

Nonaka-Hill

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Yutaka Matsuzawa

Co-curated by Alan Longino and Reiko Tomii

Originated by Yale Union, Portland, Oregon

Yutaka Matsuzawa through the lens of Mitsutoshi Hanaga

September 7 – October 5, 2019

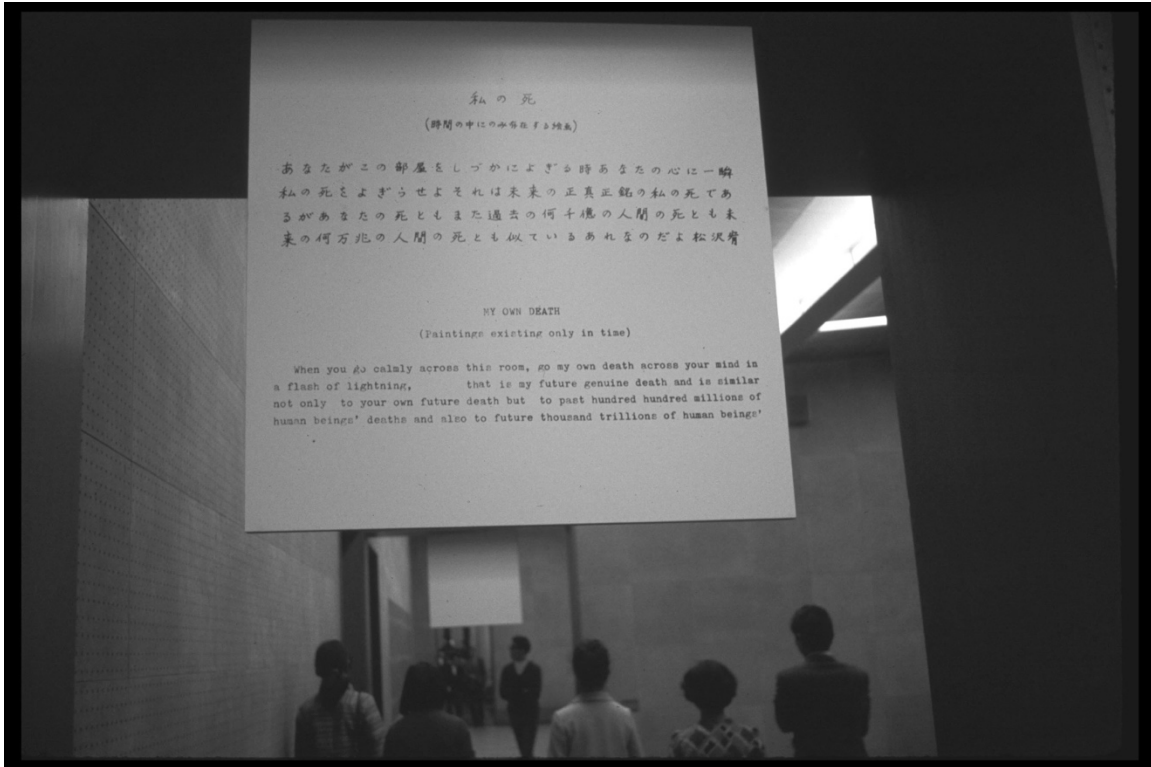
Opening reception: Saturday, September 7, 5:00 – 8:00pm

Nonaka-Hill is pleased to host an exhibition by Yutaka Matsuzawa (b. 1922; d. 2006, Shimo Suwa, Japan). Known as one of the leading Conceptual artists in Japan, Matsuzawa has been included in some of the most significant exhibitions in recent decades, such as *Global Conceptualism* in 1999 at Queens Museum of Art in New York and *Century City* in 2001 at Tate Modern, London. But it is only recently, in the past few years, that Matsuzawa's work has been given its due focus, beginning in 2016 with Reiko Tomii's publication *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (MIT Press)—which was turned into an exhibition earlier this year in New York at Japan Society.

