

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

RR-5
"From Space to Environment" - III
Manner

28 Uguisudani-machi
Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

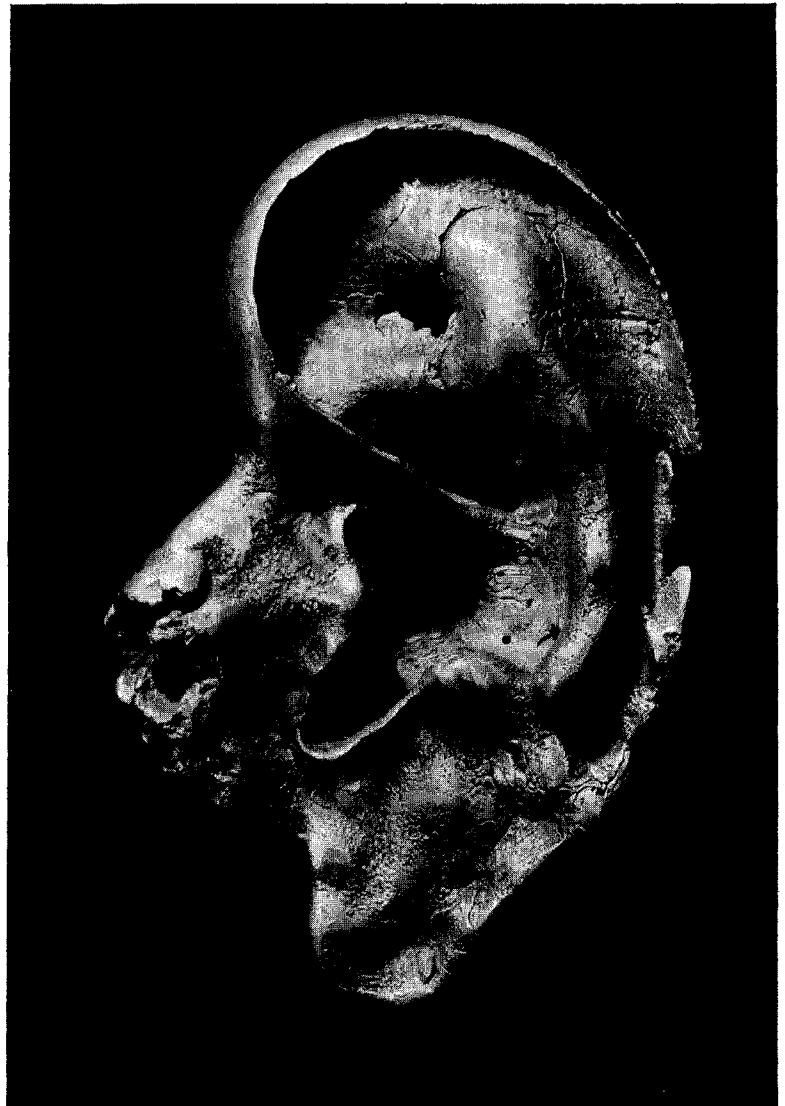
5 May 1967

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Dick:

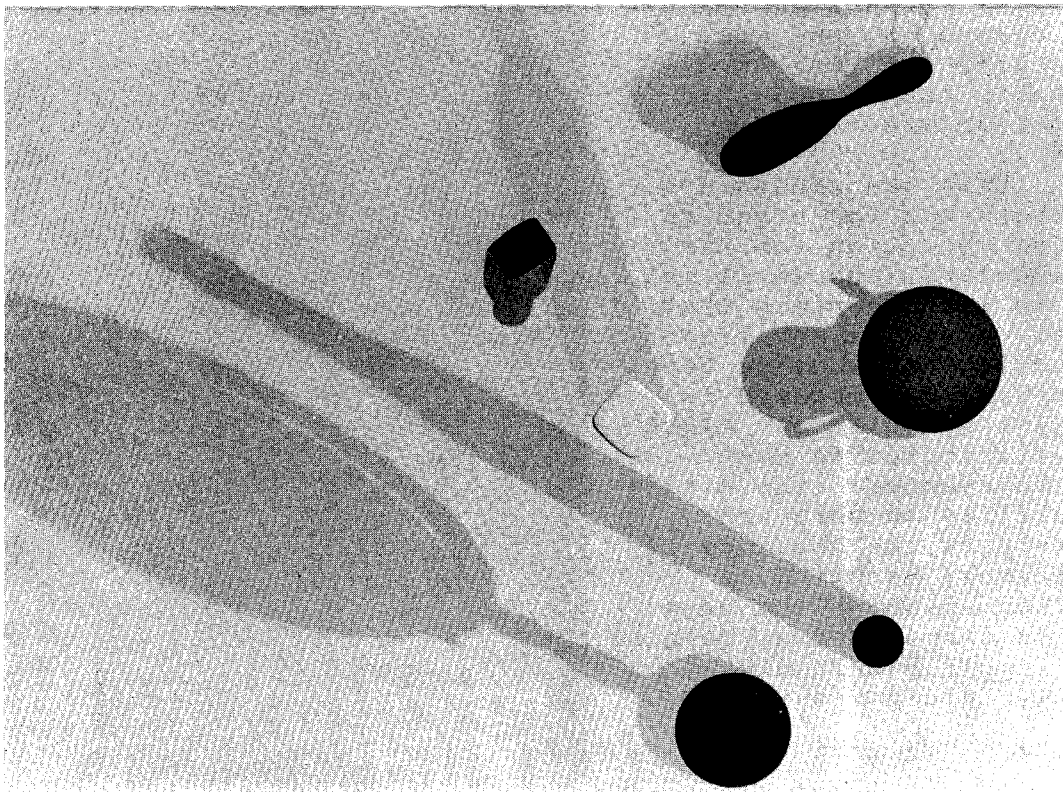
"To me, the ear is... a symbol of de-communication," says sculptor-painter Tomio Miki. "Through this symbol, I indicate the absurdity and futility of a world in which communication is impossible." Since 1962, Miki has concentrated single-mindedly on this image, producing huge aluminum models, surfaces populated by row upon row of identical gleaming ears, silk-screened lucite sheets, and numerous other variations. Some of the ears are scrupulously anatomical, others grotesquely distended, and most recently the image provoked a large, polished metal abstraction.

