

NANZUKA is pleased to announce "*Passage in the Air (1975-1993)*," a retrospective exhibition with Keiichi Tanaami that focuses on a collection of the artist's works produced between the late 1970s and the early 1990s.

Keiichi Tanaami was born in Tokyo in 1936 and graduated from Musashino Art University. He has been active in graphic design, illustration, and fine arts since the 1960s, never heeding the boundaries of mediums or genres but instead aggressively traversing them. Throughout the course of his practice Tanaami has pursued to widen his creative oeuvre from animation to silkscreen, cartoon-like illustration, collage, experimental film, painting, and three-dimensional works. To this day he has appropriated the vast design technique of 'compilation' as he takes on experimental approaches in challenging themes such as 'art and design', 'art and product', and 'memory and compilation,' and as a result continues to receive high international acclaim for his work. The artist's recent major exhibitions include the solo exhibition *No More War* (Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin), and group exhibitions *Ausweitung der Kampfzone: Die Sammlung 1968 - 2000* (Berlin State Museums, 2013), *International Pop* (Walker Art Center, Dallas Museum of Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2015), *The World Goes Pop* (Tate Modern, 2015), and *Unorthodox* (Jewish Museum, New York). Furthermore, solo exhibitions of Tanaami's latest works are anticipated to take place in international galleries, Karma International (Zurich) and Sikkema Jenkins & co (New York).

Tanaami's works created between the late 1970s to the 1980s could be described as a departure from the American pop-style he had developed in the mid-1960s. During this period he had strengthened his interests towards concerns of mysticism and symbolism, and had produced an array of works in forms of wooden sculptures, paintings, and prints. Simultaneously Tanaami had also actively engaged in the production of experimental films, and from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s created an astounding 25 works including, "*Artificial Paradise*" (1975), "*YOUSHI KEI (Another Rainbow City)*" (1979), and "*Dream Shape Records*" (1984). These films were presented in many various international exhibitions and film festivals such as, "*Japanese Experimental Cinema*" (MoMA et al, 1978), "*Cannes International Film Festival*" (1983), "*Japanese Avant-garde Art, History of Experimental Film*" (Pompidou Center, 1987), "*5 screenings of films by Keiichi*" (MUDAM - Museum of Modern Art - Luxembourg, 2011), "*Japanese Underground Cinema Program 6 : Radical Experiments in Japanese Animation*" (MoMA, 2013).

Tanaami has also actively held exhibitions in galleries since the mid-1970s. In 1976 he had presented a solo exhibition entitled "*YOUSHIKEI*" ('*Infantile Landscape*,' Nishimura Gallery), based on a series of works, "*KODACHROME*," that concerned the artist's visualization of the

original landscapes from his childhood. This was succeeded by his solo presentation “*BOENKYO*” (‘*The Mirror of Forgetting Childhood*,’ Ao Gallery) in which he exhibited his first series of three-dimensional wood sculpture works, and a solo exhibition entitled, “*Another Paradise of Artifice Series*” that included his subsequent three-dimensional series was also held at Ao Gallery in 1979. In the following year in 1980, Tanaami’s one man show “*GIKEIZUKAN (The Illustrated Book of Artificial Views) SERIES*” comprised of his newly evolved three-dimensional series and silk screen works, took place at Gallery Vivant.

Tanaami’s mentions childhood memories of ‘playing with wooden building blocks’ and ‘experiencing a bottomless labyrinth in Meguro Gajoen,’ as significant inspirations for his fascination towards the production of wooden sculptures however, such works had also been greatly influenced and had developed as a consequence of the artist’s visit to China in 1980. Tanaami states, “In comparison to Western gardens serving to represent an infinite expanse, Chinese and Japanese gardens are concerned with nature-modeling, that is to say, I am interested in the notion that further attempts to express the vast cosmos within the context of a condensed nature.” This phrase perhaps could be described as one of the keys for understanding Tanaami’s subsequent 10 years of creative activity. Furthermore, Tanaami had found himself hovering on the edge of life and death when he suffered from pulmonary edema in 1981 as result of tuberculosis, and had spent near 100 days struggling with the devastating illness. It was precisely during this time that he had encountered pine trees from his sickbed. He recounts, “I recall reading in a book somewhere that “The trees are called ‘Matsu’ (pine) because one must ‘Matsu’ (wait) while god descends from the heavens along their branches.” I had unwittingly been lured into a bizarre labyrinth and a world of oriental paradise by the pine trees that had stood outside my window.” Pine trees thus became one of the most iconic motifs that appear within his works as well as his recurrent images of goldfish. Since this experience, the universal theme of “life and death” begins to permeate Tanaami’s works. He creates paintings, three-dimensional works, and prints in which he juxtaposes festive motifs such as the god of longevity clasping a peach as he rides upon a crane, Tokiwa pine trees depicted in five colors, pyramids that insinuate Mt. Horaisan, oceans of seven colors, elephants, and a thousand paper (origami) cranes, with motifs as the likes of pine trees that have been molded into creature-like forms, rings and cages that suggest images of a prison, phalluses, nudes, and skeletons.

In pursuit of the theme of how to confront his personal experiences and memories, Tanaami during this era had heightened his interests towards unconsciously evoked images and dreams. Through doubting his own memories and affirming this very process of skepticism, the artist had gained the pleasure of expanding his imagination within his works and giving form to memory. The cruel memories that had been engrained within the artist’s mind during the war, occupational culture such

as entertainment films that had been imposed under the post-war occupation of the GHQ, the charms of Asian culture that the artist had rediscovered upon his trip to China, the designs and colors of kimono fabrics he observed in his old birth home, and the hallucinations he witnessed upon the verge of life and death. Keiichi Tanaami's works of this time period could essentially be defined as a black box that serves to reconstruct all of these elements in a complex manner.

Tanaami has presented various solo exhibitions between the late 1980s and early 1990s as a collective summary of his practice during this time. Such exhibitions include, "*The World of Keiichi Tanaami - PASSAGE IN THE AIR*" (Shibuya Seibu Seed Hall, Tokyo, 1986), "*Keiichi Tanaami*" (Annecy Chateau Museum, France, 1987), "*New Works of Keiichi Tanaami - LAW OF THE FOREST*" (Shibuya Seibu Seed Hall, Tokyo, 1989), "*The World of Keiichi Tanaami*" (Ikeda 20th Century Museum, Shizuoka), and in order to panoramically recapture the entire milieu of his works, the exhibition at NANZUKA intends to follow the artist's history through a presentation of his works in two separate installments. The first installment of the exhibition will present an installation comprising of a series of wooden sculptures produced between 1977 and 1992 under the theme of "pseudo-gardens," in addition to paintings, prints, and experimental film works. The second part will consist of a display of large-scale furniture produced collaboratively with graft in 2004 based upon the designs of the time, alongside paintings and prints produced during the 1980s.

"The whole of these childhood memories are separate from the truth, and none of the memories are accurate. I think these memories, changing daily as if at their own convenience, greatly sway who I am. There is an accepted belief that 'memories lie', but false memory to me is just another truth."
(Keiichi Tanaami)

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