

**KATSUHIRO YAMAGUCHI**  
**JIKKEN KOBO / EXPERIMENTAL WORKSHOP**

June 22 - August 31, 2012

At the end of World War II, Japan was left in ruins and a relative cultural void. There was a great need to redefine the various artistic fields. During this period, information on new cultural developments through books and journals was largely only available to the public through the library of CIE (Civil Information and Education section) set up by the Allied Occupation authority. Their weekly record concerts played the latest releases and also functioned as a meeting place.

Soon after Allied occupation ended in 1951, numerous innovative artistic groups emerged in Japan. They tested definitions and the practice of art by producing works in a variety of traditional and new media. The artists collaborated beyond the boundaries of artistic collectives, genres, and conventional exhibition spaces.

The earliest Japanese artist collective was the Jikken Kobo - Experimental Workshop. Founded in Tokyo 1951, with the encouragement of the poet and art critic Shuzo Takiguchi, the group included several composers, visual artists, set designers, a lighting designer, an engineer and musicians. Together with outside collaborators such as film-makers, dancers, choreographers and actors the group developed innovative multimedia and inter-disciplinary events producing concerts, performances, ballets, recitals and environmental art that paved the way for future avant-garde artists. Their focus was on the issue of collaborative work and the experimentation with new exhibition formats, they were constantly trying to break away from the narrow borders of the different field of arts. During these formative years in post-war Japan, the activities of the Experimental Workshop can be also understood as a social movement, the members working in a highly fluid way like a project team.

Incorporating new technology into their experiments was also important and led to the first use in an artistic context of the newly developed cassette

recorders and slide projectors. Throughout the years of their activities until 1957, the group was pioneering the idea of inter-media and interdisciplinary approach which is now never questioned any more.

Given that several members of the group were composers and musicians, from the very beginning the activities included musical experiments and recitals of new European contemporary music. Works by Schönberg and Messiaen were performed for the first time in Japan at recitals of the group.

Toru Takemitsu worked part time for the Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo K. K. (now Sony) in the early 50's, where the prototype for a Japanese-made tape recorder had recently been created. Sony and the Jikken Kobo entered a collaborative arrangement, where members of the collective created demo tapes to promote the product, while the company aided the Jikken Kobo by providing space to present their creative works. Thus the earliest pieces of Japanese 'musique concrète' were performed by the Jikken Kobo in 1952 (compositions by Shibata and Takemitsu). The Workshop's 5th Exhibition and Presentation was an influential multimedia experiment. Apart from new compositions by members of the group the program showcased works that integrated automatic slide projections with montages of recorded everyday sounds or a narration, these were made using new technology produced by Tokyo Tsushin Kogyo K. K. It was the first concert in Japan for 'musique concrète' and electronic music.

To represent how important experimental music were for the activities of the Jikken Kobo a compilation of compositions by Jikken Kobo members from 1952 - 1962 is part of the exhibition.

Three of these 'Auto-Slide' works from the Jikken Kobo/Experimental Workshop are part of our exhibition. We can also screen the film 'Ginrin (Silver Wheel) Bicycle in a Dream' (1955), a collaboration between the experimental film maker Toshio Matsumoto, Katsuhiko Yamaguchi and other members of the Jikken Kobo. This promotional film for the Japanese bicycle industry used entirely newly developed visual effects and for the first time special effects in colour. One special effect used in the film was created through a new glass product fabricated in Japan in this time. Corrugated glass, known from skylights, greenhouses or industrial buildings, were used by Yamaguchi to diffuse light. The sci-fi/surrealistic

lighting in the film was achieved through the use of this type of glass together with coloured light.

While the members of the Jikken Kobo were constantly striving to work with the newest artistic trends and technology, they also incorporated traditional Japanese forms into their projects. Experimentation was however not a means in itself but always meant an active engagement with society and the realities of the present.

In our entrance space a documentary film by Shozo Kitadai from the year 1956 shows the Jikken Kobo group and friends going on a journey together. Starting off as a classic 'road movie' the film is very soon transformed into something else, scenes appear upside down or sideways, images overlap each other, the running speed varies or the film runs in reverse. Traditional landscape views are cut into these experimental passages and comic antics of the Jikken Kobo members. The undulating movement and playful experimentation with the medium reflect perfectly the Avantgarde spirit of the group.

