



**SHINJIRO OKAMOTO**

***TALKATIVE***

March 19 – May 11, 2024

720 N Highland Avenue Los Angeles 90038

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*“Provoking laughter is a demanding, serious, even sacred, task.”*<sup>1</sup>

- Hashi Hidebumi, curator, Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura

Nonaka-Hill is pleased to present Shinjiro Okamoto *“Talkative”*, an artist expressly acknowledged in Japan for his post-war art and unabashed observance of pre-war “Japanese-ness,” as well as his subsequent innovations in that country’s vital Pop Art movement. An art director, master printmaker and celebrated artist, Okamoto (1933 – 2020) is regarded manifestly for paving the way for what would become universally recognized as the Superflat and Micropop phenomena made mainstream in the 1990s by artists Takashi Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara. *Oka-Shin*, as he was affectionately referred during his long and varied career, emitted a generous, communicative presence, while his oeuvre throughout expressed darker psychological themes - equal parts “witty and disorderly”<sup>2</sup> paradoxically personal and popular. He once described his work as “a strange amalgam in which everything is what it is and at the same time is not.”<sup>3</sup>

An avid devotee of the aesthetics of the Edo period (1603 – 1868), which protected Japan’s insular culture, Shinjiro Okamoto grew up in working class Tokyo during Showa (1926 – 1981) and as a young teenager experienced the devastating U.S. fire-bombing of his home city in 1945. Largely self-taught, his drawing, painting, design and writing are heavy with nostalgia for the old low lying Tokyo neighborhoods and streets of his youth. Okamoto early on embraced a Nihonga style of working, which developed into a subjective language of simple outlines condensing characters and scenes, infused with carefully applied uniform acrylic paint of muted, fluorescent, pastel and high color tones – combinations typical in the history of Japanese packaging and design, and in Nihonga genres, but not yet particularly common in the West, even at the onset of Pop Art in the late 1950s. Prefacing Japan’s perceived godfather of *Superflat* Sadamasa Motonaga, Okamoto created “shadowy pictures without shadows” as jocular, immersive surfaces that could elicit a range of *cheerfully nihilistic* emotions from humor to paranoia, elation to dread.

Okamoto's “One Indian ...” (1964) shown at the Walker Art Center’s 2015 survey on International Pop – art historian Hiroki Ikegami writes: “because Okamoto began making his comic-book-style paintings in 1962, before the advent of American Pop in Japan, he refused to be classified as a Pop artist, as doing so would have misleadingly indicated that his art was a byproduct of American Pop.”<sup>4</sup> However, there is sure evidence that points to Okamoto’s clear appreciation of Western Pop’s influence globally (he must have been aware and supportive of Öyvind Fahlström’s representation of Sweden in the 1966 Venice Biennale given the remarkable visual rhetoric they shared from opposite sides of the world), and he particularly noted American Pop artists in his titles (Jim Dine was a friend) and made several artwork homages to Andy Warhol. In his 1998; Museum of

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Modern Art, Kamakura; retrospective Okamoto notes, “Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein are famous practitioners of official, stereotypical, formalist subtraction,” <sup>5</sup> - subtraction Okamoto readily endorsed, but he also recognized the distinction in their endgame intentions: “I hope to produce an entertaining environment but one that does not pander to the viewer.” <sup>6</sup>

The summer of 1964 was a time of unprecedented pride (and aggravation) as Tokyo prepared to welcome/despair the opportunity to prove Japan’s post-war recovery as Olympic Games host, and contemporary artists were ready with their cynicism, humor and action. In step with Hiroshi Nakamura and Tiger Tateishi’s “Sightseeing Art Research Institute” action on the banks of Tokyo’s Tama River and Hi-Red Center’s “Cleaning Event” and subway performances, Shinjiro Okamoto produced “Ten Indians” – high in color, low in expression (a comment on human alienation in post-war Japan) – and the following year invited ten individuals to each carry one from his opening exhibition at Sato Gallery to the Yoyogi National Gymnasium, built specifically to honor and awe athletes and visitors alike to the Games. The “Indian” series which Nonaka-Hill features, is a set of 10 line drawings from 1996 and is particularly emblematic of the artist’s embrace of systematic repetition (a virtuosic printer after all), where he recycles - over decades - motifs, insignia, structures, titles: *Ten Indians*, *One Indian*, *The World of Insects*, *Betty Boop*, *Van Gogh*, *Warhol*, *Dine*, *Popeye*, *Marilyn*, *Don Quixote*, *Buddha*, *Chaplin*, *Dankichi* – all classifications and characters that make repeated appearances in *Okashin*’s world.