Miki has chosen not the eye but the organ of sound reception for his commentary, though it is by no means certain that what we see is any less chaotic than what we hear. The failure embodied in Miki's symbolic ear might be attributed to many circumstances: the mind's inability to sort and interpret the messages it receives; garbling or malformation of the messages themselves at origin; or simply overloading — satisfactory messages,



singly intelligible, which impinge upon the ear too frequently. The symbol implies a too rarely defined contemporary problem: selectivity. As Buckminster Fuller has pointed out, most hearing aids are unsatisfactory in that they rob us of the binaural faculties by which we normally "focus" attention on one sound source in a complex. The "aid" impartially amplifies all sounds in the environment and feeds them to the inner ear undifferentiated, producing a general cacophony. No doubt urban life would be a happier circumstance if we could develop more efficient methods of extracting from our surroundings only those stimuli which are relevant to our needs and intentions.

Painter Jiro Takamatsu paints shadows. Some of his canvases contain arrangements of objects as seen from above. From this vantage point, their shapes - familiar in normal perspective - become simplified but less familiar. The physical mass of a wine bottle, for example, is rendered without shading as a colored disc, but from the deliberately obscured fact of the bottle stretches a long and graceful shadow, by means of which its identity is revealed. Takamatsu reproduces shadows as accurately as possible from real situations, and varies them by his positioning of the source light. There is a variety of types: flaring shapes if the source is close to the object, converging areas when the light is relatively far away; and if a painting is contrived from six objects, each of their shadows suggests a different light source - strong, weak, near, far, high, low. This multiplicity, in turn, describes an impossible space, one which can absorb a good deal of logistic effort on the part of the viewer.



Takamatsu's means are simple but his subject matter is complex. Familiar things are often meaningless when viewed from an unusual perspective, or when robbed of their normal detail definition (similar loss of definition can result, of course, from insufficient attention). The effect that something produces as an intermediary between two other facts or forces (its shadow) may be far larger and more articulate than the thing itself. The nature of the effect depends almost more on relative positioning than upon the characteristics of the original object. Though "shadows" tend toward melodrama, Takamatsu's paintings are clinical. They question the viewer about consistency of perspective, location relationships, and also about the ways in which a thing (or a person) actually reveals itself.

One of the better known young architects in Japan is Arata Isozaki, who has written a book about "the invisible city." What he has in mind, I gather, is selective invisibility, that is, reorganizing needs and services so as to eliminate much of the reduplication and waste resulting from the conflicting priorities and uncoordinated planning which plagues cities. In his own structures, he has attempted to use color - as pigment and as light - to modify the cool separatism which is such a common by-product of contemporary architectural standards. The word "desubstantialize" comes up frequently in discussions of Isozaki's work, and relates to his use of light.

