

# The Power of Images

The National Museum of Ethnology Collection



Bark Painting "My Country" Made by Johnny Bulunbulun Group: Aboriginal Australians Country: Australia Made in 1982  
National Museum of Ethnology Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology

## The Power of Images: The National Museum of Ethnology Collection

40th Anniversary of the National Museum of Ethnology  
50th Anniversary of the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology

Wed., February 19 – Mon., June 9, 2014 Closed on Tuesdays  
(except for April 29 and May 6, 2014) and May 7

The National Art Center, Tokyo, Special Exhibition Gallery 2E [Tokyo, Roppongi]

Organized by the National Art Center, Tokyo and the National Museum of Ethnology  
Co-organized by the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology

Hours: 10:00–18:00 (10:00–20:00 on Fridays)

\*Open until 22:00 on Saturday, April 19, 2014 (Roppongi Art Night 2014)

\*Admission up to 30 minutes before closing

新 国立新美術館  
THE NATIONAL ART CENTER, TOKYO

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## Exhibition Overview

Human history is a history of images. Images preceded writing and they are believed to have served as a source for words. The act of visualizing the world by adding shape and color to its essence and structure is a fundamental part of human nature.

Are the creation and appreciation of images universal to all people? Taking this magnificent question as its theme, this exhibition introduces an array of formed objects that were created in a variety of regions throughout the world. The displays will consist of outstanding articles specially selected from the huge collection of the National Museum of Ethnology, which has amassed materials from a host of different countries. A collaborative project between the museum and the National Art Center, Tokyo, the exhibition will focus on shared forms, effects, and functions of images rather than dividing them according to geographical region or historical period. This will also provide us with an opportunity to reassess our stereotypes of formed objects.

In the expansive gallery of the National Art Center, Tokyo, everything from the masks and religious idols that you might expect to see at the National Museum of Ethnology to works by currently active artists will be presented side-by-side, transcending the boundary between an institution made for art and one designed for anthropology. Visitors will have an opportunity to experience the breathtaking vitality of objects used in religious rites, the profound nature of hybrid articles that arose out of cultural exchange, and the dynamism of images that have merged with our globalized contemporary society. In this way, we hope that you will be able to savor the power of images as a universal part of human culture.

## Exhibition Highlights

### 1. A Collaboration between Two Very Different Museums

Since its opening in 2007, the National Art Center, Tokyo has endeavored to organize numerous exhibitions, focusing primarily on modern and contemporary art. On the other hand, the National Museum of Ethnology, which commemorates its 40th anniversary in 2014, is a world-class museum devoted to ethnology that boasts a collection of approximately 340,000 items including formed objects and everyday tools from all over the world. Jointly organized by these two very different institutions, the exhibition focuses on the artistic aspects of the National Museum of Ethnology collection using an innovative approach of displaying items in the National Art Center, Tokyo gallery.

### 2. Considering the Source of Images

The National Art Center, Tokyo has set out to create exhibitions with new perspectives on outstanding visual art produced by people. This exhibition, including a wide range of geographical areas and historical eras, strives to capture a dynamic relationship between people and images. Since prehistoric times, human beings have produced images through a free use of colors and shapes while deriving a new sense of vitality from their creations. In this exhibition, we examine the power of such images on a grand scale.

### 3. A Large-scale Introduction to the National Museum of Ethnology

The exhibition will present approximately 600 items from the collection of the Osaka-based National Museum of Ethnology. While promoting research on cultural anthropology as an inter-university research institute, the museum collects and publicly displays formed objects and everyday tools made by various ethnic groups from all over the world. This marks the first time that the museum's (known affectionately as "Minpaku" in the Kansai region) collection has been presented on such a large scale in Tokyo. Numerous masterpieces, specially selected from this collection, renowned both for its superior quantity and quality, will be shown in a gallery with ceilings as high as eight meters.

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## Exhibition Details



## Prologue: The Experience of the Gaze

While human beings create images, they also derive power from them. In the prologue section, examining the dynamic relationship between people and images based on the creation and appreciation of images, the walls will be completely covered with masks assembled from around the world. Surrounded on all four sides by many different masks with deeply penetrating gazes, visitors will experience a new sensation of being watched by the images. As we are exposed to these overpowering gazes, the images seem to loom before us.

## Section 1: Images of the Invisible

### 1-1: Portraying Humans, Portraying Gods

Many formed objects in the world visualize things that are invisible. By giving an image to something invisible, people attempt to control the power of these things and their relationship to them. Images of gods and spirits are a typical example of the way in which people incorporate their own ideas. Giving a visual form to gods that resembles their own bodies, provides people with a means of living. In this section, viewers are certain to be overwhelmed by the tremendous power of images created by people.

### 1-2: Portraying Time

As with gods and spirits, certain regional, ethnic, and religious narratives are part of an invisible realm. As people live their lives, they strive to give especially meaningful stories a visual form. This enables them to convey the stories to future generations. In this section, we examine various attempts from around the world to define time and narratives through images, including illustrated biographies of Buddha, mandalas, and Aborigine tree-bark paintings.

