

Visions of 'new values'

At 71, Katsuhiko Yamaguchi is still in search of 'spiritual essence,' and in his current video installation he draws fresh inspiration from the other-worldly work of a 15th-century Korean artist.

By MONTY DIPIETRO
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It's been a long journey for multi-media artist Katsuhiko Yamaguchi, 71, who has brought his latest work, a video-based installation called "Computerized Shadow Play" (*Togen Topia*), back to his long-time Tokyo home, the Satani Gallery in Ginza.

The development of Yamaguchi's art can, in fact, be traced back to the 1950s and Shuzo Takiguchi's influential *Jikken Kobo* (Experimental Workshop), from which emerged some of the Japanese artists working in the New York and Tokyo chapters of Fluxus, the avant-garde art group.

Yamaguchi was one of the first Japanese artists to embrace the new medium of video, which he first applied to conceptual and installation art in the late 1960s. A few years later, he co-curated the access-orientated "Video Communications: Do-It-Yourself Kit" show at Ginza's Sony Building, and by then video was well on its way to acceptance as an art medium in this country.

But to trace Yamaguchi's current inspiration it is necessary to go back even further—all the way to the work of a 15th-century Korean ink-on-paper painter named Ankyon.

When Yamaguchi first saw Ankyon's "Dreaming Journey of Togen Topia" in a book at a friend's house in the Republic of Korea (South Korea) he was "overwhelmed by the exalted power of the drawing, and by its simple rhythm, which was both technically assured and at ease."

The picture is of a mysterious, other-worldly landscape where mist-shrouded trees and meadows sprawl before rocky mountains, punctuated and dwarfed by what appear to be giant stalagmites in the foreground. There is an acute sense of depth in the piece, which Yamaguchi took as his point of departure. Working with a computer-savvy assistant, the artist created digital images "as a way of entering the two-dimensional picture, so that I might experience its internal world in two-and-a-half dimensions—that extra space between two and three

COMPUTERIZED SHADOW PLAY

dimensions."

The resulting video forms the center of the exhibition. A pair of "Computer Shadow Sculptures" feature large-screen video projections of a panoramic scrolling of treated images from the Ankyon drawing, a sort of journey into the landscape itself. Yamaguchi has added cascades and occasional snow flurries to his bird's-eye trip through the drawing, but otherwise he preserved the original, monochrome atmosphere so this does not at all look like a high-tech show—it is warm, and it is inspirational.

The first sculpture consists of images of constantly shifting perspectives on a wall-mounted screen bisected by a large sheet of glass mounted perpendicularly so that it mirrors the light and doubles the image when viewed from either side, and disappears when viewed from front-center. The second sculpture is a rear-screen projection of images on a monitor built into a 3-meter-high wooden box. The show is rounded out by five smaller, Fluxus-like fluorescent-lighted display boxes in which there are paper prints featuring details of the treated photographs Yamaguchi made of Ankyon's drawing.

"People my age have had a long time to get the spiritual essence from painting and poetry," says Yamaguchi. "I think artists and scientists must find new values, and these values do not only come from the present time but also from the past, and somehow with inspiration from the future."

Sometimes the title of an art exhibition provides a clear indication of what will be up at the gallery, and sometimes it does nothing of the sort.

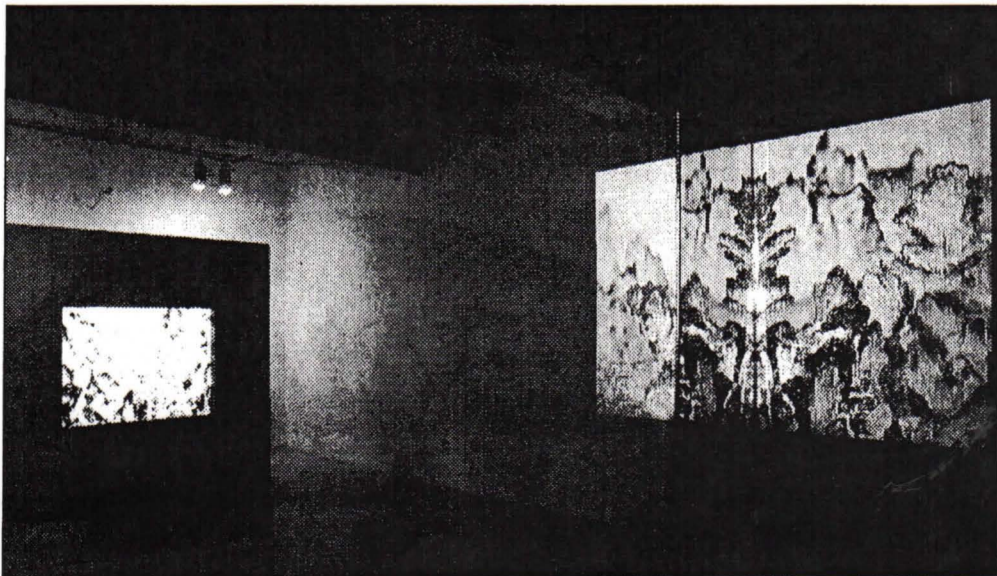
Yamaguchi's title for his current exhibition, "Computerized Shadow Play" (*Togen Topia*), intrigues in a manner that almost belies the enjoyment of adventure and discovery that the show has to offer. The key word in the title might be "play"—the best way to appreciate the artist's work being to fly right into the wonderful dreamworld that Ankyon painted half a millennium ago—a trip the smiling Yamaguchi describes as "a journey through a cosmic landscape and inner space."

It's been a long journey, and now Yamaguchi has brought us the joy we've been waiting for.

The author is a free-lance arts writer.

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"Computerized Shadow Play" is running until Oct. 16 at the Satani Gallery (03-3564-6733), near Ginza subway station. Open 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Closed Sundays, Mondays and national holidays. Admission is free.



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A view of Katsuhiko Yamaguchi's works at the Satani Gallery