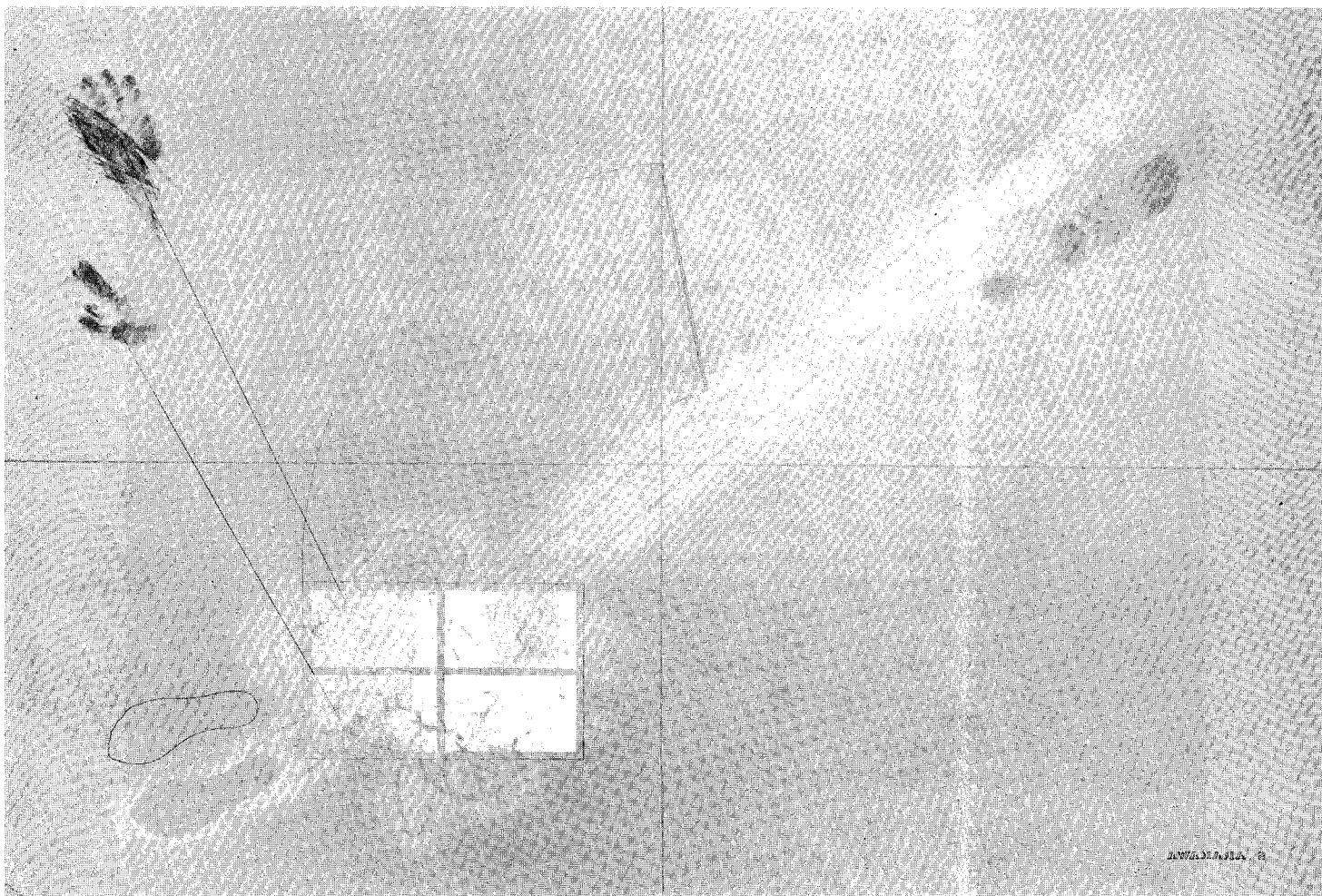
Far more tangible and assertive than the natural sort, colored light does not promote visual individuality. Rather, it neutralizes several normal object-qualities just as darkness does. It tends to draw together, to blur detail in favor of a focus on generalized shape. It is more obtrusive, more tangible than natural light. One is inclined to have misgivings about the practical effects of a visual analogy to the pervasive, insidious Muzak, but, in any case, it is an interesting attempt at practical application of "masking" (a situation in which one stimuli physically swallows or renders another of a similar sort undetectable)

Constructionist-painter Ay-O has been pursuing a related, if less restrained, approach in his "Rainbow Happening" series. Again, through pigment or light, a uniform system of colors is applied to a variety of objects and situations. Using as material a series of colored bands approximating the prismatic spectrum, this painter has striped everything from abstract shapes on canvas to a painted mock-up of the "Venus de Milo" and a "Rainbow Dinner" at the Café à Go-Go in New York. Though the rainbow probably attracted his attention because of its nostalgic "camp" qualities, it has other attractive characteristics. The spectrum, as a reality, is difficult to define precisely, though it is uniformly ordered. Ay-O has attempted to efface the subtlety of the real thing by simplifying its complex shadings into monochromatic bands of equal width, but the non-defining implication remains. Rainbows can also overlay without obscuring. In Ay-O's "Happenings" a diverse but orderly cosmetic, a banal ornamentation, is meticulously applied, without apparent discrimination. They are visual metaphors

for urban adornment, for synthetics, neon, chrome, and billboards.

