

a. SQUIRE

Sadao Hasegawa
English Companion Inc.
8 March-12 April
Opening: Friday 7th March, 6-8 pm

Brief personal history

Born in 1950. Tell you the truth, I have never had formal training of art.

I was kind of an autistic child who could not enjoy playing with other kids at all, rather, it was even painful for me.

Instead, communing with mother nature, loving flower, animals, and tiny insects were my mentor. It was my supreme happiness when I indulged in reveries, fantasies, and my own paintings.

Although I acquired sociability in my later years, my habit to 'trip', to communicate with super-nature still remained and it has become part of the most important source of my inspiration.

My past motifs have been Grecian, Indian, Egyptian, Japanese Kabuki, folklore, and Buddhism. Now I'm enthusiastic about Indonesian and Thai religious motifs.

I have strong interest in Asian men, religion, sense of beauty.

My desire is to create the universe of beauty of men, in a way which differs from Western point of view. Especially these days, I try to pursue spiritual, profound beauty and eros rather than a pornographic world which is something like furious orgies or sadism and masochism.

I have had exhibitions several times in Japan. Unfortunately, no museums have my work in their collections. Japanese society is still very conservative and museums are not ready to exhibit Gay art yet.

My work is now published every month on the 'BARAZOKU', Japanese gay magazine. This year, a plan is on foot to publish a book of selective pencil-drawings from BARAZOKU.

I travel to Indonesia 3 or 4 times a year, groping new ideas from a cultural exchange between local boys.

—Sadao Hasegawa to Durk Dehner, 13 February 1995

a. SQUIRE is excited to announce an exhibition of works on paper by Sadao Hasegawa (長谷川 サダオ), *English Companion Inc.*, organised in collaboration with Gallery Naruyama, Tokyo. This is the only solo exhibition to materialise outside Japan to date and the first presentation of Hasegawa's work in the UK, 35 years after the publishing of his first English monograph by éditions Aubrey Walter—a rare treasure in its own right.

How to introduce Hasegawa's dazzling universe for the uninitiated? It is starry-eyed and joyous and tender, richly sensual and brimming with fecundity. A hallucinogenic realm of priapic gods and demi-gods, *shibari* and romance, it is unfettered in its adoration of Asian men's bodies, and in its holism and attention to all living beings, imparts a Buddhist sensibility. It is supremely skilfully rendered, a dissertation in modulation and Day-Glo colours. And whereas any superficial glance might be misdirected to Tom of Finland, its paradisiacal worldbuilding is perhaps far closer, in fact, to Elisavon Kupffer's.

To many the unparalleled master of Japanese gay erotic art, Hasegawa nonetheless remains an indistinct figure, biographically speaking. He lived in Tokyo, longed to travel to India, and in 1978 began to work regularly with publisher Itō Bungaku, who seven years earlier had founded the first commercial gay magazine in Japan, *Barazoku* (薔薇族). During the earlier half of the 80s, Hasegawa's work gained fast attention domestically, illustrating the pages and covers of *Sabu* (さぶ), *The Adon* (アドン), and *Samson* (月刊サムソン). It was around this time, too, that his images started to appear in gay publications in the West, among them *In Touch for Men* [I.T.] and *Mach* (a *Drummer* title). Indeed, with the exception of a group show organised by Brian Scott Carr at New York's Art Bar at Zippers around 1983, and the sale of his prints through the Tom of Finland Foundation's then-president Durk Dehner, Hasegawa's works were known to audiences outside Japan only via reproductions. He declined various invitations to exhibit abroad, fearful that his drawings and paintings would never make it back through Japanese customs.

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“In Bangkok’s National Museum, when the guards were not looking, Sadao liked to touch the large stone sculptures of Khmer and Hindu deities, ‘for their power’,” recalled his friend, the late Berkeley professor Frits Staal. Hasegawa began making frequent trips to Indonesia and Thailand in the 1980s, and with these his syncretic vision of Asia emerged. It was not only a guiding superstructure but also constituted a politics of its own. In his works, Balinese cult pools with Hindu iconography, Thai mythoi and Confucian legend interweave on a seamless plane. Civilisations fuse, and anuses blossom. The artifice of distinctions gives way to the divine, the ghost image of the absented cock—veiled beneath a silken *fundoshi* or otherwise suggestively silhouetted to evade Japanese censors—the only reminder of a mortal reality to yank everything earthbound.

The works on view in London range from informal esquisses for *Barazoku* to meticulously fine drawings and one exceptional painting in which the spirit-man body-phallus emanates an ozone glow. A vitrine in the centre of the room contains, among other unseen things, 5 sheets of the letterhead of a Tokyo import-export company, ‘English Companion Inc.’, on which Hasegawa sometimes made his studies. To the left, 9 intricate compositions tell of the deep-sea affair between a cyclops, his beefcake, and *Hinomaru*-waving cocktopus acolytes; and incorporates collaged reproductions of tropical fish, whales, and other aquatic creatures by the nineteenth century English naturalist Richard Lydekker, which Hasegawa cut from the pages of Hart’s 1977 volume *The Animal Kingdom*. (This is Hasegawa’s natural history, of which copulating men are a principal part.) Elsewhere in black-and-white, an intergalactic space rock cock hurtles into view, while nearby a mortal and his mythological dreamboat float in fire-whipped embrace, the former’s spiked hair delicately scratched into the paper—a Hasegawan signature. Mists of speckled inks form the backgrounds and shadows, behind all of which is Hasegawa’s reverence for Edo-period *shunga*. ‘ACT NOW’, urges one image of nipple-tweaked ecstasy.

