

*Korea Times*  
24 May 2025

## The Korea Times

### In blinking LED numbers, Tatsuo Miyajima captures life's infinite cycles and unpredictability



Installation view of Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima's solo exhibition, "Folding Cosmos," at Gallery Baton in Seoul / Courtesy of Gallery Baton

At the heart of Tatsuo Miyajima's art lies a deceptively simple medium: digital LED counters, their numbers blinking in a silent dance.

Yet what the Japanese artist conjures from these flickering digits is far more profound, if at times abstruse — a luminous, Buddhist-inflected mediation on time and existence.

In his installations, the numbers either count down or shift randomly between 1 and 9 — but never to zero. In Western thought, the digit zero has come to symbolize nothingness, the void. Miyajima rejects that finality.

It is through these LED numerals, glowing endlessly in darkened galleries, that he physically envelops visitors in the eternal rhythm of life and death and the great cycle of time.

At his latest solo exhibition at Gallery Baton in Seoul, “Folding Cosmos,” the artist continues his spiritual exploration of life and being through two new series of works.

It’s noteworthy that both “C.T.C.S. k’in” and “Hundred Changes in Life” incorporate mirrors on their surfaces, reflecting the viewer’s body and drawing them physically into the numeral sequence.

“When the viewer sees themselves in the mirror, they’re watching both the work and themselves,” Miyajima said at the gallery. “Their life and the life of the work merge, creating a mini-cosmos.”



Tatsuo Miyajima's "C.T.C.S. k'in" series (2024) / Courtesy of Gallery Baton

In “C.T.C.S. k’in,” he weaves together the ancient Mayan conception of time with our contemporary understanding of it.

The Maya measured cosmic cycles using a base-20, or vigesimal, numeral system. Miyajima’s circular LED installations — echoing the shape of the Maya calendar — capture this way of timekeeping, yet translate it into the language of modern digital display.

And with mirrored surfaces that catch and return the onlooker’s reflection, the work collapses temporal distance, merging the here-and-now with an ancient vision of the cosmos.

As the show’s title suggests, “various layers of time, various rhythms interact and are folded into one fused cosmos,” the artist noted.

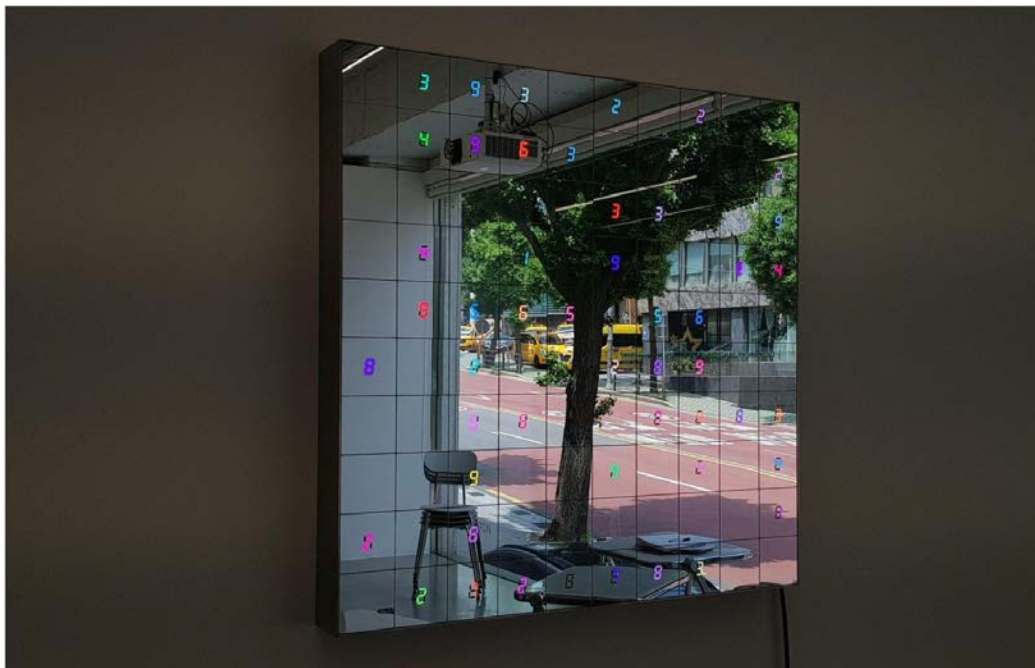


Tatsuo Miyajima's "Hundred Changes in Life — no.4" (2024) / Courtesy of Gallery Baton

Meanwhile, “Hundred Changes in Life” explores the fluid spectrum of human existence, expressing 100 emotional states to reflect life’s constant flux.

Each configuration is housed within mirrored cylinders, where the artist’s 10 digits — ranging from 1 to 9, with zero rendered as a momentary blackout — shift ceaselessly in both color and tempo. With 10 numbers and 10 hues, 100 unique combinations emerge, each suggesting a different state of being.

Their appearance is entirely unpredictable; both the number and the color are determined by chance.



Tatsuo Miyajima's "Changing Life with Changing Circumstance 01" (2023) / Korea Times photo by Park Han-sol

This embrace of ungoverned randomness stems in part from Miyajima's fascination with quantum theory. In the quantum realm, where subatomic particles defy classical logic, certainty dissolves and probability reigns.

So, too, he suggests, does human experience — and the essence of art.

“People often think that art is entirely under the artist's control,” he mused. “But artworks are not self-contained. They are transformed infinitely by the viewer and the world around them. And when viewers — who are themselves ever-changing — encounter a piece that appears probabilistically infinite, the result is near-total unpredictability.”

“Folding Cosmos” runs through June 28 at Gallery Baton.

*Present Space Magazine*  
25 April 2025

Present Space

## **Tatsuo Miyajima: Modern Humans** *In conversation with Emily Steer*

Tatsuo Miyajima discusses the genesis of time, the contemporary rejection of death, and the possibility for art to forge collective connection.



Tatsuo Miyajima's commanding installations bring cutting-edge technology together with ancient philosophies. His works challenge key concepts that are woven throughout contemporary life, from time to mortality and the nourishment of the human spirit. While they reflect on traditional practices such as Buddhism, his pieces feel future facing, often drenching rooms in richly saturated blue or red light and employing LED screens.

Since the 1980s, Miyajima's works have captured the rapid speed of contemporary technological development and the impact that this has on the world and our relation to one another. For his early performance and video pieces, the artist stood and yelled in busy Tokyo shopping areas. He hoped to shock the surrounding crowds, and observed their subsequent movements, as they often quickly diverted away from him. He also began to experiment with the Junk Art movement, utilising used goods and garbage for gallery installations. He was drawn to the mechanics of the pieces he collected, later streamlining to LED when he moved to a small studio space in Tokyo, Japan in 1987.

Many Lives, his spring solo exhibition at Lisson Gallery in New York (on show until 19 April), delves into the cycle of life and death through four new series: Many Lives, Changing Life with Changing Circumstance, MUL.APIN', and Hundred Changes in Life. Together, these pieces explore the Japanese concept of Seimei, which encompasses life, being and consciousness. Some works play with his repeated countdown format, showing full colour LEDs in a constant cycle of nine to one that evoke a rhythmic rebirth over and over. Shifting colours, speeds and patterns across the works speak to the experience of individuality within a larger, interconnected structure.





Emily Steer

Many of your works draw upon practices with ancient roots, such as Buddhism, to explore alternative readings on time and linear progression. You also work with contemporary technologies, which are often associated with rapid time. How do you see these two aspects connecting or contrasting within your practice?

Tatsuo Miyajima

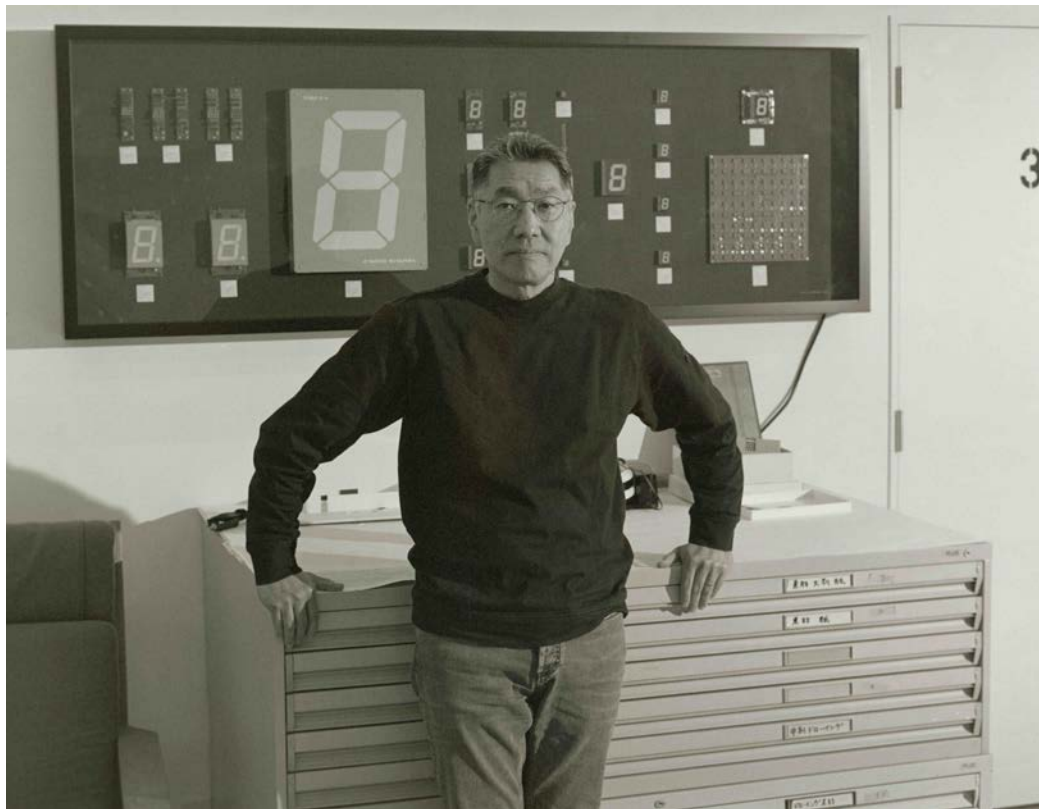
Humans go about their day by eating and sleeping. For me, Buddhism and philosophy are ancient traditions and histories, but I believe they are still extremely important for nurturing the human heart and spirit in the Modern World. Another thing is that technology, for modern humans, is as essential as eating and sleeping—an inseparable part of daily life. Both elements are indispensable to me. However, many people now are uninterested in religion or philosophy, living with their hearts and spirits undernourished while relying on cutting-edge technology. From my perspective, this seems no different from living as an animal.

ES

I wonder if there are pockets of the contemporary world, creative or otherwise, where you feel the spiritual, philosophical and technological are still especially connected and providing nourishment?

TM

It can be found everywhere but it all depends on our awareness. Great art brings awareness to people. It makes them realise the spirituality, philosophy and potential that lies dormant within themselves. That's why art is so important for humanity.



ES

You have been working with cutting-edge technology since the 1980s. In the following decades, how do you think technological developments have impacted our understanding of time?

TM

Where did time originate from? What has been revealed in recent physics and cognitive science is that 'time' was not something that originally existed, but rather a concept that was born when humans became conscious of it. Humans began to be aware of 'time' when they were confronted with 'death.' In contemplating death, humans arrived at the concept of 'irreversible time.' Recent developments in technology have been astonishing. Now, through the internet, we can instantly travel to the past and, like time travellers, soar into the future. Furthermore, with advances in medical technology, human life expectancy has dramatically increased, and with robotics and genetic technology, we are likely to reach the realm of immortality. If this happens, it will take death away from humans, and even time will lose its meaning. In other words, unless we control technology with our spirit, time itself will eventually disappear.

ES

Does this feel dangerous to you or are you intrigued by the possibility of losing time in this way?

TM

Of course, the absence of time—or death—would mean ceasing to be human, which is extremely dangerous. We must not forget the lesson we learned from our inability to control the atomic bomb. Before time—or death—disappears, humanity must learn to control these forces. However, to control technology, which has become so vast, our spirit and mind must be even greater. That is why, through art, I address the importance of spirituality and philosophy.



ES

Your early pieces explored performance and video, often filmed in busy areas of Tokyo and involving the surrounding public. What did you learn from working with these mediums and how do you think they impact the pieces you make now—if at all?

TM

My early performances had a clear concept: nature and artificiality. Here, 'nature' refers not only to the literal natural world but also to the city, other people, and everything external to me. My performances involved taking action in relation to this 'nature' and revealing the dynamics of that relationship. The conclusion I reached through this exploration was that every action I take as a living being in relation to the world is artificiality, which equals art. From this experience, I came to understand that what is alive and moving is real, and that is what defines art. That is why I became committed to expressions involving movement and life, leading me to create works that incorporate technology to achieve this movement.

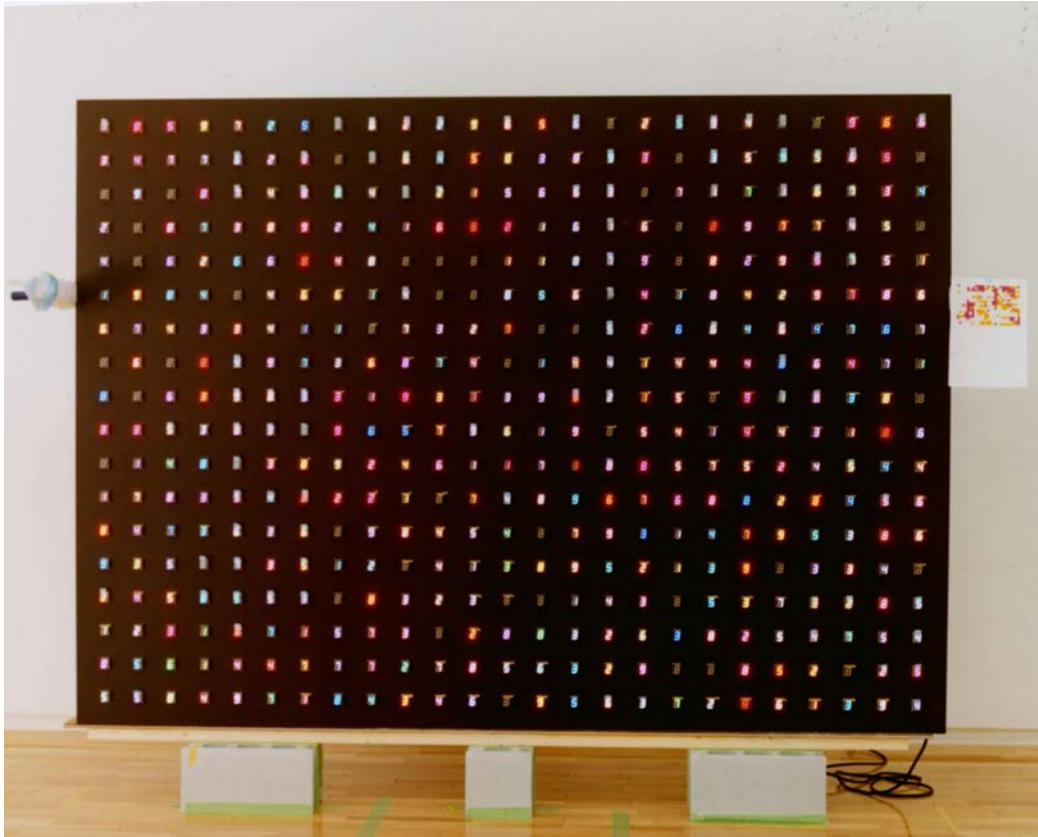
ES

In the 1980s, you were very interested in the Junk Art movement, using a lot of reclaimed materials in your pieces. It feels now as though your LED works and installations are very clean and refined. What was behind this shift, from both a practical and conceptual perspective?

TM

The works I created using scrap materials in the 1980s were an attempt to translate the conviction I gained from my performances into 'moving objects.' The use of

scrap materials was largely driven by cost considerations. Additionally, it was connected to a certain sense of nostalgia. However, by later eliminating nostalgia from my work, I was able to present my concept more clearly. This shift led me to use LED numbers because I felt they could more explicitly embody the three core concepts I had established: keep changing, connect with everything, and continue forever.



ES

In *Many Lives*, you present a constant cycle of life, death and rebirth. How do you hope for your audience to feel when they witness this piece?

