



Putting Typography on Tour
Hajime Tachibana is pretty sober for a 1990s media idol. And maybe that's as it should be. In his pristine three-story studio/shelter, he seems serious about everything: typography, computers, the Net, and the individual's place in the digital onslaught. He recently finished *APPLICATION TOUR*, his CD-ROM-as-interactive-art, and he was overdue for a rest.

Tachibana seems to say the goal is personal exchange, with or without anonymity. "For me, typography isn't ABC...and the point isn't whether it's readable or not; it has sprung from music and design; it's a symbol, an emblem of the times."

For artist/designer/musician Tachibana, resting is important. It's also important to Tachibana that he not be equated with a purely digital image. Though he is immensely grateful to the Macintosh, claiming that it "saved" him, allowing him to do his signature typographic work, he also does plenty of down and dirty cut-and-paste, and a number of his exhibited pieces involve hammering and other noisy analog construction. And in the seven hours the computer saves him on a formerly 10-hour job, he prefers fishing and biking to surfing on the Net. A great deal of his charm and popularity is due to this jack-of-all-trades position. Tachibana is known to the younger crowd as much for his musical persona, as a member of the pop group the Plastics, and more recently as a solo musician on synthesizer and drum machine. To designers, he's the man out in front, the first to hold typography exhibitions in both trendy and established Tokyo art spots (1991-present), and now, the first to design and market his own application, SiNYO Beta, on a CD-ROM. "Up until now," Tachibana explains, "big companies were the only ones turning out CD-ROMs, and these were created by synthesis—'let's do this, let's do that, what functions should it have?' and so forth. For me, the point of departure is different. In this age, anyone with an image can make a CD-ROM."

The age, the era, and the symbols thereof—these are what concern Hajime Tachibana, and these are what, in turn, he is making his name creating. He is the forerunner's forerunner, and he is impatient for the change to take place. With *Application Tour*, which is in fact touring Japan through most of 1996—as a group of Macs scattered around various venues and surrounded by bright panels of Mexican corrugated glass fiber board—you can, Tachibana claims, take part in "a new conversation, using a new language." Participants can manipulate type and drawings through a Tachibana plug-in, and come up with designs similar to his, or do something unique on their own. Digital democracy is part of Tachibana's future dream world. Even though *Application Tour* is targeted toward high-grade Mac users, mostly other graphic designers, as long as the tour is on, people all over the country can participate in this conversation, and try to hook into Tachibana's thinking, which he says is what is really on exhibit here.

Insisting that he is no different from DaVinci or the Ventures—who took advantage of the tools that were available in their time, whether paint in a tube or the electric guitar, and went as far as they could—Tachibana says the Macintosh personal computer just happened to be the tool. What sets Tachibana apart from the average artist is that he is not going to be sucked into doing things the easy way. That goes for typography, too. Even his 1996 New Year's card features original Kana, though it's not part of a full

font. It certainly seems true that as Tachibana points out, "Human beings tend to take the easy path, and then cease doing anything but the easy and convenient." They rely on ready-made fonts for example. But after Tachibana exhibited typography in 1991, every Mac-owning designer had to have his or her own font. "It was a trend," he says. Not content to be so easily and conveniently copied, Tachibana keeps pushing the limits, trying (who knows how successfully, what with our urge to take the easy path) to make us ask the fundamental questions: "Why typography? What is typography? What is an application? Why an application?" That's what makes him an artist. What makes him so easy to follow is his digital mode, his nationwide tour, and of course a nationwide CD-ROM distribution network to go with it. B.U.G., the company that copied the CD-ROMs at about \$2 apiece, is selling them at software shops around the country for about \$290 apiece. Tachibana and his programmer will split the profit.

