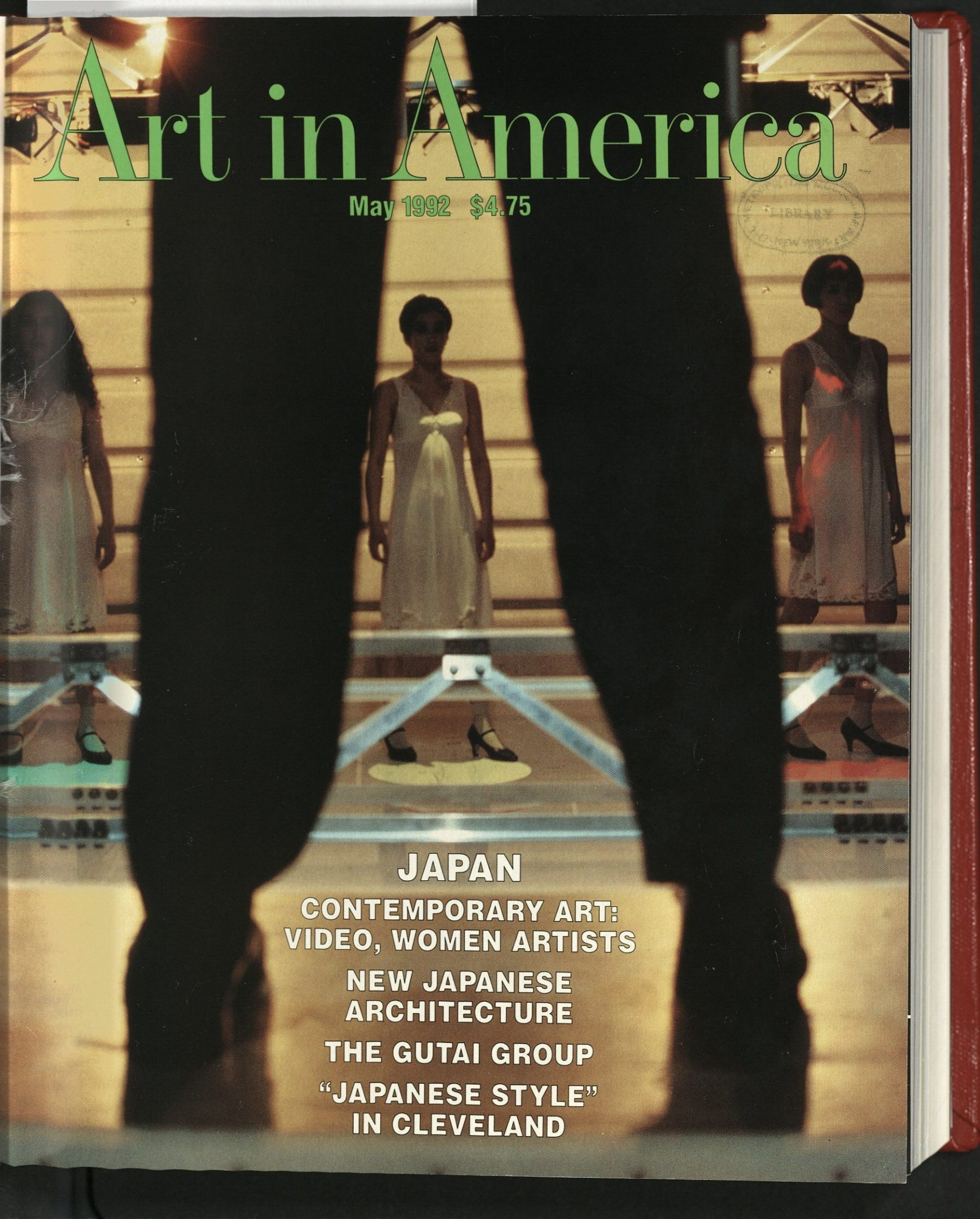


Art in America

May 1992 \$4.75



JAPAN

CONTEMPORARY ART:
VIDEO, WOMEN ARTISTS

NEW JAPANESE
ARCHITECTURE

THE GUTAI GROUP

"JAPANESE STYLE"
IN CLEVELAND

Art in America

May 1992

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Editor: Elizabeth C. Baker

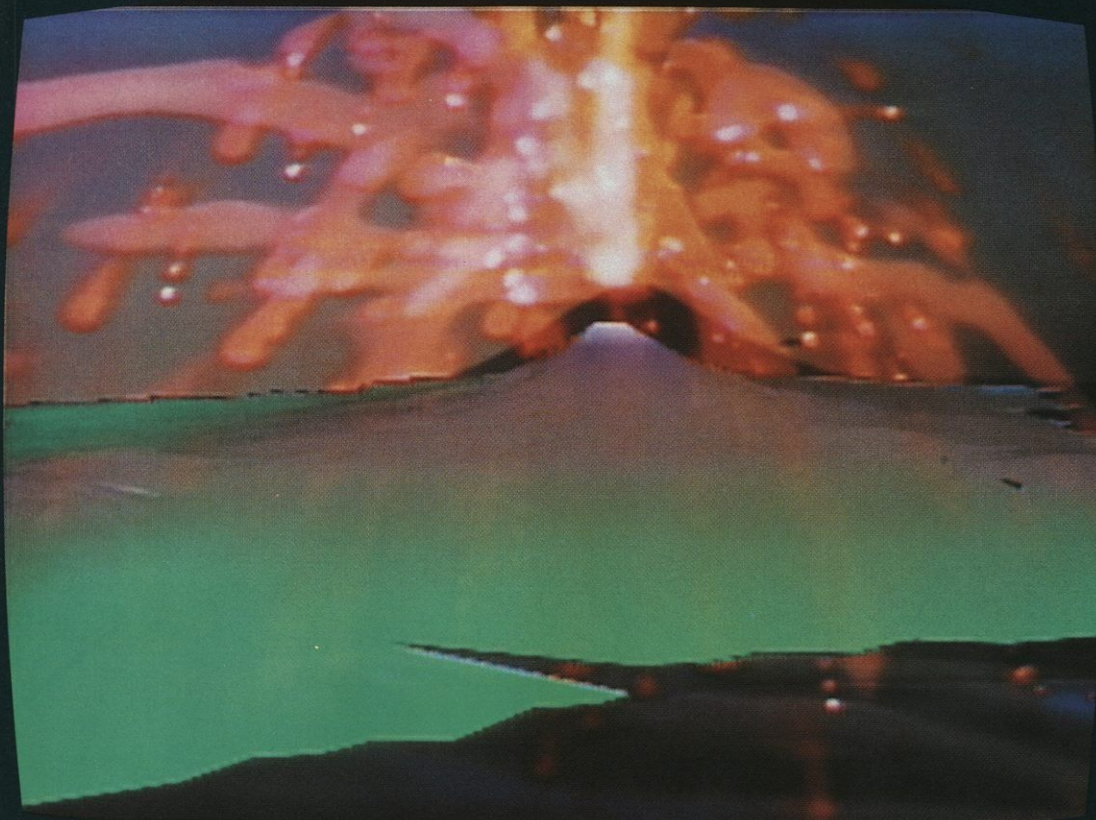
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Ko Nakajima: Video still from Mt. Fuji, 1985.