TM

I have no intention of imposing the concept of the artwork on the audience. I believe that art should be freely interpreted, and it should never provide a 'correct answer.' That being said, what I want to emphasise in this concept is, as always, the countdown that repeats, but with the addition of the LEDs changing to various colours and the variation in the speeds of the countdown. In Buddhism, the concept of Samsara is taught, where 'Seimei' is said to be reborn in various forms after death. The different colours represent the various forms of 'Seimei.' Additionally, the varying speeds symbolise the individual timelines of each unique 'Seimei.' What I wanted to express was how these individual 'Seimei' come together to form a greater world, resonating with one another.



ES

In MUL.APIN, you reference the ancient Babylonian clay tablets which were used for astronomy, connecting Buddhist ideas with ancient cosmology. This piece seems to encourage a greater awareness of the sprawling systems of time and space that we exist within. In the contemporary world, in which we know radically more information about these systems, do you feel we have a greater or lesser appreciation of our place within them?

TM

The exponential increase in information about such systems is fortunate for us. It transcends time, space, language, and culture, crossing even national and religious boundaries. Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, the undeniable truth is that we are all interconnected. In fact, I believe that making people feel this connection is the role of art.

*Artnet*  
25 December 2023

# artnet

## Art History

## Art We Love: The Playful Profundity of These Transforming Paintings

On Tatsuo Miyajima's 'Painting of Change' (2020).

Vivienne Chow, December 25, 2023



Tatsuo Miyajima's *Painting of Change*. Photo: Vivienne Chow.

*For an episode of the Art Angle podcast, we asked Artnet News writers and editors to tell us about one work of art that brings them joy. The following is a part of a series of transcripts of the answers. You can listen to the entire podcast on Apple Music, Spotify, or [here](#).*

The work I've chosen is called *Painting of Change*, from a series by Japanese artist [Tatsuo Miyajima](#).

Miyajima is best known for his sculptures and installations that employ digital LED counters. But in this painting series, which I first saw at his solo exhibition titled "[Art in You](#)" at Lisson Gallery in London in early 2022, Miyajima transformed these digital counters into analogue.

The artist adapted the digital display into minimalistic paintings of numbers, with each digit made of seven panels in different colors, hung in the exact same style as how a number is displayed in a digital counter. Like his other installations, the digit featured in “Painting of Change” can change too. But the change must be done manually.

During my visit, I had to roll a specially designed die. The outcome dictated how the painting was going to change. I picked the painting that had the number 9 on display. I rolled the die, and I got 1. Then the gallery staff took four panels off the wall and changed the display from 9 to 1.

The number cycle from 1 to 9 symbolizes the cycle of life that never stops. The beginning is the end, and the end is the beginning. Death comes with rebirth, and phoenix rises from the ashes. Change is an integral part of the life cycle, and a lot of the times, it’s out of your control. This is what the work has taught me. In this work I find peace and solace, which brings me joy—even just for a fleeting moment.



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# LISSON GALLERY

*Cobo Social*  
15 February 2022



## Tatsuo Miyajima: Finding the Art in You

**15**  
**FEB**

TEXT: Nicholas Stephens

IMAGES: Courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery



We spoke to renowned Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima, a force in digital art since the 1980s, on the eve of his new exhibition at Lisson Gallery in London. Along the way, we discussed Buddhism, the godlessness of technology, and how art really can make us immortal.



Exhibition view, "Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You", at Lisson Gallery, 67 Lisson Street, London, 10 February – 9 April, 2022. © Tatsuo Miyajima. Image courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.

Unveiling three new bodies of work—*Keep Changing (Mondrian)*, *Painting of Change*, and *Unstable Time*, created in 2020 and 2021 respectively—Tatsuo Miyajima's tripartite message of, "Keep Changing", "Connect with Everything", and "Continue Forever" is reassuringly retold through the medium of LED. The universal language of single digit numbers, flashing from 1 through 9 (0 is omitted, as if underlining death's status as a great taboo) forms a mesmerising poetry of its own. The curation nods to past practitioners of change and unpredictability: painter Piet Mondrian, composer John Cage, and physicist Werner Heisenberg.

The London exhibition follows Miyajima's commission for the opening of the new Japanese Galleries at The British Museum, titled *Time Waterfall – panel #8 (Blue)* (2017), which will remind Hong Kongers of his *Time Waterfall* display on the ICC in 2016. More recently, Miyajima has participated in the exhibition "STARS: Six Contemporary Artists from Japan to the World" at Mori Art Museum in Tokyo in 2020, which included Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara and Takashi Murakami among others. Asked about the influence of these artists on his practice, Miyajima remarked elliptically, "If there is an artist who is not influenced by other artists, I would like to meet him." Just as the exhibition opened, we had the pleasure of interviewing Miyajima to explore "Art in You" in the context of our ever-changing times, and his own artistic evolution.



Exhibition view, "Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You", at Lisson Gallery, 67 Lisson Street, London, 10 February – 9 April, 2022. © Tatsuo Miyajima. Image courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.

**Has the recent pandemic caused you to think differently about your work in any way?**

Yes, it has. It has become clear that the world is unpredictable. That's why my work is conscious of coincidence and uncontrollable situations.

**Linking with your concept of continuing forever, you've said that, "People have been able to experience immortality through a work of art." Can you explain how?**

A good work of art makes us feel the "eternal now" through our imagination. It is worthy of immortality for man.

**Your website mentions an important meeting between Einstein and Tagore in 1930, in which beauty was discussed. Is there anybody in today's world you would like to meet to discuss beauty and art?**

I don't think such a person exists nowadays, because people are too busy with social networks to talk about beauty and art.

**You collaborated with Bulgari to create a watch, and your art has been represented effectively on clothing. Is this wearability of your art important?**

Art shouldn't exist only in the graveyard of museums. It should live and move with people.

**What is it about Piet Mondrian that inspired you for this exhibition?**

I have always been deeply influenced by Mondrian. This time I expressed my homage to his work.



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Painting of Change – 022*, 2021, oil on wooden panel, 3 dices, wooden bar, 120 x 340 x 3.3 cm. © Tatsuo Miyajima. Image courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Unstable Time S – no.10*, 2020, light emitting diode, IC, electric wire, nylon fabric, switching power supply, L.E.D. type: "Time E6-W", 100 pieces, 160 x 160 x 1 cm (variable size). © Tatsuo Miyajima. Image courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.

**Your new *Painting of Change* series involves the rolling of dice. Are you attracted by uncertainty, gambling or games of chance?**

What interests me is not the gambling, but uncertainty by Heisenberg means. And the attitude of the audience to participate in the work of art.

**In *Unstable Time*, the LED gadgets are mounted on nylon fabric for the first time, instead of buildings or natural elements. Why is 2022 the time to use these new materials?**

The fabric is soft and free to change. I have experienced pandemics and natural disasters and I wanted to express the world using materials that are not fixed.

**You are also showing in Berlin this month. If you made an LED-light artwork about Berlin and an artwork about London, how would the two be different?**

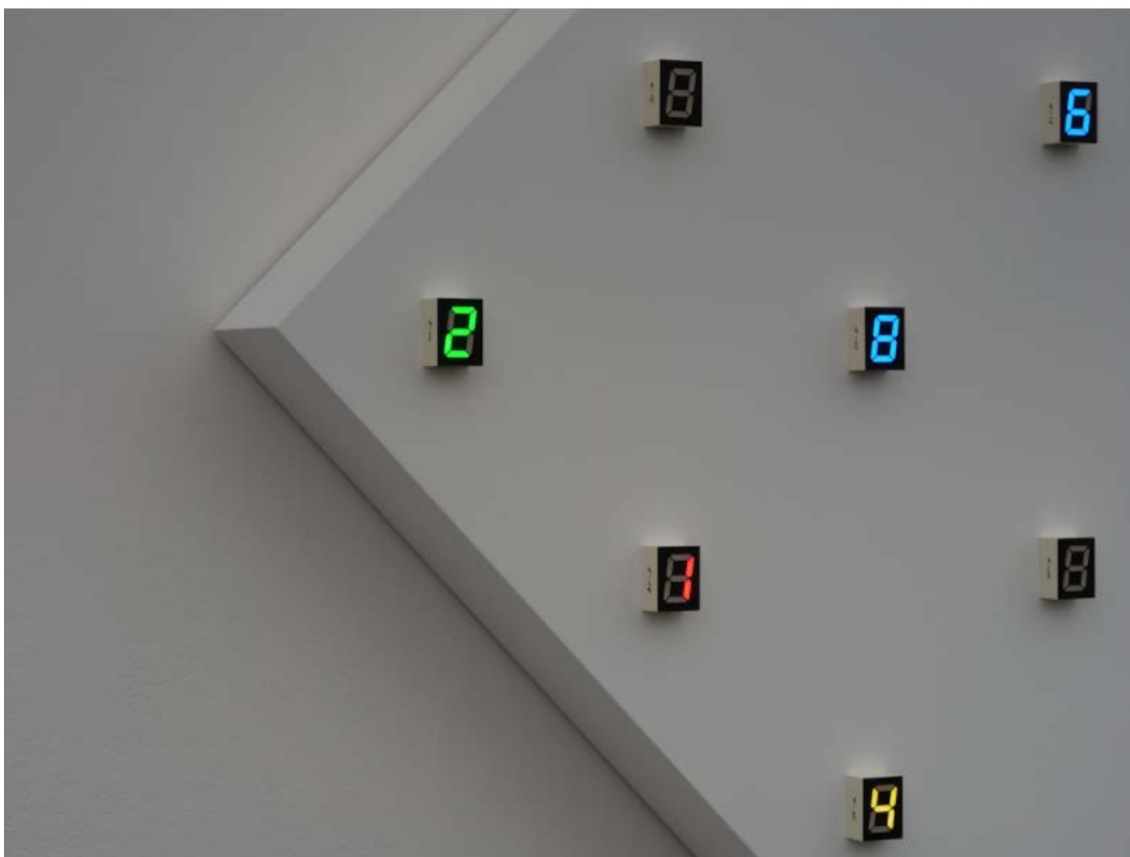
I use the same concept for my work in both London and Berlin. So, we have a deep relationship with each other.

**You merge technology with Buddhist thought. Does technology bring you closer to God?**

Technology is a technique, not an end in itself. The purpose is set by human beings and technology should only be used. And that man is far from God who is easily controlled by his desires.

**Time is a key theme of your work. Death is also present, either in memorials or in the absence of the number zero. Is death important to understanding your work?**

Time is given shape by life and death. Without death, there can be no life. They are inextricably linked. They are the two sides of the same coin. So, to think about death is to live.



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Keep Changing (Mondrian) - no.4*, 2021, light-emitting diode, IC, electric wire, white painted wooden panel, L.E.D. type: "Time G-FC", 49 pieces, 161 x 161 x 9.6 cm. © Tatsuo Miyajima. Image courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery.

*Artnet News*  
1 March 2022

artnet news

Gallery Network partner

## Spotlight: Japanese Artist Tatsuo Miyajima's Number-Based Sculptures Embody Buddhist Philosophies

Sculptor Tatsuo Miyajima debuts three new series of works in the exhibition "Art In You," currently on view at Lisson Gallery in London.

**Artnet Gallery Network**, March 1, 2022



Installation view "Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You" 2022. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London.

*Every month, hundreds of galleries add newly available works by thousands of artists to the Artnet Gallery Network—and every week, we shine a spotlight on one artist you should know. Check out what we have in store, and inquire for more with one simple click.*

**About the Artist:** Japanese sculptor and installation artist Tatsuo Miyajima often works with numbers and LED lights to encapsulate ideas found in Buddhist thought. In his new exhibition “[Art in You](#)” at Lisson Gallery in London, the artist presents three new bodies of work, “Painting of Change,” “Keep Changing (Mondrian),” and “Unstable Time”—all created between 2020 and 2021 and on view for the first time.



Installation view “Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You” 2022. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London.

**Why We Like It:** Miyajima’s “Painting of Change” series includes new works that feature large digits—forms that call to mind LED alarm clocks, as well as the passing of time. These works can be activated by the roll of a die, a device that alludes to questions of chance, Buddhist teachings on the continuity of flux, and the artist’s belief in the always-changing nature of life. New for the artist are a series of sculptures made from fabric and LED lights, called the “Unstable Time” series, which add a new sense of ephemerality and fluidity to his practice. In the last room of the gallery, viewers come across a new series of LED installations on panels arranged in checkered patterns, which are part of Miyajima’s “Keep Changing (Mondrian)” series. All of the works in the exhibition place emphasis on the

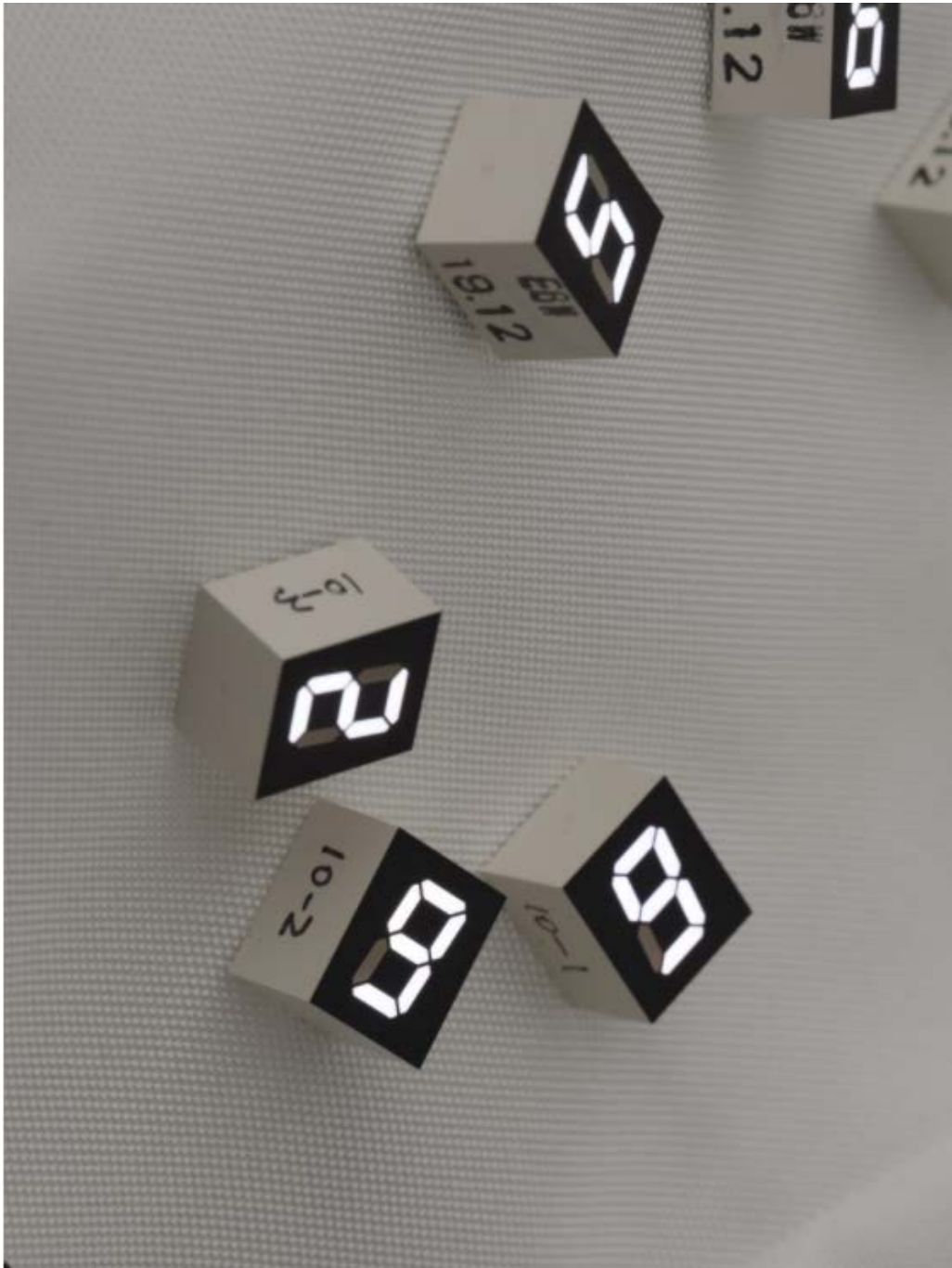
numbers, which in Miyajima's symbolic language, symbolize the human life cycle, each digit individually signifying a body and soul. Numbers, for Miyajima, are an international language that traverses cultural boundaries and his works often count down from nine to one. The artist, however, always omits zero, instead replacing the number with a pause that represents the space between life and death, before the cycle of flickering numbers begins again. Colors too have symbolism in this exhibition. In the "Keep Changing (Mondrian)" series, the colors green, blue, red, yellow, and white symbolize earth, water, fire, wind, and sky, embodying the "Five Elements."