Another Japanese artist, Shinjiro Okamoto, employs even more vivid colors in his cartoon-like designs. With such seemingly whimsical names as "Ninth Little Indian," "Western Dog," or "The Big Laugh," and blunt, outlined shapes, his work is superficially "pop." Closer examination dispels this impression, revealing that the component shapes are generalized, producing effect by combination - that the content is implicit rather than explicit, in spite of the directness of the overall form. The more one looks, the more the appearance of decorative good humor gives way to one of unsettling rancor. Okamoto confirms that "beneath the amusing scene there is hidden poison," and this is a pointed reversal of the traditional Japanese position regarding beauty (that it should lie beneath the surface, only to be revealed after a proper interval of observation). "In this age of materialism," Okamoto continues, "how can Tokyo's inhabitants hear a voice of another race when they cannot even hear their own people's voice?" There is more, I think, to the surface facts of his intended aural allegory than to its innuendo.

Shusaku Arakawa has, like Takamatsu, drawn on the legacy of Marcel Duchamp, though more directly. His series of "Diagrams"



over the past five years has dealt with transformation, silhouette, and words. At first, these works suggested explicit operations which might be, and were, performed one at a time on common objects. In one painting, for example, four different tubes are shown in a draftsman-like manner, one normal, one bent, another twisted forcibly, and the last cleanly cut. In some states it is precisely drawn, while in others a tube is actually affixed to the canvas. In the case of the tubes, Arakawa took a basic form out of its normal context of overlapping influences and showed it at discrete moments under the impact of readily understood forces.

Later, he used the air-brushed silhouettes of objects (feathers, footprints, combs, umbrellas) in a simplified yet not obvious context of guidelines, arrows, and proliferation. Now, his arena has been still further reduced so that paintings consist of arrangements of silhouetted labels: "Smell," "Tube," etc. The artist says that he is attempting to "pictorialize the state before the imagination begins to work." From another point of view, his painting could be seen as a reflection of the perplexities confronting anyone who tries to see, and to understand, even a small portion of what is around him. Arakawa's process implies scientific method. Take a simple object. Remove it from its everyday context and subject it to known forces. How does it behave? What does it consist of? If we are left with a silhouette or only a label, what has been lost or gained?

The artists described above are in no sense a group, nor have they ever professed common aims. I have commented on them individually because I feel their work all relates to the factors outlined in "From Space to Environment" - II, Motivation for the Exhibition. These included national experience with the collision of opposing forces (most evidently East with West); traditional attitudes toward space and environment as evinced in the tea ceremony, architecture, and gardens; linguistic predilections toward certain aspects of reality (including the concepts of ma and nagame); and Japanese urban existence, particularly as it is lived in Tokyo.

Whether or not the foregoing artists have privately rationalized the nature of their efforts I am not prepared to say. There are some intriguing omissions to the pattern of response. None of them, for example, uses "junk" - industrial or domestic cast-offs - either in collage or sculpting, nor to my knowledge does any other artist here. Such materials, which are seminal to many Western artists, are certainly available in Japan and it is impossible to believe that their omission stems from respect for the things themselves or what they represent.

My intention, however, is not to categorize and label, but rather to observe the Japanese scene and determine whether any useful patterns emerge. One primary area of potential importance is the nature of the Japanese artist's reaction to his environ-

ment (physical and social), and "From Space to Environment" provided an excellent opportunity to begin looking into this. Having commented on some individuals, I will pass to collective activities.

Though most of the group art shows in Japan are huge displays arranged by the numerous and monolithic art societies, there are a few enterprising dealers such as the Minami or the Tokyo Gallery which sponsor half a dozen fine one-man shows each season. In contrast to the faceless jumble of mass showings, the smaller galleries accept the responsibilities of selectivity and attempt to focus their displays. Last Fall, just preceding "From Space to Environment," critic Yoshiaki Tono organized a sculpture exhibition for Kusuo Shimizu's Minami Gallery called "Color and Space." As a critic and as a personality, Tono is an active force in the Japanese art scene. He has traveled extensively, and always returns to bring some new trend or idea to the attention of Japanese artists. His display was a precursor to the large Matsuya presentation - as are, in a sense, the individual products described above.

The poster for the show was unusual, and through it a number of notable features emerge. It is basically a plan for the installation of the pieces, and the relatively dark border which encloses the upper right and lower left areas indicates the gallery's floor space. Juxtaposed, in approximately the positions they appeared in at the show, are drawings of the sculptures themselves. They are not the sort of sketches which one ordinarily associates with a sculptor, but technical drawings which specify precisely, along with others like them, the artists' intentions. These drawings are submitted to machine shops where craftsmen who know the materials well (though not the artist's ultimate aims) execute them in the same way they might the plans for an office cabinet.

In the upper right appear two views (the two arms of an "M") of a section of Katsuhiko Yamaguchi's contribution, which, according to Tono, provoked the show. It is made of plastic, with two clear units and two that are blue. The blue sections radiate a diffused light which is borrowed by the clear units and the surrounding space. From the center of one of the clear units, a rotating, red light beam periodically sweeps through the neighboring volume as well. Again as with Isozaki, colored light becomes a means of redefining, or undefining, the local space. It is this feature which attracted Tono's interest and led to the naming of the entire show. Though the other artists admittedly used both elements, only in Yamaguchi's piece was a combine of color and space (or in space) convincingly achieved. Success or failure resulted from orientation: whether color was applied to or emitted from the sculpture.

