

Hisachika Takahashi

The Room of Spirit and Time

Empty Gallery
3 Yue Fung Street
18th & 19th Floor
Tin Wan, Hong Kong

Hisachika Takahashi

The Room of Spirit and Time, Hong Kong

7 June – 23 August, 2025

The Room of Spirit and Time was established by Empty Gallery in September 2024. Situated in an independent chamber to the left of the gallery's entrance foyer, TRST is an occasional platform for the extended contemplation of single works from a variety of periods and contexts. This new initiative functions as a space apart from the determinative logics and pressures of our formal exhibition program. Traversing both vast distances and infinitesimal niches, each presentation will be accompanied by a commissioned text approaching the work as a dynamic palimpsest in conversation with the unique social and historical circumstances of our city.

Playfully referencing Toriyama Akira's hyperbolic time chamber—a fictive dimension for self-cultivation in which the laws of space-time are transformed—TRST proposes a speculative epistemology grounded in non-Western philosophical resources as one potential method for productively wandering the treacherous crags and precipices of globalized culture.

The Room of Spirit and Time was a collaborative project which took place at the Queens Museum between 2018 and 2021. Its name and concept have been leased to Empty Gallery for an indefinite period of time in a convivial spirit.

For our fourth presentation, TRST will display two paintings by Hisachika Takahashi (b. 1940) created in 1966 and exhibited at his solo exhibition at Antwerp's Wide White Space in 1967.

Takahashi's legacy is most often framed in relation to Robert Rauschenberg, for whom he worked as a studio assistant in New York from 1969 to 2008. Living in Rauschenberg's studio building at 381 Lafayette Street in SoHo—where he also doubled as caretaker—Takahashi fraternized not only with the other artists represented by Leo Castelli but was also an active protagonist in the larger Downtown scene, participating in Gordon Matta-Clark and Tina Girouard's legendary Food project and exhibiting at 112 Greene Street (which would later become White Columns.)

The *Untitled* paintings exhibited at TRST date back to 1966, when Takahashi was living in Milan and working as a studio assistant to Lucio Fontana. He created this series of works using embossed paint rollers meant for home decoration and newly developed fluorescent pigments—covering his canvases with intersecting grids of floral motifs in contrasting colors, including patterns which hover at the edge of perception until seen under blacklight.

A standard gloss on these paintings might understand them as expressing the tension between abstraction and ornamentation, the artisanal and the mass-produced via the introduction of ready-made commercial motifs into the surface of high modernist painting. However, we would do well to look a bit more closely in order to uncover what makes these pieces unique. It is impossible not to read Hisachika's paintings of this period as a sort of dialogic response to the (then) better known and roughly contemporaneous work of Konrad Lueg (who would later become the famous art dealer Konrad Fischer.) Lueg also deployed geometric and floral motifs appropriated from the domestic sphere as well as phosphorescent paint and other newly developed synthetic materials.

His canvases expressed their meaning more or less clearly—as a sort of tongue-in-cheek critique of modern art’s decay into mere commodity—but the *Untitled* paintings are all the more enigmatic for lacking this polemical edge. On the surface, we might be able to level the claim, so often directed at diasporic artists or those on the periphery of Western modernism, that Takahashi’s paintings are either derivative or indicative of a certain discursive latency—but that would be to deny both Takahashi’s obvious sophistication and his deep enmeshment within the contemporary art scene of his day.

We then need to ask ourselves, what would it mean for Hisachika to consciously repeat (or simulate) Lueg’s or Daan Van Golden’s paintings? With this thought experiment in mind, the *Untitled* paintings take on a different inflection. They ask us to displace our search for artistic originality from the traditional categories of visual or conceptual innovation into the domain of social performance, identity, and labor—asserting the absolute internal difference (or non-equivalence) of an action performed by one person rather than another.

What does it mean to become “part of the wallpaper,” to disappear, or at least to become visible only under very specific circumstances, on purpose? The way that Takahashi’s roller paintings become animated by blacklight—how some patterns recede into the background under normal conditions, but burst into life through the grace of ultraviolet rays—reflect his intimacy with this condition. In this light, we see in these *Untitled* works the model of a personal, humorous, and tender practice of institutional critique.

