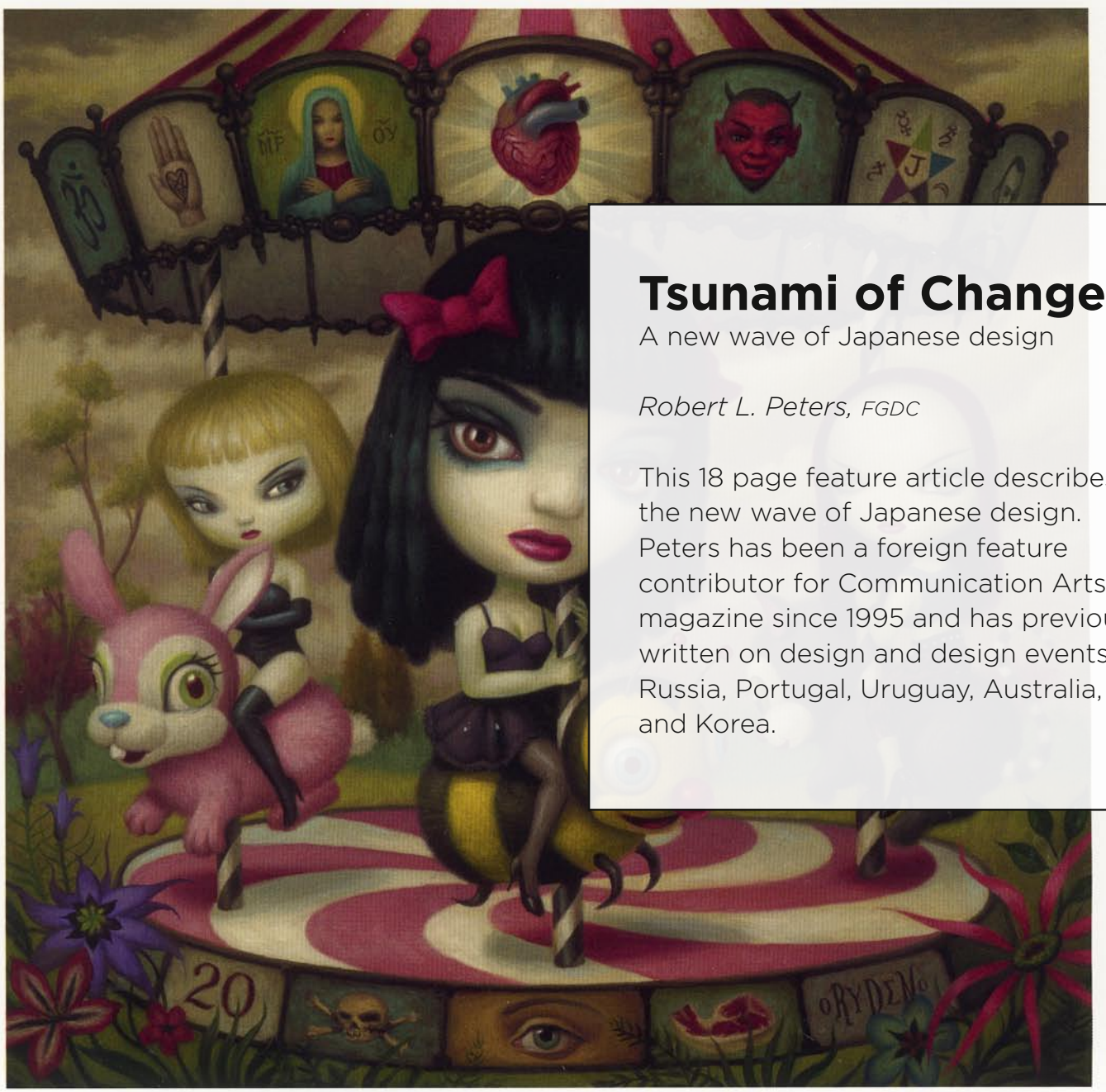
Communication Arts



Tsunami of Change

A new wave of Japanese design

Robert L. Peters, FGDC

This 18 page feature article describes the new wave of Japanese design. Peters has been a foreign feature contributor for Communication Arts magazine since 1995 and has previously written on design and design events in Russia, Portugal, Uruguay, Australia, and Korea.

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Tsunami of Change

A new wave of Japanese design

By Robert L. Peters, FGDC

Culture informs design, and design shapes culture. This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Japan. Designers in Japan draw from the traditions of the past while at the same time pushing the boundaries of the future. As would be expected, this results in work that is extremely diverse, complex and, at times, jarring to Western eyes. Expressed in ideographic language, coded in layers of meaning and informed by a unique and distinct history, Japanese graphic design remains a conundrum to most outsiders.

Is Japanese graphic design at its peak today? Is it in a state of flux? Will the visual communication profession survive the tidal wave of global change that is hitting Japan's shores? Depending on where you look, you find different answers. Depending on whom you ask, you get different opinions.

Japan Today

Japan is an island nation with a population of 125 million. Though small in size, its impact on the rest of the world is considerable, and Japan can boast the world's second largest economy. By way of simple comparison, Japan's population is roughly half that of the United States, but Japanese live on less than 5% of the land surface of the U.S. (Combined, Japan's islands are somewhat smaller than the state of California.)

Japan is densely populated by any measure, with more than three-quarters of its population in urban centers. Tokyo and the surrounding area is home to more than 45 million people. Japanese citizens enjoy a highly-developed infrastructure, one of the lowest crime rates in the world and among the longest life expectancy on our planet. Japanese consumers are fast to adopt new products and technologies (witness the ubiquity of cellular phones) and fuel a fast-paced demand for new manufactured goods.

Japanese culture is distinct, and steeped in the past. Japan is a constitutional monarchy, and can legitimately claim the world's longest living monarchy. Akihito, Japan's current emperor, is the 125th in an unbroken legacy. Geography and history alike have played joint roles in the evolution of this still largely homogenous nation. Cut off from the rest of the world until just over a century ago, Japan has truly evolved as a place apart.

State of Design

By the numbers, the graphic design profession is currently at its peak in Japan. An estimated 80,000 professionals practice graphic design today. These are joined by over 10,000 qualified graduates who seek to join the field annually. More than 200 universities in Japan offer design programs, as do an estimated 100 additional schools and institutions, resulting in a combined enrollment of over 50,000 design students. According to some, intense competition for jobs and clients has helped elevate the overall quality of work.

A glimpse back at both the cultural context and Japanese design's recent evolution is helpful. Design has long been an integral part of Japanese life. As far back as the Edo era, which many consider to be the most important to contemporary Japanese identity, one can observe how design and craft was a part of the everyday life of common people. Artisans introduced harmony into their lives, evident in the clothing, tools and houses in which they lived. An understanding of sophisticated beauty

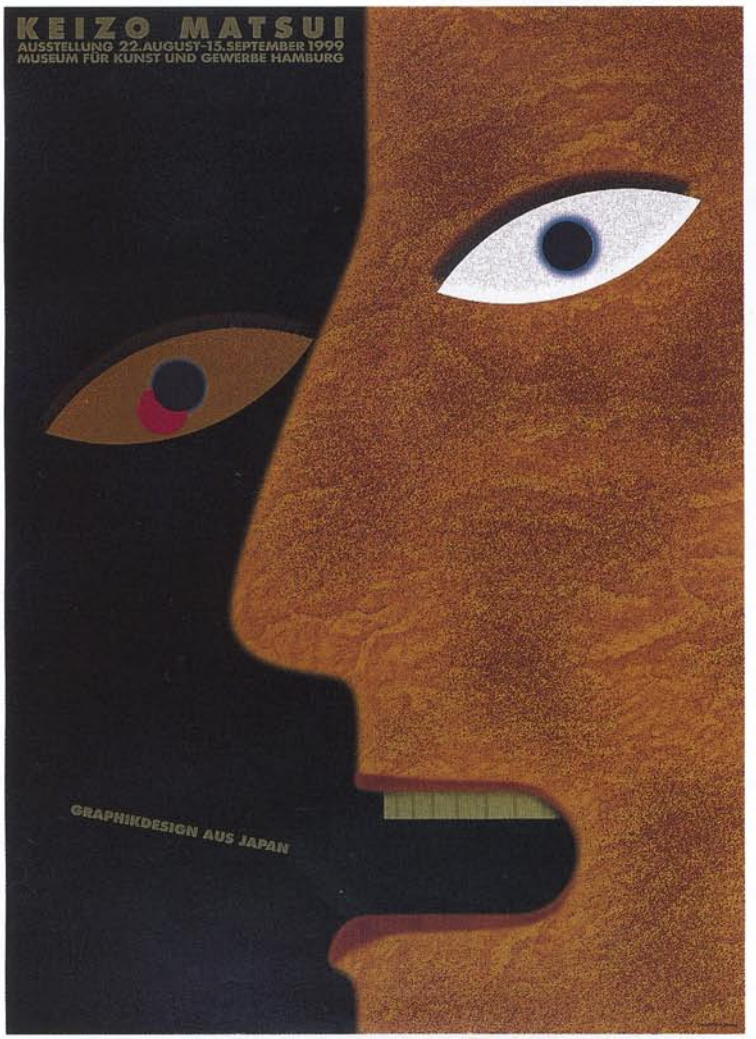
Captions were provided by the designer of each project. Thank you to Yoko Nielsen for her translation of these captions.

