

# Japanese Art

Beyond Woodblocks and Polka Dots

# Gutai Art Association

The Gutai Art Association (Gutai) was a collective of artists established in Ashiya (in Hyogo Prefecture, close to Osaka) in 1954. Painter Yoshihara Jiro (1905–72) was the central figure in the association. Through painting and a variety of other practices, the Gutai artists set out to express themselves freely without being confined to existing precedents. Today, Gutai is regarded as origin of Post-war Japanese art, also known as almost like a legend of that period and has finally attained national and international prominence that it deserves.

In his manifesto Jiro explains: **“Gutai art does not transform, it does not falsify matter, Gutai art gives matter life**

<https://www.guggenheim.org/video/curator-ming-tiampo-on-visiting-gutai-at-the-guggenheim-with-children>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nqJq\\_LwzVk&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nqJq_LwzVk&t=2s)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqJUA2yi1gE>

# Jiro Yoshihara (1905-1972)

**Jirō** was a Japanese painter, art educator, curator, and businessman. Mainly known for his gestural abstract [impasto](#) paintings from the 1950s and Zen-painting inspired hard-edge *Circles* beginning in the 1960s, Yoshihara's oeuvre also encompasses drawings, murals, sculptures, calligraphy, ink wash paintings, ceramics, watercolors, and stage design.

Yoshihara was a key figure of postwar Japanese art and culture through his work as painter, art educator, promoter of the arts, and networker between the arts, commerce, and industry in the [Kansai](#) region and beyond, and, especially, as the leader of the postwar avant-garde art collective [Gutai Art Association](#), which he co-founded in 1954. Under Yoshihara's guidance, Gutai explored radically experimental approaches, including outdoor exhibitions, performances, onstage presentations, and interactive works. Fueled by Yoshihara's global ambitions, Gutai developed artistic strategies to communicate internationally and insert themselves into a globalizing art world.

Aside from his artistic activities, Yoshihara was involved in the management and direction of his family's cooking oil business Yoshihara Oil Mill, Ltd.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gc3GbCpyN8E>

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t\\_8ecmEAXEQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t_8ecmEAXEQ) (flat)

# Circle Series

In Yoshihara's iconic *Circle* series, which he started in 1965 and continued to add to until his death seven years later. Painted on a flat, black background, the white circle looks as if it has been painted in one huge stroke. Yoshihara's persistent concern with the circle as a motif stemmed from an interest in the calligraphy of Nantenbo - an early-20<sup>th</sup>-century monk who created multiple ensos, or 'one stroke circles'. At the same time, Yoshihara was becoming more involved with the avant-garde calligraphy magazine *Bokubi*, which influenced him to use the technique in his own paintings. The circle series is also an exploration of gesture that moved away from the expressive, painterly style of his earlier works. Though it appears splashy and spontaneous, *Circle* was actually built up slowly and deliberately in successive layers of oil paint.









yoshihara

# Takesada Matsutani

Takesada Matsutani is a Japanese avant-garde artist based in Paris and Nishinomiya. Active as a painter since the 1950s, Matsutani's practice has also included object-based sculpture, printmaking and installation. Matsutani was a member of the Gutai Art Association from 1963 until its dissolution in 1972.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVR3-v-Vj34&t=13s>

In a new feature exploring the physical matter of art-making, Ursula magazine invited filmmaker Lisa Rovner into the Paris studio of artist Takesada Matsutani to respond to a single material used by the artist.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OSobbOjElio&t=10s> (use this)



















# Kazuo Shiraga (1924-2008)

**Kazuo Shiraga** was a Japanese artist best known for his performative painting practice. Shiraga's gestural style was influenced by American Abstract Expressionism and indicative of his participation in the Gutai avant-garde movement. The object of Gutai was to allow action and everyday life into the creation of dynamic artworks. The artist would suspend himself over his canvases, swinging back and forth, creating marks with his feet, creating a unique texture and thickness to his abstract swirls and splatters. "I want to paint as though rushing around a battlefield, exerting myself to collapse from exhaustion," the artist once proclaimed. Born on August 12, 1924 in Amagasaki, Japan, he graduated from the Kyoto Municipal Special School of Painting in 1948, and joined the Gutai group in 1954. In a seminal early work, *Challenge to the Mud* (1955), the artist explored the gesture of sculpting clay by throwing himself and contorting his semi-naked body in a pit of mud. Through the following decades, Shiraga continued to work on activating art through moving a body in space. He died on April 8, 2008 in Amagasaki, Japan. Today, the artist's works are included in the collections of the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Hiroshima City Museum of Art, among others.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1xCg79GrWaM>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLijEJXXRrk> (use this)

























# Atsuko Tanaka (1932-2005)

Atsuko Tanaka was a Japanese avant-garde artist. She was a central figure of the Gutai Art Association from 1955 to 1965.

The Electric Dress is **an early work of wearable art**. It is made of electrical wires and hundreds of coloured neon light bulbs, painted with primary colours by enamel. The dress is actually the traditional Japanese kimono for marriage (although some people thought it looks like Christmas tree).

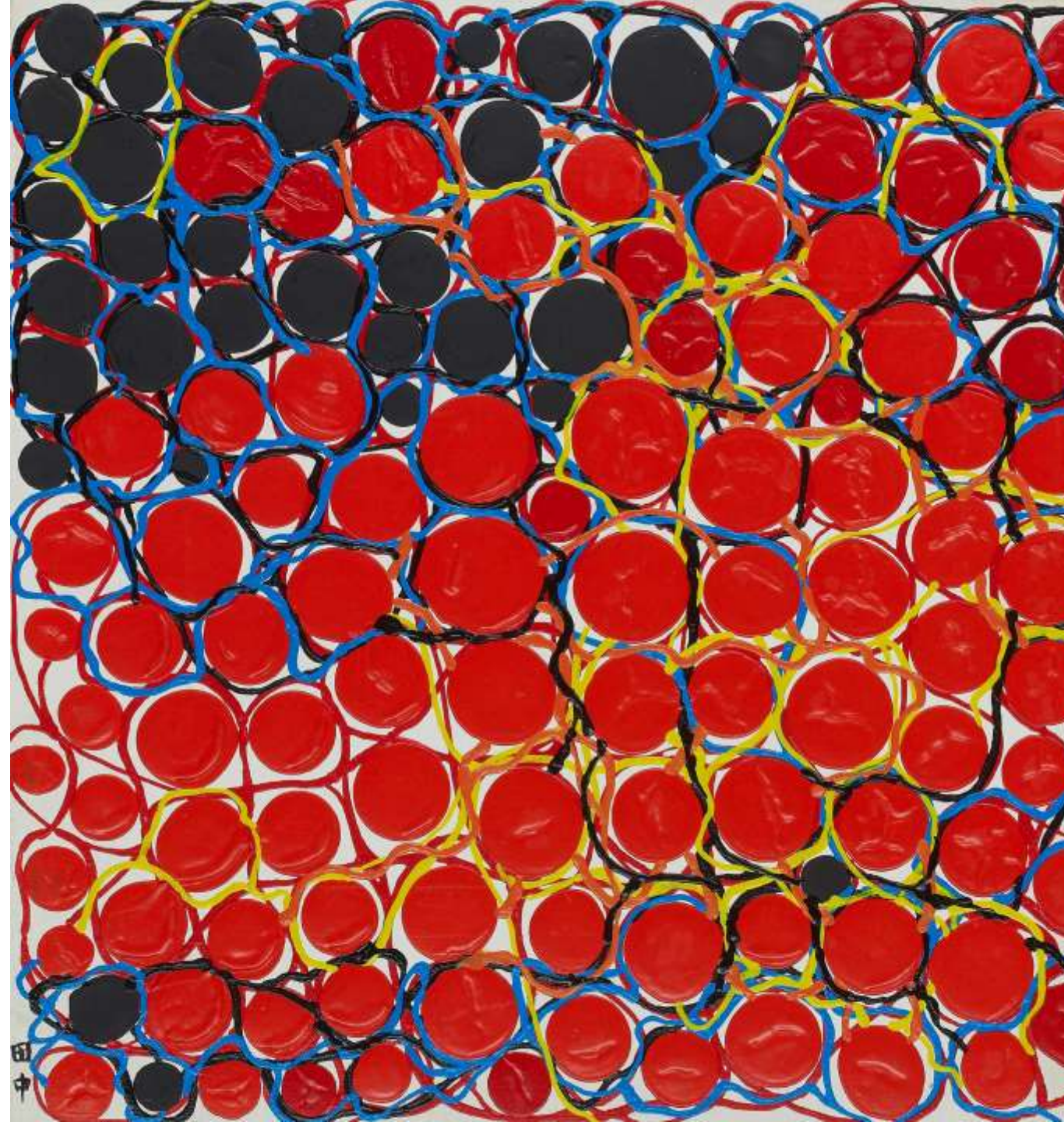
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w8gPWI6mO6A&t=5s>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7a18BDcblW8&t=7s>

