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"INNER PSYCHE"

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Text

TEXT BY MAGGIE KINSER HOHLE

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KIYOSKI AWAZU

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PORTRAIT BY TARO TERASHI

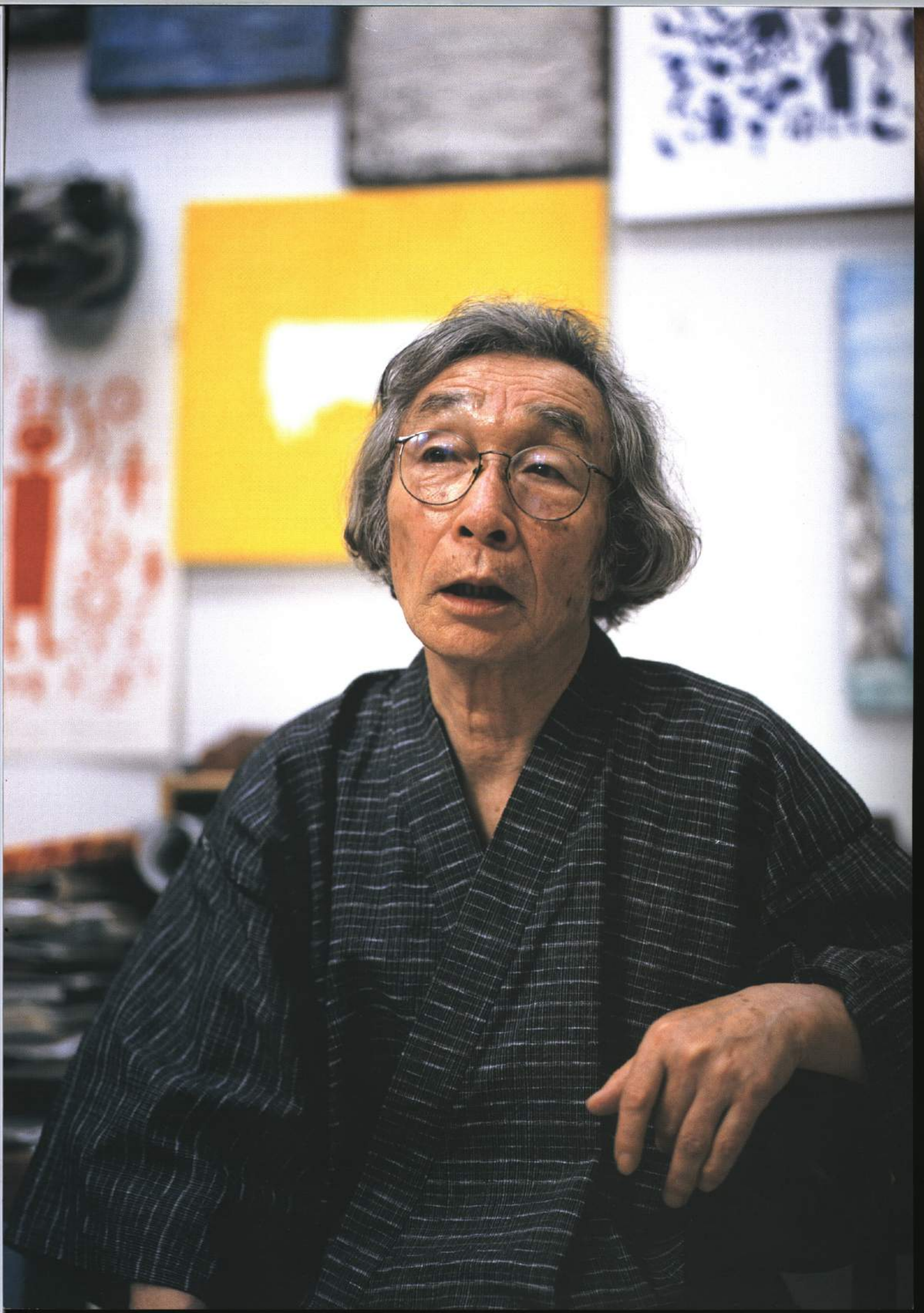
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**To create, one must first see.
Until one sees something that's worth
expressing, one should rest.**

Kiyoshi Awazu

**I don't know if I'd call Awazu a graphic
designer. Graphic design is just one area
of his boundless world, but he is truly
the originator of Japanese modern design.**