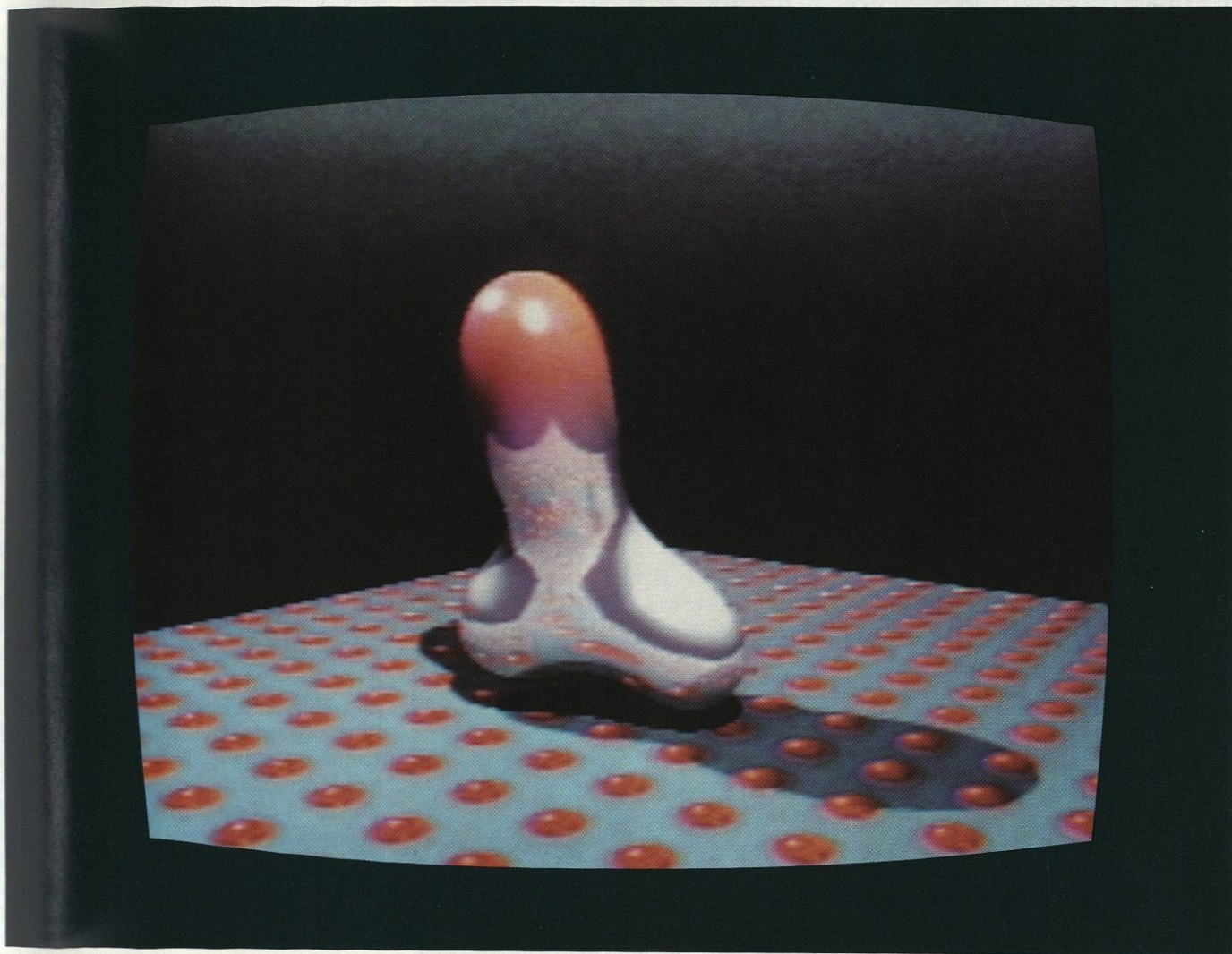
Electronic Explorations

BY BARBARA LONDON

One might suppose that artist-made video would thrive in high-tech Japan, where consumer electronics have become indispensable parts of the social landscape. But this is not the case. Video limps along, subject to logistical and conceptual impediments.

Although many Japanese artists have been experimenting with video over the last two decades, they have been constrained by the expense of making art with electronic materials and the difficulty of finding an audience. In Japan, government cultural

support is still largely restricted to the traditional art forms. And so far, the electronics industry has offered only modest and occasional assistance in the form of donated equipment, scholarships or festival sponsorship. Exhibition opportunities are far more limited than in North America or Europe, where video has found a support network of sorts. Compared with their Western peers, Japanese videomakers are on their own. They operate in a "twilight zone" between the fine arts and the commercial world, and



Masaki Fujihata: Video still from *Maitreya*, 1984. Photo Kira Perov.

