

Special feature | YOKOO Tadanori-Ever-Changing, Like Water Work Captions

Bride, 1966

The Water's Left Running!

A bride with her breasts shamelessly revealed rolls back her eyes, mouth wide open, picking her nose, while everything around her is flooded with water. This work was presented at Yokoo's solo exhibition in 1966. Japanese author and poet Mishima Yukio, who wrote a text for the exhibition, commented, "What rude art, what a lack of etiquette!"

In his 1987 diary entry Yokoo had written, "I must be vulgar," "I must produce the most radical paintings" and "I must submit my whole life as a work of art." *

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Shin The Bride in the Mirror, Even, 2021/2022

Behind the Bride

A bride stands facing a mirror while holding a razor to her face. Although her surroundings aren't flooded, she is still as blatantly unreserved as ever. The work is an iteration and variation of *The Bride* painted in 1966.

Above the washbasin where there would usually be a mirror, is the work by Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*. It appears reversed due to being reflected in the mirror, or perhaps it is a view of it from behind since the work itself is painted on panes of glass.

An airplane approaches from behind the bride who is stripped naked.

Shin Hong Kong Night/Shin James Bond /Shin Escape to the Incompletion, 2021-2022

New works of "Shin-Rojin[Elderly]"

The works with "New" at the beginning of their title, were produced in 2022. This is the first time they are presented to the public.

All of these works are based on works that were featured in Yokoo's solo exhibition in 1966. In his exhibition in 2021, Yokoo presented prints of his acrylic paintings. The works introduced on this occasion have been produced by making additional marks to those prints. By adding various scribble-like touches, works of the past are transformed into "New" works. Many layers of time thus reside within these works.

Shin The Falling Woman III, 2021-2022

Falling

The title of the work is *Shin the Falling Woman III*. Where has the woman fallen from? The tiger-patterned hanging rope and red circular scribbles may have fallen with her as well.

The wooden door in the background appears to have been referenced from Marcel Duchamp's work, *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas*.

Falling water=waterfalls are abundant in Yokoo's work. Perhaps the blue lining of the woman's clothing is the color of water?

A LA MAISON DE M.CIVEÇAWA (Garumera shokai), 1965

"The Greatest Cultural Magnetic Field on Earth"

In the late 1960s, Yokoo began to use all kinds of media as objects of expression while keeping graphic design at the center of his activities. He wrote that the "greatest cultural magnetic field on earth" was created through interactions with figures such as Mishima Yukio, Hosoe Eikoh, Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, Hijikata Tatsumi, Terayama Shuji, Kara Juro, Ichiyanagi Toshi, and Oshima Nagisa.

Yokoo intentionally incorporated into his works vulgarity and cruelty, as well as the personal and fragmented everyday life that modern design had discarded, creating grotesque and colorful worlds that do not cease to captivate.

Torture, 1969

An "Invitation"

This triptych was exhibited at the 6th Paris Youth Biennale in 1969, where it was awarded the Grand Prize for prints. The six images, one above and one below on each of the three prints, are created by printing with one or multiple plates, and there is no so-called notion of completion here. The process of printmaking itself is shown as unfinished.

As our gaze is "invited" to wander through the intense colors, we eventually find ourselves mesmerized by the alluring depiction of the figure's feet.

HOSOE Eikoh Photo works, Ordeal by Roses Reedited Version(Shueisha), 1971

The Reclining Buddha

Ordeal by Roses (Re-edited Version), published in 1971, is collection of photographs of Mishima Yukio taken by Hosoe Eikoh. Yokoo had been appointed to work on the design and illustrations for this book. This reedited version includes a new chapter titled "The Eye of the Sea," in which the sea, one of Mishima's key literary subjects, is explored through Hosoe's photographs and Yokoo's illustrations.

Mishima described this image of himself with Hindu deities as "me as a reclining buddha," and anticipated that Yokoo would be visiting India.

