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Panczenko, Russell et al.

Madison, Wisconsin: Chazen Museum of Art, University of
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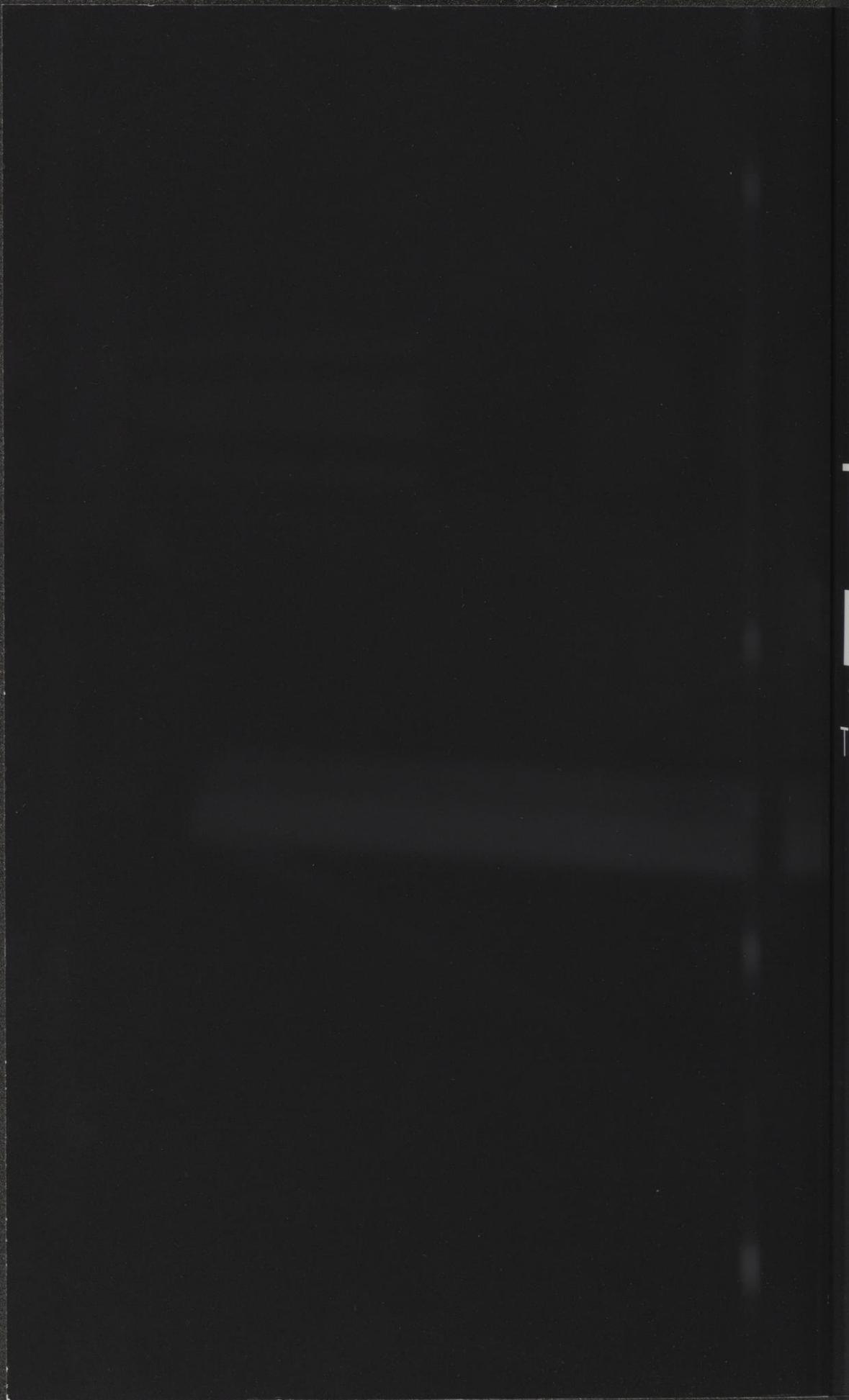
TEAMLAB



TENMYOUYA

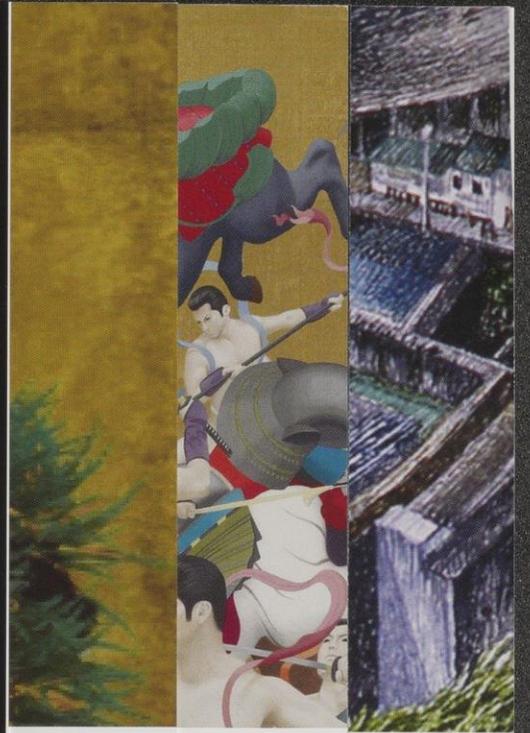


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THREE DIRECTIONS:

TEAMLAB | TENMYOUYA | IKEDA



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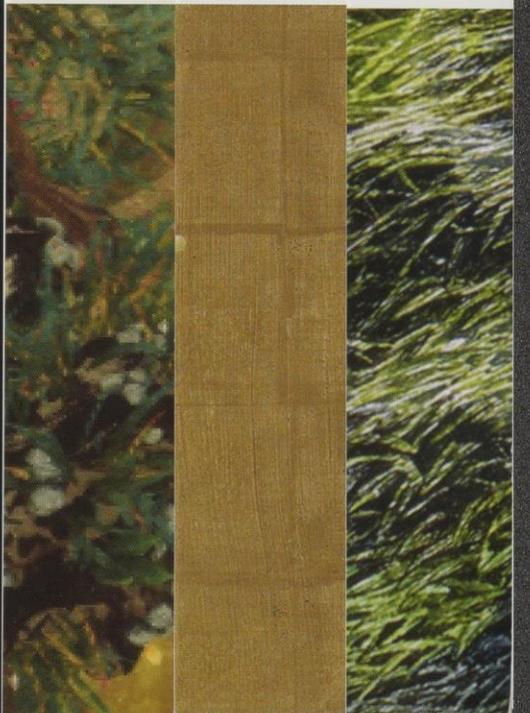


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DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

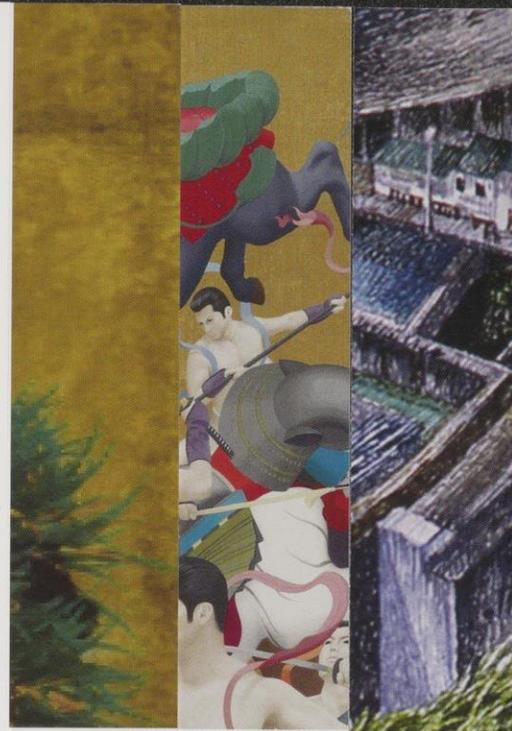
RUSSELL PANCZENKO

DIRECTOR, CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART

It is interesting to see how things sometimes return to their beginning. Although I had been familiar with the kind of contemporary Japanese art that was trending in the Western art market in the first decades of the twenty-first century, the work that I encountered in the exhibition *Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art* at Japan Society in 2011 opened my eyes. Now the fruit borne of that initial encounter has returned to Japan Society under the aegis of the present exhibition: *Garden of Unearthly Delights*.

Since the mid 1980s, when John Hasbrouck Van Vleck donated his father's extensive collection of Japanese woodblock prints to the Chazen (then Elvehjem), the museum has had a strong interest in Japanese art. However, Edward Burr Van Vleck, professor of mathematics at the University of Wisconsin from 1906 to 1929, focused most of his attention on ukiyo-e, and the more traditional *shin hanga* (new prints). Although several *sōsaku hanga* (creative prints), work that, under influences from the West, wandered from the stricter traditions of Japanese printmaking, did find their way into his collection, they were relatively few. Given the broad academic interest in Japan and its culture at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, the museum's parent institution, the Chazen soon began to expand the breadth of the collection. Among the first additions were more *sōsaku hanga* works as well as a representative selection of prints produced in post-WWII Japan.

The addition of the new Chazen building in the fall of 2011, with a gallery dedicated to twenty-first century international art, sparked an interest in acquiring a broader array of contemporary Japanese works in other media. The visit to *Bye Bye Kitty!!!* proved both timely and inspirational. The work of several artists caught our attention, the difficulty being that none of them were represented by American dealers and therefore unavailable in the United States. In circumstances such as this it is helpful to have friends. Luckily, Laura J. Mueller, an independent scholar of Japanese art and a former student of art history at the UW–Madison, was going to Tokyo that summer. I imposed on her to reconnoiter several artists whose work had been included in *Bye Bye Kitty!!!*. The immediate result of that happy exercise was the acquisition of Hisashi Tenmyouya's *Baku* (2010) in time for the opening of the new building. In the following two years the Chazen went on to acquire a second work by Tenmyouya, *Rhyme* of 2012 and two important works by Manabu Ikeda, the relatively early *Green Mantis* of 2004, and *Meltdown*, which he produced in Vancouver, British Columbia, in 2013.



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These were particularly appropriate acquisitions for a university museum such as the Chazen where the parent organization has a strong tradition of research and study of East Asian art and culture. Because of the rich cultural complexity inherent in these works of art, they lend themselves particularly well to scholarly exploration and discussion. The new acquisitions were introduced to the Chazen's public in December 2013. The two-month-long exhibition at the Chazen included additional works by both Tenmyouya and Ikeda that had been borrowed from collectors in the United States and Japan. Earlier that year, Ikeda had begun his residency at the Chazen and with the beginning of the exhibition his studio was open for the first time for public visitation. It was that original exhibition that basically comprises the first two directions of the present publication. Ikeda and Tenmyouya represent two rising and influential artistic currents in the art world of contemporary Japan.

When Japan Society requested the Chazen exhibition, we were indeed honored. However, Japan Society's interests were broader ranging than the Chazen's, hence the addition of the work of teamLab, a third direction in contemporary Japanese art, which appears in both the New York exhibition and the present publication.

The Chazen's exhibition *Two Directions: Ikeda Manabu and Tenmyouya Hisashi* included not only the museum's newly acquired works of art but also additional pieces by each of these artists that had been borrowed from a number of private collectors. Thank you to Zoë and Joel Dictrow, David Solo, Harvey Sawikin and Andrea Krantz, Ryūtarō Takahashi, and Katsura Yamaguchi for their openness and generosity. Their willingness to lend to our endeavor made it possible for our students and visitors to gain a deeper understanding of each artist's work.

The Chazen's acquisition of the works of art by Manabu Ikeda and Hisashi Tenmyouya was made possible by the Colonel Rex W. & Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund, the John H. Van Vleck Endowment Fund, and the Chazen General Purchase Endowment Fund.

Financial support for the Chazen's exhibition has been provided by the Chazen Museum of Art Council, the Madison Arts Commission, the Wisconsin Arts Board with funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Chazen Museum of Art Endowment Fund.

The Chazen's exhibition and the present publication are the result of significant effort and collaboration of a number of creative and talented individuals and staff members of the Chazen Museum of Art.

I wish to especially recognize Laura J. Mueller, who was instrumental in locating the works of art by Ikeda and Tenmyouya and negotiating their loans to the Chazen exhibition. I wish to also thank her for the excellent and insightful essay that appears in the present publication. Thank you also to Sueo Mizuma for providing important information about the artists and their work, for sharing photographic images and for facilitating loan negotiations.

Specifically in regard to the present catalogue, thank you and kudos to Brad Nellis and his staff at Distillery Design—in particular, Kari Stetson—for their creative acumen. The Chazen's editor Kirstin Pires was responsible for overseeing the development and production of the catalogue.

The Chazen's exhibition was beautifully installed by our Exhibition Designer and Chief Preparator Jerl Richmond with the very capable assistance of our expert art handlers Steve Johanowicz and Kate Wanberg. The museum's Chief Registrar Ann Sinfield, aided by Andrea Selbig, deftly organized and oversaw shipping arrangements and assured that the borrowed works were safely returned to their owners.

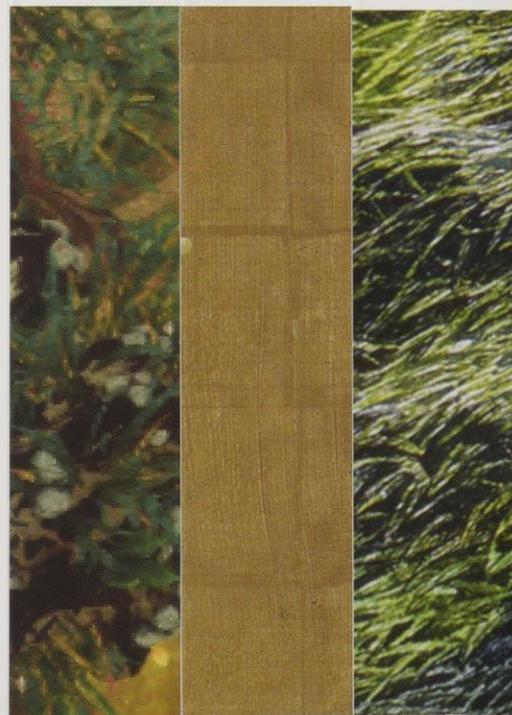
Although it is impossible to quantify such things as reviewing contracts, laying out and printing labels, organizing receptions, tracking expenses and paying bills, etc., these are still essential tasks. Thank you to Exhibitions Coordinator Mary Ann Fitzgerald, Development Specialist Amy Guthier, Assistant Director for Administration Brian Thompson, Assistant to the Director Nancy Mustapich, Accountant Shantha Chandrakanthan, and Receptionist Melinda Gleason for contributing to the success of this project.