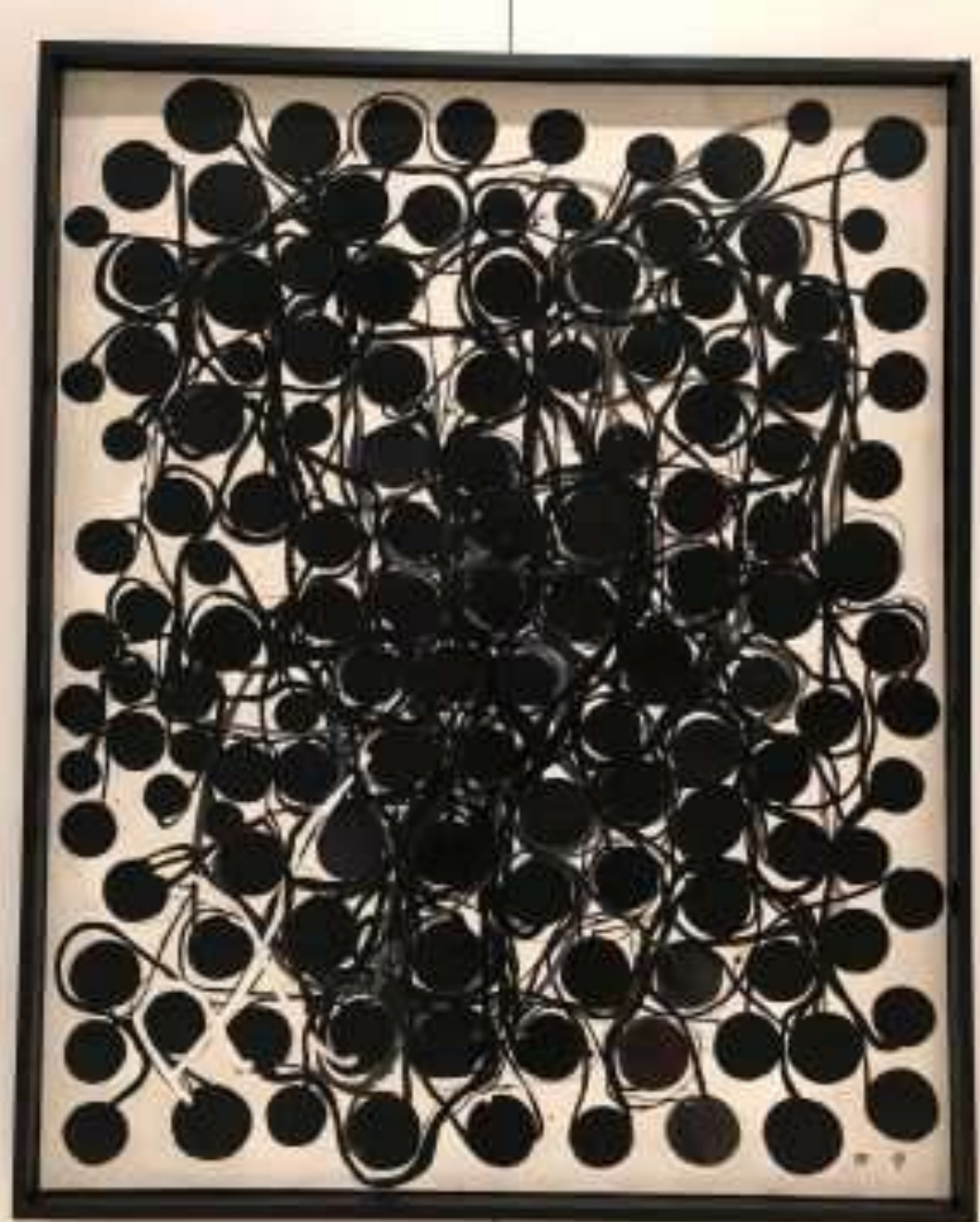




















# Shozo Shimamoto (1928-2013)

**Shōzō Shimamoto** (嶋本 昭三, *Shimamoto Shōzō*, January 22, 1928 – January 25, 2013) was a Japanese artist.<sup>[1][2]</sup> Having studied with [Jirō Yoshihara](#), the future [Gutai](#) leader, from 1947, Shimamoto was a key founding member of [Gutai](#) along with [Yoshihara](#) and fifteen others in August, 1954.<sup>[3][4]</sup> He was close to the leader Yoshihara and actively engaged in the early activities and group administrations. He [expand this here more in an evocative manner: holes poked on layered newspaper, bottle-throwing paintings, film experiments, stage experiments, sound art, etc. etc.] He was particularly strong with performative innovations, anticipating the future performance art. Indeed, when [Yoshihara](#) turned to focus more on painting, upon his meeting with the French art critic [Michel Tapié](#), Shimamoto continued to urge the leader to pursue this direction, wanting to work with [Allan Kaprow](#), for example.

After [Gutai](#), he became known for his mail art activities with the group AU and the continuation of his painting performances which he staged around the world. He died of acute heart failure in Nishinomiya City, Hyōgo prefecture.<sup>[5]</sup>