Though Japanese videomakers lack a support system and regular exhibition opportunities, they have produced video art in a surprising variety of styles ranging from the satiric to the lyric. Most notable are those hybrid works that fuse video installations with performance art.

their works lack both the prestige of conventional art objects and the profit of entertainment products.

A further obstacle to the development of this art form is the prevailing conception of the nature of art in Japan. Long-established conventions still hold sway, and many artists, even those using contemporary mediums, produce anodyne works that soothe rather than challenge the viewer and seem vapid and cloyingly sweet to Western eyes. In general, the video field is not as highly

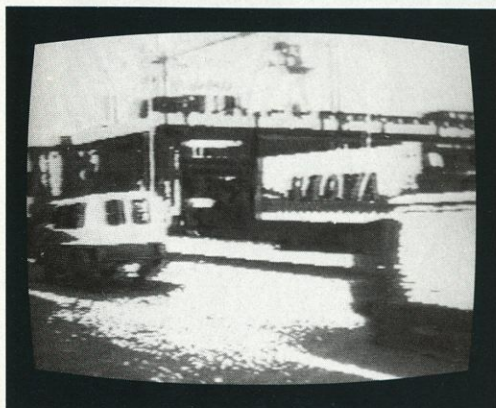
developed as in the West. Still, video is shown in festivals, in artist-run centers such as Tokyo's Video Gallery Scan and Image Forum, and occasionally in art museums. The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo has included video work by young artists in its prestigious Annuals for the better part of a decade, and the National Museum of Modern Art in Osaka has been developing a video collection.

There are a handful of Japanese artists who work primarily in video and make

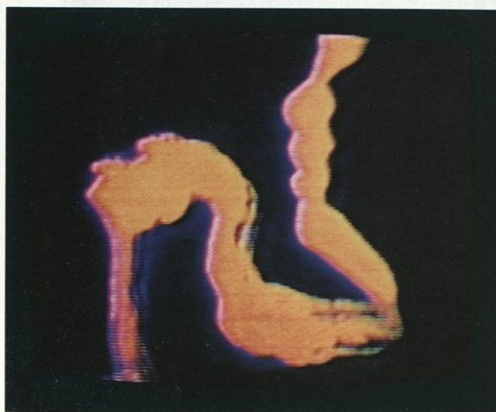
impressive works. There are also several provocative multimedia artists who make use of video. This article will discuss, in addition to art videos, the work of a performance group that uses video both as a set and as a narrative device, and the work of a filmmaker who exploits video for the sense of immediacy it brings to film.

For the most part, the modern arts of the West, including photography, came to Japan during the second half of the 19th

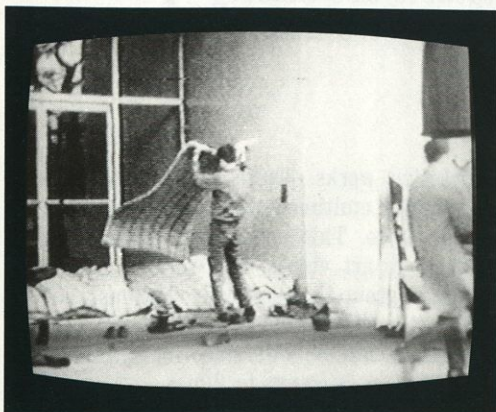
Video technology permeates Japanese life. It is used by hobbyists, by makers of video-commercial billboards, and for visual Muzak in waiting rooms. Videotape is as common as wooden chopsticks.



Katsuhiko Yamaguchi: Video still from Ooi and Environs, 1977. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art.



Keigo Yamamoto: Video still from Human Body Energy No. 3, 1984. Photo Kira Perov.



Still from Fujiko Nakaya's black-and-white video Friends of Minamata Victims, 1972. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art.

century, along with foreign concepts of science and industry. Photography was at first subsidized by the wealthy, who sought portraits of themselves or of courtesans, and by foreign merchants who craved souvenir images of a novel culture. Symbolic of Japan's swift adaptation of industrial and artistic practices from abroad, the early photographs combined a new Western technology, devoid of tradition, with the local esthetic conventions of printmaking, literature, journalism and advertising. Photographic images were, on the one hand, connected to the old poetic vocabulary of *ka-cho-fu-getsu* (flowers, birds, wind and moon), which was suitable for pondering the beauties of nature and its cycles of life and death. And they equally reflected the traditions of the Japanese advertising world, a boisterous realm of loud hucksters and of garish banners that were attached to market stalls lining crowded temple paths.

During the 20th century, the versatile camera arts gradually came to seem indigenous and indispensable in Japan. Video technology, in particular, has penetrated daily life to an extent unheard of in the West. Not only are taxis, trains and doctors' waiting rooms equipped with TVs showing the news and visual Muzak, but billboard-size video projections of soft drink and clothing commercials that seductively sell a "life-style" light up thoroughfares in major urban shopping and nightlife districts, such as Tokyo's Shinjuku. Videotape has become as common and as disposable as wooden chopsticks. Video figures in both the entertainment domain of popular television culture and the leisure world of hobbyists. Today's young artists, who have grown up in a media world, may begin their careers by mimicking the styles of the electronic milieu of video games, music video and animation, or, succumbing to the lure of fame and fortune, they may work in the entertainment video field itself.

While Sony and Japan Victor Corporation have occasionally sponsored workshops, festivals or other video events, for the most part they and related corporations are interested in the artistic applications of their hardware only if it will generate broader acceptance of their own technologies. They have commissioned some of the more commercially inclined video artists to make

slick product-launching presentations for international trade shows, but they have supported very little else. Some of these highly successful electronics and camera manufacturers, however, have been working with such prominent filmmakers as Peter Greenaway and Wim Wenders, hoping to develop new applications and to establish a favorable image of being stylishly up-to-date. So far such corporate interest has yielded only minimal benefits to serious video artists. Canon recently launched its Artlab workshop to support new electronic art—and to encourage artists to use Canon equipment. Although the company has not yet settled all questions of copyright and marketability for workshop projects, Artlab is a start for corporate support of contemporary work, and if it is a success other corporations are likely to follow suit.