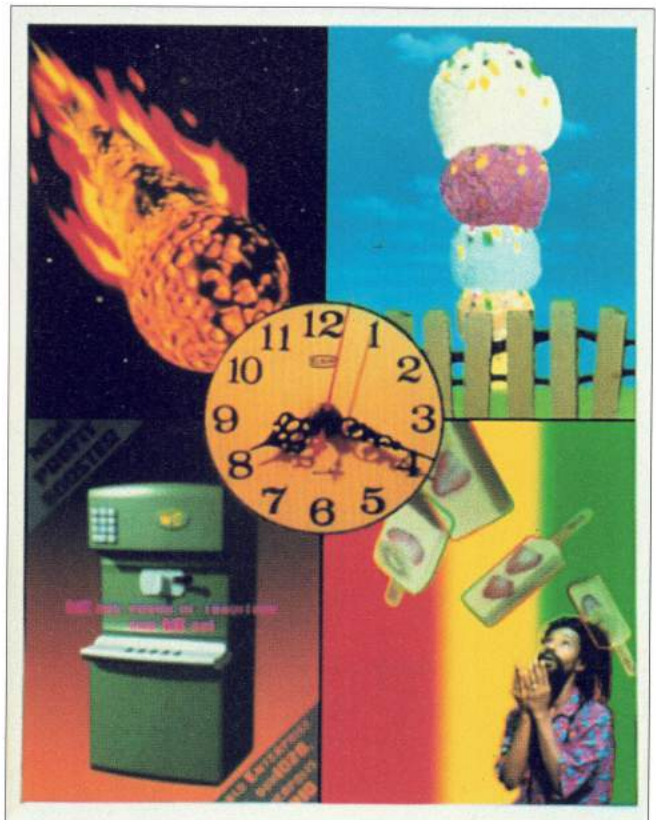
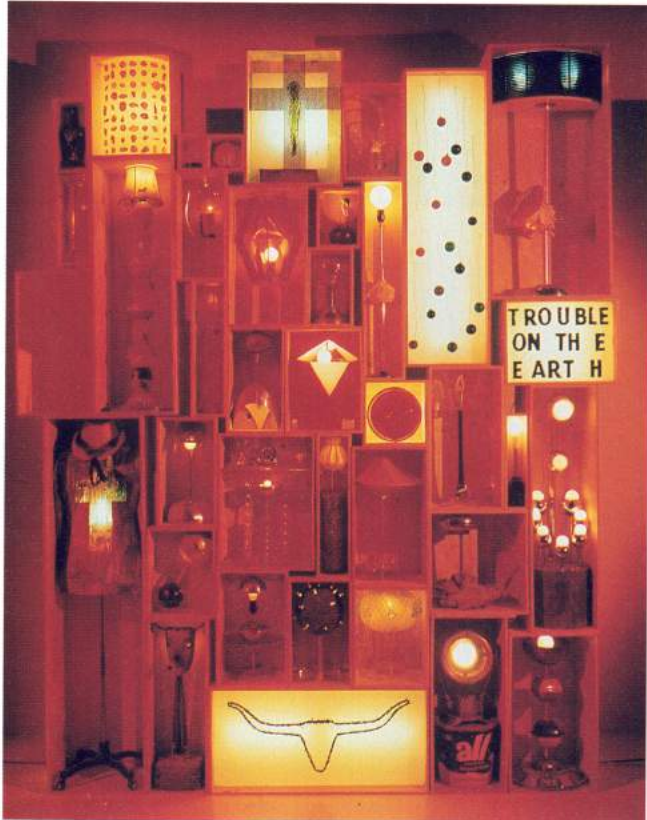
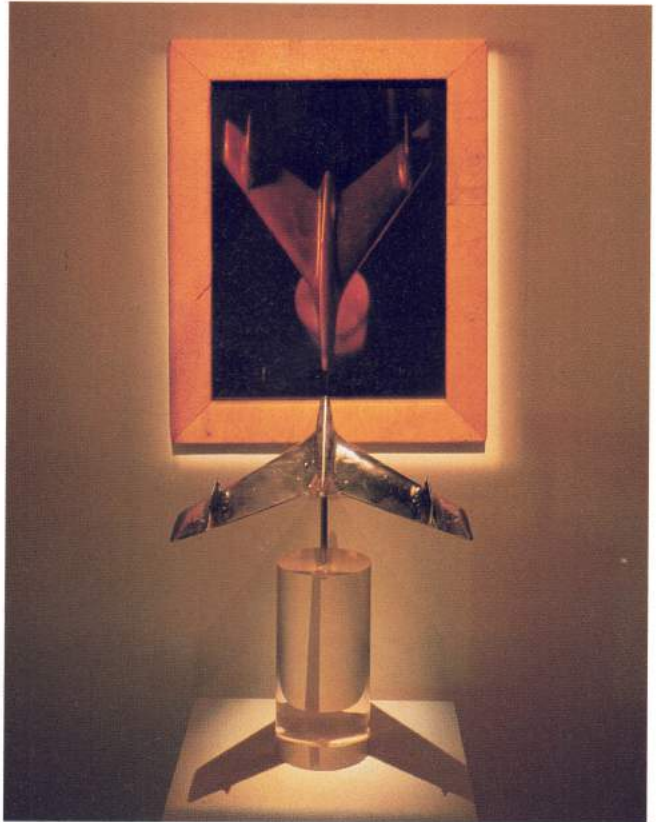
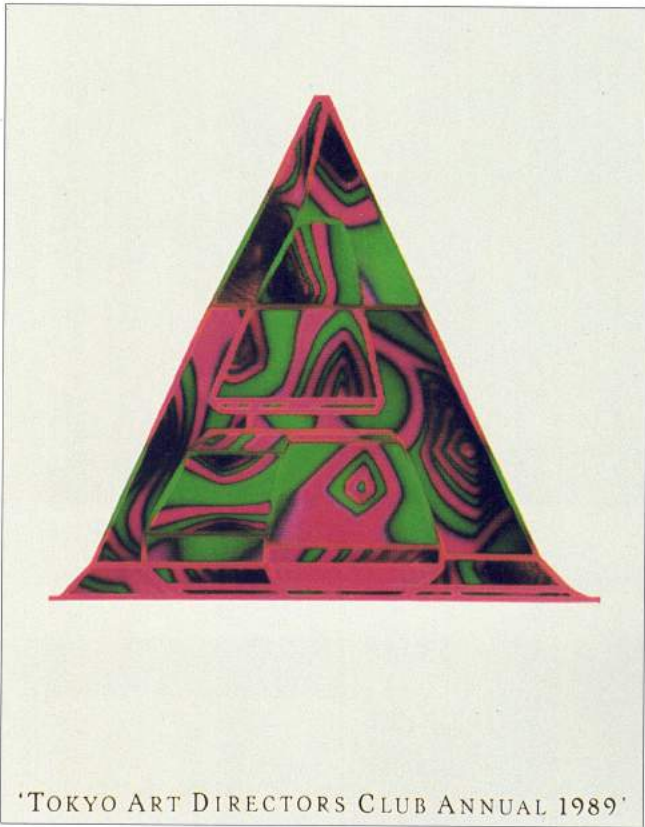
In answering his own big questions, Tachibana seems to be saying that the point is mutability, and the goal personal exchange, with or without anonymity. "For me, typography isn't ABC...and the point isn't whether it's readable or not; it has sprung from music and design; it's a symbol, an emblem of the times.