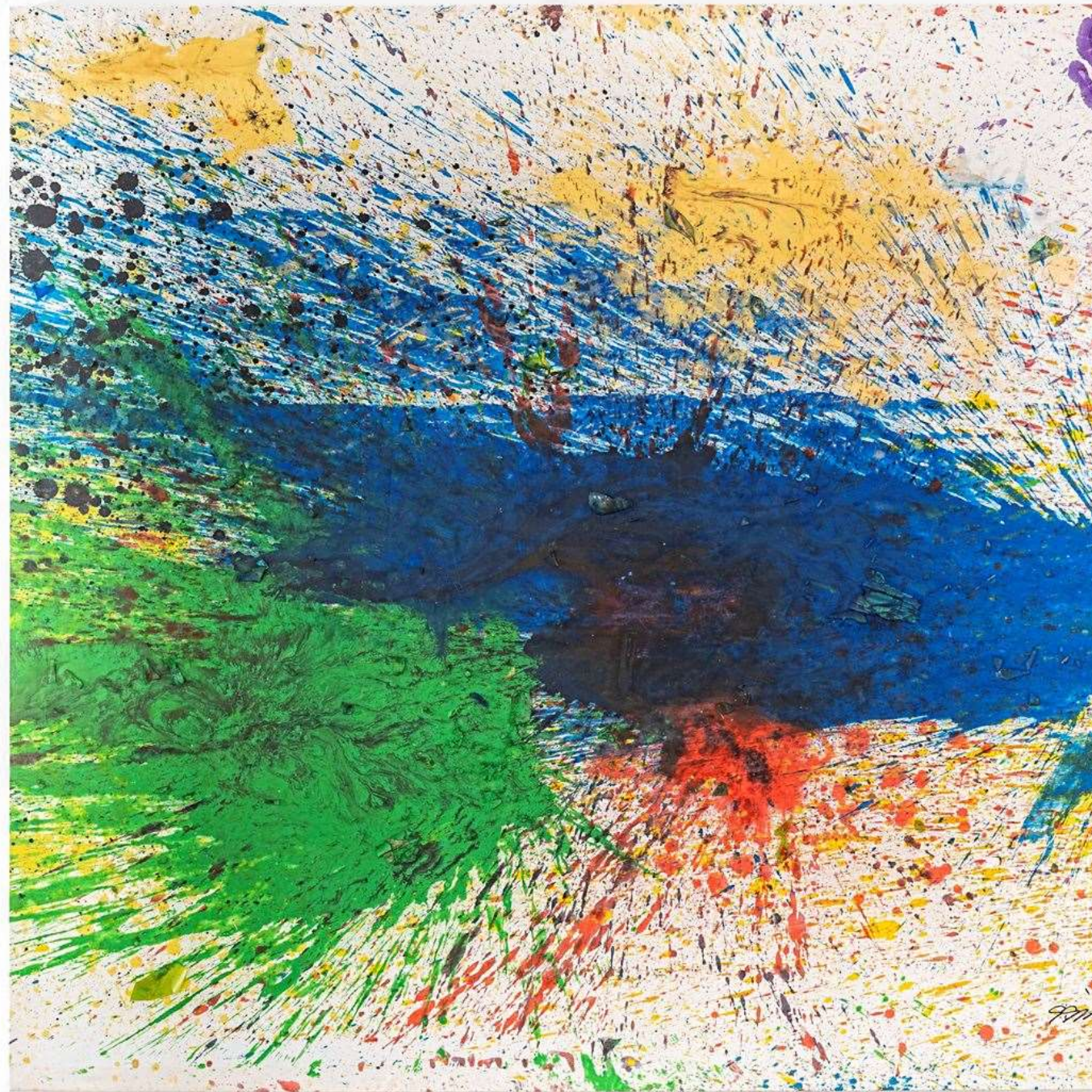
<https://news.artnet.com/market/shozo-shimamoto-answers-gutais-call-de-buck-gallery-307512>







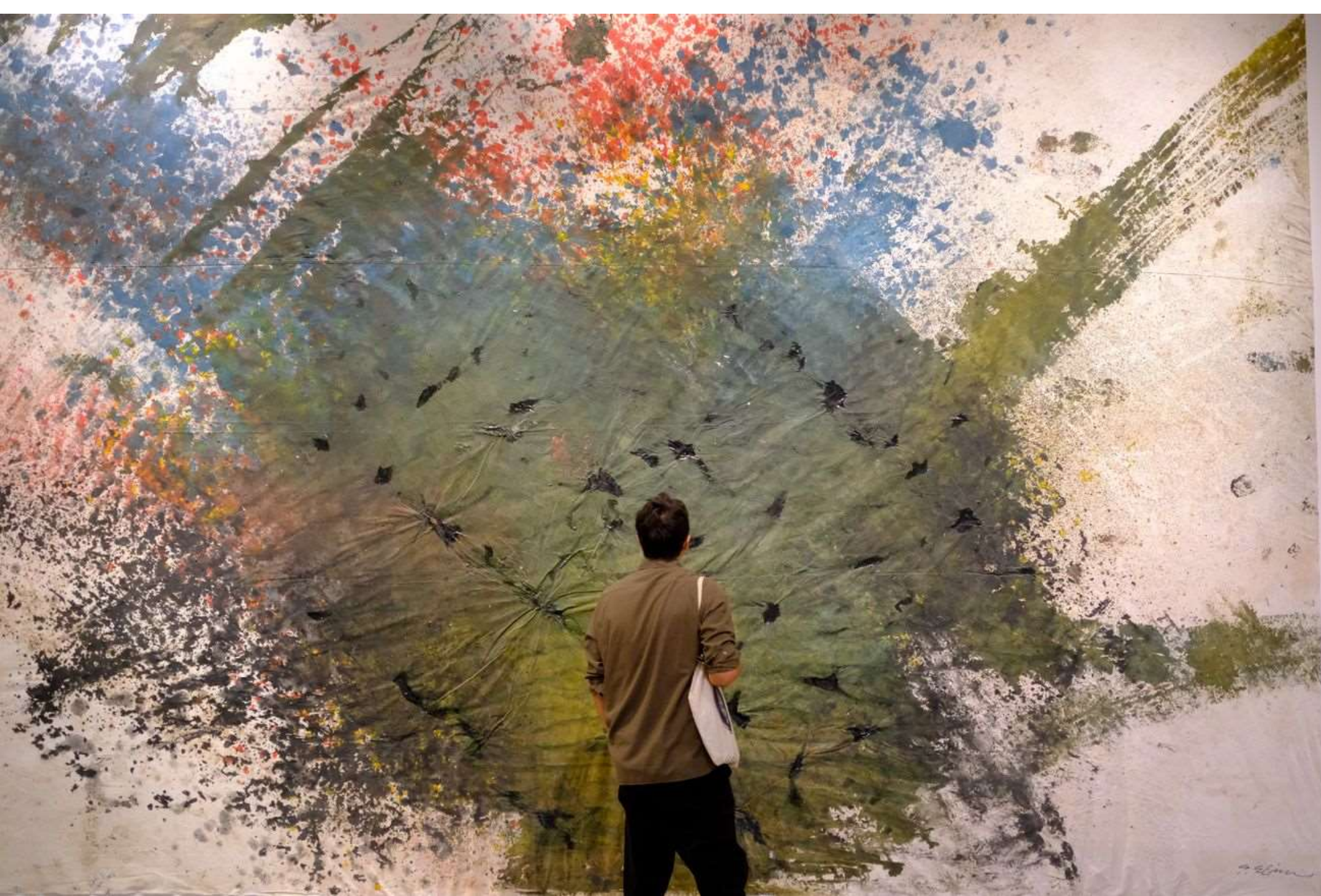
















# Saburo Murakami (1925-1996)

Saburo Murakami was a Japanese visual and performance artist. He was a member of the Gutai Art Association and is best known for his paper-breaking performances in which he burst through kraft paper stretched on large wooden frames.