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**GARDEN OF
UNEARTHLY
DELIGHTS:
WORKS BY
IKEDA,
TENMYOUIYA
& TEAMLAB**

MIWAKO TEZUKA, PhD

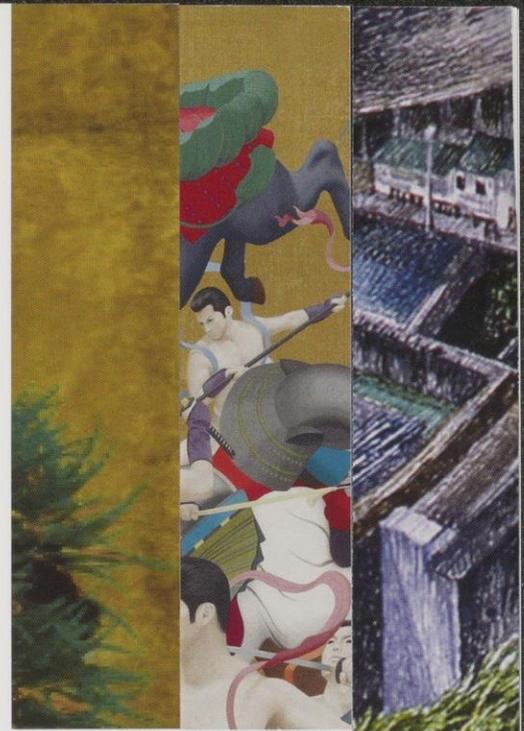
DIRECTOR, JAPAN SOCIETY GALLERY

A monster tsunami uproots a city. Modern tough guys lock samurai-style in battle. Candy-colored streams of animals and flowers hyperpixelate. These dramatic visual moments are among those to be encountered in Japan Society's exhibition entitled *Garden of Unearthly Delights: Works by Ikeda, Tenmyouya & teamLab*. Manabu Ikeda (b. 1973), Hisashi Tenmyouya (b. 1966), and the art and technology collective teamLab (est. 2001) are artistic visionaries who are shaping today's Japanese art and culture. This exhibition introduces over twenty intricate allegorical paintings, installations, and digital works by these three artists.

In these works, the past, the present, and the future collide creating hallucinatory visions like *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (ca. 1504), the fantastical triptych by the fifteenth-century Netherlandish painter Hieronymus Bosch, in which the present exhibition finds an affinity (see fig. 1, page 67). Just as Bosch did, the three Japanese artists allegorically depict urgent cultural and social issues in a manner informed by their contemporary environment—in their case, today's world of spectacle and information overload. But each also harkens back to the Japanese tradition of the master craftsmen, *takumi*, in the level of technical precision and detail they bring to the creation of complex images. The exhibition co-curator Laura J. Mueller will expand on this topic of transhistorical influence as seen in the works of each artist in the latter pages of this catalogue, so this introduction focuses on contextualizing the exhibition in relation to Japan Society Gallery's institutional history and the field of contemporary Japanese art as a whole.

Since 1971 Japan Society Gallery has been presenting exhibitions covering topics as diverse as classical Buddhist sculpture and calligraphy, contemporary photography and ceramics, samurai swords, export porcelain, and masterpieces of painting from the thirteenth to the twenty-first century. Our mission is to bring to public attention the topically relevant issues and themes in Japanese art and culture and to generate open and critical dialogue through art. In the area of contemporary art, we have organized a series of milestone exhibitions in the past decade including *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture*, curated by the artist Takashi Murakami in 2005, and *Bye Bye Kitty!!! Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art*, curated by the internationally acclaimed curator David Elliott in 2011.

Garden of Unearthly Delights follows the Gallery's ongoing effort to present the very best of cutting-edge Japanese art and to instigate public interest in—and inquiry about—contemporary Japanese culture. Indeed, realization of this exhibition itself represents the efforts of the Gallery's long-term aim to further expose and enrich the understanding of contemporary Japanese art in the United States; many of the works in this exhibition are on loan from the Chazen Museum of Art. Thanks to the global vision of Director Russell Panczenko, works by



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THE PLURALITY OF APPROACH TO
MEDIUMS SEEN IN THESE ARTISTS'
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THIS EXHIBITION A RICHLY REWARDING
EXPERIENCE. IT MAKES CLEAR SOME OF
THE NOTABLE CHARACTERISTICS OF
TODAY'S JAPANESE ART SHARED

Ikeda and Tenmyouya, both of whom were introduced in the *Bye Bye Kitty!!!* exhibition, are in the permanent collection at the Chazen. Japan Society Gallery's fall 2014 exhibition adds one more artistic voice, teamLab, to the aforementioned exemplary artists of today's Japan. This is the American museum debut of this "ultra technologist group," as teamLab call themselves, and will show the future direction of art of the digital age.

The plurality of approach to mediums seen in these artists' works makes navigating through this exhibition a richly rewarding experience. It makes clear some of the notable characteristics of today's Japanese art shared by all of them—the obsessive attention to details requiring vertigo-inducing amounts of time to execute and the total immersion in the dense and fast-changing visual sensations of the information society.

While *Little Boy* and *Bye Bye Kitty!!!* brought in the curatorial perspectives of the artist and the contemporary art specialist, respectively, this time in *Garden of Unearthly Delights* we are creating a hybrid approach by combining a viewpoint of a classical Japanese art specialist, Laura J. Mueller, and my own, which focuses on contemporary art. From the very beginning of this endeavor, our underlying goal has been to break through the misconceived division between traditional art and contemporary art. Such a border only exists in the nomenclature of academic studies, which is of little to no concern to artists from any period of history.

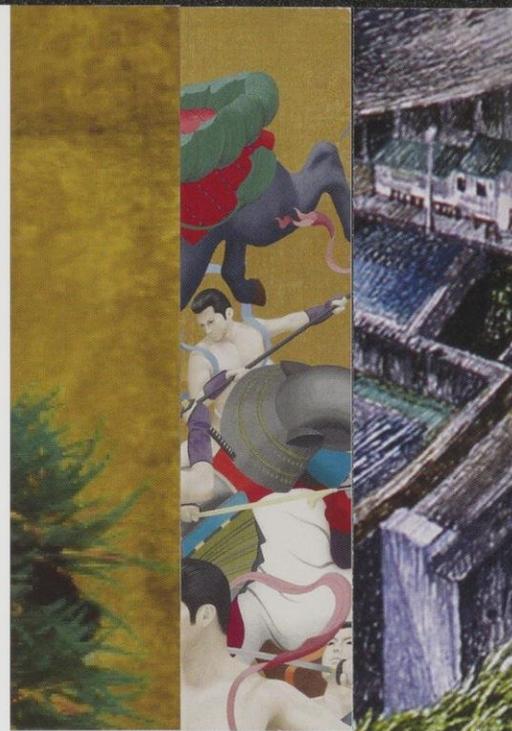
In fact, Ikeda, Tenmyouya, and teamLab are resourceful when finding their inspirations and they freely mine imagery from medieval to present times. In order to help viewers navigate the array of time-crossing allusions in these contemporary artists' densely layered artworks, the exhibition also features contextualizing reference works. These include a 1980s paperback edition of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, the Japanese post-apocalyptic fantasy illustrated by the legendary manga and anime artist Hayao Miyazaki; a few selections of master ukiyo-e prints; and a hanging scroll painting by the eighteenth-century painter Itō Jakuchū. From the co-curators' point of view, this "garden" is designed to evoke both a serene

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Japanese stroll garden with lush greens and ponds carefully built by human hands and also a cacophony of today's urban environment filled with constant news feeds and noises.

To close, I would like to thank, first of all, the artists for creating such thought-provoking works. My deepest gratitude also goes to many people who worked on this project: Laura J. Mueller for her tireless effort as my co-curator to bring this exhibition together; Russell Panczenko, director of the Chazen Museum of Art, and his staff for the most collegial collaboration on this publication; Clayton Vogel for the dynamic exhibition design; Jon Newman for leading a dedicated installation crew; Japan Society President Motoatsu Sakurai for his leadership; Japan Society Board of Directors for their commitment to our mission; and my gallery staff Masako Shiba and Cory Campbell for thoughtfully, and with great patience, working on all aspects of this exhibition. We also appreciate the lenders to the exhibition for allowing us to share the works with the public. And, last but not least, an exhibition of this significance could not have come together without the most generous support of our exhibition funders: Chris A. Wachenheim, The W.L.S. Spencer Foundation, ISE Cultural Foundation, and Mitsubishi Corporation (Americas), and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council. Transportation assistance was provided by Japan Airlines. Sony 4K monitors are provided courtesy of Sony Electronics Inc. The exhibition artists' stay in New York was made possible by The Globus Family with the assistance of Tea-Whisk. Exhibitions at Japan Society are made possible in part by the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund, Director's Circle members, and Friends of the Gallery. Exhibition-related programming for *Garden of Uearthly Delights* was assisted by American Chai Trust, Cindy and Howard Rachofsky, and David Teiger. Arts & Culture Lecture Programs are made possible by funding from the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Endowment Fund. Additional support is provided by Chris A. Wachenheim and the Sandy Heck Lecture Fund.

We at Japan Society Gallery hope this exhibition and the catalogue trigger your imagination and challenge you to find the delights in this world with brand-new eyes.



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CURATOR'S
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

LAURA J. MUELLER

This project would not have been possible without the enthusiasm and encouragement of the director of the Chazen Museum of Art, Dr. Russell Panczenko. I am sincerely grateful for his continued dedication and support of the field of Japanese art through the museum's collecting and artist residency program. Since taking one of my very first graduate courses at UW–Madison under Russell, I continue to learn from his expertise and experience. I would also like to thank the entire staff of the Chazen for their dedicated efforts in exhibiting these artists' work (including Jerl Richmond's meditative raking of the sand!). Additional gratitude is also given to Kirstin Pires for her patience and tireless editorial work on this catalogue.

I must also give my heartfelt gratitude to Japan Society Gallery Director Dr. Miwako Tezuka for her collaborative efforts in expanding and bringing this project to New York and for her shared passion of the work and artists included in *Garden of Unearthly Delights*. It has been a sincere pleasure working with her and her wonderful staff at Japan Society Gallery. And lastly, I dedicate this to my daughter, Ama-chan, the next generation.

Laura J. Mueller
New York, July 2014

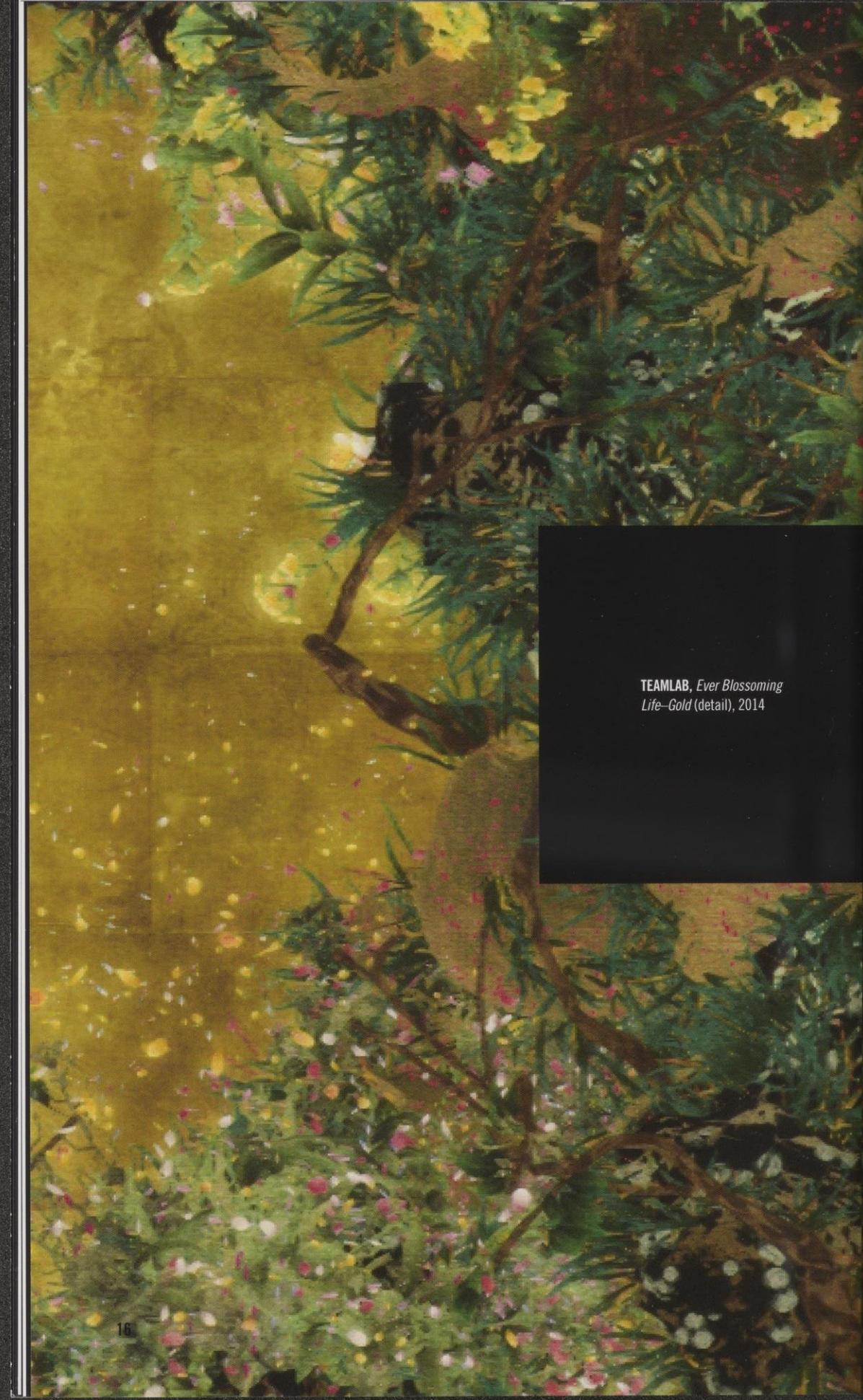


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TEAMLAB, *Ever Blossoming
Life-Gold* (detail), 2014



GARDEN OF
**UNEARTHLY
DELIGHTS**

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TEAMLAB:
GARDEN OF
UNEARTHLY
DELIGHTS

INTERVIEW WITH TEAMLAB
FOUNDER TOSHIYUKI INOKO
AND MIWAKO TEZUKA

IN ORDER TO SEARCH FOR THAT LOGIC OF SPACE, TEAMLAB RENDERS THE SPACE DEPICTED IN TRADITIONAL JAPANESE PAINTING IN 3D COMPUTER GRAPHICS. WE FIRST CREATE A THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE ON A COMPUTER, AND THEN, THROUGH TRIAL AND ERROR, WE SEARCH FOR A CERTAIN LOGICAL STRUCTURE IN IT.