"The *Application Tour* is the same. I don't know who's going to use it how, or where. The buyers will spread, it won't stay in the exhibit hall, it will change shape, and the circle of people unknown to me, who are collaborating with me, will spread. The concept isn't as narrow as, 'anybody can design like me.' I've just opened the contents of my head to the public. People can do with it what they will."

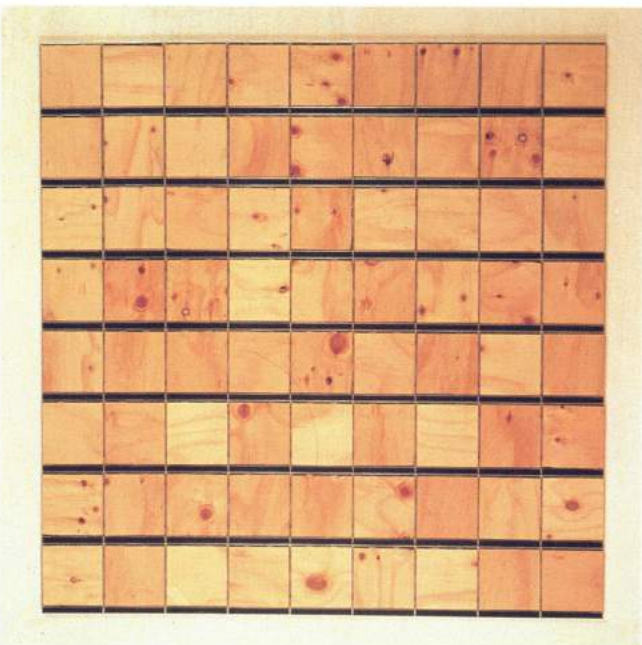
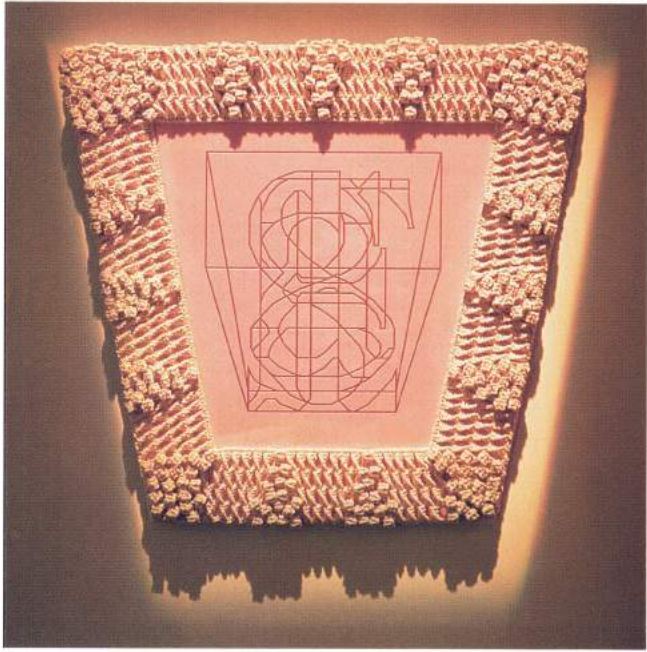
People doing what they will alternately inspires and depresses Tachibana. Like the rest of us, he's fascinated by the possibilities of the Net, daydreaming that it will eventually replace the boorish, provincial TV, offering more individualized communications with equal visual quality. But he's a curmudgeon when it comes to the possibilities of the public. Just mention Windows 95, and he's on a rampage, "Through irresponsible editing of US footage, Japanese TV has sponsored a run on the software, implying that every US citizen is out buying it. And Japanese people love a matsuri (festival). They love to dance, or rather to be made to dance. The shopkeepers are no better. They don't know what it can do, and they claim it can do 'anything'."

But in Tachibana's own words, *Application Tour* is also "unlimited; the takeoff points are boundless, and so are the paths you can follow with it." The difference is a subtle one, and Tachibana, as an artist charting the future, is stuck in the middle, trying to explain the degree of integrity that is necessary to participate in his world. ■