SANTANA: LOTUS, 1974

“Soul Brothers”

Yokoo designed the cover for the album *LOTUS* by the Latin rock band Santana, which was recorded during their live tour in Japan. In the 22-sided jacket, which has been certified by the Guinness World Records as having the most sides, gods, pyramids, UFOs, airplanes, and other objects are seen coexisting and spreading out across the vastness of outer space. Yokoo described his encounter with Carlos Santana, who was in search of “the supreme,” as that which was fateful, while Santa himself referred to Yokoo as his “soul brother.”

"Shambala", 1974

The Home of One's Soul

In 1970, following a traffic accident, Yokoo announced that he would be taking a hiatus. Through spiritual experiences, dreams of UFOs, and the death of Mishima, Yokoo had lost interest in the real and pragmatic, instead beginning his pursuit of the universe, the afterlife, and other worlds to which one's soul originally belonged and to which it will eventually return.

Of particular interest were legends regarding the kingdom of Agartha, which is said to exist within a hollow inside the earth, and the belief that superhuman beings living in its capital of Shambhala have the power to raise the consciousness of those living upon the surface. This series of prints illustrates such aspirations that the artist harbored.

Francis Picabia 1999-2000 (Apt International), 1999

Japanese Culture: The Fifty Postwar Years (Meguro Museum of Art, Tokyo, The Asahi Shimbun Company), 1995

Weekly Shōnen Magazine (Kodansha Ltd.), 1970

[Matchbox], 1966

What's yours is mine. What's mine is mine

These words are the subtitle of Yokoo's solo exhibition “Tadanori Yokoo Incomplete,” which was held at the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa in 2009. It appears to perfectly capture Yokoo's characteristic as an artist who employs reproduction, citation, and collage as methods for producing his work. Yokoo, by copying a certain object or borrowing from its inherent power, assembles various images into a ‘container’ such as a poster or magazine cover, as if making a bowl of fruit punch. The interest and curiosity of Yokoo's work perhaps lies in the selection and mixing of these images.

As This Time the Pursuit of Truth Has Already Started, 1991

Jungle and Waterfalls

This work is based on the front cover of the American magazine *Jungle Comics*. It is an adventure story featuring “KAANGA,” a

character derived from Tarzan.

As can be seen from the text, the original cover image is depicted in reverse. Countless waterfalls flow through the characters who appear transparent asides from their faces and clothes. The setting seems to have shifted from the jungle to an otherworldly realm of waterfalls.

Gathering and Dispersing-The Action of Its Power, 1991

What has the Artist Painted?

This work is based on *Las Meninas* by the Spanish painter Diego Velázquez. Velázquez is said to have painted the portrait of the King and Queen reflected in a mirror positioned in the center of the image.

Seen reflected in the mirror in Yokoo's work is Kegon Falls in Nikko, Tochigi Prefecture. If so, has the artist painted a waterfall? Yokoo concentrated on paintings of waterfalls since 1988, drawing inspiration from his dreams.

Dragon Vessel, 1988-1989

Yokoo's Mirror Cruel World

This series of five printings reimagines the story of Ruggiero and Angelica from the epic poem *Orlando Furioso* by Italian Renaissance poet Ludovico Ariosto. The story is of a knight rescuing a princess from the clutches of a sea monster, yet here the characters are respectively replaced with a warrior, a woman in bondage, and a tyrannosaurus.

Perhaps the work represents the anguish of having a lack of freedom due to constantly being trapped by something, as well as the very desire to escape from it. In the world behind the mirror, one may find a way to escape without resorting to the help of warriors.

Are You Ready for Reading the Book of Yoichiro Minami?, 1992

The Thrill and Excitement of Childhood

The title of the work, “the Book of Yoichiro Minami,” refers to *The Adventures of Balubar*, a jungle adventure novel written by Yoichiro Minami and illustrated by Gyosui Suzuki, which Yokoo had read with absorbed interest as a child. Depicted in the upper corner of the image is the “One-Eyed Golden Lion,” a companion of “Balubar” who is the Japanese incarnation of Tarzan.

The blue silhouette is a duel scene between Miyamoto Musashi and Sasaki Kojiro. It is based on what Yokoo had enthusiastically copied from a picture book published by Kodansha when he was five years old.