When the first portable video equipment appeared on the consumer market in Japan in the mid-1960s, a few artists were immediately drawn to experiment with it. Their formal approach was generally influenced by the techniques of avant-garde film and especially by the work of Peter Kubelka and Michael Snow, who visited Japan during that time. But the history of video in Japan really begins with a 1968 event called "Say Something Now, I'm Looking for Something to Say," organized in Tokyo by the critic Yoshiaki Tono along with Katsuhiko Yamaguchi, an artist still working in video today. Yamaguchi had long been interested in new media: in the early '50s he covered his paintings with lenses that turned them into refracted images that shifted as the viewer moved. Beginning in 1971 he applied this treatment to video monitors. A year or two before that, Taka Imura began making video performances that analyzed the relationships between subject and viewer and between live and recorded action. His works consisted of statements and actions overlapping identical statements and actions on a prerecorded tape.

But video production was sparse until 1972, when Canadian video artist Michael Goldberg, on a four-month stay in Japan, helped to organize an exhibition called "Video Communication: Do-It-Yourself Kit." Many of the Japanese artists involved in the show joined together that same year to form a group called Video Hiroba. These artists came to video from painting, sculpture, experimental theater and cinema, as well as from music, photography and graphics. Many of the early experimenters were "disenfranchised" people—dissident art students, including many women.

The 13 members of Video Hiroba, among

them Yamaguchi and Tono, Mako Idemitsu, Fujiko Nakaya, Nobuhiro Kawanaka, Haku-do Kobayashi and Keigo Yamamoto, jointly purchased a black-and-white portable video camera. They began exploring the technical limits of the medium and assisted with each others' projects, which ranged from formalistic works to social-documentaries. An example of formalist video is the work of Keigo Yamamoto, who attempted to use the medium to express the Japanese concepts of *ma* (the interval or space between people and objects) and *ki* (the energy that emanates from the spirit). He presented contrasts of real and depicted space and objects (in performance he placed his foot on top of a monitor showing the live image of his foot); he also created installations suggesting, by means of feedback and visual interference, the electric "aura" of video equipment. Around the same time Fujiko Nakaya's video *Friends of Minamata Victims* (1972), a record of a sit-in protesting a Japanese factory's negligent disposal of mercury and the ensuing poisoning of the residents of a town, became part of the protest it documented.

In the mid-'70s, members of Video Hiroba engaged in important cross-cultural exchanges. In '73, Hiroba videos were shown at a conference in Vancouver, B.C., and they received encouragement as well from New York documentarians John Reilly and Rudi Stern, who lectured at the Tokyo American Center. In '74 the "Tokyo-New York Video Express" presented the work of 30 American artists along with that of 15 Hiroba members at a hall in Tokyo.

The New York connection was established by Shigeko Kubota, a Japanese artist who had moved to the city in 1964 and had subsequently become involved in video because of her associations with Fluxus and with Nam June Paik. Kubota [see *A.i.A.*, Feb. '84], certainly the most famous Japanese video artist in the West today, created a *Video Self-Portrait* in 1970 and by 1975 was making sardonic video sculptures combining man-made and natural materials. Often her pieces comment on the position of women, and others pay homage to Marcel Duchamp, whose work is familiar to every art-school student in Japan.

Video Poem (1968-76) incorporates Kubota's anxious, Day-Glo-hued self-portrait videotape running on a monitor partially concealed inside a zippered nylon bag that is made to billow by a concealed electric fan. An accompanying text—a Dada poem with feminist overtones—is usually printed on a nearby wall. It reads:

Video is Vengeance of Vagina
Video is Victory of Vagina



Shigeko Kubota: *Niagara Falls I* (detail), 1985, video sculpture, 96 by 54 by 96 inches. Courtesy American Museum of the Moving Image.



Still from Mako Idemitsu's *Great Mother*, Part II: "Yumiko," 1983-84.

Mako Idemitsu spent nearly a decade on the "Great Mother" theme, investigating family discord and exposing the painful constraints of social conventions in a mixed Japanese-and-Western culture.

Video is Venereal Disease of Intellectuals
Video is Vacant Apartment
Video is Vacation of Art
Viva Video...

In a retrospective exhibition of her work presented at the American Museum of the Moving Image in 1991 and recently shown at the Hara Museum in Tokyo, Kubota was recognized for her pioneering work in video as an artistic medium and for developing the category of video sculpture.¹ Her engaging pieces consist of various sculptural housings in which television equipment is disguised (or rendered visually neutral) while the video images themselves have consider-

able personal import. Whereas Japanese art as a whole tends to avoid expressions of emotion, for many years Kubota has recorded ardent feelings, especially in her video diaries dealing with traumatic events such as the death of her father. Another unsettling subject was the severe damage to her living space and work. This emotional approach has been adopted by some experimental video artists; articulation of personal expression makes such work the antithesis of video's commercial sister, broadcast television.

In addition to Video Hiroba, there were other groups in those early days, such as

Video Earth, founded by film animator Ko Nakajima toward the end of 1971 to unite people interested in public-access cable television.² But Nakajima is better known today for his later videotapes and installations. In recent works on the theme of wood, Nakajima combined actual trees and sheafs of grain with video images of fire. A particularly apocalyptic group of installations symbolized the earth with metal: he used videotape (which is plastic with metal oxide particles) to weave tents and clothing and to shroud rocks, mannequins and monitors. Nakajima's objective is to heighten viewers' awareness of ecological dilemmas, and there is conscious irony in the fact that he does so through high technology. He has pointed out that vast amounts of natural resources (such as water) are wasted in the manufacturing of electronic equipment. Some of his themes are derived from Taoism—for example, he bases series on the five elements, a metaphor for nature. He maintains that his



Still from Idemitsu's video Hideo, It's Me, Mama, 1983. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art.

work, when seen as a whole, forms a kind of mandala.