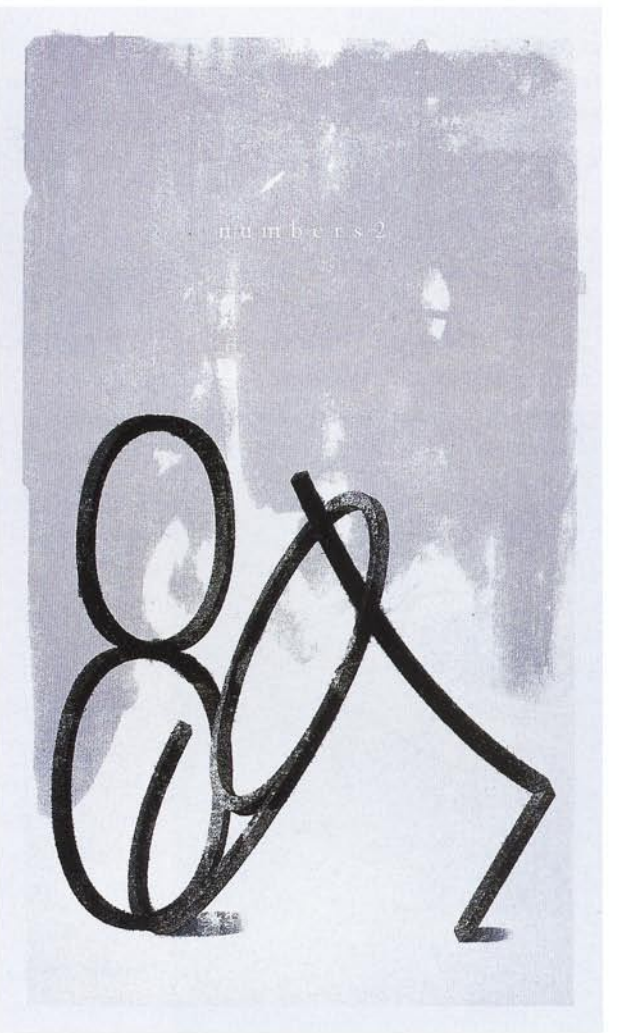
This page: Packaging for Can Chu Hi beer. "This is the premium version of the Can Chu Hi series (a kind of Japanese wine cooler). While Can Chu Hi is targeted to many people, the premium version of the product places priority on the quality of the design as a sophisticated product, not just intended for mass consumption. This version was released as a means of renewing the design of a hit product, the main force behind the Chu Hi popularity boom sixteen years ago." Shin Matsunaga, art director/designer; Kenichi Masaki, designer; Takara Shuzo, client.

Right: "This is a poster advertising the Keizo Matsui Exhibition at a museum in Hamburg, Germany (Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg), held from August to September, 1999. The theme was Japanese graphic design. There were 300 pieces of work displayed including posters and packages." Keizo Matsui, art director/designer.

"This is one of the posters I designed for my own exhibition, *number 2*. I used numbers, those universal symbols, as my motif in order to explore their beauty and ultimate simplicity." Masaaki Hiromura, art director/designer; Tamotsu Fujii, photographer.

Ginza Graphic Gallery group exhibition poster. "This is the main visual design used for a series of posters and small graphic works advertising an imaginary tour to an unknown destination on an ark supposedly built in Tokyo around the end of the 20th century. The imaginary boat was brought to the pier in Odaiba, and over 350 logos from corporate sponsors were placed on its body." Hiroshi Yonemura, art director; Watch, designer; Shinji Watarai, photographer; Tomoko Sano, illustrator; Kazuhiro Yamamoto, artist.


KEIZO MATSUI
AUSSTELLUNG 22.AUGUST-15.SEPTEMBER 1999
MUSEUM FÜR KUNST UND GEWERBE HAMBURG
GRAPHIKDESIGN AUS JAPAN


numbers2


HAKOBUNE CAMPAIGN
1999

and æsthetics evolved in the populace, based on both the decoration and symbolism of traditional art. A particular penchant for graphic art can be seen in historic family crests and insignia.

Kazumasa Nagai, one of Japanese design's senior statesmen, observes: "Japanese designers today do not merely follow tradition, but understand and digest it, break it down and restructure it in a modern sense. They do not follow one single and identifiably Japanese pattern, but rather are full of variety." Clearly, the essence of Japanese æsthetics is a major factor in contemporary Japanese design.

An (admittedly) simplistic history of graphic design in Japan follows. In the first half of the last century, "modern" graphic design in Japan was greatly influenced by the posters of Cassandre, the Bauhaus, de Stijl and other Western influences. Following the war, American advertising and editorial design had an effect. From the 1950s on, designers positioned themselves in a manner similar to artists or expressive creators. Demand by Japan's burgeoning industries for corporate identity design fueled the early growth of the profession. Western æsthetics were employed in a distinctly Japanese style, resulting in an expressive trend that became known in the 1960s as 'Japonica.' This was mostly seen in the form of poster designs, which became the prime medium for graphic designers. The influence of the Bauhaus and the geometric compositions of the Russian Constructivists are clearly evident in work from this period.

The 1964 Tokyo Olympics gave unprecedented international exposure to Japanese graphic design, cementing the reputation of Yusaku Kamekura, who was to become an almost iconic leader for the profession. Significant awards won by Japanese designers at international poster biennials led to a growing confidence among the designers working in Japan. Modernism was widely adopted throughout the 1970s, and the distilled doctrine of "less is more" suited Japan well (though there were nonconformists such as Tadanori Yokoo who protested the æstheticism of modern expression).

In 1978, the Japan Graphic Designers Association (JAGDA) was formed from the remnants of the defunct Japan Advertising Artists Club and the Tokyo Commercial Artists Association. JAGDA helped give the Japanese graphic design profession a face and increased visibility, both at home and abroad. As elsewhere in the world, information began to become a commodity in the 1980s with the broad application of electronic technology. Established designers were relatively slow to adopt the computer as a tool, and Japanese PostScript® fonts only became available in the late 1980s. Use of new tools did bring with it a rediscovery of modern typographic composition, which is evident in work from the last decade. Early in the 1990s, the 'bubble economy' burst, and that has left both Japanese industry and many designers reeling since.

JAGDA, the most prominent Japanese professional design organization, offers a variety of services to more than 2,000 members, including insurance, copyright information and guide documents such as fee schedules and sample contracts. JAGDA has developed innovative initiatives over the years such as: One Day School, a touring symposium aimed at young people aspiring to become designers; the Design Caravan program which links design with traditional Japanese industries; the publishing of *Visual Design*, a series of graphic design textbooks; and the staging of a wide variety of thematic exhibitions, many of which have toured around the world. For the past twenty years, JAGDA has also compiled an impressive annual catalog of juried work titled *Graphic Design in Japan*. (Most of the work shown in this article is drawn from the 2000 catalog.)

Though the largest numbers of designers are in the Tokyo region, there are significant initiatives in other cities as well. Nagoya, for example, has identified the objective of becoming a world Design City, and has invested accordingly. In the last decade, Nagoya has hosted world congresses of the International Council of Societies of Industrial Design (ICSID) and the International Federation of Interior Designers and Architects (IFI). The International Design Center, Nagoya (IdcN), a $150 million state-of-the-art venue for the showcase and promotion of design, opened its doors in 1996. In 2003, Nagoya is planning to host

Right: "A poster for my own exhibition. The theme was *yakumono*. *Yakumono* is a printing word which indicates all the symbols other than letters and numbers. For this exhibition, I featured these yakumono symbols, which always make a spectacular showing to support letters, but lack pronunciation themselves." Kan Akita, art director/designer.

A poster for East Japan Railway's "Let's go skiing by Shinkansen!" campaign. Yoshihiro Kobayashi, art director/designer; Hiroshi Ichikura, writer; Yoshihiko Ueda, photographer.

"J-PHONE, a cellular phone company facing a very competitive market, adopted a sharp and stylish advertising strategy to target the younger generation. This is one of a series of magazine advertisements, featuring a graphic logo design. To get the attention of fashion-conscious young people sensitive to cool and pretty stuff, I tried to make something that they would love at first sight. There is no deep logic behind this sort of expression, but I like its modern feel." Kazunari Hattori, art director/designer; Tokyo Digital Phone, client.

Advertisement poster for Image Poster Exhibition. The posters were created by JAGDA members in Aichi Prefecture to increase awareness of ICOGRADA 2003 Nagoya. Kyoji Kotani, art director/designer; Council of Chubu Design Organizations, client.

"This is one of a six-piece series created as the first official poster for Expo 2005 Japan. I used Edo Era illustrations of natural history to express the theme of the exposition, 'Nature's Wisdom.' The Japanese view of nature has long considered humans the same kind of creatures as animals and plants and treats them all with amazement and a sense of awe. (This is different from western science's attempt to categorize and analyze the world so as to see things from God's perspective.) By combining these visuals with this sensitive outlook, I was able to create a new image for the Expo not dependent solely on technology." Kenya Hara, art director/designer; original illustration of carp by Shunzan Takagi from "Honzo Zusetsu."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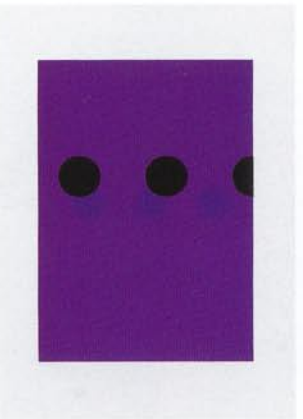