Miwako Tezuka: teamLab creates many interactive works. What is the significance of interactive art?

teamLab: During the twentieth century, content and viewers existed separately. But the emergence of the digital concept changed works to become participatory for the viewers. For example, during the late twentieth century most people received information from non-interactive media such as TV, radio, books, and newspapers. In contrast, today we spend most of our time using new media that allow our participation. The digital concept has enabled us to create participatory artworks.

MT: And these changes in both the medium and viewers set the backdrop for the birth of teamLab, the “ultra technologist group”?

teamLab: Yes. Let's think about what the digital concept is. In the past, information came with some

kind of physical medium as a set. For example, information such as music came in the form of a vinyl record. Today, thanks to digital technology, music exists independent of the vinyl record. In short, information has been freed from the limits of material media. This is the same in artistic expression. Art is being freed from the limits of its conventional media such as a canvas. This means that digital art has no physical boundary and can contain so much information. It is the same principle as when a solid material becomes a liquid form: liquid has an exponentially bigger transformative potential than solid matter. This transformative potential is brought to the realm of art thanks to digital technology. This change is happening very quickly and artworks are ever more flexible and able to change via the viewers' participation. In a way, this has become the norm.



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MT: According to that logic, teamLab's work *United, Fragmented, Repeated and Impermanent World*, which draws inspiration from an eighteenth-century painting by Itō Jakuchū, already embodies that freedom to change.

teamLab: That's right. I am perfectly fine with it being displayed on a one-thousand-inch monitor when that becomes available.

MT: Is it less an homage to Jakuchū and more like Jakuchū being a source of information that you transformed into a form that is contemporary to our time?

teamLab: Subconsciously, I think that is correct, but more consciously, we think there was a clearly logical theoretical structure in traditional Japanese spatial perception. In general, the Japanese spatial concept is said to be conceptual or innately flat while the Western perspective system is logical. But, I think the Japanese had their logic of space, and that led to the particular Japanese way of depicting space in art. In order to search for that logic of space, teamLab renders the space depicted in traditional Japanese painting in 3D computer graphics. We first create a three-dimensional space on a computer, and then, through trial and error, we search for a certain logical structure in it. We are trying to find out what kind of spatial theory the Japanese had in the past, how they saw the space, what the advantage of this theory is in contrast to the Western perspectival system, how this spatial theory affects people, and so forth. What we discover through this deductive process becomes the seed of our new creation. Itō Jakuchū's *masume ga* (mosaic painting) happens to be unique in terms of its spatial rendition, so we began to question what is happening in that work by first reconstructing, in 3D computer graphics, the space depicted in it. After we created the three-dimensional space on a computer, we could place each motif in the painting into that digital landscape. This restructuring process let us discover many things. Those discoveries kept informing our new expression. After all, it all began with the uniqueness of Jakuchū's painting (see figs 10a and 10b, pages 70-71).

MT: When was the first time you saw his mosaic painting?

teamLab: I saw it in person for the first time at the Mori Art Museum's grand-opening exhibition in Tokyo entitled *Happiness*. Of course, I knew Jakuchū before that show from books and catalogues.

MT: Were you interested in any other works by Jakuchū?

teamLab: I don't really have any particular paintings that I am interested in. But, when I first found out about Jakuchū, I instinctively felt some sort of continuity between his art and today's popular culture. When you read the manga *One Piece* by Eiichirō Oda, you see the lineage, or the continuity, from *Dragon Ball* by Akira Toriyama. It's this kind of continuity that I felt in Jakuchū. There is something that is shared by *Dragon Ball*, *One Piece*, and Itō Jakuchū but not found in the Western art history. We are very curious about what that is.

MT: By "today's popular culture," you mean specifically popular culture of today's Japan, correct?

teamLab: Yes. It is the continuity between Jakuchū and the popular culture of today's Japan as seen in the works by Akira Toriyama, Matsū (another manga author), and so forth.

MT: Working always as a group is quite a different attitude, or even a creative philosophy, from the more traditional concept of a single artist creating a single work of art. Is teamLab's collective nature a natural result of where you come from: the science and technology field?

teamLab: Yes, I think teamLab has quite a different attitude. I believe we are moving into the period during which highly specialized professionals create things together and discover new possibilities together, and then bring those new possibilities into future creations. It is happening not just in the field of art, but in all fields. The digital concept has made the walls between various things porous. For example, if we think about the production of cars, there are



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engineers and designers, but they work separately. But we can no longer tell whether the iPhone interface is the work of a designer or an engineer. Collective discovery and collective creation will become the mainstream method of production in the future because the boundaries of all fields have become so blurry. I think this has already been happening for a while now. Even in the art field. But, until recently, we had moved forward without making that clear. teamLab has made our collective nature outwardly clear, so in that sense, we might be unique.

MT: In the work *Life Survives by the Power of Life*, you are using a character written by the calligrapher Sisyu¹, and in a way, it is a collaboration with her. What made you look into calligraphy?

teamLab: There are many reasons, but I am very interested in the difference between the origin of Western alphabets and that of kanji (Chinese characters) and the *raison d'être* of the kanji characters. I think kanji was initially like a sculpture. It was carved onto stones and wood, and used for divination. Later, with the invention of paper and ink, characters become calligraphy. The origin, meaning, and concept of calligraphy are very distinct from the Western alphabets, and I wanted to search for the cause and effect of this difference.

MT: This work places one character, *sei* (noun: life; verb: to be born, to bear), at the central vertical axis around which it seems to slowly spin. Is it expressing this character's innate magical power through the movement?

teamLab: You could say that, or it might be the opposite of that. Maybe we used the magical power to conjure up the character. I think kanji characters were originally a kind of magic and not letters; something like the "summon" in the game Final Fantasy. We could say one character embodies one world within. In our contemporary society, we use kanji in the same way we use alphabets, in display and on personal

computers, but their origins are different and with such a difference, there must have been a difference in the way of understanding the world. I think, by making this work, we were trying to find out what the difference is.

MT: *Life Survives by the Power of Life* is from 2011. This is a significant year for everyone in Japan with the Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that happened on March 11th. Was this created in response to the disaster?

teamLab: That's a very difficult question. We were in the middle of making this work at the time, and it was exhibited after 3/11. Our contemporary society is so complex. The world has become increasingly entangled as a network, and the problems we face today are no longer so simple as for an individual to come up with a solution. Our confidence in our ability to comprehend the world and our belief in the possibility of solving everything seems to lead us to a deadlock. teamLab takes the complexity of the problems in the world seriously. Even when we acknowledge this complexity, we still pursue creating works that positively accept everything.

MT: You sound like a classic sage, like Kenkō Hōshi².

teamLab: Do I!? Basically, in the West there is a strong belief in human power: that there is a solution to a problem and that the problem can be solved. But, traditionally, Japanese people see society and nature as something beyond the realm of human comprehension and yet they believe that they still have to live on by trial and error. What I am saying follows this philosophy, so perhaps that's why I sound rather old-fashioned.

MT: I feel that you are sensing some kind of core value of Japanese arts and philosophy in such a worldview.

teamLab: I just feel that way in my day-to-day living. I have the science background, so I do know there is little in this world that lasts forever.

¹ Sisyu is a professional Japanese calligrapher. She has been practicing calligraphy since the age of six, and has lived in Nara and Tokyo. She has provided her hands for title graphics of national television network NHK's dramas including *Ryōmaden* (broadcast from January 3 to November 28, 2010), among many others.

² Yoshida Kenkō (c.1283–c.1350) was a Buddhist monk in medieval Japan and is known for his essay entitled *Tsurezuregusa* (*Essays in Idleness*) that is considered as a literary epitome of Buddhist understanding of the transience of life.

LEFT: TEAMLAB (est. 2001), *Ever Blossoming Life—Gold*, (増殖する生命—Gold) (detail) 2014, digital work; endless, courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery



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BASICALLY, IN THE WEST THERE IS A STRONG BELIEF IN HUMAN POWER: THAT THERE IS A SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM AND THAT THE PROBLEM CAN BE SOLVED. BUT, TRADITIONALLY, JAPANESE PEOPLE SEE SOCIETY AND NATURE AS SOMETHING BEYOND THE REALM OF HUMAN COMPREHENSION AND YET THEY BELIEVE THAT THEY STILL HAVE TO LIVE ON BY TRIAL AND ERROR.

MT: Nonetheless, teamLab's work is never eschatological.

teamLab: We are one hundred percent positive!

MT: In terms of technology, is Japan still a leader in the field?

teamLab: Not at all! The leading force is still in Silicon Valley. But, the goal of Silicon Valley is to expand an individual's brain. In other words, a computer is an expansion of the human brain, a CPU is the processing speed of the human brain, a hard disk is the memory capacity of the human brain, etc. In a nutshell, the computer is an external brain that allows individuals to expand their brains. teamLab is not really interested in this expansion of the human brain. In this sense, we work closer to the artistic field than to the technology field. For example, teamLab wants to create a "tree." We want to create a tree that triggers change in human action. It won't expand one's brain capacity, but it will make us see it, and this act of seeing will change a pattern of people's movement [in space and in mind]. teamLab aspires to create something that may be called art, something that changes mankind. Not expansion of a brain but expansion of a human. We are interested in making

something whose existence shifts the direction or perspective of the society.

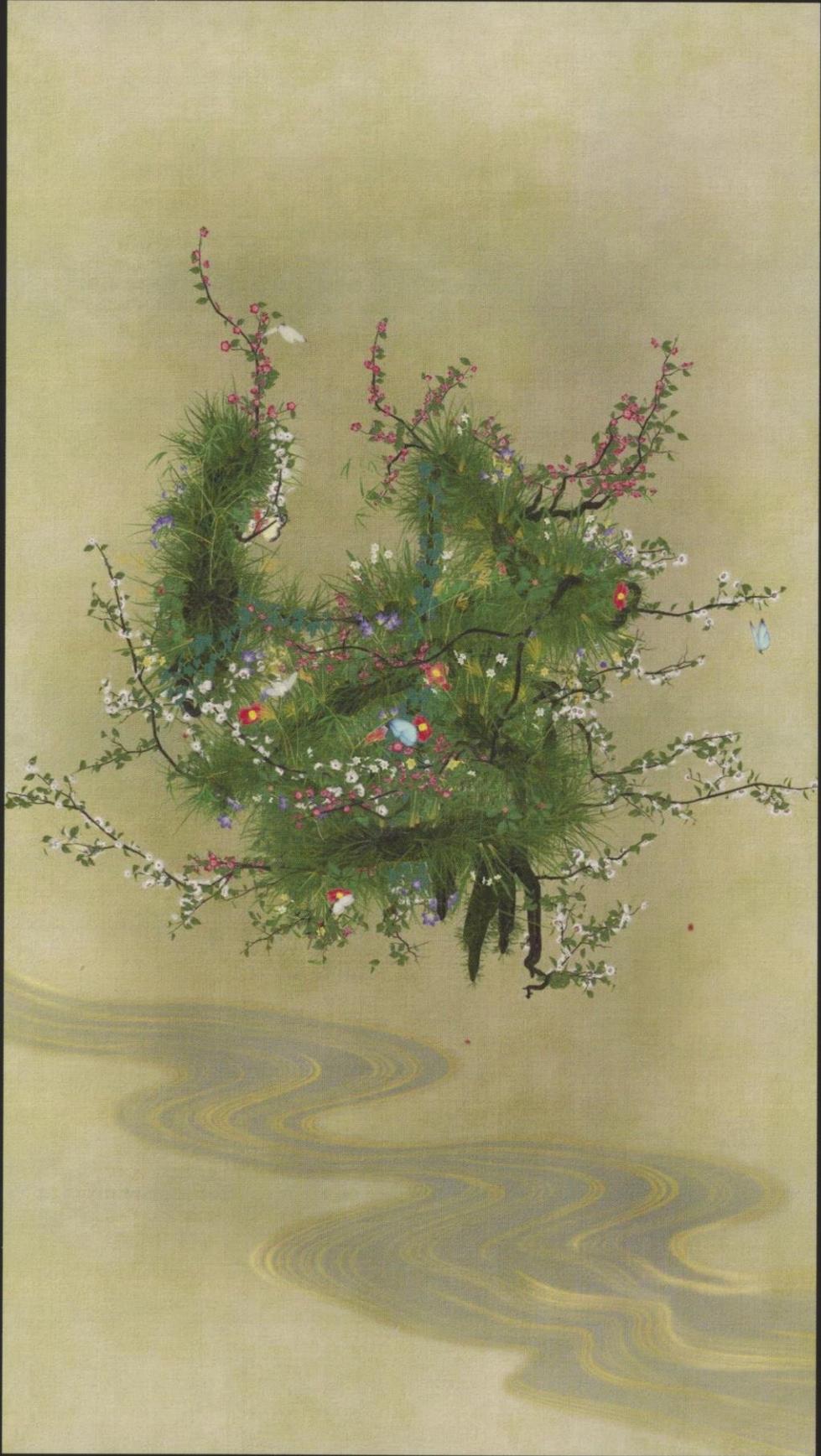
MT: What is your vision for the future?

teamLab: Since tens of thousands of years ago when we humans thought up the concept of information, the information always came with material things as a set. Today, information is free from material and it can transform itself into any media. teamLab is fully enjoying this transformative world. In the past, people had to make material objects in a space. But teamLab creates information in a digital space because, simply put, digital is so much cooler than analog materialism! You see, oil painting stinks because the more you mix paints, the darker and heavier it gets. In contrast, the more information we mix digitally, the closer it gets to pure white. We want to use the digital concept to change the value system of the world that still puts emphasis on material. Transformative things are cooler than stable things. If our value system changes to this kind of worldview, we think people will be freed from the bind of materialism and can become at least a little bit happier. I think we can then be free of the concept and act of exploitation.