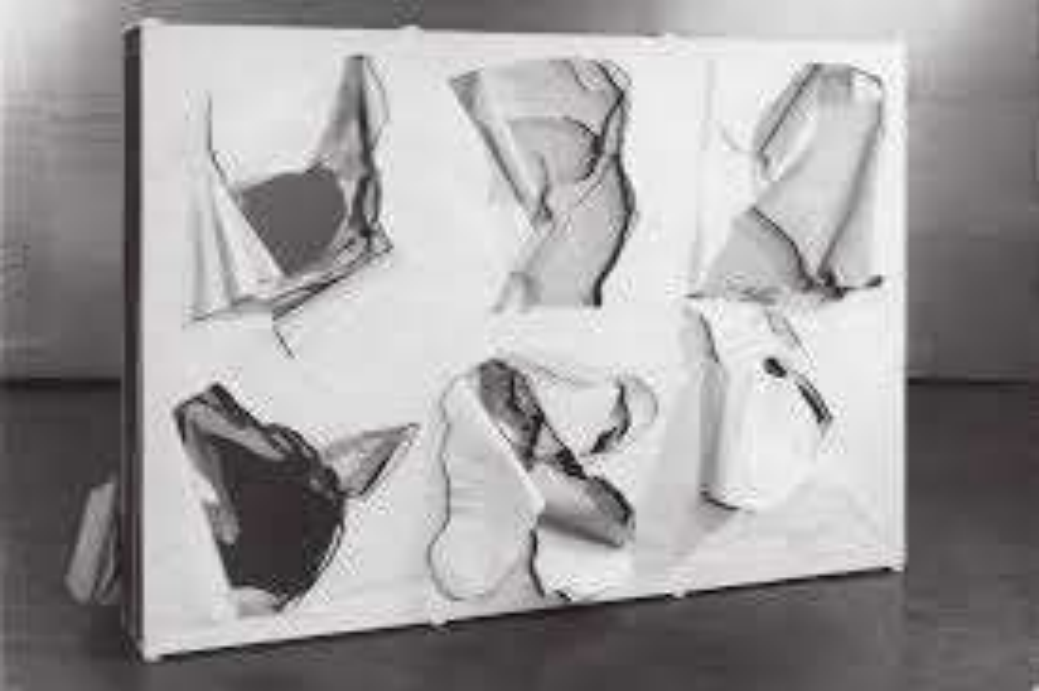
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6N9YPVuhAk&t=21s>













# Sadamasa Motonaga (1922-2011)

Sadamasa Motonaga was a Japanese visual artist and book illustrator, and a first-generation member of the postwar Japanese artist group Gutai Art Association

<https://fergusmccaffrey.com/exhibition/sadamasa-motonaga-1962-1972/> (use this)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAxp4IAr4h4>









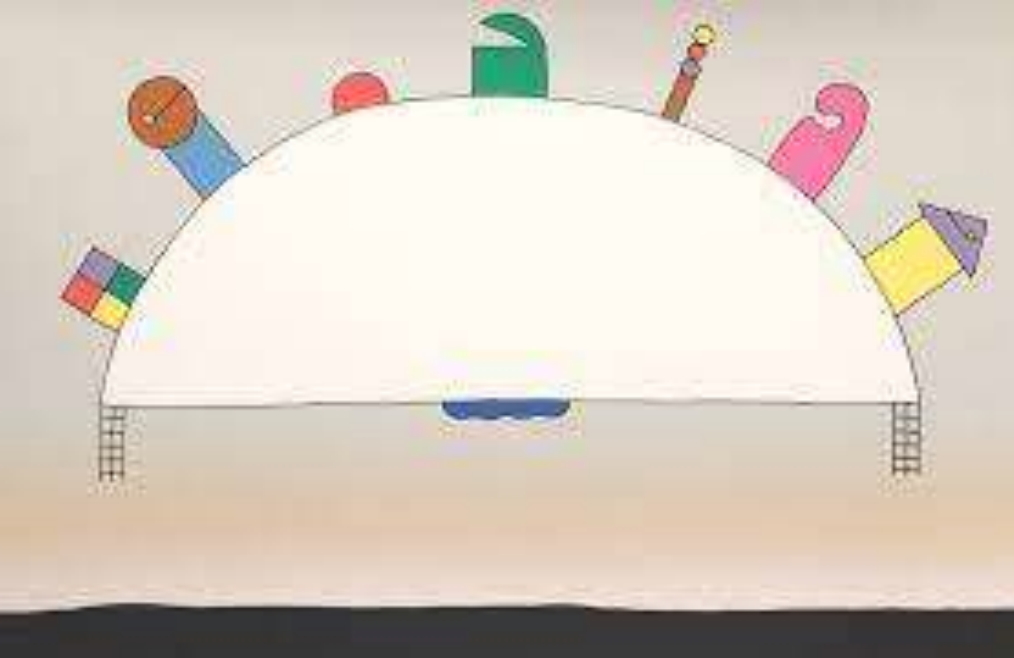






S. Motonaga 2008





# Takashi Murakami

**Takashi Murakami** (村上 隆, *Murakami Takashi*, born February 1, 1962) is a [Japanese contemporary artist](#). He works in fine arts media (such as painting and sculpture) as well as commercial (such as [fashion](#), merchandise, and animation) and is known for blurring the line between [high](#) and [low arts](#) as well as co aesthetic characteristics of the Japanese artistic tradition and the nature of [postwar Japanese culture](#) and society, and is also used for Murakami's artistic style and other Japanese artists he has influenced.<sup>[1]</sup>

Murakami is the founder and President of [Kaikai Kiki](#) Co., Ltd., through which he manages several younger artists. He was the founder and organizer of the biannual art fair Geisai.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTwUx9hcHrA>











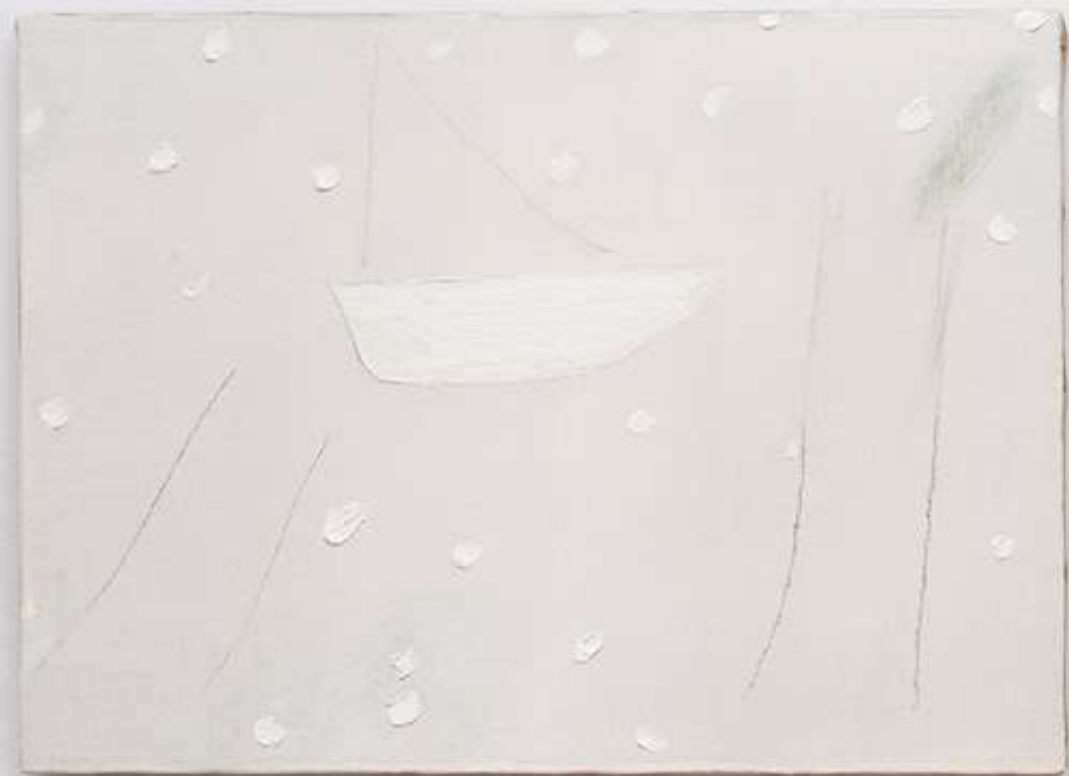
# Hiroshi Sugito

- <http://tomiokoyamagallery.com/en/exhibitions/sugito-semiose2022/>

















# Aya Takano

Japanese artist Aya Takano is widely recognized as a prominent member of Japan's Superflat generation and is an active member of Takashi Murakami's Kaikai Kiki contemporary art collective, who merge Japanese pop and cute [kawaii](#) references with the style of ukiyo-e woodblock prints. Takano's artworks are dominated by women with huge eyes and skinny, elongated legs, recalling the cartoonish style of Japanese manga. Many of her artworks also reference Japanese woodblock prints with brilliantly colorful fabric and eye-catching arrangements of color, as seen in *Every Day is a Carnival*, 2012. But in contrast with the Japanese art of the past, Takano's women are strident, confident, and sexually empowered, illustrating a new brand of Japanese femininity and perhaps even acting as reflections on Takano's own identity.

