

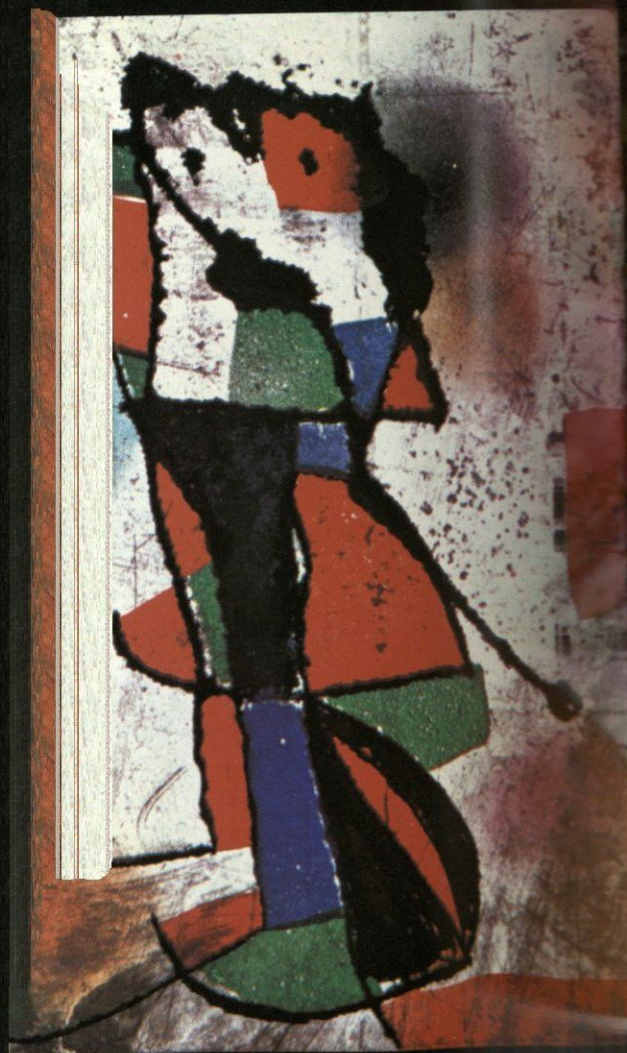
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212-371-9077
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Japanese Art: Yesterday · Today · Tomorrow

ARTnews

September 1981

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CREATING PRINTS WITH JOHNS AND PEARLSTEIN
THE CASE OF THE \$10 MILLION DURERS



USHIO
SHINOHARA





USHIO
SHINOHARA



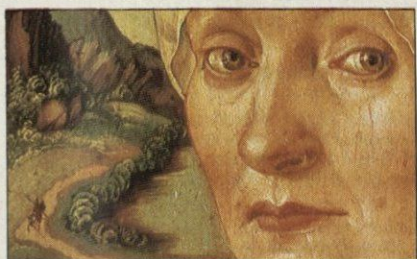
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COVER ►
Ushio Shinohara with a recent painting. An article by Rand Castile on contemporary Japanese art begins on page 86. Photo by Howard Barash.



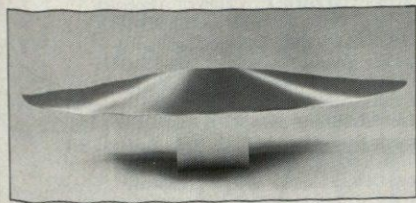
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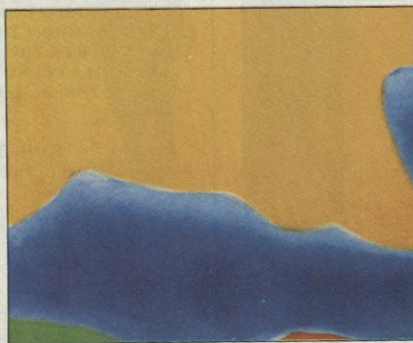
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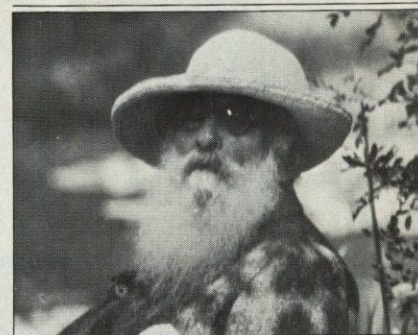
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The Museum of Modern Art

On Kawara, from the "Today" series, 1979, synthetic polymer on canvas. Kawara, who lives in New York, is identified with the conceptual movement.

as music. The same is true of Takehisa Koguchi. One of the few Japanese artists working in a realist style is Naoto Nakagawa, a resident of New York and New Hampshire for nearly 20 years. Eschewing the camera, his paintings are nonetheless as carefully detailed as a Richard Estes street scene. Nakagawa's early work tended to the surreal, and startling juxtapositions continue in his current canvases. His landscapes and machines, while highly personal, speak to universal experience.