Hideki Nakajima *Nakajima Design*



In 1969, Kiyoshi Awazu had just completed two works that put him—squarely and simultaneously—on both sides of the spectrum between realism and fantasy. He had designed the stage and masks for a German performance of "Inugami," or "Dog God," a play by Shuji Terayama, who described theater as the "means to generate and experience chaos." For his art direction of "Double Suicide," a black-and-white film set in the Edo period (1615-1868), Awazu had just won the Kisaku Ito Prize. The masks for "Dog God" were hyperbolic specters, grotesque and powerful: ears, lips, crying mouths, foxes, ogres. The set for "Double Suicide," on the other hand, was minimal and symbolic, and historically accurate.

Awazu has a particular genius for grasping the truth of his subject, whether they spring from the inner psyche or the outside world. In the "Double Suicide" project, the sensibility of the time, the sentiment, and the way people thought were more important than the hairstyles and clothing, or even the customs portrayed. In the Edo period, a culturally and politically sophisticated system was developing within a nation that had isolated itself completely from the rest of the world. It turns out that as the gap between the subsistence farmers and the emerging merchant class widened, and as women ventured out into society, there really were a great number of double suicides. They were motivated in the rural villages by poverty, and in the city by more romantic impulses.

After intense research, Awazu came away with an understanding that "within the Japanese soul, there is a world that is like air, something that isn't clear, like a mist—Japanese speak more from feelings." Feeling in Japanese is expressed as "ki," a syllable which, occurs in more than 180 words and phrases, and is one of the primary emphases of the Japanese people. And yet, it is a nebulous thing from the realm of the unknown, the invisible. For "Double Suicide," Awazu pursued the expression of that truth and although it was difficult he underlined the contrast between Japan and Europe, and even between pre-modern and modern Japan. Awazu was also dedicated to exposing the contrast between the common state of mind and the physical conditions of the past as well as of the present. To create, according to Awazu, we must first see—both what is and what is in our minds. Until we have seen something that we must express, we should rest. "A holiday," he calls it, "for our eyes and our spirits, which are striving to see."

Awazu's childhood was an amalgamation of the emptiness of fire-bombed Tokyo and the elusive, illusory reality of post-war films. He spent it learning to see. One of the memories he related to me was walking from Meguro to Shibuya (today a 10-minute ride on the Yamanote, Tokyo's loop line), "there were no train tracks. It was just a vast burnt field. I was 14 or 15. There was nothing to eat. That's the way it was." This was Awazu's informal education. It gave him a unique perspective on both nothingness and possibility—the known world that had been destroyed, and the unknown world yet to be created. Awazu spent much of his free time going to the movies. Flat broke, he finagled his way into the theater by making friends with the ticket girl and thus managed to watch more than a hundred films. The films presented another world to him, one that was manipulated by skilled cameramen who offered just the right details to depict a selective truth. Awazu recalls that in French films for instance, "you could see how people decorated their houses, and you would think, 'wow, this is the house of a really poor family.' You could really see it. The cameraman was an expert at conveying that information." Later, Awazu trained himself to see, to create, and to express his own vision by riding the Yamanote line around and around, drawing the drunks and other passengers for hours on end. "As time went on," he says, "I began to draw from memory, from the pictures in my mind. The imagined person is important, the eye that sees the subject is important, and after that, you have the image in your mind."

Awazu studied in the commerce department of Hosei University, where as a freshman he won his first of many awards, the Grand Prix in a JAAC exhibition, for the poster "Return Our Sea." For two years he worked in the advertising department of a film company and in 1958 he began freelancing.

Awazu is a member of a generation of designers who intentionally merged art and design, and whose work intersected many genres,

Awazu is certainly the most inclusive designer among these. By the time he had directed "Double Suicide," he had already won the First World Film Competition in Paris, designed and created the mesmerizing iron gate for the Izumo Shrine, displayed his sculpture at the Tokyo exhibition "From Space to Environment," designed the playground for Expo '70 in Osaka, and presented his own film using eight projectors at a "happening" symposium in Tokyo.