Although Video Hiroba was short-lived as an organization—by the late 1970s the group disbanded as its members pursued radically different matters, from computer graphics to fiction to sculpture—several of the original members are still important figures in Japanese video as artists, curators or teachers. Fujiko Nakaya abandoned the form of political documentation exemplified by her Minamata videotape to concentrate on nonvideo “fog installations” that are often used as settings for music and dance. In 1980 she founded Video Gallery Scan, which has played a major role as a distribution service, an archive and a screening studio for video in Tokyo. It has promoted the medium through a newsletter, competitions and international festivals, most recently in February 1992.

Mako Idemitsu was a rebel who broke

away from her cultured and traditional family to study film at Columbia University in New York. She subsequently lived for eight years in California, where she experimented with both film and video, returning to Japan in time to be a founding member of Video Hiroba. Her innovative video work began in California with her attempts to study the people around her, to penetrate their psychology and understand how they related to others, by asking pairs of people to discuss spontaneously on camera their relationships or a specific psychological topic. When Idemitsu returned to Japan she continued such video “studies” as part of an effort to come to grips with her country's profoundly misogynist society. She explored women's conscious and unconscious behavior by recording their daily routines, taking advantage of the you-are-there sense of reality that video imparts and the apparent candidness of people on camera. After first making low-budget collaborative projects with family

and friends, she began to develop complicated scripts and to hire professional actors and production crews. In the context of Japanese video, her use of plots is her most distinctive feature.

Idemitsu spent nearly a decade creating videotapes on the “Great Mother” theme. In these she scrutinizes the emotional interactions of mother-child relationships, revealing the underlying volatility of seemingly placid households. Her fictive episodes might depict a spoiled daughter who insolently picks up men but is incapable of leaving her dispassionate professional mother, or a despondent artist painfully struggling with identity, career and social conventions after she is forced into a marriage. In her video narratives Idemitsu investigates family discord to expose the constraints of social conventions and the conflicts caused by living in a hybrid Japanese-and-Western culture. She provides troubling observations, never solutions.

Idemitsu's videos take place in claustrophobic rooms that represent ordinary urban homes. In each room there is a prominently placed television set; its screen, displaying close-up shots of various family members, is a window into her characters' minds. In *Hideo, It's Me, Mama* (1983), a son away at college is shown only on the television set kept on his mother's kitchen table. Both go about their daily lives: he studies, listens to music on earphones, she putters in the kitchen, makes dinner for her husband. The mother puts the son's meals in front of the television and he consumes them on screen.

With sound tracks based exclusively on dialogue and ambient noise, Idemitsu's videotapes are more like documentaries than dramas. This merger of fact and fiction is a familiar aspect of conventional docudramas seen on Japanese television, but Idemitsu's work (shown only in the typical video milieu of galleries, museums and festivals) gains a

psychological twist from the intruding presence of the monitor.

Most early video works in Japan (as elsewhere) concentrated on creating perceptual dislocation or studying the video-making process itself. The work of the '70s artists most often consists of real-life events fragmented or abstracted into sequences of moments, or well-crafted, carefully composed images concerned with the two-dimensionality of the TV screen. Katsuhiro Yamaguchi's work is typical. His 1977 *Ooi and Environs*, a portapak stroll around his home neighborhood, is colorized in distorting, sometimes cotton-candy hues. In his recent video sculptures, Yamaguchi is still preoccupied with light and movement; unfortunately his work tends to resemble the kinetic light shows of the mid-'60s on St. Mark's Place.

But Yamaguchi has been very influential. Japanese civic leaders turn to him when

planning large, world's-fair-like "expovisions," as was the case in Kobe in 1981, Tsukuba in 1985 and Nagoya in 1989 and '91. He has also been a prominent teacher. When Japanese art colleges in Tokyo and elsewhere began to offer video courses in the '80s, the teachers were from the Hiroba generation (then in their 40s or 50s), while their students tended to be 20 years younger. For that reason video in Japan has sometimes been described as jumping a generation. The students took up editing processes, which were central in the U.S. in the '70s but only became possible in Japan in the '80s.³

Among the younger, post-Hiroba artists are Masaki Fujihata and Hiroya Sakurai. Sakurai, who studied with Yamaguchi, was one of about 20 young videomakers who organized their own group exhibitions in 1984, '85 and '86, under the name Video Cocktail. He makes installations that include nonnarrative video and thus can be

viewed at the observer's own pace. One of his best-known works is the 1987 installation *TV Terrorist*, shown in video festivals in Japan and Australia. At a time of terrorism in Europe and the Middle East, Sakurai raised questions about the mass media's manipulation of information and representation of violence. Of this work he wrote, "Why must I kill? Television told me. The media as fiction blinds me, robs reality from me. . . . I want to make everything blow apart like a time bomb in my path."

Fujihata also showed with Video Cocktail; he is known for his elegantly realized high-tech computer graphics rather than installations with political implications. In 1985, while working for the Sedic computer design group, he directed his whimsical and sophisticated *Maitreya*, which combines a Buddhist text with images of proliferating geometric objects. He then formed a small design company to integrate video and computer graphics, but now has moved on to

Nakajima's objective is to heighten viewers' awareness of ecological dilemmas, and there is conscious irony in the fact that he does so through high technology.

other projects. In March of this year he presented an installation commissioned by NTT (Japan's AT&T); shown in Tokyo's Spiral Building, the work was designed to have the impact of virtual reality. Viewers experienced Fujihata's spatial environment wearing infrared headphones, hearing pleasant and unpleasant sounds triggered by an invisible grid contained in a sloped vinyl floor. His intention was to create a fascinating aural and physical experience, and his work makes fun of technology at the same time that it makes fun for the viewer.

