

# SHOP



Taka Ishii  
Gallery

## Group Show “Design + Contemporary Art in Ukiyo-e”

Dates: May 22 – Jul 19, 2020

Location: SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery, Hong Kong

By appointment only

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SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery is pleased to present “Design + Contemporary Art in Ukiyo-e”, from May 22 - July 19, 2020, in cooperation with the Adachi Institute of Woodcut Prints. The group exhibition will feature woodblock prints produced from the 1970s to 2010s, created by eight artists, including Ay-O, Atsushi Fukui, N. S. Harsha, Mitsuo Katsui, Hideaki Kawashima, Ikko Tanaka, Makoto Wada, Akira Yamaguchi, with the expert craftsmanship of the Adachi Hanga artisans.

Striving to keep alive the woodcut printing techniques of Japan, the Adachi Institute of Woodcut Prints has collaborated with world-leading artists and designers from Japan and abroad, translating contemporary designs and arts into the visual language of Edo-period Ukiyo-e. The eleven prints exhibited at SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery will construct an appealing floating world with figures and scenery both familiar and foreign, bringing new heights of imagination.

**Ay-O**, internationally renowned as “The Rainbow Artist”, has experimented with a variety of mediums, from prints, paintings, sculptures and sensory-engaging installations, known as ‘environments’. The famous rainbow-striped motifs developed in the mid-1960s is part of his avant-garde activities against the use of lines. From red to purple, Ay-O filled his works with different gradations until the present day. In his 1982 collaborative woodcut print, Ay-O turned the classic ukiyo-e motif of Mt. Fuji into a fantasy landscape, where ribbon-like lava bursts in rainbow color, floating gracefully in the sky.

**Atsushi Fukui**'s oeuvre often expresses an air of tranquillity through fragmented imagery. A clump of mushrooms, a young girl in the woods, an ancient scene, the vast, starry expanse of the universe, when viewed side by side, Fukui's paintings tempt the viewer into believing that they are somehow connected mythologically. Yet what emerges from these images is not a concrete narrative, but a newfound sense of perspective, as the viewer embarks on a journey from antiquity to modernity, from the minute to the unimaginably expansive. The woodcut print “Lunar Eclipse” (2014) represents another Fukui's utopian vision, a free-spirited girl walking towards the crescent moon up above the sky. It is a vision that transcends time and space.

Drawing from his Indian heritage and armed with a unique take on the use of color, **N.S. Harsha** breathes new life into the traditional art of Japanese woodcut printing. Interested in the representation of animals in Ukiyo-e, Harsha created the series of “Shy Monkey” (2017), in which a bashful monkey covers its eyes with one hand as it points to the sky with the other, seemingly to guide the viewer on a spiritual journey. “The Raid” (2017) depicts an elephant, commonly believed in India to be an incarnation of the Hindu God Ganesh, as it relentlessly charges forward, leaving behind rows of trampled chairs in its wake. These two pieces are lively depictions of the absurd and the breakdown of worldly order, and Harsha's light, airy palette adds to their whimsical charm.

**Mitsuo Katsui** has been a leading figure in Japanese graphic design, as well as a pioneer in digital design, who used technologies to further his expression of “ikizama”, or forms of life. When he was a student, he had a strong interest in color

contrast, gradation, light and shade in photography. Over half a century, Katsui's works centred on the phenomenon of light, which is translated into colors in many of his designs. In 1968, the master created a comprehensive color sample book "DIC Color Guide". The woodcut prints series "Closed Forms II" (1979) presents how Katsui experimented monochrome gradation, creating abstract graphics with geometric compositions.

**Hideaki Kawashima's** creations touch upon themes of spirituality, mythical narratives, anxiety, depression, and isolation - all in an unapologetically monochromatic or minimalist palette. Critics speculate that the androgynous and sensuous figures that inhabit these works are versions of self-portraits. The artist, however, insists that his works are more like "painting a character", as opposed to the "ideological" act of self-portraiture. "Wind" (2013) is Kawashima's first attempt in making woodblock print, which features his iconic female figure with flaming hair executed in yellow-red gradations, lying against a lime-cream color background.

**Ikko Tanaka**, known as the father of contemporary design, develops a timeless style by infusing ancient Japanese art elements into Modern simplicity. Through his vision, forms appropriated from traditional ukiyo-e forms are reduced into universal abstract patterns, kanji characters are transformed into effective graphic tools. The series of "Ropes" (1979) enlarges and features different forms of Japanese knots in urban and rural settings. By eliminating everything useless and superfluous, Tanaka's minimalistic, bold, colourful designs strive to achieve universal aesthetic value.

