogino Hiromasa, Okuno Kanmei, Kurokawa Hirotake. Eight consecutive exhibitions of five artists per group, selected from students and graduates of various art universities in Tokyo.

The Critical Point in Art, at Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, July 25–August 20, 1983. Exhibiting artists: (July 25–30) Oguro Yūkō, Kurashige Noriko, Nishimura Fumihiko, Hirabayashi Kaoru, Yano Michiko; (August 1–6) Oka Misuzu, Kikuchi Toshinao, Kurioka Takao, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Nishizono Kumiko; (August 8–14) Abe Mamoru, Kikuchi Akihiko, Taira

Noboru, Bandō Miyabi, Yamakura Kenshi; (August 15–20) Arase Kagetoshi, Katayama Akifumi, Maemoto Shōko, Miyamae Masaki, Yoshikawa Yōichirō. Text: Tani Arata.

The Critical Point in Art: Phase 1985, at Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, July 8–August 10, 1985. Planning: Tani Arata. Exhibiting artists: Ushijima Tomoko, Sugano Yumiko, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Nakamura Kazumi, Matsuo Naoki, Kasahara Takeshi, Nakanishi Manabu, Honma Kaori, Maemoto Shōko, Matsui Chie, Kawashima Kiyoshi, Koizumi Toshimi, Nakanishi Keiko, Nakahara Kōdai, Matsui Shirō, Arase Kagetoshi, Ishihara Tomoaki, Okamoto Yukihisa, Kikuchi Akihiko, Kondō Katsuyoshi, Senzaki Chieo, Torikai Kyoko, Morita Satoshi, Yamakura Kenshi, Yano Michiko. The 1985 edition of *The Critical Point in Art*¹⁹ included Kansai-region artists Nakahara Kōdai, Matsui Shirō, Ishihara Tomoaki, and Nakanishi Manabu. The 1980s were also a time when the “Kansai New Wave” swept over Japan’s art world, inspiring gibes at the Kanto region’s expense like “highs in the west, lows in the east.” But the loose network that had formed among mutually empathetic spirits overcame distinctions of region or academic affiliation.

¹⁹ The exhibition was held again in 1988: *The Critical Point in Art: Phase 1988*, at Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, August 1–27, 1988. Planning: Tani Arata. Exhibiting artists: Yamazaki Yoshihisa, Fukuda Shinnosuke, Kōma Hiroshi, Masuda Satoko, Kawagoe Satoru, Kirihara Atsuyuki, Yamaguchi Tomohiro, Itō Makoto, Tachi Katsuo, Nishina Shigeru, Kawashima Keiju, Ono Yoshihiro, Yanagi Yukinori, Maki Tomoko, Kuniyasu Takamasa, Tanaka Miwa, Takatsu Mie, Iwamoto Takashi, Odanaka Yasuhiro, Yanagi Kenji.

FUJIYAMA GEISHA AND THE KANSAI NEW WAVE

When I first met Sekiguchi Atsuhito at a Ginza gallery, we hit it off and began talking about holding an exchange exhibition. Subsequently we expanded our pool of volunteers, and settled on the somewhat anachronistic-sounding title *Fujiyama Geisha*, which was thought to evoke a nearly forgotten image of Japan as it was once viewed from abroad. But can youngsters

like us really dismiss that as an anachronism? Today, when the economic and technological sectors make such an overwhelming impression that an image of the “economic/technical animal” predominates, the “Fujiyama Geisha” trope seems like it wasn’t so bad after all. Artists like us today should not turn our gaze inward; rather, we should act with an awareness of the position of our art within a global frame of reference. As a first step in that direction we are presenting an exchange exhibition that will travel between Tokyo and Kyoto.

20 The last exhibition under this title took place in 1987. In 1988 Tokyo University of the Arts and Kyoto City University of Arts held an exchange exhibition titled *SOL+GEL*.