Ushio Shinohara and On Kawara live in New York. Kawara's conceptual work of the '70s was shown at the Museum of Modern Art. Shinohara is one of Japan's hidden treasures. His painting-constructs of the '60s and early '70s—large, sectioned expanses of canvas poured with paint—are among the strongest by contemporary Japanese artists. His *Hina Matsuri* print, a tryptich, with pinks, reds, greens and yellow lucite slices, never received the attention it deserved.

Video is strong in Japan. Video curator John Hanhardt's exhibition of Taka Iimura and Shigeko Kubota at the Whitney in 1979 was a good example of the vitality of the art. In the same year, Barbara London of the Museum of Modern Art produced "Video

from Tokyo to Fukui and Kyoto," an exhibition accurately marking the development of the medium in the 1970s. Everyone in video owes something to the incomparable Korean artist Nam June Paik, and this is clear in the exhibition, but the independent progress of Japanese video is also plain. Of particular note is the work of Fujiko Nakaya, a woman with considerable experience in the United States but one who has staked her reputation on work in Japan.

Nakaya began at Expo 70, where she executed a fog sculpture that enveloped a pavilion. Watching its form move with the breeze, contract and expand, flow and rise, was an experience to be remembered. Nakaya recently completed fog sculptures in a valley near Nikko, north of Tokyo. Last year she received a commission from dancer Trisha Brown for a fog "set" for dance. The control she achieved was uncanny.

One of the traditional arts that is still important to Japanese artists is calligraphy. There are more schools and publications for calligraphy in Japan than there are leaves on Mt. Hiei. Twentieth-century calligraphers have dozens of associations to join, exhibitions to attend and prizes to compete for, but what is interesting to us in this context is the modernist movement. These calligraphers

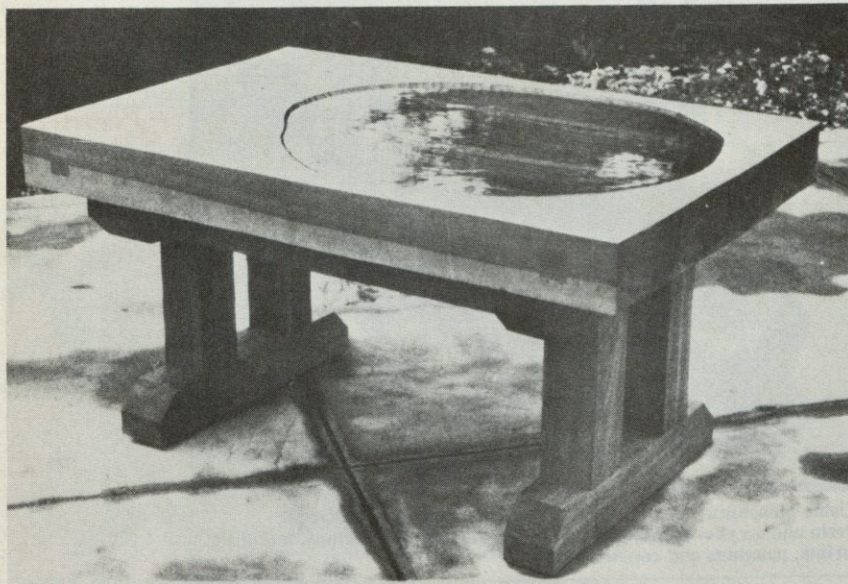
VIDEO IN THE LAND THAT PRACTICALLY INVENTED IT

VIDEO ART HAS RECEIVED ONLY modest support in the country that produces so much of the world's home television hardware. In the late 1960s, when the Japanese first became interested in video, it was an expensive medium, beyond the means of most younger artists. During this counterculture era, when many young artists were working collaboratively outside the established systems, video's appeal was in its intimacy, portability and immediacy. Image and sound are recorded simultaneously; the image is visible on a television set during recording and can be replayed immediately afterward. Video was used to create political, personal, fictional and abstract works, which were frequently shown in a single gallery room on four or more monitors simultaneously displaying different tapes. The result was often chaos.

Video Earth, the first independent, noncommercial Japanese video organization, was founded in 1971 by Kou Nakajima, a young film animator, as a communications network for documentarians and artists living in different cities. This group, whose main interest is in documentary video, is still active; it continues to meet yearly to share information, provide encouragement to members and organize shows.