RIGHT: **TEAMLAB** (est. 2001), *Life Survives by the Power of Life*, (生命は生命の力で生きている) 2011, animation, 6 minutes 23 seconds, 9:16, calligraphy by Sisyu, courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery

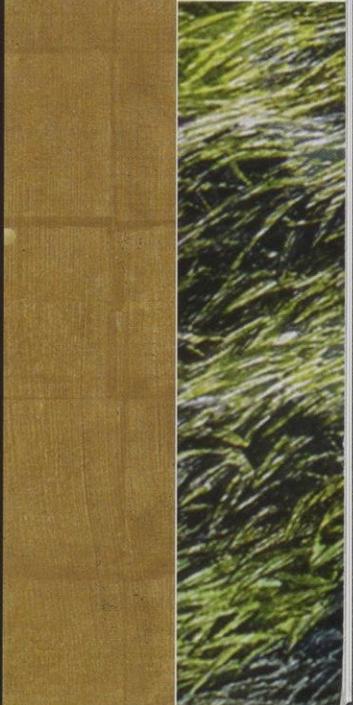
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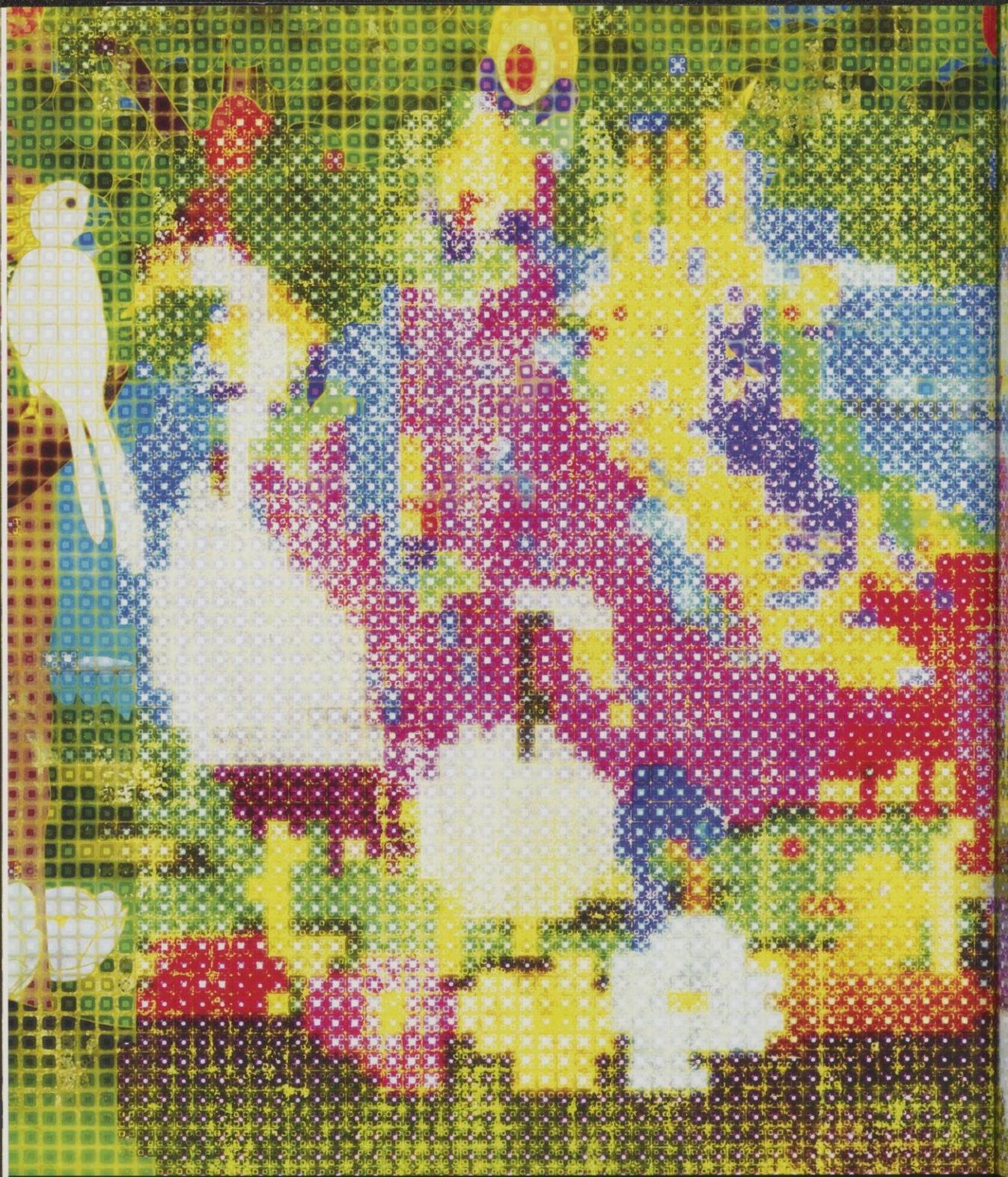
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TEAMLAB, (est. 2001), *United, Fragmented, Repeated, and Impermanent World* (世界は、統合されつつ、分割もされ、繰り返しつつ、いつも違う) detail, 2013, interactive digital work; 8 screens; endless, 9:16; sound by Hideaki Takahashi. Courtesy of the artist and Pace Gallery.



HISASHI TENMYOUYA,
Rhyme, (detail) 2012



RENAISSANCE SAMURAI

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**HISASHI
TENMYOUYA:
RENAISSANCE
SAMURAI**

INTERVIEW WITH
HISASHI TENMYOUYA
AND LAURA J. MUELLER

MY MANIFESTO BASARA IS BASED ON THE SUBCULTURE OF THE "STREET SAMURAI," WHICH IS EXCESSIVELY DECORATIVE AND IMBUED WITH A REBELLIOUS SPIRIT THAT DEFIES TRADITIONAL VALUES. BASARA STANDS FOR ANTI-AUTHORITY AND ANTI-ARISTOCRATIC CULTURE, WHICH IS DERIVED FROM SAMURAI CULTURE ON THE STREETS. BASARA REPRESENTS A COUNTER TO THE TRADITIONAL VALUES OF WABI SABI, ZEN, AND OTAKU.

Laura J. Mueller: What has inspired you most as an artist?

Hisashi Tenmyouya: Before the establishment of the concept of Nihonga, or "Japanese-style painting," I have taken inspiration from various schools of early-modern (1615-1868) Japanese painting like ukiyo-e, Kanō school, and Maruyama school.

LM: Where have you in the past, and where do you currently look for inspiration for your art?

HT: In the past a lot of early-modern Japanese painting inspired me. More recently, as in my work *Illustrated Scroll of Defiant Satire* and *Legendary Warriors Series*, I was inspired by current affairs in Japan. Lately, images and scenes from movies have occasionally become the source of my inspiration.

LM: How would you describe your approach to painting?

HT: I begin with a rough sketch of an image that comes to mind. Then, I gradually enlarge and elaborate, filling in details in the rough sketch. In cases where I feel I need a model, I take a picture of the model based on the rough sketch and scan it into the computer, manipulating the colors accordingly. Afterwards, I print it out in the intended finished size and trace the image. I transfer the traced image onto the picture ground and color to complete the process. Because I take many steps to complete a given work, I have various sketches, plans, and images in the end.



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LM: Are there any past or current artists or artistic movements that you are drawn to for inspiration or creative ideas?

HT: I have been influenced by the Bakumatsu³-Meiji period artist Kawanabe Kyōsai (1831-1889). I have been particularly drawn to his style, use of irony, and rebellious spirit. I have also been influenced by Marcel Duchamp (French, 1887-1968). His readymades concept meant to subvert conventional practices of art making had an impact on me. The concept behind my theory of BASARA is also to subvert stereotypes or preconceived notions.

LM: What has been the effect of traditional Japanese art techniques and imagery on your own art?

HT: I would have to say there are various traditional Japanese painting techniques that I have appropriated like “dripping in” (*tarashikom*), use of outline drawing, and use of gold leaf in the background. I also often reference the traditional Japanese art of tattoo. Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) had a big influence on me, and he used tattoo designs. My artwork entitled *Illustrated Scroll of Defiant Satire* and *Legendary Warriors Series* pay homage to the ukiyo-e artists Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1839-1892) and Kyōsai, who worked during the Bakumatsu - Meiji period of transition between the Edo and Meiji periods.

LM: What are the most dominant themes or subjects in your artwork?

HT: The concept and themes of my art are expressed in my art manifesto BASARA produced in 2010. The traditional components of Japanese culture have always emphasized the concepts of wabi sabi, Zen, or otaku. Japanese culture has been considered a world that is ascetic, static, simple, minimal, one of anime and manga.

However, that is just one aspect of Japanese culture. It is more diverse. We treasure the view of cherry blossoms falling from the tree. We amuse ourselves with fireworks exploding like flowers blooming in the sky. We enjoy festivals with elaborately designed floats moving down the street. My manifesto BASARA is based on the subculture of the “street

samurai,” which is excessively decorative and imbued with a rebellious spirit that defies traditional values. BASARA stands for anti-authority and anti-aristocratic culture, which is derived from samurai culture on the streets. BASARA represents a counter to the traditional values of wabi sabi, Zen, and otaku.

The word BASARA comes from Sanskrit meaning “diamond.” Diamond is the hardest stone and can break everything—just like someone who defies the existing power and breaks through established values. It is a commonly held belief that Japanese culture stands for a tranquil and minimal world, as well as the concept of wabi sabi.

However, Japanese culture has nurtured, at the same time, an extremely decorative and gorgeous culture as an antithesis to those traditional values. You can imagine a similar dichotomy between the tranquil and quiet movies of Yasujiro Ozu and the violent, active, and dynamic movies of Akira Kurosawa and Takeshi Kitano. They are outsiders to this elegant and graceful beauty, but they represent the attractiveness of the chaos and dynamism of the world of the street. That is BASARA.

LM: Traditional religious imagery is often present in your paintings. Do you consider your work to be religious in nature?

HT: I will sometimes borrow religious images to make ironic comments and satire, but I don't think my works are religious as a whole. It all comes back to my BASARA concept.

LM: How do you see this traditional religious imagery resonating with contemporary audiences? What type of relationship do you see between medieval Buddhist imagery and contemporary visual culture?

HT: In contemporary society we are bombarded with images in the media. However, I believe that one single, static painting can have more power to communicate. The phrase “grand narratives have come to an end” has been used to describe how religious belief has been lost. However, I believe it has not yet ended and it is still going on.

LM: You use historical concepts like *basara* (meaning

³ The uneasy and conflict-filled period when Japan changed from a feudal shogunate to the Imperial-lead Meiji government.

LEFT: HISASHI TENMYOUYA, Japanese, b. 1966, *Neo Thousand-Armed Kannon* (ネオ千手観音), 2002, acrylic paint, wood, 89 1/2 x 63 3/4 inches (227.3 x 162 cm), Takahashi Collection



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IT IS FREE FROM THE CONFINES OF TRADITIONAL MATERIALS, AND INSTEAD, IT ALLOWS FOR THE USE OF NEW MATERIALS LIKE ACRYLIC PAINT AND UTILIZES NEW MODES OF DRAWING WITH THE STRONG CONTOURS, DECORATIVENESS, SYMBOLISM, AND PLAYFULNESS OF JAPANESE ART. IT ASPIRES TO DEPICT A MODERN JAPANESE SOCIETY WITH THE ESSENCE OF TRADITIONAL JAPANESE ART.

eccentricity or self-indulgent) and *kabukimono* (meaning dandy or eccentric) to describe your art. How does your study of Japanese history inform your own contemporary art practices?

HT: I have already addressed BASARA, but I will add a bit more. In today's chaotic time, the only thing an artist can do is to provide a grand vision. I feel my work doesn't have meaning if I play it safe by confining it to a small and internal world only of myself. Especially after the 3/11 earthquake and tsunami disaster, it seems superficial and naïve to produce childlike images that were proclaimed to represent the uniqueness of contemporary Japanese art. It was too over-simplified and too innocent to convey what had happened in Japan even under the guise of "art for art's sake." I feel the trends in childlike imagination are over. It served its purpose in a movement that was called "Micro-Pop."

It is no longer appropriate to espouse the purity and innocence that stem from the literary movement of the "I" novel. You may still be able to rest and produce work in this realm that has a following and is deemed significant by the establishment. However, these safe modes of art have already been

consumed, and you will be left out of doing something more substantial due to your lack of seeing the real world around you. Nevertheless, it is too easy and too convenient to rely on the label of "Cool Japan"⁴ as a rescue route for contemporary Japanese art merely utilizing popular trends like Internet technology and otaku culture.

I foresee a way to escape this trap. We can re-examine the roots of Japanese art with its grand perspectives without this innocence and predetermined mindset. And we can try to recapture the relationship between art and history and society that was laid to rubble by postmodern philosophy. I would like to try to represent Japan in its excessively multi-colored scenes that have yet to be witnessed outside of the established systems. I would like to contemplate what is at the root of Japan—beyond the stereotypes—by revisiting the periods when Japanese arts were alive with vivacity and vigor as in the Sengoku⁵ (c. 1467–c. 1573) and Bakumatsu periods. I take pride, as a *kabukimono* eccentric of today, in my artwork that supplants the preconceived image of Japanese aesthetics as in Zen, wabi sabi, kawaii (cute) culture, or Cool Japan.

⁴ Cool Japan was a term coined by the Japanese government in 2002 to brand Japan as a cultural leader in the world.

⁵ Also known as Warring States period, a tumultuous time when all political power was being unified under the Tokugawa shogunate.

LEFT: HISASHI TENMYOUYA, Japanese, b. 1966, *Neo Acalanatha* (ネオ不動明王), 2004, acrylic paint on wood, 42 3/8 x 18 2/3 inches (107.5 x 47.4 cm), collection of Katsura Yamaguchi



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LM: How do you see these historical concepts relating to contemporary culture?

HT: I strive in my work to introduce Japanese BASARA aesthetics, which have not been discussed even in Japan. The ideas of wabi sabi and Zen are far from the reality of contemporary Japan. BASARA more closely captures a true self-portrait of Japan that possesses tenacity and allure, and that includes a powerful desire to be a true contemporary society full of contradictions, and without the idealized notions of being either “beautiful” or “grotesque,” nor distorting its core.

LM: You have stated you looked at old masters imagery like Leonardo da Vinci's *The Battle of Anghiari* for inspiration. What kind of relationship do you see between Western and Japanese art?