21 From the book *Fujiyama Geisha* published by the organizers in 1984.

The quotation above is from the organizer of the Kyoto installment of *Fujiyama Geisha*,²⁰ Ikeda Shūkō.²¹ *Fujiyama Geisha* was the title of the first exchange exhibition organized by undergraduate and graduate student volunteers from Tokyo Geidai and Kyoto City University of Arts [a.k.a. Kyoto Geidai]. This was not just an opportunity for artistic exchange, but also a chance for young Kansai artists to bridge the gap between the Kansai and Kanto regions and show a large number of their works without any time lag in Tokyo, the nation’s center. Moreover, by tearing down walls between university-based cliques, the exhibition stood as a declaration, however offhanded, of rejection of the old modes of artistic expression and the odious conventions of the seniority system that held sway in academic circles. The first iteration of the exhibition took place in November and December 1982 with the following participants:

Fujiyama Geisha, at Kyoto City University of Arts Gallery, Kyoto, November 1–13, 1982; at Tokyo University of the Arts Gallery, Tokyo, December 13–25, 1982. Participating artists: (November 1–6) Konishi Shū, Hashimoto Kanoko, Ikeda Shūkō, Okuno Kanmei, Takagi Hideaki, Nakahara Kōdai, Tsubaki Noboru; (November 8–13) Yamabe Yasushi, Masuda Makiko, Ōhashi Hiroshige, Nagano Hisato, Sugiyama Tomoko, Nunobiki Masako, Sekiguchi Atsuhito; (December 13–18) Sugiyama Tomoko, Nakahara Kōdai, Nunobiki Masako, Okuno Kanmei, Ōhashi Hiroshige, Ikeda Shūkō, Hashimoto Kanoko; (December 20–25) Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Nitta Kazunari, Masuda Akiko, Tsubaki Noboru, Konishi Shū, Takagi Hideaki, Nagano Hisato, Yamabe Yasushi.

Fujiyama Geisha originated with the meeting between Ikeda Shūkō of Kyoto Geidai and Sekiguchi Atsuhito of Tokyo Geidai at the

White Art Gallery,²² where Sekiguchi's solo exhibition *single pulse* was showing from November 16 to 28, 1981. The two found they were kindred spirits and promised each other that they would hold a joint exhibition featuring students at their respective schools in a year.²³ Sekiguchi had long been fascinated by Japanese culture's development as an amalgamation of foreign cultural elements, and had pondered how that same eclecticism might be legitimized and incorporated into contemporary art. He was profoundly affected by a trip he made to Kyoto to study antique art when he was in his third year of university, and continued to visit the city whenever the opportunity arose. Conversely, students from the Kansai region made it a point to travel to Tokyo to view exhibitions there.²⁴ Just as their art attempted to break out of existing frameworks, the effort by these student artists to effect a mutual exchange unhampered by distinctions of region or academic affiliation was itself a forceful message directed at the previous generation.²⁵ The title *Fujiyama Geisha* was chosen at a meeting at Tsubaki Noboru's apartment attended by Sekiguchi and Okuno Kanmei from Tokyo and Ikeda, Tsubaki, Sugiyama Tomoko, Nakahara Kōdai, Hashimoto Kanoko (or possibly Nunobiki Masako), Masuda Makiko, and Yamabe Yasushi from Kyoto. Criticism from the older generation was fierce: "Do you have any idea what 'Fujiyama geisha' meant? It was an insult aimed at Japan by European civilization!" "Fujiyama" referred to the iconic Kanto-area (including Tokyo) tourist destination, while "geisha" connoted the pleasure quarters of Kyoto. By actively highlighting what had been a somewhat demeaning cliché about Japan in the eyes of the outside world, the artists wanted to reexamine their own identity.²⁶ Compared to Western art, Japan's seemed inferior and lacking in originality, and they wanted to call attention to that state of affairs as well. While Ikeda recruited participants in Kyoto, Sekiguchi did the same in Tokyo. However, Sekiguchi recalls, "I had thought there was some innovative work in Tokyo, but there were limits to it. The Kyoto artists' work was fresher, so I also saw this as a chance to stir things up in Tokyo." The generation of artists slightly older than Sekiguchi included many of established status like Kawamata Tadashi and Hoshina Toyomi, who had participated in the 1982 Venice Biennale; Sekiguchi no doubt had a strong incentive to challenge the weaknesses of his own generation. He got an "entirely different" impression, he said,

22 The owner of the White Art Gallery was a designer who apparently wanted to open a gallery in the United States and was engaged in a variety of undertakings. At the time he had entrusted curation of the gallery to art critic Chiba Shigeo, who saw and liked Sekiguchi's graduation artwork and contacted him about doing a solo show there. (Incidentally, on this occasion Yamamura Tokutarō, known for the famous Yamamura Collection of Gutai art, bought two works by Sekiguchi that are currently housed in the Kobe City Museum.)