Some of the most interesting video work

in Japan has been produced by "visitors" to the medium. Recognized abroad as one of the best Japanese videotapes ever made is a 1982 collaboration between two men who had previously worked only peripherally with the medium. Shuntaro Tanikawa, a poet, and Shuji Terayama, a playwright, had been working for more than 30 years with an interdisciplinary group of artists in Tokyo. Surrounding themselves with diverse talents, these longtime friends had taken up various artistic means, both popular and underground, before they tried video.

In their *Video Letter*, made with the aid of the artist-run video center Image Forum,



Nakajima: *L'Ame du bois*, 1991, video installation at the Zekou Art Gallery, Paris.

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Hiroya Sakurai: *TV Terrorist*, 1987; installed at the second Australian Video Festival. Courtesy Video Gallery SCAN, Tokyo.

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Some of the most interesting video work

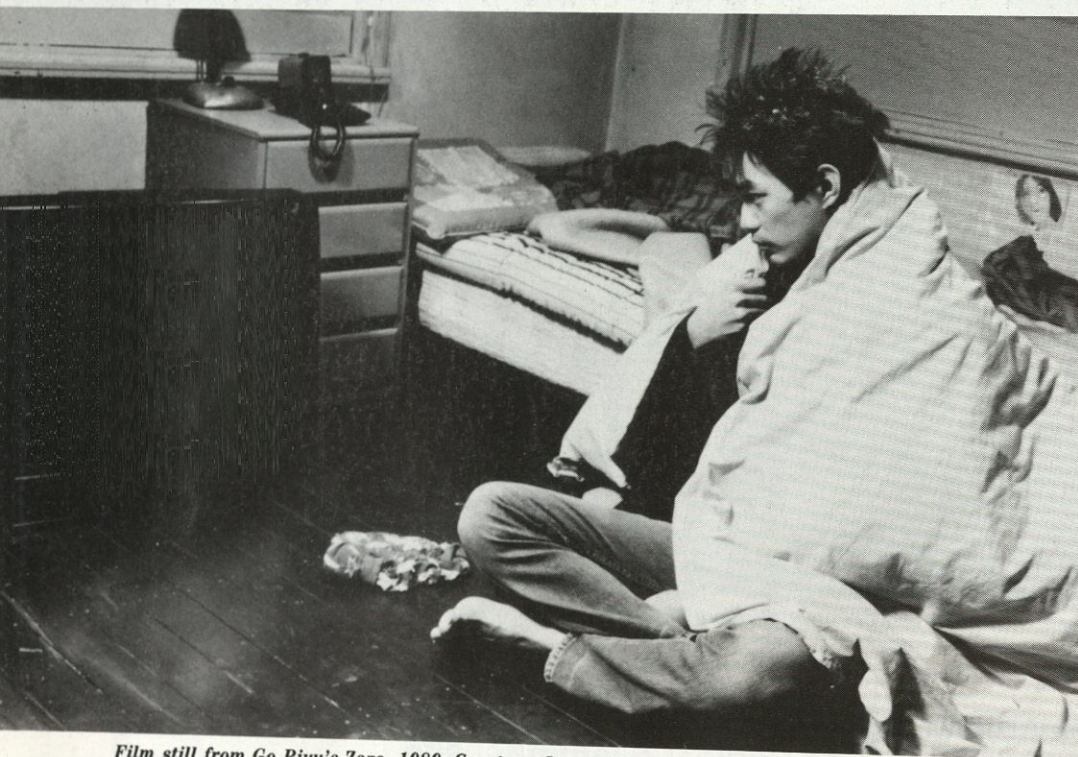
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In their *Video Letter*, made with the aid of the artist-run video center Image Forum,

Dumb Type's 1987 performance/installation *Pleasure Life* is a hypothetical view of the near future, while its 1990 *pH* looks at impersonal, repressive aspects of megacity life.

they used rudimentary consumer video equipment to update a venerated literary form, the collaborative *renga* (linked verse). They exchanged electronic "letters"—monologues composed directly in front of the recording camera with a theatrical sense of timing and a poetic command

at current popular culture. The group, now consisting of architects, engineers, graphic designers, choreographers, musicians, actors, painters, video artists, sculptors and computer programmers, was formed in 1984, when the founders were students at art school. Free-lance design work by members



Film still from *Go Riju's Zaze*, 1989. Courtesy Japan Society.

of language (Japanese, with English subtitles). Speaking spontaneously, they considered words, values, images. Each ruminative "letter" reflected the reality of a particular moment, yet each was connected to the preceding one. *Video Letter* has a particular poignancy because of Terayama's fatal illness, which brought the project to an end. His death is acknowledged in the last "letter." The work, subsequently edited by Tanikawa, became a powerful mourning poem for Terayama.

Video is central to an unusual interdisciplinary arts collective called Dumb Type. Internationally known for its performances, Dumb Type takes an irreverent look

of the group supports their collective activities. Dumb Type is based in calm, historic Kyoto, which was the capital of Japan for a thousand years. The city is still governed by time-honored ways and a strong sense of the past—to which the group responds creatively.

Dumb Type's performance/installation *Pleasure Life* (1987-88) is an ironic, hypothetical view of the near future, a mélange of new and old Japan. The English title conjures up both the dispassionate routines of daily life and the refined culture of Kyoto's geisha houses. That antiquated pleasure world, where music, poetry, conversation and cuisine were relished as sophisticated conventions, has today been diluted and

transformed into an electronic environment of karaoke bars,⁴ fast-food restaurants and celebrity talk shows.