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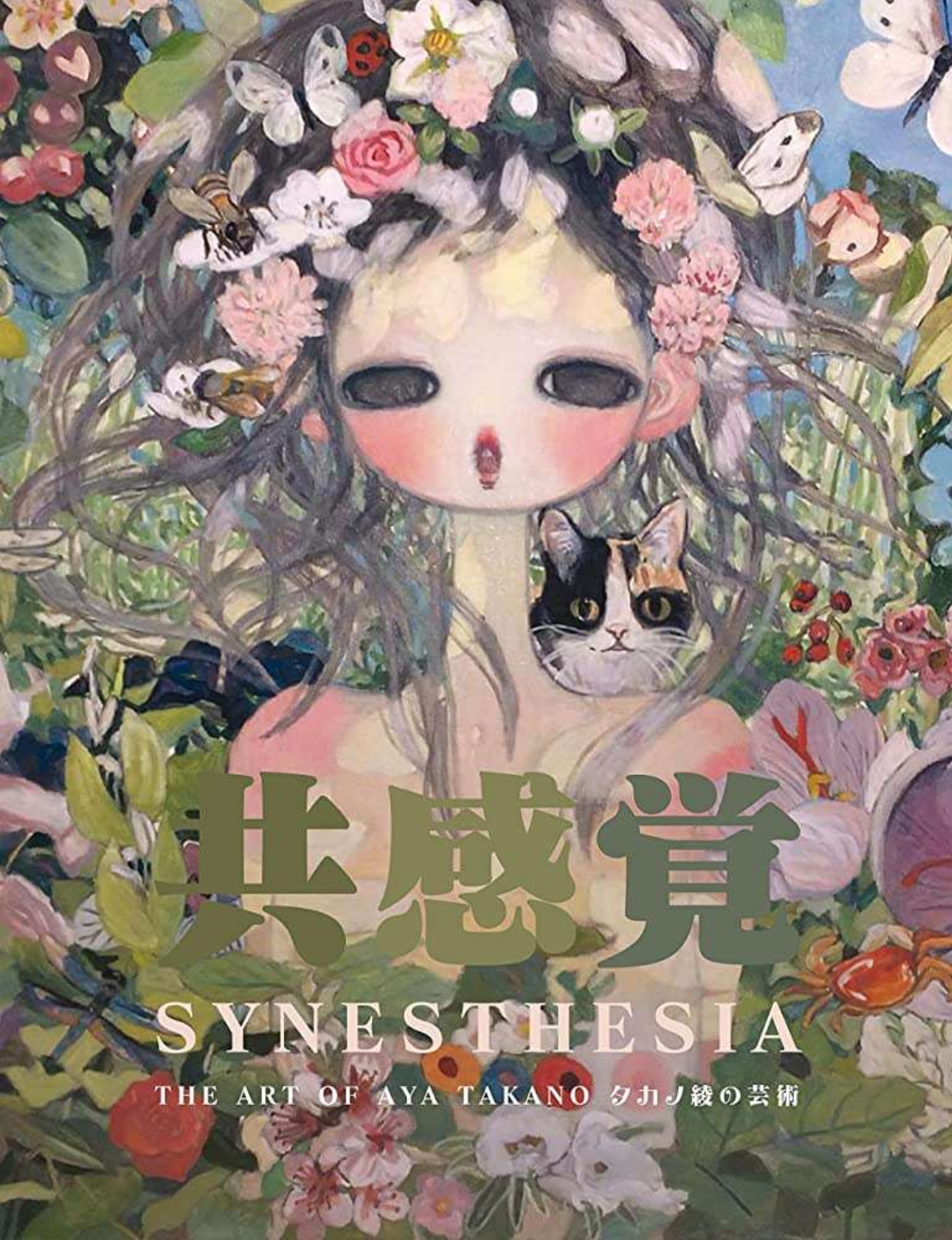