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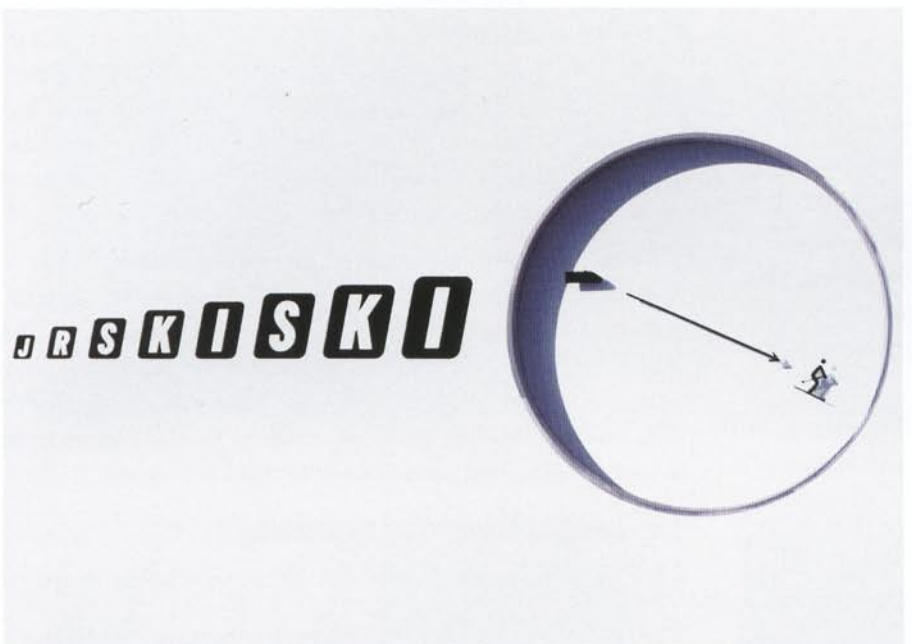
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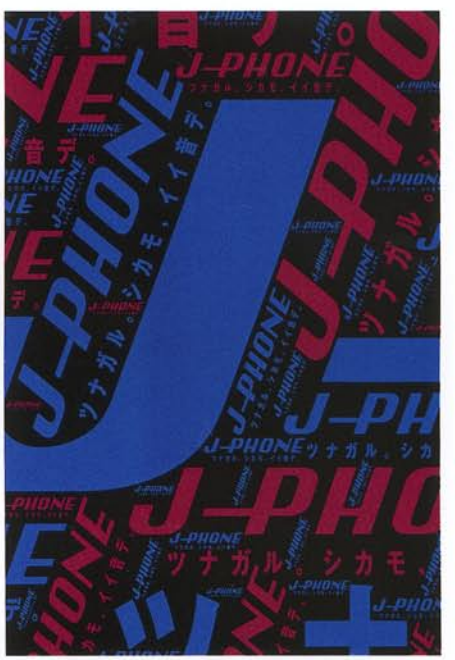

J-PHONE
ツナガル。シカモ、イイ音で。


POSTERS
「890×1600」
icograda 2003 Nagoya
icograda 2003 Nagoya イメージポスター展


EXPO
JAPAN 2005

Japan

the World Congress and General Assembly of the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA).

Economic Doldrums

Since 1990, Japan has experienced the worst recession in recent memory. For designers, this has brought a previously unknown attention to the bottom line. Competition for clients and projects is stiff, in some cases design fees have dropped, and clients expect tangible results from their design investment. Ad campaigns which would have run for several years in the past are now expected to bring returns within a matter of months.

The cost of living in Japan is high, and the recession hasn't helped. Because space is at an absolute premium, living in Tokyo costs several times as much as living in New York. The weakened yen has reduced purchasing power for foreign products, and has made international travel for Japanese designers even less accessible than it used to be.

Japanese government operates by means of well-organized networks of friendly politicians. Economic reality and louder calls for transparency, greater accountability and responsiveness to the needs of the people are bringing pressure to change. Japan's civil service is now undergoing significant reform, with whole ministries disappearing, being merged and being renamed in a move towards smaller government, stronger political leadership and a switch in role for Japan's bureaucracy—to serve rather than to rule the people.

The ailing economy and dragged-out recession of the past decade has also brought with it a variety of societal woes. For example, the statistical average life expectancy of men in Japan has dropped in recent years due to the high number of suicides triggered by poor economic performance and mounting bankruptcies.

Tradition—Anchor or Rudder?

Japan has a highly-refined cultural tradition, and while Japanese culture may be old, it is still remarkably intact. A visit to the Kyoto region with its many temples is a good way to immerse one's self in the traditions of Japan's past, and to better appreciate the unique history and rituals that are so intertwined with contemporary Japanese culture.

The deep roots of Japanese tradition are evident everywhere, both on the street, and in the background. In Kyoto, for a fee, any woman can be a *Geisha* for an hour, a process which actually involves the better part of a day to perfect the elaborate hair, makeup and clothing involved. Theatrical entertainment like *Kabuki*, *Noh* and *Bunraku* reflect the preservation of traditional values. Everywhere you look, the past is carefully preserved in homes, temples and shrines built according to traditional Japanese styles of architecture.

Centuries-old art forms are still taught and practiced, such as brush painting (*sumi-e*), flower arranging (*ikebana*), ceramics, woodblock printing and the famous tea ceremony, *Cha No Yu*, in which both host and guests strive for a moment of tranquility. While on an inspection tour of the Nagoya Congress Center, I and a number of design colleagues had the good fortune, and somewhat surreal experience, of being invited to participate in this traditional ritual by a convention of tea ceremony hostesses that was taking place there.

It's clear that even in the face of globalization and strong Western influences, the Japanese people adhere to their unique customs and values. However, among designers I met, I got the impression that while the older generation sees Japanese cultural tradition as a navigational rudder that helps provide sustainable direction, the younger generation tends to see these issues more as an imposed anchor which slows forward movement.

Language, Language, Language

Language issues play a primary role in how communication is

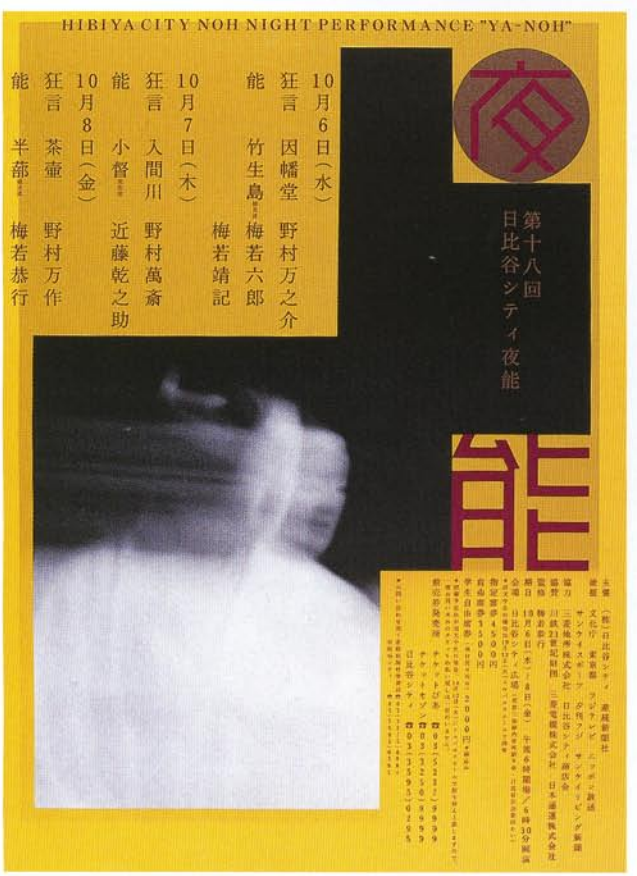
This page: "These are calendars designed for display and exhibited at a café and open gallery in Hanae Mori Shopping Building in Tokyo. They were also used for a window display for New Year's. All 36 calendars were laid out on the walls overlapping each other, giving them a three-dimensional look." Hitomi Sago, art director/designer; Takeo Co., Ltd./ Hanae Mori International, clients.

Right: A poster created for the Select Shop chain when they were opening their branch in Yokohama. "Yokohama is a stylish city with a tradition of attracting lots of fashionable people who used to be called Modern Boys (*mobo*) and Modern Girls (*moga*). Since there is a carriage drive in the city, the design includes a horse, and the color is brightened to add an archaic feel. The title is written in Roman letters '*Kigokochi no yoi omise*,' which literally means 'a comfortable shop to wear.'" Kaoru Kasai, art director; Mayumi Kawahara, designer; Gianluigi Toccafondo, illustrator; United Arrows, client.

"This is a poster for the *Takigi Noh*, or Night Noh, held annually in the Hibiya City Building in the center of Tokyo. This is the nineteenth performance, and I have designed the posters since the first performance was held. Even though Noh is a traditional performance art, I try to use modern forms of expression in the design as much as possible." Masayoshi Nakajo, art director/designer; Jun Miyajima, photographer.

"This is an advertising poster for the 1999 Design Management International Conference held in Nagoya, the theme of which was 'to create business with design.' Using 'design' as its keyword, the poster was created to reflect the purpose of the event, in which business management and design-related parties joined to discuss the importance and roles of design in business and seek new methods of design management." Shigeo Okamoto, art director/designer; Nagoya City, client.


UNITED ARROWS
yokohama 2.26 open!
"kigokochi no yoi omise"


HIBIYA CITY NOH NIGHT PERFORMANCE "YA-NOH"
夜
第十八回
日比谷シティ夜能
10月6日(水)
狂言 因幡堂 野村万之介
能 竹生島 梅若六郎
梅若靖記
10月7日(木)
狂言 入間川 野村萬斎
能 小督 近藤乾之助
10月8日(金)
狂言 茶壺 野村万作
能 半蔀 梅若恭行
能


デザインマネジメント国際会議'99名古屋

constructed, codified and interpreted. A brief look at some unique aspects of the Japanese language may help inform the way Western designers view the communication design being done in Japan today.

Japan is homogenous, which is rare in this globalized age of multicultural exchange and multi-ethnic communities. While on one hand this has allowed for high standards of education, a high rate of literacy and a uniform lifestyle with few apparent class differences, it has also provided a barrier to foreign exchange and interaction which has made it difficult for outsiders to understand Japan and the Japanese language.

Japanese is a complex language with many layers. As interpersonal relationships and distinctions carry great importance in Japan, the Japanese language has evolved to allow for varying degrees of formality and a complex social status with unique forms for expression of respect and courtesy. Even Japanese men and women are bound by distinctly different rules of language usage and expression.

Traditionally, the Japanese language is written vertically, from top to bottom and right to left. However, it may also be written horizontally from left to right, as is English. (I know what you're thinking—imagine the creative possibilities!) A combination of three kinds of characters are used, together, in writing Japanese words and sentences—*kanji*, *hiragana* and *katakana*.

Kanji is the ideographic (written symbol) language system which the Japanese adopted from the Chinese in the fourth or fifth century. Individual symbols, called kanji, can be simple, consisting of one or two strokes, or quite complex, built of many strokes. Japanese people usually learn about 2,000 kanji by the end of high school. These represent the basic characters used in newspapers, text books and the media, though most will know several thousand additional kanji as well. As ideographs are composed of individual units, it is sometimes possible to guess the meaning and pronunciation of unknown kanji characters, yet true understanding of meaning takes a long time. Because kanji represent both pronunciation of a sound as well as distinct meaning, additional complexities arise.