*“Few artists have shown the same ability as Okamoto in digging up the elements from their own experience necessary to reveal these conditions.”* <sup>7</sup>

- Ichiro Haryu, Art Critic

Shinjiro Okamoto offers a rare example of both pre-war and post-war mass culture sensibility as seen through Japanese eyes. This exhibition presents work from each decade 1956 – 1997 and includes early watercolors, pencil, acrylic on canvas, three dimensional paintings that incorporate plastic balls and wooden clogs, in an effort to convey the active, “talkative” if you will, nature inherent in Okamoto’s “luxuriously elegant and artificial paradise” <sup>8</sup> that simultaneously manages to retain the modest sensibility of his shitamachi (inner city) upbringing. In this selective survey at Nonaka-Hill, influences of political satirists (Saul Steinberg, Hiroshi Nakamura, Tiger Tateishi, Pino Pascali, Mario Schifano) are as apparent and pervasive as the Pattern and Decoration movement of 1970’s, 80’s and 90’s (Howardina Pindell, Tina Girourd, Miriam Schapiro, Lari Pittman) and reference the influence and history of decorative arts as pictorial political testimonies, then and now.

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Shinjiro Okamoto (1933 – 2020) was the recipient of several awards during his lifetime, including the Niki Society Exhibition Shell Art Award (1956), Frontier Prize (1963), Shirataki Prize, and Accolades (1969) and the subject of many solo international exhibitions including BTAP, Beijing (2020), Shoto Museum of Art, Tokyo (2011), Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art, Shizuoka (2001), Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura (1998), Niigata City Art Museum (1987). Institutional group exhibitions include Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Nagoya (2019), Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa (2016), Walker Art Center, Minnesota (2015), Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art, Shizuoka (2000), Miyagi Museum of Art (1990), Museum of Modern Art, New York (1965).

Selected Public Collections include Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (Kobe, Japan), Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art (Shizuoka, Japan), Miyagi Museum of Art (Miyagi, Japan), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (Ibiza, Spain), Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (Belgrade, Serbia), Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (Tokyo, Japan), Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama (Kanagawa, Japan), Museum of Modern Art, Saitama (Saitama, Japan), Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama (Wakayama, Japan), National Museum of Art, Osaka (Osaka, Japan), National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (Tokyo, Japan), Niigata City Art Museum (Niigata, Japan), Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art (Niigata, Japan), Takamatsu City Museum of Art (Kagawa, Japan), Tochigi Prefectural Museum (Utsunomiya, Japan), and Tokushima Modern Art Museum (Tokushima, Japan).

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\*1 Hidebumi, Hashi. "Welcome to Okashin World: A Few Words on the Laughing Art of Okamoto Shinjiro". Shinjiro Okamoto "The Laughing Panorama Museum". (Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura, 1998), 68.

\*2 Yoshie, Yoshida. "Generating a Primal Landscape, Attacking the Fictional City: The Critical Spirit of a Master Swordsman". Shinjiro Okamoto "The Laughing Panorama Museum". (Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura, 1998.), 11-12.

\*3 Okamoto, Shinjiro. "Laughing Time Machine". Shinjiro Okamoto "The Laughing Panorama Museum". (Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura, 1998.), 15-16.

\*4 Ikegami, Hiroko. "'Drink More?' 'No Thanks!': The Spirit of Tokyo Pop". International Pop. (Walker Art Center, 2015.), 172

\*5 Okamoto. "Laughing Time Machine".

\*6 *Ibid.*

\*7 Haryu, Ichiro. "Art and Mass Culture of Shinjiro Okamoto." The Exposition of Shinjiro Okamoto Tokyo Shonen. (Niigata City Museum of Art, 1988.), 140-141.

\*8 Hidebumi. "Welcome to Okashin World".