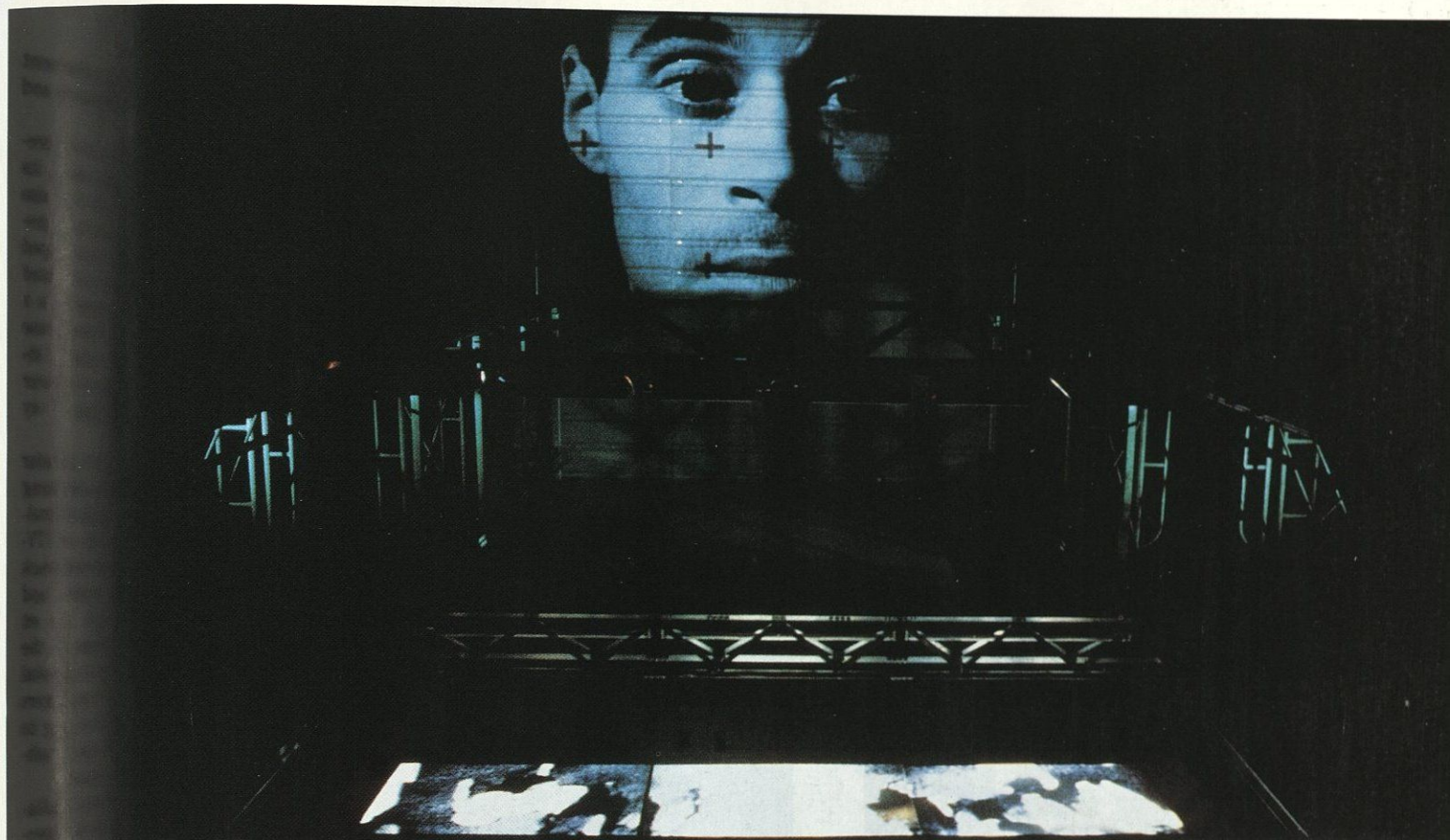
As *Pleasure Life* evolved and was presented at various performance spaces, its original set—a white platform that also served as a screen for slide and video projections—was replaced by a more developed and larger set that resembles an integrated circuit suffering from urban sprawl. It is a bristling grid consisting of 36 metal-frame pedestals supporting ordinary household objects such as room fans or glasses of water along with TV sets depicting images of sky and grassy fields.

In front of video images of calendar pages, the performers silently move among the pedestals to the accompaniment of mellifluous yet commanding voices and TV-jingle music on the videotape sound track (the production's lights, projections and sound are operated by computer). The set itself seems to actively participate as the white neon light-rings within the pedestal frames switch on and off. The performers repetitively mime such actions as going to work, relaxing and having a picnic, brushing their teeth, changing the channels.

Dumb Type's new performance/installation, *pH* (1990-91), contemplates the impersonal and repressive aspects of megacity life; it examines the way we regard our electronic tools as status symbols and how we pay little attention to who controls the programs we see on them. The title is meant to imply a measurement—a litmus test—for modern life. Collaborating with writer/translator Alfred Birnbaum, Dumb Type constructed an opaque text based on a mixture of English and Japanese words. The words lead one to think that the text has a coherent meaning, yet they actually constitute only a flow of sound. In this work Dumb Type is looking at Japan's changing relationship to the United States. The use of nostalgia-provoking '60s pop music from America subtly suggests the fleetingness of success—and hints that Japan's recent financial power might well prove to be precarious.

Viewers of *pH* sit on high, narrow bleachers along the periphery of the stage. The action occurs around a menacing set of metal frames that aggressively sweep over the rectangular, boxlike performance area like the light-emitting bars of an enormous photocopier. Projected from the uppermost moving frame onto and across the white stage floor are such generic yet politically charged symbols as dollar, pound and yen signs.

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*Above, view of Dumb Type's performance/installation pH, 1990-91.
Below, view of Pleasure Life, 1987-88, a performance/installation by the same group.*



Electronic

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The stiff actions of five performers convey their obedience to strictly codified social behavior. Three women, clad in beige slips and moving in unison, make unemotional grimacing smiles and utter primal cries as they repeat such routine actions as sitting down or placing provisions in supermarket carts. They submit to the forceful, almost brutal, actions of two male performers who shove them against the walls, push them down into chairs. The men put on and take off similar suits and shoes, as if portraying the same character. A grainy, unstable videotape transferred to film is projected in black and white onto one end of the set. Consisting of alternating close-ups of staring eyes and dreamy, indistinct urban scenes, the video is a kind of stream-of-consciousness landscape that provides insight into the mentality of the male characters. This work has already been seen in Europe as well as Japan, and last July, Creative Time presented it at New York's cavernous Anchorage space beneath the Brooklyn Bridge.