The glittering light of the falling waterfall seems to heighten the feeling of excitement.

300 Years Party, 1996

Dreaming for 300 Years

Since the mid-1990s, Yokoo has created many works with themes of adventure and other worlds rooted in his boyhood experiences and memories.

The image of Urashima Taro in this work is based on a picture book published by Kodansha. A diver witnesses Urashima Taro on a turtle returning to earth from the underwater Dragon Palace with a mysterious jeweled box in his hand. With warm tones that seem to be enveloped in light, it depicts an undersea fairy tale that transcends both time and space.

Experimental Report, 1996

Two as One

A couple of boys appear to be fixated on the scene unfolding before them. Let us follow their example and take a look.

From the woman gathering skeletons in the foreground to the star in the furthest background, all of the figures and objects depicted in the work are numbered. While the number corresponds to the order in which the artist painted them, they appear to have gathered in this cave from all over the place, seemingly unaware of each other's presence. Looking closely, one notices that many of them are in pairs, and even the water that flows down from the waterfall becomes one inside the cave.

Princess Konohana-Sakuya's Rebirth, 1998

Portrait of Mt. Fuji

Princess Konohana Sakuya is the goddess of Mt. Fuji in Japanese mythology, and her symbols of the moon and the sun are depicted on either side of the image.

Up close, it is possible to see a myriad of faces pasted throughout. It is as if countless people are being drawn to Mt. Fuji's tremendous energy. This work too, must have been created in response to the great power of Mt. Fuji.

To the Another World, 2000

This World and the Afterlife

This work was painted in Yokoo's hometown of Nishiwaki City, Hyogo Prefecture. Portraits of his deceased classmates float amidst the scenery of a railroad track that runs over an iron bridge near Shin-Nishiwaki Station. Yokoo himself is also seen, painted in red as a living person.

A red spider lily is painted in the foreground along with a moth that was perched on the floor at the artist's feet during the time of production. Just as the moth representing the soul of the dead had flown into the studio, the railroad track also serves to connect this world and the afterlife.

Shot Inspiration, 1991

The Annunciation

The work is based on the Annunciation, in which the Archangel Gabriel announces to the Virgin Mary that she would conceive and bear a son by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yokoo imagined

the inspiration "shot" from the angel to dwell in the artist and manifest as a work of art.

Floating amidst the yellow are UFOs. They are painted from a photograph Yokoo took when he witnessed a UFO at the fifth station of Mount. Fuji. For Yokoo, UFOs and angels are both messengers from another world.

Mysterious Benefit, 2021

Two Smiling Figures

This work is from the series "Hanshan and Shide," which was presented in Yokoo's 2021 solo exhibition. Hanshan and Shide are two legendary Chinese monks of the Tang Dynasty. Hanshan is depicted holding a scroll on which he inscribes poems, but it has been replaced by a roll of toilet paper. The sight of them playfully straddling a toilet bowl seems appropriate for these two figures known for their eccentricity.

The red shapes floating around them are brushstrokes that have been contoured and filled in. Akin to the unexpected shapes that have emerged upon the canvas, the two figures seem to have suddenly come riding on their toilet bowls.

Love of Heaven and Earth, 1994

The Death of Two Men

Painted in the lower right corner of the image is Mishima Yukio, referenced from Shinoyama Kishin's book of photographs, *The Death of a Man*. The figure in the upper left corner is based on a photograph published in *Tadanori Yokoo's Posthumous Works*. Yokoo himself was also to be featured as a subject in *Death of a Man*, but this was never realized due to his unexplained illness. In this work, one could say that the death of these two men is finally depicted together within a single image. As it is mentioned in Yokoo's 2022 novel *Genkyo no Mori* ("Forest in Soul"), the communion between Yokoo and Mishima continues to be a deep and long-lasting one.

Fall, 1982

The Painter Reborn

A pink male figure, stark naked, is being struck by a waterfall. The waterfall transforms into different colors while splashing symmetrically from the shoulders, navel, groin, knees, and ankles, as if reacting to the man's body.