**According to the Gallery:** "For Buddhists, nothing is constant or fixed but rather in flux, a perpetual stream of change, of re-birth or Samsāra—the cyclicity of all existence. The introduction of the die also engages with the paradox between the certainty of the object, undermined by its fate controlled by the indeterminate roll of the dice... Miyajima was also inspired by John Cage's *Music of Changes*: a ground-breaking piano solo composed in 1951, described as 'indeterminate music', where the process of composition involved applying decisions made using the *I Ching*, a Chinese classic text that is commonly used as a divination system."

See images from "[Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You](#)" below.



Installation view "Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You" 2022. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London.



Installation view "Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You" 2022. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London.



Installation view "Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You" 2022. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London.



Installation view "Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You" 2022. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery, London.

*"Tatsuo Miyajima: Art in You" is on view a Lisson Gallery, London, through April 9, 2022.*

*Designboom*  
7th June 2022

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## issey miyake & tatsuo miyajima play with time & fashion at milan design week 2022

The city of Milan is a mixing ground for leading creativity, whether that is industrial design, fashion, art or architecture. The same themes are ever-present at Issey Miyake, as the brand's clothing is designed in the same way that a product is. ISSEY MIYAKE / MILAN hosts the collaborative, experimental exhibition THINKING DESIGN, MAKING DESIGN: work by A-POC ABLE ISSEY MIYAKE and Tatsuo Miyajima during Milan Design Week 2022. The TYPE-II Tatsuo Miyajima project is on show, unveiling the conceptualization and realization of the design work behind the revolutionary fashion brand.



All images courtesy of Issey Miyake

Issey Miyake has always challenged itself to create original products. Since its inception in 1998, the company's aim has been to revolutionize the process of clothes-making. The design work goes beyond form-making to create garments that reflect the wears' lifestyles, most notably through advanced development of original fabrics. Research project **A-POC ABLE ISSEY MIYAKE** focuses on the future by interweaving artwork in fashion design through creative collaborations.



Tatsuo Miyajima's artwork represents time and life through the depiction of numbers from 1 through to 9

## **ISSEY MIYAKE X TATSUO MIYAJIMA**

Issey Miyake's collaborates with renowned contemporary artist Tatsuo Miyajima for Milan Design Week 2022. He creates artwork that represents time and life through the depiction of numbers from 1 through to 9. Three concepts are apparent in his work: it keeps changing, it connects with everything, and it continues forever. The collaboration stems from the idea of promoting experiences of wearing art in everyday living. Digital numbers adorn the fashion designs in a display of seven segments.



Pieces of the seven segments of numbers are wrapped in the special textile throughout the exhibition

## NUMERICAL FASHION AND ARTWORK

On show at the exhibition THINKING DESIGN, MAKING DESIGN: work by A-POC ABLE ISSEY MIYAKE and Tatsuo Miyajima, two fashion designs are on display for visitors to see: TYPE-II-001 and TYPE-II-002. The former resembles a blouson that uses the steam stretch method to combine a pleated garment with Miyajima's expression of digital numbers. The technique affects special heat-reactive threads woven into the clothe to then shrink it when hot steam is applied. Three-dimensional patterns and shapes are created by only treating intended sections.

TYPE-II-002 fashions a unisex blouson using Sony Group's triporous™, a new sustainable material made from rice husks. Digital numbers feature randomly on the clothing, with the color black extended to highlight the artwork most visibly.



Each day a visitor rolls a 10-sided die and then hangs the segments on the wall accordingly

The fashion show is paired with a series of participatory artwork and a video interview with Tatsuo Miyajima, who reveals the thinking and making behind the collaboration. The exhibition's artwork serves as the inspiration for the entire project. Pieces of the seven segments of numbers are wrapped in the special textile. Each set of pattern is different as the numbers are randomly woven into textiles. Each day a visitor rolls a 10-sided die and then hangs the segments on the wall accordingly. The ritual plays on the artist's balance of analog and digital in his work.



Digital numbers adorn the fashion designs in a display of seven segments



The collaboration stems from the idea of promoting experiences of wearing art in everyday living

**brand:** A-POC ABLE ISSEY MIYAKE  
**exhibition:** THINKING DESIGN, MAKING DESIGN  
**collaborator:** Tatsuo Miyajima  
**location:** ISSEY MIYAKE / MILAN  
**address:** Via Bagutta 12, 20121 Milano - Italy  
**dates:** June 7-21, 2022  
**times:** 10:00-19:00

tim spears | designboom

jun 07, 2022

# LISSON GALLERY

*designboom*  
5 November 2020

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STARS brings together tatsuo miyajima, yoshitomo nara and lee ufan at mori art museum

from now through january 3, 2021, the **mori art museum** in tokyo presents six artists whose careers propelled them beyond the confines of japan, earning them international acclaim across generations. *STARS: six contemporary artists from japan* to the world traces the journey of yayoi kusama, lee ufan, tatsuo miyajima, takashi murakami, yoshitomo nara, and hiroshi sugimoto from their earliest to most recent works, exploring how their practices have been evaluated in the global context. *STARS* touches upon the artists' pursuit of universal issues exceeding nationality and culture, traditions and aesthetics, technology and subculture — all while keeping in mind the social, cultural and economic background unique to japan.

designboom is in tokyo and has visited the exhibition, and highlights the show across two, in-depth articles. see [part I here](#) — where we document contributions by yayoi kusama, takashi murakami, and hiroshi sugimoto — and read on for part II, which looks at the exhibits of tatsuo miyajima, yoshitomo nara, and lee ufan.



exhibition view of tatsuo miyajima at STARS | image © designboom

the decades of postwar economic growth in japan were punctuated by a series of national events — such as the olympics and world expo — as the country began to turn its gaze outward once more. in the art world, the period was characterized by debates on decolonization and multiculturalism, and the proliferation of new contemporary art settings, such as biennials and art fairs. fast-forward to 2020 — the is world thrown into turmoil by the COVID-19 pandemic and the vulnerability of our social and economic structures is increasingly highlighted. at this moment in history — as well as raising some fundamental questions about the essential role of art and how we define artistic success — the exhibition at mori art museum seeks to offer powerful messages suffused with inspiration for future.



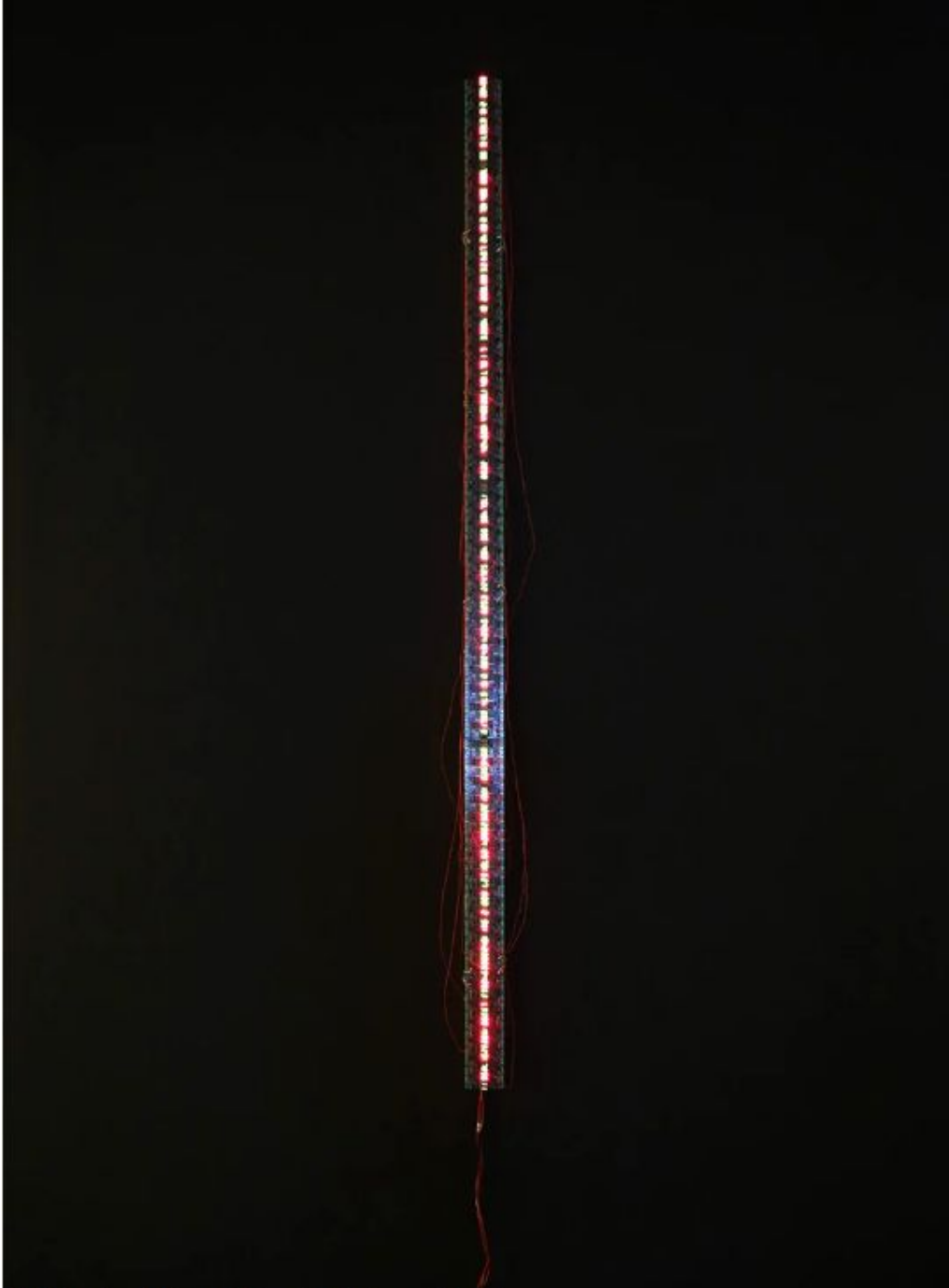
exhibition view of tatsuo miyajima at STARS | image © designboom

since the mid-1980s, tatsuo miyajima has created a body of installations and sculptures using digital LED counters with numbers changing from 1 to 9. these studies explore the concepts that the artist describes in terms of, *'it keeps changing'*, *'it connects with everything'*, and *'it continues forever'*. LEDs deliberately go dark without ever displaying the number 0 — a choice intended to signify death, and how life and death are constantly repeating. the exhibition at mori art museum features a new work bringing together all the digital counters made until now for *'sea of time - tohoku'*, alongside documentary footage of members of the public setting the counter speeds. the other exhibits are *'clock for 300 thousand years'* from 1987, which theoretically will count the time for over three thousand centuries, and *'monism/dualism'* from 1989, both dating from around the time of miyajima's international debut.



exhibition view of tatsuo miyajima at STARS | image © designboom

dealing with universal notions of time, miyajima's work is acclaimed for fusing elements of buddhist thought and technology. he has also created projects about the tragic bombings of hiroshima and nagasaki, and, since 2017, devoted himself to socially engaged participatory art projects such as 'sea of time - tohoku', which aims eventually to install permanently 3,000 LED counters in the tohoku region of northeast japan with the hope of serving as a requiem for the victims of the great east japan earthquake and passing on their memories. back in 1988, miyajima exhibited the original 'sea of time' at the 43rd venice biennale. he subsequently created 'sea of time' in 1998 for the art house project on the island of naoshima, kagawa prefecture. 'sea of time - tohoku' is a further development of this series of works.



exhibition view of tatsuo miyajima at STARS | image © designboom



exhibition view of tatsuo miyajima at STARS | image © designboom



five of the six artists, except the elderly yayoi kusama, gathered at the museum in late july for a press conference prior to the exhibit's opening  
from left: takashi murakami, lee ufan, tatsuo miyajima, hiroschi sugimoto, yoshitomo nara | image via japan forward

*Japan Forward*  
15 October 2020



CULTURE

## STARS at the Mori Art Museum: Five Contemporary Art Superstars Share their Views on a Post-Corona World

Ayako Kurosawa October 15, 2020 12:09 pm

[\(Click here to read this article in Japanese.\)](#)

and Takashi Murakami, Ayako Kurosawa, coronavirus, COVID-19, Editor's Pick, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Lee Ufan, mori art museum, Mori Tower, Roppongi Hills, six contemporary artists, STARS exhibit, Tatsuo Miyajima, Yayoi Kusama, Yoshitomo Nara

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The lineup of six superstars in the world of contemporary art in the Mori Art Museum's "STARS" exhibition (Roppongi, Tokyo) has attracted much attention. The artists are Yayoi Kusama (91), Lee Ufan (84), Hiroshi Sugimoto (72), Tatsuo Miyajima (63), Yoshitomo Nara (60), and Takashi Murakami (58).

Five of the six artists, excepting the elderly Yayoi Kusama, gathered at the museum in late July for a press conference on the day prior to the exhibit's opening. The internationally-active artists discussed the turmoil of the pandemic and the nature of art in the age of COVID-19.

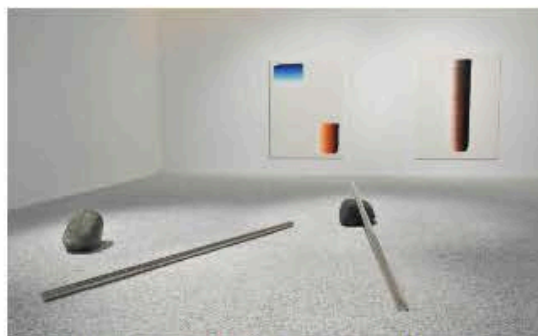


*Yayoi Kusama: Pink Boat(1992) (Courtesy of Mori Art Museum)*

It is as if the stars have aligned to bring about this unparalleled exhibition of six art legends, originally planned for the same year as the Olympics. "We planned to introduce artists that people coming from all over the world most wanted to see," said Museum Director, Mami Kataoka.

On display are both early works that garnered high praise internationally, as well as more recent works of all six artists. Following the respective trajectories of each artist's career gives viewers a look at both the history of Japanese contemporary art as well as an idea of where it stands today. For anyone in Japan interested in learning more about contemporary art, this exhibit is a great starting point.

The pandemic resulted in postponement of the Olympics, and the opening of the exhibition was also delayed three months in conjunction with Japan's state of emergency. At the press conference, the artists shared their experiences during the stay-at-home period and their views on the post-Corona world, with an astuteness so typical of artists.



*Lee Ufan Installation view (Courtesy of Mori Art Museum)*

## Tatsuo Miyajima and the Age of Selection

"This pandemic has exposed what is truly important," says Tatsuo Miyajima, known for his installations using LED digital counters. Sudden advances in online communication during the ock-downs and stay-at-home periods have been pivotal.



*Tatsuo Miyajima: Sea of Time-TOHOKU Project (2020, Tokyo) (Courtesy of Mori Art Museum)*

We somehow get by not seeing people we don't need to see, and not going places we don't need to go. We can just go online. And it's pretty much the same for art. In other words, there's a selection involved.

It makes for rough times for art museums, too. People will still go to exhibits that truly demand to be seen, and people will still stand in front of real-life art that demands to be seen.

Since 2017, Miyajima has been working on a memorial for victims of the Great East Japan Earthquake, entitled "Sea of Time—TOHOKU". The project asks different people from along the coastline who experienced the disaster to set the speed of a digital counter, each in their own way, with the aim of setting up 3,000 LED lights in total.

The latest version is displayed in the current exhibition, with 719 LED lights over a basin of water symbolizing the memories of 719 lost lives. The solemnity of this work is indeed felt all the more standing in front of it in real time.