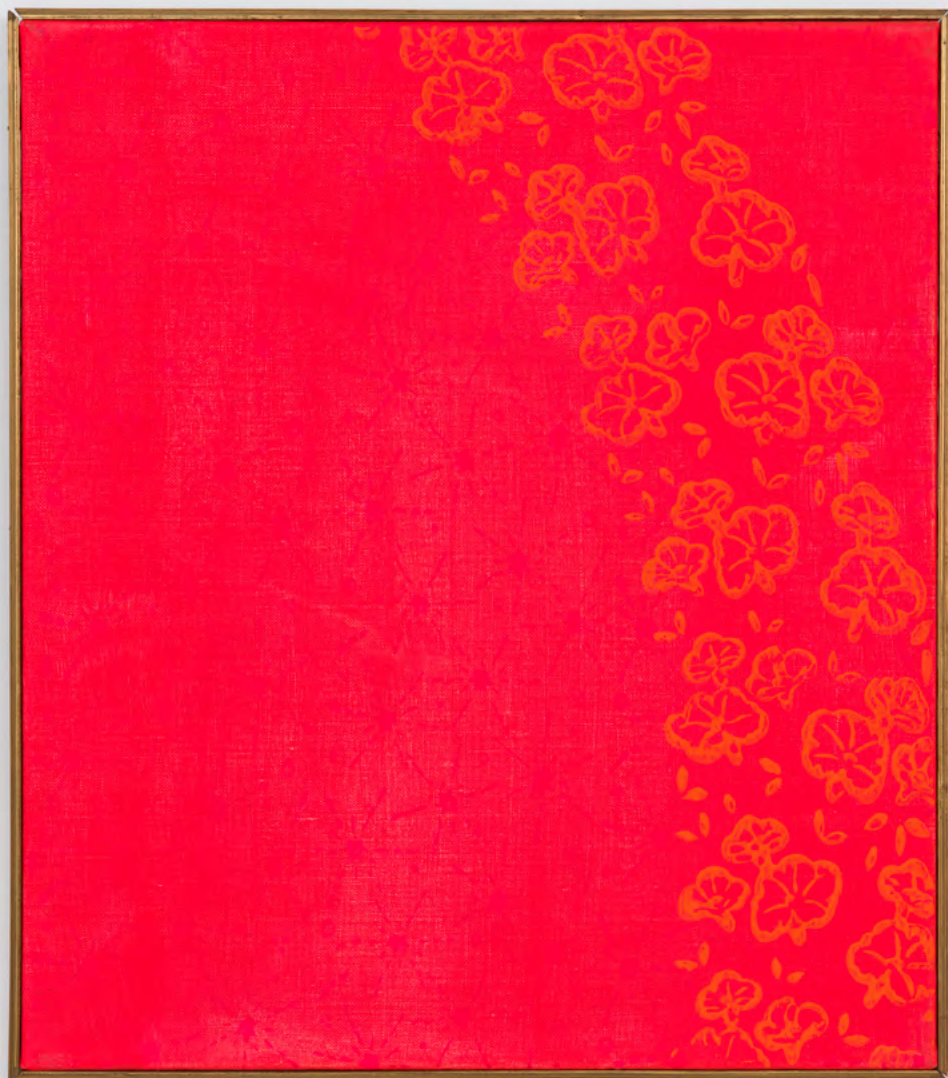
Could it be coincidence that it was these paintings that led Takahashi to the relationship that would so persistently define his career in the art historical record of the 20th century? Introduced to Rauschenberg by John de Menil following a 1969 studio visit, Takahashi became a close collaborator and confidant of the prominent postmodernist for nearly

four decades—with the older artist often asking for creative feedback from his friend “Sachika.” Taking a closer look at Rauschenberg’s legacy, we can see how Takahashi’s manual and cognitive gestures inhabit canonical pieces such as the *Carnal Clocks* and the *White Paintings* in silent collaboration and invisible co-authorship, echoing, or, perhaps, completing and deepening the project begun in his *Untitled* paintings through a complete absorption into the production and maintenance of another’s persona. Much like the phosphorescent tracings in his work, Sachika is both everywhere, and nowhere.

Special thanks: MISAKO & ROSEN, Tokyo

Hisachika Takahashi (b. 1940, Tokyo) is an artist based in Vermont and Paris whose work deals with memory as well as with the creation of community through collaboration. He oversaw Robert Rauschenberg's studio starting in 1969 until the artist's passing in 2008, and also previously worked in Milan for Lucio Fontana (1964–66) and Roberto Crippa (1962–64). His time in New York was also marked by his involvement with 112 Workshop, the earliest iteration of White Columns, and the artist-run restaurant Food.

Takahashi's works are in collections including The Menil Collection, Houston, Dallas Museum of Art, Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar, Minneapolis Institute of Art, and Consolandi Collection, Milan. His recent solo and two person exhibitions include MISAKO & ROSEN (2021), Maison Hermes Le Forum (with Yuki Okumura), Tokyo (2016) and WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (in collaboration with Yuki Okumura) (2013). He has participated in group exhibitions at The National Museum of Art, Osaka (2018), Prada Foundation, Milan (2016), Leo Castelli Gallery, New York (1981), Museum of Modern Art, New York (1974) and Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut (1973) amongst others.