Tono had a relatively easy time arranging a group show in his attempt to plead a common theme, but the committee which met to discuss "From Space to Environment" faced formidable difficulties. The individual artist can chart his path, more or

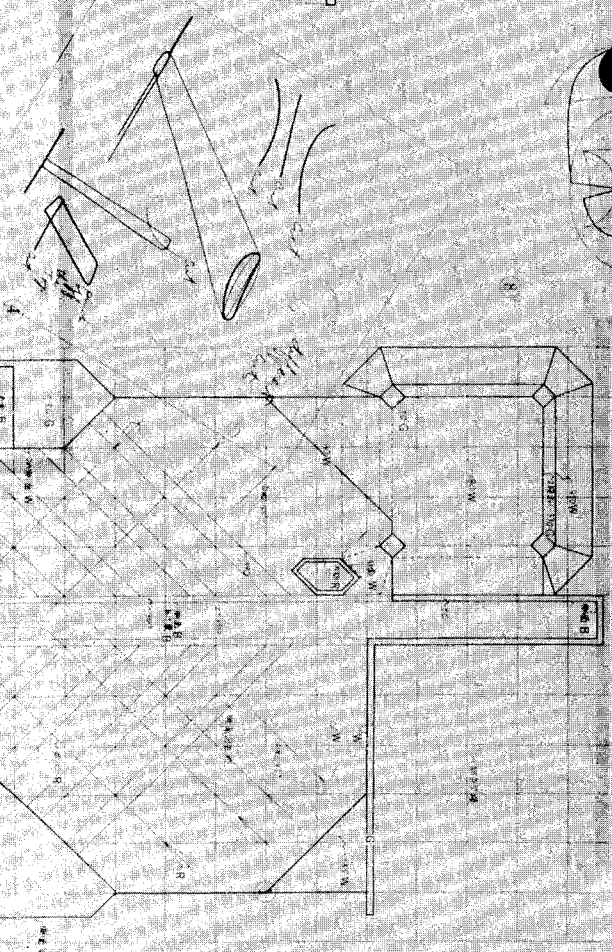
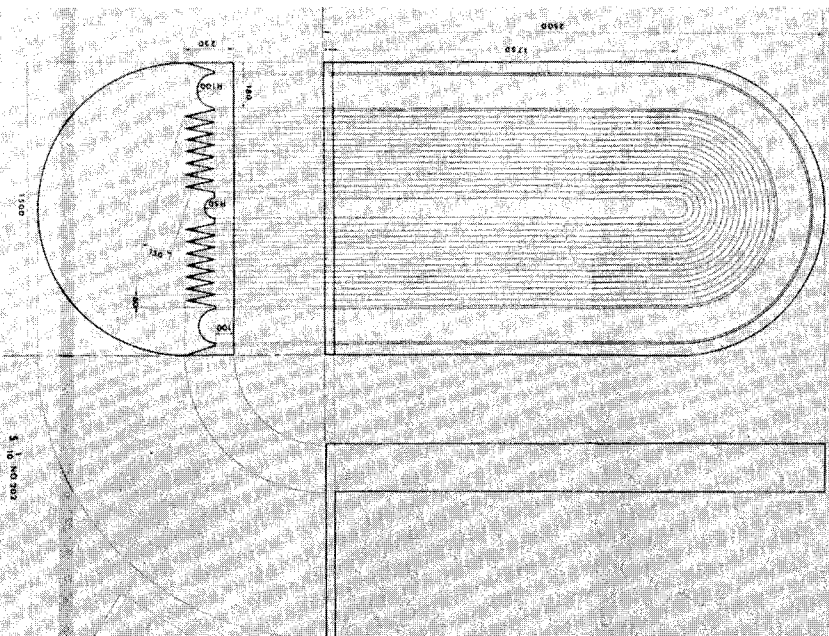
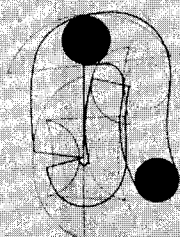
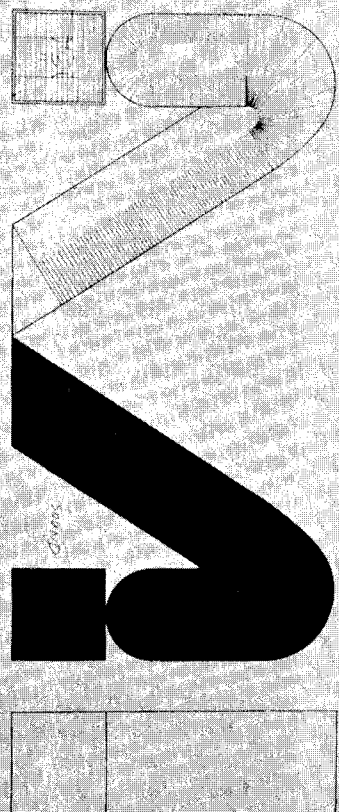
less consciously, and a lone organizer, through careful selection, can uncover suspected intersection. A diverse selection of artists, however, one which includes architects, industrial designers, painters, sculptors, and musicians, must resolve differences in professional, functional, and aesthetic attitudes. In the present case there were also limitations of exhibition space, planning time, and financial support.