Hiragana and *katakana* are used to represent the sounds of syllables. Hiragana is used for native Japanese words, and katakana is used for words of foreign origin. Each consists of an alphabet of 46 characters or sounds.

Spoken language gets even more complex. Verbal communication is often ambiguous—in fact, ambiguity might be considered an essential etiquette—with the ultimate art form in Japanese communication being able to understand what has been left unsaid. As a result, exact communication usually relies on the written form. Although Japanese borrows some of its vocabulary and much of its writing system from China, spoken Japanese is completely different from Chinese. An interesting, and to Western ears often humorous aspect of modern Japanese language, consists of thousands of English "loan words" which have been borrowed, often without a change of meaning but with changes of pronunciation, and sometimes even as a new invention. For example, beer becomes *biru*, gasoline becomes *gasorin*, and in baseball, the word *naita* is derived from the English expression 'night game.'

Add to this mix the inevitable transliterations, figures of speech and colloquialisms that arise when people of different languages try to communicate, and you have the making for some very entertaining, and sometimes obtuse, conversations. Naturally, an interpreter is almost a must. (Knowing almost no Japanese myself, I found that the best way to communicate directly with Japanese designers was with the assistance of a few biru, the help of pen and paper and a handful of metaphors. It seems the more one employs the former, the clearer the dialogue becomes.)

OK, if conversation seems complex, imagine what it takes to create typographic fonts. In comparison to a mere 126 units in a typical Latin alphabet character set, there are nearly 10,000 different units—kanji, hiragana, katakana and Roman letters and symbols—used in writing the Japanese language.

A meeting with designers at Morisawa, the country's premier source for digital PostScript type, underscored the cost and complications of developing Japanese fonts. Unlike the relative ease of creating character sets for Latin-based languages (I can feel typographers cringing), it takes a type designer more than three years to create a single Japanese font!

Due to the complex nature of Japanese society, Japanese language,

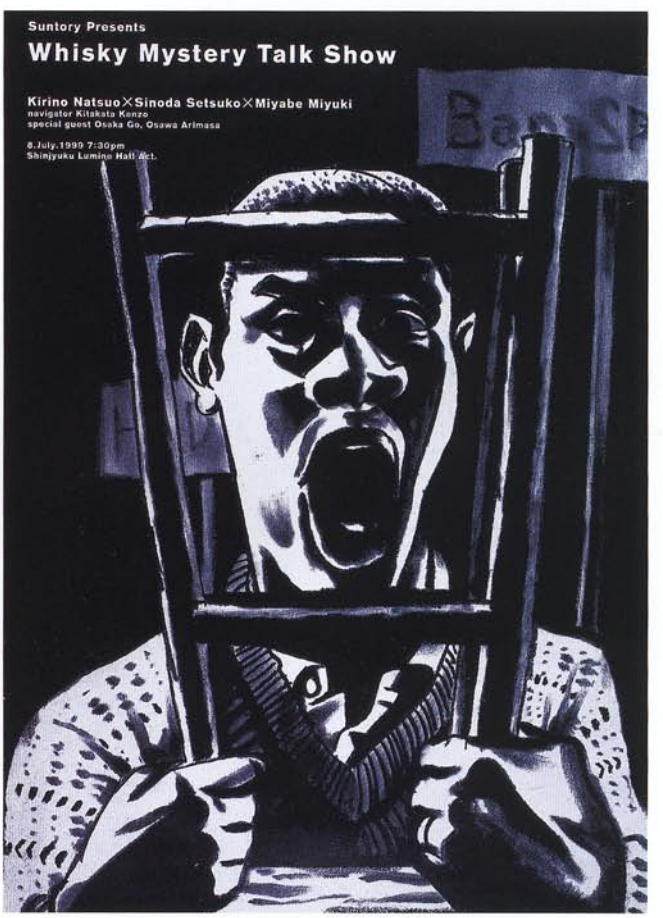
Right: "Direction Line font poster. The design expresses the possibility that an arrow could be extended and bent freely as a font is transformed using vector graphics. The font develops according to a user's active design. This is an interactive font, born from an idea with an acquisitive point of view, not simply new, but also brimming with unlimited possibilities." Toshiyasu Nanbu, art director/designer; Taste, client.

"One of a series of posters created in memory of Yusaku Kamekura, a graphic designer and good friend of mine. He shone like the sun in the design community, and he lived his life like the sun, reaching the highest point in his life like sunrise and ending his life like sunset. This is what I mean to express in my work, *Sunrise, Sunset*." Makoto Saito, Makoto Saito Design Office, art director/designer; Kazumi Kurigami, photographer; Toppan Printing, client.

"This is a poster advertisement for the Kazumasa Nagai Poster Exhibition at the design gallery of the International Design Center in Nagoya. Posters with animal motifs were chosen from ten years of my work for this exhibition." Kazumasa Nagai, art director/designer/illustrator.

"Whisky Mystery Talk Show" poster. "Famous Japanese female mystery writers wrote short stories with whisky as their motif. This is a poster for a talk show event in commemoration of the project." Kaoru Takai, art director/designer; Hideo Kato, creative director; Tomoo Gokita, illustrator; Suntory, client.

Everyone now understands that the world of computers can only exist on the basis of language. Typography is an act which visualizes the concept of letters and words. Both computers and typography are a main current of your times. I think that the key to successful creation now is to understand the kind of relationships through which the linguistic world of computers and typography is converted into the visual world.



and the unique way that Japanese people communicate, outsiders often don't "get" the meaning of Japanese graphic design. And while æsthetics are more readily conveyed, deciphering meaning is often difficult.

Layers and Loyalties

Japan is clearly a vertical society. Authority follows a top-down hierarchy, informed by social status, patriarchy and age. For centuries this has provided a stable system of control, cemented in place by tradition. As a whole, Japanese society respects the old virtues of stoicism, loyalty and obedience of *Bushido*, a code of behavior drawn from the traditions and honor of the *Samurai*, Japan's ancient warrior class.

People deal with each other according to relative positions on the vertical ladder. Deeply entrenched rules of etiquette and respect are second nature, and are evident everywhere in levels of language, gestures and subtle interactions. Japanese bow whenever meeting or greeting people, and the kind, degree and depth of the bow depends on the relationship—relative status, age, obligation and feeling of respect. It's interesting to observe that the custom of bowing is so instinctive, you even see Japanese bowing when they're standing on a street corner and talking on a cell phone.

The effects of traditional attitudes are clearly visible in the Japanese workplace today. Few women have visible positions of authority in business. Although nearly as many women as men work as graphic designers in Japan, their contributions largely go unrecognized. It is rare to see work by women included in exhibitions, receive awards or be published in catalogs. A telling statistic is that only one out of nine members of JAGDA is a woman.

In Japan, business is built on relationships, and relationships are based on trust. First you get to know someone, then you do business. A new relationship is usually based on a direct introduction by a trusted third party, who then takes responsibility for the integrity of the relationship. *Keiretsu*, a model of corporate networking, which in Japanese literally means "link," is the basis for most major business alliances. The importance of the trust relationship explains why, at least among the older more established designers, formal contracts are still rarely used.

In keeping with the importance of hierarchy and the sensitivity to age, designers in Japan tend to categorize themselves in terms of generations.

I found again and again that designers would refer to each other as being of an older or a younger generation. It's worth noting that in Japan a 'young' designer is someone under 40 or 45 years of age. I also observed that one of the first questions I would be asked was about my own age.

Professional Perspectives

A highlight of my time in Tokyo was a late evening visit to the delightful studio/home of Shigeo Fukuda, Japan's well-known illusionist designer and visual prankster. Though I've met Fukuda before in individual encounters on three continents, it's a treat to meet him again here in his own milieu. Over drinks, he regales us with his mischievous sense of humor, clever creations and samples of visual tricks he has encountered around the world.

With more than 1,300 posters to his name, a variety of books and numerous cultural monuments, Fukuda ranks among the established elite of Japan's graphic design community. Unlike most Japanese designers of his generation, Fukuda travels extensively, and has exhibited his playful work around the world. His popularity comes from his masterful wit in expressing universal themes, and from the optical illusions that he delivers so deftly through simple line and form.

Fukuda is the current president of JAGDA, a role of honor he takes seriously. When I ask Fukuda about his greatest achieve-

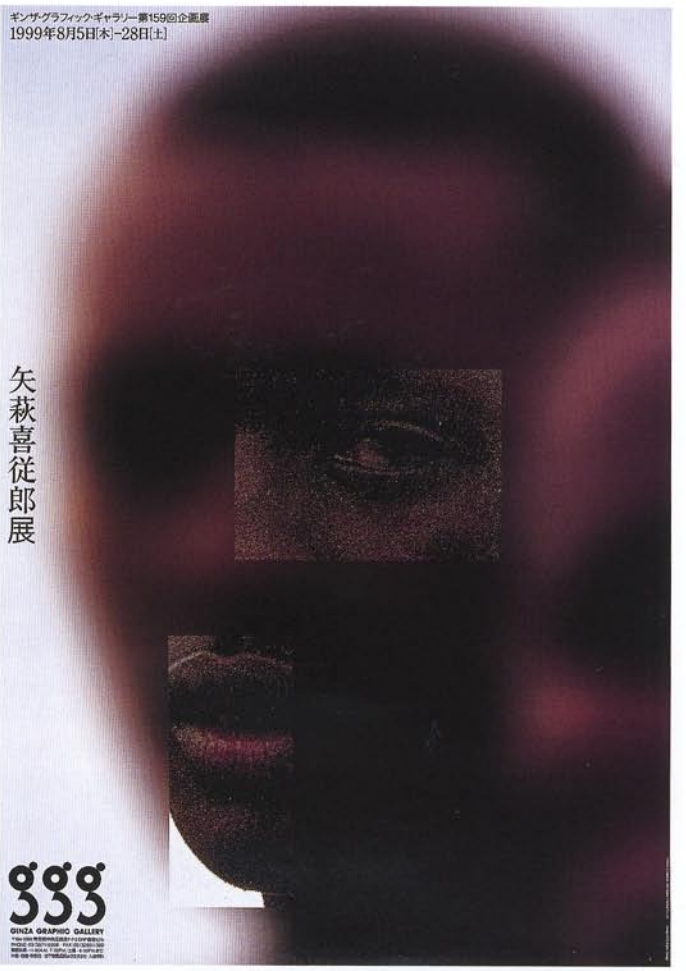
This page: Sake packaging for Kusumi Shuzo Brewery. Katsumi Asaba, art director; Mitsuhiro Takasugi, designer; Hiroshi Senjyu, artist; Masahiro Dohi, coordinator.