HT: The work *Rhyme* (2012) was created from inspiration from *The Battle of Anghiari* by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), (see fig. 6, page 68). Battle scenes by some other old masters also inspired me in this work. The artist Kanō Kazunobu (1816-1863), for example, widely appropriated Western painting techniques such as perspective and shading during the transition period of the Bakumatsu to create a mysterious and magical atmosphere in his paintings like *Five Hundred Arhats (Gohyaku rakan zu)*. Another example is the Edo-period artist Maruyama Ōkyo (1733-1795) who achieved a heightened degree of naturalism in his work by using Western techniques of realism. Both of these artists attest to the fact that there has been a long and ongoing relationship between Western and Japanese approaches to painting.

Considering this relational nature of Japanese art that can be summed up as having *wakon-yōsai* (a Japanese soul and a Western aptitude), I have labeled my artwork as Neo Nihonga: I produced the manifesto on Neo Nihonga in 2001. Neo Nihonga is an antithesis to the already outmoded traditional Nihonga that was born in the Meiji period as a contrast to Yōga (Western-style oil painting) merely identified by its materials like mineral pigments, glue, and ink. Neo Nihonga that I proclaim is a new genre of Japanese art. It is free from the confines of traditional materials, and instead, it allows for the use of new materials like acrylic paint and utilizes new modes of drawing with the strong contours, decorativeness, symbolism, and playfulness of Japanese art. It aspires to depict a modern Japanese society with the essence of traditional Japanese art.

Neo Nihonga puts an end to the hegemony of traditional Nihonga whose hierarchical system called *gadan* (authoritative artist association system) has dominated the Japanese art circle since the end of nineteenth century. Neo Nihonga offers a new vantage point from which to think about the painterly expression of contemporary Japan. Rather than seeing itself as an opposite of the Western mode of painting, Neo Nihonga seeks expressive models in traditional painting styles that have existed in Japan before the modernization or Westernization of the Meiji period. To summarize, I would say that Neo Nihonga inherits the spirit and the views of the world expressed by ukiyo-e and the various other traditional painting schools of Japan.

NEO NIHONGA OFFERS A NEW VANTAGE POINT FROM WHICH TO THINK ABOUT THE PAINTERLY EXPRESSION OF CONTEMPORARY JAPAN. RATHER THAN SEEING ITSELF AS AN OPPOSITE OF THE WESTERN MODE OF PAINTING, NEO NIHONGA SEEKS EXPRESSIVE MODELS IN TRADITIONAL PAINTING STYLES THAT HAVE EXISTED IN JAPAN BEFORE THE MODERNIZATION OR WESTERNIZATION OF THE MEIJI PERIOD.

RIGHT: HISASHI TENMYOUYA, Japanese, b. 1966, *Baku (Mythological Chimera)* (猿図), 2010, acrylic paint on wood, gold brocade, 65 3/8 x 59 7/8 inches (166 x 152 cm); Chazen General Endowment Fund and John H. Van Vleck Endowment Fund purchase, 2011.27



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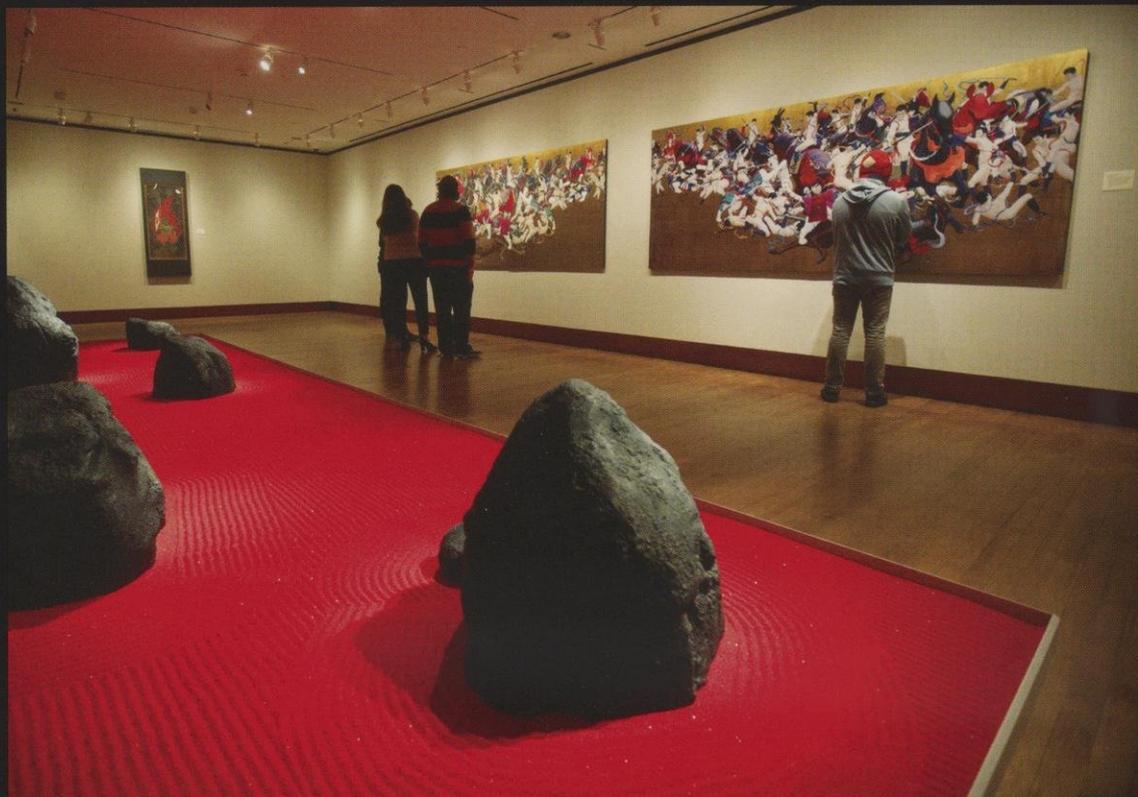




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HISASHI TENMYOUYA, Japanese, b. 1966, *Rhyme (韻)*, 2012, (detail), acrylic paint, gold leaf on wood, 49 7/8 x 118 1/8 inches, Colonel Rex W. and Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.23.1-2a



HISASHI TENMYOUYA, Japanese, b. 1966, *Rhyme* (韻), 2012, painting: acrylic paint, gold leaf on wood, 49 7/8 x 118 1/8 inches, print: inkjet print on paper mounted on wood, 49 7/8 x 118 1/8 inches, floor installation: fiberglass reinforced polyester, calcium carbonate fiberglass, variable measurements, Colonel Rex W. and Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.23.1–2a–b; John H. Van Vleck Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.23.3a–g.



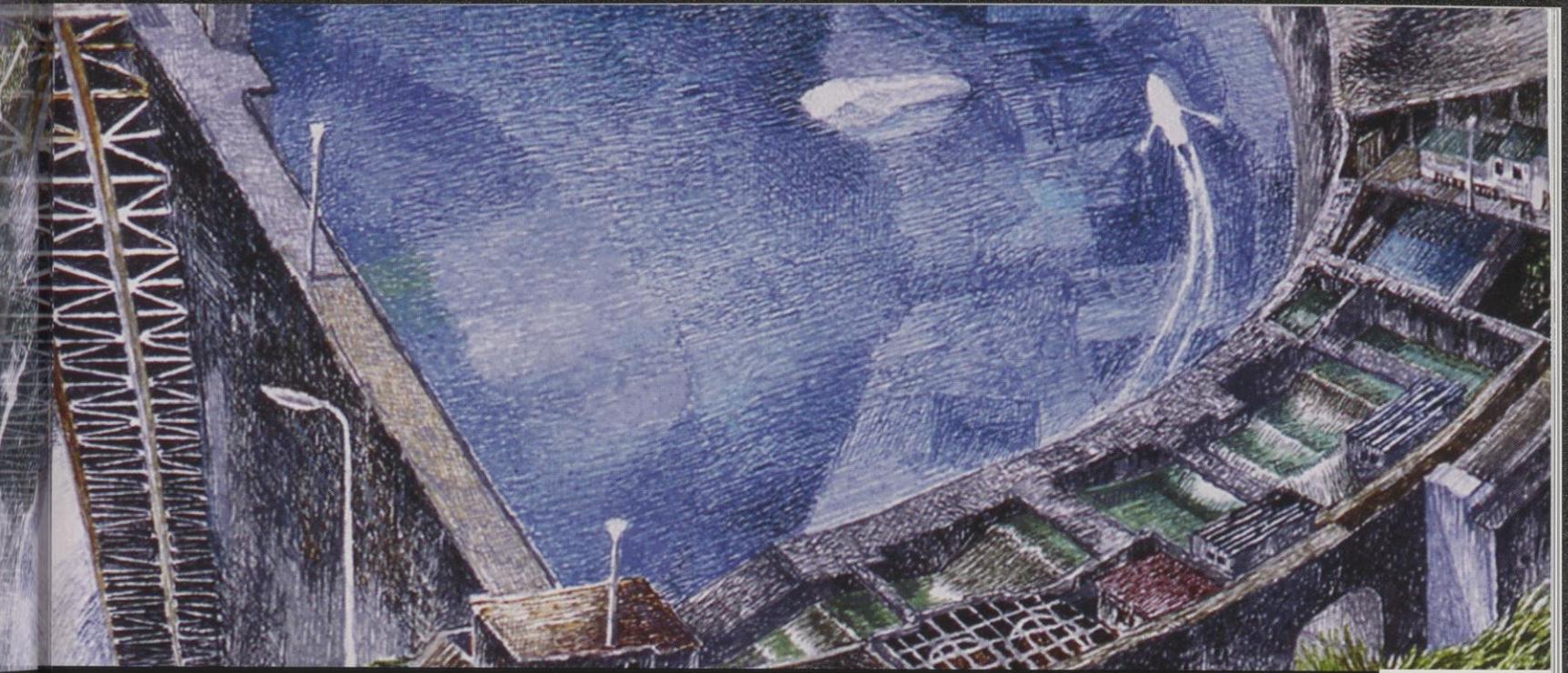
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HISASHI TENMYOUYA, Japanese, b. 1966, *Rhyme* (音韻), 2012, (detail), floor installation: fiberglass reinforced polyester, calcium carbonate fiberglass, variable measurements, 2013.23.3a–g.



MANABU IKEDA, *Two Water Surfaces*, (detail) 2010



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MANABU IKEDA: DISCIPLE OF DETAIL

INTERVIEW WITH MANABU IKEDA
AND LAURA J. MUELLER

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I FEEL AS IF MY WORK IS MY INNER VOICE. IT ACTS AS A FILTER FOR EXPRESSING MY HAPPY AND SAD MEMORIES, ANGER, ANXIETY, HOPE, AND INNER EMOTIONS.

Laura Mueller: What has inspired you most as an artist?

Manabu Ikeda: It is hard to name just one, but I take inspiration from nature, having visited various locales of mountains and oceans. In addition, I find inspiration in trivial scenes and events of daily life.

LM: Where have you in the past, and where do you currently, look for inspiration for your art?

MI: My inspiration has not changed over time in that I create my art based on daily experience and memory. Although recently I have been preoccupied with calamity like earthquakes and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster.

LM: How would you describe your creative process in painting?

MI: At first, I determine how large the panels of the work will be according to a vague theme I have in mind. My approach to painting depends on the size of the work. For smaller works, I envision the finished painting before I begin. I create a rough outline of that vision in my sketchbook to prevent my work from straying from my original concept. Distinctive from the process of my larger works, the smaller works cannot be developed more organically as I go. In my approach to larger works, I begin without

deciding its full structure and composition, and start with a small detailed section. As I develop the smaller sections, I constantly envision the entire work. As the completed sections spread across the panels, the final composition appears more clearly in my mind. It usually takes about a year for me to finally be able to envision it in its entirety.

LM: Are there any past or current artists or artistic movements that you find yourself drawn to for inspiration or creative ideas?

MI: I don't have anything in particular, but I am often inspired by bold compositions and extremely stylized waves and clouds in ukiyo-e prints created by artists like Katsushika Hokusai. The ukiyo-e artists' ability to create these dynamic designs based on observed life thrills me.

LM: What has been the effect of traditional Japanese art techniques and imagery on your own art?

MI: Since I was young I was surrounded by the anime and manga culture, and these creative expressions became a part of me. Many aspects of these artistic forms have influenced scenes in my work. In particular, the figures in my work appear to move as though they are advancing frame by frame, and also my depiction of comical and humorous situations comes from the anime and manga influence.

My work entitled *Yochō (Foretoken)* is often compared to Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, commonly known as *The Great Wave* (see fig. 2, page 67). However, I didn't start with this image in mind at all. Originally I created a work of only three panels, but it felt too constricted when I completed it. So, I added a blank panel to the left of the composition and I then realized the work was reminiscent of Hokusai's design. I really liked Hokusai's design, and found it interesting that it ended up compositionally right-to-left, opposite to that of Hokusai's image.

LM: What do you think are the most dominant themes or subjects in your artwork?

MI: The conflict and coexistence between man and nature.

LM: What kind of relationship do you have with your art? Do you see yourself represented in your art as a type of self-portrait?

MI: I feel as if my work is my inner voice. It acts as a filter for expressing my happy and sad memories, anger, anxiety, hope, and inner emotions. I have placed myself often in past paintings, including events that occurred while working on a particular composition like my grandmother's funeral, my own wedding, and my child's birth. The reason you often see figures skiing or rock climbing is my desire to try them out myself and have fun in my paintings. In a way you can say my paintings are like a diary recording my private, daily life.



MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Staircase of Waves* (波の階段), 2010, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 8 2/3 x 10 2/3 inches (22 x 27 cm), collection of David Solo

MY GOAL IS TO FAITHFULLY EXPRESS MY VIEW OF THE WORLD IN MY COMPOSITION, BUT I DON'T INTENTIONALLY DEPICT DETAILED IMAGES. BECAUSE I SEE DETAILS WHEN I OBSERVE THINGS, RATHER THAN THE WHOLE, I FIND PEN AND INK TO BE THE BEST TOOLS TO EXPRESS HOW I SEE THEM.

LM: Your paintings take months, if not years, to complete. How does your artistic vision change over these extended periods of time?

MI: The main theme does not change, but as I described earlier the finished composition is continually evolving throughout the creative process. There is a time in the beginning that I have a distinct image of how I want the work to look, and then there are times that I get a new idea or find inspiration. I proceed in the creation of large compositions by mixing these two approaches. I consciously try to keep my original theme in mind because if it changes, the whole structure of the work will shift into something completely different.

LM: How do you cope with the painstaking detail that you achieve in your art? Do you find the work to be meditative or religious in nature?