## Section 2: The Dynamics of Images

### 2-1: The Power of Light, the Power of Colors

Light and color have a strong power to attract our attention. The light and color emitted by a headdress made out of feathers or a personal accessory covered with multicolored beads, for example, might express a human connection to something sacred or symbolize wealth and power. Attaching mirrors or pieces of metal to clothing and other daily necessities is also recognized throughout the world as a means of warding off evil. In this section, we take a closer look at things that people use to create visual effects through light and color.

### 2-2: Links to the Heavens

Images sometimes draw our gaze in a particular direction. Formed objects such as grave markers with a special emphasis on height remind us of an elevated realm or provide us with a link to the other world. Images that help convey a dead person's soul to the next world and function as a path for the gods when they descend to earth are a universal part of many different regions and cultures. With a veritable forest of grave posts and wooden sculptures from all over the world, this space evokes the connection between a distant realm and those who inhabit the present space and time.

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## Section 3: Playing with Images

Not only do human beings make things with a certain purpose in mind, they also enjoy creating and encountering images. The aprons used by Kuba women, who live in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are adorned with a variety of appliques. The appliques supersede the practical goal of patching up holes, and clearly display traces of the maker's creativity. In this section, which includes everything from Kuba aprons to Easter eggs, we present a variety of examples from all over the world that convey the pleasure and joy derived from creating images.

## Section 4: The Translation of Images

### 4-1: Hybrid Images

Through migration and various forms of exchange, people develop relationships with those they have never met before. This leads to the distinct emergence of new images throughout the world. For example, the Fante people of Ghana saw the Union Jack as a symbol of "strength," and decided to incorporate it into their own flag. In this section, we focus on hybrid forms that are a product of cultural exchanges and examine how new expressions arise by adopting images from the outside world.



### 4-2: Consuming Images

Images are closely connected to changes in communication, distribution, and lifestyle. Today, images related to consumption are uniformly diffused all over the world with the same amount of power. Toys made out of tin and aluminium cans sold as tourists souvenirs in Senegal and Vietnam are made out of empty beverage cans with brands that are known throughout the world. This is reminiscent of Pop Art, which took its inspiration from mass consumption society. In this section, we examine images that are being consumed in our rapid-changing global society and acquiring new forms and functions.



## Epilogue: Found Images

The images that people create are not necessarily accepted and interpreted in the same manner in every region or culture. Not only are they sometimes misunderstood or used in a different way, they are sometimes given completely new meanings and values, greatly altering their original form. In this section, we make use of an art museum's basic function of displaying "works" and exhibit practical items such as ladders and colanders using the installation method of contemporary art. While suggesting that appreciating an image is an extremely subjective act, this approach will also call attention to the fact that images are always open to new contexts. In this section, which serves as an epilogue to the exhibition, we question the function and meaning of an art museum and reexamine the relationship between images and people.

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## Admission

Title: The Power of Images: The National Museum of Ethnology Collection

Date: Wed., February 19 – Mon., June 9, 2014

Closed on Tuesdays (except for April 29 and May 6, 2014) and May 7

Venue: The National Art Center, Tokyo, Special Exhibition Gallery 2E(Tokyo, Roppongi)

Organized by the National Art Center, Tokyo and the National Museum of Ethnology

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Hours: 10:00 – 18:00 (10:00 – 20:00 on Fridays)

\*Open until 22:00 on Saturday, April 19, 2014 (Roppongi Art Night 2014)

\*Admission up to 30 minutes before closing

Tickets (tax. incl.)

General: ¥1,000 (Adults) / ¥500 (College Students)

Advance: ¥800 (Adults) / ¥300 (College Students)

Group: ¥800 (Adults) / ¥300 (College Students)

\*Free admission on Sat., April 19, 2014 in conjunction with “Roppongi Art Night 2014” and Sun., May 18, 2014 for International Museum Day.

\*Visitors who are under 18, including high school students and disabled people with ID booklets (along with one assistant) will be admitted free.

\*Tickets (both Advance and General) are available through Ticket Pia (P-Code: 765-886), and Lawson Ticket (L-Code: 35715). Service charges may apply.

\*Advance tickets can be purchased through the above services from Sat., November 9, 2013 to Tue., February 18, 2014, but will only be available at the National Art Center, Tokyo from Wed., December 11, 2013 to Mon., February 17, 2014.

\*Group tickets will only be available at the venue (discounts only applicable to groups of 20 or more).

\*Visitors who present a ticket or ticket stub from another exhibition currently underway at the National Art Center, Tokyo, the Suntory Museum or the Mori Art Museum (the three facilities that make up the Roppongi Art Triangle) will be eligible for the group discount.