Right: Poster for Illustration Yokohama Competition, organized by a newspaper. "The original picture of the hand in the design is taken from a picture on a rock done by Native Americans in prehistoric times. The same hand is used in a poster for the exhibition of this competition, but this time in the shape of a fist." Koichi Sato, art director/designer; Asahi Culture Center Yokohama, client.

"A poster for my own exhibition at Ginza Graphic Gallery. Human eyes move in many different directions in a moment to look at many different spots and then finally put all of the information together to comprehend an entire image. This poster was designed to emphasize the movement of the eyes when looking at a person, such as looking at the eyes first and then the mouth." Kijuro Yahagi, art director/designer/photographer.

***DON*, paper-sample book for designers and the printing industry for Shin Fuji Paper Company. "This is designed in the style of a picture book so that the characters in the design express qualities and printing effects of each type of paper. The word *YOKOME* in the visual describes the flow of the fiber in the paper, and means 'short grain' in English." Ken Miki, art director/ designer; Shigeyuki Sakaida, designer; Takanori Tomiura, photographer.**


ヨコハマ
COMPE
Illustration
YoKoHaMa
ComPetition
ヨコハマコンペ99
イラストレーション
ヨコハマコンペティション
1999
作品募集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1999年8月5日[木]-28日[土]
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333
GINZA GRAPHIC GALLERY

ment, he replies: "I am proud to be in the same genre with Tanaka, Yokoo, Katsui and Nagai. Although I was unsure for a while what I wanted to be, I am grateful that I found my path. I was drawn to visual games." Fukuda now uses computers for some tasks, but concentrates on the core of what makes design relevant to the audience. He states: "The bubble economy is over. The strongest conceptual thinkers will always win."

Across town in Ginza, we meet Kazumasa Nagai and Kenya Hara at the impressive Nippon Design Center (NDC), one of Tokyo's largest, and longest-established design organizations. Founded in the early 1960s by Nagai and other pioneers of Japan's "first generation" of graphic designers, NDC's client roster is a who's-who of Japanese corporations, including Asahi, Nikon, Toyota, Seiko, Toshiba and Japan Rail. NDC today employs 150 designers in a variety of focused specialty teams.

Nagai, an elegant elder of Japanese design and executive director of the board of NDC, describes the Center's past success in simple terms. "NDC's founding designers had strong credibility and direct links with industry. Both designers and industry hold shares in NDC. Designers therefore were able to influence corporate CEOs at the highest levels, providing a powerful voice for change, and for the setting of high standards." Nagai, whose work includes many of Japan's major corporate identity programs of the past three decades, is the current chairman of the Expo 2005 design committee. While I have the impression that most senior Japanese designers hold onto control, Nagai strikes me as unusual in his willingness to pass power on to a younger generation.

Kenya Hara, a passionate and accomplished 'junior' designer (at the age of 42), picks up where Nagai leaves off. "Design in Japan is going through a great transformation, and design disciplines are merging. Design is really about information architecture. The greatest challenge of our generation (of designers) is to bring the beauty of function to the forefront—to discover the æsthetics of information. Architects need to move beyond just designing monuments, because it is really the distribution of information that forms the core and meaning of a city. As designers, we should be applying our talents to accessible everyday design, and we should be drawing on the wealth of human wisdom."

Acting on his convictions, and with the goal of raising the profile of practical design, Hara recently conceived and orchestrated an innovative project called *RE DESIGN—Products of the 21st Century*, with support from the paper company Takeo. After challenging an invited list of Japanese designers and architects to rethink existing everyday products and to offer new solutions for living, the remarkable results were published in a handsome catalog. Already a resounding success in Japan and the winner of several international design awards, Hara hopes that the concept will take off internationally with designers in countries around the world making practical contributions to improve everyday life.

Commenting on how Japanese design is viewed abroad, Hara explains: "Outside of Japan, Japanese design is really not understood. The naïve and childish design seen today is the result of new designers with access to new tools, and this has created an enigma. London views Japan as advanced and a high-tech Mecca, but the reality is quite different." Hara heads a team of seven designers within NDC who work under the banner of the Hara Design Institute.

A rare exception in Japan's male-dominated design profession is the attention Keiko Hirano (of Hirano Studio) is gaining for her elegant and refined packaging designs for Shiseido. Though it's not easy being a woman designer in Japan, soft-spoken and self-effacing Hirano seems to take things in stride. For her, design is a journey, a cause and an extension of who she is as an individual. She claims, "Design is a way for me to find truth. Design is a way to make people happier."

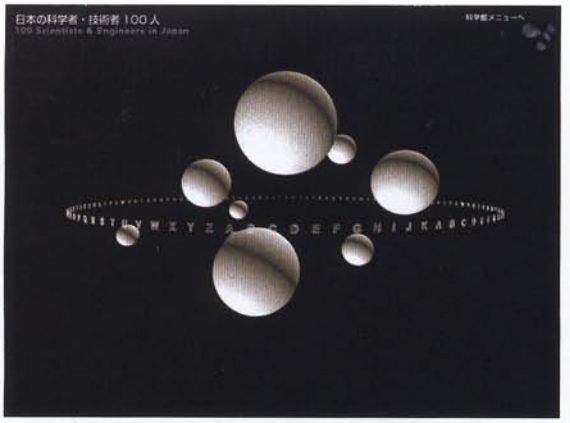
Games are at the core of youth culture in Japan, and an evening visit to Shibuya is an eye-opening experience. A testing ground for the latest design offerings in interactivity and virtual reality, Shibuya's famous game palaces and video arcades are a magnet for Tokyo's young people who come to play, to observe and to strut the latest in flamboyant fashions.

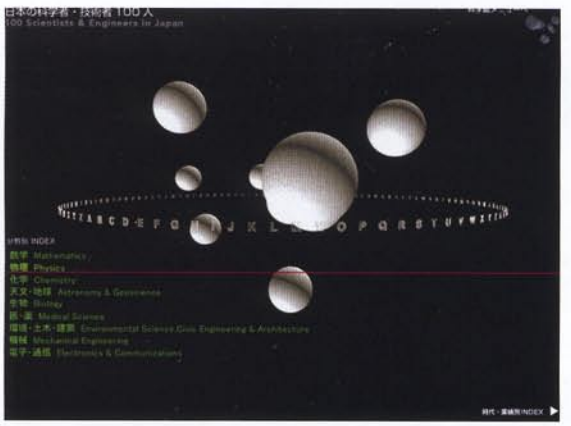
Among the new generation of successful young designers is Tetsuya Mizuguchi of Sega (Dreamcast, Space Channel 5), considered by many to be one of the game industry's most innovative minds. Commenting on the social responsibility that design as a culture-shaping force brings with it, Tetsuya remarks, "We are entering into an era when game creators must consider

Right: "Interface design for the archive of Aikitsu Tanakadate Memorial Science Museum. It is designed to be fun to click and move a visual expression of a strange yet interesting atomic-model or star-cluster-like object on the screen (using the mouse) so that people can eventually understand how to manipulate these structures and virtually experience the exploration of science." Mitsuhiro Tohyama, art director; Shuzo Saito/Masahiko Oshima/Atsushi Yamagata, designers; Japan Science Foundation, client.

Newspaper ad for Shiseido. Katsuhiko Shibuya, art director/designer; Tetsuro Kanegae, coordinator; Eiichiro Sakata, photographer.

Cover of *Tategumi Yokogumi, Morisawa Quarterly*, which is sent to the Japanese design community, showing Morisawa's latest research on cultures surrounding type fonts (one-half of wraparound cover shown). For this issue's cover, designer Keiko Hirano created an installation consisting of blue offset-printed postcards which were mounted one by one to a wall in her studio. The picture of the completed installation was used for the cover. Hirano explains: "This was a design experiment incorporating the relationship between accumulation, time and space." Mitsuo Katsui, art director; Hiroshi Sugimoto/Ikko Tanaka (logotype for title)/Keiko Hirano (installation), designers; Yasuo Saji, photographer.


日本の科学者・技術者100人
100 Scientists & Engineers in Japan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100 Scientists & Engineers in Japan
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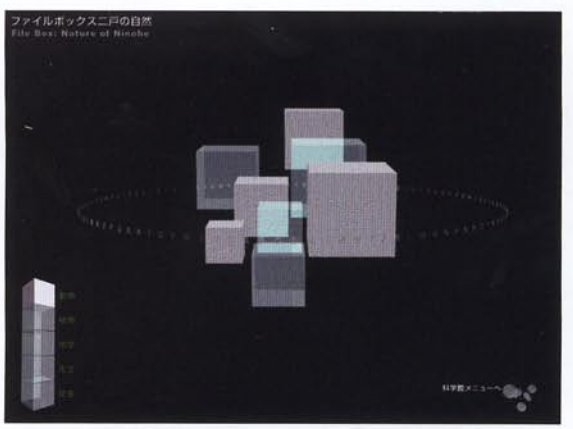
機械 Mechanical Engineering
電子・通信 Electronics & Communications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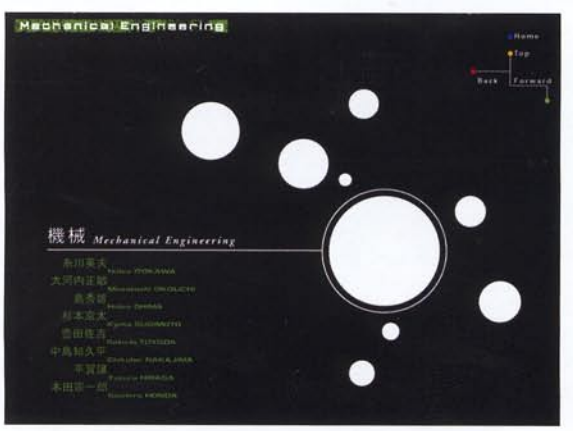
Mechanical Engineering
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夢で逢いましょう
一九九九年 元旦 時、紅来たる。
SHISEIDO


たて組 ヨコ組
52
TATEGUMI YOKOGUMI
MORISAWA QUARTERLY 1999

alternatives to violence. I will continue to make games that are filled with peace and happiness. As developers, we must take responsibility for our creations and strive to make the game community and the world a better place." I'm encouraged by what Mizuguchi has to say, and pleased to see that old ideals have a place in new media.

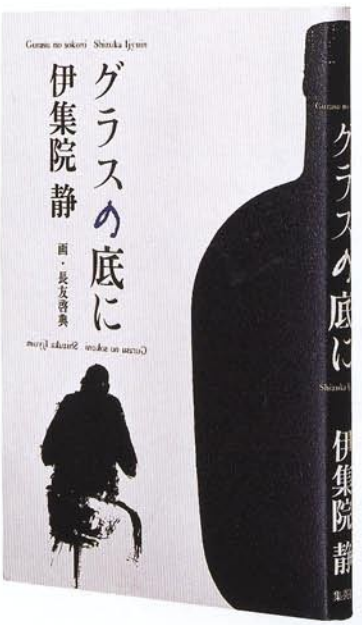
Critical Viewpoints

Speaking with the editors of Japan's top design magazines brings interesting viewpoints to light. I had the good fortune to meet with a number of these keen design observers and critics in Tokyo, and I was impressed with their passion for design and the role it plays in serving society. Here is their perspective on the changes and challenges facing Japan's graphic design profession.

I start by asking what the greatest challenges are. According to Takehiko Katsuo, executive editor of *Nikkei Design* (Japan's largest design publication): "In the early 1990s, design was seen as important. Now because of the recession, there is much less work. As elsewhere in the world, the 'low end' of the profession is threatened by 'shrink wrap' solutions from readily available software in the hands of untrained or less-skilled individuals. Clients still don't fully understand the value of design."

Katsuo notes that Web design is the big new influence in Japanese design, along with the design of animation and games. "Design in Japan is at a turning point, and Japanese designers are searching for direction. It is important for designers to develop strong concepts—those who cannot will not survive." Commenting on multidisciplinary design practice, he adds, "The walls between graphic design, packaging design, design for the Internet and industrial design are falling down rapidly. It is important to eliminate the boundaries between disciplines." In recognition of the impact that design has on societal values, *Nikkei Design* has been focusing much of its energy on design for universal access, transgenerational design and ecological design.

When asked what the greatest challenge facing Japanese designers is, Katsutoshi Ishibashi, editor-in-chief of *AXIS* magazine, cuts right to the point. "The Web, and the burst IT bubble. If designers don't get with it—get to the core of what it really means to design, they will become extinct. There are more Web projects today than capable designers, so the standard is currently being lowered. Demand for good design outstrips supply." He concludes, "Personally, I'm bored with the 'state of the art' in Web design. Everything looks the same. Perhaps exploring the old analog world will provide new inspiration and answers."



Ishibashi observes that the ongoing Japanese recession is still having a large negative effect on design and advertising, and he identifies a polarizing trend among graphic design firms in Japan today. He predicts that, "Good design companies will be very successful—but many others will die. Designers have to work so fast today, that there is little time to develop strong concepts—the pressure to earn money is dominant." When I ask him about design and globalization, he responds that Japanese designers do not really have a global view, and that this is a significant challenge to overcome.

Junji Oshigane, editor-in-chief of the bimonthly multidisciplinary *Designers' Workshop* magazine, is happy to share his opinion. "Young designers are the catalysts of change in Japanese society today. Traditionally a fledgling designer would team up with a master from whom he would learn, as part of the master/apprentice system. Today, many young designers have to make it on their own—without the introductions and networking that are so important in Japanese society. Things are changing though. While the old acolyte system was good, new paths are also important. We see our role as supporting young designers as they find new paths."

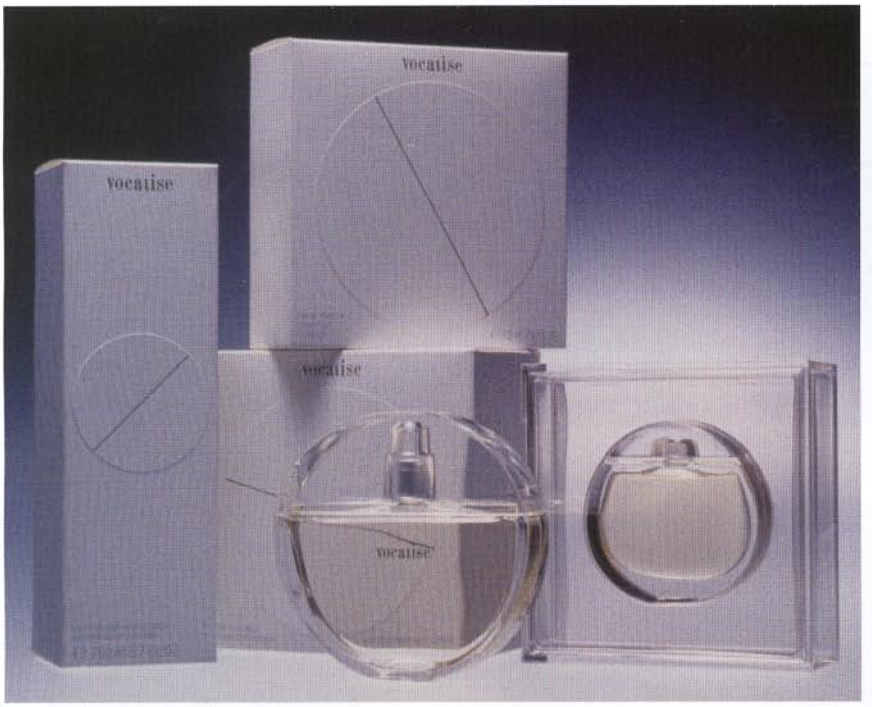
While Katsuo, Ishibashi and Oshigane each had their own views regarding the challenges facing Japanese design, all three underscored the need for designers to respond rapidly to changes brought on by technological advances and global influences. They also noted that the established design organizations such as JAGDA will have to become more flexible, more open and less of a "closed club" if they wish to remain relative to the changing profession.

This page: Book cover. "This book is a collection of the series of newspaper advertisements I did for Suntory Old Whisky over the course of three years. I designed the cover to represent the image of all twenty pieces of the series." Keisuke Nagatomo, art director/illustrator; Takamichi Maebashi, designer; Shueisha, client.

Right: Vocalise Perfume packaging. "Circle and line—the way of symbolizing the shapes of product design with the package design. For Vocalise, a globally-distributed line, Japanese aesthetic betrays a French sensibility reminding us that France is the home of perfume." Aoshi Kudo (product)/Keiko Hirano (package/logotype), designers; Shiseido, client.

"Company poster for a digital font maker with a focus effect done by digital display processing. This was an attempt to recognize each of the letters of the word 'FONT' from as far away as possible. This is the first of the four designs used in the series." Mitsuo Katsui, art director/designer; Kentaro Ota, operator; Morisawa, client.

A 1999 poster for Super Kabuki, *Shin-Sangoku Shi*, featuring Ichikawa Ennosuke. This is the first design in a three-year series. Tadanori Yokoo, art director/designer; Theater Shinbashi Enbyjo, client.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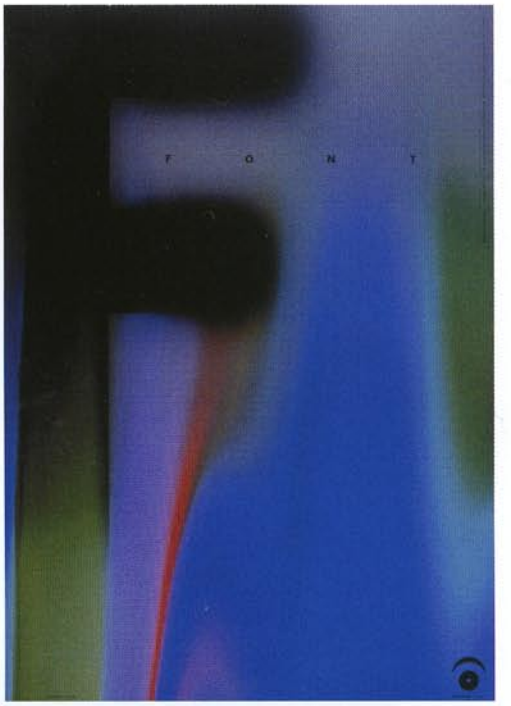

F O N T


SHIN
新・三国志
新橋演舞場


SHIN SANGOKUSHI
新・三国志
新橋演舞場

Japan

Old Structures, New Media

To my foreign eyes, Japan is a land of great contrasts and contradictions—of wonderful opportunities, and baffling barriers. In spite of the fact that meaning is often masked, processes are hidden and communication is codified, I can't help but feel the domination of old structures and hidden controls. Young people, and women in particular, seem to yearn for faster change and empowerment, yet are conditioned to patience by deep respect for elders and for tradition.

Some older practitioners, who led design through the age of industrial expansion in Japan, complain that the young are now only designing surfaces, without deeper imagination. They lament the shift from "pure design," blaming the computer for this erosion, and noting that there is a decline of art and culture in design. Many older designers also seem to have a hard time accepting new media design, such as the Internet or PlayStation® characters, as being on the same plane as the revered poster.

As elsewhere in the world, design has become more democratic and more accessible to the common person. With this comes the fact that the common person is not necessarily encumbered by critical judgment or by modernist design doctrine. Established designers see this as a threat to the specialized processes and unique talents they could once claim as their own domain, and this represents a loss of control. Within the profession itself, it is clear to see why the older designers seem reluctant to pass on the reins to younger designers.

Will young designers be able to produce work as original and powerful as Japan's graphic design pioneers? It appears they already are. Has design then reached a stage in Japan where younger designers will take over from the older generation who have laid the professional foundation, and who have acted as mentors and role models in the past?

This raises the drama of an age-old struggle—between empowering faith on one hand—and dominating control on the other. While this confrontation with change is not unique to Japan, the hierarchical underpinnings of traditional Japanese culture appear to amplify the challenge and make the prospect of transition that much more difficult.

The Future Will Tell

As the sun rises on the new millennium, some important questions form on the Eastern horizon. With design entering the mainstream of culture and becoming less rarified, what is its role? Will graphic design cease to be a field of specialty? Or, will it become even more specialized as the cultural impact of design becomes more clearly understood?

Will Japanese design maintain the distinct diversity it has been known for in the past? Indeed, can it? Is there an empirical link between æsthetics and social value? If so, will Japanese design be able to hold fast to this in the tumult of change?

Is global dominance and media colonialism by Western cultures coming to an end? If so, what role will Japanese designers play in ushering Eastern cultures into the present?

Herman Melville offered some wise words over a century ago—"The wind and the waves are always on the side of the ablest navigators." ■

Author's note: Thanks to the designers I met while in Japan, to the design magazine editors in Tokyo and to the board members of JAGDA for their hospitality. Special thanks to Leimei Julia Chiu of IdcN, for her tireless assistance as a host, guide and interpreter. Special thanks as well to Chika Kudo at JAGDA for her help.

This page: Packaging. "Neue" is a hair-care product for women by Shiseido. It is a brand of shampoo and conditioner and is available in convenience stores and supermarkets in Japan. The brand is expanding its series with this product for hair styling. Taku Satoh, art director; Minoru Shiokawa, creative director; Kazutoshi Amano, designer.

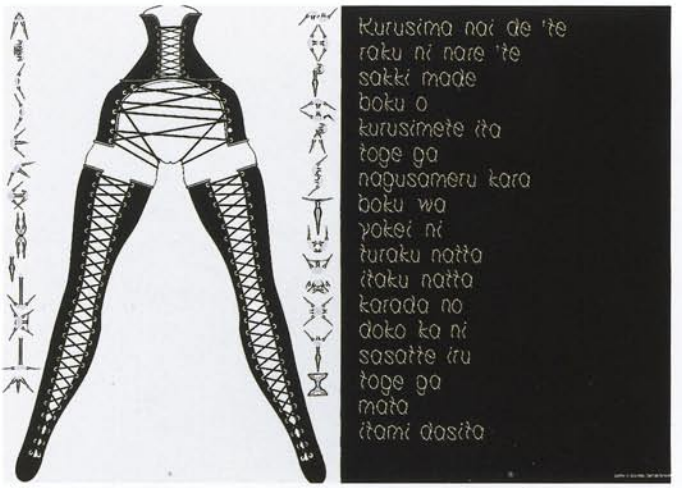
Right: Picture book of original fonts created through collaboration with students at Inter Medium Institute Graduate School. Akio Okumura, art director/designer; Hiroko Matsubara, designer.

Poster for Japan Graphic Designers Association, Inc. Norihisa Tojimbara, art director; Yoshiko Kogo, designer.

"This is a magazine advertisement for a new song by the Japanese band, My Little Lover. The title was 'The Water,' and the visual was created with the image of liquid in mind. It is hard to see in the picture, but there is a transparent film inserted between the two pages, and there are grooves printed with a special ink on the film." Eiji Yamada, art director; Naoko Nodera, designer; Toshihide Kimura/Moto Takagi, writers; Toy's Factory, client.

Two-page magazine ad for Honda Motor Co., Ltd. "The 'step-wagon' campaign had a big impact in both Japanese creative and the car industry, and is very popular here." Kashiwa Sato, art director; Jun Kamata/Daisuke Nagai, designers; Ken Inoue, writer.

"This poster, made in 1999, was created for a design festival event held at the opening of the Shigeo Fukuda Design Museum in Iwate Prefecture, where I went to high school, even though I was born in Tokyo." Shigeo Fukuda, designer/illustrator; JAGDA, client.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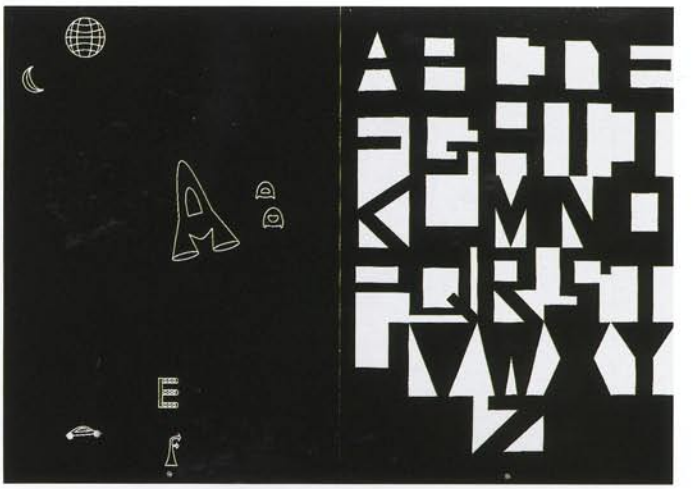
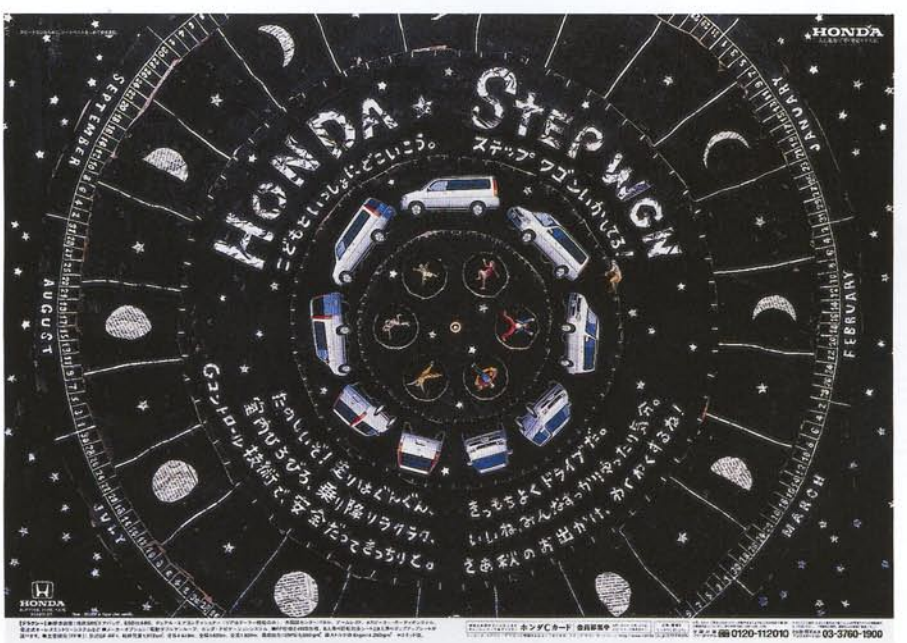



MY LITTLE LOVER
SPECIAL ISSUE #2 "The Waters" OUT NOW
ALBUM + PHOTO BOOK
LIVE REMIX VIDEO "SIGN OF THURSDAY" OUT NOW
1997.11.20 (THURS) at LIQUID ROOM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ステップワゴンにかえる。
こどもといっしょにどこにいこう。
JANUARY
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SEPTEMBER
たのしいぞ！走りはどんどん。
Gコントロール技術で、安全だってきっちりと。
きっもちよくドライブだ。
いいねお父さんねっ！がやったら気分。
さあ家族のお出かけ。わくわくするね！
HONDA
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fukuda
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Icograda 2003 Nagoya,Japan

i c o
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Welcome to
Icograda 2003 Nagoya Congress

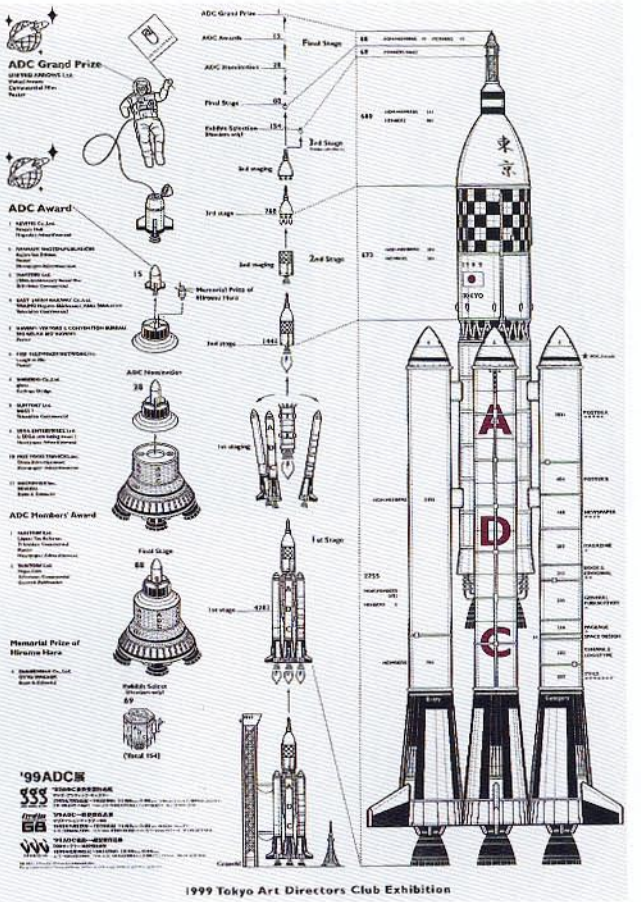
A Brief Introduction to JAGDA, JDF and IdcN

