

MOT Collection Art for Starters

April 28, 2026 –August 16, 2026

Collection Gallery, Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo

Foreword

The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo is home to around 6,100 predominantly postwar artworks. The MOT Collection exhibitions are designed to showcase these works, and exhibits are refreshed several times a year in order to present as much of the collection as possible, from different angles.

“Art for Starters” features a range of works—including a number of new acquisitions—chosen for their connection to “firsts and beginnings” as these play out in an art context, and explores art in terms of where to begin engaging with it, via inquiries that include starting with the familiar, what it is to see a work of art for the first time, and where painting arise from. For both first-time visitors, and those who have already viewed multiple MOT collection exhibitions, “Art for Starters” offers an opportunity to “start art,” or perhaps, to start it anew.

In closing, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all of these who have honored us with their unstinting cooperation in realizing this exhibition.

[1st Floor]

I. Start with the familiar?

Have you ever been walking along, suddenly spotted something, and stopped, perhaps even taken a photo? A plastic drink bottle, for instance, or a bouncy ball, wedged in a wire fence at the side of the road. Discarded by someone? And why here, of all places?

Fence is from the “PET” (Portrait of Encountered Things) series by USUI Ryohei (b. 1983). On closer inspection one finds, characteristically hard and transparent, a glass sculpture, robust yet fragile. Crafting an abstract scene by combining accurate sculptural recreations of the kind of plastic containers discarded on the streets, with commercial fencing, Usui seems to be urging us to reconsider things around us that are more usually overlooked, and the existence of those things.

Displayed alongside here are other works that started with the artist turning their gaze to familiar objects, including the white heat series of photographs showing permutations of “white” encountered in everyday life that KANEUJI Teppi (b. 1978) has been taking since his first year at university.

2. Look at what is in the room?

Surveying the contents of our room, we may notice that most of what is there, comes from a store. The practitioners of Pop Art, which appeared in Britain, the US and elsewhere in the 1950s, and flourished in the 1960s, incorporated and presented as works of art images (often enlarged) of the advertising, comics and mass-produced goods that were flooding everyday life—celebrations of popular culture.

Bathtub Collage #2 by Tom WESSELMANN (1931-2004) teams an image of a woman in the bath that appears to have been cut out of an advertisement, with actual household items such as a towel, shower curtain, and toiletries. The traditional Western painting subject of “bathing” is here cloaked in the garish hollowness of consumerism, and composed in an eyepopping color palette.

Other examples presented here include Roy LICHTENSTEIN’s (1923-1997) *Girl with Hair Ribbon*, and prints of interior scenes by David HOCKNEY (b. 1937). Dipping into the current of early 60s British Pop Art, Hockney subsequently went on to employ various media in an ongoing exploration of idiosyncratic personal expression that continues to this day.

3. Where is the start, and where the finish?

What has the same start and finish? What has no beginning or end? Here we turn our attention to a shape found in familiar objects, and in nature: the circle, which has the same beginning and end. The circle has symbolized eternity, the flow of energy, and cycles of myriad sorts, since antiquity.

SHIRAKAWA Yoshio’s (b. 1948) circle is vivid and dynamic. Harboring doubts about dividing things into opposing elements for consideration, he sought to create an image of those elements not in a state of rivalry, but mutually resonant in one of continuous motion. A variety of objects become involved with the yellow ring, and there is a palpable sense of the circle opening up.

The work by TERAUCHI Yoko (b. 1954) eliminates the distinction between front and back via an arrangement in which tracing a surface with the fingers, brings those fingers back to the original surface. In the works of Gabriel OROZCO (b. 1962) and SHIRAI Mio (b. 1962), images of rings and cycles are shaped from familiar objects, time progressing not in unidirectional fashion, but cycling continuously in the manner of the seasons. The inherent shape of the circle offers us such visions of the world.

4. What does it mean to see something for the first time?

Walking around, where do you direct your gaze? It is likely that you glance to the side from time to time, but mostly face

forward in your perambulations, vision taking in the space surrounding your body.