**Makoto Wada's** graphic designs are testimonies of the blooming magazine-related media industry in post-war Japan. The Osaka-born illustrator persistently worked on personal subjects across different commercial projects, his simple caricature-like body of works reflect a unique artistic taste and a strong influence of film and jazz music. Depicting Hollywood stars like Humphrey Bogart, Jean-Louis Barrault and Marilyn Monroe in highly stylized form, Wada's series of "Six Stars on the Screen" (1979) is an attempt to modernize "Yakusha-e", a genre that used to feature famous actors in the Edo-period.

Characterized by a style of traditional Japanese painting, **Akira Yamaguchi's** works equally demonstrate excellent Western oil painting techniques such as perspective and shading. Embodying a unique sense of humour, his creative expressions of birds-eye-view cityscapes and battlefield paintings, sculpture, manga and installation are imaginary, comedic fusions of past and present. The series of "New Sights of Tokyo" (2012, 2014) is a contemporary take on "meisho-e", which are ukiyo-e prints of famous views.



N. S. Harsha

"Shy Monkey -Twilight-", 2017

Woodblock print on washi paper

31.7 x 22 cm

© N. S. Harsha / Courtesy of The Adachi

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Makoto Wada

"Marilyn Monroe", 1979

Woodblock print on washi paper

30.3 x 23.6 cm

© Makoto Wada / Courtesy of The Adachi

Institute of Woodcut Prints

### Artist Biographies

**Ay-O** (b. 1931) was born in Ibaraki prefecture, Japan. He joined the Demokrato Artists Association in 1953 and graduated from the Art Department of Tokyo University of Education in 1954. In 1958, the artist moved to New York, where he joined 'Fluxus' in 1962. Ay-O represented Japan at both the Venice Biennale in 1966 and the São Paulo Biennial in 1971. Ay-O exhibits regularly at galleries and museums in the United States, Europe and Japan. He has had several retrospective exhibitions in Japan including "Over the Rainbow, Ay-O Retrospective 1950-2006", the Fukui Fine Arts Museum and Miyazaki Prefectural Art Museum, Fukui (2006-2007); "AY-O 1950s-2010: A Retrospective", the Tsukuba Museum of Art, Ibaraki (2010); "Ay-O: Over the Rainbow Once More", the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo (2012). His works are included in the collections of numerous museums including the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo/ Kyoto; British Museum, London; New York Museum of Modern Art; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Cincinnati Art Museum; Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art; Machida City Museum of Graphic Art, Tokyo; Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art; Smithsonian's Museum of Asian Art, Washington D.C.; Weserburg, Museum für moderne Kunst, Bremen.

**Atsushi Fukui** (b. 1966) was born in Aichi prefecture, Japan. In 1989, he completed his B.A. in oil painting at Tokyo University of the Arts. He is currently based in Yamanashi prefecture. His major solo exhibitions include "Arcadians", Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo (2019); "air", Yu-Un, Tokyo (2016); "Council of Backpacking", Roppongi Hills A/D Gallery, Tokyo (2015). Fukui's major group exhibitions include "TAKAHASHI COLLECTION Mindfulness!", the Kirishima Open-Air Museum, Kagoshima & Sapporo Art Museum, Hokkaido (2013); "ORANGE SKY", RH Gallery, New York (2011); "Punkt Art 2011 David Sylvian-in cooperation with Atsushi Fukui uncommon deities", the Sorlandets Kunstmuseum, Kristiansand (2011); "The Masked Portrait", Marianne Boesky Gallery, New York (2008); "ROPPONGI CROSSING", the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2004). His works are included in the public collections of The Olbricht Collection, Berlin; The JAPIGOZZI Collection, New York / Geneva; The Takahashi Collection, Tokyo; The Japan Foundation, Tokyo.

**N.S.Harsha** (b. 1969) was born and based in Mysuru, Karnataka in Southern India. In 1995, he received a Master Degree in Painting from the Maharaja Sayajirao (MS) University of Baroda, Vadodara. The artist is a recipient of prestigious awards including the DAAD Scholarship (2012) and Artes Mundi Prize (2008). He has participated in a number of international exhibitions such as the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2014); Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art (2013); Dojima River Biennale, Osaka (2013); Adelaide International Biennial (2012); the Yokohama Triennale, Kanagawa (2011). To mark his first exhibition in Japan entitled "N. S. Harsha: Charming Journey" at the Mori Art Museum, Tokyo in 2017, he took on the role of an ukiyo-

e artist and worked with carvers and printers at The Adachi Institute of Woodcut Prints to create modern works of ukiyo-e. In 2019, Harsha had his first large-scale solo show in Hong Kong, titled "Gathering Delights" at the Centre for Heritage Arts & Textile, The Mills.

