

Guidebook

時代を Prism of the Real

日本で生まれた美術表現
MAKING ART IN JAPAN 1989-2010

What's "Making Art in Japan"?

The works in this exhibition were not only made by Japanese people living in Japan. Some were made by Japanese abroad, some were made by people from other places living in Japan, and some were influenced by Japan.

The art you see here is "Japanese-born" in many different ways. With the arrival of the Heisei era, more and more people and information began moving back and forth between Japan and abroad. This led to massive changes in Japanese culture and people's way of thinking. It was around this time that artists started making challenging works based on new ideas.

What kind of era was 1989-2010?

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2025年9月3日(水) → 12月8日(月)
The National Art Center, Tokyo Exhibition Gallery 1E | Closed: Tuesdays

What is Lens?

Three Lenses are some suggestions that the people who made this exhibition came up with for you. They thought that you might discover something new by looking at the artworks from different viewpoints.

Is War
All Over?



下道基行

SHITAMICHI Motoyuki

When you look closely at this photograph, you see that the people are sitting on a *torii* gate lying on the ground. Many years ago, when Japan colonized other countries, *torii* were erected all over the place. This was a way of making people in the countries follow the same lifestyle and religion as Japanese people. Even after colonial rule was over, people left the *torii* as they were. Although as time went on the gates became a calm and peaceful sight, they are still remnants of the war. This photograph seems to be telling us that that's the kind of world we live in.

Shitamichi Motoyuki, *Taichung, Taiwan* from “*torii*,” 2006–12, Collection of The National Museum of Art, Osaka

What are the people sitting here thinking about? Write down your ideas!

Use a pencil when you write.

Are Our Lives Unrelated to Wars
and Accidents That Happened in the Past?



ヤノベケンジ

YANOBE Kenji

This photograph was taken at a nursery school in an area that became off limits after an accident at a nuclear power plant many years ago. The artist who made this work was deeply shocked by the misery caused by massive disasters and incidents that go way beyond imaginary things like games or movies. To get a closer look and grasp the reality of these events, he put on a yellow protective suit that he made and visited these sites. What was he thinking about when he saw this broken doll that some children had probably played with?

Yanobe Kenji, *Atom Suit Project: Nursery School 1, Chernobyl*, 1997, Collection of Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art © Kenji Yanobe. Courtesy of the artist.

What is this man in the protective suit thinking about?
Write down your ideas!

Curatorial Lens 1:

過去といふ亡霊
The Past is a Phantom

What Does It Mean to Be Yourself?



What Does It Mean to Be “Typically Japanese”?

The artist collected and lined up some photos taken by a bunch of Japanese people, showing things like a kid taking a bath, a family celebrating someone’s birthday, and people posing in front of the bullet train. Even though different people took the pictures, isn’t there something similar about the people flashing peace signs, and the scenes of cherry-blossom viewing? When all of the pictures are lined up together, the people who took them seem to share something “typically Japanese.”

Fiona Tan, *Vox Populi, Tokyo*, 2007, Collection of Bernard Buffet Museum
© Fiona Tan. Courtesy Wako Works of Art, Tokyo.

Which photographs seem typically Japanese to you? Draw what you choose!



イ・ブル
LEE Bul

Is being “yourself” based on gender and appearance?

What do you think this woman looks like? Write your ideas!

It looks like the woman in the strange costume is having trouble moving. She keeps falling over as she walks down the street. Everyone around her is trying not to be noticed and keeping their distance. Having gone out of her way to change from a “regular” woman into some kind of mysterious creature walking through town, she seems to be asking people, “How do I look? What in the world do you think I am?”

Lee Bul, *Sorry for suffering-You think I’m a puppy on a picnic?*, 1990, Collection of the artist
© Lee Bul. Courtesy of the artist.

Curatorial Lens 2:

2

自己と他者と
Self and Others

What Can We Find
Out by Doing
Things
Together?

曾根裕

SONE Yutaka



A bunch of bicycles are connected together. Try to imagine people sitting on top of all the seats. When you ride a bicycle, you usually move at your pace. But in this case everybody would have to work together and breathe at the same time. Otherwise, they wouldn't get anywhere. They would probably also have to discuss when to start pedaling and how fast to go. Nineteen people got together, practiced, and made one mistake after another, but even then they barely moved forward. What were they aiming to do by riding this vehicle?

Sone Yutaka, *Her 19th Foot*, 1993, Collection of Art Tower Mito
Photo: Ken Kato.

Community Is a
Group Made Up of People
Who Live in the Same Area
or Share
a Common Goal

Which community in the works in Lens 3
would you like to join?

Title:

Write down the reasons
why you think so!

These are just a few of the works in the exhibition.
Take a look around and try to find something that interests you.



SHIMABUKU
島袋道浩

The people in the video on the right are singing as they watch the video on the left. Since they don't understand Japanese or English, the lyrics they imagine based on what they see are actually completely different. With gusto and power, they sing about him being a great fisherman. In fact, he's an artist, but to them he looks like a fisherman. Is this simply a case of misunderstanding the song? There was a misunderstanding, but maybe this is a new way for people to communicate and get to know each other.

Shimabuku, *Asking the Repentistas-Peneira & Sonhador-to remix my octopus works*, 2006, Collection of the artist
Courtesy of the artist / Air de Paris, Romainville / Amanda Wilkinson Gallery, London / Galleria Zero..., Milano.

Is it still possible to
communicate even
when you can't convey
your ideas and feelings
through words?

Curatorial Lens 3:



コミュニティの
持つ未来
A Promise of Community

Let's Think of Lens 4 !

What did you think about as you were looking at this exhibition?
If you met someone who had also seen this exhibition,
what do you think you would talk about?

Is War All Over?

What Can We Find Out by
Doing Things Together?

What Does It Mean to Be Yourself?

What other things could you talk about?

Write your ideas!

Then you'll have your own original **Lens 4!**

Curatorial Lens 4:
VIZ

おはなりのVIZ
Your Lens

Rules for Looking at Works

- 👉 Don't touch
- 🚶 Walk slowly
- 🗣️ Speak in a small voice
- ✍️ Use a pencil when you write

Prism of the Real: Making Art in Japan 1989–2010

September 3 (Wed) - December 8 (Mon), 2025.

Closed on Tuesdays *Closed on September 24 (Open on September 23)

Opening Hours 10:00-18:00 *10:00-20:00 on Fridays and Saturdays
(Last admission 30 minutes before closing)

Venue The National Art Center, Tokyo Special Exhibition Gallery 1E

Organized by The National Art Center, Tokyo, in partnership with
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Government of Japan

Website https://www.nact.jp/english/exhibition_special/2025/JCAW/

Prism of the Real: Making Art in Japan 1989–2010 Guidebook

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Works [Front Page]

Left: Tsubaki Noboru, *Esthetic Pollution* [detail] 1990

© TSUBAKI Noboru Photo: SAIKI Taku. Courtesy of 21st Century Museum of
Contemporary Art, Kanazawa / Right: Fiona Tan, *Vox Populi, Tokyo*, 2007

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