

BETWEEN COLLECTIVISM AND INDIVIDUALISM



The Play, Miyagi, Happening in an Egg, photograph, LOG, 1968, Kai Hiroto, Wakayama, courtesy of Koichi Ikemizu

JAPANESE AVANT-GARDE IN THE 1950s AND THE 1960s

25.11.2021 — 13.03.2022

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JAPAN FOUNDATION
国際交流基金



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ZACHĘTA — NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART
PL. MAŁACHOWSKIEGO 3, 00-916 WARSAW
ZACHĘTA.ART.PL

Between Collectivism and Individualism — Japanese Avant-garde in the 1950s and 1960s

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art
25 November 2021–13 March 2022
curator: Maria Brewińska

Institution financed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland

Exhibition co-organized with The Japan Foundation
 Exhibition is realized in cooperation with:
 Takamatsu Art Museum, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo and the Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama
 Honorary Patronage: Embassy of Japan in Poland

partner of the exhibition: Polfa Tarchomin

Zachęta — National Gallery of Art presents a major exhibition of the Japanese avant-garde, showing works from two decades crucial for the development of contemporary art in the country. It was in the 1950s and 1960s, which followed the war and the experience of post-war trauma, that radical transformations took place, resulting in the emergence of the Japan we know today. The exhibition features works by the most important artists of the period, which are very rarely shown outside Japan, as well as documentation of the avant-garde movements of the time.

The need for rebirth after years of war meant that Japan of the 1950s and 1960s was characterised by an unprecedented dynamic of change. The country, recovering from the wartime devastation, grew at a dizzying pace into the largest economy in Asia and the second largest economy in the world — in 1964, Japan hosted the Tokyo Summer Olympics, and in 1970, the Expo'70 world exhibition opened in Osaka. The eponymous decades, although still anchored in the experiences of war and post-war political ferment, that became the period in which Japanese culture was redefined.

The works and documentation gathered in the exhibition represent the art fields that were developing at the time, such as painting, installation, performance, photography, film, drawing and printmaking, as well as the artistic practices that accompanied them. They reflect the dynamism and energy of art emerging in a unique period of socio-economic development of the country, which then, for the first time in its history, joined the global processes of change. This unique combination

of circumstances, but also the opening of Japan to Western influence, created favourable conditions for the development of avant-garde art in the 1950s. Artists who felt liberated from old patterns or ideas built new creative strategies far from the previously known forms imposed by the traditional hierarchy-based organisations and associations existing in Japan.

The exhibition at the Zachęta gallery presents works and artists who broke with the conventional understanding of art and focuses primarily on the phenomenon of avant-garde groups and artistic collectives emerging at the time. It includes works by the so-called reportage painters (also known as avant-garde realists), who dealt with the experience of war and radical post-war transformations, important political and social issues, crucial for understanding the reality of Japan at the time. In the politically turbulent 1950s, innovative art movements and groups emerged in various parts of the country. The network of interconnectedness of artistic individualities and collective practices the exhibition shows through the works and archival documents of groups such as Jikken Kōbō, the Democratic Artists Association, the Gutai Art Association, Kyūshū-ha [School of Kyushu] and the photographic group Vivo. The 1960s brought, on the one hand, a number of outstanding works by representatives of the older generation, and on the other, resulted in works by the new generation, whose radical installations and performances changed the face of the Japanese avant-garde. Visitors to the exhibition will be able to see works and documentation of actions by such groups as Neo Dada, Zero Jigen, Hi Red Center, the Play, Gun [Group Ultra Niigata], Bikyōtō and Provoke. Attempts to reconcile the seemingly contradictory attitudes of individualism and collectivism, which manifested in many ways, turned out to be invigorating for the development of Japanese contemporary art. As a result, the exhibition brings together the works and practices that have made Japan a new centre of artistic life.

More information about the exhibition: zacheta.art.pl

Press images: zacheta.art.pl/pl/prasa [to access Zachęta's press images, you will need to register]

media contact:

Olga Gawerska
 rzecznik@zacheta.art.pl, phone +48 603 510 112,
 Joanna Andruszko
 j.andruszko@zacheta.art.pl, phone +48 693 974 686