MI: I get these types of questions often, but I don't consider my paintings to be miniatures as others think of them. My goal is to faithfully express my view of the world in my composition, but I don't intentionally depict detailed images. Because I see details when I observe things rather than the whole, I find pen and ink to be the best tools to express how I see them. It takes great time and effort to draw large compositions well, and hard work is unavoidable. Inspirationally, I strive to find a "cool" factor, or subjects that evoke a "desire to paint" to convincingly accomplish these goals. This approach to my painting has not changed since my childhood. Therefore, the act of painting for me is far from meditative or religious in nature. I feel it is closer to the concept of play, like building a plastic model or playing sports.

LM: Where do you look for and find the multiple examples of imagery that populate your canvases?

MI: I think it is an accumulation of my habits formed from a young age on the act of looking at everyday things from day to day. My eyes took things in with great detail and my brain processed them in a way that made me think, "How would I draw that?"

LM: What is your intended meaning of the void (blank, no painted detail) human and animal figures that populate your dense, detailed compositions?

MI: There are two reasons. The first reason is that if I included detailed people and animals, they would be difficult to make out in my paintings. By using figures in white, I think it creates a visual balance between the complex world and humankind. The second reason is that I avoid depicting specific characters. I think it is easier for viewers to become emotionally connected to the humans and animals when drawn with minimal information. I don't like when the background and figures are fully rendered and crowded, as there isn't a point of entry in the image for the viewer.

LM: The conflict between humans—including their man-made machinery and consumption—and nature is a recurring theme in your art. How do you see this conflict playing out? And do you see one side winning?

MI: I feel as if my idea has been changing little by little. When I was living in Japan, I could not help but feel conflicted between material society based on construction and consumption, and the resulting environmental situation of excessive energy use and waste that was a byproduct of an overcrowded population. In Tokyo, where I lived, it was difficult to find any nature in the city full of people and buildings. But since I came to America, I have been awed by the existence and vastness of nature, where the existence of human beings seems to be small. I must admit that I felt a more-immediate threat to the environment when I was living in small and overcrowded Japan. We often hear news reports on television and the Internet of the global threat to the environment in this country as well. But when I go outside and am surrounded by vast landscapes and intense weather patterns, I am convinced that nature is far superior and more powerful than the human race. These new experiences make me think that your reality depends on your surroundings even if you know all the facts. This might not be answering the questions, but it is too easy to determine a stance by following a specific news or Internet source. As of right now, I must admit that I am not sure which is winning, man or nature.



MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Victim*, 2009, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 27 1/2 x 39 2/5 inches (70 x 100 cm), private collection, New York



INDEED, MANY OF THE SUBJECTS IN MY PAINTINGS APPEAR TO SHOW NATURE LAUNCHING A COUNTERATTACK ON CIVILIZATION. HOWEVER, PEOPLE IN THE PAINTINGS ARE NOT BEING BROUGHT DOWN. RATHER THEY ARE SHOWN HAVING FUN, SKIING OR TAKING A WALK.

LM: Mass destruction and calamities (like Fukushima) appear often in your work, including results of climate change and natural disasters. Do you see your paintings as optimistic or pessimistic toward our shared future and our children?

MI: It is clear that they are not optimistic, however I would not say that they are pessimistic either. It depends on which point of view you choose: as a viewer or as a person in the painting. Indeed, many of the subjects in my paintings appear to show nature launching a counterattack on civilization. However, people in the paintings are not being brought down. Rather they are shown having fun skiing or taking a walk. I think people are extremely resilient and adapt to new environments they face. I felt this when I visited in February 2012 the tsunami-ravaged cities of Kesennuma in Miyagi Prefecture and Rikuzentakata in Iwate Prefecture. They were cities where many people died. To a person like me who did not have previous knowledge of the area, they appeared as beautiful fields covered in snow that could have existed for many, many years. But to people who knew these places previously, they recognize the devastation and destruction of annihilated villages. It made me think that even the familiar places where I had played and spent happy times could have been places of total destruction in the past. In the long history of the earth, it must have occurred many times over in many places. Regardless, we have no way of knowing. To many future generations, locations of total devastating destruction will become places that include lovely, happy homes without the knowledge of the disasters that took place there in the past. Human beings are part of nature. If nature changes, humans within it will also change. It might be that our role in humankind is to create a new way of life according to the evolving environment in which we find ourselves.

MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Ice Stream (Episode from Foretoken)* (氷流(予兆より)), 2008, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 13 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches (35 x 45 cm), private collection, New York





MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Foretoken* (予兆), 2008, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 72 x 132 inches (182.9 x 335.3 cm), collection of Sustainable Investor Co, Ltd.









MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973,
Imprint (痕跡), 2011, acrylic ink on
paper, mounted on board, 24 x 36
inches (61 x 91.3 cm), collection of
Harvey Sawikin and Andrea Krantz



MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Settlement* (居住区), 2009, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 7 7/8 x 11 7/8 inches (20 x 30 cm), collection of David Solo



MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Claw Marks* (爪痕), 2010, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 8 2/3 x 10 2/3 inches (22 x 27 cm), collection of Katsura Yamaguchi



MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Two Water Surfaces* (ふたつの水面 (みなも)), 2010, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 8 2/3 x 10 2/3 inches (22 x 27 cm), collection of Harvey Sawikin and Andrea Krantz

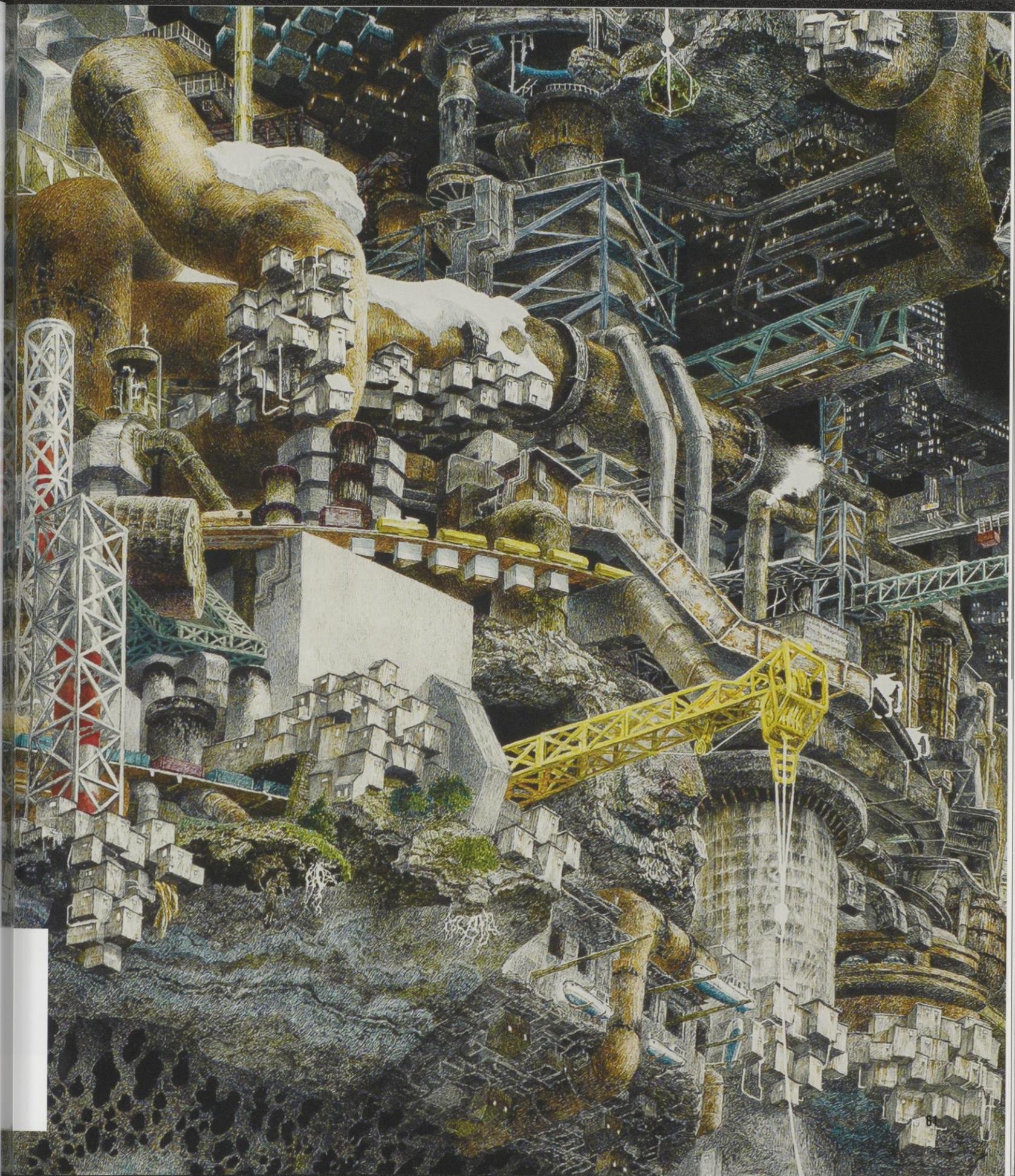


MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Grass Mantis (Kusakamakiri)* (くさかまきり), 2004, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 9 x 11 2/5 inches (23 x 29 cm), John H. Van Vleck Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.25



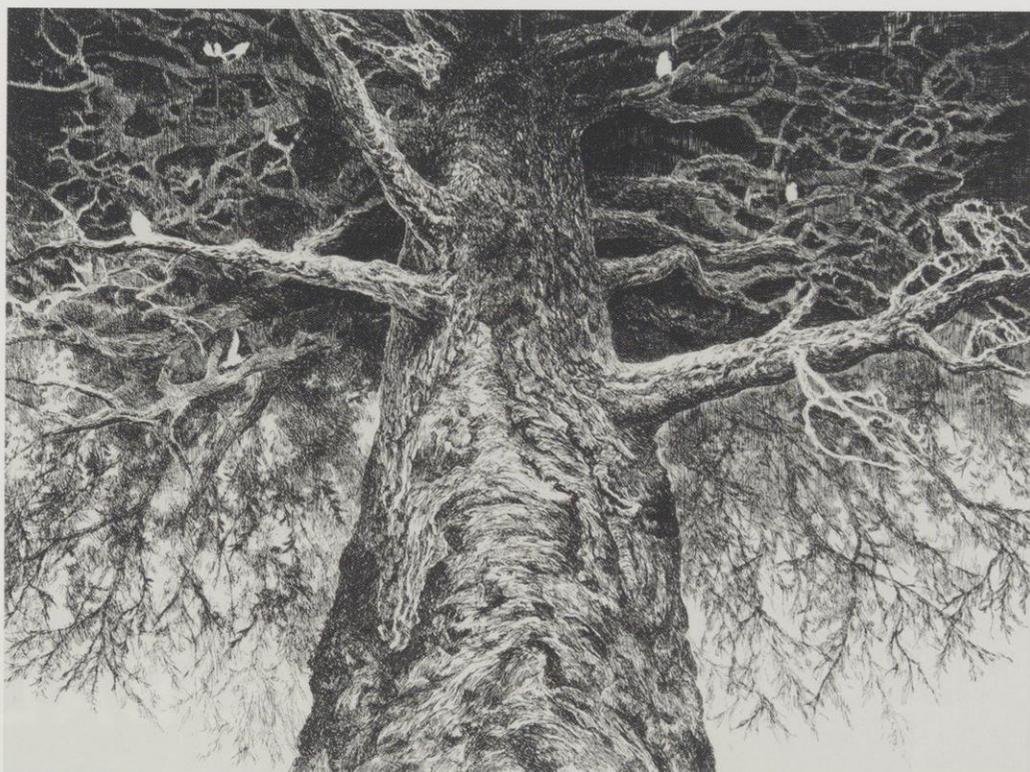
MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Meltdown*, 2013, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm), Colonel Rex W. and Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.24

MANABU IKEDA, Japanese, b. 1973, *Meltdown*, (detail) 2013, acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 48 x 48 inches (122 x 122 cm), Colonel Rex W. and Maxine Schuster Radsch Endowment Fund purchase, 2013.24



Graphic
by
W. and
F.





ABOVE: **MANABU IKEDA**, Japanese, b. 1973, *Untitled*, 2014, etching, 8 7/8 x 11 7/8 inches (22 x 30 cm), Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–Madison, transfer from Tandem Press (Note: this image represents Ikeda's first foray into printmaking.)

LEFT: **MANABU IKEDA**, Japanese, b. 1973, *Mountains and Clouds* (山と雲), acrylic ink on paper, mounted on board, 23 2/3 x 27 1/2 inches (60 x 70 cm), private collection

TRADITIONS ALTERED:
“JAPANESENESS” IN
THE GLOBAL NOW

LAURA J. MUELLER

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The history of art in Japan is long and distinguished with rich variety and many celebrated traditions. Japanese art possesses a deep understanding of and respect for nature and natural beauty in both subject and materiality. It is sophisticated in its use of compositional space and balance, and it is highly developed in its decorative schemes that span the range from imperial opulence to meditative austerity. But alongside the well-respected, admired, and studied artistic traditions of Japan can come an overwhelming feeling of constraint and burden for a contemporary artist tied to its legacy. Artists can feel trapped by the weight of this profound history and tradition. As contemporary art has thrived and our visual experience has become truly global, cultural and geographic distinctions have become blurred, often losing distinct significance and meaning. This context allows artists to willfully break from the constraints of art historical narratives. But faithfulness to tradition and engagement with new movements need not stand in opposition. Manabu Ikeda, Hisashi Tenmyouya, and teamLab are three examples of those who, rather than shun the seemingly restrictive artistic traditions of Japanese art, have embraced them, sampling, altering, and repackaging them to create a dynamic, contemporary Japanese identity with a new sense of “Japaneseness” for the global now. Utilizing both traditional and new modes of representation, these artists have created works that successfully reflect our world’s current condition with its technology, industrialization, street culture, and recent events.

These three artists play with established Japanese traditions in innovative and shocking ways, not simply copying and regurgitating motifs, patterns, and subject matter, but revitalizing artistic traditions and presenting them anew in the contemporary context. As we experience these works in this exhibition, recurring themes and references from Japan’s long art history—one of the world’s longest continuous artistic traditions—become evident. The first is the complexity and sophistication of the concept of “master craftsmanship” (*takumi* 匠). The artists develop consummate skill in their chosen media, enhancing their work through the sheer virtuosity of execution. The second is that the completed works

are imbued with an undeniable spirituality or religiosity that adds great weight to their effectiveness and meaning. And the third is the efficient use of negative space and spatial structure of composition (*ma* 間). Art historically, East Asian spatial recognition and perspective stand in stark contrast to Western perspective, providing opportunities for complex spatial ordering that adds elements of dynamism and surprise to the works of art. As part of Japan’s contemporary society, Ikeda, Tenmyouya, and teamLab look beyond the confines of Japan’s art historical traditions and take inspiration from more recent creative developments in Japanese visual culture such as manga (漫画) and anime (アニメ). Direct references to these two creative fields, with their distinctive visual vocabulary, are evident in every work included in the exhibition and their impact is undeniable.