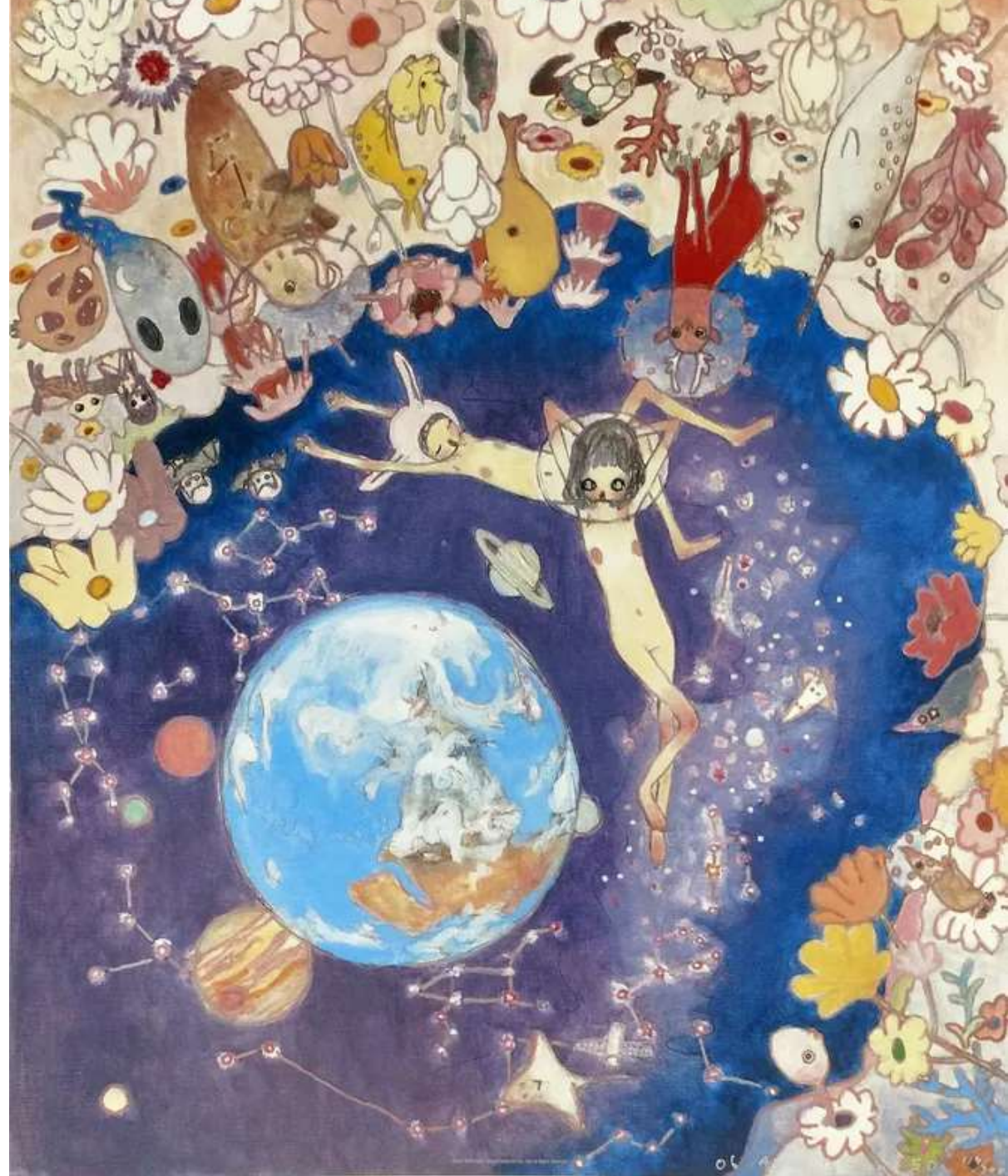












# Chiharu Shiota

Chiharu Shiota makes dazzling, visually arresting installations from yards and yards of humble thread, spread out across vast spaces to form intricate, complex, and all-encompassing webs that are as active and alive as the forces of nature. Bound into these huge installations are various found objects loaded with their own weight of human history, including keys, book pages, bed frames, and doors. These items have had another life elsewhere before being upcycled into her art. *Uncertain Journey*, 2016, was made for [Gallery Blain Southern](#) in Berlin, with a series of tessellated boat skeletons bound by the elemental sweeping forms of intense red thread. Chiharu trained in Japan, Australia, and Germany and now lives and works in Germany, but her practice is infused with the haunting poetry and ghostly spatiality of her Japanese heritage.

<https://www.chiharu-shiota.com/top>























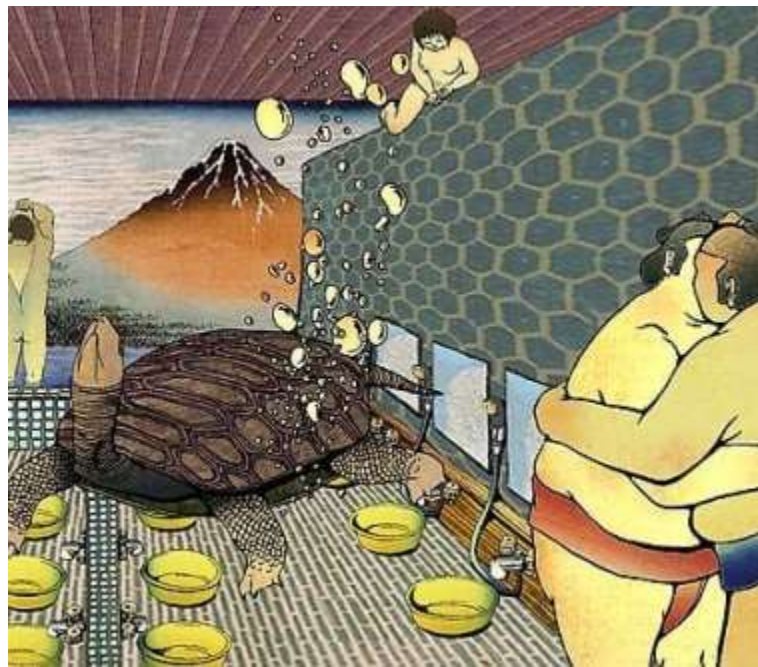




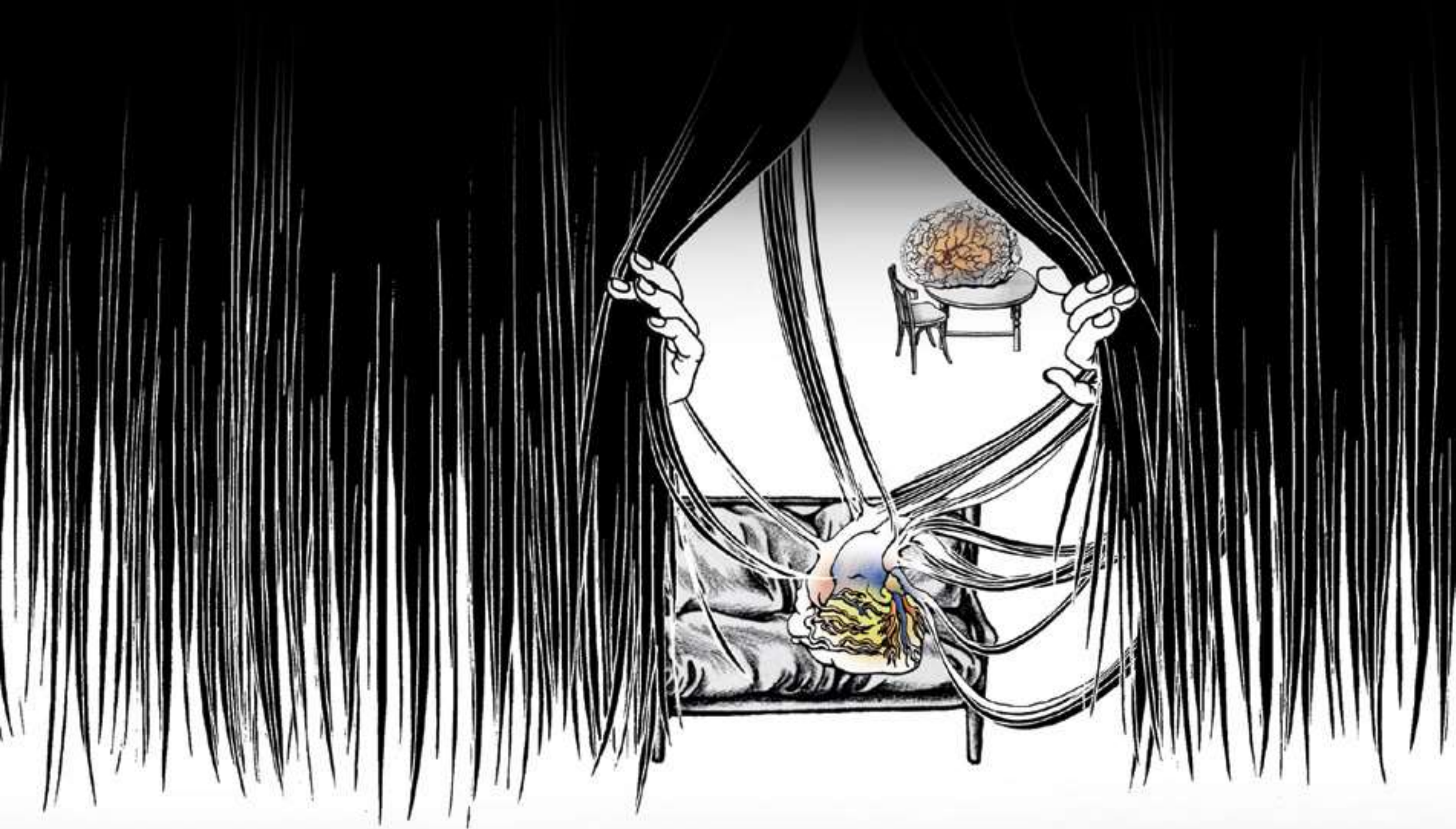
# Tabaimo

Ayako Tabata, better known under her artist name Tabaimo, is a contemporary Japanese artist. She combines hand-drawn images and digital manipulation to create large scale animations which evoke traditional Japanese woodblock prints while presenting a pointed, complex view of Japanese society.