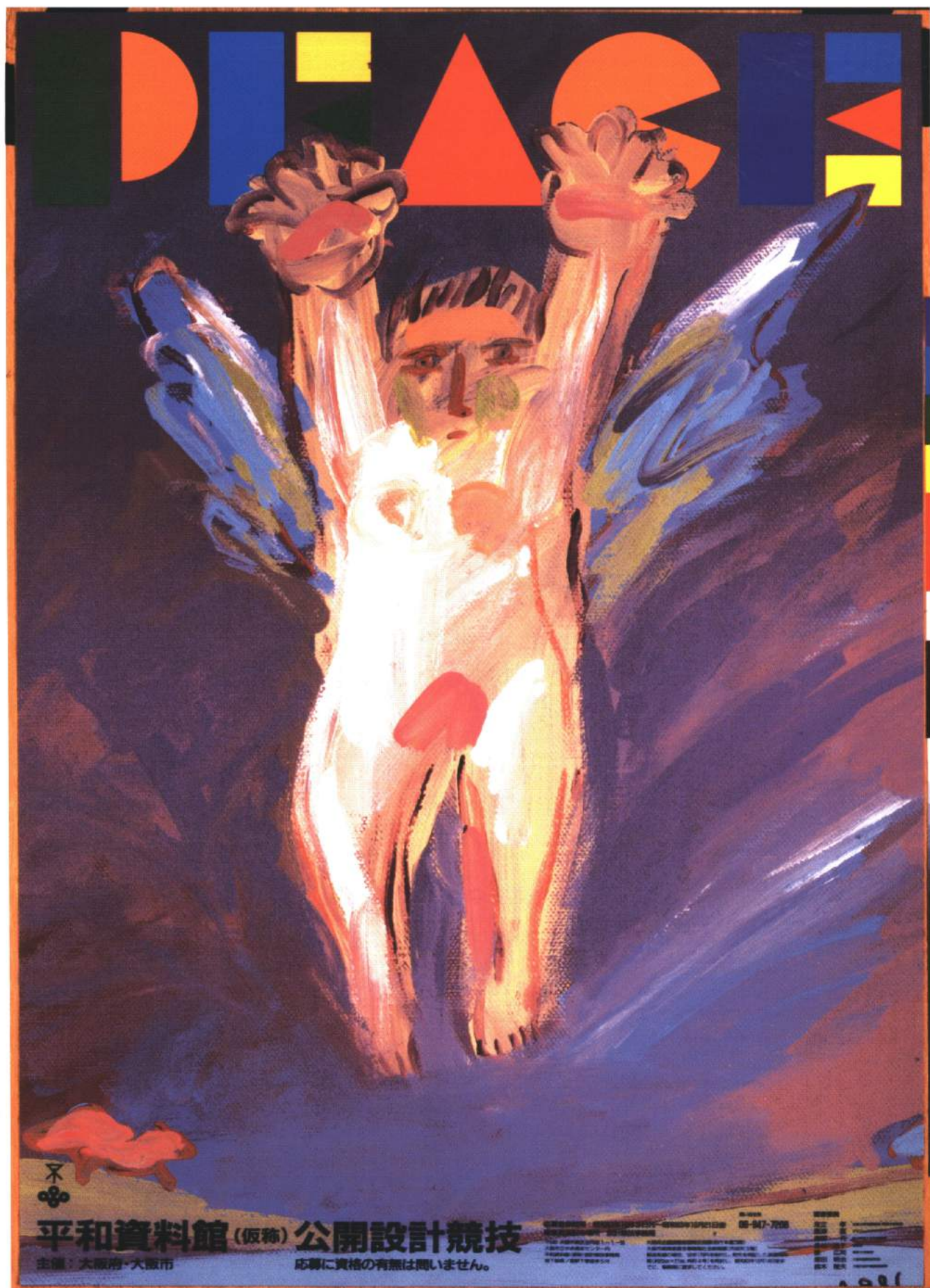
After "Double Suicide," Awazu went on to create the huge Yokohama City Subway turtle relief, hold one-man shows of both his independent films and his pictures, art direct another movie, and receive the grand prize at the World Contest for the Most Beautiful Book in Leipzig, Germany. He wrote and art directed his own operetta and art directed two more movies, both of which won him the Japanese equivalent of an Oscar. His most recent sculpture is installed at the Printing Museum in Tokyo, which delineates the history of lettering and printing.