*Shine*  
29 May 2019



## Numbers add up at artist's museum launch



Wang Jie



Ma Siliang

"Time Waterfall Panel #MAM" by Tatsuo Miyajima

Tatsuo Miyajima, one of Japan's foremost sculptors and installation artists, is an ideal choice to launch the relocated Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum.

The museum's new venue, at Wenshui Road, has been renovated from an old and abandoned metallurgical factory and occupies an area of 7,000 square meters.

Miyajima is the perfect artist to promote the new location as industrial remains echo well within his artworks.

Titled "Tatsuo Miyajima: Being Coming," the solo-exhibition features representative works from the 61-year-old since 1988, including his LED installation and performance art.

When entering the exhibition hall, visitors are immediately taken by a cluster of colorful LED numbers hanging from the ceiling or "popping out" from the screens.

Numbers always play a part in his works. For example, “Time Waterfall Panel #MAM,” stands out like a monument, projecting natural numbers from one to nine on the LED pillar, decreasing from big numbers to small numbers, but never reaching zero.

The artist’s continuous process of counting down symbolizes a life experience, along with the vanished light that hints the number of zero is a metaphor of death. Every digit appears in a different size at a different speed, which generates overlapping layers and each layer implies a distinctive trajectory of each individual’s life.

Born in 1957 in Tokyo, Miyajima finished his undergraduate and postgraduate studies at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1986. After his studies he began experimenting with performance art before moving on to light-based installations.

“Time connects everything, and I want people to think about the universe and the human spirit,” the artist said. “For me, there is no particular meaning about these numbers. Numbers are a universal symbol. Changes in numbers vividly reveal a changing or fading process.”

“Keep changing,” “connect with all” and “goes on forever” are three of the Japanese artist’s core concepts.

The bigger the themes, the harder the creations. But Miyajima swiftly finds his way through the use of digital light emitting diode (LED) counters, or “gadgets” as he calls them, and has done since the late 1980s.

These numbers, continually flashing and repetitious — though not necessarily sequential — cycles from one to nine, represent the journey from life to death, the finality of which is symbolized by “0,” which consequently never appears in his work. This theory derives partially from humanist ideas, the teachings of Buddhism, as well as from his core artistic concepts.

His LED numerals have been presented in grids, towers, complex integrated groupings or circuits and as simple digital counters, but are all aligned with his interests in continuity, connections and eternity, as well as with the flow and span of time and space.

The spotlight of the exhibition is his installation “Time Train to the Holocaust/Counter Coal.” It is actually two works, yet they are a harmonious match.

“Counter Coal” is a pile of coal in the exhibition hall, and the digital LEDs are constantly flashing among the coal blocks.

Then there is a toy train track around the pile of coal, with a train moving around it, also with LED numerals flashing in some of the compartments.

Miyajima summed up the 20th century as a period of human history that was more violent than any before. Here the moving train is reminiscent of those that were transporting thousands of Jewish people to their fatal destination in the concentration camps of World War II.

“The brutal killing of the Jewish people by the Nazis is already a past history, and I hope that such crimes will never reappear or be repeated,” Miyajima explained.

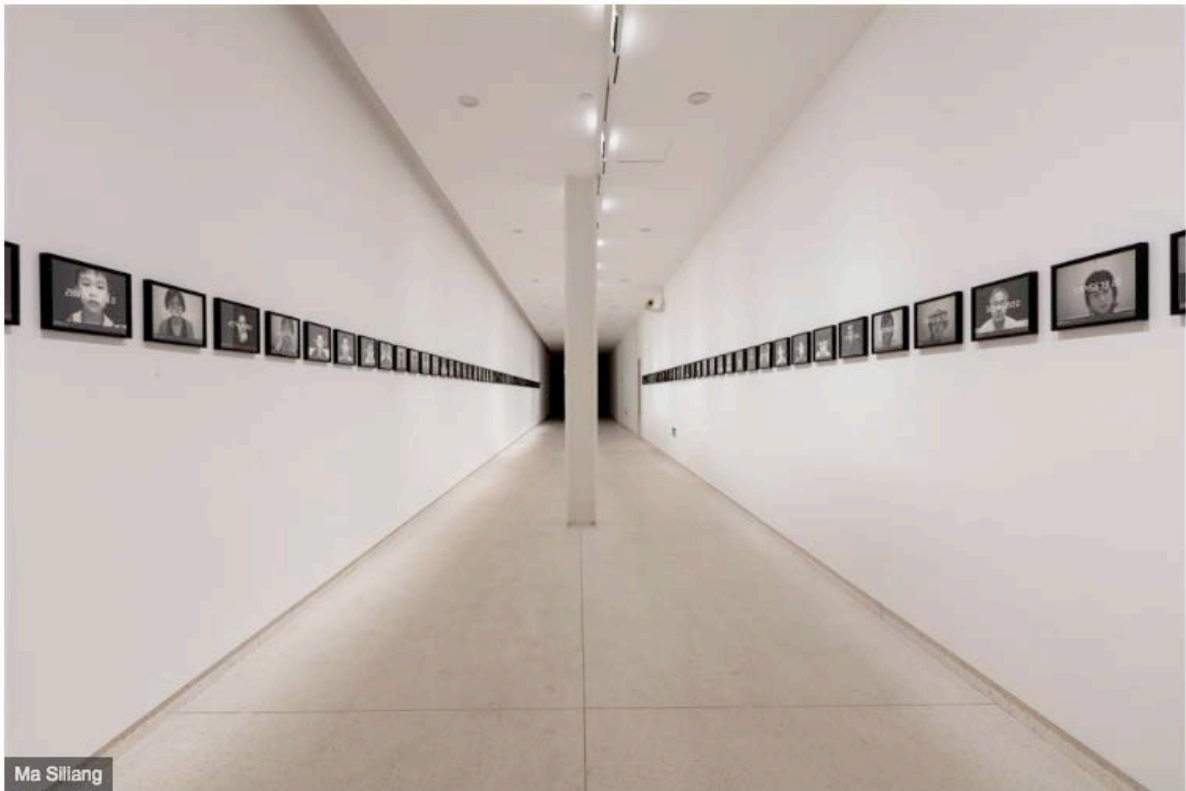
Aside from his thought-provoking installations, Miyajima is also noted as a performance artist.

For example, “Counter Voice in the water at Fukushima” (2014), sees a video record Miyajima counting down from nine to one. When he reaches “0,” he inhales and holds his breath, and puts his face in the water from the sea. In front of the sea is the nuclear power plant, which was severely damaged by the Tsunami that struck Fukushima, Japan in 2011.

When confronting another work titled “Archives of Deathclock,” visitors are directly forced with the theme of death.

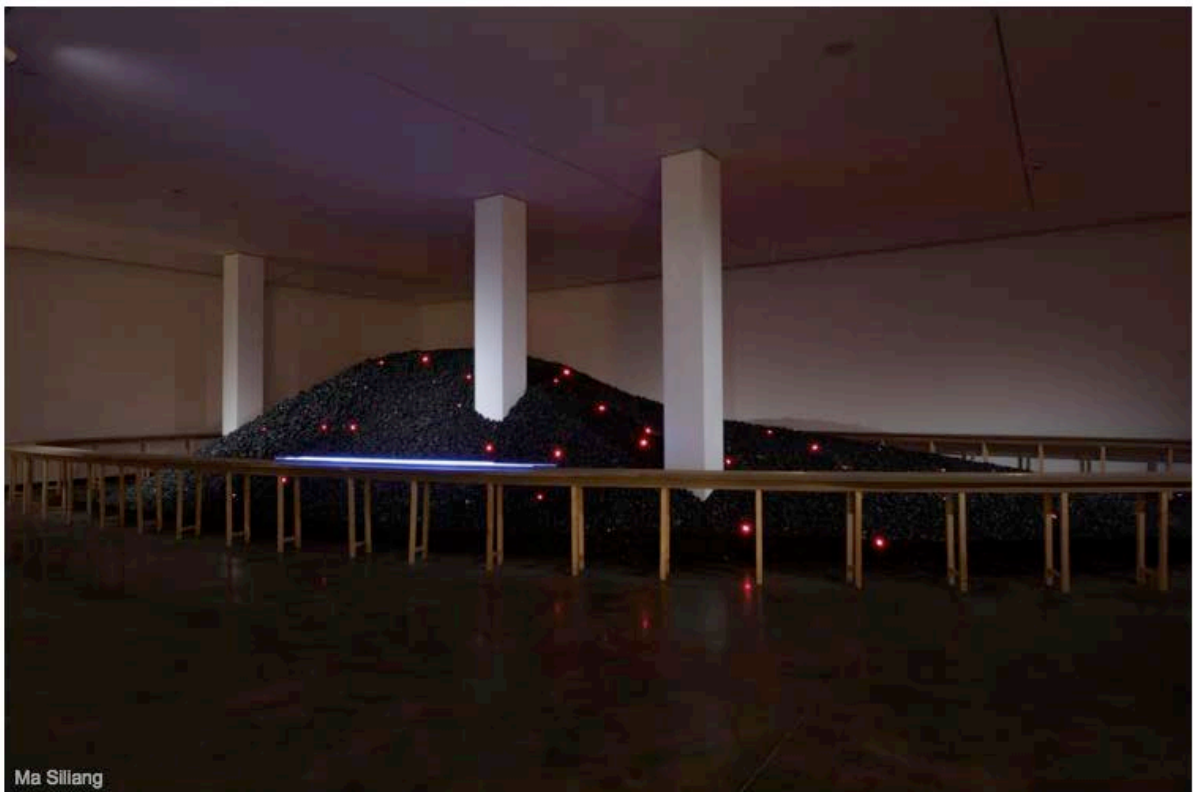
The work creates a place where one can confront one’s own death. People who register with “Deathclock” are asked to type in their own date of death. But this death is a different version of death — it is like the aforementioned welling up of an intuition that makes them sense the next life ahead.

Viewing a group of pictures capturing various people with their Deathclock, visitors might think of their own demise. Here the artist emphasizes “those who can teach how to die can also teach how to live.”



Ma Sillang

When confronting another work titled "Archives of Deathclock," visitors will be directly forced with the death topic.



Ma Sillang

The spotlight of the exhibition is Miyajima's installation "Time Train to the Holocaust/Counter Coal."

# Forbes

287 views | Feb 11, 2019, 07:49pm

## Tatsuo Miyajima, "Innumerable Life / Buddha" At Lisson Gallery, New York

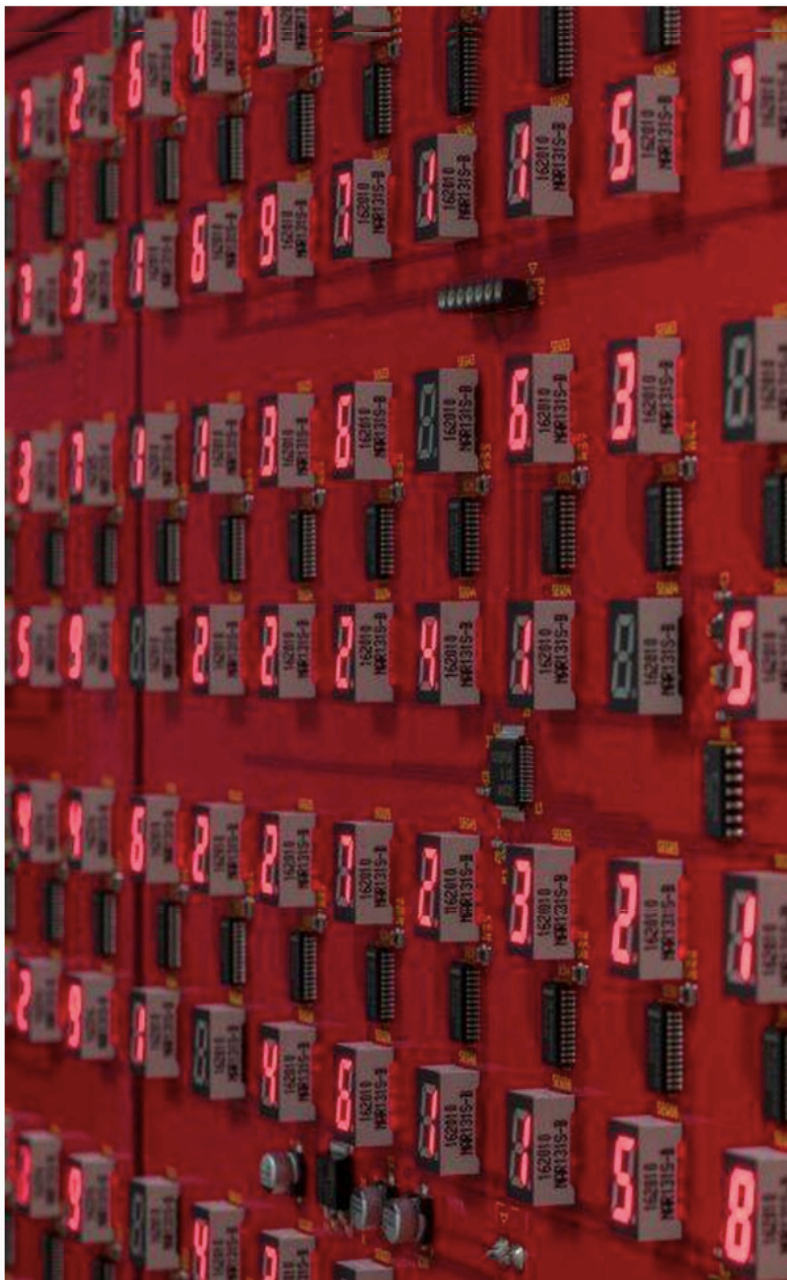


**Clayton Press** Contributor   
Arts

**f** “Artists must take responsibility in extracting the positive aspects of technology. If people think negatively, then people act negatively. I have to think and act positively.” Tatsuo Miyajima, October 1, 1992.

- in**
- Keep Changing
  - Connect with Everything
  - Continue Forever

These three concepts govern the art of Tatsuo Miyajima. They are the “endpoint and indeed the goal of my art,” as Miyajima explained in a [recent film](#) by Laura Bushell for Lisson Gallery. “They comprise the universe, space, time, human life itself.”



Tatsuo Miyajima: *Innumerable Life / Buddha*, detail PHOTO BY NOBUTADA OMOTE. COURTESY OF LISSON GALLERY NEW YORK.

At art school, Miyajima was initially interested in performance art. But he realized that performance is ephemeral, “a temporary expression,” in his words and he wanted to create a more lasting experience. He began making objects, but he also crystallized the idea that objects did not have to exist in a fixed state, but rather perpetually transforming, even unstable. This led to his exploration of the potential of light and movement. Since the late 1980s, Miyajima has worked with various small, digital counting devices that make up the artist’s sculptural works and environments.



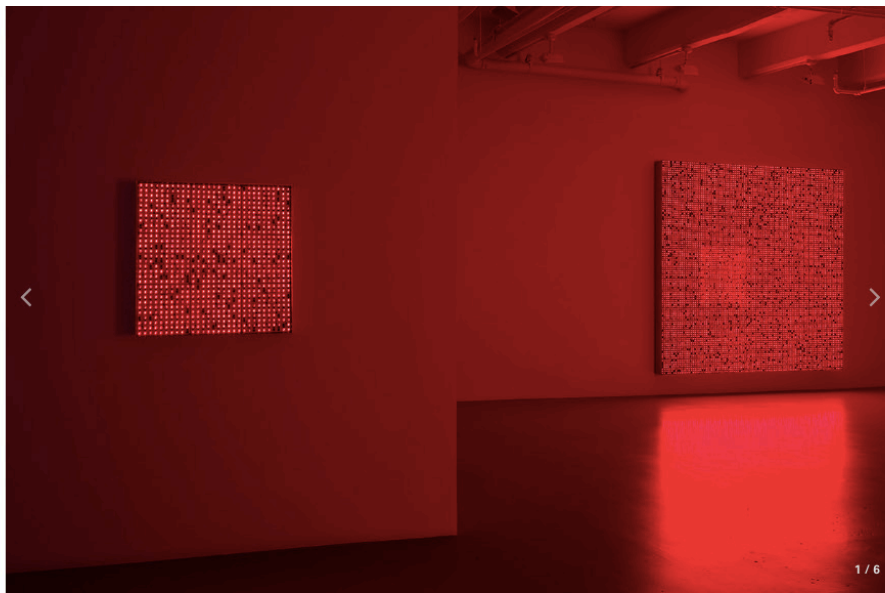
Tatsuo Miyajima: *Innumerable Life / Buddha*, installation view. IMAGE COURTESY OF LISSON GALLERY, NEW YORK.