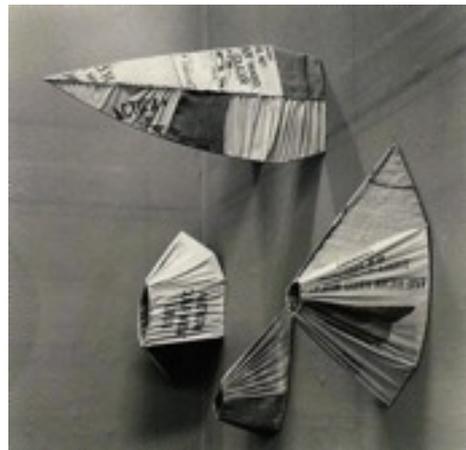
**KATSUHIRO YAMAGUCHI**

Katsuhiro Yamaguchi continued throughout his career to experiment with new media and is considered one of the major pioneers in video art in Japan. Prior to his engagement with video, he created in the early 60's a series of fabric-covered objects from old food sacks and other left-over fabric.

Originally these sculptures were installed floating in a gallery space and he also installed them outdoors, for example in a rather barren landscape or hanging in trees.

Whether in a gallery space or a natural environment they appear strangely foreign, even sometimes alien-like. Assembled in a group, as a wall relief or installed outside, the sculptures create an abstract understanding of a modified living environment through artistic intervention.

For one of the last presentations of the Experimental Workshop in 1956, Yamaguchi created for the auditorium a radial arrangement of ropes which we have recreated in the gallery, linking his engagement for the Experimental Workshop with his artworks from the early 60's.



**JIKKEN KOBO / EXPERIMENTAL WORKSHOP**

Jikken Kobo - Experimental Workshop consisted of 14 members: the visual artists Shōzō Kitadai, Hideko Fukushima and Katsuhiko Yamaguchi, the graphic designer Tetsurō Komai, the composers Kazuo Fukushima, Keijirō Satōh, Hiroyoshi Suzuki, Tōru Takemitsu and Jōji Yuasa, the poet and critic Kuniharu Akiyama, the photographer Kiyoji Ōtsuji, the stage light specialist Naoji Imai, the pianist Takahiro Sonoda, and engineer Hideo Yamazaki.



Members of Jikken Kobo, 1954  
Courtesy Teiko Satani

**Kuniharu Akiyama**

1929 - 1996

Kuniharu Akiyama was an Avant-Garde composer, critic and poet. He is well known for his writings about Eric Satie and Japanese film music.

He wrote two poems for the 5th Presentation of Jikken Kobo in 1953 'Composition A' and 'Composition B', which were read and recorded to be played once more in reverse during the presentation.

Soundtrack



**Hideko Fukushima**

1927-1997

Hideko Fukushima was a painter and the only female member of Jikken Kobo.



**Kazuo Fukushima**

born 1930

Kazuo Fukushima is a self-taught composer. In his compositions he prefers the flute. Special about his works are the combination of contemporary western music and the Japanese tradition of NŌ-theatre und Gagaku.

Soundtrack

**Toshi Ichiyanagi**

born 1933

Toshi Ichiyanagi is a Japanese composer. He studied in the beginning of the 50s composition in New York and belonged to the group around John Cage. Beside compositions for electronic musical instruments, he also composed symphonies, operas, recitals and compositions for piano. He often combines classical Japanese musical instruments with western musical instruments. Ichiyanagi was not a member of Jikken Kobo, but he was important especially to Takemitsu, as he performed the first Cage concert in Japan.



**Naoji Imai**

born 1928

Naoji Imai is a specialist for stage lighting. He is still working for the theatre in Tokyo.

**Shozo Kitadai**

1921 - 2003

Shozo Kitadai started his artistic career with Jikken Kobo. After the active years with the group he was working between 1957 and 1980 as a photographer. His photographs weren't exhibited but published in magazines.



**Tetsurô Komai**

1920 - 1976

Tetsurô Komai was a visual artist. His field of interest was printmaking. He was especially concerned with different engraving techniques.



Fotografie von Kiyoji Ōtsuji (*Eyewitness* Portfolio der Mitglieder von Jikken Kobo) Katsuhiko Yamaguchi, Hiroyoshi Suzuki, Shozo Kitadai, Joji Yuasa, Kazuo Fukushima, Kiyoji Ōtsuji und Kuniharu Akiyama arbeiten an ihren Auto-Slide Projection Werk, 1953.