23 After meeting at the gallery, the two men chatted over coffee about doing an exchange exhibition. According to Sekiguchi, "We agreed to do it in a year, around this time. I told Ikeda I would find space and make the preparations at [Tokyo] Geidai and he should do the same. About a half year later, I asked Ikeda how things were going, Ikeda said 'OK,' and that's how the exhibition began."

24 Ishihara Tomoaki saw the work by Tatsuno Toeko in which the "S" shape made its debut at the Seibu Museum of Art in Tokyo in 1980. The 1982 exhibition *The Front-Line of Contemporary Art* also inspired considerable debate in Kansai as it did in Kanto.

25 At the time, Kyoto Geidai required that students wishing to hold an exhibition consult with their professors. Few instruc-

from the work of Kansai artists Ishihara Tomoaki and Nakahara Kōdai in particular. He thought Ishihara's work was novel and "cinematic," while Nakahara's was dense and multilayered; these two, he was sure, would go far. At the time Ishihara was producing works ranging from monochrome photographs of triangular ruler-like objects overlaying their shadows to composite works with a dangling vertical drape flanked by nude photos of the artist arching his back. Nakahara, meanwhile, was constructing installations made up of seemingly random arrangements of objects of various shapes and sizes—building blocks, table-like structures, sticks and scraps of wood—all painted in bright colors. Sugiyama Tomoko and Yamabe Yasushi also counted among artists with a "Kansai-esque" flavor that could not be found in Tokyo. Both were producing mural-size installations that covered entire walls with colorful semi-solid shapes that resembled familiar objects. By contrast, the Tokyo-area students' works seemed devoid of color, and many consisted of materials laid out with what appeared to be minimal processing by the artists.

In the Kansai region, younger artists were already busy producing innovative work. Exhibitions like *Kyoto Indépendant*²⁷ (since 1955) and *Good Art*²⁸ (since 1979) had provided a breeding ground for artistic expressions of all kinds; an environment that fostered work of any shape and scale was already in place. Moreover, since 1973 the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art had been holding an annual exhibition, *Art Now*,²⁹ that featured selected contemporary Kansai artists; in 1982 the policy was changed to host only first-time exhibitors, with a focus on young Kansai artists. Each artist was provided with ample display space, making it feasible to construct and exhibit ever-larger works. This was, indeed, a factor in the growing reputation of Kansai artists for producing "huge" works.³⁰

Students from Kyoto Geidai as well as Osaka University of the Arts [a.k.a. Osaka Geidai] formed groups of like-minded members of the same generation and organized their own shows at venues like the Osaka Contemporary Art Center, actively promoted their activities through self-published fanzines, and appealed to the fashionable sensibilities of their peers. Even as they nurtured their own sense of solidarity, they also began working with one eye on the "center"—Tokyo—and beyond that the world. In the autumn of 1982, students

tors showed up at the *Fujiyama Geisha* show. "Enokura Kōji came to see it," recalls Yamabe Yasushi.

²⁶ According to Yamabe Yasushi.

²⁷ Organized in 1955 primarily by Kyoto Seinen Bijutsu Sakka Shūdan [Kyoto Young Artists' Collective], it was sponsored by the city of Kyoto from 1957 on. Though it has not been held since the 1991 *Kyoto Indépendant*, there has been no announcement of its termination.

²⁸ This long-running exhibition continues today under the slogan "Recognize the value in all forms of expression."

²⁹ Though the exhibition took a break in 1988, it resumed in 1990 and continued for a while thereafter.