Since the beginning of his career, Awazu's vision has ignited intense action. He participated in all of the momentous gatherings that defined his era: the World Design Conference in 1960, the Persona exhibition in 1965, the International Design Conference in Aspen, the Environment Group and Metabolism. For Awazu however, design is a tool, not an occupation. He has continually used it to bind the outside world to the one within. Since the early days of the environmental movement, he has been chairman of the Earth Environment Peace Foundation and responsible for coordinating competitions and exhibitions of children's art that address the question "How is the Earth doing?" This art, which comes from more than 40 countries and numbers 10,000 entries, is now available to government agencies thanks to Awazu.

He traveled throughout Europe as a committee member of the comprehensive National Museum of Ethnology, later returned to Spain to study Gaudi at length and make a movie about him, and design the Great Japan Exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. In 1990, he produced a book from an illustrated play called "The Planet's Secret," a child's view of the environment crisis written by 6th grader Aika Tsubota. Awazu arranged environmental conferences for children to accompany with the book's publication. Awazu does not shy away from the truth of the real world, but enhances it with his imagination. "The reason for delving into both worlds," Awazu says, "is to create."

For nearly a decade, Awazu has studied ancient Chinese characters, hieroglyphs, and cave paintings to try to understand the state of mind of those original true creators. Man's first attempts to express himself graphically involved distilling signs from facts scattered in the world around him combined with his own interpretations. Chinese and Japanese characters, called kanji, are an ancient form of montage, which become more complex as they are combined, and clearly show the original auteur's point of view. For example, the moderately complex kanji for "cry" is not made up of "human" and "pain," but "bird" and "mouth." Sergei Eisenstein, the Russian director who introduced montage to film in the early part of the 20th century, learned his art from studying not only kanji, but also the syllabic verse of haiku and tanka. Both of these bring out their subjects through a series of scenes that to Awazu seem to "float up" through the syllabic count. So reading haiku or tanka is much like watching a movie in which the poet releases to the audience images postulated by reality but created in his mind.

In 1973, Awazu illustrated an exhibition poster and catalog with a complex and compelling image. "The theme was modern sculpture, but I fancied a pencil-boy carrying a little girl piggyback. This is the world of my imagination," he explained. Over the past 45 years this world has harbored recurring icons: turtles, rainbows, concentric lines, figures swimming, heads, hands, physiognomic forms superimposed with kanji, spheres connected by meandering lines, birds, cows and angels; images from real life, from dreams and fantasies. The heart of these images lies in Awazu's ability to truly see. These images, are a manifestation of the fusion between the external and the internal and regardless to how hideous, strange, or beautiful they may be, Awazu chooses to share them and hence to create a new kind of vision for everyone.



Credits & Comments

Pg.98 Anti-war, public poster (silkscreen), 1971.

Pg.101 Portrait of Awazu by Taro Terashi.

Pg.103 Peace Research Center, public poster (offset), 1989.

Pg.104 Tomoyo, theater poster (offset), 1969.

Pg.105 Hanaokaseishu No Tsuma, theater poster (offset), 1970.

Pg.106 Mano Dharma Concert, concert poster (offset), 1974.

Pg.107 The 43rd International Design Conference in Aspen,
Kiyoshi Awazu Exhibition and Workshop, exhibition poster (offset), 1993.

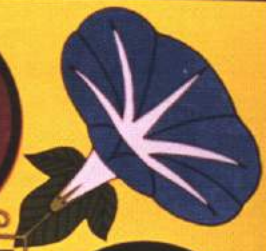
Pg.108 Print Work, 1970-1980, exhibition poster designed in 1980.

Pg.109 Meta (silkscreen), 1961.

Pg.110 The 6th Exhibition of Contemporary Japan Sculpture, exhibition poster (offset), 1975.

Pg.111 Reminiscence of a Journey to Lithuania, film poster (offset), 1975.