The media-conscious Dumb Type group operates in several genres. The foremost is live performance, but the sets also function as sculpture. The *Pleasure Life* set was shown as an installation in the exhibition "Against Nature: Japanese Art in the Eighties," which toured the U.S. between 1989 and '91 [see *A.i.A.*, Apr. '90]. Moreover, the group has documented its work in a schematic book and a videotape that provides a bird's-eye view of their brisk actions on stage. Sophisticated about technology and quite serious about articulating a vision, the members of Dumb Type belong to a self-confident and generally pleasure-loving generation that is less restricted by conventions than its war-traumatized parents and more comfortable with moving back and forth between the fine arts of the West and Japan's 1992 "high-tech" definition of itself.

Now that film and video are so interchangeable, there are artists who seek to combine the effects of both mediums in one production. They also alternate between filmmaking projects, which require sharply detailed images and a large projection system, and video works, which take advantage of the sense of immediacy and intimacy of the small screen. One of these new-era artists is 28-year-old Go Riyu. An actor, filmmaker, scriptwriter and sometime music-video creator, Riyu, like Idemitsu, works in

that ambiguous area where reality and fiction blur. He uses video to examine society's subtle but pervasive controls and the relationship of the individual to the group. He looks at the stark difference between people's social facades and their genuine motives, as well as the male and female aspects of every human being.

Last year his film *Zaze* (1989) was presented in New York at the Japan Society's Young Japanese Cinema Festival. *Zaze* is the leader of a popular rock band who "drops out" after his group achieves extraordinary success. Seen by his buddies as a mystic with emotional strength, he is fawned over by all kinds of assertive and beguiling young women. But he is overcome by feelings of emptiness. He picks up a Video-8 camera and stares into his soul. *Zaze*, with a striking detachment, tapes himself and his friends along the Tokyo waterfront and then withdraws to his nearby dilapidated loft with his VCR and simple camera. For *Zaze*, video is both an honest companion and a kind of Zen meditation device.

Riyu represents the transitional Japan: he came of age amid affluence and post-modernism, conversant with Jingles⁵ and surrounded by examples of American-influenced pop culture such as the Elvis and James Dean look-alikes of the '70s and '80s. As a child he acted professionally for television. He has appeared in a number of recent movies, playing the adolescent part in Paul Schrader's *Mishima*. He went to an "arts" high school in the Kichijoji section of Tokyo, where he started making Super-8 films. Also an accomplished scriptwriter, in 1980 he won first prize in the annual *Pia* award for emerging talent⁶ for his own film, *Lesson One*.

As a playful sort of hobby and as a favor for his rock-musician friends, Riyu has been making low-budget music videos about alienation. Spoofing film noir and sci-fi styles such as that of *Blade Runner*, he freely experiments with equipment and concentrates on spontaneity. His rough promotional sketches are shown in clubs and on music stations. They have the same energy and hip stylization found in video games, commercials and trendy magazines with names like *Garō* (girl) and *Brutus*.

Experimental video has now existed quietly on the fringes in Japan for 20 years. In the '70s it could be said that Japanese videotapes were clearly Eastern in sensibility, having a particular kind of concentration, a flowing sense of time and lyrical use of color; today, with Japan's increasing internationalization, such distinctions are harder to make. Some artists, such as

Yoichiro Kawaguchi, are experimenting with "high definition" video computer graphics, creating imaginary underwater worlds. Although Kawaguchi's well-crafted, exquisite images are rather innocuous, he has opened corporate doors for others. A number of artists, improvising with cruder tools, are trying to direct viewers' attention back to nature. Atsushi Ogata, for example, juxtaposes indoor views in a farming village with outdoor shots, as if to compare culture and nature, but he switches the sound tracks for the two settings.

Video artists in Japan have had to be resourceful, given the limitations of their venues and markets and the restrictions imposed by traditional definitions of art. They have eked out livelihoods by teaching or free-lancing in industry. Today a few visionary souls recognize the extraordinary potential video and computers have together, and they are persistently exploring new opportunities beyond mainstream mass entertainment. Perhaps these artists will point to new possibilities somewhere between Eastern and Western esthetics. □

1. The catalogue *Shigeko Kubota: Video Sculpture* (New York, American Museum of the Moving Image, 1991) was edited by Mary Jane Jacob, with a foreword by Rochelle Slovin and essays by Brooks Adams, Moira Roth and JoAnn Hanley. The exhibition was on view at AMMI Apr. 26-Sep. 15, 1991.

2. Another group, the Video Information Center, was founded in 1974 by Ichiro Tezuka to tape *Butoh* performances and other cultural events for archival preservation. Around the same time, experimental filmmaker Nobuhiro Kawanaka and organizer Katsue Tomiyama founded a media workshop called the Japan Underground Film Center, which introduced such figures as Stan Brakhage and Paul Sharits to Japan. The organization's name was a reflection of the difficult and avant-garde situation of media arts at the time. Now known as Image Forum, the group also publishes a serious art magazine of the same name.

3. Editing equipment was not available to Japanese artists in the '70s. But in the '80s, school facilities were augmented by corporate offerings. Companies such as JVC, seeking to expand consumer video, organized festivals of home videos and set up "post-production centers" so that amateurs could edit their festival entries. Artists were quick to take advantage of these centers.

4. Patrons of these popular "hostess" bars select a song title from the bar's library of laser video disks and sing their favorite pop songs into a microphone—the lyrics scrolling across "soft porn" video images—as musical backup bellows from a heavily amplified sound system.

5. The English words used in advertising more for sound than for sense.

6. *Pia* is a biweekly magazine guide to cultural events in and around Tokyo. Founded in 1972 by former members of university film clubs, it sponsors an annual festival for up-and-coming filmmakers.

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