³⁰ Such art was often the target of negative reviews and jokes about "big 'n' funny Kansai [art]." But Kansai culture, which has always been tolerant of oddities and upstarts, served as a nurturing environment for bold, free, novel modes of expression.

from Osaka Geidai and Kyoto Geidai formed the nucleus of a group that put on an exhibition, *Yes Art*³¹ at Gallery Haku³² in Osaka. Whereas in the '70s, saying “No” to everything—particularly where society and politics were concerned—was considered an indispensable means of making oneself heard, *Yes Art* declared “Yes” to all manner of undertakings. Positioning itself as an exhibition that would respond flexibly to the exigencies of the era by eschewing guidelines and welcoming a fluid membership, the show began expanding its reach in the mid-'80s to include participants in such places as Aichi Prefecture and Kyushu. Another noteworthy exhibition during the same period was:

Spiritual Pop, at the Osaka Contemporary Art Center, Osaka, February 1–6, 1982. Exhibiting artists: Oda Hideyuki, Fujimoto Yukio, Yamabe Yasushi, Iida Miyo, Kobayashi Yoshitaka, Takama Jun, Taniguchi Yūko, Tsubaki Noboru, Nakatani Akio, Horio Mitsuru, Yagi Tadashi, Yoshida Takamitsu.

This may be one of the earliest examples of the new style of exhibition in Kansai organized by young kindred spirits of the same generation. It was planned by Oda Hideyuki, Yagi Tadashi, and Yamabe Yasushi, who opened an office for that purpose. “Spiritual Pop confronts the way people and things exist and live from a more primitive standpoint than conventional concepts of art.” “Spiritual Pop doesn’t cultivate art in a pure culture by building a cocoon and hiding inside. It is rooted in reality and open to the environment, but it is not mindless; each individual engages in an original, liberated multiplicity.” “Spirit is the shock and sensation when old conceptual units break down; it is the simultaneous process of destruction and birth.” “Spiritual Pop takes a positive stance toward all forms of existence that are in constant motion and flux.” “Environments and media are still important today. By these we refer, however, not to abstract environments or electronic media, but to city landscapes and spiritual networks. What is necessary is to activate the many kinds of circuitry that lie hidden in phenomena.”

The above quotations describing “Spiritual Pop” appear in a booklet published at the time of this exhibition. The booklet contained a message from Matsuoka Seigō, editor in chief of the then trendy magazine *Yū*, while a symposium held on the occasion of the exhibition included Osaka University professor Ishida Tadashi and Imura Kōji

³¹ Led by Yamabe Yasushi, this exhibition was held nine times until 1990, always accompanied by the publication of a booklet.

³² Most of the “artists of the '80s” mentioned here exhibited at Gallery Haku and Gallery [yju:] (also in Osaka).

of the Japan BioEnergetic Group as panelists. Lectures were given by Hiroshima University assistant professor Wakao Yū on “Music and perception,” Ishida Tadashi on “Play theory: Contemporary art and play,” and Imura Kōji on “The world of spirit: Art and supertechnology.” A psychic attended and did live paintings of auras, and *Yū* magazine published articles about the exhibition, edited by Yamabe. Utilizing the media, displaying a breadth of interests, adding a bit of fashionable occultism, the organizers produced an event to their own tastes, which, as reflected in the content of the exhibition and its target audience, were not restricted to the purview of “art.” This was an exhibition that aspired to force that purview wide open—the motivation for which arose from the participants’ experience of attending university, viewing the art of the past and of one’s elders and finding it wanting, and then resolving to thumb their noses at the old order and try something altogether new.

Following quickly on the heels of *Spiritual Pop* were the exhibitions *Mode All Over* and *Polymode*:

Mode All Over, at Gallery Iteza, Kyoto, May 18–23, 1982. Exhibiting artists: Ishibashi Tamotsu, Nakahara Kōdai.

“Today, when it may be said that the spatial sensibility of artwork has reached a certain reductive state, the task we face as we attempt to reconstitute painting and sculpture is [to achieve] a parallel, multiplicitous state between mode and mode that transcends arguments over figure and ground, and ultimately, to eliminate modal hierarchies. To that end we work via a consciousness of what we call ‘mode all over’ toward the liberation of micro and macro, seeking a new expression of space grounded in reality.” (From a leaflet for the *Mode All Over* exhibition)

Polymode, at Kyoto Geidai Gallery, Kyoto, July 5–10, 1982. Planning: Takama Jun. Exhibiting artists: Ishibashi Tamotsu, Takama Jun, Nakahara Kōdai, Nunobiki Masako, Matsuo Naoki.

