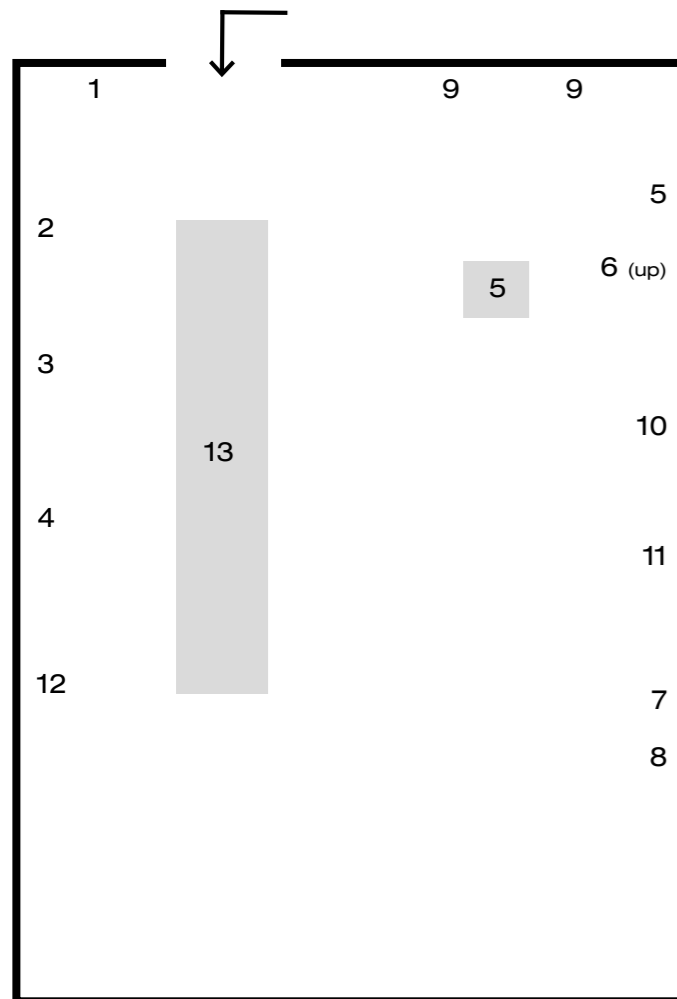


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EXHIBITS
Yoshio Nakajima
UNBEAT!
25.01.2025 – 16.03.2025

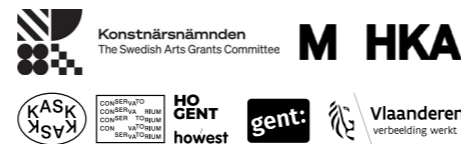


UNBEAT! is curated by Mercedes Sturm-Lie and Martin Schibli. The exhibition is organized in collaboration with the Yoshio Nakajima Archive, M HKA, Stefan Wouters, Roger D'Hondt and Marie-Hélène Van Audenhove (New Reform Archive) and Frank Hendrickx - arteVentuno archives Hasselt. This exhibition has been made possible through the generous support of The Swedish Arts Grants Committee.

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1. *Unbeat – Dam Act*, Tokyo 1957
2. *De eeredienst aan de verslaafde konsument van morgen*, Amsterdam March 13, 1965
3. *Krak's Crash High Lipstick Village Happening in the Fresh Air*, Gouda March 29, 1965
4. *Traffic in Town*, Galerie Honger, Schiedam May 21, 1965
5. *NU HAPPENING! van een bezette stad III*, Antwerp July 9, 1965
6. *KYRPWWAWAX - Happening in een heerlijke nieuwe stadium IV*, Ostend August 6, 1965
7. *Happening 6*, Antwerp September 25, 1965
8. *Happening 7 – Godsdienst, Vorst & Staat*, Antwerp October 2, 1965
9. *Happening News 1 & 2* 1965
10. *MILKYWAYS artist book* s.d.
11. *Letter from Fumiko Yoshio and Fumiko Nakajima in Antwerp Heyrman, Nakajima and Panamarenko in front of Panamarenko's yellow Cadillac*, Antwerp 1965
12. *OVERGROUND MOVEMENT* 1968
13. *PSI Mandala in the '73 Art and Idea 2 Documenta Aalst* 1973

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EN I

UNBEAT! sheds light on the crucial role Japanese artist Yoshio Nakajima (°1940) played in the Antwerp happenings of the 1960s. The exhibition and its public program, featuring lectures and performances, accompany Thomas Hitchcock's exhibition *Abstract Entities*, in the main space of KIOSK, where students from Belgian art academies are given the opportunity to present performative work.