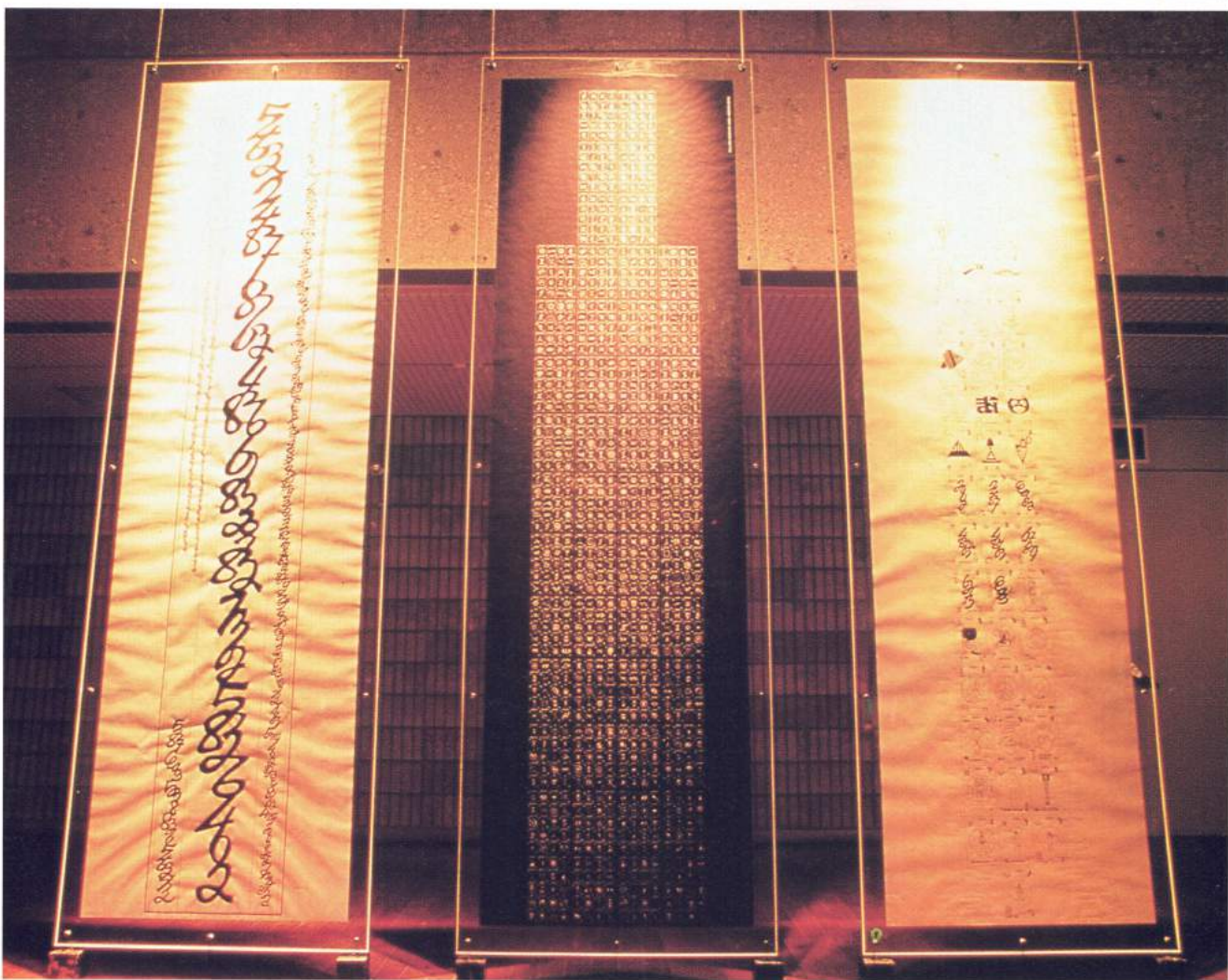
(TOP LEFT) TOKYO ART DIRECTORS CLUB ANNUAL, 1989. ART DIRECTOR AND DESIGNER: HAJIME TACHIBANA. (RIGHT, BOTTOM LEFT) PHOTOS FROM A



1993 SOLO EXHIBITION OF TACHIBANA'S WORK. (BOTTOM RIGHT) "ICE CREAM CLOCK" FOR SHISEIDO, ART DIRECTOR AND DESIGNER: HAJIME TACHIBANA.



(OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP ROW AND BOTTOM ROW) PHOTOS FROM SOLO EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF HAJIME TACHIBANA, 1993. (MIDDLE ROW, LEFT) "BAMBI SHOP" POSTER. ART DIRECTOR AND DESIGNER: HAJIME TACHIBANA. (CENTER) HAJIME TACHIBANA'S "TAIYO SUN," ALBUM DISC DESIGN, 1985.



ART DIRECTOR AND DESIGNER: HAJIME TACHIBANA. (RIGHT) SLEEVE DESIGN FOR TALKING HEADS SINGLE "CITIES," 1981. ART DIRECTOR AND DESIGNER: HAJIME TACHIBANA. ■ (ABOVE) PHOTOS FROM SOLO EXHIBITIONS OF THE WORK OF HAJIME TACHIBANA. (TOP) 1993, (BOTTOM) 1995.