**Hideaki Kawashima** (b. 1969) was born in Aichi prefecture. After graduating from Tokyo Zokei University in 1991, he undertook two years of training in Buddhism at the Hieizan Enryakuji Temple from 1995, subsequently commencing his career as an artist in 2001. His solo exhibitions include, "Youth", Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo, (2018); "Back and Forth", Richard Heller Gallery, Santa Monica (2014); "Turning", Richard Heller Gallery, Santa Monica (2011); "Wandering", Kukje Gallery, Seoul (2009). Other major exhibitions include "Little Boy", curated by Takashi Murakami at the Japan Society, New York (2006); "Idol!", Yokohama Museum of Art (2006); "LIFE", Art Tower Mito, Ibaraki (2006); "Japanese Experience Inevitable", Museum der Moderne Salzburg (2004)

**Mitsuo Katsui** (1931 – 2019) was born in Tokyo. After graduation from Tokyo University of Education (now University of Tsukuba), he joined the Japanese food and biotechnology corporation, Ajinomoto as a graphic designer in 1956 and started his studio in 1961. He worked as the art director of the Japan World Exposition in Osaka (1970), the International Ocean Exposition in Okinawa (1975), the International Exposition of Science and Technology in Tsukuba (1985), and was a Professor Emeritus at Musashino Art University. Katsui has received many awards, including the Kodansha Publishing Cultural Prize (1972), Tokyo ADC Members Award (1972), Gold Prize at Brno Biennial of Book Design (1972), the Minister of Education Award for Fine Arts (1993), Gold Prize at the Warsaw International Poster Biennale (1994), Mainichi Design Award (1995), Japanese Government Medal with Purple Ribbon (1996), Katsumi Masaru Prize (1997), NY ADC Merit Award (1997), Grand Prix at Poster Biennial of Mexico (2001).

**Ikko Tanaka** (1930 - 2002) was born in Nara and moved to Tokyo in 1957. He graduated from Kyoto City College of Fine Arts (now Kyoto City University of Arts) in 1950, and later joined the Nippon Design Centre in Tokyo as the graphic designer and art director at Nippon Design Centre in Tokyo. Tanaka established his design studio in 1963, where he collaborated with Mazda, Hanae Mori, KENZO and Issey Miyake. Throughout his career as a designer, Tanaka received numerous awards, including Mainichi Design Award (1973), The Art Encouragement Prize for New Artist in Fine Arts (1980), Tokyo ADC Members' Grand Prize (1986), Mainichi Art Award (1988), Japan Cultural Design Award (1991), Japanese Government Medal with Purple Ribbon (1994), and the New York ADC Hall of Fame Prize (1994). His work is in the permanent collections of MoMA, New York and Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.

**Makoto Wada** (1936 - 2019) was born in Osaka. He received the Japan Advertising Art Award in 1958 when he was attending Tama Art University. Later he entered the advertising industry and became an independent illustrator in 1968. In 1964, Wada formed 'Tokyo Illustrators' Club' along with Akira Uno, Tadanori Yokoo and others (dissolved in 1970). As a leading illustrator and designer in post-war Japan, Wada is well-known for the magazine cover designs of Shūkan Bunshun across four decades, from 1972 to 2017. His caricatures and illustrations are also featured in the publications of writers Shinichi Hoshi and Haruki Murakami.

**Akira Yamaguchi** (b. 1969) was born and is currently based in Tokyo. He studied oil painting and graduated from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music (BA, 1994; MA 1996, now Tokyo University of the Arts). Yamaguchi's illustrations are featured in publications including newspaper stories and novels. His major solo exhibitions include "Resonating Surfaces", the Daiwa Foundation Japan House Gallery, London (2018); "Stepping Back to Seek the Underneath", Contemporary Art Gallery, Art Tower Mito, Mito (2015); "TOKIORE(l)MIX", Maison Hermès 8F Le Forum, Tokyo (2012). His artworks are included in institutions such as Mead Art Museum, Amherst; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; The Vangi Sculpture Garden Museum, Shizuoka. He has contributed with public artworks in locations including Narita International Airport, Tokyo's Fukutoshin Line at Nishi-Waseda station and Fujisan World Heritage Center in Yamanashi Prefecture.

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