1. *Unbeat – Dam Act*, Tokyo (1957)
Photo courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

Nakajima began working with performance art in 1957. Performance became an almost daily activity carried out in a variety of settings, particularly in urban environments. The duration of these street performances typically lasted 5–10 minutes—the time it took for the police to arrive and disperse the audience.

In 1957, Nakajima began collaborating with two other artists, Tashiro Minoru and Kagami Masayuki, who were studying art at Shohei High School. Their actions were collectively called *Damact*. They organized exhibitions and DADA events. From 1961 onward, they started referring to themselves as the Tokyo UNBEAT Group, and their earlier collaborations were retrospectively attributed to the group. While it was a collective effort, their performances were carried out individually.

The term *UNBEAT* could be interpreted as a break in the flow, a slowdown or pause, deprogramming, or resistance to the rat race. This aligns with Nakajima's broader work during this period, which highlighted the negative consequences of society's rapid transformation, such as environmental and natural degradation.

A more explicitly political interpretation might see "beat" as a metaphorical reference to American music and, by extension, U.S. influence over Japan. In this view, *UNBEAT* could be understood as a protest against the Americanization of Japanese culture. Regardless of the meaning ascribed to it, Nakajima would continue to use *UNBEAT* throughout his artistic career as a significant, symbolic element representing individual liberation from systemic constraints.

2. *De eeredienst aan de verslaafde konsument van morgen (The worship service for the addicted consumer of tomorrow)*, Amsterdam (March 13, 1965)
Poster, photos by Cor Jaring (1936–2013), courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

Nakajima met the Dutch artist Robert Jasper Grootveld (1932–2009) in the autumn of 1964. Grootveld was known, among other things, for campaigning against tobacco companies, highlighting the link between smoking and cancer. He defaced tobacco ads with a "K" for "Kanker" (cancer), which earned him a prison sentence. From February 1965, Grootveld began inviting Nakajima to various events.

During this time, Grootveld used a public sculpture, *Het Lieverdje* on Spui Square in Amsterdam, as a recurring meeting point for his actions, which attracted a loyal following. On 13 March, Nakajima participated in Grootveld's anti-smoking campaign at the statue with a performance. A journalist described the event as a form of striptease for lack of other terms. The police arrived after ten minutes and took Nakajima away in a police car.

3. *Krak's Crash High Lipstick Village Happening in the Fresh Air*, Gouda (March 29, 1965)
Photos by Cor Jaring (1936–2013), courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

Poet Dop Reida (Cornelis van den Berg) invited Nakajima, among others, to a protest against the construction of a new shopping center on the site of a former Catholic church. Nakajima wore a white T-shirt with the text *UNBEAT*. The protest was about more than the church itself—it addressed air pollution, lack of traffic safety, and the broader issues caused by cars overtaking city centers. The event had the character of a religious ceremony mourning the victims of traffic accidents, referencing the location's former purpose.

The ultimate aim was to critique the influence of commercialism and advocate for better urban centers. Police arrived after fifteen minutes and arrested the organizers, including Nakajima.

4. *Traffic in Town*, Galerie Honger, Schiedam (May 21, 1965)
Photos by Cor Jaring (1936–2013), courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

A performance by Robert Jaspers Grootveld, Thom Jasper, and Yoshio Nakajima involved multiple segments and props, including a crashed car, 50 liters of blood-like liquid, toy cars, and a person playing a nurse. Jaspers mentioned that the blood symbolized a sacrifice to the "sacred cow"—the car. The performance also touched on the negative effects of smoking and alcohol consumption when driving.

The gallery owner, Bouw, reportedly had reservations and tried to prevent the performance by closing the gallery, but this was unsuccessful. After several calls, the police eventually arrived. Just days later, on 25 May 1965, Grootveld, Roel van Duijn, and Rob Stolk officially founded the Provo movement. Several individuals associated with Nakajima during his time in the Netherlands were key figures in the inner circle of this movement.