Miyajima has spoken extensively about the centrality and influence of Buddhism on his art. When the artist was younger, he suffered from bouts of depression. He recalled that during these periods, we would watch movies and visit art galleries. “Afterwards,” he said, “I found I was able to face life honestly and to find a direction, a straightness in my life.” By his early twenties, after a period of intense personal questioning, Miyajima turned to Buddhism, which “allowed me to clarify my vision and direction, and helped me to understand why I was creating art and had become an artist. In other words, it clarified for me that was making art for people, not for art. That was an important moment for me and gave me a new perspective.”

# LISSON GALLERY

*Highsnobiety*  
24 January 2019

## HIGHSNOBIETY



## Tatsuo Miyajima's Latest Exhibition Is a Powerful Meditation on Life & Death

By [Lia McGarrigle](#) in [Design](#) · Jan 24, 2019 · 0 Shares · 0 Comments

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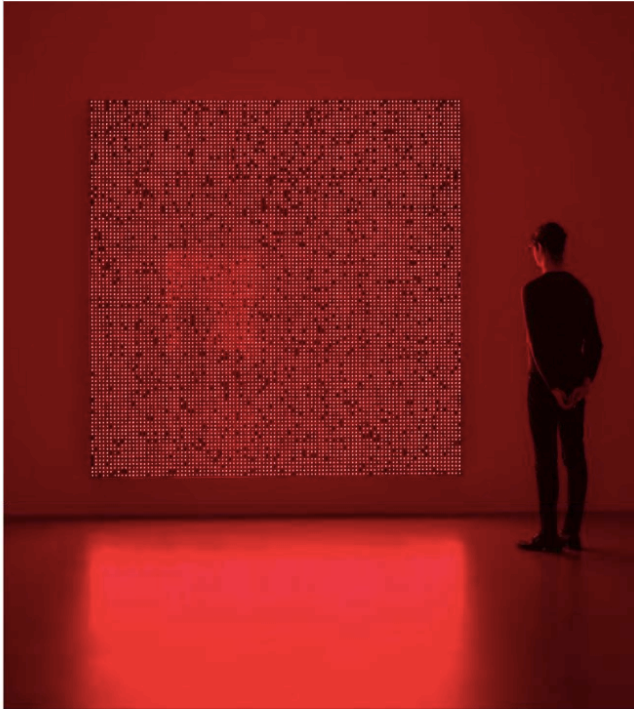


COMMENTS



Japanese artist [Tatsuo Miyajima](#) has a new solo show at New York's Lisson Gallery. Known for his digital-focused installations, this new exhibition, "Innumerable Life/Buddha," recreates the concepts of life and death using thousands of LED displays.

Across five works and at different speeds, miniature LED numbers count down from nine to one. At zero, the LED display goes momentarily dark to represent death, before resetting and starting all over again.

lisson\_g...  
Lisson Gallery [View Profile](#)



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 2,565 likes  
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Tatsuo Miyajima – Innumerable Life / Buddha – Opens Tonight, 10 January from 6-8pm at Lisson Gallery, 138 Tenth Avenue, New York. The series of glowing red installations are inspired by a particular Buddhist teaching, reminding us of the power of the individual within a networked whole. The exhibition will be on view through February 16, 2019.

Numbers are at the heart of Miyajima's practice. An international language, digits transcend cultures: "Whether applied to mathematics and physics, or language and daily activity, they play a central role in our lives and are understood by all" (Miyajima, 2015). Miyajima's numbers have danced on walls, in water, on the façades of buildings, in forests and in ponds, on skyscrapers, in gardens and courtyards, and on the faces and bodies of men and women. To Miyajima, technology is an instrument, and perhaps even an organism, that allows the expression of poetry and spirituality through light and movement.

Image: Tatsuo Miyajima – Innumerable Life Buddha, Installation view at Lisson Gallery, New York. January 11 – February 16, 2019. © Tatsuo Miyajima #TatsuoMiyajima #LissonGallery @tatsuomiyajimastudio

[view all 33 comments](#)

Add a comment... 

Taking inspiration from Buddhism, the work is a reminder of the human life cycle. Viewers are bathed in a warm red light, which according to Miyajima denotes "the blood of life, love, fire, passion, strength, and joy."

"Innumerable Life/Buddha" is on now and runs until February 16. For more information, go to [Lisson Gallery](#).

### Lisson Gallery

138 Tenth Avenue  
New York 10011

Lisson Gallery

Tatsuo Miyajima



Words by **Lia McGarrigle**  
Senior Staff Writer

Berlin-based writer and Rihanna enthusiast.

 **McGarro**  
 lia\_mcgarro

LISSON GALLERY

*The New York Times*  
23 January 2019

## The New York Times

### What to See in New York Art Galleries This Week

Ben Pederson's "Shape Trees"; Tatsuo Miyajima's red LED sculptures; Sophie von Hellermann's beguiling paintings; Norman Lewis's Eastern influences; and artworks "under erasure."

#### Tatsuo Miyajima

Through Feb. 16, Lisson Gallery, 138 10th Avenue, Manhattan; 212-505-6431, [lissongallery.com](http://lissongallery.com).



Tatsuo Miyajima's "Innumerable Life/Buddha CIOO-01," from 2018, LED, electric wire, stainless steel and transformer. Tatsuo Miyajima, via Lisson Gallery

Every piece in the Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima's "[Innumerable Life/Buddha](#)" is a square grid of red LED numerals counting down from nine to one. They descend at various speeds, and occasionally, apparently at random, wink out entirely. (According to the show's news release, Mr. Miyajima leaves out the zero because it stands for death, but I'd prefer to imagine that he does it as a sort of double wink to the empty circles of traditional Zen ink painting.) The smallest grid is 30 inches by 30 inches, or 30 digits by 30, and the largest, 100 by 100, giving it a total of 10,000 searingly bright digital counters.

That number is no coincidence. In East Asia, "ten thousand" is a proverbial stand-in for the myriad things of the phenomenal world. And Mr. Miyajima's wall pieces, whatever their incidental similarity to electronic or minimal art, are very traditional Buddhist portraits of the world as an apparently fleeting, essentially changeless realm that can be both heaven and hell. The constant red flicker of what looks like urgent information conjures a mood of existential emergency: They look like control panels at Norad on a terrible day. But the pattern of scattered lights going off evokes the serenely weightless beauty of a gentle snowfall on a hidden pond. *WILL HEINRICH*

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*Blouinartinfo*  
11 January 2019

BLOUINARTINFO

VISUAL ARTS / NEWS / ARTICLE

## Top Art Shows in New York this Week: Rodney Graham to McArthur Binion

BY BLOUIN ARTINFO | JANUARY 11, 2019



### **“Tatsuo Miyajima: Innumerable Life / Buddha” at Lisson Gallery**

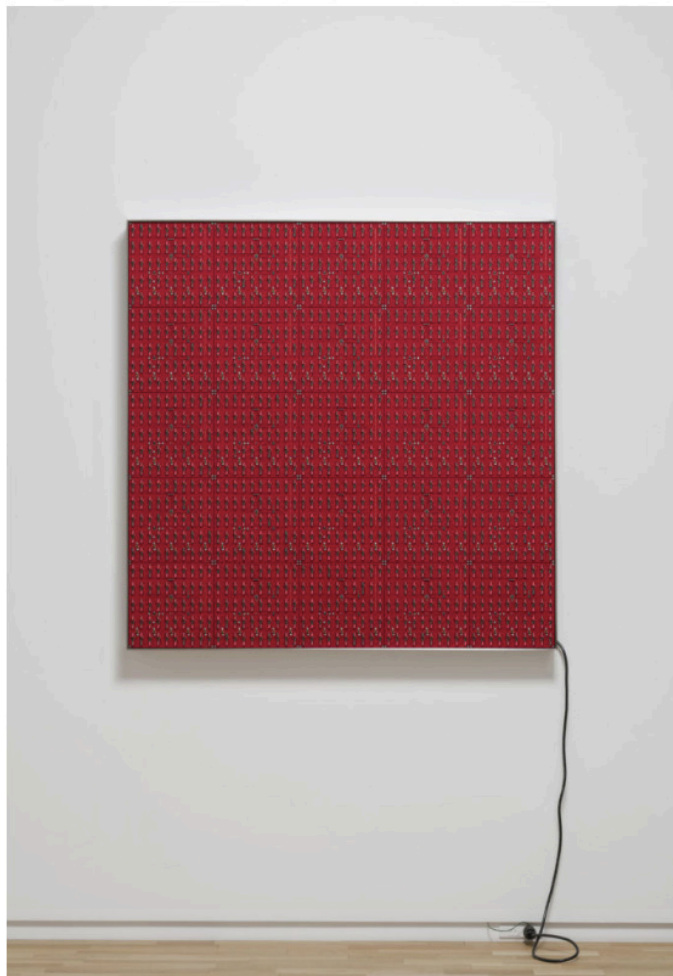
*January 11 through February 16*

The Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima’s exhibition features a series of five glowing red LED installations, which introduce American audiences to Miyajima’s eastern philosophies, inspired by a legend from the Lotus Sutra of Mahayana Buddhism. His work is heavily informed by numbers, which according to the gallery, can be perceived as an international language that transcends cultures. “Whether applied to mathematics and physics, or language, and daily activity, they play a central role in our lives and are understood by all,” said Miyajima. “Innumerable Life/Buddha” consists of thousands of numbers from nine to one counting down at differing speeds, embodying “the human cycle and the eastern philosophy of change and renewal; each solitary, blinking diode signifying the individual body and soul,” the gallery says.

<https://www.lissongallery.com/>



Miyajima's installations operate similarly. On its own, a single LED is small; it produces little light. When combined with hundreds—or even thousands, as the artist has done for previous projects—the effect can be powerful.



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Innumerable Life/Buddha MMD-01*, (2018). © Tatsuo Miyajima.  
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

"I started out as an artist by learning oil painting. But oil painting has no great history in Japan, and I felt it was a very old-fashioned medium with which to make my way in the world," Miyajima explains in a video produced by Lisson for the show, a helpful resource for those unfamiliar with his work. "Performance art matched my mode of expression perfectly, but it's a one-off event that ends there. Hence, because I wanted people to participate in or see the media that I create, I ended up producing these kinds of works, where the objects do the performing."

In the video, Miyajima breaks down his works, and talks about the decisions that led to their making. The LEDs take on the role of performer. The numbers bring a sense of neutrality, he says, which "conjures up imagination in the hearts of the audience."



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Innumerable Life/Buddha C100-01* (2018). © Tatsuo Miyajima.  
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

And why the prevalence of the color red?

"The reason I chose red was that I wanted in a way to express energy, the energy of human life, the energy of Buddha..." says the artist. "Buddhism seeks to discover potential within all people, and that is symbolized by the word 'Buddha.' Buddha is not a type of person, it is rather a reference to human potential. The purpose of my art is to open up this potential."

*"Innumerable Life / Buddha"* opens January 11, and will be on view through February 16, 2019 at Lisson Gallery's New York space.

# LISSON GALLERY

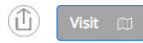
GalleriesNow  
10 January 2019

GalleriesNow

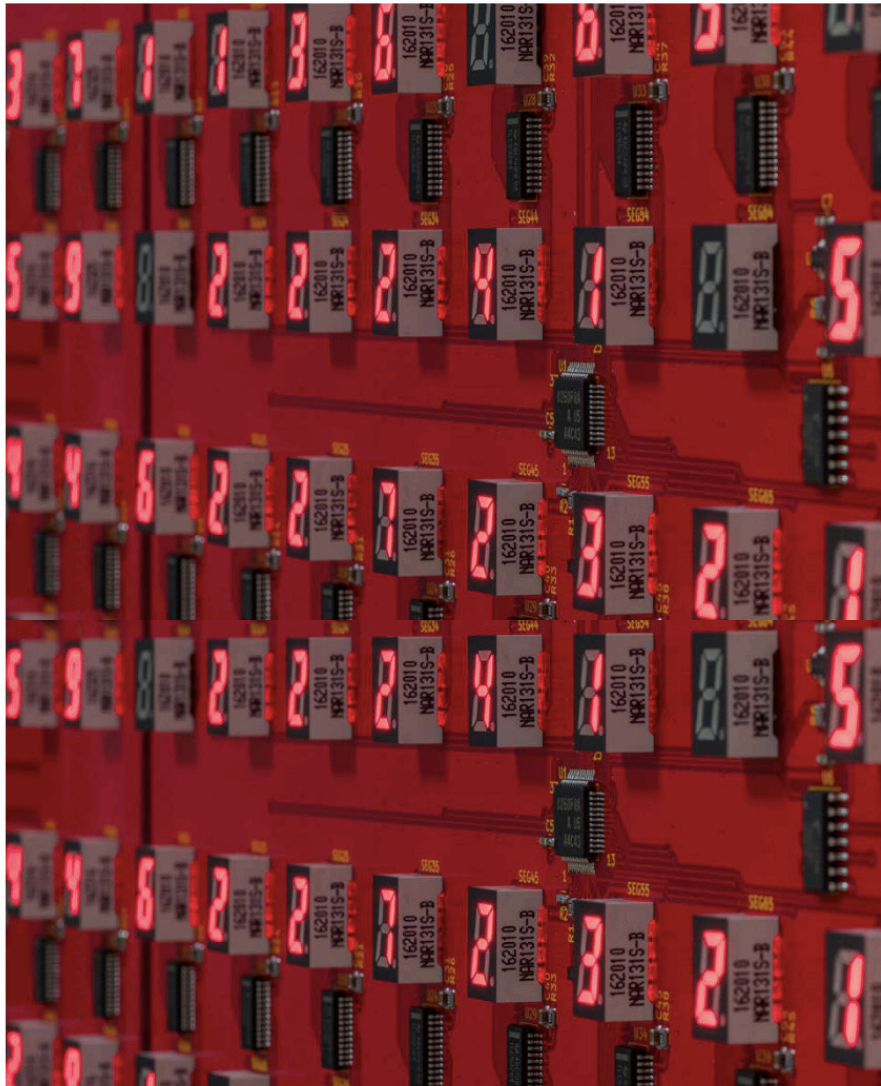
## Tatsuo Miyajima: Innumerable Life / Buddha

Lisson Gallery, New York 10th Av, New York

Fri 11 Jan 2019 to Sat 16 Feb 2019



Tatsuo Miyajima opens his first solo exhibition in New York with Lisson Gallery, premiering his new series, *Innumerable Life/Buddha*.



The exhibition features five works by the Japanese artist, introducing US audiences to his eastern philosophies and signature digital visual vocabulary. This new body of work, a series of glowing red installations, are inspired by a particular Buddhist teaching, reminding us of the power of the individual within a networked whole. A continuation of Miyajima's meditations on time and its passage, these installations invite reflection, addressing the fundamental concepts of change, death, connection and eternity. The exhibition follows on from recent large-scale public commissions, including *Count Down Dialogue* (2018) launched during West Bund Art & Design Fair and comes ahead of Miyajima's largest solo exhibition in Asia to date, opening at the new Shanghai Minsheng Art Museum in May 2019.

Numbers are at the heart of Miyajima's practice. An international language, digits transcend cultures: "Whether applied to mathematics and physics, or language and daily activity, they play a central role in our lives and are understood by all" (Miyajima, 2015). Miyajima's numbers have danced on walls, in water, on the façades of buildings, in forests and in ponds, on skyscrapers, in gardens and courtyards, and on the faces and bodies of men and women. To Miyajima, technology is an instrument, and perhaps even an organism, that allows the expression of poetry and spirituality through light and movement.

The five new works in the *Innumerable Life/Buddha* series are made up of glowing LED displays, with thousands of numbers counting down from nine to one at differing speeds, before going dark momentarily. These digits embody the human cycle and the eastern philosophy of change and renewal; each solitary, blinking diode signifying the individual body and soul. The counting sequence continues, as if everlasting, and yet '0', implying death, is expressed solely by darkness. Through this allusion, the numbers – or 'Life' – are destined to an everlasting cycle of regeneration. This idea is also reflected in the colour of the new works: the radiant red of the installations denotes the blood of life, love, fire, passion, strength and joy.