The *Polymode* exhibition featured vividly colored boards cut into varying sizes and arranged at every conceivable angle—vertical, horizontal, diagonal—so that they appeared to fill every inch of the gallery space, from ceiling to floor. Interspersed among them were small solid objects reminiscent of Joel Shapiro as well as wooden block-like pieces on the floor, paths made of scraps of board, table-like

structures, and flat surfaces consisting of large boards painted with layers of color. “Mode all over” was a highly apt description of these works, which derived from multiple overlapping principles. Exhibitions in a similar vein took place in Tokyo:

Polyparallel 1, at G Art Gallery, Tokyo, August 1–15, 1983. Planning: Sekiguchi Atsuhito. Exhibiting artists: Iguchi Daisuke, Kaneko Yasunori, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Nakahara Kōdai, Nomura Kazuhiro, Matsui Eiki, Furui Satoshi, Watanabe Masahiro.

Polyparallel 2x, at Gallery K, Tokyo, November 14–December 20, 1983. Exhibiting artists: Iguchi Daisuke, Kaneko Yasunori, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Nakahara Kōdai, Nomura Kazuhiro, Matsui Eiki, Furui Satoshi, Watanabe Masahiro. Symposium “Art and Sociality” participants: Matsuura Hisao, Fujii Masami, Sekiguchi Atsuhito, Kaneko Yasunori.

“Polyparallel” was defined as a state of parallel, equal, non-hierarchical coexistence among multiple diverse modes—a fitting keyword for the art of this period.

History now demands a synchronous intuition. Whether we are talking of Japan vis-à-vis the West, or New Painting vis-à-vis Minimalism, however we might seek a direction for expression through repetition along a single line, nothing speaks to us anymore. Possibilities first arise with the foretelling of an intentional break from the prevailing current. Due to the unconscious power within deep structures that strives to assert the self logocentrically, people intrinsically legitimize the ego, set goals, and express themselves. The value perceptions vis-à-vis these expressions have generated works of art by defining levels of expression according to their environmentality or associated spirituality, based on the assumption that society shares a single logos. In reality, however, a pluralization of consciousness is evolving that cannot be grasped within a single framework bound by latent violence. If we do not recognize this evolution of multi-logos, violent power will only accumulate. Yet because there is no value system and no method that recognizes this fact, art is losing its meaning. We are a transient group that aims to reconsider the intuitive powers we have lost, employing concrete methods while

simultaneously coexisting with subsystems scattered around the world. Therefore, without relying on images that promote latent violence, and recognizing that each individual method is a temporary one, we wish to explore the possibilities of visual sensation by working from the positions determined by our roles (a flying tumor of thought, an ant's perspective, an alien past-tense form, a Pol Pot interpretation, etc.) and employing the importance of the intuitive difference structure as a mode of reversal. *Polyparallel* is an attempt to correctly grasp simultaneous, transitory subsystems as intentionally not subject to integration. (From "Polyparallel Manifesto" by Sekiguchi Atsuhito, referencing his "Polydeism Manifesto" [unpublished])

“SMILE WITH RADICAL WILL”

“WHEN I LOOKED AT WORK by someone like Kōdai, I felt that he wasn't dragging any baggage with him. We, on the other hand, are dragging a whole lot. We're dragging the vanguard led by Japan's left wing. We're dragging the avant-garde movement in art. Nakahara is thinking along more formal lines. He's not dragging. That's what I thought.”

These are the words of Ishihara Tomoaki, recorded on the occasion of an exhibition of Nakahara Kōdai's work titled *80 nendai kō: 1983 nen no "Pine Tree Installation"* [On the eighties: 1983's "Pine Tree Installation"] at Galerie 16 [Kyoto] in April this year [2008]. Nakahara