As members of a global society, Ikeda, Tenmyouya, and teamLab also look to Western art sources, in order to enter into a synthesis of artistic visions and creativity from disparate times and places. All three appeal to non-Japanese art for inspiration. Their works stand in stark contrast to the countless repetitious images that bombard us daily and instead give pause, requiring us to stop and contemplate, to study and discover the layered meanings and messages of their creative visions. Ikeda, through the medium of his meticulously executed pen-and-ink drawings, creates dreamlike worlds on his canvas that visually explicate some of the major dilemmas that we face today—such as climate chaos and resulting natural disasters—questioning mankind’s role in both causation and correction. Tenmyouya samples from both Japanese and Renaissance works to create visions that emphasize similarities and consistencies in artistic expression, reflecting on the timeless questions of religion, power, and war. And teamLab samples imagery from the Japanese artistic canon to revitalize compositions through technology, presenting images anew through the lens of pixels and computer screens. Most notably, their work provides motion to images that have long stood still, bringing the art to life. All three embark on a quest to retain and redefine a specific Japaneseness in their dynamic contemporary visions.

MANABU IKEDA

Using fine-point pens, inks, and acrylic pigments often employed in the production of manga and anime, Manabu Ikeda creates detailed compositions composed of imaginary worlds within worlds that are born from his lived experiences and contemporary events. His curious imagery is intricately tied to his memories of—and anxieties over—contemporary society in a way that visually presents some of the most pressing questions of our time, contemplating their complexity rather than simply providing specific answers. He does so by using a visual vocabulary that combines a variety of sources including the virtuoso animation produced by Hayao Miyazaki (Japanese, b. 1941). Connections can also be made to the traditions of East Asian landscape painting and printmaking with their detailed explorations of vast natural environments and the creative use of space and perspective. And in contrast, Ikeda's art references the dreamlike and surreal compositions that developed during the Renaissance in Europe that saw the rise of humanism and an evolving dialogue about the relationship between humankind and God. One of Ikeda's stated inspirations is the work of the Netherlandish master Hieronymus Bosch (ca. 1450–1516). The expansive, detailed landscape of Bosch's paintings, as seen in the central panel from his triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights*—the inspiration for the title of Japan Society's exhibition—showcases the fantastical and the bizarre while contemplating the origins of good and evil (fig. 1). Hybrid elements fill Bosch's composition, bringing into question the viewer's understanding of the relationships between the subjects depicted (like heaven and earth or humankind and nature) much like the work of Ikeda. Reminiscent of Bosch's compositions, Ikeda's pen-and-ink surfaces are covered with minute details that reward viewers who take the time to unravel the layers of imagery, which require months or years to complete.

Ikeda's work highlights the complexities of the natural world and the increasingly adversarial relationship between it and humankind, vis-à-vis industrialization and technology, asking the viewer to contemplate the origins of good and evil after the example of Bosch. He draws inspiration from the tragedies of our time, such as the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster and the increasingly erratic weather events that cause widespread death and destruction. Close observation of Ikeda's drawn surfaces reveals tiny humans and animals—left blank as empty, unpainted silhouettes—actively responding to the larger events in which they find themselves. His understanding of this technique is twofold: first, it is used to “create a visual balance between the complex world and humankind,”

⁶ See Manabu Ikeda interview page 47

and second, to provide a “point of entry in the composition for the viewer.”⁶ This second reason is commonly adduced in the tradition of East Asian landscapes, which often include anonymous figures depicted on retreat or hiking along a mountain path as a way the viewer can associate and easily enter a composition. The world that Ikeda depicts in his art is not a world in which we humans are at the center and in control, but rather one in which we humbly exist as tiny components in a greater natural universe.

Foretoken (pages 52–53), completed in 2008 and Ikeda's largest work to date, has been connected by many to *The Great Wave* by Katsushika Hokusai (fig. 2). Although Ikeda states in his interview that he did not intentionally set out to reference the iconic imagery of this piece, his composition nevertheless takes a distinctive form that mirrors Hokusai's original representation of nature's power eclipsing the majestic and revered Mount Fuji, together with the small, huddled fishermen caught in the wave's swell. Ikeda explains that *Foretoken* took on its visual connection to *The Great Wave* after a late addition of a panel and blank space, through which he focuses on the Japanese concept of placement within a composition and critical use of negative space. The use of blank space is perhaps one of the strongest ties to Japanese artistic traditions. In this work, as in many of Ikeda's compositions, the cluttered and decaying masses of material mixing and dissolving with natural elements eerily bring to mind the countless images that appeared on the television and news media during the aftermath of the tsunami that hit the coast of Japan in March 2011. Though this work was completed before these tragic events came to pass, it presaged the death and destruction that devastated Japan and unsettled the world.

Ikeda's recent work, *Meltdown* (page 60), completed in 2013, is the artist's direct response to the 3/11 tsunami and its aftermath. The title not only references the nuclear meltdown that ravaged Fukushima and the entire Tohoku region of Japan, but also the melting ice of the elevated glacial form that is hovering above the earth in the image, melting to fill the calm waters that seem to be rising from the bottom of the composition. The glacier is attached to a grassy hill under a maze of industrial pipes, scaffolding, cranes, and chimneys billowing smoke. It is difficult to ascertain whether the industrial mass is supported by the natural formations of ice and rock, or rather if it has nature in its grip, devouring the ice and rock to continue production. The minute silhouettes of humans, moose, and birds dot the composition, and appear at times calm and at times panicked, both lamenting and reveling in the convoluted environment in which they find themselves.



Figure 1: **HIERONYMUS BOSCH** (Netherlandish, ca. 1450–1516), *The Garden of Earthly Delights: Allegory of Luxury*, central panel of triptych, 1500–1505, oil on wood, 86 2/3 x 153 1/2 in., Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, P02823.



Figure 2: **KATSUSHIKA HOKUSAI** (Japanese, 1760–1849) (葛飾北斎), *Behind the Wave off Kanagawa (The Great Wave)*, from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mt. Fuji*, 1830–1835, Edo period, color woodcut, 10 1/3 x 15 in., Chazen Museum of Art, John H. Van Vleck Endowment Fund purchase, 1980.2386.



Figure 3: **TSUKIOKA YOSHITOSHI** (Japanese, 1839–1892), *Watanabe no Tsuna Cutting Off the Demon's Arm at Rashomon Gate*, 1888, color woodcut, 28 5/8 x 9 11/16 in. Chazen Museum of Art, John H. Van Vleck Endowment Fund purchase, 2004.39a-b.



Figure 4: **UTAGAWA KUNIYOSHI** (Japanese, 1798–1861) (歌川国芳), *Kaoshō Rochishin*, no. 6 from the series *The 108 Heroes of the Popular Suikoden, One by One*, ca. 1830, Edo period, color woodcut, 15 1/5 x 10 5/16 in., Chazen Museum of Art, John H. Van Vleck Endowment Fund purchase, 2003.10.

HISASHI TENMYOUYA

Hisashi Tenmyouya appropriates imagery and creative techniques from traditional Japanese art, reinterpreting them in a shockingly contemporary manner with reference to subjects such as modern warfare and street violence. Taking cues from Buddhist themes and imagery, Tenmyouya imbues his art (whether intentionally or subconsciously) with meditative and religious meaning. As he states, “The phrase ‘grand narratives have ended’ has been used to describe how religious belief has been lost. However, I believe it has not yet ended and it is still going on.”⁷ A self-professed practitioner of “New Japanese Painting” (Neo Nihonga), Tenmyouya works with the traditional aesthetics of gold- and silver-leaf backgrounds and textile frames that give his images a definitively Japanese identity while simultaneously approaching the contemporary themes that occupy the daily global news cycle. His paintings contain an element of hyper-masculinity that invokes the dynamism and brawn of the warrior prints of Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (fig. 3) and Utagawa Kuniyoshi (fig. 4). These works explore something Tenmyouya refers to as “outlaw culture” (*basara*), which comments on the celebration of brutal acts of violence and aggression. But while doing so, his refined creative approach visually references the heightened aesthetic sense that permeated traditional Japanese military practices as promoted in the moral code known as “Way of the Warrior” (Bushidō).

⁷ See Hisashi Tenmyouya interview, page 33

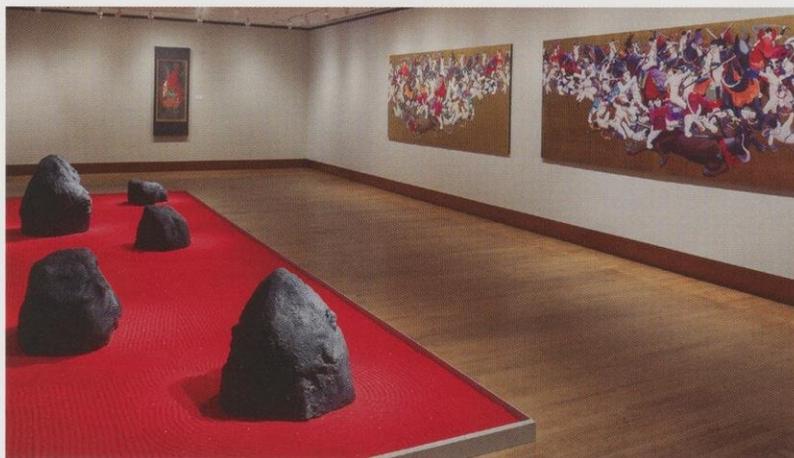


Figure 5: Gallery installation of *Rhyme* from Ikeda Manabu and Tenmyouya Hisashi, exhibition at the Chazen Museum of Art, December 13, 2013–February 16, 2014.

Tenmyouya’s most recent work included in the exhibition is *Rhyme* (pages 38–39). Completed in 2012, it is a mixed-media installation piece that combines two large scenes in mirror reverse—the left side painted and the right side in high-resolution digital printing. The scene, painted with acrylic on gold leaf, depicts warring soldiers on the backs of horses and white tigers. The work includes an installation of red sand and black boulders that create a defined space, providing specific religious and spiritual overtones (fig. 5). According to the artist, a major inspiration for this painting was the celebrated *The Battle of Anghiari* (1505) by Leonardo da Vinci. The now-lost fresco is known from an equally famous sketch by Peter Paul Rubens (fig. 6). The violent clash of warriors and horses is imitated in Tenmyouya’s painting. His work seems also to closely reference elements from other Renaissance battle scenes. Compositional elements are even more visually attuned to the controlled and choreographed battle scenes by Paolo Uccello (fig. 7). Uccello’s *The Battle of San Romano* incorporates the distinctive upright lances and a fallen, foreshortened horse across the bottom of the foreground—both elements distinctly referenced in Tenmyouya’s completed work.⁸

The accompanying installation of blood-red sand and skull-embossed boulders directly mimics the meditative quality of the Buddhist stone garden at Ryōan-ji Temple in Kyoto with its abstract arrangement of objects and patterns (fig. 8). While the representations of blood and death are conspicuously absent from the two-dimensional depictions on the wall, the red

⁸ I want to thank Russell Panczenko for this observation.



Figure 6: PETER PAUL RUBENS (Flemish, 1577–1640), copied after Leonardo da Vinci (Italian, 1452–1519), *The Battle of Anghiari*, ca. 1603, black chalk and brown ink, 17 4/5 x 25 in., Musée du Louvre, Paris, 20271.

of the sand and inclusion of skulls in relief on the surface of the black rocks allude to the unavoidable horrors of war and conflict. Just as Japan's history is littered with instances of warfare waged under the guise of religion, so too do we find it in contemporary times. Religion and war—whether state-organized, terrorist, or on the street—have long been inextricably linked and Tenmyouya provides the visual means to contemplate how this plays out.

Tenmyouya has previously explored the theme of religion and warfare in a powerful work from 2002, titled *Neo Thousand Armed Kannon* (page 32). The work references the traditional subject depicted in the twelfth-century Buddhist painting, *Thousand Armed Kannon* (*Senju Kannon*) held in the collection of the Tokyo National Museum (fig. 9). Kannon, often translated as the “Goddess of Mercy,” is named in reference to the witnessing of earthly suffering with one thousand eyes, and the accompanying acts of compassion to relieve the suffering with one thousand hands. Traditionally, the figure holds various objects used in granting mercy. Tenmyouya has inverted the representation showing the hands holding the weapons of modern warfare, including machine guns, bayonets, and knives. In doing so, Tenmyouya transforms the traditional meaning of the figure into something that is antithetical to mercy and compassion. The new (neo) deity, nevertheless, stylistically conforms to the traditional visual vocabulary of flowing robes and other Buddhist accouterments that Tenmyouya appropriates in its depiction. The shock of the inclusion of weapons is further heightened by the artist's reliance on the serene and beautiful Buddhist visual conventions employed in its composition.

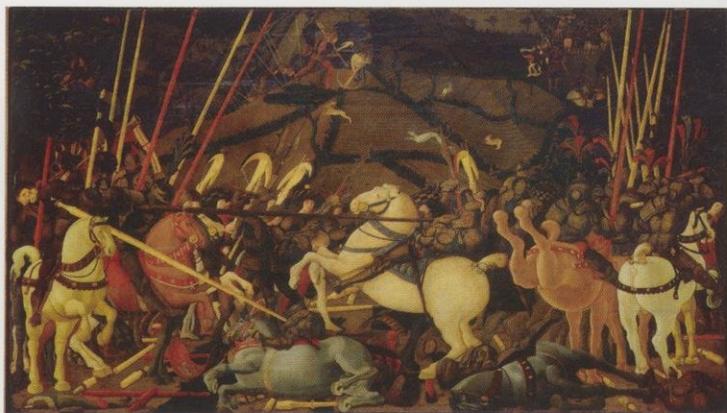


Figure 7: **PAOLO UCCELLO** (Italian, 1397–1475), *The Battle of San Romano*, central panel of triptych, ca. 1435–1455, tempera on wood, 71 5/8 x 126 in., Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, 1890.479.