In Yokoo's 1966 solo exhibition, pink women were painted against a background of water. This work was created in 1982, when he began presenting his work with the determination of becoming an artist.

In the way that performing cold water ablutions enable one to experience a sense of awakening and regeneration, the work itself can be seen as Yokoo restarting his career as a painter.

A Dark Night's Flashing: Double Darkness, 2001

A Nonexistent Landscape

The "Y-junction" is a series of landscape paintings in which a single road branches off into two paths, one on the left and one on the right, with its junction positioned in the center of the image.

What Yokoo had considered as a memorable place in his hometown, when photographed, simply turned out to be a Y-junction at night. His encounter with this Y-junction became the incentive for this series.

This seemingly familiar landscape is in fact a landscape that is nowhere to be found, created through combining photographs taken in different locations.

Picasso in the 20th Year, 2001

From an Encounter with Picasso

Yokoo decided to become a painter after seeing a Picasso exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1980. He intuitively understood that life and creativity are to be found in play and expressing one's emotions honestly like Picasso.

The boy and girl crossing the bridge are inverted in relation to the waterfall and the basin, which are depicted in an upright position. Just as the *dosojin* (tutelary deity of borders and paths) pasted on the image stands at the boundary between here and there, and between the world of the living and the afterlife, the work serves to connect two opposing things.

Destiny, 1997

Red Cosmos

A girl and boy are crossing a bridge through the red darkness amidst a nebula and the light of flying fireflies. Their path is protected by a celestial robe that gently drifts above them. Perhaps the reason why we can only see the lower half of the girl and boy is because they have only just set foot in this world. These two who make an appearance in *Picasso in the 20th Year*, remain close to each other as they walk along a bridge that looks as if it is about to collapse. Such suggests Yokoo's creative attitude of trying to retain the sensibility of a child.

A Dark Night's Flashing: From the Red Darkness, 2001

Two Worlds

The cemetery along the left path is engulfed in a sea of red, while the path on the right is lush with greenery.

At first glance, the landscape appears to be divided into the world of the dead and the world of the living, yet a green light is seen in the distance beyond the cemetery, while the roots of the trees are illuminated in red. In the midst of these two intersecting worlds, will the red dog venture towards the realm of green?

Both the red and green worlds depicted in this Y-junction, can originally be traced back to the same one road.

I was born on the same day as Helen Keller, June 27, to my father's younger brother and his wife, and adopted by the main Yokoo family. My adoptive parents told me they found me under the bridge. Since small, I often lay beneath the stars imagining my

destiny; and I likened myself to a firefly, which twinkles like a star. I know clearly that an invisible guardian spirit and the Rat of the Chinese zodiac have been my companions on my long voyage..
2001

Green Cosmos

The long title conveys the autobiographical elements of this work. From fireflies, to people, and nebulae, as both minute and mammoth entities are born together and drift through the air, the infant Yokoo, protected by his parents, is seen on board a small boat rowing away. A guardian spirit stands in the front, while a mouse is in the back.

The painting could also be perceived as Yokoo's distinct narrative rendition of the theme "Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?" (Paul Gauguin).

Wandering Mind, 2002

Wandering Here and There

This is a work from the "Y-junction" series, which was featured in Yokoo's solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo in 2002.

Perhaps the light appears to be reflecting off the road due to it being wet from the rain. The pedestrian crossings form similar shapes on the ground and in the sky, while the curves of the railroad track and roads undulate through the image.

Amongst all this, the red streetlight in the foreground seems to extend out towards the viewer.

TADANORI YOKOO, 1965/SELECTED POSTERS 116 (amus arts press), 2001

A Falling Man

This poster was produced for the graphic design exhibition "Persona," held in 1965. Yokoo, who was still in the early days of his career at the time, with the intention of creating an "advertisement for myself," depicted an image of him hanging himself under what looks like a banner of his own name.

Let's take a slight change of perspective. In his poster announcing the publication of his collection of works, books of his selected posters are seen falling from the sky attached to parachutes. Yokoo himself may have indeed used the rope to descend upon earth from some distant planet. Perhaps in this way he continues to communicate various messages through his work.

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