**Kiyoji Ōtsuji**

1923 - 2001

Kiyoji Ōtsuji was a photographer.

**Keijirō Satōh**

1927 - 2009

Keijirō Satōh was a Japanese composer, beside his musical career, he made and showed kinetic artworks that were activated by magnets.

**Takahiro Sonoda**

1928 - 2004

Takahiro Sonoda was a famous concert pianist. He was a pianist of the NHK symphonic orchestra during the first visit of Herbert von Karajan in Japan 1954. This was followed by a big career as a pianist with international performances.

**Hiroyoshi Suzuki**

1931 - 2006

Suzuki was a composer, who also wrote the film music for *Ginrin (Silver Wheel) Bicycle in a Dream*, 1955.

**Tōru Takemitsu**

1930 - 1996

Tōru Takemitsu was a composer and music theorist. He belonged to the pioneers of electronic music in Japan. Important for his work was beside the compositions by Cage, Debussy, Webern and Messiaen also jazz music, French Chanson and pop music. Moreover he composed film music for 100 Japanese films, including works for Akira Kurosawa. He's one of Japan's most important composers of the 20th century. Beside his work as a composer he also wrote and worked as a TV-chef.

Soundtrack



**Shūzō Takiguchi**

1903 - 1979

Shūzō Takiguchi was a Japanese poet, literature critic and painter. He is known as one of the important surrealist painters in Japan beside Nishiwaki Junzaburō and Kitasano Katsue.

After World War 2 Takiguchi was mainly working as an art critic and organizer of numerous art exhibitions. In 1957 he was a commissioner for the Venice Biennial. During the following journey through Europe he met André Breton, Salvador Dalí, Henri Michaux and Antoni Tàpies. He wasn't a member of Jikken Kobo, but he was very important for the founding of the group. In this sense, Tōru Takemitsu described him as the spiritual leader of Jikken Kobo.



**Katsuhiko Yamaguchi**

born 1929

Throughout a career that spans the late 1940s to the present, Katsuhiko Yamaguchi has consistently proven to be one of Japan's most visionary artists, distinguished by his restless curiosity about new media and new means of artistic expression. He expressed himself not only through artworks but also through the organization of exhibitions and symposia and in numerous analytical and discursive publications synthesizing wide topics of international art history.



In 1951 Yamaguchi was one of the founding members of the avant-garde art group Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop). Following the disbandment of Jikken Kobo in 1957, Yamaguchi continued making works on his own as well as in collaboration with other artists. Investigating the interactions between artwork and viewer, his 1950s-era "Vitrine" series led in the 1960's to fabric assemblages and sculptural works incorporating the use of coloured light to transform the architecture of the exhibition space. In 1968 Yamaguchi premiered Japan's first art video event, followed in 1972 by Yamaguchi's establishment of the collective Video Hiroba (Video Plaza) along with 12 other artists to further innovate the use of video in Japanese contemporary art.

**Hideo Yamazaki**

1920 - 1979

Hideo Yamazaki was an engineer.

**Jōji Yuasa**

born 1929

Through his friendship with Tōru Takemitsu and Kunikharu Akiyama, Joji Yuasa became in 1952 a member of Jikken Kobo and started to be concerned with composition. Like Takemitsu he was very interested in experimental and electronic music. He did various works for orchestras, choral music, recitals, compositions for theatre, electronic music and computer music.

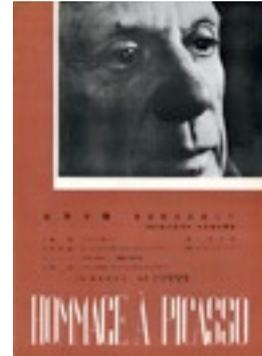
Soundtrack

**List of Jikken Kobo presentations**

**1951**

First Experimental Workshop Presentation

Ballet *Ikiru Yorokobi (Joy of Life)*  
Part of the Picasso Festival



**1952**

Second Experimental Workshop Presentation

Performance of contemporary music with special light effects and sculpture, the program included works by foreign composers like Olivier Messiaen, Aaron Copland, and Béla Bartók which were performed for the first time in Japan

Third Experimental Workshop Presentation

presentation of art works, Takemiya Gallery

**August 1952**

Fourth Experimental Workshop Presentation

performance of works by Messiaen and Satie and for the first time presentation of compositions by Takemitsu, Yuasa and Suzuki (*Space Modulator*)