Figure 8: Rock Garden, ca. 1450, Ryōan-ji Temple, Kyoto, Japan.



Figure 9:
Anonymous,
Senju Kannon
(*Sahasrabhujā*),
twelfth century,
Heian period,
54 5/16 x 27 5/16
Tōkyō Kokuritsu
Hakubutsukan,
A10506.

TEAMLAB

Using varied elements such as digital animation, sound, performance, light, holography, and other advanced technology, the interdisciplinary collective named teamLab produces creative experiences that expand traditional modes of artistic production. Founded in 2001 in Tokyo by Toshiyuki Inoko (Japanese, b. 1977) with university friends, the group combines art and technology to engage audiences in ways that question not only how art is produced, but also how it is perceived and experienced. Taking inspiration from contemporary society and the global reach of images—both static and moving—and information, teamLab strives to bring artistic expression to new, tech-savvy audiences who feel comfortable in front of computer screens connected to tablets and smart phones. The use of technology as a medium allows teamLab to break free from the confines of traditional art media and to create works that are fully participatory. Interestingly and paradoxically, Inoko has done this by situating the groups' output firmly in the reality of traditional Japanese art stretching back hundreds of years.

Inoko takes as a point of departure the conceptualization of spatial ordering: "We are trying to find out what kind of spatial theory the Japanese had in the past, how they saw the space, what the advantage of this theory is in contrast to the Western perspectival system, how this spatial theory affects people, and so forth."⁹ It is his belief that spatial recognition is learned, and that Japan had a very different concept of space in the Edo period (1615-1868) before the introduction of Western perspectival theory, and the consequent misconception of traditional Japanese art as flat. In teamLab's 2013 work, *United, Fragmented, Repeated and Impermanent World* (pages 26–27), Inoko takes an eighteenth-century pair of six-fold

⁹ See teamLab interview, page 21.

screens, *Birds, Animals and Flowering Plants in Imaginary Scene* by Itō Jakuchū as his inspiration (fig. 10a and 10b). By digitizing the painting, teamLab was able to expound on Jakuchū's unusual use of "mosaic painting" (*masume-gaki*, 柘目描き), which divides the painting surface into a grid of small colored boxes used to render the image. The resulting digital creation projects Jakuchū's image in three dimensions, bringing the animals to life through animated movement. As viewers pass in front of the work, their bodies cause the digital image to distort and become abstracted, and thus the viewers participate and become part of the artwork.

Itō Jakuchū—an artist often referred to as an eccentric painter—broke from artistic conventions during his time, much as the work of teamLab does today, so it is fitting that Inoko and teamLab should find inspiration in his work. In an earlier piece from 2011, *Life Survives by the Power of Life* (page 25), teamLab creates a moving art piece that begins with the three-dimensional brushstrokes of calligraphy for the character for "life" (*sei* 生). As the character slowly spins on its central stroke as an axis, the dripping ink begins to transform first into a cluster of bare branches, before being covered in light snowfall and ice, which then melts and the branches bud and bloom, depicted in vibrant colors of leaves and flowers. All the while, flying birds and fluttering butterflies enter and populate the composition. Although not specifically referenced by teamLab, a striking similarity can be seen with another painting by Jakuchū that dates from the late eighteenth century, *Japanese Nightingale in Plum Tree* (fig. 11). The painting of ink and color pigment on silk depicts a blossoming plum tree with six nightingales perched in its branches. The tree is rendered in characteristic Jakuchū style with dramatic strokes of ink to



form its trunk. It includes a Chinese-style poem (*kanshi* 漢詩), calligraphically painted in the upper register of the composition. The calligraphy was executed by Kinryū Dōjin (Japanese, 1712-1782), a Buddhist scholar and poet:

*Near the delta to the south,
a solitary plum tree
Created by a painter's brush
bursts into bloom—
Capturing the lovely scene
buffeted by spring breezes,
Without relying on a courier
to convey tidings from afar.¹⁰*

The poetic references to the painter's brush and blooming flowers reflect a sentiment similar to teamLab's work that digitally comes to life through an artist's work.

By experimenting with the recognizable artistic traditions of Japan, Ikeda, Tenmyouya, and teamLab all establish themselves within a long history of creative practice. Their artwork, while actively engaged in a global dialogue referencing current events, retains an undeniable Japaneseness that only adds to their appeal. Building on the achievements of both Japanese and Western artists who came before them, all three of these creative forces we have examined produce work that is dynamic and relevant to contemporary audiences and is sure to inspire future art production in Japan and abroad.

¹⁰ I am grateful to Dr. John Carpenter for his insight and assistance in the translation of the poetry included on the painting by Itō Jakuchū.



Figures 10a and 10b: **ITŌ JAKUCHŪ** (Japanese, 1716–1800) (伊藤若冲), *Birds, Animals, and Flowering Plants in Imaginary Scene*, eighteenth century, Edo period, pair of six-panel folding screens: ink and colors on paper, 66 2/5 x 147 2/5 in. (each), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Etsuko and Joe Price Collection.



Figure 11: **ITŌ JAKUCHŪ** (Japanese, 1716–1800) (伊藤若冲), *Japanese Nightingale in Plum Tree*, ca. 1770s, hanging scroll: ink and color on silk, 40 1/2 x 15 1/2 in., Oni Zazen Collection.



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THE IKEDA RESIDENCY AT THE CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART 2013-2016 A WORK IN PROGRESS

Manabu Ikeda first came to Madison in July 2012 together with art dealer Sueo Mizuma, who represents both Ikeda's and Hisashi Tenmyouya's work in Japan. Mizuma was curious: not only had the Chazen, an institution of which he had never heard, purchased a fairly expensive work from him, but it was also making inquiries about available works by Ikeda. Works by this artist are scarce given the length of time they take to produce. And when Ikeda does complete a new work, it is quickly purchased by one of a small group of clued-in, primarily Japanese collectors. Furthermore, given the artist's relatively short career, there is no secondary market to speak of. Hence the dealer, who fully appreciated the future creative potential of this artist, had a dilemma: "Would the Chazen be an advantageous placement for Ikeda's work?" During the ensuing discussions, Mizuma broached the possibility of Ikeda being in-residence in Madison for a three-year period, i.e., long enough for him to complete his "masterpiece." Although the Chazen had never sponsored artists' residencies, except short stays sufficient for temporary installations, the idea was appealing. The museum's new building had a studio classroom and staff had been exploring innovative ways to engage its audiences. The opportunity to observe a major large-scale work come into being over a three-year period would be unique. Although the Chazen had offered opportunities for its visitors to observe the creation of works of art, these were limited to the team fabrication of temporary installations in its Paige Court area. Ikeda, on the other hand, would produce the work with his own hand, without a

bevy of assistants. The artist and the museum agreed to terms and Ikeda, his wife Ai, and their four-year old daughter Tou, arrived in Madison in late June 2013. Personal affairs settled, Ikeda took up residence in the Chazen's studio at the end of July.

In preparing for his time in Madison, Ikeda had decided on the size of the overall work and had ordered from Japan the panels that would comprise its support. Specialized craftsmen constructed the four wooden panels, each measuring 118 x 39 ½ in. (300 x 100 cm) and covered in a hard-surfaced paper. They arrived on July 9. When joined together as intended, they would comprise a total surface area measuring 120,000 square centimeters or approximately 130 square feet. Ikeda's work is done in pen and ink, with pen strokes that usually measure no more than one-eighth to one-quarter of an inch in length. It was immediately obvious to Chazen staff that this was truly an ambitious project. Small but important practical issues sprang to mind looking for resolution. Ikeda has always used a specific kind of acrylic ink. Although he had brought a supply from Japan, did he have enough for a project of this magnitude and duration? If not, could it be acquired locally? Obviously for continuity of color and surface, he could not switch from one kind of ink to another mid-project. As it turned out, the same ink was not available locally or even in the United States. However, it could be readily acquired from Japan. The round steel dip pen points that Ikeda has favored during his career, however, were another matter. He prefers them



AUGUST 7, 2013

because he feels they sit more firmly in the holder and thus afford him greater control of his line. These round pen points, which have also been the favorite of manga artists, are sometimes called comic pen nibs. They have been largely superseded in the trade by a nib with a quarter moon shank and, therefore, are hard to find. Ikeda wears out one steel nib approximately every working day. A quick arithmetical calculation reveals that to complete the three-year project, Ikeda would need more-or-less one thousand pen points. An adequate supply had to be assured. Ikeda moved his supplies into the studio during the last week of July 2013. He immediately taped out a rectangle on the wall that was the size of the future artwork.

Stopping into the studio unannounced at the end of that week, I was very taken by the image of him sitting in front of the taped rectangle in a contemplative state. I watched for a while. He did not move until, a few moments later, I coughed to make my presence known. On August 7, after several days of quiet mental preparation, Ikeda asked that

the panels be brought into the studio. Once careful examination had ascertained that they had successfully weathered their transportation across the Pacific, he selected one, which was placed face up across two tables, and had the others removed. Sometime later that same day, having asked to be left to his own devices, Ikeda started drawing directly onto the selected panel in an area that he decided would be the lower left of the entire composition. Shying away from the edges, he began to draw a myriad of realistically rendered objects, many of which were drawn from his new Wisconsin environment. After a few days, one could find a University of Wisconsin logo, Bucky Badger, a fragment of a Home Depot sign, and the octopus from the Octopus Car Wash. By August 13, he had completed approximately a sixty-square-inch section. No narrative direction was as yet discernable; it was all a jumble of exquisitely rendered miniature details. When asked about his subject, he would only say that the work was to be roughly based on the tsunami that had devastated Fukushima, Japan, in 2011. And,



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in fact, what he had drawn so far did indeed look like detritus after a storm. During the first year, Ikeda has expanded his drawing from left to right. To date upward progress has been limited. When Ikeda was approaching the right edge of that first panel, he asked for the next one to be attached, and he continued the composition horizontally. Later he asked for the third panel to be conjoined with the second and so forth. However, he could not work on more than two panels at any one time because of their size and weight. Furthermore, since the ink flow from the steel pen points depends on gravity, the artwork must lie flat while the artist works. Ikeda draws in a seated position with back and shoulders arched over the work surface and can only draw as far as he can reach from an edge. This explains why there are four panels instead of one or two. Watching Ikeda's progress has been fascinating. There were no preparatory drawings; he began and continues to draw directly on the paper surface in ink. There can be no mistakes. Erasure is not possible and starting over is not an option.

WATCHING IKEDA'S PROGRESS HAS BEEN FASCINATING. THERE WERE NO PREPARATORY DRAWINGS; HE BEGAN AND CONTINUES TO DRAW DIRECTLY ON THE PAPER SURFACE IN INK. THERE CAN BE NO MISTAKES. ERASURE IS NOT POSSIBLE AND STARTING OVER IS NOT AN OPTION.





JANUARY 24, 2014

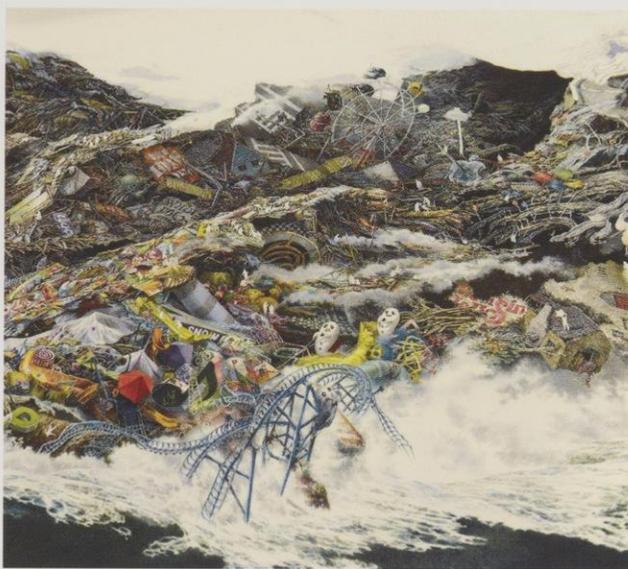
Now, as the composition progresses and becomes more complex, Ikeda sketches new areas lightly in pencil before proceeding with the pen and ink. However, the preliminary pencil work is a very basic indication of where the energy of the drawing is to go. Future dark areas of the growing composition are overlaid with a thin veneer of watercolor so that the white paper does not show between the pen strokes. However, the final imagery is created directly from the artist's imagination as he draws with pen and ink over the preparatory steps. In January of 2014, Ikeda was comfortable enough with his progress to open the studio to the public. For one hour per day, four days per week, a docent escorts visitors by elevator to the studio on the museum's lower level. Questions or other interruptions of the working artist are not permitted unless Ikeda himself decides to initiate a dialog. After a month or two of such visits, Ikeda began to overcome the self-consciousness that arose as a result of being observed doing what—up to this point in his life—had always been private. He brought in catalogues of his work, drawings and sketches from other times, and decided that engaging the audience was a good opportunity to improve his English. On occasion, the docent records the questions and answers:

"Will the top be clouds? Have you planned it?"

"I do not know."

"Is the story or narrative more important or the emotion?"

"No story ahead of drawing— you create own story as viewer— not my story, but yours."



FEBRUARY 9, 2014

"Is your work meditative?"

"Not spiritual. When I begin I think about subject, of course, but once drawing starts, I have a stream of thought: kids, film, friends, etc. Only hands move then and no thoughts." (2/12/2014)

In purely quantitative terms, 250 working days per year translates into a total of 750 days for the entire three-year project. This number does not take into account vacations or other personal situations that may arise—such as the birth of a second daughter, Huki, in October 2014. Dividing 750 days into the 130 square feet of the surface area that has to be covered with tiny pen strokes reveals that the artist needs to complete about 75 square inches each day. Given that the work is not a merely physical but an active creative process, one can begin to imagine the difficulty of the challenge that Ikeda has set for himself. No one area looks anything like another. The imagery is coming from the artist's mind directly to the paper surface. Although the theme of the masterwork, as mentioned above, is largely based on the Japanese tsunami of 2011, the tsunami is also a fascinating metaphor for the workings of Ikeda's mind. Like the debris being swept together by the force of water, the artist's myriad visual experiences as he encounters his new world are jumbled together and reflected in his drawing. As the work progresses, the ideas as well as their physical manifestations are falling into some kind of personal order. The day-to-day development of this work, following the workings of the artist's imagination and its physical articulation, is amazing and humbling to watch.



JULY 17, 2014



JULY 18, 2014

JULY 18, 2014



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Pages 72–79 Russell Panczenko

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