## Shinjiro Okamoto

- 1933 Born in Tokyo, Japan  
 2020 Passed away in Tokyo, Japan

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2024 *SHINJIRO OKAMOTO: TALKATIVE*, Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, USA  
 2022 *Third Memorial Exhibition: Quiet Uproar*, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Beijing, China  
 Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan  
 2021 *Okashin – Shinjiro Okamoto Beyond POP*, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Beijing, China  
*Shinjiro Okamoto Exhibition*, Cashart, Shenzhen, China  
 2020 *The Pioneer of Japanese Pop Art*, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Beijing, China  
 2011 *Shinjiro Okamoto: The Big Bomb at 25:00*, Shoto Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan  
 2008 *Shinjiro Okamoto's Panoramic Humor Universe – The Philosophy of Humor 1950-2001*,  
 Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Beijing  
 2001 *Roly-poly Cherry Blossom Laughing Show – Moon and Flower*, Ikeda Museum of 20th  
 Century Art, Shizuoka, Japan  
 1998 *The Laughing Panorama Museum*, Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura, Japan  
 1991 *Laughing Sketch*, Gallery Taiki, Tokyo, Japan  
 Kosai Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 1987 *The Painting Laughs: The Exhibition of Shinjiro Okamoto – Tokyo Shonen*, Niigata City  
 Art Museum, Niigata, Japan  
 1981 Kanagawa Prefectural Gallery, Yokohama, Japan  
 1979 *The World of Shinjiro Okamoto: Records of 25 Years*, Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art,  
 Shizuoka, Japan  
 1978 *My Sword Fighting Experience*, Ao Gallery, Tokyo and Anri Gallery, Nagoya, Japan  
 1974 *Betty Boop's Country*, Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 1966 *Insect World*, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 1965 *Ten Indians*, Sato Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 1964 *Sacred Landscape*, Mudo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 1963 Kunugi Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 1962 Kunugi Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
 1956 Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2024 *The Factory of Images*, SEARCHING ART SPACE, Xiamen, China  
 2023 *Celebrating the Museum's First Anniversary: Art in Love with Design* ♥ *Design Envious  
 of Art*, Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan  
 2022 *MOT Collection: Rewinding the Collection 2nd*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan  
 2021-2 *Collection 1 - 1968: In Search of a New Paradigm for Postwar Art*, The National  
 Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan  
 2020 *MOT Collection: Present Day and in Time Past - Multiple Perspectives*, Museum of  
 Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan

- Selected Group Exhibitions
- 2019 *Earth Attack*, Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art, Nagoya, Japan
  - 2017 *A Trip through the Tokyo Station Gallery Collection from Railway Art to Picasso*, Tokyo Station Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Parody and Intertextuality: Visual Culture in Japan Around the 1970s*, Tokyo Station Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
  - 2016 Permanent Collection Exhibition, Takamatsu Art Museum, Kagawa, Japan
  - 2015 *International Pop*, Walker Art Center, Minnesota, USA
  - 2014 *MOT Collection, Part 1: Our Ninety Years: 1923-2013; Part 2: Chronicle 1966- | Expanded Vision*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan
  - 2013 *Awakening – Where Are We Standing? – Earth, Memory and Resurrection*, Aichi Triennial 2013, Aichi, Japan
  - 2007 *Trajectory of Yoshio Murakami*, Aomori Museum of Art, Aomori, Japan
  - 2000 *Art Front 25 Years – With The Artists*, Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art, Shizuoka, Japan
  - 1990 *Contemporary Poetry and Color*, Japan Contemporary Poetry and Literature Center, Iwate, Japan  
*Picasso and Japan*, Tokushima Modern Art Museum, Tokushima, Japan  
*The Power of Fantasy: From the Modern and Contemporary Art of Japan*, The Miyagi Museum of Art, Miyagi, Japan
  - 1988 *Varieties of Human Form*, Kintetsu Art Museum, Osaka, Japan
  - 1987 *Landscape of the Heart-Naive Art Exhibition*, Seibu Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan 1986  
*Lieca International Drawing Biennial (Purchase Prize)*, Belgrade Modern Art Museum, Belgrade, Yugoslavia  
*Ryu Modern Art Exhibition*, Sakaide Civic Museum of Art, Kagawa, Japan  
*83 Contemporary Japanese Painters*, Sogo Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan
  - 1985 *Contemporary Japanese Paintings, 83 Artists*, New Delhi National Museum of Modern Art, New Delhi, India  
*40 Years of Modern Art*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1984 *Humor in Contemporary Art*, The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Japan  
*Japanese Contemporary Paintings, 1960-1970*, Gunma Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Gunma, Japan
  - 1983 *Trend of Contemporary Art II, 1960s – Beginning of Diversification*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1982 *A Panorama of Contemporary Art in Japan – Oil Painting*, The Museum of Modern Art, Toyama, Japan  
*Illustration Today*, The Miyagi Museum of Art, Miyagi, Japan
  - 1981 *Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo / Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, Kyoto  
*Inaugural Exhibition Part 1 - A Scene of Contemporary Japanese Art*, The Miyagi Museum of Art, Miyagi, Japan  
*Shonen Senki*, 81 Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*The Pop Wave*, Gallery Humanité, Nagoya, Japan