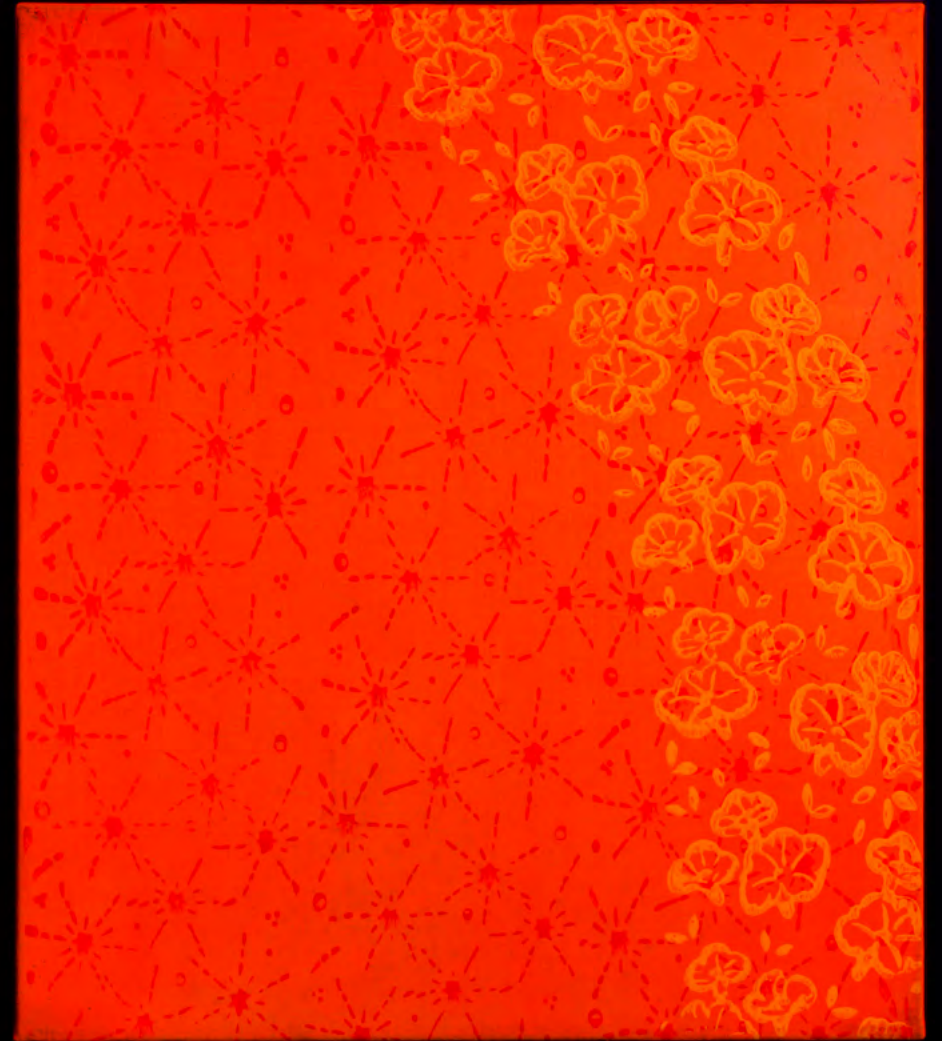
Hisachika Takahashi

Untitled, 1966

Synthetic paint on canvas

53.6 x 46.5 cm

21 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ in







Hisachika Takahashi

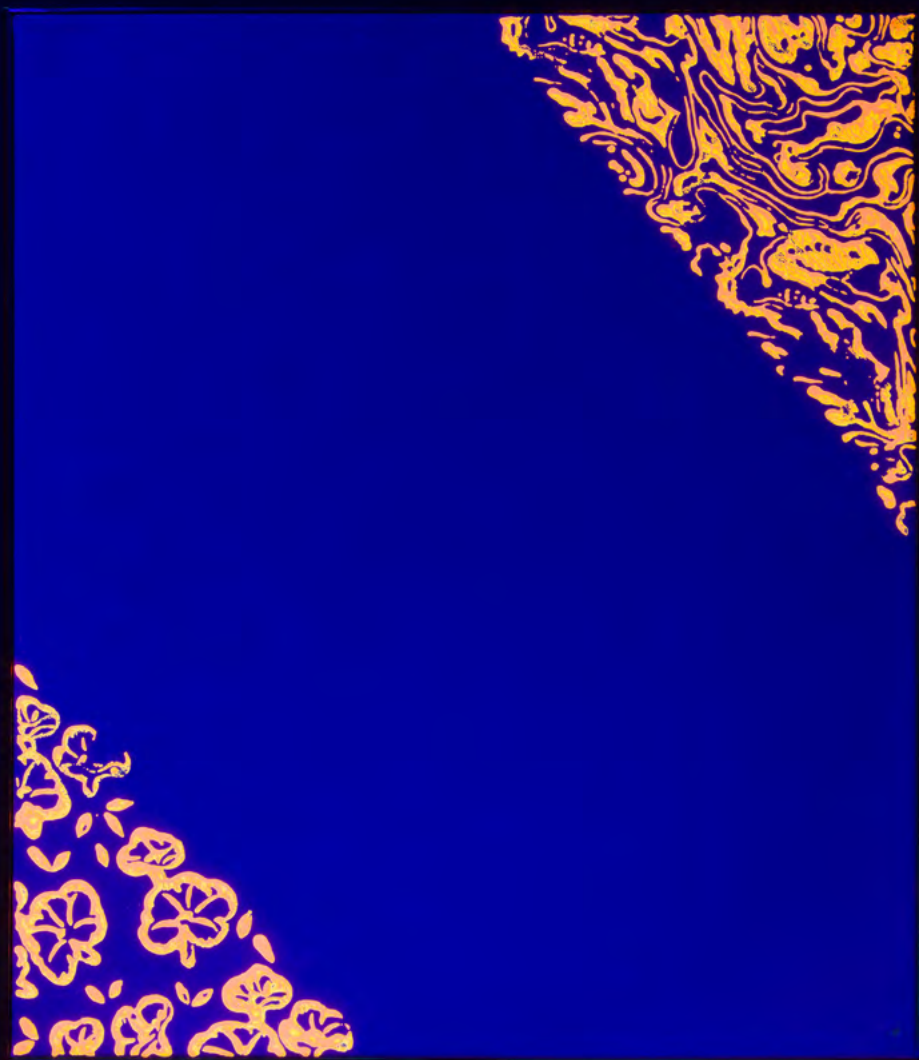
Untitled, 1966

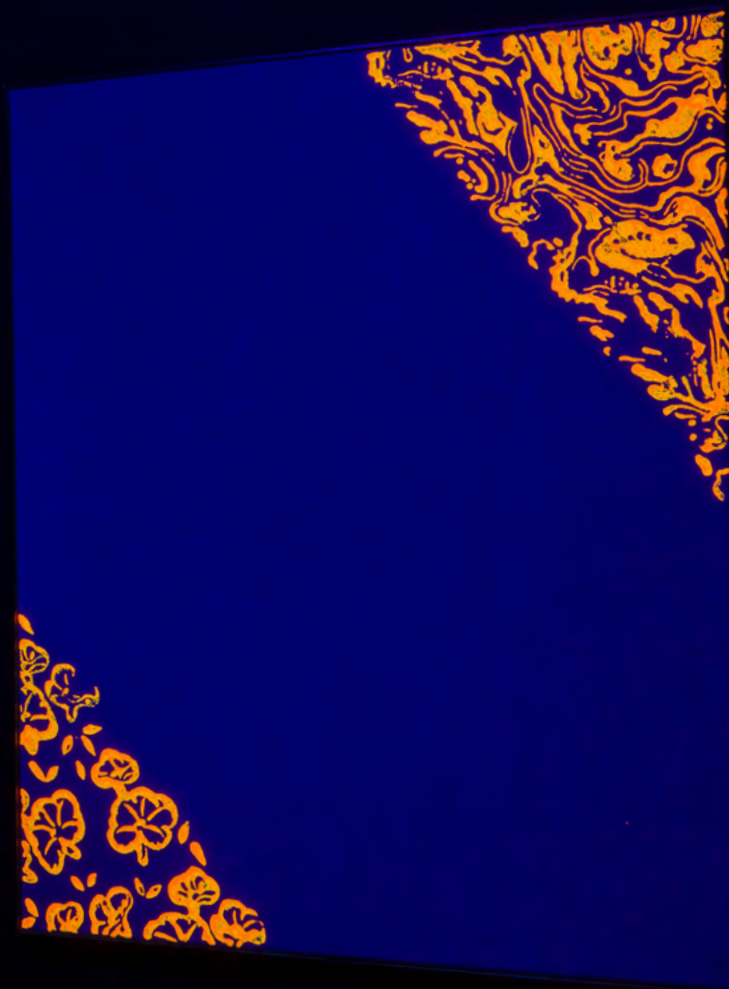
Synthetic paint on canvas

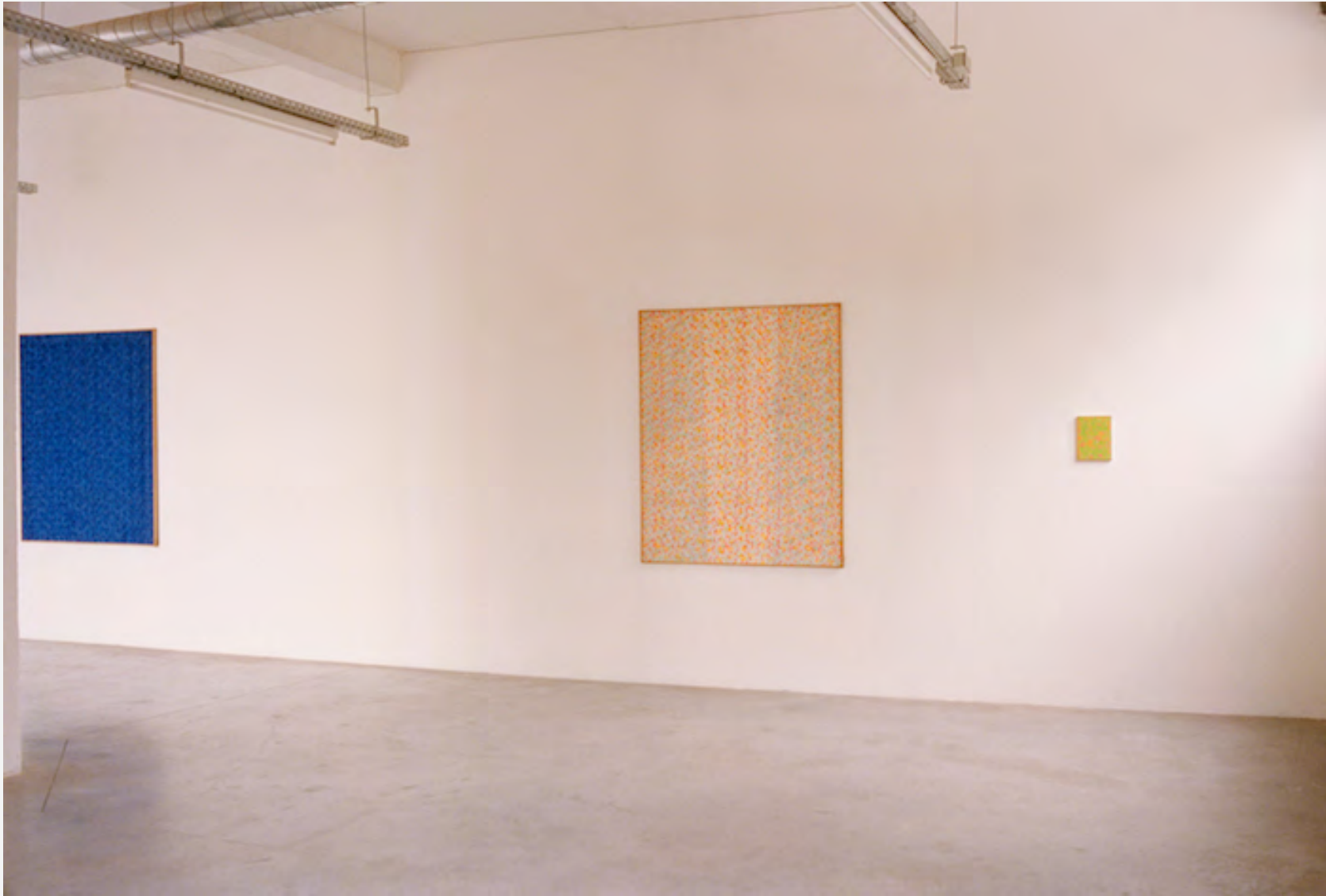
53.5 x 46.5 cm

21 x 18 ¼ in









Installation view of Hisachika Takahashi at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels, 15-30 May, 2013. The exhibition of seven paintings form a near complete recreation of his solo show at Wide White Space, Antwerp, 1967. Organised by Yuki Okumura.



Detail of center painting above under black light in Yuki Okumura's
installation *Hisachika Takahashi*.

Konrag Leug
Schrage Tischdecke, 1965
Casein tempera on canvas
78 ¾ x 57 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Greene Naftali





Daan van Golden
Collage met passe-partout (Matted Collage), 1965
Paper on cardboard
19 ³/₄ x 19 ³/₄ inches

Sara Sinclair: I wanted you to tell me the story of Yuki Okumura, how he contacted you. Tell me a little bit more about the project with him.

Hisachika Takahashi: Yuki Okumura was a young Japanese artist. The Japanese government had given him some money for the project, I think. He was going to Belgium in residence at WIELS and was living there and he wanted to do contemporary artwork. He was researching a new project and he saw the catalogue for Wide White Space Gallery in Antwerp. He saw in the catalogue, my performances, jobs, the artwork, and he was somehow interested. I'm not sure