had shown work at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum for the *OPERA I*³³ exhibition held in the summer of 1981, the only artist from his age group to participate. He had this to say about the older artists he encountered there: “These people were thinkers and far more knowledgeable than I, and my impression was that they submitted works of very high quality. They did things like invite someone who wrote articles for *Yū* to give a lecture. . . . I was faced with a choice whether to follow in their footsteps, or contemplate what to do next with others of my generation.”³⁴ Roughly speaking, a high proportion of the artists making up the New Wave generation of the ’80s were born between 1958 and 1961. In the sense that they ranged from Yamabe Yasushi (b. 1958), who read and related to *Yū* and hung out at Kousakusha, to Nakahara Kōdai (b. 1961), who thought of Yamabe’s crowd as belonging to the previous generation, the New Wavers did not necessarily share the same point of view or belong to the same network. That slight age difference harbored a wide gap. Also, insofar as the Kansai movement got underway around 1982 after Tokyo’s New Wave had already begun, Kansai artists were extremely conscious of what was going on in Tokyo, while Tokyo for its part sought stimulation from Kansai. Thus both regions constantly energized each other, collectively spawning over one hundred self-organized group shows in a given year. This activity peaked around 1985, which is also when the mass media started paying attention to the youthful movement. By 1984 *Bijutsu techō*, too, had begun featuring New Painting or New Wave artists,³⁵ and galleries were displaying interest in their work. The women artists who were gaining prominence at this time were introduced as *chōshōjo* [“supergirls”],³⁶ and artists became objects of interest not only for their works but for their looks or their words. Even art journals took a page from the mass media with features on “fashionable young artists” as a social phenomenon. In 1984 the *TAMA VIVANT* exhibition was launched as a project of the Art Studies Department at Tama Art University,³⁷ and the Hara Annual [at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art]³⁸ also began to showcase more and more young artists. Every year new venues opened up for exhibiting works—not just galleries and free spaces that permitted art shows, but places created by the artists themselves as well as discos and music clubs.³⁹ Kansai artists were also enjoying more opportunities to exhibit

33 *OPERA I*, at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, July 24–31, 1982. Exhibiting artists: Ichikawa Kazuhide, Katō Takashi, Kanuma Ryōsuke, Gen Miwa, Komatsu Yoshikazu, Nakahara Kōdai, Nishiwaki Yurika, Fujita Moto’o, Matsuoka Etsuo, Muramatsu Masayuki, Watanabe Minoru. Site: Sculpture Gallery 1, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum. Held as a project of the 11th Contemporary Artist Center Exhibition, 1981. Organized by the Contemporary Artist Center; curated by Fujita Moto’o.

34 From a statement by Nakahara Kōdai in *Shirizuru: 80 nendai kō* [Series: On the eighties] (Galerie 16, 2008).

35 These features included artist introductions, visits to their studios and so on, but did not touch on their innovative ideas or messages.

36 “Tokushū: Bijutsu no chōshōjotachi” [Special feature: The supergirls of art], in *Bijutsu techō*, August 1986 issue, introduced these artists: Iida Miyo, Ishida Yasuko, Inō Keiko, Ushijima Tomoko, Uchikura Hitomi, Umehara Kayano, Ōtsuka Yumiko, Okamoto Hiroko, Katō Mami, Kanai Yoshiko, Kumagai Yūko, Koizumi Masayo, Sakakibara Misako, Sasada Rui, Satō Tomoko, Sugano Yumiko, Sugiyama Tomoko, Seto Tomie, Tanaka Miwa, Tsutsumi Nobuko, Terada Mayumi, Tomita Yukiko, Hara Machiko, Hibino Mikiko, Hirabayashi Kaoru, Hirota Miho, Honma Kaori, Maemoto Shōko, Matsui Chie, Matsuo

in Tokyo, and students were no longer content to study and make art in the confines of their universities, but actively sought outside venues at which to show their work. The atypical mood this intense energy engendered was already beginning to affect the previous generation and the next one as well. It became the norm for artists at exhibitions to use their bodies in performances associated with the art on display. At Kyoto Geidai, members of the post-New Wave generation formed the theater troupe Karma (later renamed Dumb Type), which grew out of their university drama club. Dumb Type emerged as a unit with a quintessential '80s sensibility in which production, sound, and cast all asserted distinct personalities, generating a multiplicity that blended and dispersed. At the time the leaders of Dumb Type frequented the Photography Classroom run by Y. Ernest Satow at Kyoto Geidai, where Kimura Hiroshi, Morimura Yasumasa, Ishihara Tomoaki, Matsui Chie and other artists also gathered. As part-time instructors, Morimura (born in 1951) and Kimura (born in 1952) served as mentors even as they gained tremendous inspiration from their juniors. The art they had studied was that of the previous generation and before, and they were fully steeped in the conceptual genre; their own work was hemmed in by various constraints. The artwork emblematic of the '80s, with its insertion of physicality and its occasional use of fashionable "easy-to-view" formats unlike those of the '70s, spurred the older artists to try creating work with more impact. With this incentive, Kimura, Morimura, and Ishihara began talking about planning exhibitions by turns. The first was held at Gallery [vju:] in Osaka from June 12 to 24, 1984. Planned by Kimura, it was titled *Can't You See We Are Not Reticent?* The six exhibitors were Ishihara Tomoaki, Katō Michiyo, Kimura Hiroshi, Towata Masayuki, Matsui Chie, and Morimura Yasumasa. The works they were making in Ernest Satow's class were monochrome photographs. Morimura exhibited photographic work inspired by Duchamp; Ishihara, compositions incorporating nude photos of himself; and Kimura, photos of a one-meter-plus carpenter's square with the tip rendered as a sharpening knife. The next year it was Morimura's turn; he organized an exhibition titled *Radekaru na ishi no sumairu* [Smile with Radical Will] at Kyoto's Galerie 16 from July 2 to 7, 1985. There were three exhibitors: Ishihara, Kimura, and Morimura.⁴⁰