Initially, the aim was to present something in the nature of a unified product to which everyone's skills contributed but from which no "personal" features could be traced. The Japanese are accustomed to group activities and loyalties but always within a somewhat authoritarian or correctly architectonic structure, thus identity is a particularly poignant question. The Matsuya exhibition was to be a freely cooperative enterprise. Individual suggestions were diverse: a labyrinth; a complex total space which would bombard the visitor with an altered and intensified reworking of his appearance, sounds, and actions; or an enormous void, purposefully empty of stimulation and responsiveness. Though these ideas are drastically different in form, they all spring from individual reactions to an oppressive daily environment, I think.

Regrettably, though not surprisingly, the organizational and financial demands which the initial themes required could not be met within the available time, so a compromise was reached, one which was, in effect, antithetical to the original aims. Each participant created at personal expense, some element appropriate to the theme, and they were all combined, anonymously, under the direction of architect Isozaki. Enough funds were available for a reasonably elaborate installation, and it was hoped that something in the way of an "environment" could be achieved. (With respect to this aim, the organizers were, of course, approaching the ideals of New York "Happeners" and "Environmentalists.") In order to reduce the implication of diversity which individually named and attributed works have, it was agreed that all exhibited items would be designated by numbers only, and that these would be explained in a key at the back of the exhibition brochure. This satisfied no one. After spending so much time and money, the artists were less inclined toward submersion in an ideal, while the labels - albeit numerical - remained, attesting that there were distinct sources for the visitor to uncover. But before discussing visitor reaction, and what the exhibition led to, I would like to spend a few paragraphs on the subject of "anonymity."

"Groups" are becoming an increasingly common feature of the art world everywhere, and this may be due to the individual's growing awareness of personal impotence as well as the need for borrowing skills and information. It is difficult for an artist even to remain apprised of the new media which are constantly

COLOR and SPACE



山口 勝弘
YAMAGUCHI katsuhiko

②

アントレーイト
anne TRUITT

③

サム フランシス
sam FRANCIS

④

三木 富雄
MIKI tomio

⑤

田中 信太郎
TANAKA shintaro

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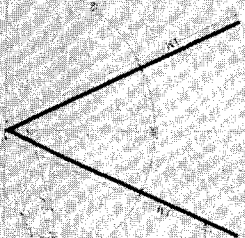
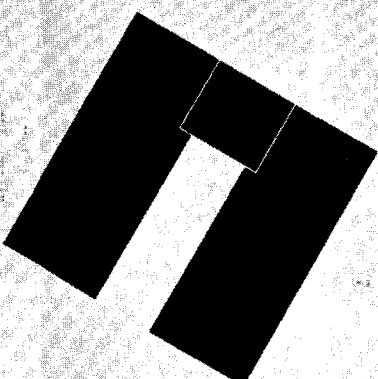
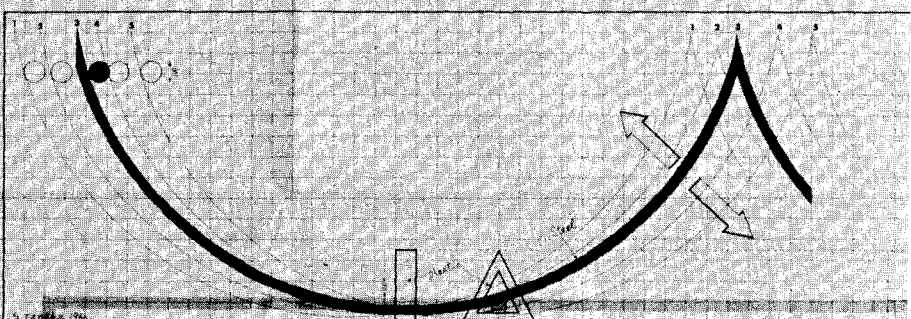
湯原 和夫
YUHARA kazuo

⑦

五 東 衛
GOTO mamoru

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企画 東野 芳明
Organized by TONO yoshiaki



色彩と空間展

9.26 — 10.13

日本橋 南 画廊

MINAMI GALLERY

becoming available, let alone to learn the technical details of their manipulation. As a result, he has increasingly pooled information with other artists - each of whom has a region of technical fluency in at least one new medium - and with technical people (engineers, machinists, electronics technicians).

It is not yet by any means clear what the new alliances will do for or to "the artist" as we have thought of him during the past several centuries. New functional or expressive requirements naturally stimulate an artist's interest in emerging materials and techniques. These may even be the actual subject of his efforts. But the range of training necessary for such flexibility is beyond most workers in the field of art, and they are forced into alliances, and, subsequently, rationalization of each new position. When a sculptor sends a drawing to a machine shop which then returns to him a completed object, he will face obvious (though not necessarily relevant) questions as to who or what is responsible for the result. Some profess reverence for anonymity or coöperative facelessness, while others exhibit their works without reference to the borrowed technical skills involved, accepting the "credit" if it comes.