Kiyoshi Awazu, Japan
email: awazu@mail.sc4.so-net.ne.jp



出演
 杉村春子
 田代信子
 矢吹幸子
 本山可久子
 尾崎友美
 稲野和子
 新橋耐子
 渡辺美佐子
 三津田健
 龍岡晋
 小浜裕
 北村和夫
 高原駿雄
 飯沼慧
 大山俊
 三宅康夫
 高木武彦



文学座創立三十五周年記念公演 五月八日 十日 渋谷東横劇場
 五月八日 十日 毎日六時十五分開演
 五月十日 毎日七時十五分開演
 悲劇的な女の宿業を執拗に追いつげ 人間存在のあり方を訴える有吉文学の真髓
 江戸時代の名医華岡青洲の 世界初の全身麻酔の発明
 乳癌手術の成功の影に秘められた嫁と姑の涙ましいましの哀愁を通して鮮烈感動の舞台



夕日とからす鳥

華岡青洲の妻

作 有吉佐和子

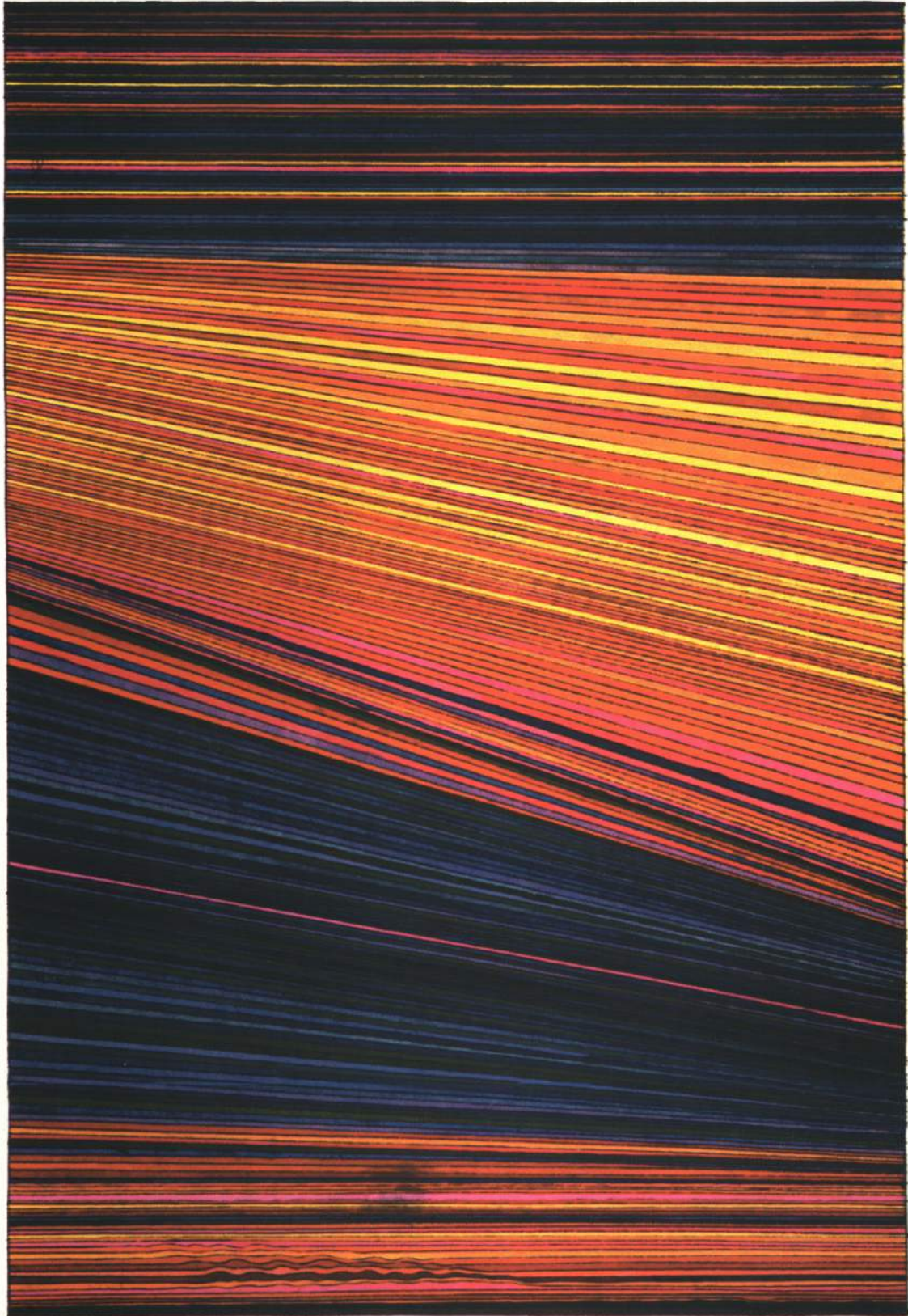
華岡青洲の妻

作 有吉佐和子
 演出 戌井市郎

装飾 古賀宏一
 照明 六次喜美男
 音楽 平井澄子
 効果 吉田美能留
 舞台監督 楠本章介
 制作 西田辰雄



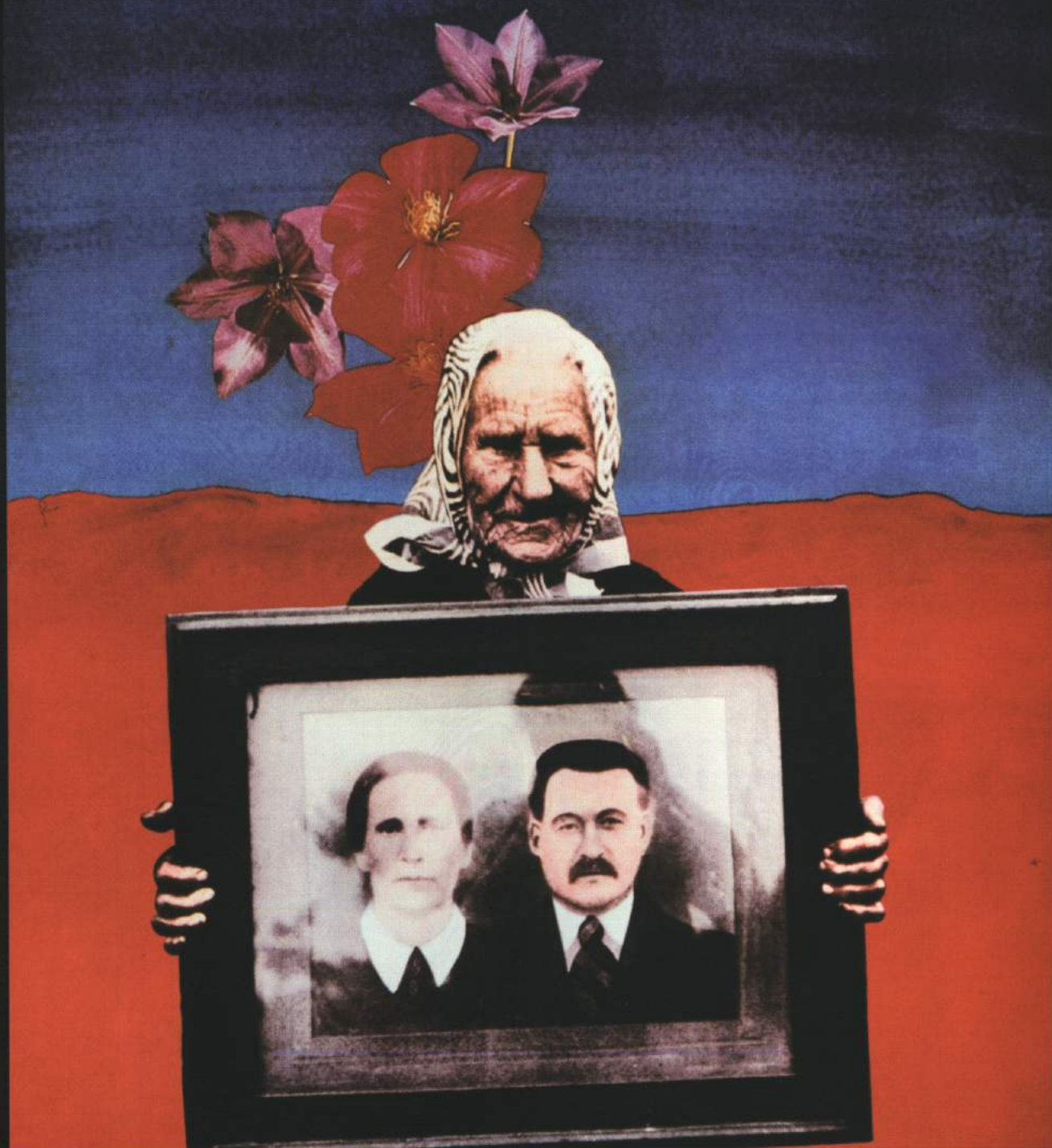
spring



summer

autumn

winter



● ● 家族との再会、風景、そして祝祭—ナイーヴな情感と緊張した歴史意識の中に織りなされる自らの年代記 ● ●

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