- Selected Group Exhibitions
- 1981 *The 1960s — A Decade of Change in Contemporary Japanese Art*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo / National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan
- 1980 *Form and Rhetoric*, Sato Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1980 *Japanese Prints*, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Tochigi, Japan
- 1979 *Shimizu Kusuo and Artists*, Minami Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1976 *British International Print Biennial* (Lunt Humphrey Prize for joint work made with Go Yayanagi), Bradford, UK
- 1975 *Contemporary Print Exhibition*, College Women's Association Japan, Tokyo, Japan  
*Ljubljana Print Biennial*, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia  
*Still-Life Today*, Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan  
*Yellow Machine and Green Times Exhibition*, Science and Technology Center, Tokyo, Japan
- 1974 *Modern Print Exhibition*, College Women's Association of Japan, Tokyo, Japan  
*Tokyo International Figurative Art Biennial*, Tokyu Department Store, Tokyo, Japan
- 1973 *Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*Contemporary Japanese Print Exhibition*, College Women's Association of Japan, Tokyo, Japan
- 1972 *Contemporary Japanese Print Exhibition*, College Women's Association of Japan, Tokyo, Japan  
*Developments of Contemporary Japanese Art Changes in Figurative Expression*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 1971 *Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*Contemporary Japanese Print Exhibition*, College Women's Association of Japan, Tokyo, Japan  
*Contemporary Japanese Print Exhibition*, Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan  
*Modern Art Festival*, Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan  
*100 Artists Today*, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Hyogo, Japan
- 1970 *Human Documents*, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1969 *Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 1968 *Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*Environmental Game Council Exhibition*, Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Mutual Influences between Japanese and Western Art*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan
- 1967 *Art in Wonderland*, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Japan Art Festival*, Houston, Texas, USA  
*Japan International Art Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*War Exhibition*, Nippon Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1966 *Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*New Generation of Contemporary Art*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan  
*War Exhibition*, Nippon Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 1965 *My Sword-fighting Experiences, Hello, Space Man!*, Yoshida Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*New Japanese Painting and Sculpture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA  
*Seven Deaths*, Tsubaki Modern Gallery, Tokyo, Japan  
*Tokyo Biennial*, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*15 Contemporary Japanese Artists*, Zurich City Art Museum, Zurich, Switzerland

- Selected Group Exhibitions
- 1964 *Artists Today 1964*, Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan  
*Contemporary Trend of Japanese Paintings and Sculptures*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan  
*International Young Artists Pan-Europe and Japan Exhibition*, Seibu Department Store, Tokyo, Japan  
The Museum of Contemporary Art Nagaoka Prize Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Nagaoka, Niigata, Japan  
*World Modern Art Exhibition*, Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Yokohama, Japan  
*Young Seven Exhibition*, Minami Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1963 Shell Art Award, Shirokiya Department Store, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1962 Shell Art Award, Shirokiya Department Store, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1961 Artists Exhibition, Shinjuku Daiichi Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1959 The 2nd Seisaku Kaigi Exhibition, Bunshun Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1958 Asian Youth Art Exhibition, Toyoko Department Store, Tokyo, Japan  
Eureka Poetry Painting Exhibition, Gallery Hiroshi, Tokyo, Japan  
Niki Society Exhibition, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
*Shinjiro Okamoto, Tsuyako Goto Joint Exhibition*, Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1957 The 1st Seisaku Kaigi Exhibition, Hibiya Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
  - 1956 The 9th Nihon Independent Exhibition, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
The 8th Yomiuri Independent Exhibition, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan  
(Participated in all subsequent annual Yomiuri Independent Exhibitions)

- Accolades
- 1969 Frontier Prize
  - 1963 Shell Art Award
  - 1962 Award for Excellence, Niki Society Exhibition  
Shell Art Award
  - 1956 Shirataki Prize

Selected Public Collections

Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art (Kobe, Japan), Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art (Shizuoka, Japan), Miyagi Museum of Art (Miyagi, Japan), Museo de Arte Contemporáneo (Ibiza, Spain), Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade (Belgrade, Serbia), Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (Tokyo, Japan), Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama (Kanagawa, Japan), Museum of Modern Art, Saitama (Saitama, Japan), Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama (Wakayama, Japan), National Museum of Art, Osaka (Osaka, Japan), National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (Tokyo, Japan), Niigata City Art Museum (Niigata, Japan), Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art (Niigata, Japan), Takamatsu City Museum of Art (Kagawa, Japan), Tochigi Prefectural Museum (Utsunomiya, Japan), Tokushima Modern Art Museum (Tokushima, Japan)