The title of the exhibition was a play on Susan Sontag's book title

Megumi, Yasuda Naoko, Yano Michiko, Yamazaki Kafumi, Yamada Yukari, Yamamoto Yūko, Yoshizawa Mika, Rikimaru Ushio, Watanabe Kotomi, Watabiki Nobuko. A considerable number of women artists garnered attention in the 1980s.

37 *Dai-ikkai TAMA VIVANT '84: Tawamurenaru hyōmen* [TAMA VIVANT '84 Part 1: Surfaces at play], at the Hachioji Campus of Tama Art University, September 17–29, 1984. Exhibiting artists: Iwase Kyōko, Uchikura Hitomi, Sugiyama Tomoko, Matsui Chie, Yasuda Naoko, Yano Michiko, Yoshizawa Mika. Planned and implemented by students as a project of the Art Studies Department of Tama Art University, the exhibition was subsequently held annually. Part 2 of this first show was held October 5–29, 1984, in the 7th Floor Special Events Hall of the Hachioji branch of the Seibu Department Store.

38 Presented from 1980 until 1990.

39 As one example, Sekiguchi Atsuhito opened 212F in February 1984 in a former industrial bakery in Waseda, Tokyo. This was a multipurpose space that included a studio, café, and gallery, and hosted numerous symposiums.

40 In the end there was no third exhibition planned by Ishihara Tomoaki. The title, however, had been decided: *A Hard Slap at the Photography Fetish*.

Styles of Radical Will. “Radical” was intentionally misspelled “Radecal” in katakana as a sly poke at Japanese mispronunciation of foreign words, while “Styles” was changed to “Smile.” According to Morimura’s own account some years later in his book *Geijutsuka M no dekiru made* [How artist M came to be] (Chikuma Shobo, 1998), these two alterations were an attempt to indicate an ’80s-style “getaway” from self-conscious profundity. For this show, Ishihara displayed monochrome photos in which he appears standing in front of a dome-shaped greenhouse in a botanical garden; the backgrounds are in sharp focus while the figure is not. Kimura presented a series of photographs titled *Ahobakamanuke* [“Stupidfoolishidiot”] in which various people shake their heads from side to side, causing them to blur; text appears below the photos. Kimura said that these works were meant to express an intention to make this a challenging and provocative exhibition. Morimura, for his part, exhibited the “Vincent van Gogh” photograph that would subsequently make him famous. The color photo was just as shocking as van Gogh’s original self-portrait with a bandage covering the side of his head after he had cut off his ear and mailed it to Paul Gauguin in revenge after a fight. The work earned Morimura such notoriety that only three years later the artist—until then a virtual unknown even in Kyoto, let alone Tokyo—was exhibiting at the 1988 Venice Biennale. The rapidity of this rise must have been unnerving for a man who never publicized his age or background, as well as for his intimates.⁴¹

“Those of us who came up through the Minimalist experience rejected Impressionist painting, and van Gogh was particularly taboo. A ‘favorite of women and children,’ and all that. Of course it was also a big taboo for the experts to say that. Those were the stoic conditions under which we made things. We might actually have wanted to create bright sunny oil paintings like that, but we suppressed that impulse as we pursued our art.” (Kimura Hiroshi, in conversation with the writer.)

The impact of a ’70s artist making his entrance by impersonating van Gogh was incalculable. Morimura’s van Gogh not only rejected the reductionist modernism that had been preserved into the ’70s, it also rejected the abstract language used to describe the work of the ’80s New Wave. In other words, it represented a dual rejection. In the wake of Morimura’s almost violently direct van Gogh—that is, from 1985 on—the New Wave movement went into a noticeable decline.