This new series is inspired by a legend told in the Lotus Sutra, one of the most important texts in Mahayana Buddhism, recalling the teachings of Gautama Siddhartha, the spiritual teacher who founded Buddhism. Siddhartha was preaching to a number of his disciples and, when asked who would be the chosen ones to propagate these philosophies after his death, he indicated towards thousands of Buddhas arising from a cleft in the earth. He prophesised that these people – the 'Bodhisattvas of the Earth' – were the enlightened ones, the 'Buddhas' who would continue his teachings in the future. By not selecting an elite follower, or one of his Ten Great Disciples, he rendered Buddhism a divine power for all – regardless of name, power or status.

Miyajima's philosophy, as told through these works, is that the future is not created by the genius of the individual, but by the collective body. Every tiny diode is small and seemingly insignificant, yet together creates the glittering web of the universe. For Miyajima, each life – no matter how brief – has meaning in the mass.

all images © the gallery and the artist(s)

# LISSON GALLERY

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08 January 2019

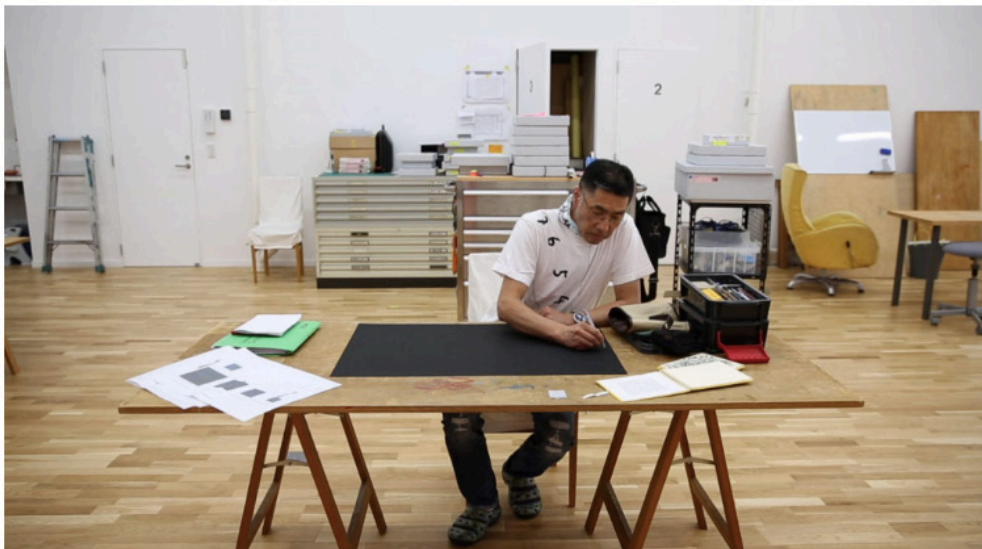
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## On View

### Watch Japanese Artist Tatsuo Miyajima Explain the Spiritual Significance of His LED Art

At Lisson Gallery, the Lotus Sutra lives on in light.

Taylor Dafoe, January 8, 2019



Tatsuo Miyajima in his studio, 2018. Taken from a video produced by Lisson Gallery. Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

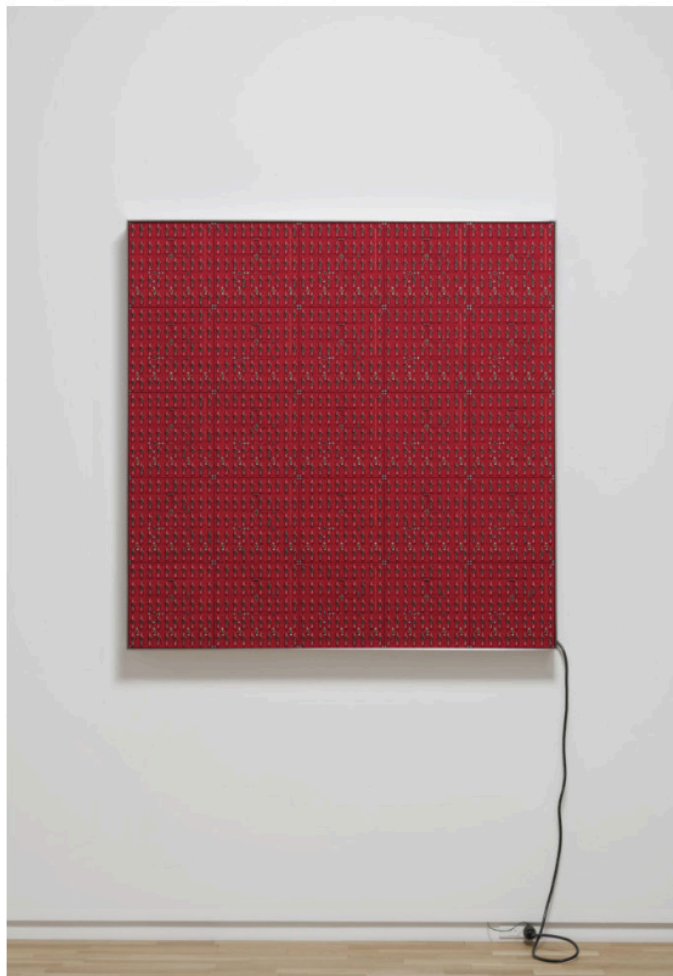
Technology-driven installation art may seem like a strange medium through which to explore Buddhist philosophy, but the work of Tatsuo Miyajima does just that. And it's profound.

Miyajima's new exhibition—his first solo outing in New York—entitled "[Innumerable Life / Buddha](#)," opens this week at [Lisson Gallery](#). The show debuts five new installations by the Japanese artist, all constructed from intricate networks of red LED lights. Each individual LED displays a number that successively counts down from nine to one.

These five works were inspired by a legend from the Lotus Sutra—a text on which many sects of Buddhism are based. In it, the Gautama Siddhartha is asked who among his Ten Great Disciples will spread his word after he's passed away. Rather than choose one, the Siddhartha gestures to thousands of Buddhas arising from the earth. The power of Buddhism, he suggests, belongs to everyone equally; yet the collective whole is stronger than any one of its constituent parts.



Miyajima's installations operate similarly. On its own, a single LED is small; it produces little light. When combined with hundreds—or even thousands, as the artist has done for previous projects—the effect can be powerful.



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Innumerable Life/Buddha MMD-01*, (2018). © Tatsuo Miyajima.  
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery.

"I started out as an artist by learning oil painting. But oil painting has no great history in Japan, and I felt it was a very old-fashioned medium with which to make my way in the world," Miyajima explains in a video produced by Lisson for the show, a helpful resource for those unfamiliar with his work. "Performance art matched my mode of expression perfectly, but it's a one-off event that ends there. Hence, because I wanted people to participate in or see the media that I create, I ended up producing these kinds of works, where the objects do the performing."

In the video, Miyajima breaks down his works, and talks about the decisions that led to their making. The LEDs take on the role of performer. The numbers bring a sense of neutrality, he says, which "conjures up imagination in the hearts of the audience."



Tatsuo Miyajima, *Innumerable Life/Buddha C100-01* (2018). © Tatsuo Miyajima.  
Courtesy of Lisson Gallery

And why the prevalence of the color red?

"The reason I chose red was that I wanted in a way to express energy, the energy of human life, the energy of Buddha..." says the artist. "Buddhism seeks to discover potential within all people, and that is symbolized by the word 'Buddha.' Buddha is not a type of person, it is rather a reference to human potential. The purpose of my art is to open up this potential."

*"Innumerable Life / Buddha"* opens January 11, and will be on view through February 16, 2019 at Lisson Gallery's New York space.

## THE ART NEWSPAPER

### SPECIAL REPORTS

# Tatsuo Miyajima transforms Hong Kong's tallest tower into a metaphor for life

Japanese artist's large-scale light installation was commissioned by Art Basel

by GARETH HARRIS | 23 March 2016

0 Comment



Tatsuo Miyajima's Time Waterfall is on show on the façade of Hong Kong's 490 meter high International Commerce Centre (ICC) on the Kowloon harbor front

The Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima has a lot to live up to with his large-scale light installation Time Waterfall, which will illuminate the 118-storey International Commerce Centre (ICC) building in Hong Kong's harbour.

The annual light show, commissioned by Art Basel and the ICC, is a high point in the city's art calendar. Last year, the Chinese multimedia artist Cao Fei stopped city dwellers in their tracks with her work Same Old, Brand New, which included icons from 1980s video games such as Pac-Man. But Miyajima is not fazed. Since the late 1980s, he has made ambitious and dazzling works, such as Mega Death (1999), a monumental wall studded with 2,400 LED counters, and Hoto (2008), a huge mirrored pagoda. "The ICC project is on a giant scale, but I've never been intimidated by the scale of a project. What I am always concerned with is quality, which has nothing to do with the scale," he says.

The ICC installation furthers his use of LED as a source of light—his trademark medium. "I like the way LEDs are illuminated, and I like the quality of its light. I have no other way but to continue using it, as I have not encountered anything better," he says. Miyajima, who lives and works in Ibaraki, Japan, is planning another "gigantic installation" in the north-eastern Tohoku region of

Japan, entitled Sea of Time in Tohoku.

“I wish to make this work as a prayer and requiem for those who lost their life in the [Fukushima] earthquake and tsunami five years ago. This will be a participatory project with bereaved families. I wish to construct a building on a hill, looking over the sea and the deceased spirits,” he says.

In Hong Kong, the numbers one to nine run down the face of the ICC but never reach zero, and the digits, in varying sizes, fall at different speeds. For Miyajima, numerals constitute an abstract language that can be universally appreciated. “Numbers in my work are abstracted to a pure state, not indicating any quantity whatsoever, and have no comparative to the original. That’s how these numbers can represent life,” he says.

Crucially, the work is an elegiac metaphor for existence. “All people live until their death, and life is about this whole stream of time. Time is irreversible,” Miyajima says. *Time Waterfall* reflects his long-held theories derived from the teachings of Buddhism, which feed into his core artistic concepts: *Keep Changing*, *Connect with Everything* and *Continue Forever*.

His *Connect with Everything* thesis encompasses the following ideal: “Art has long been isolated from the real world, and spoiled within a framework of the ‘art world’.” But what does that mean? “For a long time, art has been described in a particular vocabulary and valued within the closed circle of the art world,” he says. “But today, it no longer solely belongs in the hands of top intellectuals. In this case, artists should go beyond boundaries, making connections to all possible fields and acting upon society. I believe that art should have the potential to inform and reform society.”

# FINANCIAL TIMES

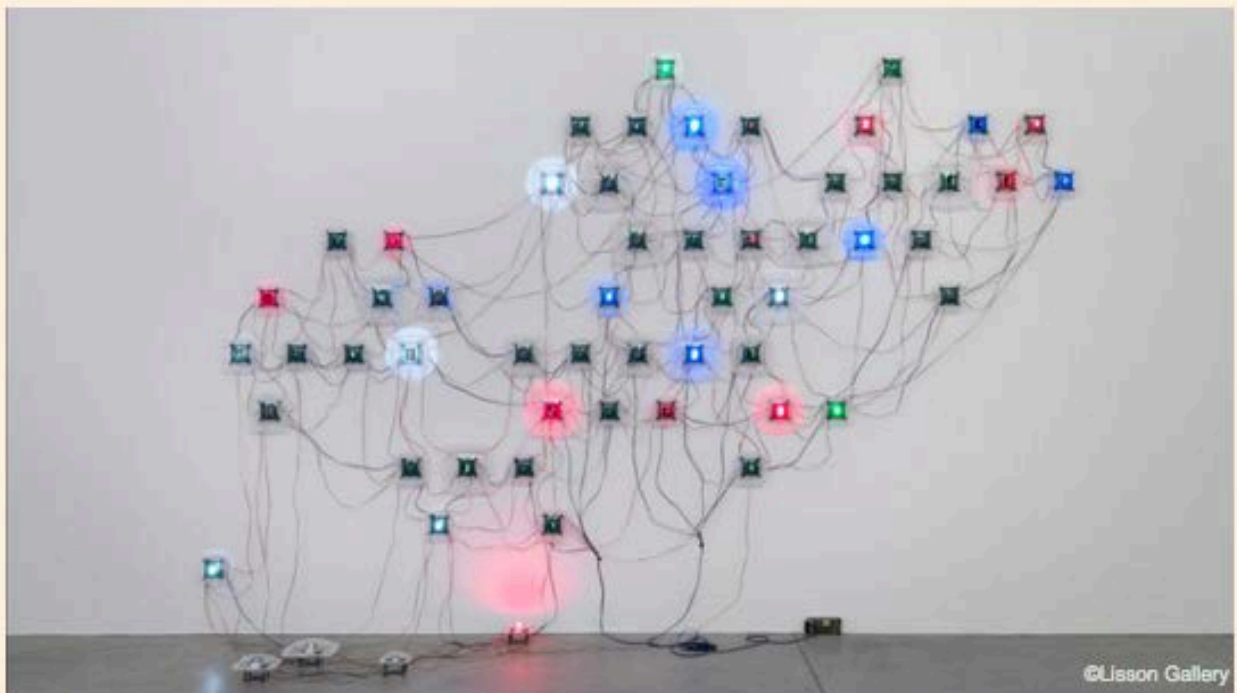
March 18, 2016 2:58 pm

## Tatsuo Miyajima: the lightness of being

Leo Lewis

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The Japanese artist illuminating Hong Kong's tallest skyscraper talks about technology and creativity



Tatsuo Miyajima's 'Life (Corps sans Organes) No.18' (2013)

To most of us, the seven-segment display — the flat, ubiquitous format able to generate all numbers from parts of an “8”, and the basis of every digital timepiece produced since the 1970s — must rank among the dullest images of the electronic age.

To Tatsuo Miyajima, it's a thrilling, powerful delivery mechanism: one of the few mediums, he rushes to inform me seconds into our interview, that allows an artist to express the universe-sized concepts of change, death, connection and eternity.



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Sensing that he has startled, he settles back into an armchair, prods at a laptop and brings up pictures of his works over the past 30 years — a visually irresistible, often uncomfortable contribution to contemporary art that involves an awful lot of seven-segment displays.

Some are vast, illuminated and wall-sized, others small and cut into mundane items such as banknotes. Conspicuously absent from all of them is zero, a number Miyajima sees as representing death. By avoiding it, his works hint at the birth-to-death cycle of human life but, in accordance with Buddhist belief, he does not view death as an end.

Much of his work, with its fusions of electronics and nature, has the feel of futuristic art as imagined by the more optimistic science fiction writers of the 1970s. There are other typically Miyajima gimmicks, involving multiple beads of LED lighting or human heads being thrust into bowls of liquid, but often these, too, have enumeration somewhere at their heart.

It is not, Miyajima explains, that he is particularly obsessed with numbers. Nor that, at 59, he is in every sense part of the generation of Japanese who globalised the seven-segment display in the form of cheap Casio watches and Sharp calculators. The fact that so many of his works involve digital displays or verbal countdowns is merely testament to the ability of numbers to transcend cultures, he says. Although that does not, he admits, make his art automatically accessible.

“Art is something very free in its interpretation. So two people looking at the same thing but from different generations or cultural backgrounds will have totally different impressions [ . . . ] What is important is the existence of my hidden message, that people who see my work receive that message,” he says.

Miyajima’s gentleness is beguiling. His soft monologues are peppered with references to nature, fragility and the need to “connect with everything”. It makes his diatribes — abrupt, unexpected and harshly critical of Japan — all the more pungent. He mocks the state of Japanese education: when he was a student the great art academies placed no emphasis on contemporary art, and he feels that not much has changed. If Miyajima had not taken his own initiative to learn about it, “nobody else at the art academy would have taught me. It was all about very old art. They stuck me in the oil painting department.”

He is even more scathing about the country’s corporate fascination with *monozukuri*, or “the art of making things” — a word used to encapsulate the precision and beauty with which so many Japanese manufactured goods are supposedly infused. But to view it as an art form, says Miyajima, is wrong.

“To change the world, you need innovation and new ideas. Those are the only things that are highly valued in the world of contemporary art. Japanese society is good at making things, but in terms of new ideas, we are a backward nation [ . . . ] That is the biggest reason that Japanese artists do not become globally famous: they are not good at creativity,” he says.