Video Hiroba and the Video Information Center (VIC) were both founded in 1972. The former group was started by 13 Tokyo artists who rented an office and purchased and shared a portable video camera. They organized collaborative projects and joint shows, frequently in the Sony Building, where they were allowed to use space. Group members have since gone on to become advisors to video manufacturers, television station administrators and professors of art or video at major Japanese universities. VIC was founded by a group of students at the International Christian University in Tokyo, and its main purpose is to document contemporary Japanese performing arts. VIC has an archive of over a thousand tapes, which they screen in their offices. They also sell and repair video equipment.

JVC (Japanese Victor Company), which makes video equipment, began its annual Tokyo Video Festival in 1978. These festivals feature small-format video and are aimed at amateurs as well as



Susumu Koshimizu, *Working Table—Water*, 1979, wood. Koshimizu, featured in last year's Venice Biennale, makes his amusing furniture from wood and stone.

artists. By making portable equipment and editing facilities available at nominal cost to independent artists at its Tokyo center, JVC has stimulated new video activity in Japan and recently published the first Japanese video guide, *Play the Video*.

Today, as video cameras and recorders are being mass-produced for the home market, the medium is becoming more accessible. The technology is coming of age, but critical thinking about the medium has lagged behind. The only Japanese organization that is seriously considering such basic questions as the differences between artistic, amateur and commercial video is Scan, the first independently run video gallery, which was founded by Tokyo artist Fujiko Nakaya in 1980. Supported by Sony, among other manufacturers, Scan encourages informal critical dialogue through its exhibition program, lectures and workshops, and an annual juried exhibition. *Image Forum*, a monthly magazine devoted to film, video, television and photography reviews, was also founded in 1980, by Katsue Tomiyama and Nobuhiro Kawanaka.

A few museums—the Hara Museum in Tokyo, a private institution devoted to post World War II art, and the Fukuoka Museum in Fukuoka City—have recently begun video programs. Some private galleries—Kitano Circus in Kobe, Iteza in Osaka, Studio 300 and Art Core in Kyoto and Maki Gallery in Tokyo—have presented video, and in 1980 NHK, the government-sponsored TV system, aired a two-part survey of Japanese video called "Future of Video." Recently, during the summer of 1981, video art was featured at Portopia 81, a six-month fair in the port city of Kobe devoted to technology and the future.

Japanese video today shows great diversity. Ideas are more thoughtfully developed than in the past—a reflection of the greater opportunities for critical writing and dialogue about the medium—and control and handling of material are increasingly sophisticated. Mention of all of the artists working in video is impossible, but some representative works can be described here. Tsunekazu Ishihara's *From Face to Face* (1980, 15 minutes) is a work that focuses on the artist as he walks down a corridor over a series of large photographs of his own grimacing face. Two works that explore the recording process are Masato Hara's *Strange Journey of Ulysses* (1979, 28 minutes) and Yasuno Shinohara's *Silence Mécanique* (1980, 10 minutes). Hara's work captures the ease and spirit of a small boy using a super-8 movie camera, shooting with his family at home and on outings and being photo-



ABOVE Tsunekazu Ishihara's *From Face to Face*, 1980, focuses on the artist walking down a corridor.



LEFT Yasuno Shinohara explores the processes of the video medium in *Silence Mécanique*, 1980.

graphed in turn by family members. Video, super-8 and photographic images are combined in the tape in the order in which they were shot, revealing the point of view of the person doing the shooting. *Silence Mécanique* is rhythmically structured by the sound and image of a 35mm camera set on an empty metal drum, which resonates with the opening and closing of the shutter. Images of the nearby area—a warehouse building, a walking figure and reflecting puddles—are sensitively synthesized in color.

Hidefumi Yamamoto's *Welcome to Mukasa's Kitchen* (1981, 30 minutes) and Akira Matsuyama's *The Story of a Man* (1980, 19 minutes) are both strong documentaries. Yamamoto runs a small cable television station near Tokyo, and his work is both a thoughtful portrait and an advertisement for a small local restaur-

ant. The protagonist of *The Story of a Man* is a flag-waving, fanatical baseball fan who moves about the stadium bleachers while his local high school team competes in a national playoff game.

Fujiko Nakaya's *Waterfall*, a work for eight monitors, is an impressive recent installation. "Colorized" close-up footage of a river is presented as if it were a waterfall, with the monitors stacked on their sides, and because the river flows very slowly, the water appears to be viscous. This work will be shown in New York in 1982 at the Japan Society.

—Barbara J. London

Barbara J. London has curated the video exhibition program at the Museum of Modern Art since 1974. She also teaches a course on "Experimentalists in Video" at New York University.