⁴¹ The process leading up the birth of the van Gogh picture is detailed in Morimura Yasumasa, *Geijutsuka M no dekiru made* [How artist M came to be] (Chikuma Shobo, 1998).

Morimura's work could be said to have triggered the re-balkanization of the rhetoric of abstract art as painters returned to painting and sculptors to sculpting, each to their original niche. The New Wave boom that had spread around the world from the late '70s on had splintered into genres with their own names: Transavanguardia, German Expressionism, Figuration Libre, Neo-Expressionism, Punk Art, Bad Painting, Graffiti. Now, in the latter half of the '80s, new categories like Simulationism and Neo-Geo arose. From around 1986 Japan headed into the era of its economic bubble; art museums were springing up everywhere, art dealers were enjoying newfound power, and Ōtake Shinrō was touted as the flagbearer of New Painting. Even Mono-ha was the subject of efforts to sum up the past few decades of art in shows like *Art in Japan since 1969 / mono-ha and post mono-ha*.⁴² The avant-garde represented by Japan's New Wave enjoyed the favor of neither the media nor the market and was effectively erased from the pages of art history. It has rarely been spoken of since, right up to the present. Morimura's van Gogh stood at a fork in many roads as Japan entered its post-1986 bubble, ushering in an era of economic globalization and artistic reterritorialization.

⁴² *Art in Japan since 1969 / mono-ha and post mono-ha*, at Seibu Museum of Art, June 16–July 19, 1987. Participating artists: Sekine Nobuo, Lee Ufan, Suga Kishio, Koshimizu Susumu, Yoshida Katsurō, Narita Katsuhiko, Yamanaka Nobuo, Kitatsuji Yoshihisa, Takubo Kyōji, Suwa Naoki, Toya Shigeo, Ebizuka Kōichi, Yoshizawa Mika, Hirabayashi Kaoru, Kamo Hiroshi, Fukai Takashi, Yano Michiko, Endō Toshikatsu, Kurokawa Hirotake, Maemoto Shōko.

CONCLUSION

SINCE AROUND THE TIME of the publication this past April [2008] of *Shiriizu: 80 nendai kō* [Series: On the eighties], I have been conducting interviews in various places about the New Wave of the 1980s, a movement that has since been cloaked in darkness, one might say. However, the artists themselves are still not prepared to

speak definitively about that period. The works of the New Wave era, including those of artists who are still active today, have rarely if ever been discussed. This may be due to contemporary art history's abandonment of the developments of the early '80s before the work of the avant-garde known as the New Wave could be properly critiqued, lumping it all under the rubric of "the '80s as the era of restoration of painting and sculpture." Another factor may be its history of neglect by the critics who created the "restoration" narrative as well as the art dealers of the bubble years. However, it can also be said of this era that, in the words of Fujii Masami, it was "a dreamlike period of history" when artists were able to express themselves in fidelity to their own sensibilities without being influenced by the market or the media. Nonetheless, the current state of art criticism, which has long been said to suffer an "absence of critique," can perhaps be traced back to that time, when critics were incapable of fully addressing this new development in art. By the same token, what art criticism needs now to redeem its influence may well be a reexamination of that period. At the very least, I believe that some of the works and words of the early '80s merit recognition today for their brilliance.

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Shiriizu: 80 nendai kō [Series: On the eighties] was a pamphlet published on the occasion of two exhibitions held at Galerie 16 in March and April 2008: Nakahara Kōdai's 1983 *nen no "Pine Tree Installation"* [1983's "Pine Tree Installation"] and Fukushima Noriyasu's 1980 *nendai no matsu no ki wo meguru* [Regarding the pine tree of the 1980s].

This publication includes the writer's interview with Yamabe Yasushi, Nakajima Ippei's "Memorandum on the establishment of Concept and Media Planning and its prelude," "The return to image: A dialogue between Fukushima Noriyasu and Tatehata Akira in 1985," Nakahara Kōdai's "Rebuttal starting from the fact of not being a painting of a pine tree," and a detailed chronology of group exhibitions, primarily by the Kansai New Wave, from 1980 to 1990.

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