exactly what his interest was in my artwork, but he tried approaching me but he didn't have any contact information for me. He only had the name and catalogue. So he searched for me online and looked for two years. A friend of mine has friends at the gallery and Yuki gave information through the gallery to my friend Misha Spirenborg. Misha approached me and said, "This young Japanese artist is looking for you, you'd better get in contact." At the time, I was living in Paris so I called him on the telephone in Brussels, Belgium and he said, "Oh wonderful, maybe I'll come and see you in Paris." I was surprised to later hear him say, "Let's go to Antwerp in Belgium to check out the artwork." And so after forty-five years, I re-met the owner of the gallery [I had showed at]. She was a very young, slim lady at that earlier time and she still had a wonderful shape. It was the first time I had seen her in forty-five years and she was very pleasant receiving me and showed me my work. The next thing Yuki suggested to me, "I already made a plan for a show." He said, "Okay?" and I said, "Why not?" Better for people to see it." And so they made arrangements for my friend from Paliseul, Belgium to see this opening and the owner of the gallery would come over to see it and the owner of some of my collection, artwork, would come and see it. It was a very wonderful reunion after so many years. And then this show, when it was over, was going to move to Liverpool, to some kind of art museum—the museum at the university. There were a lot of fashion designers there, photographers, architects, and painters. All of these