He is especially proud of his early adoption of the **blue LED**, the invention that created low-energy white light and revolutionised the way the world and its gadgets are illuminated. Before all that happened, Miyajima spotted the technology’s potential for art and it has been central to most of his projects ever since.



Miyajima in Tokyo last month

“The moment I read about it in the paper, I ran out and got one because I knew I had to have it. The LED light is different from normal lightbulbs. It is a very pure light, as if it came from the universe itself. It was important to me. I adored the idea of an abstract world — the kind that artists like Yves Klein were trying to create. The LED seemed to let me touch that concept,” he says.

His latest work is on the grandest of scales: a permanently moving cascade of numbers in an LED lighting display that runs down the outer walls of Hong Kong’s tallest skyscraper. Other artists have attempted to use the ICC as their canvas, but Miyajima believes that his numbers will have more impact than any of their works.

“Both the numbers themselves, their size and the speed they fall is completely random. It is very chaotic, very fragile. The numbers and speeds will always be different so the image you see one moment will never be seen again. If you see a pattern in a display like this, you get bored after three minutes. But when you see randomness, it is like seeing a real waterfall.”

And what is the Miyajima message hidden on these 484-metre walls of steel and glass? “I think that human life and death are viewed as decreasingly important as the world moves more quickly,” he says. “For me, the numbers are people’s lives. Birth to death is a countdown from nine to one. It is so very fragile. It must be cherished. That is why they fall straight down and never come back.”

He returns to the question of undertaking work on such a large and ostentatious scale, and the artistic channels that brought him there. Again, the rights and wrongs of *monozukuri* as national ideal bubble into his train of thought. His early years as an artist in the 1980s, he says, were set against the background of the global success of Sony, whose products were ambassadors for the Japanese belief that “small is beautiful”. To Miyajima, working on small-scale projects in a small-scale studio, it did not feel unnatural at the time.

“In that sense, I was very Japanese. But my idea was to connect with everything so if the space was small, the pieces of work must be small,” he says, noting how things have since changed. “My concept became one of expanding my art kaleidoscopically, connecting media, space and cultures. That means I can do it on a skyscraper in Hong Kong, or in a small Japanese teahouse.”

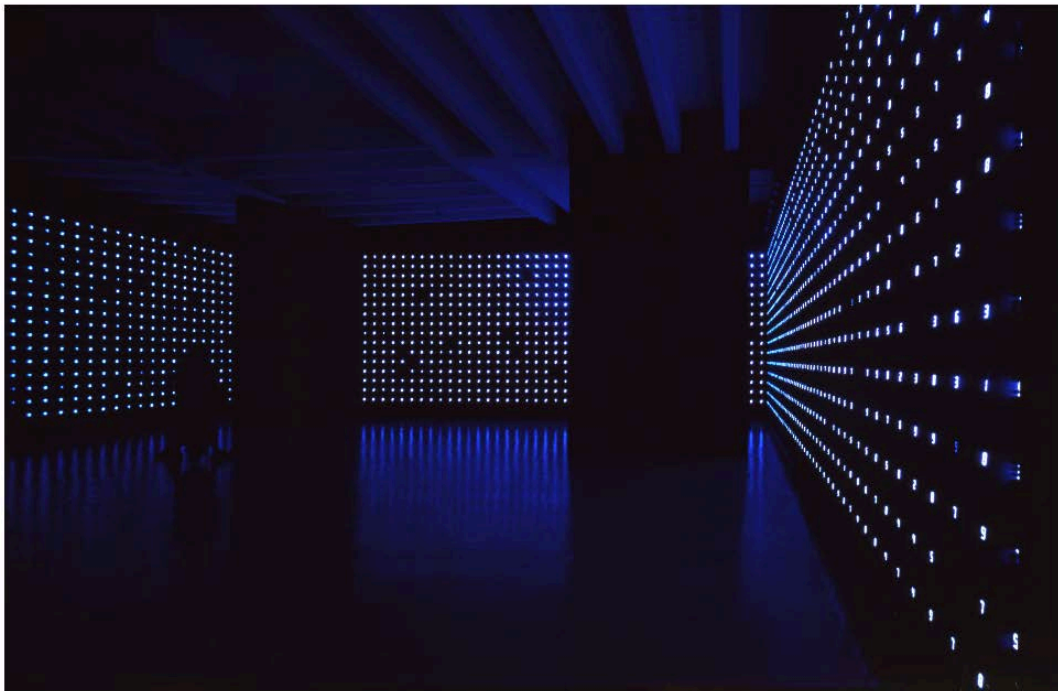
*Tatsuo Miyajima’s light installation ‘Time Waterfall’ is on show at Art Basel Hong Kong, until March 26, intermittently between 7.20pm-10pm*

*Leo Lewis is the FT’s Tokyo correspondent*

*Photographs: Tatsuo Miyajima/Lisson Gallery; Jeremie Souteyrat*

# Aesthetica

Tatsuo Miyajima, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney



As part of the 2016-2017 Sydney International Art Series, the **Museum of Contemporary Art Australia** (MCA) presents a major exhibition of the works of renowned Japanese practitioner, Tatsuo Miyajima. The artist is known for creating immersive, technology-driven sculptures and installations. This is his first large-scale solo exhibition in Australia, encompassing key sculptures and installations from the beginnings of his career to the present, as well as video and performance works which have expanded his object-based practice over time.

Central to Miyajima's practice are numerical counters that count from one to nine using light emitting diodes (LEDs). Presented in vast groupings with contrasting speeds and colours, Miyajima's counters symbolise both the multitude of humanity as well as the individual, with their varied tempos and flashing colours. They also reflect time's central importance in our lives and draw inspiration from Buddhist philosophy, with its exploration of mortality and human cycles of life, death and renewal.

Miyajima represented Japan at the Venice Biennale in 1995 with the vast installation *Mega-Death* – which is a centrepiece of this Sydney survey – a room-scale installation of brilliant, blinking blue LEDs, each representative of human life or energy. A silent, twinkling memorial to the Holocaust, the lights are programmed to switch off at intervals, plunging viewers into complete darkness momentarily, before lighting up and counting once more.

The exhibition is curated by MCA's chief curator Rachel Kent, who worked closely with Miyajima on her own international exhibition *Marking Time*, which inaugurated the newly re-developed MCA's opening season in 2012. Museum of Contemporary Art Australia Director, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, commented: "The reputation of our curatorial team for working closely with artists has enabled us to attract the likes of Anish Kapoor, Yoko Ono, Chuck Close, Grayson Perry and now Miyajima."

Running alongside the Miyajima show as part of this year's Sydney International Art Series, the Art Gallery of New South Wales will also showcase a selection of works by the likes of Picasso, Rodin and Bonnard in *Nude: Art from the Tate Collection*.

Tatsuo Miyajima, until 5 March, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), 140 George St, The Rocks NSW 2000.

For more, visit [www.mca.com.au](http://www.mca.com.au).

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#### Credits

1. Tatsuo Miyajima, *Mega Death*, 1999. Installation view, Suntory Museum, Osaka. Image courtesy of the artist and Scai the Bathhouse. Copyright the artist, photograph: Shigeo Anzai.

Posted on 4 February 2016



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## LETTER FROM NAOSHIMA

### Constitutional Change

On Sunday 24 June 2014, a man on a pedestrian bridge close to Tokyo's busy Shinjuku station set himself on fire. This first of two separate self-immolation attempts in the city that year was an act of public protest against a proposed constitution change. Prime minister Shinzo Abe sought to switch Japan from a pacifist country, legally barred from entering into military combat unless attacked, to a nation able to launch first strikes and provide military support. The proposed legislation, which has since been passed, would fundamentally alter Japan's peaceful national identity and for large swathes of the population this was an intolerable act of betrayal. During my time in the country's capital, thousands were taking to the streets to protest through marches, free concerts, public speeches and standing demonstrations outside parliament. Tokyo was a city abuzz with the energy of dissent. Hundreds of miles away, travelling to my destination across the Seto Inland Sea, things couldn't have been more different. Naoshima is a small, picturesque, sparsely populated island town, home to site-specific installations, public sculpture, three contemporary art museums designed by Japanese minimalist architect Tadao Ando and a fourth, the 'Ando museum', dedicated to

him. This fusion of island and art was the brainchild of Soichiro Fukutake, a billionaire businessman who consolidated his inherited personal fortune through Benesse Holdings. According to US business magazine *Forbes*, the company owns language schools and '275 nursing homes throughout Japan', profits from which, along with a reported \$240m of the Fukutake family fortune, are funnelled into the Fukutake Foundation, which supports art projects on the island. Fukutake purportedly composed the name Benesse from the Latin words for 'well-being'. It corresponds with his vision of Naoshima as an idyllic island getaway that personifies the national identification with peace and harmony, features that many see prime minister Abe as bent on destroying.

With its mountainous topography, all difficult-to-scale inclines, sharp declines and roads baked by the intense August heat, summer makes Naoshima tricky to cover on foot. But for less than 1,000 Yen (around £5), island visitors can rent electric bikes. Pedalling up into the terrain, you first come to the Chichu Art Museum, a remarkable structure built deep into the island as opposed to rising totemically out of it. Visitors walk down into this gallery, which has no exterior, through a dark angular stairwell – crafted with Ando's signature untreated concrete slabs – into corridors manned by deferential visitor

assistants in white suits (part dental nurse, part lab technician) who seem to hover or else glide across gallery floors. Chichu displays work by only three artists – Walter De Maria, James Turrell and Claude Monet – and Ando has produced purpose-built spaces for each. Not a world-beating triumvirate on paper, but in situ quite astonishing. De Maria's installation *Time/Timeless/No Time*, 2014, features a huge, granite orb that rests halfway up a ten-metre-wide bank of concrete stairs, surrounded by neat arrangements of three angular mahogany planks covered in gold leaf and positioned close to the walls. In lesser hands this could easily become pure camp spectacle but, at Chichu, art and architecture – the dizzying ceiling height, texturally rich materials and mathematically precise installation – create a deeply reverential and meditative space quite capable of inspiring a sense of awe. Turrell is an artist whose light works reach for noumenal depth but can skirt dangerously close to producing kitsch, quasi-spiritual effects. Again, Chichu's environment helps to push the work into the desired territory of a plausible ambient mysticism, specifically with *Open Field*, 2000, a glowing room that, once shoeless visitors step inside, feels an endless blue void.

Because Chichu mostly depends on natural light, the museum corridors are cool and dark, while the galleries are large and bright. This simple differentiation heightens the experience of entering rooms that wash viewers in visual stimulus and the clarity of diffuse radiance. At the entrance to Monet's space, a brilliant white interior with rounded walls that create an edgeless impression of infinity, there were audible gasps from visitors. The vivid greens and blues in works like *Water-Lily Pond*, 1915-26, and *Water-Lilies, Reflections of Weeping Willows*, 1916-19, burst from canvases that seemed less like flat

surfaces than portals to fecund preternatural scenes. What became clear after exiting the gallery is that the dark exterior corridors and bright gallery interiors at Chichu exist in a state of interdependence. That is to say, darkness was as much a contributing factor to the display and reception of Monet's work as the standard white of the cube, and each space was dependent on the other.

Darkness continued to be a parameter artfully utilised in the Art House Project, a multi-site series featuring six historic houses in which invited artists have created six permanent installations. In the classic essay *In Praise of Shadows*, an occasionally inspired but also shortsightedly nationalistic, racist and weirdly sexist 1933 text (English translation 1977), Junichio Tanizaki writes of the historic importance and cultivation of darkness, shadow and the colour black in older Japanese domestic interiors. Rather

than installing florescent bulbs (now prevalent everywhere else in the country), the artists have worked with this structural feature of the spaces they inhabit. Some fare better than others. At Kodoya house, Tatsuo Miyajima's trademark LED number counters are submerged in inky water in *Sea of Time* '98, 1998, but still feel as banal as watching a digital clock at night. At Minamidera, Turrell's *Backside of the Moon*, 1999, a completely dark room in which a single form gradually takes shape as eyes adjust, is an absorbing exploration of black's lustre, affects (its ability to submerge spectators in a disembodied and unending nothingness) and possible gradations. Shinro Ohtake's transformation of Haisha (the former home and office of a local dentist) into a single work of art is a Schwittersesque chaos of scrap, steel and the artist's own paintings, while Hiroshi Senju's stunning paintings inspired by the Seto Inland Sea cover interior panels of Ishibashi with

powerful, abstract vistas that give the impression of waterfalls or waves breaking.

After the singular architectural and aesthetic highs of Chichu and parts of the Art House Project, the star begins to wane on the Naoshima art island venture. The Benesse house museum features work by Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman and Richard Long, and is, despite Ando's packaging, essentially a star-studded yet depressingly staid private collection of top-tier contemporary art. The Lee Ufan museum is a space dedicated to the eponymous artist whose quiet works carry painterly gestures too scant to take control of their surroundings or hold a spectatorial gaze previously treated to such unforgettable sights. Outside Ando's museums, riding across the island to site-specific sculptures, I stopped at Yayoi Kusama's giant spotted pumpkin, watched tourists of all nationalities pose for pictures in front of it and thought, 'what is this island really for?'

There is always an air of hubristic narcissism about the multimillionaire's passion for fantasy island building. Richard Branson has one, as does Anita Zabludowicz. In such cases one suspects the real spur for idyllic getaways is distaste for the metropolitan rabble. Still, when Fukutake's art island project works, it can be an extraordinary and profoundly moving experience, transcendental even. In such moments, the exquisite sensorial trio of art, architecture and island tranquillity threw the fraught atmosphere of Tokyo into sharp relief. In those moments, I understood why citizens might sacrifice their lives to preserve that sense of peace and harmony that is heightened in Naoshima, but diffuse across Japan. ■

MORGAN QUAINANCE is a writer, musician, broadcaster and Cubitt curatorial fellow for 2015/16.

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## Artist makes every second count

By Liu Xiaolin | October 11, 2015, Sunday |  PRINT EDITION



Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima unveils 39 LED number counters he made for a public art installation on top of Fosun Art Center.

FOR over three decades, Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima has been exploring the eternity of life and time with works that feature LED number counters as “a metaphor for life and death.”

All counters scroll in order from 9 to 1 and go out for a moment. Then the lights come back, and the countdown restarts from 9 to 1. The numeral 0 never appears.

“That moment of blackness embodies death, leaving viewers in awe,” Miyajima told Shanghai Daily. “Thus they will learn to cherish life.”

He said a personal close escape from death taught him to “respect life and make most use of every second.”

The 58-year-old artist appeared in Shanghai in September to unveil 39 LED counters he made for a public art project at the future Fosun Art Center on the southern Bund. Designed by British architect Thomas Heatherwick, the center is designed in the shape of an ancient Chinese emperor's crown. According to the blueprint of the Bund Finance Center, it lies amid skyscrapers, luxury hotels and shopping malls. The venue is set to open in late 2016.

To follow his ideas of "getting connected with everything," Miyajima will display his work "Counter Sky Garden" over the floor of the center's rooftop garden.

"It will better blend the work with the architecture and surroundings," he said. "The rooftop is closest to the sky dome and thus connected with the universe."

Miyajima said he plans to invite 300 Shanghai residents to join him on the artwork project so that it "gets connected with viewers." He added, "it is the artist's responsibility to involve more people in art."

When finished, the project will comprise 300 LED counters embedded in charcoal grey marble, each with an individual design.

"Every LED light represents a person, leaping to its own beat — some hectic, some slower," he explained. "Everyone has his or her own beat. It differs among Shanghai people, and also differs among cities."

The artist said Shanghai has a much faster pace than it did 20 years ago when he first visited the city, but it's not as fast as his hometown Tokyo.

If represented in the leaps of LED lights, "the beat of Tokyo would be formed in a line," he said.

Recruitment of public participants for the project has been published in the Bund Finance Center's WeChat account. Anyone who lives or works in Shanghai can sign up. Miyajima said he wants his 300 "co-artists" to come from diverse ages, backgrounds, jobs and nationalities.

"The number 300 means all walks of life, the whole world, even the universe," said Miyajima, an avowed Buddhist.

“In Buddhism, there are three worlds, three views and three lives. The number 100 often refers to totality or infinity, such as a hundred worlds, a hundred fortunes and the ‘Treatise in a Hundred Verses’ (or Sata sastra in Sanskrit) by Aryadeva.”

