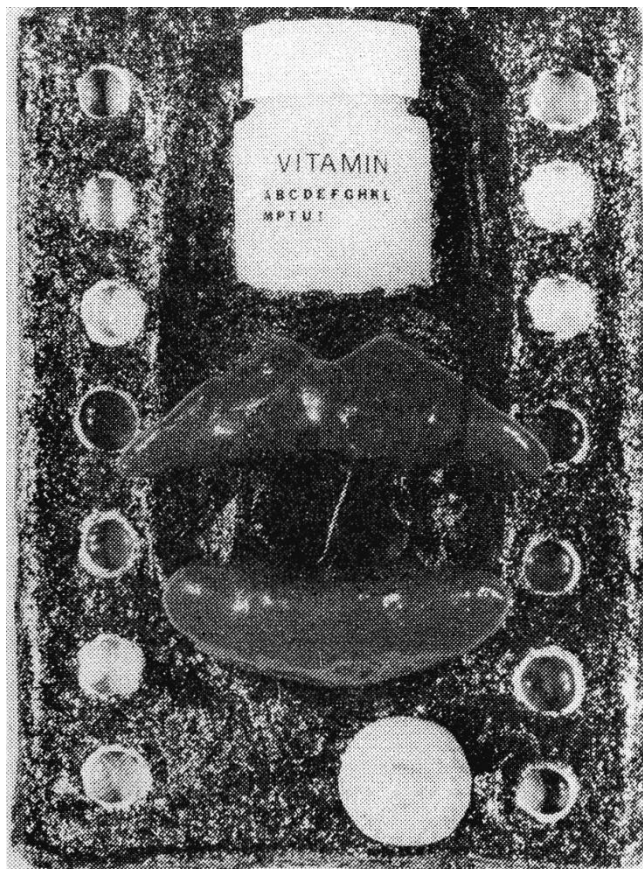


A JAPANESE AVANT-GARDE

"I am the master who has nothing to teach you, but I will create an optimal climate for creation.. -Jiro Yoshihara, founder of Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai

La Jolla / Michael McManus

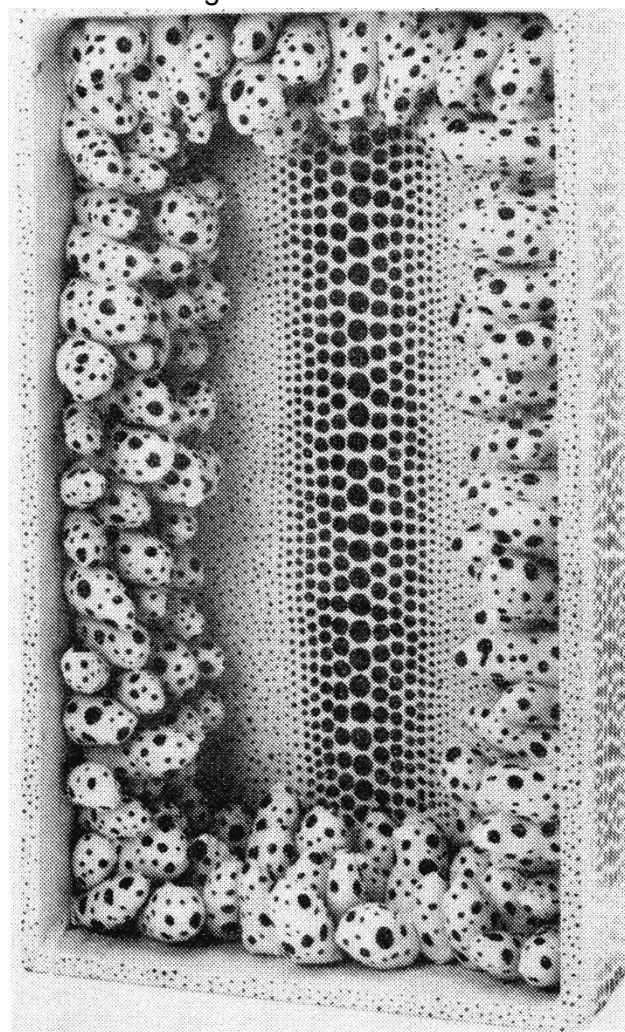


Ryoichi Majima, *Let Us Talk No. 48, Vitamin Crazy*, 1985, mixed media, 20cm x 14.5cm x 8.5cm, at Mandeville Gallery, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla.