sections had one gallery space to show in. I was invited to have a show there with the student collaboration work next door. We set up a black light, a spotlight. A very big, professional spotlight. So my artwork looks like it's coming over, to take you over, and when you're standing in front of the painting, you just feel like you go inside it. It was a color combination of fluorescent and phosphorescent for the black light to take on, but when the light was off, you could still see it in the dark, glowing. My idea was that I wanted to make artwork— when you have the light off, any beautiful artwork, you cannot see it, like Mona Lisa [ca. 1503– 06], anything. I said, "I just want to make something I'm able to see in any condition."

— Excerpt from The Reminiscences of Hisachika Takahashi, Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project,
Columbia Center for Oral History Research, Columbia University, 2015



Robert Rauschenberg and Hisachika Takahashi, New York, 1971



Left: Robert Rauschenberg tracing hummingbird and Hisachika Takahashi's silhouette for *1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong* piece, 1981-98, Rauschenberg studio, captiva, Florida, 1984. In the background is *Colonnade (Salvage)*, 1984. **Right:** Robert Rauschenberg, panel 68 from *1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong*, 1981-98, paint stick and acrylic on fabric collaged to panel, 96 x 48 1/2 inches (243.8 x 121.9 cm), Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.

Bob says there are four people whose opinion about new work he really cares about: Ileana, Cy, Brice, and Sachika.

