

Prism of the Real: Making Art in Japan 1989–2010



Tsubaki Noboru
Esthetic Pollution
 1990
 Polyurethane, clay, wood (willow), paints, etc.
 290 x 360 x 270 cm
 Collection of 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa
 Photo by SAIKI Taku
 Courtesy of 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa
 © TSUBAKI Noboru

The National Art Center, Tokyo is pleased to announce the special exhibition *Prism of the Real: Making Art in Japan 1989–2010*, to be held from Wednesday, September 3, to Monday, December 8, 2025.

This exhibition examines the practices of more than 50 artists from Japan and abroad, exploring art that emerged in Japan and how Japanese cultural expression inspired the world between 1989, when the Showa era (1926-1989) ended and the Heisei era (1989-2019) began, and 2010.

These two decades saw the end of the Cold War and the advent of contemporary globalization, enabling the freer movement of people, goods, and information, and greatly encouraging international dialogue and engagement. Co-curated and co-organized by The National Art Center, Tokyo and M+, Hong Kong, this exhibition reflects on this critical transitional period through the lens of art.

The exhibition begins with a prologue that sets the stage with the early stirrings of internationalization in the 1980s, followed by a critical turn, beginning in 1989, marked by a surge of artistic activity during a period of dynamic socio-political transformation in Japan. The examination of this era is conducted from three thematic perspectives. The first, **“The Past is a Phantom,”** explores how artists continued to engage with the trauma of war, the atomic bombings, and other postwar issues. The second, **“Self and Others,”** focuses on artistic practices that interrogate identity – particularly gender and cultural identity – through the interpersonal exchange of gazes. The third, **“A Promise of Community,”** features projects that explore new possibilities of relation through interactions with existing communities or creating new ones. Throughout this period, artists in Japan and elsewhere pursued new approaches, acting as prisms that refracted the social and cultural currents of the time into works that pose diverse questions. This exhibition presents a multifaceted view of art in which multiple histories and contexts coexist, while examining Japan as a platform for artistic creation over these two decades from both national and international perspectives.

Featured Artists *Alphabetical order by last name

Aida Makoto, Matthew Barney, Guo-Qiang Cai, Christo, François Curlet, Dumb Type, Fukuda Miran, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, David Hammons, Pierre Huyghe, Ishiuchi Miyako, Joan Jonas, Kasahara Emiko, Kawamata Tadashi, Kazama Sachiko, Koizumi Meiro, Lee Bul, Miyajima Tatsuo, Mori Mariko, Morimura Yasumasa, Murakami Takashi, Nagashima Yurie, Nakahara Kodai, Nakamura Masato, Nara Yoshitomo, Nishiyama Minako, Ohtake Shinro, Oscar Oiwa, Ozawa Tsuyoshi, Philippe Parreno, Navin Rawanchaikul, Shiga Lieko, Shimabuku Michihiro, Shitamichi Motoyuki, Sone Yutaka, Simon Starling, Hito Steyerl, Thomas Struth, Tabaimo, Takamine Tadasu, Fiona Tan, Teruya Yuken, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Tsubaki Noboru, Franz West, Xijing Men, Yamashiro Chikako, Yanagi Miwa, Yukinori Yanagi, Yanobe Kenji, Yoneda Tomoko, and others



Murakami Takashi
Randoseru Project
1991
Cobra skin, harp seal skin, sei whale skin, ostrich skin, caiman skin, hippopotamus skin, great blue shark skin
30 x 23 x 20 cm (8 pieces)
Collection of Toyota Municipal Museum of Art
Photo by Tatsuo Hayashi
© 1991 Takashi Murakami/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.



Ozawa Tsuyoshi
Vegetable Weapon: Saury fish ball hot pot / Tokyo
2001
C-print
113 x 156 cm
Collection of The National Museum of Art, Osaka
© Tsuyoshi Ozawa



Tabaimo
public conVENIENCE (Still image)
2006
Video installation
6 min. 05 sec.
Collection of the artist
© Tabaimo / Courtesy of Gallery Koyanagi

I General information

Exhibition Title Prism of the Real: Making Art in Japan 1989–2010

Japanese Title 時代のプリズム：日本で生まれた美術表現 1989–2010

Traditional Chinese Title 時代的稜鏡：日本的藝術實踐 1989–2010

Organized by The National Art Center, Tokyo, in partnership with M+, Hong Kong; Japan Arts Council; Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan

Co-presented by Nikkei Inc.

Curatorial Team:

Curatorial Director Doryun Chong, Artistic Director and Chief Curator, M+

Curators Isabella Tam, Curator, Visual Art, M+; Jihye Yun, Curator, The National Art Center, Tokyo

Coordinating Curator Kamiya Yukie, Head, Curatorial Division, Chief Curator, The National Art Center, Tokyo

Exhibition Advisors Osaka Eriko, Director General, The National Art Center, Tokyo;
Hayashi Sumi, Independent Curator

Exhibition Period September 3 (Wed), 2025 – December 8 (Mon), 2025

Venue The National Art Center, Tokyo Special Exhibition Gallery 1E

7-22-2 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-8558

Hours 10:00-18:00 (Fridays and Saturdays, 10:00-20:00)

*Last admission 30 minutes before closing

Closed on Tuesdays *Closed on September 24 (Open on September 23)

Admission TBC

Inquiries (+81) 47-316-2772 (Hello Dial)