In this summer, the first solo exhibition of Matsuzawa was co-curated by Alan Longino and Reiko Tomii, at Yale Union in Portland, Oregon, which travels to Nonaka-Hill. Focusing on seminal, rarely seen works from the artist's career—including works from both the 1976 Venice Biennale and the 1977 Sao Paulo Biennial—the exhibition looks at the historical significance of Matsuzawa as a Conceptual artist while also translating the spiritual sense of his practice into an experience for the visitor.

In conjunction, Nonaka-Hill have organized *Yutaka Matsuzawa through the lens of Mitsutoshi Hanaga*, a small presentation of the photographer who documented the avant-garde in 1960s Japan, underground and youth culture, and such social issues as pollution and political activism.

The firsts for both of them on the West Coast, these exhibitions together illuminate the history of friendship and conceptual collaboration that they established while working on the fringes of the Tokyo-centered art world.



Yutaka Matsuzawa, *My Own Death*, installed at Tokyo Biennale 1970, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum
Photo: Michio Horikawa

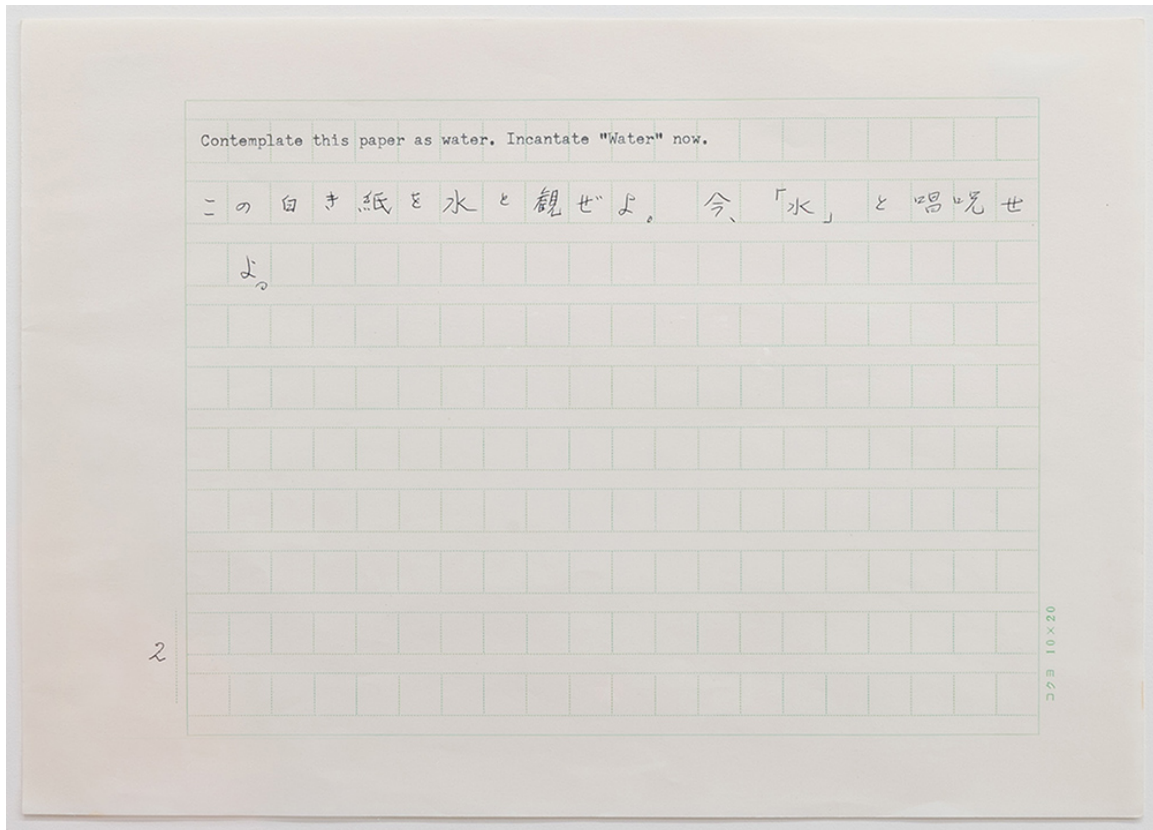
Co-curator Alan Longino writes on the artist on the occasion of *Yutaka Matsuzawa*:

In the mountainous countryside of Nagano prefecture, Yutaka Matsuzawa was born on February 2, 1922 in the small town of Shimo Suwa (pop. 20,055). The town, bordering on the North side of Lake Suwa, is quiet and steady. A walk to the lake in the morning reveals Mt. Fuji in the distance, rising up out of the valley. And behind, up steep roads, two shrines, Akimiya and Harumiya of the Suwa Shrine lay at the base of surrounding foothills. It would be negligent to just call it peaceful, but it is (and more). Though to travel there is anything but. Both this quietude and the trials required to arrive are sources in getting to know and realizing the continuous strength of Matsuzawa's work.

Originally graduating from Waseda University in Tokyo as an architect, Matsuzawa proclaimed that he did not believe in the "solidness of concrete or iron," and instead sought to make an "invisible architecture." These beliefs were stirred by his experiences in seeing the landscape of Tokyo following the fire bombings in March of 1945, and in response he began to formulate an idea upon the impermanence of matter and reality that would progress and mature through the following decades. Shortly after graduating, he started to take up poetry. These early poems, mostly in Japanese, quickly progressed into a language beyond, taking the form of diagrams and symbols—mostly mathematical or compositional—with seemingly encoded particles of arranged letters and drawings that edged into the concrete. The creation

of these poems in the mid-1950s was spurred by a realization that his earlier poems could “be understood only by the Japanese people [. . .] since I wished to create the kind that could be understood by global people, I began to use signs.”¹

These poems, as an introductory point to both Matsuzawa’s visual career as well as for the exhibition, are presented as part of a box-set portfolio called *Ψ Box* (1983). This box contains works and documentation separated into nine separate folios, ordering and categorizing Matsuzawa’s work into such divisions as *Art via Matter*, *Art via Act*, *Poem via Language*, and *Poem via Symbol*. On view in full are the eight *Symbol Poems*, which act as an early marker in the development of Matsuzawa’s work as he began creating a language that let go of parameters and syntax, and instead is felt and received from within. In an earlier note on the construction of a symbol poem, Matsuzawa had equated the mixing and balancing of elements in chemistry—oxygen and nitrogen reaching a state of equilibrium when diffused—as being of a same symmetry and concentration as the use of these letters, symbols, and diagrams to illustrate a pure image.



Yutaka Matsuzawa
The Nine Meditation Chambers, 1977
Ink and typed on paper, 12 sheets
18 x 25.6 cm each (7-1/8 x 10-1/8 in.)

The idea of a pure image is one that I often use to ascribe to Matsuzawa's work. Essentially referring to the ability of the image to originate from and receive information, it does so without betraying or displaying what that information precisely is. It is a void without the needing to be filled. A major reasoning and influence into this idea was Matsuzawa's own significant revelation on the evening of June 1, 1964, whereupon a voice called to him to "vanish matter." Upon thinking on this passage, he decided from that point to no longer make sculpture or paintings but instead to conceive of and excel his work, and art with it, into a much higher realm. One of the first works he created in this time period was *Psi Corpse* (1964). Seen in the gallery, the 3x3 grid of nine works draws directly from the same grid design seen in the work on paper, itself. A guide in how to read—from center position spiraling clockwise out—is given at the top of the work, and a translation of the text is provided for the visitor. Translated by Reiko Tomii, the text acts as a programmatic guide in not primarily how to conceive of the artist's work and the others around it, but in how to see the works speaking to a larger image—a larger spirit—that is latent within their body.

This spiritual body is a vessel of information that recombines histories and conceives of a "world after death."² As Matsuzawa proceeded along this trajectory, each work or event began to speak more to this reality that must be contemplated. In the Tokyo Biennial of 1970, Matsuzawa invited visitors into an empty room where one would contemplate on both his, and their own, death as a promise in passing. Entitled *My Own Death* (1970), the work allowed for visitors to either walk through through its two entrances, or to linger, stay and meditate in emptiness.