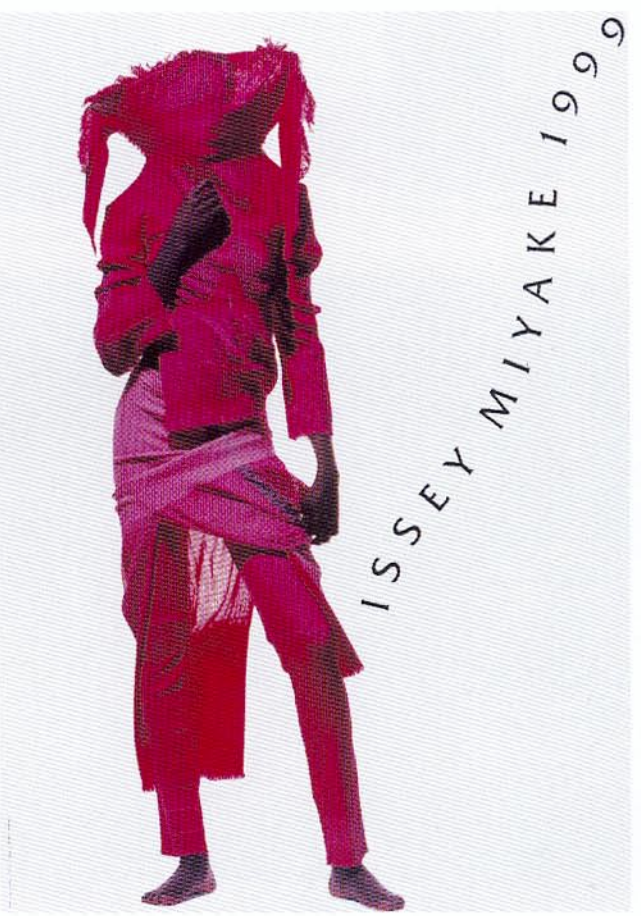
●JAGDA: Japan Graphic Designers Association, Inc.
URL http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jpod/design2/jagda/
JAGDA boasts 2,875 members(1 999.9.1), forming the largest organization of graphic designers in Japan. Almost all of Japan's graphic designers take part in the lectures and exhibitions organized by JAGDA, and it also carries out training in design, helps in establishing copyrights, playing a large role in raising the status of graphic design and in establishing designers' professional abilities. This is one of the few graphic design organizations around the world, however you choose to measure it – in the standard of its designer members, in the number of members, or in the scope of its international activities.
JAGDA is also active within Icograda. In 1951, members of JAGDA made volunteers contributions for the establishment of "Friends of Icograda". Plans are being made for events to take place in Nagoya in 2003, the 25th anniversary of the founding of JAGDA.

●JDF: Japan Design Foundation URL http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jpmdesign/jdf/
Through various international design events, such as design festivals and the presentation of competition awards, the JDF has made positive contributions to the promotion of design, activities and the furtherance of international communication and exchange. One such event is the International Design Competition, endorsed by Icograda, ICSID and IFI, which is well-known for having launched the careers of many designers working on the international stage. In recent years, the JDF has concentrated on communication and interaction within Asia, and the international network that the JDF has built up over many years will be an invaluable asset in the organization of the Icograda Nagoya Congress.

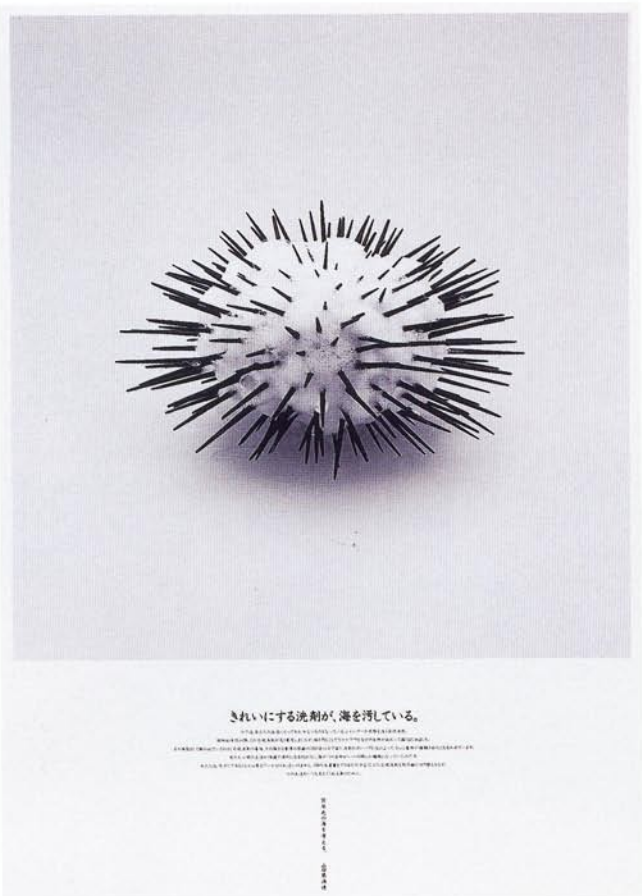
●IdcN: International Design Center NAGOYA Inc. URL http://www.idcnagoya.or.jp
International Design Center Nagoya was jointly established by regional government and the business community in 1952, as an organization for the promotion of design, and in 1956, the International Design Center was opened as a facility for the support of creative design activities. It is the first and only all-encompassing design center in the whole of Japan, and is equipped with a design museum, a design gallery, a design hall, a design library, design rooms and shops.
The IDCN carries out a wide variety of activities. It conducts research activities such as design seminars, consultations, and mediates with businesses. It also carries out promotional activities such as the Nagoya Festival and the international "Nagoya Design DOT" competition, which aims to cultivate young creative minds from across the globe and provide them with invaluable networking opportunities. It also undertakes many international activities, such as organizing a travelling exhibition of World Heritage posters around the world.

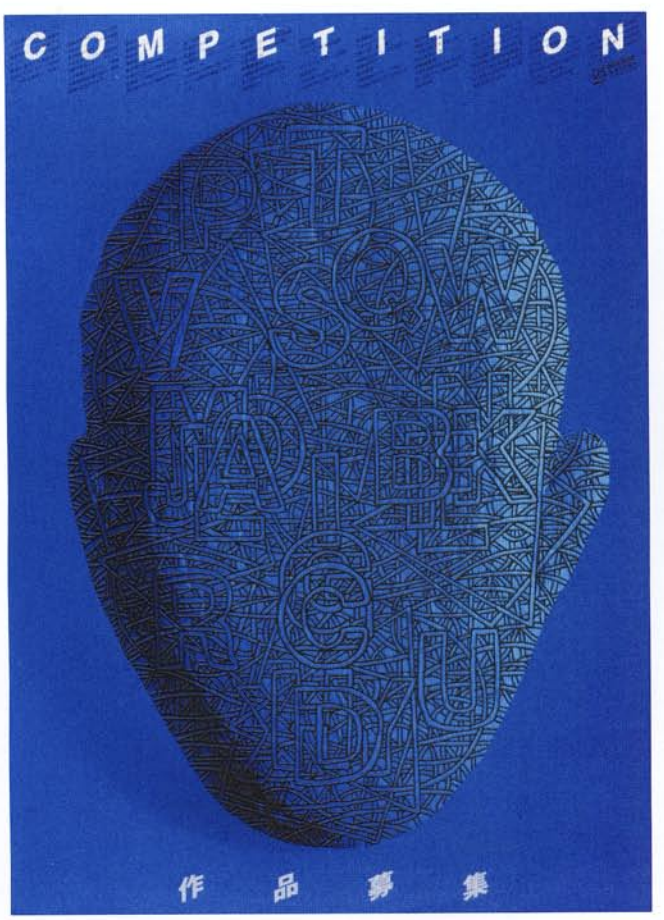
The Committee for the Icograda 2003 Nagoya Congress
The committee consists of the following organizations:
JAGDA, JDF, IDCN, Ministry of International Trade and Industry, Chubu Bureau of International Trade and Industry, JIDPO (Japan Industrial Design Promotion Organization), Aichi Prefecture, City of Nagoya, Nagoya Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Chubu Economic Federation, Nagoya Convention and Visitors Bureau.





Japan





Left: Overseas PR leaflet for the World Congress and General Assembly of the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA) planned to be held in Nagoya, Japan in 2003. "The cover is designed in the style of the Japanese flag, *hinomaru*, shaped from a throng of energetic people colored in red and orange bidding visitors welcome to Japan. The overall structure of the leaflet uses a page-folding technique, which is reminiscent of traditional Japanese wrapping techniques." Toyotsugu Itoh, art director/designer.

"This is a poster for the Tokyo Art Directors Club Exhibition. The design describes the process for winning the prize as if it were the process for launching a rocket. It was an experimental attempt to fit detailed contents and some editorial elements on a work the size of a poster. My intention was to make people stop and think by reading the explanation of the contents before they actually went to the exhibition." Katsunori Aoki, art director; Bunpei Yorifuji, illustrator; Ginza Graphic Gallery/DDD DNP Duo Dojima Gallery/Creation Gallery G8, clients.

"I designed posters for Issey Miyake twice a year, for thirteen years, from 1987 to 1999. All of these photographs were done by Irving Penn. It took a lot of work to complete the typography for the titles in each design." Ikko Tanaka, art director/designer.

This page: Yamaguchi Prefecture fishery guild poster. "Concept: Thinking a hundred years ahead. Due to environmental pollution and land development, the sea has become dirty and the number of fish has decreased. This poster was created to make all of us aware of the current situation of the sea and to keep the sea beautiful and rich." Norito Shinmura, art director/designer; Masakazu Nifuji, writer; Ko Hosokawa, photographer.

Logo for a hair/make-up artist: Seiko Saeki. "I used lines of hair as a motif and the letters 'SS,' from the artist's initials, as part of the figure. The design is intended to allow each element to stand singly and make a distinct impression on a business card or letterhead, yet at the same time maintain the basic image." Michisuke Aoki, art director/designer; Taku Hirasawa, designer.

"This poster is for Guardian Garden, a place which provides young creators with the opportunity to exhibit their works. Details of application guidelines are written in small letters, and underneath there are the words, *sakuhin boshu* (accepting applications) in a slightly larger font." Masuteru Aoba, art director; Isao Fujii/Tomomi Akamine, designers.