Website https://www.nact.jp/english/exhibition_special/2025/JCAW/



Morimura Yasumasa
Portrait (Futago)
1989
C-print, transparent medium
210 x 300 cm
Collection of Mori Art Museum, Tokyo
Installation view photo: Muto Shigeo
© MORIMURA Yasumasa



Mori Mariko
Miko no Inori
1996
Video
4 min. 42 sec.
Collection of the artist
© Mariko Mori, Courtesy of the Artist

I Meaning of the Title

The exhibition title *Prism of the Real* conveys the idea that artistic expression that emerged in Japan between 1989 and 2010 functioned like a prism that absorbs external light and refracts it into distinct wavelengths. The “real,” likewise, exists along a spectrum and cannot be defined in a singular way. Contemporary art not only served as a lens for interpreting and incorporating sociopolitical trends, but also acted as a medium that drew inspiration from Japanese cultural traditions and practices and helped disseminate them during a time of vibrant international exchange. Both Japanese artists and those who came to Japan from abroad observed the world and reality through their spectrum of interactions with the nation's culture and society, reflecting their observations in their penetrating analyses through art. With the concept of the “prism” as a guiding theme, this exhibition explores the diverse elements that shaped artistic expressions that unfolded in and beyond Japan.



Yanagi Yukinori
The World Flag Ant Farm 1991-Asia
1991
Colored sand, plastic boxes, plastic tubes, video and monitor
176.5 x 741.5 cm
Collection of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art
© YANAGI STUDIO, Courtesy of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art



Takamine Tadasu
God Bless America
2002
Video installation
8 min. 18 sec.
Collection of The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
© Tadasu Takamine



Nishiyama Minako
The PINKU House
1991/2006
Acrylic on plastic cloth, steel, urethane mat, etc.
310 x 400 x 370 cm
Collection of 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa
Photo by SUEMASA Mareo
Courtesy of 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa
© NISHIYAMA Minako



Lee Bul
Sorry for suffering - You think I'm a puppy on a picnic?
1990
Edited video of the performance photo - documentation
3 min. 50 sec.
Collection of the artist
© Lee Bul. Courtesy of the artist.

I Curators' comments

"This collaboration with the National Art Center, Tokyo extends and deepens M+'s commitment to Japanese contemporary art and visual culture in the museum's transnational collections and programming.

We are confident that *Prism of the Real: Making Art in Japan 1989–2010* offers a refreshing look at a critical moment in Japanese culture and society in the first two decades of globalization, when contemporary art served as fertile ground for porous exchanges and dialogues. Eschewing a national framework, the exhibition hopes to remind viewers of a remarkable period of internationalism and encourage them to reflect on the possibility of dialogues with the wider world in the 21st century."

Doryun Chong, Artistic Director and Chief Curator, M+

"In this ambitious curatorial collaboration, we reflect on a time when artists cast their gaze on everyday life while imbuing their work with sociopolitical messages.

Prism of the Real is being carried out through a constant dialogue between two museums rooted in Asian cities, M+ in Hong Kong and the National Art Center, Tokyo. We examine, from multiple perspectives, art that emerged amid the complexities of an era marked by dynamic shifts in society, politics, economy, and technology."

Kamiya Yukie, Head, Curatorial Division, Chief Curator



Yanobe Kenji
Atom Suit Project: Nursery School 1, Chernobyl
 1997
 Light box, color transparency
 120 x 120 x 21 cm
 Collection of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art
 Courtesy of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art
 © Kenji Yanobe



Yanagi Miwa
AquaJenne in Paradise II
 1995
 C-print
 200.0 x 100.0 cm each (triptyque)
 Collection of The National Museum of Art, Osaka
 © Miwa Yanagi

I About NACT



The National Art Center, Tokyo (NACT) is the fifth institution to be established as part of the Independent Administrative Institution National Museum of Art with the mission to make a contribution to culture through art in order to achieve mutual understanding in diverse cultures and coexistence. Since opening in 2007, we have constantly worked to become an art center that enables people from various regions and countries to experience a wide range of artistic expressions, acquire knowledge, and encounter diverse values. Moreover, in addition to hosting a broad spectrum of exhibitions in the facility's 14,000-meter-square space (one of the largest of display areas in Japan), the Center works to collect, present, and provide access to art-related information and resources, initiate educational programs, and facilitate cross-cultural exchanges.

I About M+



M+, Hong Kong
Photo: Kitmin Lee
Courtesy of M+, Hong Kong

M+ is Asia's global museum of contemporary visual culture. Located in Hong Kong's West Kowloon Cultural District (WestK), it is dedicated to collecting, exhibiting, and interpreting visual art, design and architecture, moving image, and Hong Kong visual culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The landmark M+ building on Hong Kong's Victoria Harbourfront was designed by the world-renowned architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron in partnership with TFP Farrells and Arup. It spans a total floor area of 65,000 square metres, featuring thirty-three galleries alongside a Learning Hub, Moving Image Centre, Research Centre, and Roof Garden, among other event and programming spaces. The M+ Facade is one of the largest LED screens in the world, showcasing commissioned artworks on the Hong Kong skyline every evening. The museum stewards a multidisciplinary permanent collection that includes objects from regions across Asia and beyond. A highlight is the M+ Sigg Collection, one of the world's most extensive collections of Chinese contemporary art. Today, M+ is a nexus for researching and presenting contemporary visual culture, inspiring thought and curiosity.

Press Inquiries

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