This decade of the 1970s was to be the artist's most mature yet, participating in multiple early bulletins with Art & Project in Amsterdam, and continuing to show throughout Europe—participating in the Sonsbeek '71 festival, showing at multiple solo and group exhibitions in Germany, and being invited to the Venice Biennale of 1976. The work shown at the Biennale, *Swan Song*—its text written in Italian, Japanese and English--not only continues on the concepts of finality and fulfilment but of inner peace at the end of things. This work is a soft work for the visitor to contemplate, as it easily transfers its directive to the reader while also providing an immediate levity that must be otherwise searched for and discovered in others. A work the following year, *The Nine Meditation Chamber*, shown at the Sao Paulo Biennial of 1977, is a guided diagram as much as it is a sculptural space for relief and relaxation. While one feels directed at and instructed by its individual plaques—telling the visitor to contemplate a white sheet of paper as wind, or space, or catastrophe—the paper that lays before the visitor both expands upon that directive as well as fully negating and subsuming it.

These works, mostly contained to the 1970s and 60s, formed a system of belief that Matsuzawa would use to more fully develop what he was call his final Quantum Art moment. In 1988 Matsuzawa would publish his *Quantum Art Manifesto*, a collection of works, writings, and exercises from his career that best expounded upon what he

believed was the substantial bridge between theoretical physic and the higher reality in the spiritual world. As the art critic Midori Ishikawa would say of Quantum Art: “the manifestation is literally a call to mankind for the purpose of community in this spiritual method.”³

In the form of a publication, re-published by Yale Union and available here for the first time in the U.S. in nearly three decades, *Quantum Art Manifesto* may be read as a simple text or refined artist book. But the alignments set forward by Quantum Art point towards a consideration of the nuance and complexity behind matter that even challenges and reassesses our current understanding of images and the information by which they are composed.

Notes

1. Matsuzawa, in conversation with Mokuma Kikuhata, “Pusai no hako no naka de” [In the box of Pis], in *Kikan*. no 13, 14; quoted in Midori Ishikawa, “Quantum Art: Post Hiroshima Psychotechnique,” in *To Spiritualism*, 84.
2. Matsuzawa’s words, as recollected by Kō Nakajima in his public conversation with guest-curator Reiko Tomii for *Radicalism in the Wilderness: Japanese Artists in the Global 1960s*, an exhibition at Japan Society, New York, on March 10, 2019. Nakajima visited Matsuzawa in Shimo Suwa to photograph his *Psi Zashiki Room* in 1969.
3. Midori Ishikawa, “Quantum Art: Post Hiroshima Psychotechnique,” in *To Spiritualism*, 86.



Mitsutoshi Hanaga
The 10th Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition at The Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, 1971
Gelatin silver print

Yutaka Matsuzawa through the lens of Mitsutoshi Hanaga

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Mitsutoshi Hanaga (1933-1999) was a prolific photographer documenting the thriving avant-garde art and youth-culture scenes of Tokyo and beyond. Concurrent with the exhibition *Yutaka Matsuzawa*, Nonaka-Hill is presenting a selection of thirteen works featuring the artist across decades of their friendship.

Like Matsuzawa, Hanaga was part of the “war-experienced generation.” Having lost his father at a young age, life’s hardships further compounded when he lost a lung due to tuberculosis in his early 20s and suffered a fall on a mountain, which compromised his mobility. Living with such life challenges, Hanaga naturally empathized with marginalized communities and turned his camera onto those who were often overlooked, valuing these figures as vital to cultural history, and worthy of being remembered throughout time. Hanaga passed away in 1999 and, recognizing the indispensable value of these photographs for the study of postwar culture and society, his son Taro established the Mitsutoshi Hanaga Archives Project to organize more than 100,000 negatives.



Mitsutoshi Hanaga
Performing My Own Death with Kazuko Tsujimura, 1970
Gelatin silver print
paper size: 35.5 cm x 27.9 (13x 11 in.)

Drawn to the anti-establishment, Hanaga documented underground theaters, performance art, artists, protests, environmental pollution, and communes in Japan from the 1960s to the 1980s. When photographing artists, his interests were in the artists themselves, their concepts, and processes, more than their artworks, often capturing behind-the-scene moments.