Sadao Hasegawa hung himself in a Bangkok hotel room on the 20th November 1999. His works, originally discarded by his family, were subsequently retrieved and taken to Akimitsu Naruyama according to his final wishes.

Sadao Hasegawa (b. 1945, Tōkai region, JP–d. 1999, Bangkok, TH) lived and worked in Tokyo, Japan. His work was the subject of just one known solo show during his lifetime, *Sadao Hasegawa’s Alchemism-Meditation for 1973*, at SEIBU Shibuya department store, Tokyo, in 1973. Posthumous solo exhibitions have been presented at TOGA TRIANGLE, Tokyo (2024), and at Gallery Naruyama, Tokyo (2024, 2023, 2014 and 2000). Recent group exhibitions include *Echoes of Mishima*, Galerie Pepe, Mexico City (2023); *Myth Makers—Spectrosynthesis III*, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hong Kong (2022); *G*, Gallery Naruyama, Tokyo (2017); and *Naked Men 1876-2016*, Gallery Naruyama, Tokyo (2016). His works are held in the collections of the Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS; the Sunpride Foundation, Hong Kong; and the Tom of Finland Foundation, Los Angeles, CA.

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Works

Clockwise from left:

Untitled, 1980s
Pencil, ink and collage on paper, in 9 parts
Inserts for the magazine *Barazoku*
Frame: 34.6 x 175.5 cm, 13 5/8 x 69 1/8 in
AS-HASES-0011

Lover, 1983
Pencil, ink and gouache on paper with stamping
Cover concept for the magazine *Samson*
26 x 19.5 cm, 10 1/4 x 7 5/8 in
Frame: 40.8 x 33.7 cm, 16 x 13 1/4 in
AS-HASES-0013

SNOWMAN, 1980s
Pencil, ink and gouache on paper
Image: 17.5 x 19.6 cm, 6 7/8 x 7 3/4 in
Frame: 39.5 x 45.4 cm, 15 1/2 x 17 7/8 in
AS-HASES-0012

That Floating Feeling, 1980
Acrylic on canvas board
Commissioned for the magazine *Barazoku*
41 x 32 cm, 16 1/8 x 12 5/8 in
Frame: 49.5 x 40.8 cm, 19 1/2 x 16 in
AS-HASES-0014

Office:

Untitled, 1994
Pencil, ink on sgraffito on paper with stamping
Insert for the magazine *Barazoku*
23.7 x 17.4 cm, 9 3/8 x 6 7/8 in
Frame: 40.8 x 33.7 cm, 16 x 13 1/4 in
AS-HASES-0015

Vitrine

Near side, left to right:

Untitled, 1980s
Pencil, ink and collage on paper
Insert for the magazine *Barazoku*
13.9 x 12.9 cm
5 1/2 x 5 1/8 in
AS-HASES-0006

Untitled, 1980s
Pencil, ink and collage on paper, in 3 parts
Inserts for the magazine *Barazoku*
i. 22.5 x 15.4 cm, 8 7/8 x 6 in
ii. 21.9 x 22.5 cm, 8 5/8 x 8 7/8 in
iii. 21.9 x 21.2 cm, 8 5/8 x 8 3/8 in
AS-HASES-0007

Untitled, 1980s
Pencil, ink and collage on board
Insert for the magazine *Barazoku*
9.2 x 8.9 cm
3 5/8 x 3 1/2 in
AS-HASES-0008

Untitled, 1980s
Pencil, ink and collage on board
Insert for the magazine *Barazoku*
9.2 x 8.9 cm
3 5/8 x 3 1/2 in
AS-HASES-0010

Untitled, 1980s
Pencil, ink and collage on board
Insert for the magazine *Barazoku*
9.2 x 8.9 cm
3 5/8 x 3 1/2 in
AS-HASES-0009

Far side, left to right:

Untitled, c. 1979
Pencil and coloured pencil on letterhead
29.7 x 20.9 cm
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in
AS-HASES-0003

Untitled, c. 1979
Pencil on letterhead
29.7 x 20.9 cm
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in
AS-HASES-0001

Untitled, c. 1979
Pencil on letterhead
29.7 x 20.9 cm
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in
AS-HASES-0002

Untitled, c. 1979
Pencil on letterhead
29.7 x 20.9 cm
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in
AS-HASES-0004

Untitled, c. 1979
Pencil on letterhead
29.7 x 20.9 cm
11 3/4 x 8 1/4 in
AS-HASES-0005

Gay Times, November 1990