— Calvin Tomkins

In the art world, as in film and fashion circles, there are first-name-only individuals, singular personalities everyone can be expected to know or know of. In a research note dated February 15, 1978, for *Off the Wall*, his essential early biography of Robert Rauschenberg, Calvin Tomkins recorded his subject's short list of people whose assessment of new work he valued above all others. Ileana, of course, is Sonnabend, Rauschenberg's European dealer, whom he had known since 1957, when she was the wife of his New York dealer, Leo Castelli. Cy can only be Twombly, Rauschenberg's friend since 1951, when the two attended the Art Students League of New York. Brice, we are sure, is Marden, Rauschenberg's one-time studio assistant and, by 1978, a formidable painter with a lengthening resume. And Sachika?

Sachika is Hisachika Takahashi, who was then Rauschenberg's assistant and the overseer of his home and studio in New York. In 1962, as a twenty-two-year-old art student, Takahashi had taken a slow freighter from Japan to Italy to study in Milan. He stayed for seven years, working as an assistant first for Roberto Crippa and then for Lucio Fontana. At a 1969 dinner given by a friend, the American expatriate artist Nancy Martin, Takahashi was introduced to John de Menil. Invited by his new acquaintance to make a studio visit, the collector promptly offered to buy a canvas from a series of abstract

paintings dating to 1966. When Takahashi hesitated to set a price, de Menil proposed an option that would not be refused: in exchange for a plane ticket, the artist would deliver the work in person and be the guest of the de Menils in New York for a period of three weeks. Takahashi arrived in the United States in the spring of 1969.

In the course of his visit, during a soirée at the de Menil apartment attended by New York's creative elite, Takahashi was enlisted by a short-handed Rauschenberg to help complete the silkscreens for a work in the *Carnal Clocks* series, which was to debut shortly at the Leo Castelli Gallery. Then, from the opening on April 26 until the closing on May 17, Takahashi journeyed to the gallery daily, synchronizing the timers of Rauschenberg's motorized constructions to ensure that the lights of the pieces would be illuminated when the clock struck noon and midnight. Within months of finishing that initial assignment, and following a rare trip home to Tokyo, Takahashi became Rauschenberg's primary assistant. He was installed on the top floor of 381 Lafayette Street, the former church orphanage bought by Rauschenberg in 1965. Takahashi managed the studio, helped restore the vaulted space that had been the chapel of the orphanage, developed the roof garden, and joined in cooking the now-storied meals that —along with an open bar —routinely turned Rauschenberg's place into a social club and party hub for

downtown artists. Takahashi would live at “381” for more than three decades.

When *Off the Wall* was published in 1980, Takahashi appeared in a single sentence, his reliability and utility acknowledged but not the aesthetic acumen appreciated by Rauschenberg. Noting that Rauschenberg had made Florida’s Captiva Island his primary base by 1971, Tomkins briskly reported, “Hisachika Takahashi, a young Japanese artist who had come to stay at Lafayette Street for a few days in 1970 and quickly made himself indispensable, looked after the house itself.” This emphasis on the caretaker at the expense of the artist is characteristic of the way that Takahashi came to be hidden in plain view, at once illuminated and eclipsed by his close association with the larger-than-life Rauschenberg.

Takahashi’s story is interwoven with Rauschenberg’s, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, when he was not only the steward of all operations at 381 but a traveling assistant as well. In the spring of 1971 Takahashi joined Rauschenberg and the artist Robert Petersen in Captiva to restore an old lithography press and launch Untitled Press, Inc., a workshop for guest artists. Two years later, at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, the exhibition *Prints from the Untitled Press, Captiva, Florida* included pieces by Rauschenberg, Takahashi, and Petersen along with David Bradshaw, Marden, Twombly, and Robert Whitman. Takahashi and his infant son, Hummingbird, appear in photographs taken by Hans Namuth in 1971 during the fabrication of Rauschenberg’s *Cardboards*, the first series undertaken at the Captiva studio. Throughout the book that documents Rauschenberg’s 1974 trip to Israel, Takahashi is seen

gathering materials, assisting with the on-site creation of assemblages for an exhibition at the Israel Museum, and celebrating at the show’s reception. The following year Takahashi accompanied Rauschenberg to Ahmedabad, India, to work on a series of prints for Gemini G.E.L. and to study local techniques of textile- and paper-making. In a photograph commemorating the trip, for which artists, patrons, and area craftspeople assembled, Takahashi stands in the back row, just a little bit apart. From 1984 comes a group of slides that records Rauschenberg tracing the overlapping silhouettes of Takahashi and Hummingbird—the two lie on a studio table—for one panel of the multipart *¼ Mile or 2 Furlong Piece* (1981-98). In the final composition, father and son are upright, one acrobat perched upon the shoulder of another.