Suspended from the ceiling here are works from the “BOAT” series of sculptor ITO Makoto (b. 1955). These works can also be experienced by wearing them, and on donning one, the wearer ends up with a large mirror under their eyes. Imagine trying to walk with a mirror extending directly beneath your eyes: your own feet are obscured, in fact all you can see is the sky or ceiling. This different view of the world may make walking interesting, or intimidating.

The works on the wall also encourage viewing from different directions. As we move the shapes initially identified morph into completely different ones. In Ito’s works, various things occur with regard to how we look at objects, how we envision things, and our relationship to the work. New discoveries make themselves known, meaning that we can experience seeing for the first time, many times, over and over.

5. Try listening for “sounds”?

Close your eyes and sensation is concentrated in your ears. Note how you begin to hear different sounds to usual. Yet there must be “sounds unheard” still lingering there; what happens when you tune in to them?

Lento-Presto (Corridor) by YAGI Lyota (b. 1980) is a work on video showing two speakers (high and low frequency) installed in a university corridor, with two pieces of music playing, sped up, and slowed down. Students move busily to and fro through the corridor. What happens when the footage slows or speeds up? The disclosure of two pieces of music not audible at ordinary speed (a tempo), and of different temporal currents, opens our senses to a domain outside the world as we usually perceive it.

SEKINE Naoko (b. 1977) uses the likes of traditional and mechanical pencils to create drawings composed of lines. Take a closer look and note how the gleaming black lines are of varying lengths and intensity. For this exhibition such works, accomplished via a cumulation of countless lines, are accompanied by the sound of one being drawn in pencil, allowing visitors to imagine its very production as they experience it.

6. Start of war, start of peace

In this section, we invite you to take your time to study a painted work. *Peace and War* by Oscar OIWA (b. 1965) approaches “starting” from a slightly different angle.

War has spawned a great deal of art over the centuries. Whether documenting or commemorating war, opposing it, appealing for peace, or remembering those who died, works that depict war in various ways—works carrying or burdened by different backgrounds, playing different roles—encourage us to think more widely about the world, about history, and

about people’s lives and deaths.

Peace and War is set in the Tokyo working-class neighborhood of which Oiwa was a resident. Having previously focused primarily on themes such as pollution and global warming, here the artist delved into the wartime history lurking beneath his day-to-day existence, and pulled out memories of the period through paintings.

As one looks at the two paintings on the wall alternately, back and forth, the dark canvas that presumably depicts memories, begins to resemble something not from the past, but happening now. Or a vision of the future. When can we say that a war “starts”? What lies between a state of “war” and one of “peace”? Between his twin depictions of peace and war the artist has positioned the image of a figure in profile that appears when the paintings are superimposed. Is he deep in thought? Or asleep?

The composition of this “Art for Starters” MOT Collection show takes inspiration from the picture book *Art at the First Time* by Oscar OIWA.

Oscar Oiwa is a second-generation Japanese-Brazilian born in São Paulo. A lover of drawing from early in life, as a child of Japanese parents Oiwa also became a great fan of manga. When manga artist TEZUKA Osamu visited São Paulo, the young Oscar went to meet him, and says he has never forgotten Tezuka’s advice on that occasion: “Never copy anyone else.” After studying architecture at the University of São Paulo, Oiwa moved to Tokyo, where he began making art while employed at an architectural firm. Gradually finding more opportunities to present his work, after ten years in Japan, in 2002 Oiwa relocated to New York, where he continues to pursue his art practice.

Oiwa’s work is represented here mainly by the original illustrations for his picture book, in pencil and acrylic on plywood. These are joined by works such as *Bottle Ship*, made when the artist was at middle school, and his *Rubber Man* figure of a soldier carved (as an adult) from an eraser. Are you thinking these are things you too could make?