The LED lights will scroll in the order of green, blue, red, yellow and white, symbolizing the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and emptiness.

“Emptiness, or sunya in Sanskrit, has two meanings,” Miyajima said. “One is nothing; the other is infinity, implying mega power.”

The artist said he was “inspired by the skyline and architectural complexity of the Bund” when he stood on the art center’s rooftop.

“Shanghai is an international metropolis where East meets West and history and modernity juxtapose,” he said. “The diversified population leads to the beauty of co-existence, which becomes Shanghai’s unique charisma.”

Widely considered the frontrunner of Japan’s post-Mono-ha school of art, Miyajima rose to fame in 1988 at the Venice Biennale with his “Sea of Time,” a LED light installation. Learning after his masters, who were devoted to presenting the true nature and beauty of objects, Miyajima prefers to present works in modern media and Western art forms.

Wu Yang, CEO of the Bund Finance Center, said he was “deeply impressed” by Miyajima’s signature “Counter Void,” which he saw when he visited Tokyo about 10 years ago. Set atop the Mori Building at Roppongi Hills, with a 360-degree bird’s-eye view of the capital, the artwork comprises six LED counters, each measuring 3.2 meters in height.

The counters change by day and night. During daytime, they display digital counters in neon lights. When night falls, the background is lit up and the counters start scrolling in black digits against the white screen.

Miyajima immediately came into Wu’s mind when he was thinking about what to do with the rooftop of the art center.

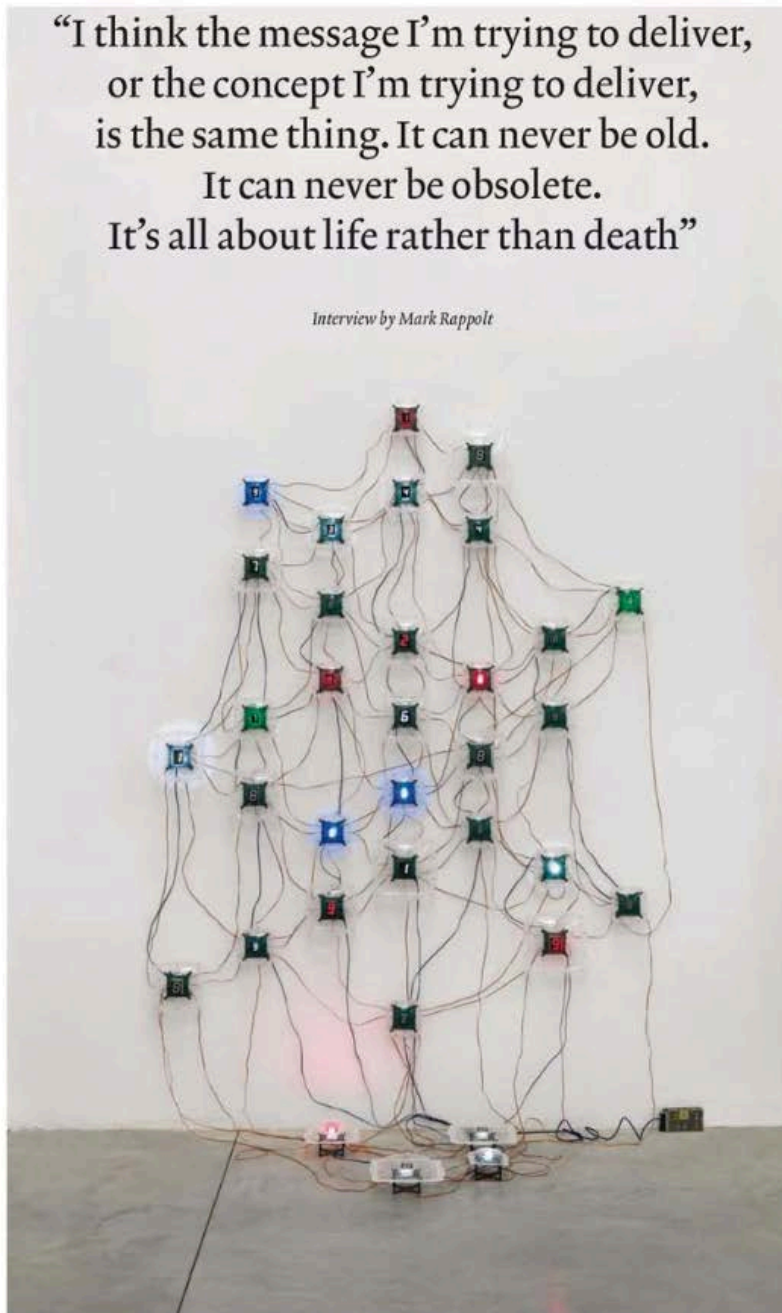
“Digits are a universal language,” he said. “Despite our different languages and cultural backgrounds, we have a common understanding of numbers from zero to infinity. With digits, Miyajima manages to connect all kinds of people, which tallies with the character of the Bund — very inclusive.”

# ArtReview

Tatsuo Miyajima

“I think the message I’m trying to deliver,  
or the concept I’m trying to deliver,  
is the same thing. It can never be old.  
It can never be obsolete.  
It’s all about life rather than death”

*Interview by Mark Rappolt*



Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima has been producing sculptures and installations that combine electronic technology and Buddhist philosophy since the late 1980s. During that time, his use of light-emitting diodes (LEDs) counting numerals from 1 to 9 (but never 0) has become the central (albeit not exclusive) formal component of his work. *ArtReviewAsia* caught up with him in London at the opening of his exhibition *I-Model* (2013) at Lisson Gallery to talk about art and technology, but ended up considering the meaning of life.

**ARTREVIEW ASIA** *How did you first become attracted to or make a decision to use LEDs as your signature component?*

**TATSUO MIYAJIMA** There are three main concepts that I want to express through my work. The first is 'keep changing', the second is 'connect with everything' and the third is 'continue forever'. To use changing LED numbers was just the method for me.

**ARA** *Do you think you use more science and technology than people would normally expect from an artist?*

**TM** The word *techné* [meaning skill in Ancient Greek, and from which the word 'technology' evolved] covered both science and art originally.

**ARA** *And how much does the evolution of technology influence the development of the work?*

**TM** Part of my work definitely has a wider spectrum of expression thanks to that. I use LEDs as my medium,

and that obviously has a rather short history as a technology, but those changes that have happened have broadened my expression. Especially the colour blue, which was only introduced as an LED in 1995, which is very recent – since then they developed lots more colours, and that really gave me a much broader way of expressing my art.

**ARA** *You use numbers as an expressive form, and your LEDs rely on a mathematical base. Do you think your view of the world is conditioned by mathematics?*

**TM** The way I look at the world, my personal view of the world, is rather emotional. How I capture the world is rather emotional, and I try to keep the concept of human emotions, even the narrative one, within me. Then beauty is very important to express that concept in my work; and then only for the method, to express

my concept, do I use technology and maybe mathematics. It's the beauty of mathematical logic or technical logic as the media to express the concept of emotion, perhaps more the concept of humanity.

**ARA** *To most people, using mathematical logic is a way of repressing the emotional.*

**TM** I think the arts, or the expression of the arts, has to be delivered in a very neutral way to the audience. It shouldn't impose my opinion or my ideas, but rather inspire in an audience the free will to think by themselves. So, how you accept, or how you receive, is completely under their control. So, yes, maybe you're right. It might be a kind of self-restriction on my side not to impose too much, but neutrality is very important. In order to express my art in a neutral way, I'm using the mathematical, or physical, or technological logic in my art.



**ARA** *Is it still possible to be neutral now that your career has moved along and you're very much associated with the LEDs? Is it still possible in the same way for that to be neutral as it was 10 or 15 years ago?*

**TM** What I want to deliver – the message or the concept – stays the same. It has to be repeated again and again. Yes, the media or the material might have been there for 10 or 15 years, but the concept I would like to express through the material, using the media, should stay the same. That's the fundamental, main concept of the message I would like to deliver. So it's not the media or the material that starts having the

above *Life Palace (Tea Room)*, 2013, mixed media, dimensions variable

facing page *Life (Corps sans Organes) No. 15*, 2013, mixed media, dimensions variable

power of the message; it's more that I have to stick to the fundamentals. I have to stick to the same message again and again.

**ARA** *To what extent is that message connected to the fear of death or ending?*

**TM** The message, or the concept, I'm trying to deliver is all about a human life itself. So any time – now, in the past, present or future – that is the same message forever. It's an eternal message, and if you think about the masters of art, like Giotto and Michelangelo, the message they are trying to deliver is this fundamental message towards human beings. I think the message I'm trying to deliver, or the concept I'm trying to deliver, is the same thing. It can never be old. It can never be obsolete. It's all about life rather than death.

**ARA** *But life has a relationship to death...*

**TM** Obviously if you think about life, death cannot be separated from life, and death has to be on the same level as life. To live a life, a happy life, and enjoy it, you cannot avoid thinking about death, but then how you think about death determines how you live your life, and how you enjoy your life. So while you are still alive, you have to think about death, and that message is mentioned in all my artworks.

**ARA** *Do you see art as something that should have a function of helping people in society?*

**TM** I think at least art has the power to do that. Unless it had the power to do that, I don't think art would have had this important position in society for thousands of years.

**ARA** *Is it something you have to fight for, this position in society?*

**TM** It's the effort made by artists and by all the supporters of art.

**ARA** *When I was looking at the work downstairs at Lisson Gallery (Tatsuo Miyajima: I-Model, 27 September – 2 November 2013) I was struck by a kind of balance between the control in the work, the programming, not having zeros showing connections, but also the idea that the work exists independently. That once the programme is started, it's away from the control*



*of the artist, to some degree. Is that balance something that you're interested in exploring?*

TM As for the artworks downstairs you mentioned, and about controlling and then being unable to control, actually being unable to control is a very big thing for the group of artworks downstairs, and that is because of my experience, or our experience, of the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami in 2011. We all thought about so many things, and then I came to the conclusion that nature is uncontrollable by human beings, and then we have to pay respect, or we have to be awed by the power of nature which is uncontrollable. That is very important for human life, and yes, maybe the layout is done by me, but I'm using more like a random system. So it's more like a design. Yes, I am, to a certain degree, maybe designing it, but it's more of an organic phenomenon. The wire is also, sort of, automatically placed. So it's more out of my control and more an organic phenomenon. I would like the audience to enjoy that nature of the works downstairs.

ARA *Do a lot of the works start with responses to events or situations, or do they come in a more abstract way?*

TM Well, some of my artworks, yes, do respond to what's happening in society, in the artworld. For example, like this series at Lisson. I was very influenced by the Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, so that's responding directly to that phenomenon. Also, I once made a series in response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. So, yes, maybe 30 to 40 percent of my artworks do respond to the events outside. Then that's not always the case, 60 to 70 percent would be more about just looking at things in general and thinking about my fundamental concept within me.

ARA *Is art, for you, a form of self-examination in the first instance?*

TM Actually, I'm not interested in myself at all, but what I'm interested in is, I feel as if it's

my duty to deliver a message to people. A message or a concept about life, about human life, and I'm interested in how I can give out the message. How I can express the concept to the people out there. What I'm really concerned about now, for example, is about what is happening in Syria, or the children in Africa starving to death. I would like my audience to think about those things. Think about the life or death through my works. Each piece of my work is not directly talking about it, but then through my artworks, if people can start thinking about life and then start thinking about what's happening in those places, that's what I'm constantly aiming at.

ARA *To what extent was the choice to work with numbers to do with finding a language that was universal and international? Has that been an important part of it?*

TM Universality, yes, that is one thing, but numbers are very highly abstract symbols, and that's very much related to the issue of beauty. The numbers are highly abstract symbols, and the numbers are highly conceptual. So that enables people to think about the main concept, think about the main message more clearly.

Being unable to control is a very big thing for this group of artworks, and that is because of my experience, or our experience, of the Great East Japan Earthquake. We all thought about so many things, and then I came to the conclusion that nature is uncontrollable by human beings, and then we have to pay respect, or we have to be awed by the power of nature. Yes, maybe the layout is done by me, but I'm using more like a random system. I am, to a certain degree, designing it, but it's more of an organic phenomenon

ARA *Do you think there is a different reaction to the works when you show them in Japan, compared to when you show them in Europe or America?*

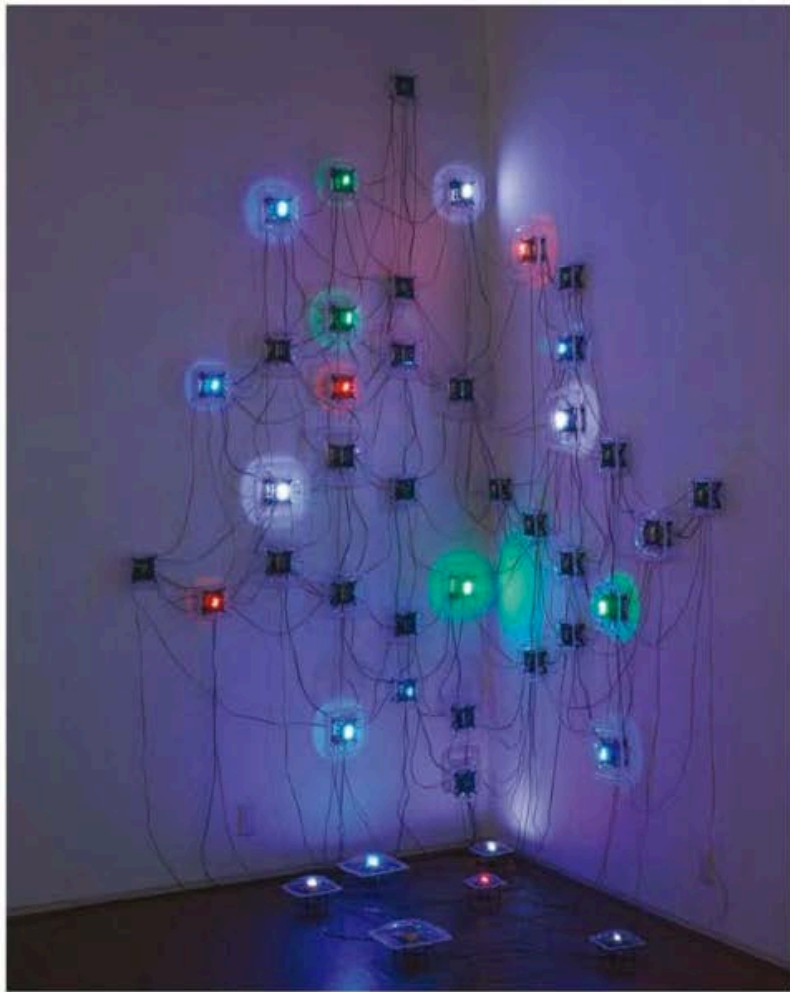
TM I've never been in the audience to my artworks, so it's difficult to tell. I do often hear that there are a variety of reactions, a variety of responses to the concept or the message of my artworks. So perhaps it's the same type of response in the sense of diversity of response from here or America.

ARA *I also wanted to ask about the context in which the work is shown. A show in a London gallery such as [Lisson] or the Hayward is one experience; when we met in Finland, in a natural setting, it was a very different experience. Do you have a preference for the kind of context in which it's shown?*

TM Actually, I have no preference for the context. I don't exactly have a particular preference as to the context of my shows because I can adapt to the context, or the location. It's a challenge, of course, because I have to find a new way of delivering the message accordingly, but it can be in a gallery context like this one, or it can be in a desert, or surrounded by ice. Whatever the context or the location that was given to me, I enjoy adapting to the situation. That would be my strength, because I can find a new way of doing it.

ARA *My last question is about the sound in the installations. There seems to be a slight hum. I guess it's a transformer, maybe. Is that something that you work with actively as part of it? How loud or how soft it is, or is that just what it is?*

TM There is actually no sound. It's strange because people are constantly talking about sound, but there is no sound. I talked with a neuroscientist and he said because the audience are staring at those numbers flickering and changing, then that visual stimulus is changed into a sound somewhere in your brain. So you think that you are hearing sound, but actually there is no sound. ar



*above* *Life (Corps sans Organes) No. 19, 2013,*  
mixed media, dimensions variable  
*all images* © the artist. Courtesy Lisson Gallery,  
London, Milan, New York & Singapore

35. Predict something totally unpredictable, such as disasters of any type