

## 20th Century Japanese Art (CAA Annual Conf., Boston, 22 Feb 06)

Reiko Tomii

Collectivism and Its Repercussions in 20th-Century Japan  
Sponsored by Japan Art History Forum

Panel on 20th-century Japanese art  
at College Art Association's (CAA) annual conference, Boston

Wednesday, 22 February 2006, 2:30-5:00pm

Chairs: Reiko Tomii, independent scholar, New York; Midori Yoshimoto, New Jersey City University

Papers (in order of presentation)

1. The Kokuga Society and Taisho-Era Nihonga Reform  
John Szostak,  
University of British Columbia

2. Art For the War, Art For the Workers  
Maki Kaneko, University of East Anglia

3. Takiguchi Shuzo and Jikken Kobo: The New Deal Collectivism of 1950s Japan  
Miwako Tezuka, Columbia University

4. Gutai Chain: The Collective Spirit of Individualism in Gutai Art Exhibitions  
Ming Tiampo, Carleton University

5. "Ritual" (Gishiki) Performance in 1960s Japan: Zero Dimension and Allies  
Kuroda Raiji, Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

### Session statement

Collectivism in postwar art has been a lively topic in recent scholarship. Publications such as *Art Tribes* (ed. by Achille Bonito Oliva, 2002) and *Collectivism After Modernism* (ed. by Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette, 2006) have illuminated the global scope of artists' collectives. As these publications suggest, the study of collectivism provide a critical perspective to understanding the distinctive local developments of modernity and postmodernity worldwide.

In Japan, throughout the modern and contemporary periods, collectivism has played an important role in the evolution of Japanese art, both in the mainstream art world and the vanguard circles. Collectivism itself evolved over time. The mainstay of Japanese collectivism, "exhibition collectivism" first helped shape the culture of public display as a modern form of cultural consumption, driven by numerous bijutsu dantai (art organizations) that functioned as exhibition societies. As demonstrated in this panel, exhibition collectivism provided a valuable platform for the vanguard rebellions (e.g., the prewar Kokuga Society specialized in the neo-traditionalist medium of Nihonga), as well as the socialization of art (e.g., the wartime Art Unit for Promoting Munitions Industry). The latter example prefigured "participatory collectivism" and "grass-roots collectivism," which increasingly inform the recent practices of contemporary art that proactively engage ordinary viewers and local communities. In postwar years, exhibition collectivism gradually shed its organized character; especially in the 1960s—an age of regional collectives—vanguard artists explored collectivism's true and critical potentials in a wider context of global art. Accordingly, collectivism dramatically shifted its site of operation from the exhibition hall to the public sphere, as demonstrated in this panel through the examples of Jikken Kobo/Experimental Workshop, Gutai, and Zero Dimension. A new vanguard collectivism was markedly collaborative, interventional, and participatory, echoing a more mobile and performative social formation within a democratic yet politically volatile society. Many collectives—like Jikken Kobo and Zero Dimension—pursued alternatives to the modern concepts of singular authorship and originality in their "collaborative collectivism," while the tension between collectivism and individualism became a grave issue for Gutai artists. Zero Dimension brought "interventional collectivism" to its formal and theoretical extreme in the late 1960s, when its performances were fueled by political activism.

Preliminary program of CAA's annual conference will be made available later this month at [\\_http://www.collegeart.org/conference/\\_](http://www.collegeart.org/conference/)  
(<http://www.collegeart.org/conference/>)

Reference:

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