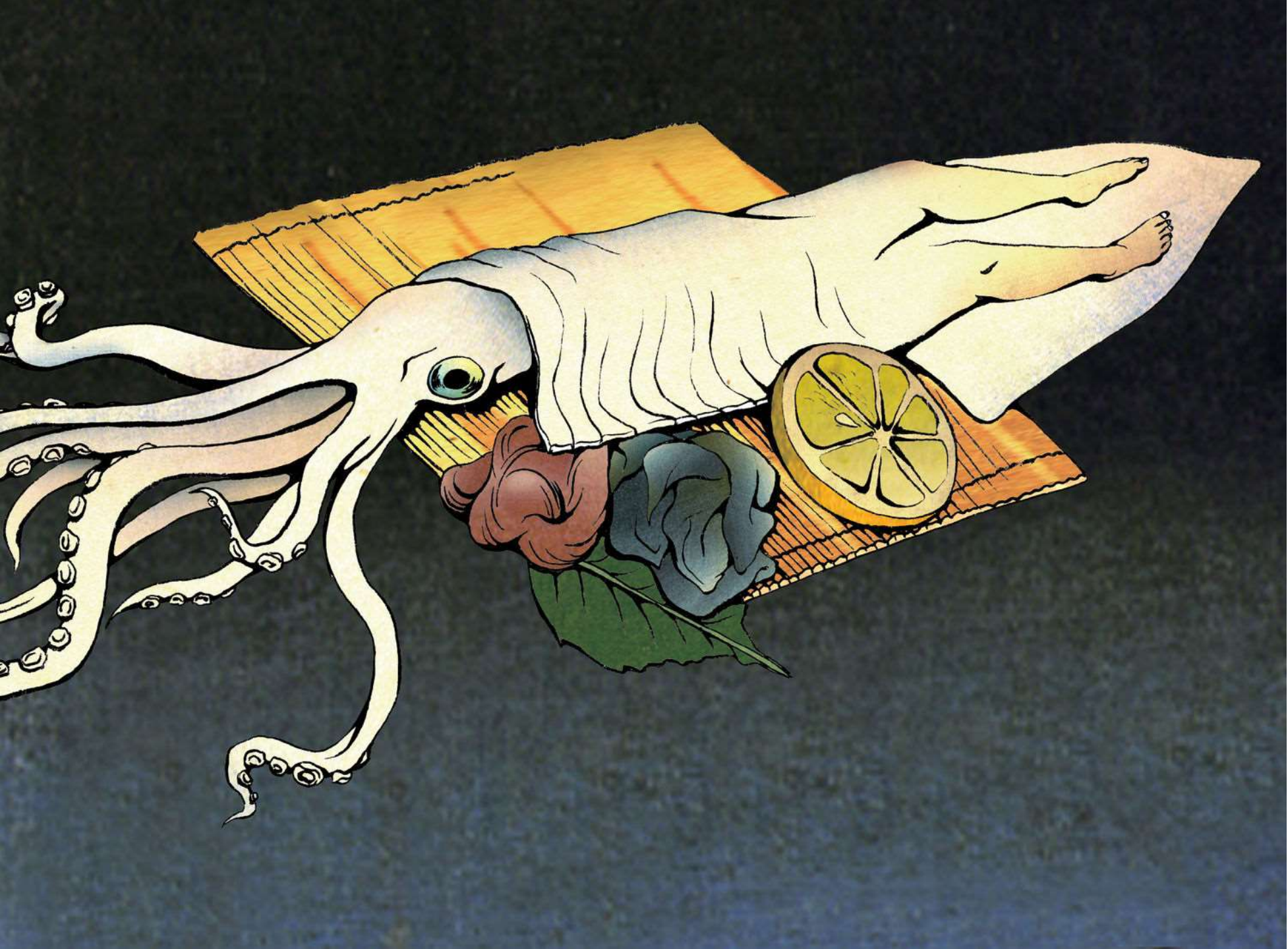
<https://www.moma.org/artists/35902>



















# Chiho Aoshima

Japanese artist Chiho Aoshima is another prominent member of Takashi Murakami's Kaikai Kiki Collective. Like many of her contemporaries, her art fuses references to Japanese popular culture with the stylized language of Japan's woodblock prints. Aoshima uses the software program Adobe Illustrator to create fantastical, dream-like landscapes. These designs are then printed onto various surfaces, including paper, plexiglass, canvas, and aluminum. In Aoshima's world, young girls, sushi chefs, and monsters nestle in among cherry trees or soaring artificially lit skyscrapers, transforming the Japanese land and cityscapes into surreal and otherworldly realms. References to anime, mythology, erotica, and surrealism are blended into one in her strangely haunting arenas, where cuteness teeters on the brink of evil.

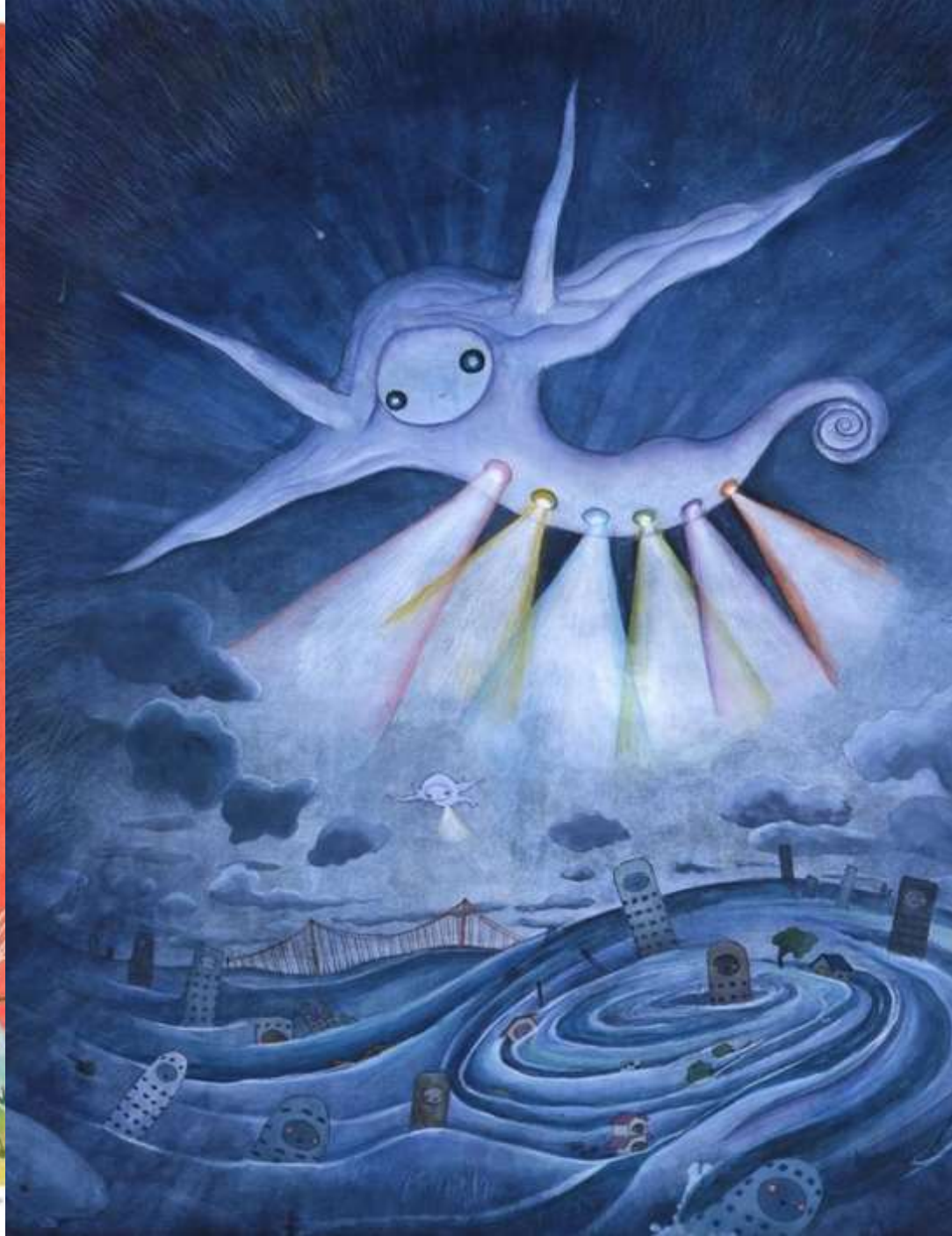
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5427YXnyKXY&t=24s>













# Hiroshi Sugimoto

Hiroshi Sugimoto is a Japanese photographer and architect. He leads the Tokyo-based architectural firm New Material Research Laboratory.