Yet if Takahashi did indeed become indispensable to Rauschenberg, at home and abroad, he also became active in the creative life that was unfolding in downtown New York, where artists were pioneering new practices—performative, environmental, participatory, text-based, fugitive—and developing the spaces in which those practices might flourish. Takahashi took to this spontaneous and nonhierarchical milieu, so different from both Milan and the world of Rauschenberg and the other Castelli artists. Beginning in May 1971, he showed his work and took part in performances at 112 Greene Street, the trailblazing space opened by Jeffrey Lew in 1970 and conceived as a lab or workshop rather than a conventional exhibition venue. For a solo presentation there in early 1973, *Collage Reflection: Work in Progress*, Takahashi assembled found images, diagrams, scientific illustrations, and maps in provisional-looking collages that were taped directly to the walls, without support or frame, underscoring

the temporary status of their configuration. In 1972, he was a guest chef at FOOD, the community canteen for cash-strapped artists founded by Carol Goodden and Gordon Matta-Clark with Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris, and Rachel Lew. After participating in the 1971 debut of Trisha Brown's Rummage Sale and the Floor of the Forest as well as in several performances at 112 Greene Street throughout the decade, Takahashi staged an event of his own in June 1979 in the former chapel at 38. His collaborators were the choreographer and video artist Laura Foreman and the electronic music composer John Watts." In a blend of caprice and endurance—there were five demanding performances each day for three days—Takahashi held aloft an unwieldy, bilevel aluminum frame with a membrane-like covering through which emerged waxed-paper balloons that hovered briefly, hopefully, before sinking to the floor.

During the 1980s, Takahashi found opportunities beyond 381 and 112 Greene Street. In February 1982 he participated in Pastiche, a loosely organized exhibition of drawings, photographs, objects, and text works at Grommet Gallery, a space operated by Jean Dupuy, Christian Xatrec, and Emily Harvey in the Soho loft Dupuy had acquired from Fluxus founder George Maciunas." Six years later, after Grommet had been reborn as the Emily Harvey Gallery, Takahashi was included in Extended Play, an international show of some three dozen artists that was dedicated to the vinyl record as sound source, object, and raw material. "Listed in the catalogue under the jazzy moniker Sachka Hisachika, Takahashi had cut fragments from pop singles to assemble a 45 rpm Frankenstein record, misshapen and unplayable. The only song title visible in its entirety within the

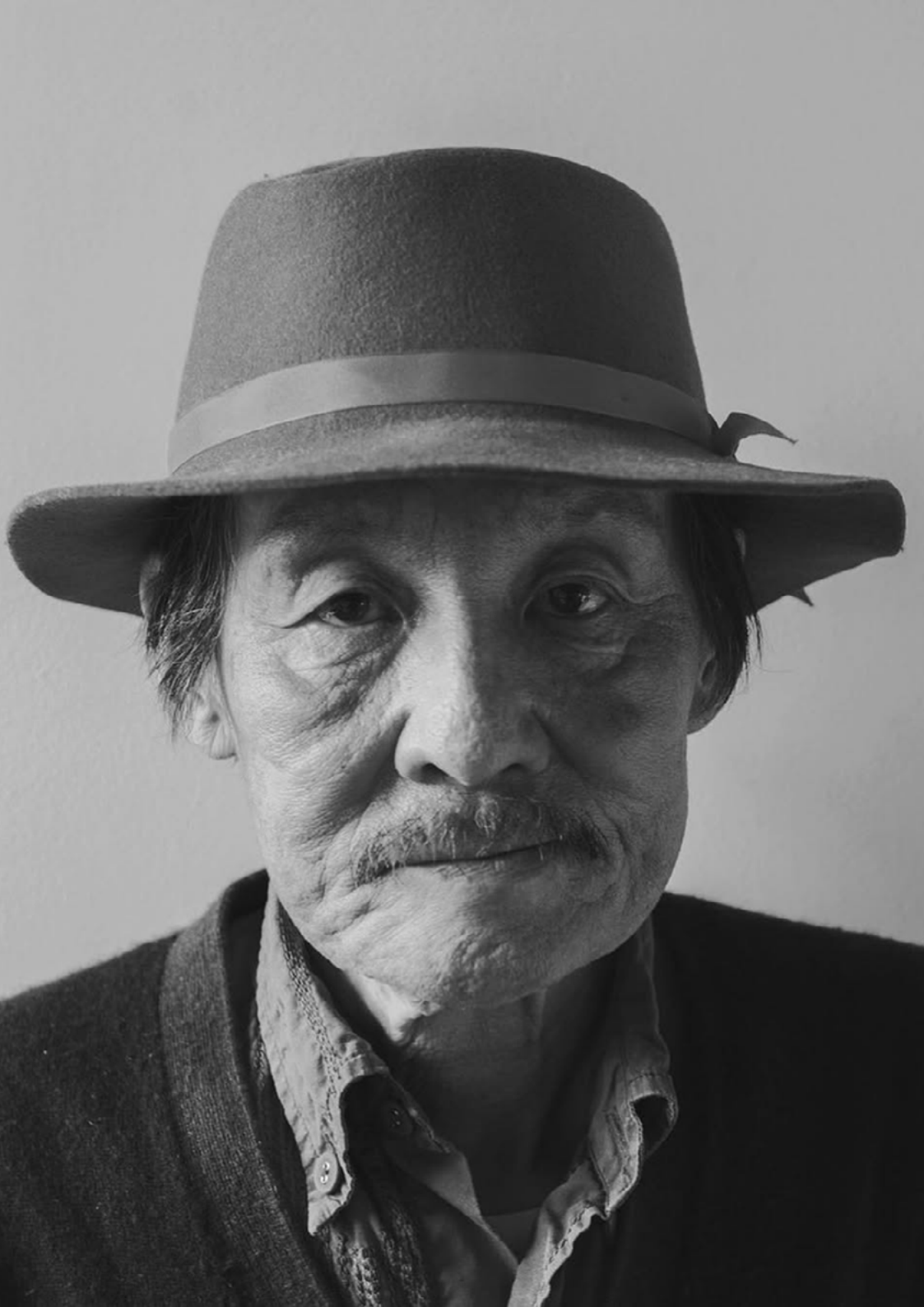
collage of printed record labels is the Rolling Stones' *The Under Asvistant West Coast Promotion Man*. Preserving the title may well have been Takahashi's private joke about his role as Rauschenberg's go-to assistant.