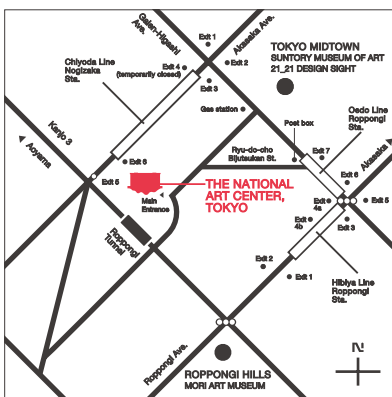
\*Visitors 65 and over (I.D. with proof of age required) who present a ticket stub from artist associations' exhibition held at the art center during The Power of Images will be admitted to the exhibition at the college student group rate.

Access

Direct access from Exit 6 (in the direction of Aoyama Cemetery) of Nogizaka Station on the Chiyoda Line of the Tokyo Metro

5-min. walk from Exit 4a of Roppongi Station on the Hibiya Line of the Tokyo Metro

4-min. walk from Exit 7 of Roppongi Station on the Toei Oedo subway line



The National Art Center, Tokyo

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Tel: +81 (0)3-5405-8686 (Hello Dial)

Website: <http://www.nact.jp/>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/the.power.of.images>

Related Events

Details on related events will be released as they are finalized. For the latest information, please visit the National Art Center, Tokyo website or the official exhibition Facebook page.

Exhibition held in the same period

NAKAMURA Kazumi

Wed., March 19- Mon., May 19, 2014

\*The exhibition is also scheduled to be held at the National Museum of Ethnology from Thu., Sept. 11 to Tue., Nov. 25, 2014.

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## The Power of Images: The National Museum of Ethnology Collection

### List of Image Data for Press Use

We are pleased to offer a number of different images of the works on display to help promote the exhibition. If you would like to receive one (or more), please fill out the attached form and return it to us by fax (e-mail requests will also be honored).

\*Please refrain from using the images included in the press release without prior permission.

| No. | Image   | Photo Credit  | No. | Image  | Photo Credit  |
|-----|---|---|-----|--|---|
| 1   |    | Ceremonial Stool<br>Group: latmul<br>Country: Papua New Guinea<br>Collected in 1988<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology  | 6   |    | Feather Headdress<br>Group: Txukarramaë<br>Country: Brazil<br>Made in 1960s<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology                        |
| 2   |   | <i>Cham</i> mask "singye"<br>Place: Thimphu<br>Country: Bhutan<br>Made in late 20th Century<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology                                    | 7   |   | Elephant Mask "mbap mteng"<br>Group: Bamileke<br>Country: Cameroon<br>Collected in 1996<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology            |
| 3   |  | "Hatohobei Wooden Man" Figure<br>Place: Tobi Island<br>Country: Palau<br>Collected around 1940<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology                                 | 8   |  | Over Skirt "ncak"<br>Group: Kuba<br>Country: Democratic Republic of the Congo<br>Collected in 1983<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology |
| 4   |  | Transformation Mask<br>Made by Richard Hunt<br>Group: Kwakwaka'wakw<br>Country: Canada Made in 1977<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology                            | 9   |  | Appliqué flag (Emblem of an Asafo company)<br>Group: Fante<br>Country: Ghana<br>Made around 1940<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology   |
| 5   |  | Bark Painting "My Country"<br>Made by Johnny Bulunbulun<br>Group: Aboriginal Australians<br>Country: Australia<br>Made in 1982<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology | 10  |  | Tin Lithograph Toy (Biplane)<br>Place: Ho Chi Minh City<br>Country: Vietnam<br>Collected in 2000.<br>National Museum of Ethnology<br>Photo: Courtesy of the National Museum of Ethnology  |



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## Application Form for Image Data and Ticket Giveaway for Press Use

Public Relations Division, The National Art Center, Tokyo  
Fax: 03-3405-2532 E-mail: pr@nact.jp

**I would like to receive data for the following images**

(please check the number of the images you would like to receive):

1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  10

Name of company:

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Name of publication:

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Date when article is scheduled to appear:

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Writer's name:

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Date and/or time you would like to receive image data:

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**I would like to receive exhibitions tickets to use as a giveaway in my publication**

(please check the box below):

Ten pairs of tickets (total of 20)

Tickets will be sent out as soon as it's ready. Please provide us with the mailing address at which you would like to receive them:

Address:

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When making use of photographs, we kindly ask that you observe the following guidelines:

1. Photos of the art works are intended only for the promotion of the exhibition. Please do not use them after the exhibition has ended.
2. When using a photograph, please include the entire credit (either in English or Japanese) as provided. (Please refer to list of image data.)
3. Please do not trim or superimpose text on the photos.
4. Please submit your manuscript to us by fax or e-mail before it is published, so that we can ascertain the accuracy of the factual information.
5. After the article is published, please submit a copy of your article to us. In addition, we ask that the editorial office of your publication oversee the issuing of giveaway tickets after you receive them in the mail.

For inquiries or more information, please contact:

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