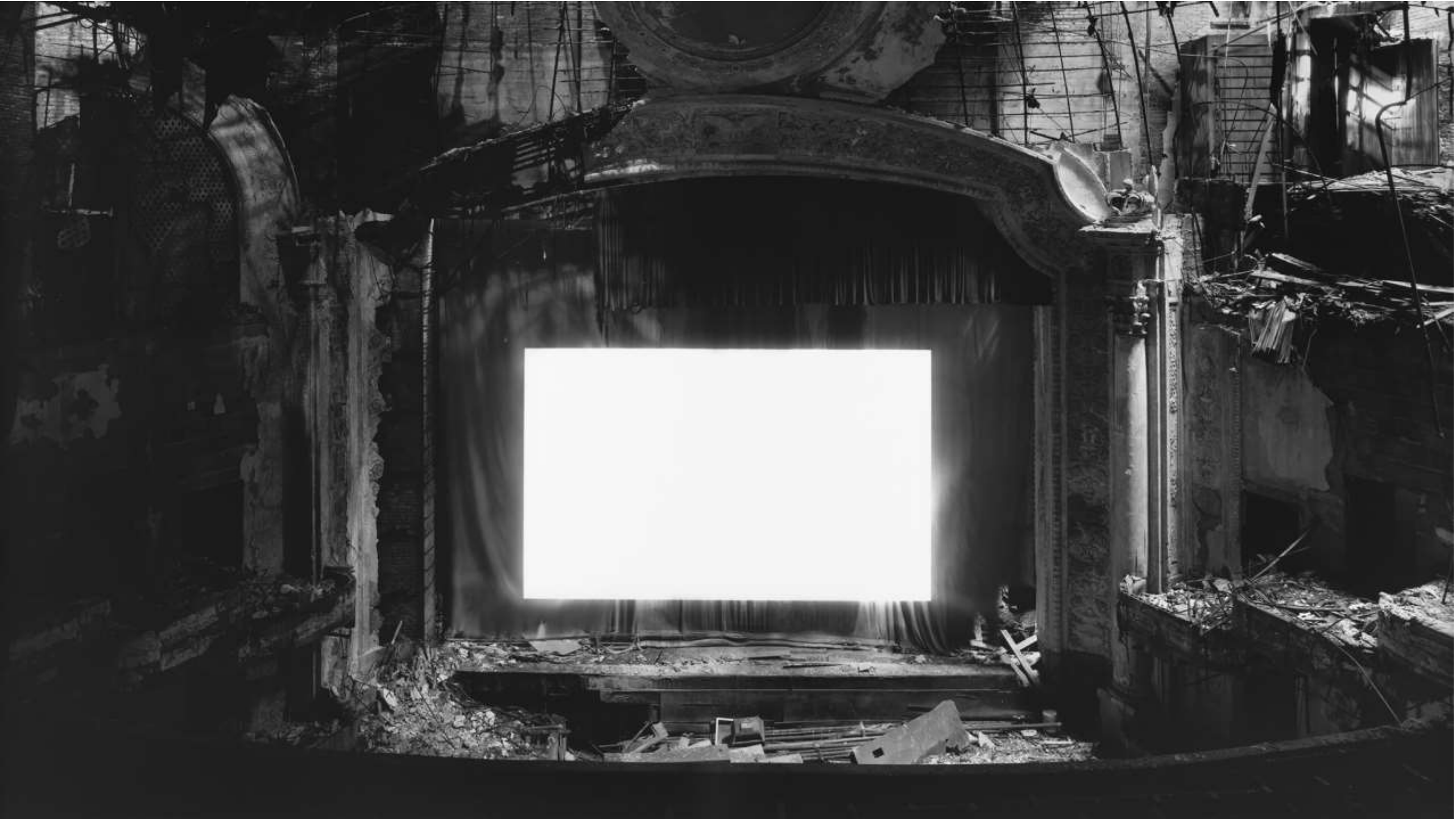
Japanese photographer and architect Hiroshi Sugimoto (1948–) treats the camera not as a simple documentary device but as a nexus of assumptions about objectivity and time that his own photos seek to challenge. His early, though still ongoing, work, *Dioramas* (1976–)—examples of which are shown above—has been released as both gallery exhibitions at the Getty Museum in Los Angeles and the Pace Gallery in New York and [a photo book](#). Sugimoto's photos in this series seem to capture realistic scenes of people, animals, and nature in action, but this first glance upon his images belies the fact that Sugimoto's photos are taken of [museum dioramas](#).

By showing dioramas, many featured from the American Museum of Natural History, these photos draw attention not to the natural world itself but to how it is represented in museums and, as Sugimoto's shadows on some of the images suggest, how these dioramas are looked at as well. His photos question the objectivity of both museum dioramas and photographs—media understood to provide viewers with an accurate representation of reality—and impel us to reconsider the authority of these media and the position from which we view them.

<https://www.moma.org/artists/5721> (good)













# Ei Arakawa

New York-based Japanese artist Ei Arakawa creates a series of collaborative performances and actions during his week residency at the Tanks, Tate Modern.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7LpTDxGZ05o&t=39s>



# Tanaka Koki

Koki Tanaka is a Japanese artist and videographer. He was a visiting scholar at Tokyo Zokei University. His work is Minimalist, and primarily focused with finding the unusual in everyday objects and situations.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7vJ6oFNp0g&t=12s>

# Yasumasa Morimura: Ego Obscura

“In the end, what is history? And what is historical truth? These are questions that do not have ready answers,” Japanese artist [Yasumasa Morimura](#) asks in “egó sympósion”, the preface he pens in the catalogue for [Ego Obscura](#), a 30-year retrospective of photographic work in which he transforms iconic works of art and pop culture into self-portraits.

Whether presenting himself as Marilyn Monroe in the famous *Playboy* centerfold, appearing as Frida Kahlo standing bare-breasted in her brace, or portraying Marcel Duchamp’s alter ego Rrose Sélavy, Morimura surgically deconstructs the concept of “the self” to explore the perils of binary thinking that accompany our assumptions of race, gender, sexuality, and identity, and the ways in which we ensconce them in the pantheon of cultural memory and art history.

“Various truths are concealed in many paintings,” Morimura continues. “On the other hand, a painting can be seen as a fake, something caked with falsehoods and misunderstandings. A painter’s testimony is at once a confession of a hidden truth and an attempt to overwrite their life with a false statement.”

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cphUQBybMuU&t=24s>



# Assignment Suggestions...

- Create an artwork with expressive circles
- Experiment with pouring paint mixed with acrylic medium (or white glue) or pour watercolor paint.
- Use a torn canvas in an artwork