As galleries proliferated and artist-run spaces vanished, moved, or submitted to professional administrators—in short, as Soho became the city's commercial center for contemporary art—Takahashi continued to make prints, collages, and assemblages, though typically under more solitary circumstances than before. In 1991-92, he took a studio in Paris at l'Hôpital éphémère, a multidisciplinary artists squat that offered something of the anarchic creative environment he had known in New York two decades earlier. He stayed with the fashion designer Agathe Gonnet, and the two, who married in 1993, have lived in Paris and Vermont since 2006. With the passage of time, Takahashi's ephemeral installations, fragile collages, and collaborative performances became just so many unconnected notations in the histories of defunct institutions and the chronologies of other artists' catalogues. But in 2013, at the age of seventy-three, Hisachika Takahashi was rediscovered—not just once, but twice.

When the artist Yuki Okumura embarked on the research for the May 2013 exhibition that would cap his residency at WIELS Contemporary Art Centre in Brussels, he came upon the unfamiliar name of a countryman in a catalogue about the history of Wide White Space, the legendary gallery that had operated in Antwerp from 1966 to 1976. Amid the entries on exhibitions by Marcel Broodthaers, Christo, and Joseph Beuys, Okumura found a reference to a 1967 show of paintings by Hisachika Takahashi. Assisted by Wide White

Space co-founder Anny De Decker, Okumura located seven of the ten canvases shown in 1967 and reconstituted Takahashi's exhibition forty-six years later at WIELS. The paintings went on to appear in exhibitions in Oud-Rekem, Belgium, and in Liverpool. Five were subsequently sold at Art Rotterdam 2014.

— Excerpt from *Remembering The Map/Mapping The Moment*,
Marcia E. Vetrocq, Hisachika Takahashi: From Memory
Draw A Map of the United States, Hatje Cantz, 2015



Hisachika Takahashi

Born in Tokyo, 1940

Solo Exhibitions

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2021 | <i>This is Hisachika Takahashi</i> , MISAOKO & ROSEN, Tokyo |
| 2013 | Project Room, WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels
“From Memory: Draw a Map of the United States”,
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York
“Hisachika Takahashi: Antwerp 1967/Brussels 2013/
Liverpool 2013”, Exhibition Research Center, Liverpool |
| 1988 | “From Memory: Draw a Map of the United States”, Barbara
B. Mann Performing Arts Hall, Edison, State College, Florida |
| 1987 | “From Memory: Draw a Map of the United States”, Tampa
Museum of Art, Tampa |
| 1976 | Galleria D'Arte Cortina Cavour, Milan |
| 1973 | “Collage Reflection: A Work in Progress”, 112 Greene St.
Gallery, New York |
| 1967 | Wide White Space, Antwerp |
| 1964 | Galleria Montenapoleone, Milan |
| 1963 | Galerie Cavallino, Venice
Galleria “La Garitta”, Bergamo |

Group Exhibitions

- | | |
|------|---|
| 2018 | “The Myriad Forms of Visual Art: 196 Works with 19
Themes”, The National Museum of Art, Osaka |
| 2016 | “Thomas Demand : L'Image Volee”, Prada Foundation, Milan
“Takahashi Hisachika by Yuki Okumura”, La Maison Hermes
Forum Ginza, Tokyo |
| 2015 | “Hisachika Takahashi Annotated by Yuki Okumura:
Memory of Past and Future Memory”, Annet Gelink Gallery,
Amsterdam |

Group Exhibitions (Continued)

- 2013 *"Here is always somewhere else"*, Kasteel Oud-Rekem, Oud-Rekem
- 1994 *"Arts and Formes ou 40 Variations pour une Histoire d'Eau"*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris
- 1988 *"Extended Play"*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York
- 1982 *"Pastiche"*, Emily Harvey Gallery, New York
Chinese Chance (Mickey Ruskin), New York
- 1981 *"Artists' Benefit for the Trisha Brown Dance Company"*, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York
- 1980 *"The Norman Fisher Collection"*, Jacksonville Art Museum, Florida
- 1975 *"Prints from the Untitled Press, Captiva, Florida"*, Seattle Art Museum, Seattle
- 1974 *"Works from Change, Inc."*, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 1973 *"Aspects de l'art Actuel: Festival d'Automne à Paris"*, Galerie Sonnabend, Musée Galliera, Paris
"Prints from the Untitled Press, Captiva, Florida", Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut
- 1972 112 Greene St Gallery, New York
- 1971 112 Greene St Gallery, New York
- 1963 Galerie Cavallino, Venice
- 1962 La Galleria "LA TANA", Albisola, Savona
- 1961 *"9 Sculptures: 2nd Exhibition"*, Ginza Gallery, Tokyo

Public Collections

The Menil Collection, Houston
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas
Museum Voorlinden, Wassenaar
Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minneapolis