[3rd Floor]

When you hear the word “drawing” or “painting,” what image comes to mind? An illustration? Landscape painting? Or a work of abstract art? Executed with a paintbrush? In a splendid frame...? The possibilities are endless. The exhibition on the third floor focuses on such “drawings/paintings.” There you may find not only those that fit your personal image of what constitutes a drawing or painting, but others like nothing you have ever imagined. Turn your thoughts to drawings and paintings as you enjoy your encounters with the artists.

7. Inside or outside the frame?

Where do you usually see paintings? Paintings can be found not only on display at museums, but adorning every place from stores and restaurants, to people's homes. And frequently, you will have observed, in frames. Works such as portraits, landscape paintings and still lifes are composed according to how the motifs will fit into a rectangle. Over time, ideas around framing have also grown increasingly diverse, with some artists making or designing these border areas themselves. This includes figures such as David HOCKNEY (b. 1937), who makes the frame itself part of the picture plane; those who combine multiple frames into a single work; those who eschew frames and view the picture plane as wrapping around the edge of the canvas; and those moving away from the very idea of the rectangle.

On display here are works offering myriad manifestations of framing, including those where careful thought has obviously gone into fitting motifs inside the frame, and those that move conceptually beyond the four sides of the frame.

8. Where paintings arise from

From where do paintings arise, and how?

In this room we explore these questions, seeking clues in the works of artist NAKANISHI Natsuyuki (1935-2016).

Paintings were a constant preoccupation for Nakanishi. Contemplating how people first began to make them, led him to start his own by making faint points or dots. What appeared on the paper or canvas were scattered dots, lines that ascend and descend, or float fluffily, and planes consisting of thin coats of purple and orange, all suggestive of the newborn and as yet nameless.

Eventually Nakanishi would take brushes to which he had attached long handles, and wield them on vast canvases. He employed these special brushes not only to reach places his hand could not, or to acquire a view of the entire canvas, but to bring about the birth of a painting by holding the long brush as if flying a kite or fishing, feeling forces beyond his own volition moving him toward and away from the canvas. Stand in front of his easel, and you may feel the presence of the painter in action.

9. The start of a painting?

How does a painter start to paint a painting?

In this next room, we look at large works by NAKANISHI Natsuyuki.

Before commencing a painting, Nakanishi compiled copious notes, and did numerous drawings. Yet he made no drawings on the canvas itself, perhaps because despite being so meticulous when it came to planning, and following a defined set of steps for production, when actually faced with the canvas, the sensation in that moment of brush making contact took on greater importance.“ 1) The faint ‘points’ on the canvas are of

great value to me. 2) I reinforce those ‘points’ using thick paint in two colors. 3) Then mix those spots in two colors by painting an X with a brush.”* Starting with points, paint blends on the canvas, giving rise to new colors and forms with each brushstroke, the freshness of this producing a vibrant painting of spontaneous appearance.

Taking as his foundation the very limited color palette of green, white and purple, Nakanishi embarks on a new painting as if attempting to achieve in the next picture plane, what he could not in the first. Follow his quivering green lines, observing how they change: coalescing and dispersing, forming generous expanses.

*NAKANISHI Natsuyuki, “Notes for television 1980 XII-1981 I” in NATSUYUKI NAKANISHI: painting 1980-85 (Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, 1985).

10. The expanse of a painting

A nine-meter picture scroll painted in sumi ink, and projected on the wall, video footage of brushstrokes filling that scroll, captured by a fixed camera. Like a scroll in which time passes and a narrative unfolds as we unfurl it with our left hand, turning the spindle to view, in this video, the brush races across the paper as it is drawn towards us, conveying the immediacy and temporal depth of moist ink suffusing paper to forming ever-expanding lines.

Speaking of this work, ISHIDA Takashi (b. 1972) has said that if one were to classify it by technique, “by rights it should be dubbed drawing animation,” and that “it is also a ‘documentary’ painted serially over a three-week period.”*

Perhaps the merging of such different viewpoints, ideas and techniques from time to time expand the possibilities of painted expression, and offer new insights for us all.

* ISHIDA Takashi, “On’ Unasaka,” Tama Art University Bulletin 22 (2007), 58.

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