Art history is full of coöperative enterprise, of course, and we have traditionally bestowed praise or blame on the man who has conceived and guided the product. Many of the old masters had studios full of apprentices or assistants, and the sculptor's actual casting has usually been entrusted to skilled artisans (A good foundry was a important in the 16th century as a good machine shop is now.). In recent years, however, it has not always been clear whether the idea or effect of a work actually is the result of the artist or the "technical assistance."

Frequently, there is no way that a sculptor could personally determine the potential for light transmission, fabrication, surface working, or flexibility of a new medium. He can only ask, listen, and select from what is revealed by the technician. With regard to light, electronics, remote control, programmed mechanical activity, computerized information sifting and decision-making, the phenomena themselves are so commanding that the artist ends in sponsoring rather than manipulating these materials.

Further, to facilitate the present, presumably transitional period, it would seem essential to keep accurate track - publicly - of the identity and contribution of each participant in any "art" product or process. This is good for individual morale and allows us to keep track of which elements (and of who) are succeeding and of where and why trouble occurs. After last Fall's "Theater and Engineering" festival in New York City, criticism was more careless and uninformed than usual and this may be partly blamed on the organizers' policy of silence about technical problems and personal responsibilities.

It is natural that there should be a certain amount of

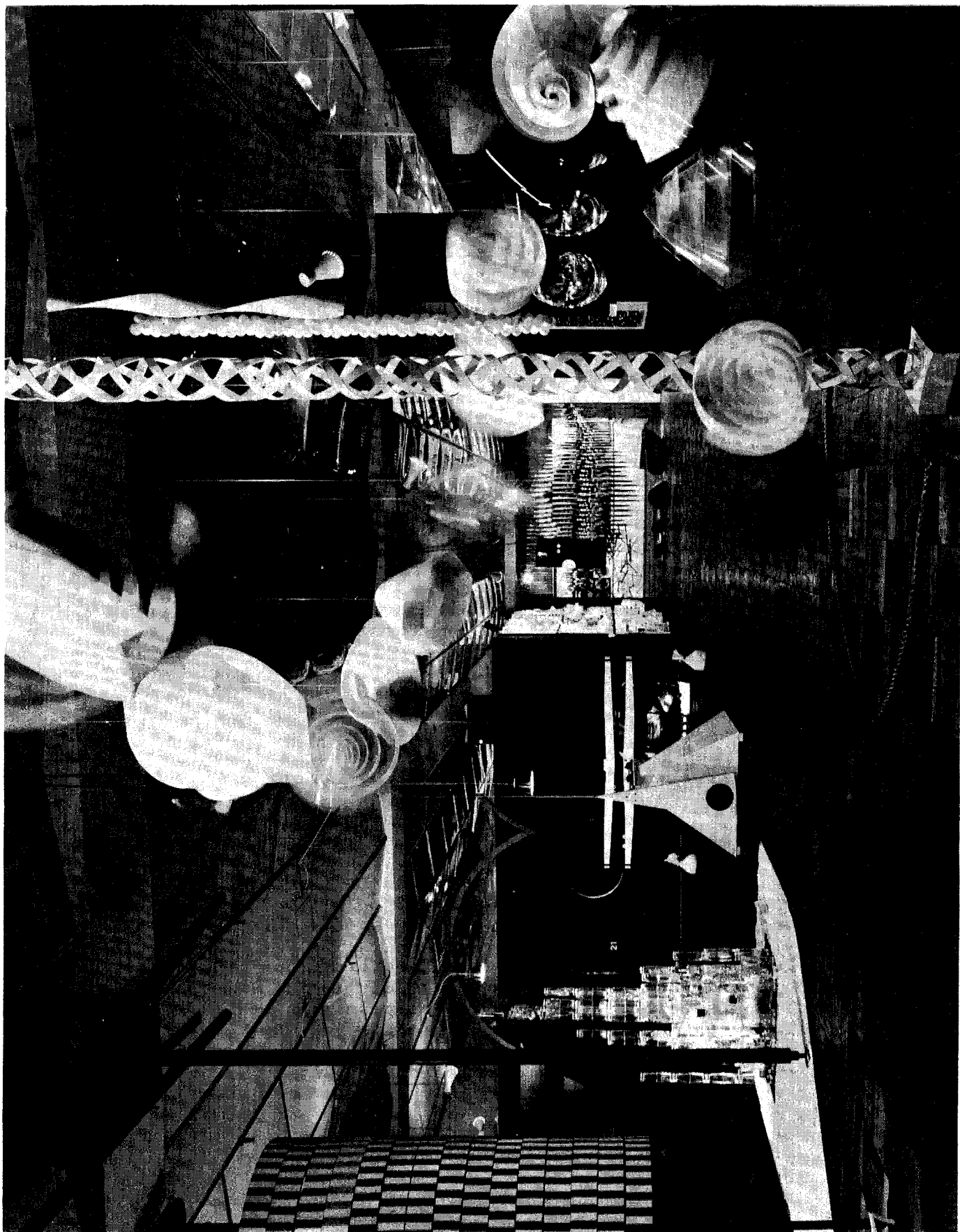
confusion over roles and functions, and that groups should provide some relief from these uncertainties. Anonymity is one way of avoiding the strain of definition, but, I think, an unfortunate one. The artist's role will either alter (and perhaps ultimately evaporate) or his training will, in time, equip him with the technical facility he presently lacks. Things move too swiftly now for easy assimilation in the manner of preceding centuries. In the meantime, it is useful to clearly define who is responsible for what. The avoidance of labels or crediting doesn't add cohesion to the product. The exhibition "From Space to Environment" was not made into a unified gestalt - an "environment" - by the avoidance of name tags. The products were individual and no amount of artifice on the part of Isozaki could have forced them into a comfortable, consistent context.