One of Hanaga's photographic subjects was Yutaka Matsuzawa, who entrusted Hanaga to witness and record a number of Matsuzawa's private and public performances, encapsulating transient moments in time into his photographs. At Nonaka-Hill, Hanaga's photographs of Matsuzawa include his *Psi Room*, the artist's recently disassembled art installation in Shimo Suwa, Japan and select performances from 1969 onward. Hanaga's picture from 1969-70 portrays a younger Matsuzawa in a meditative pose inside the dense *Psi Room*, while his 1980s photo shows an older Matsuzawa standing with a silkscreen print with an egg image from *Anata No Yomei* (1986) in his home Japanese-style garden. A pair of photos, shot at *Tokyo Biennale 1970: Between Man and Matter* (an international exhibition that gathered works by artists known for conceptual, environmental, and performance art, such as Christo, Richard Serra, and On Kawara) show Matsuzawa's empty-room installation *My Own Death*, where he clandestinely performed with the Butoh dancer, Kazuko Tsujimura, who touched his chest to feel his future death. A

color photograph depicts a Matsuzawa performance with *Banner of Vanishing* (1966) in Shimo Suwa in 1970, while a pair of black and white photographs, taken in the following year, show the artist spreading the banner dressed in a suit and tie in front of the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum for *The 10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*. Hanaga captured a sense of immediacy of these fleeting events, while evoking the enigma of Matsuzawa's presence.

Hanaga and Matsuzawa shared a distrust of built civilization, as shown in another solo exhibition “Curse Mantra: How to Kill Factory Owners / Jusatsu Kito Sodan (Mitsutoshi Hanaga),” currently on view at Para Site residency, Hong Kong. It features which his more socially minded series of radical anti-pollution Buddhist monks and is curated by Koichiro Osaka (Asakusa) and Aoyama | Meguro. Hanaga's earnest personal aspiration to connect with and to record Japan's culture, in the dynamic period in which he lived, will undoubtedly add immeasurable benefit to this study for years to come.

Mitsutoshi Hanaga (b. Tokyo, 1933-1999) His work has been exhibited at Pompidou Centre, Paris (1983), Asia Culture Center, Gwangju (2015), Tate Modern, London (2015), National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2018), among many others.

Recommended viewing:

For a broader view of Mitsutoshi Hanaga's work and Taro Hanaga's efforts with the vast photographic archive, we recommend the watching “Following His Father's Footsteps: Taro Hanaga with Reiko Tomii and Tom Looser”. This video documents an evening symposium at Asia Art Archive in America, Brooklyn, NY on March 11, 2019 (<http://www.aaa-a.org/>).

Books on / by Mitsutoshi Hanaga:

Mitsutoshi Hanaga 1000, published by 1000Bunko

Alan Longino is an art historian and curator from Biloxi, MS. His thesis in Art History from CUNY Hunter College (2017) focused on the event of telepathy within information as the source of image production. His writing has appeared in the *Haunt Journal of Art*, from UC Irvine.

Reiko Tomii is an independent art historian and curator, who investigates post-1945 Japanese art which constitutes a vital part in world art history of modernisms. Her early works include her contribution to *Global Conceptualism* (Queens Museum of Art, 1999), *Century City* (Tate Modern, 2001), and *Art, Anti-Art, Non-Art* (Getty Research Institute, 2007). She is co-director of PoNJA-GenKon, a listserv group of specialists interested in contemporary Japanese art. With PoNJA-GenKon, she has organized a number of symposiums and panels in collaboration with Yale University, Getty Research Institute, and other major academic institutions. Her recent publication is *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (MIT Press, 2016) received the 2017 Robert Motherwell Book Award. Based on the book, she curated *Radicalism in the Wilderness: Japanese Artists in the Global 1960s* at Japan Society Gallery in New York.

Nonaka-Hill Gallery and the curators, Alan Longino and Reiko Tomii, wish to thank the Matsuzawa family—Kumiko, Yoko, and Haruo—for their support and guidance for this project. We are grateful for the commitment, focus, and diligence of the exhibition organizers & publishers at Yale Union—Aaron Flint Jamison, Hope Svenson, and Gary Robbins

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