Japanese Art Today is a refined sampler of the recent work of five living Japanese artists and one Buto dance group. Currently on view at the University of California, San Diego, Mandeville Gallery, this exhibition of the works of Kazuo Kadohara, Yayoi Kusama, Ryoichi Majima, Goro Namerikawa (a soloist from the Buto troupe Sankai Juku), Kazuo Shiraga and Katsuro Yoshida displays numerous traits associated with Far Eastern art in the popular imagination. Conversely, there is much here that relates to the European and American avant-garde. But most excitingly, there is a certain practicality or concreteness common to the works that is both uniquely Japanese and contemporary. This quality is more an attitude or stance than it is a selection of particular forms or materials. Maintaining a sense of temporal "presentness" in the art-making process is at the

center of this attitude.

Stylistic breadth is one of the stronger features of this exhibit. Having emerged as professionals from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s, the exhibiting artists present movements and styles that include Gutai, Mono-ha, Buto, the New York expatriate work of the sixties and the sort of recent organic minimalism that I term "essentialism." Most of the artists have strong affiliations with the United



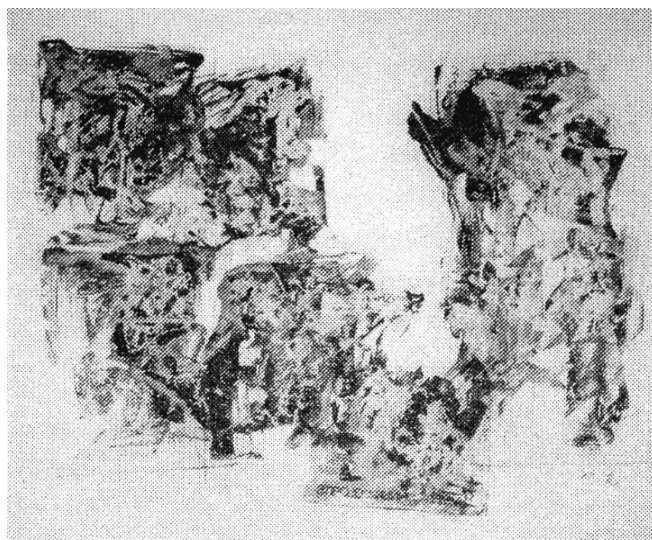
Yayoi Kusama, *Midsummer*, 1983, mixed media, 60cm x 35cm x 15cm, at Mandeville Gallery, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla.

States and/or Europe. Kadohara (the essentialist) is represented in Los Angeles by Space Gallery and has had numerous shows in southern California. Kusama was a prominent figure in the New York Happenings scene during the 1960s. Majima earned his MFA at the Otis Art Institute in 1981, and the Sankai Juku have made their name largely in western Europe and the U.S.

Nihon-ga (Japanese style painting) is conspicuously absent from the show, as are traditional stone-work and finecarpentry sculptural objects. (Yoshida's use of paint and various types of metal leaf in a series of miniature collages from 1985 do, however, make gentle ironic reference to the traditional forms, as do Kadonaga's wood sculptures.) Mavo (the Taisho-era dada of the early 1920s) is not represented in the Mandeville show, but given the age of the surviving practitioners, this is understandable. Somewhat more disappointing is the absence of the Tokyo neodadaists of the early 1960s. The works of the High Red Center and the Zero Jigen group would (I think) be of particular interest to the California art audience, which shares their taste for performance, politics and provocation. These omissions, however, are to be attributed to the present miserly financial climate for public art and not to the exhibition organizers--who would, no doubt, be delighted to present a more comprehensive survey. Similarly, the modest scale of the works is an index of the real crisis the art world is experiencing in crating, shipping and insurance costs, which over the past decade have far outstripped any realistic prices for work by artists of nonsuperstar status.