In this sense, the show was, admittedly, a failure. The public responded as one might have expected, with interest and amusement, but hardly with a total involvement or an "inner-collapse." As the accompanying photograph indicates, the all-over effect was quite lively but reminiscent of particularly adventure-some gift shops. The manifesto which I quoted last month ended with an exhortation to the visitor: "Please engage yourself. Involve yourself in the environment we have provided....," but as critic Tono observed, the public's response was on an altogether trivial plane, even though, in some instances, it was too eager. Crowds make it difficult to sort out the special elements of the surroundings. The works by Ichiyonagi and Akiyama, assisted by Okuyama, which I mentioned in the first newsletter on the exhibition, were overtaxed almost to the point of collapse. Constantly surrounded and subjected to light-hearted experiment, the sound devices were unable to produce subtle or sustained responses to individuals. Having been released from the normal standards of reserved decorum, the public was delighted to thump, twist, knock, rub, and prod, but there was no evidence that anything more than a manipulative involvement was attained by any of the spectators.

Realistically, more could not have been expected. A crowded exhibition hall in a large department store does not provide a contemplative atmosphere. Possibly a careful programming of visitors so that crowds could not collect inside, and each person could move in response to his own wishes, might have improved things, but zoos would also profit from this approach.

In the absence of fundamental reforms, social, educational, and psychological, the only obvious direction for the artist or exhibitor is toward larger and more powerful environments which compel a reorientation on the "spectator's" part. The organizers of "From Space to Environment" have not given up and are now engaged in some promising discussion. Though the result of their first exhibition was unsatisfactory, the attempt was admirable, and a good deal was learned. Now the same group has been given a voice in preparations for the Japanese World's Fair, Expo. '70, as the "Committee for Special Research on Events."

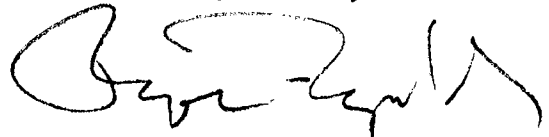
At the turn of the century, the Eiffel Tower appropriately



represented the emergent strength of industrialism and the control of structural materials. Now, the Japanese feel, invisible forces (laser beams, electronic speed, atomic energy) and the potential for action at a distance are more characteristic of the times. Though the variable nature of large governmental projects must be born in mind, it seems likely that the idea behind the physical preparations for the World's Fair at Osaka in 1970 will be "the invisible monument." Display pavilions will be clustered around an enormous "Festival Plaza" over 50,000 square meters in area. In this space, large scale events - hopefully including bullfights, dance, Greek drama, and even colossal "happenings" - are to take place. The space will not be passive, but rather geared to encourage the extraordinary by means of massive and flexible technical facilities. An enormous portable crane has been suggested in the base of which sound studios, lighting equipment, television and radio control rooms are planned. With its aid, theatrical space could be achieved anywhere - either stationary or moving. Means are also being explored for providing an unprecedented climate and lighting control over the whole outdoor space.

The opportunity for younger artists to influence environment on a large scale, even if only for a temporary facility, is due in large part to the exhibition discussed here. It served as a focus for the range of critical response which such individuals feel toward contemporary surroundings, but are generally powerless to express in broad public terms. It also demonstrated - if incompletely - the fact that the practical implementation of these personal but socially directed responses is technically and psychologically feasible. Some of the items in "From Space to Environment" succeeded in promoting an interaction, though in a somewhat docile and cooperative fashion. They made one hopeful that technology can, in time, be made to flexibly serve the aesthetic needs of a mass public. At present, it seems more intent on stamping out an endless deluge of perfectly unspontaneous, identical, and unresponsive objects destined for discard in contempt or boredom.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Roger Reynolds', with a stylized, flowing script.

Roger Reynolds

Received in New York May 15, 1967.