5. **NU HAPPENING! van een bezette stad III (NOW HAPPENING! of an Occupied City III), Antwerp (July 9, 1965)**

Video courtesy of VRT-Beeldarchief

Photos courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

Framed silkscreen poster, design and print by Wout Vercammen, Antwerp, courtesy of Frank Hendrickx, ArteVentuno archives Hasselt

Shortly after arriving in Antwerp, Nakajima and his wife Fumiko met Wout Vercammen, Hugo Heyrman, and Panamarenko at the jazz café *De Muze*, an encounter that would significantly influence all four. With help, Nakajima and Fumiko found housing in the same building where Flemish poet Paul van Ostaijen had once lived.

On 9 July, they collaborated on *NOW HAPPENING! of an Occupied City III*, which was covered by the media extensively. The content of these happenings included themes from Nakajima's work in the Netherlands, including traffic safety and air pollution. In Belgium, however, they also referenced the Vietnam War and the threat of nuclear weapons.

They deliberately used the term *happening*, emphasizing collective execution, audience participation, and the unpredictable, rather than *performance*. At the time, the term *happening* was relatively unknown, but its novelty carried a significant impact. Nakajima continued to use the concept of *UNBEAT* in his happenings in both Holland and Belgium.

6. **KYRPWWAWAX - Happening in een heerlijke nieuwe stad IV (Happening in a Brave New City), Ostend (August 6, 1965)**

Seven photos, courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

Framed silkscreen poster, design and print by Wout Vercammen, Antwerp, courtesy of Frank Hendrickx, ArteVentuno archives Hasselt

This happening was carried out on a sea dike in front of the Ostend Casino. It is worth noting that Panamarenko introduced elements with references to space. Standing on small red chairs, he repeatedly recited an English text through a megaphone, while Nakajima

performed movements with a red ribbon and played the trumpet. Later, Nakajima climbed atop the Atlas statue, shouting, "hap-hap-hap-happening." They also proclaimed that the first happening had taken place on the moon.

7. **Happening 6, Antwerp (September 25, 1965)**

Poster designed by Hugo Heyrman and Fumiko Nakajima, courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

Nakajima's final happening in Belgium was Happening 6, which was also one of the few times the artists sought prior permission, although it was denied. In addition to Panamarenko, Heyrman, Nakajima, and Vercammen, Thom Jaspers and Bernd Lohaus (1940–2010), also participated.

The happening consisted of a series of interconnected segments. For example, Jaspers set fire to a cardboard sculpture of an ESSO tiger. Since it burned well, both the police and the fire brigade were called, unwittingly becoming part of the happening themselves. As part of the dramaturgy, Nakajima arrived in a yellow Cadillac with Heyrman and Panamarenko. Many participants were arrested by the police. The newspaper *Volksgazet* later described Nakajima as a danger to public safety.

However, after Happening 6, the authorities decided to deport Nakajima and his wife from Belgium, which occurred on October 1, 1965. They were informed only a day in advance. Three police officers came to their home to collect them, allowing them to take only what they could carry. Nakajima was forced to leave behind much of his artwork in Belgium.

News of their deportation spread, leading to many people gathering at their home. The police escorted the couple – with a stop at the jazz club *De Muze* – to the train station, where they were put on a train bound for West Germany.

8. **Happening 7 – Godsdienst, Vorst & Staat (Religion, King & Fatherland), Antwerp (October 2, 1965)**

Framed poster, xerox and stamps on yellow paper, courtesy of Frank Hendrickx, ArteVentuno archives Hasselt

A happening was planned for October 2, 1965, in Antwerp with Vercammen, Heyrman, Panamarenko, and Nakajima. However, due to Nakajima's deportation from Belgium following the previous happening, he was unable to participate in Happening 7, although the poster had already been printed.

The layout of posters and flyers played a key role in spreading information about upcoming happenings. In connection with Nakajima's name, *UNBEAT*

is mentioned. It is likely that Nakajima, through his collaborations in Belgium with Vercammen, Heyrman, and Panamarenko, developed the idea that invitations, flyers, and posters announcing upcoming events – so-called printed matter – could have artistic value through their graphic design. Even the dissemination of art itself could be imbued with artistic quality.

9. **Happening News 1 & 2 (1965)**

Selected pages from the magazine *Happening News* nr. 1 (September 1965), and *Happening News* nr. 2 (October 1965).

Photographs of pages by M HKA / CKV. Courtesy of M HKA and the Panamarenko archive (Paul Morrens)

In Antwerp, Nakajima, Heyrman, Vercammen, and Panamarenko started the magazine *HAPPENING NEWS*. The magazine, printed using a Rank Xerox copier, was published six times between September 1965 and spring 1966. Its graphic design was in a collage style, inspired by van Ostaijen's *Occupied City*, whose poems were used as collage elements in the magazine.

The magazine featured a blend of images, text, and design with literary references. Other artists were invited to contribute a page, such as Lohaus, Jaspers, and Marcel Broodthaers.

The magazine, as well as the themes of their happenings, also related to the Provo movement in the Netherlands. However, Nakajima, Heyrman, Vercammen, and Panamarenko likely considered themselves somewhat independent. Compared to the magazine *PROVO*, which emphasized the content of its texts, *HAPPENING NEWS* was more artistically inclined, focusing on the visual aspects and the design itself.

10. **MILKYWAYS artist book (s.d.)**

Printed scans. Selection of collages of newspaper articles by Hugo Heyrman, from the artist book *MILKYWAYS* by Panamarenko and Hugo Heyrman. Courtesy of M HKA and the Panamarenko archive (Paul Morrens)

11. **Letter from Fumiko**

Photocopies of correspondence and drawings (possibly as preparation for the happenings?) from Fumiko Nakajima (wife of Yoshio Nakajima). Courtesy of M HKA and the Panamarenko archive (Paul Morrens)

Yoshio and Fumiko Nakajima in Antwerp (1965)
Heyrman, Nakajima and Panamarenko in front of Panamarenko's yellow Cadillac, Antwerp (1965)

Photos courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

12. **OVERGROUND MOVEMENT (1968)**

Photo's from Brussels, Paris, Gothenburg and Amsterdam. Courtesy of the Nakajima Family Archive

In 1966, Nakajima accidentally ended up in Sweden and was accepted into the Valand Academy of Art in Gothenburg, Sweden. Nakajima continued with performances and initiated his own projects, notably collaborating with excluded artists from the Situationist movement and fostering international partnerships.

Overground Movement was a journey undertaken from Gothenburg, passing through Copenhagen, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Brussels, Paris, and then back to Gothenburg via Kassel. The participants included Stellan and Tommy Wiberg, Fumiko Nakajima, and Tetsumi Kudo.

13. **PSI Mandala in the '73 Art and Idea 2 Documenta Aalst (1973)**

11 collages/drawings from Yoshio Nakajima to Roger D'Hondt. Courtesy of Roger D'Hondt and Marie-Hélène Van Audenhove (New Reform Archive)

In 1975, Nakajima stayed with Roger D'Hondt for the *Travelling Museum – 100 Day Symposium* at New Reform in Aalst. Nakajima maintained contact with D'Hondt, sending numerous mail art letters over the years. Nakajima, always prolific, was an early adopter of mail art as a way to spread his work.

Nakajima often referred to the *Travelling Museum* as a concept aligned with his idea of identifying himself as an "art missionary," constantly on the move to showcase his art.

The reference to *PSI Mandala* is something Nakajima occasionally still mentions. It originated in connection with *Documenta 5* in 1972, curated by Swiss curator Harald Szeemann (1933–2005). The artist Yutaka Matsuzawa (1922–2006) invited Nakajima to collaborate on a performance, *PSI Mandala*, at Documenta.

Both Matsuzawa and Nakajima included their participation at Documenta in their CVs, but neither seems to appear on any official list of invited participants. Upon further research through Documenta's archives, it appears that Szeemann himself verbally invited artists he met during the planning of the exhibition to come to Kassel and present something in connection with Documenta, which was followed up on.

In hindsight, it is evident that not all of these verbally invited artists were necessarily included on the official invitation list. However, understandably, the artists perceived that they were officially invited. The art world operated differently back then.