**September 1953**

Fifth Experimental Workshop Presentation

first presentation of audio-visual works using the Auto-Slide device (technology developed by Tokyo Tsushuin Kogyo (later Sony) also performance of four new compositions by members of the group, such as Akiyama's Poems for Tape Recorder and four Auto-Slide works:



*Minawa wa Tsukurareru (Forming of Foam)*, produced by Hideko Fukushima with music by Kazuo Fukushima (part of our program)

*Lespugue*, produced by Tetsuro Komai with music by Joji Yuasa

*Shiken Hikoka W.S.-shi no Me no Boken (The Adventures of the Eyes of Mr. W.S., Test Pilot)*, produced by Katsuhiko Yamaguchi with music by Hiroyoshi Suzuki

*Mishuranu Sekai no Hanashi (Tales of an Unknown World)*, produced by Shozo Kitadai with music by Hiroyoshi Suzuki and Joji Yuasa

#### 1954

recital of music by Schönberg, and a performance of his piece *Pierrot Lunaire* (first time this was performed in Japan)

#### 1955

ballet performances of *Illumination*, *Kojiki Oji (The Beggar Prince)* and *Mirai no Eve (L'Eve Future)*, stage design, music and visual effects for experimental Kabuki and vaudeville theatre,

production of the promotional film *Ginrin (Silver Wheel)* with the experimental film maker Toshio Matsumoto for the Japanese bicycle industry using entirely new visual effects and for the first time special effects in colour

contribution to the production of the play *Pierrot Lunaire*, play experimented by joining Arnold Schoenberg's music with Japan's time-honoured art, *nō* theater

#### 1956

various experimental music production, *Musique Concrète/Electronic Ongaku Audition (Musique Concrète/Electronic Music Audition)* with the support of the NHK (the equivalent of the WDR Studio in Cologne)

For the auditorium Katsuhiko Yamaguchi installed a radial arrangement of ropes.

First concert in Japan for 'musique concrète' and electronic music.

Summer exhibition by the members of Jikken Kobo

#### 1957

Summer exhibition by the members of Jikken Kobo

**Film *Ginrin (Silver Wheel) Bicycle in a Dream, 1955, 12 mins***

directed by Toshio Matsumoto (with help of Masao Yabe and Genichiro Higuchi)  
written by Toshio Matsumoto, Shozo Kitadai and Katsuhiko Yamaguchi  
music by Toru Takemitsu and Hiroyoshi Suzuki  
presented by Japan Bicycle Industry Association  
produced by Shinriken Motion Picture Co. Ltd.  
special effects by Eiji Tsuburaya

Commissioned by the Japanese bicycle industry as a promotional film to encourage the export of bicycles, *Ginrin* was produced by Shinriken Motion Picture Co. Ltd., one of the industrial and educational film productions, and the company's young filmmaker Toshio Matsumoto. Matsumoto invited Shozo Kitadai and Katsuhiko Yamaguchi for co-writing the scenario and production design, and Tōru Takemitsu for including the scores of his musique concrète. Matsumoto also asked for help of Eiji Tsuburaya (known for his special effects in *Godzilla*), worked with a cinematographer of Toho Studio and received advice from veteran documentary filmmakers Genichiro Higuchi and Masao Yabe. These young artists as well as experienced professionals gathered in this production and with these facts it is very interesting to contextualize this film within the framework of Japanese postwar contemporary art and particularly in relation to Jikken Kobo.

'Experimental Workshop is a group of young artists in their twenties, unpretentiously working together for such a purpose. I believe the fact that their work brings together such differing worlds as music, the plastic arts, and poetry makes this a promising and valuable movement. It is a mystery that, in an age when Camus and Eluard are translated into Japanese, and the latest works of Picasso and the 'Salon de mai' exhibition are shown here, we are not exposed as well to contemporary currents in the world of music. This is why Experimental Workshop's bold efforts to introduce new musical works from abroad are so encouraging.'

**Shūzō Takiguchi**

Originally published as 'Jikken no seishin ni tsuite' in *Jikken kōbō dai 2-kai ensōkai/Experimental Workshop's 2nd Exhibition*, program, 1952. Translated by Lewis Cook and reprinted in *Jikken kōbō to Takiguchi Shūzō ten/Experimental Workshop: The 11th Exhibition Homage to Shūzō Takiguchi*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Satani Gallery, 1991), pp. 10-13.