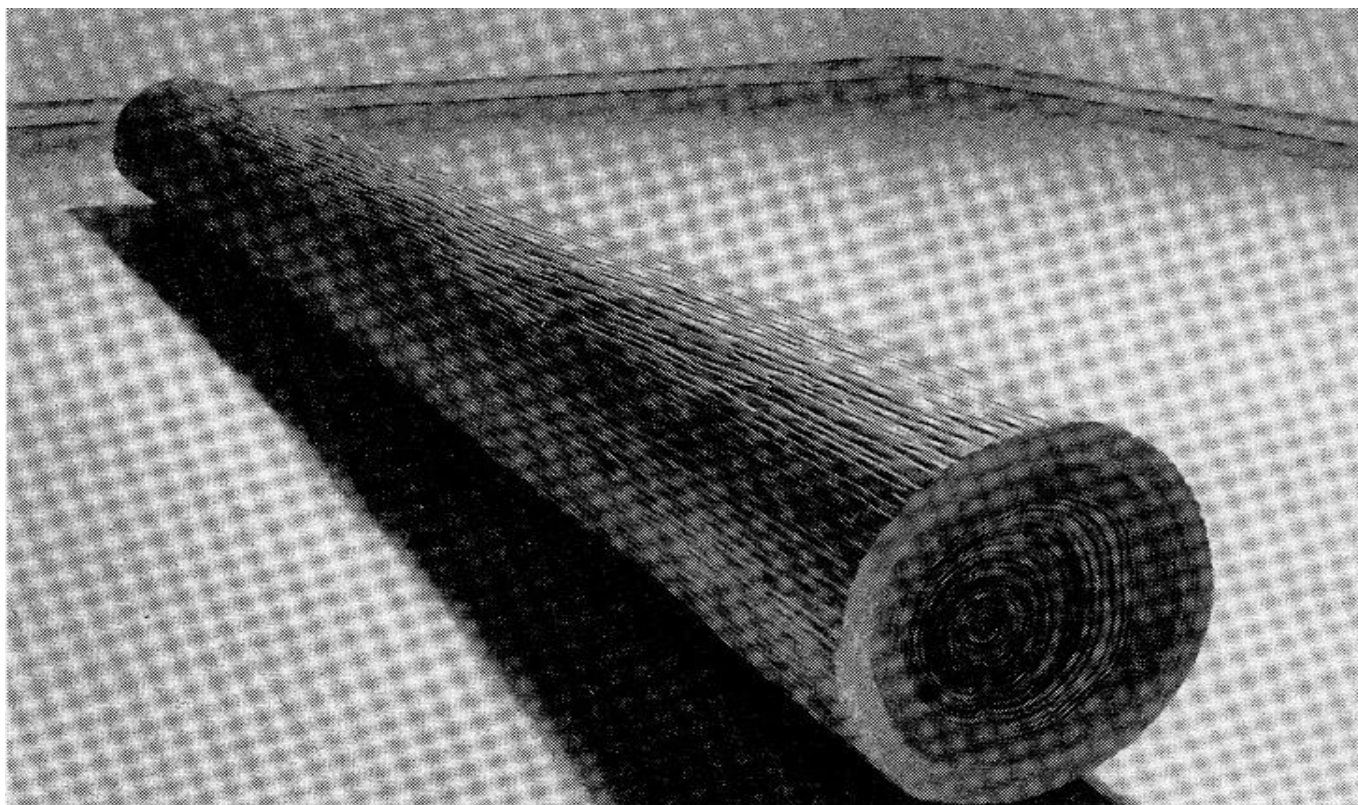
Particularly noteworthy pieces are dif Overall, the work of these Japanese artists is low tech, embodying an attitude that is antithetical to the nation's positivist technocracy. In this exhibit, the Sankai Juku videotape has dozens of glitches in the edits. Majima's electrical works are all broken

or malfunctioning. Everything is made by hand (or



Katsuro Yoshida, *Untitled*, 1980, acrylic and collage on paper, 31"x 43", at Mandeville Gallery, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla.

by foot). Sankai Juku's choreographer Ushio Amagatsu has man's struggle to overcome the distance between himself and the material world." Jiro Yoshihara maintains that "in Gutai art, the human spirit and matter unite through confrontation." One thing you will not find in Japanese Art Today is the cynical complicity the Tokyo neodadaists represented in 1960 when they issued a manifesto claiming that "the only way to be spared from the massacre is to side with the assassins."



Kasuo Kadonaga, *Wood No. 12D*, 1981, 118"x 11-3/4", at Mandeville Gallery, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla.