

長瀬江里

佐藤晃一

菊竹青訓

内田 繁

石本藤雄

柏木 博

亀倉雄策

中野三郎

黒川雅之

畠田繁雄

水井一正

松本浩光

清家 清

長 大作

石元泰博

伊藤隆道

伊東豊雄

森

岩崎信治

正洋

川上元美

松永 真

北川原温

喜多俊之

渡辺 力

第500回デザインギャラリー展

ONE by ONE

【コミッティメンバー近作展】

1995年10月4日[水]—10月23日[月] 最終日午後5時閉場 松屋銀座7階・デザインギャラリー

Koichi Sato: Mr. Sandman Awaiting the delivery of a poster by Koichi Sato must be a delicious anticipation—like waiting for a dream. Making the anticipation that much more thrilling must be the comfort in knowing that the dream will be perfect, and true. Although Koichi Sato came of age as a designer just as the airbrush was meeting the California style, and is identified with gradation, stylization, and extraterrestrial motifs—like the moon—his work is not the least bit elusive. Nor is it facetious, or light, though it is filled with light. He regularly juxtaposes the realistic image with the quirkily fantastic, but illusion is not his game. Koichi Sato's ambition has never been your run-of-the-mill variety. At the end of one of those junior high school "what do you want to be when you grow up" essays, Sato mentioned just three

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occupations: physicist (his dad was a radar technician), atomic power researcher, and designer. At the latter, he concluded, it might be hard to make a living.

As it turned out, he decided to create a type of visual expression that would be, in his words, "as internationally viable as American pop art." Until his mid-twenties, he had dismissed everything Japanese—even the ancient art of flower arrangement, ikebana—as kitsch. But when he realized that he was not American, and that every day he spent copying Andy Warhol was in vain, he began to search for a new and powerful form of his own. He made a cultural about-face, touring every traditional Japanese painting exhibition he could find, and in the end decided that "an outright imitation of the style would bring nothing new, but I could extract an essence of Japanese art, do a close-up take on that, and make a very simple statement."

FINDING A LOST WORLD In 1976, Sato held a two-panel exhibition expressing his view of design. On two B-size canvases, he had printed an enlargement of a famous waterfall at Nikko, a natural paradise and tourist spot. On the straight enlargement, he printed the characters of Nikko. On the other, with an airbrush, he blacked out the parts he deemed unnecessary, leaving a luminous, mysterious waterfall; on this one, he printed the characters for Oku Nikko. "Oku" indicates the interior, the depths. He hung the two facing one another. "That was a long time ago," says Sato, speaking now from his office in Tokyo. "But there's been no change in my fundamental conception of graphic design, the confrontation of reality and fantasy."

There are those who would scold Sato for mistaking art for design. In an essay discussing a publisher's plea for an introductory book on design, he took on his critics. "Art, design, whatever," he wrote, "all expression is the healthy power of a restless, capricious heart, trying to retrieve a lost world. It's the validity of purposely forgetting rules, the flexibility of the spirit and passion. It's a willfulness that contributes to the health of the society."

IN SWAY TO THE HEAVENS As an interlocutor, Koichi Sato is no airy mystic. His logical mind works almost visibly to tie down a point others might leave to intuition. This is a man who grew up in Gunma and spent his schoolboy days putting out his own three-color, hand-printed newspaper, the Blue Sky Gazette; investigating electricity and inventing gadgets;

and writing poems about the sky.

As an adult, he composes and publishes haiku, a poetry that, in the same way as do his images, constructs an imaginary world from a natural physical moment, contradictions intact. The sky is still prominent. In a series of posters for a printing company, Sato engaged in "haiga," the coupling of haiku and image. Over a fading,

inverted red-to-deep-purple Mount Fuji, he lay the following haiku: "As still as the bottom of our planet's lake, the autumn sky."

In much of his visual work, the sky, in its many transformations, may find its own level in tilted boxes, or ebulliate as a black fog from level boxes, or partially obscure any number of ordinary objects—peaches, moons, carp. He achieves this two-dimensional representation of the vast space above us with an extremely subtle gradation of colors.

"It would take a book to fully explain why I use gradation," Sato says, "but one reason for it is that I wanted to introduce to communication something other than the rational. An individual's memory contains much more than the sum of all experiences and visions from birth on. Prenatal memory is ground into the genetic makeup of every individual. Gradation is one way to visualize this unconscious world."

"And," he adds, with a nod to the technician within, "gradation also compensates for a terrible shortcoming of mine. The objects in my work tend to appear rigid and small, so I cover them with a soft blanket of gradation."

INVENTING FANTASY In his intense eyes, and in the technical perfection of his work, you can almost see the fascination of a little boy alone in his "Edison shed" in the backyard, where at 15 he invented a buzzing device to warn busy housewives before their bathtubs overflowed, and at the same time, make the important announcement that the temperature was just right. For this, young Koichi was awarded the Mayor's Prize.

In the fantasy inherent in his images, you can also see the exuberance of a young man on stage, where Sato played nothing but lead roles. Sato did his first theater poster for his amateur thespian group at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music. The theater poster—advertising another kind of carefully crafted fantasy—has been one of his main modes of expression ever since.

In his "Edison Shed," Sato investigated, like Faraday, the connection between electricity and magnetism. Analyzing his sky



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images, where there is no horizon, he likens them to the gravity-free world of electricity. Sato says this sense of freedom from gravity is common to space travel, as well as to most graphics in modern western culture. "When I create something two-dimensional I get a sense of freedom from gravity," he says. "It's the exact same feeling I get looking at the sky."

He jokes about the Nobel Prize he might have won if only he'd been able to get the results he was looking for as a child, but he has captured something equally fascinating in his own two-dimensional escapes from gravity and logical reality. To achieve this enigmatic end, he has spent countless hours before printing presses, directing colors into form. "In my case, subtle changes in tones can't be indicated from the other end of a phone," Sato says. "It's important to be there. I've got a very clear understanding of what can and cannot be done in printing. I don't ask for the impossible."

Known in the graphic design world as an inventor of sorts, Sato had an exhibition in 1996 devoted to his "research" in printing techniques. But that's as far as he's likely to go in explaining his processes. "Once the piece is finished," he says. "I get nothing out of going over the method." Still, periodically, he is urged to write the definitive book on his "discoveries."

FROM COPYCAT TO MASTER But of course it wasn't always this way. Master status was in no way preordained. The 53-year-old Sato is an intuitive man, and a passionate one, and a technically talented artist. And when he finds something he likes, he makes it his own. But as a young man, this pursuit often took the form of imitation. Among those flattered by his early efforts was one of his first art teachers, a local artist whose oil paintings inspired Sato to improvise his own oil painting setup: undiluted watercolors painted with a cut-down brush on junked veneer. Subsequently, his parents bought him a oil painting set.

After graduation, in an American pop art imitation stage, he mocked up some Japanese caramel packages with a comic-book self-portrait. He collected—as kitsch—so many cardboard novelty boards, novelties intact, from a local candy shop that the neighborhood kids mistook his front room for a shop itself. And he held the obligatory pop/conceptual art exhibitions. He can make light of it now, but he was such an accomplished copyist of Tadanori Yokoo, that at one point he actually signed

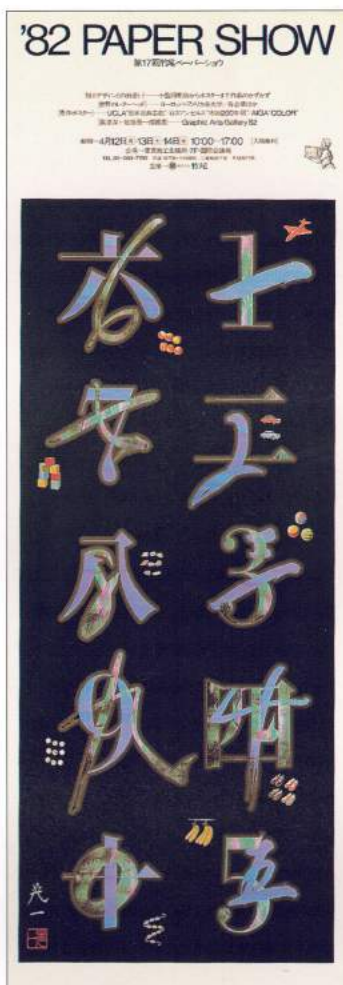
a poster, which he submitted in an Art Directors Club competition, with the master's name. He heard later that he nearly won a prize as Yokoo, but that the judges were tipped off by an odd sidebar, which gave Sato's name as the copycat artist, with his phone number and address. "It was a way," he explains, "to look for work."

At the beginning of his career, playing around with the neighborhood kids was what Sato did in his considerable free time. That, and copy Yokoo. It took a wife with a knife to bring him to his senses. She was pregnant, Sato recalls, which might have accounted for the crash she took through the kitchen floor of their tiny apartment one day while chopping vegetables. "She pointed the knife at me and said, 'Enough is enough.'" That's when Sato went out and bought a bunch of canvases, and made the jump to the sky—with his boxes, and a visual poetry he has continued to produce for 25 years.

The first box he painted was, Sato says, the most neutral and meaningless object he could find that had both inner and outer space. He makes it absolutely clear that it shouldn't be attributed with any meaning at all. "When I'm painting a box, my intent is to paint in the sky, to paint 'ku,' or space. My interest lies in the variation of colors within the confines of the constancy of the sky. So though it's just a picture of a box, it's not just a picture of a box." Does he keep a box on his desk for reference? And where is it now?

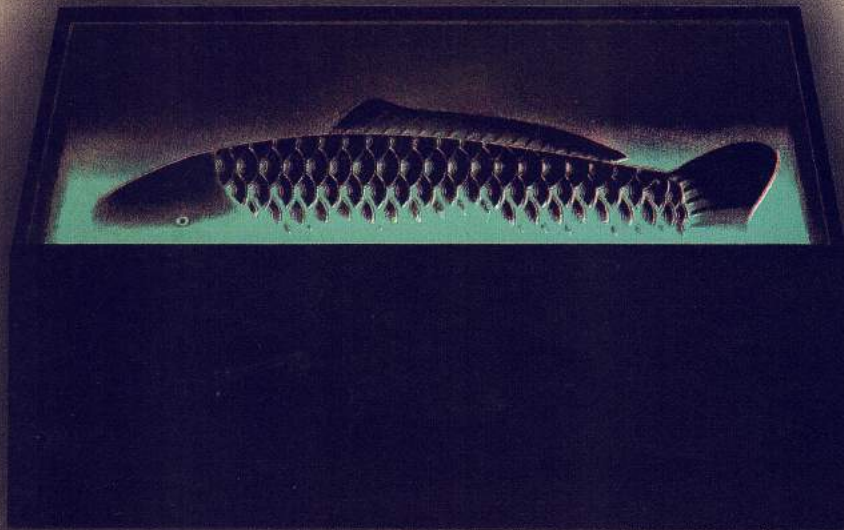
"In my head," he says. "But I work from a vast collection of photographs of the sky." Intuitively selecting the box, diligently depicting the sky—the physicist meets the poet.

THE NEXT STEP—FADE TO BLACK In Zen Buddhism, color is nothing. It includes everything in the universe, but nothing. Recently, Sato's boxes have been fading from view. He has been liberated from gradation too. And his friends tell him he hasn't been using objects much either. "I've never been that interested in things," he said in a recent interview. "Sometimes I look at the moon, and I think of creating pieces with no objects at all." Koichi Sato is getting closer and closer to this goal. His latest favorite poster, which is already winning awards, is one for the Nagoya International Design Center. "I didn't have to do anything," he says, a smile flitting across his face, "I just placed my hand on the copy machine." Appearing from afar as five moons in a blackened sky, his giant prints grasp at the dark. ■



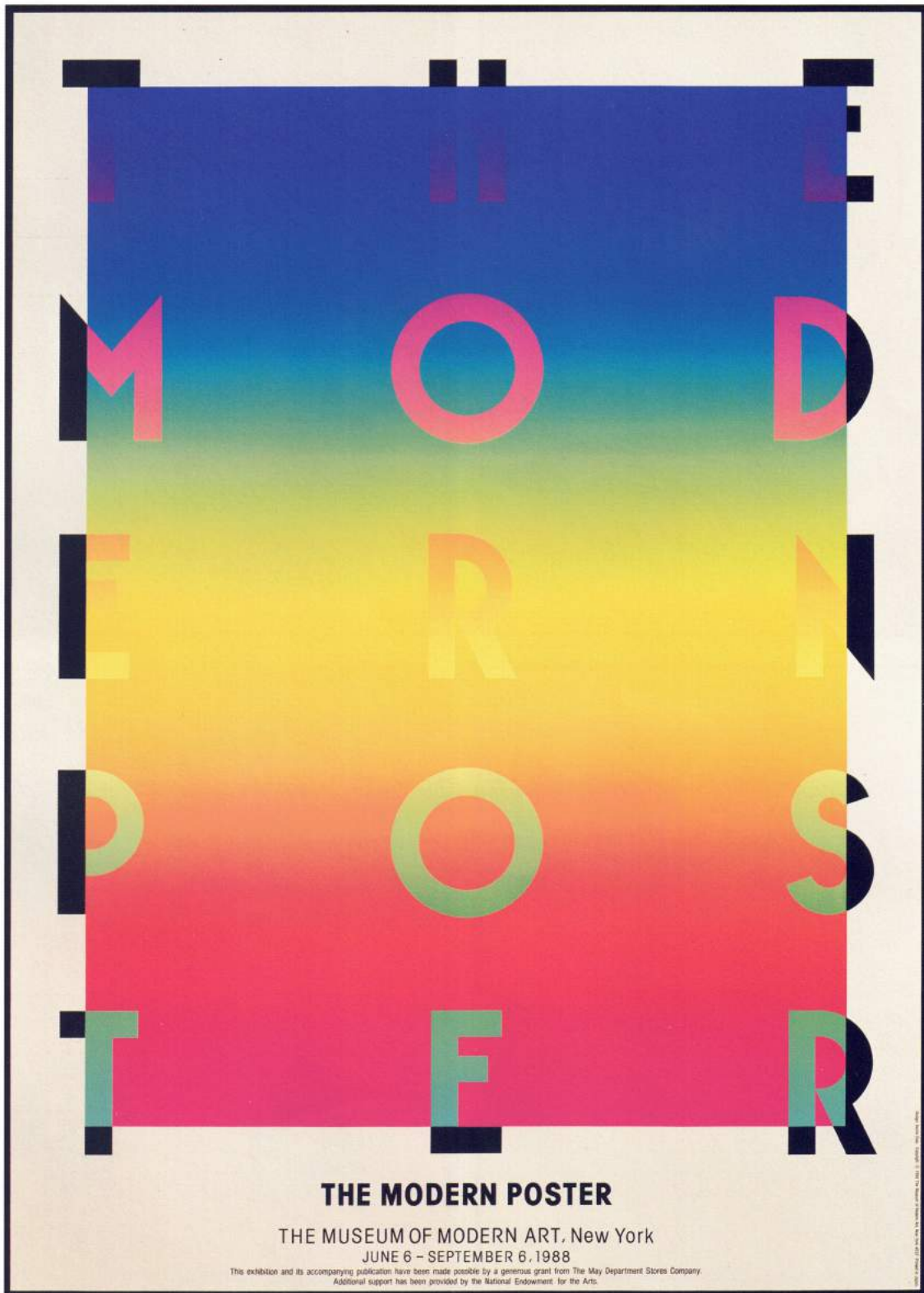
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NEW MUSIC MEDIA

新魔法媒体
NEW MAGIC MEDIA

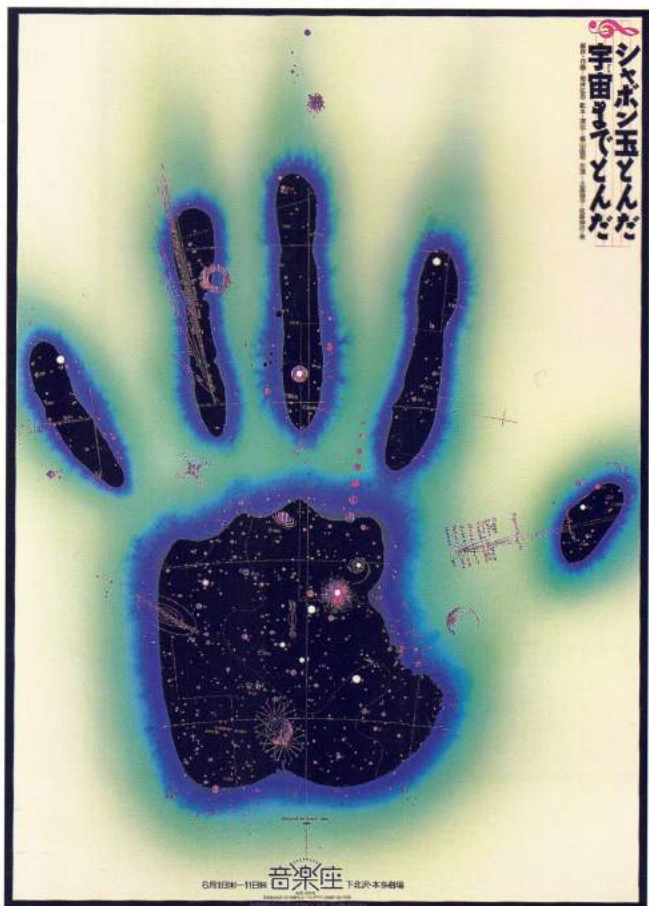
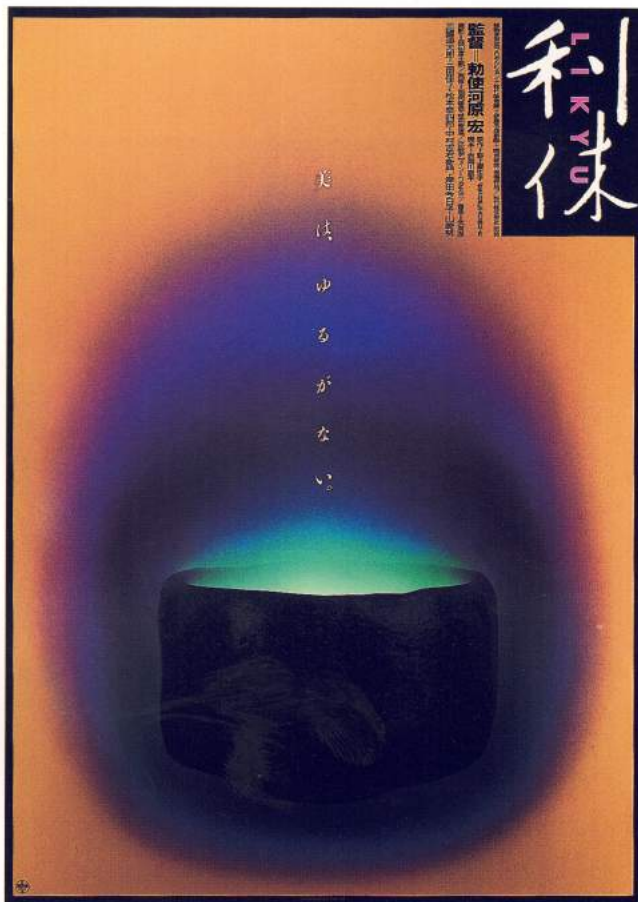
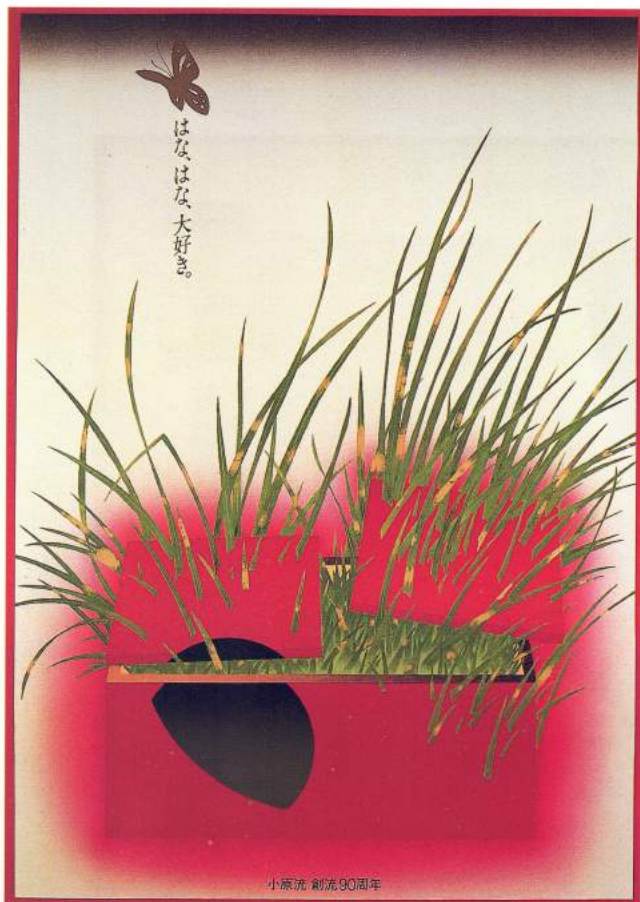


1988 Reproduced by Paper Printing Co., Ltd. Designed by KOICHI SATO

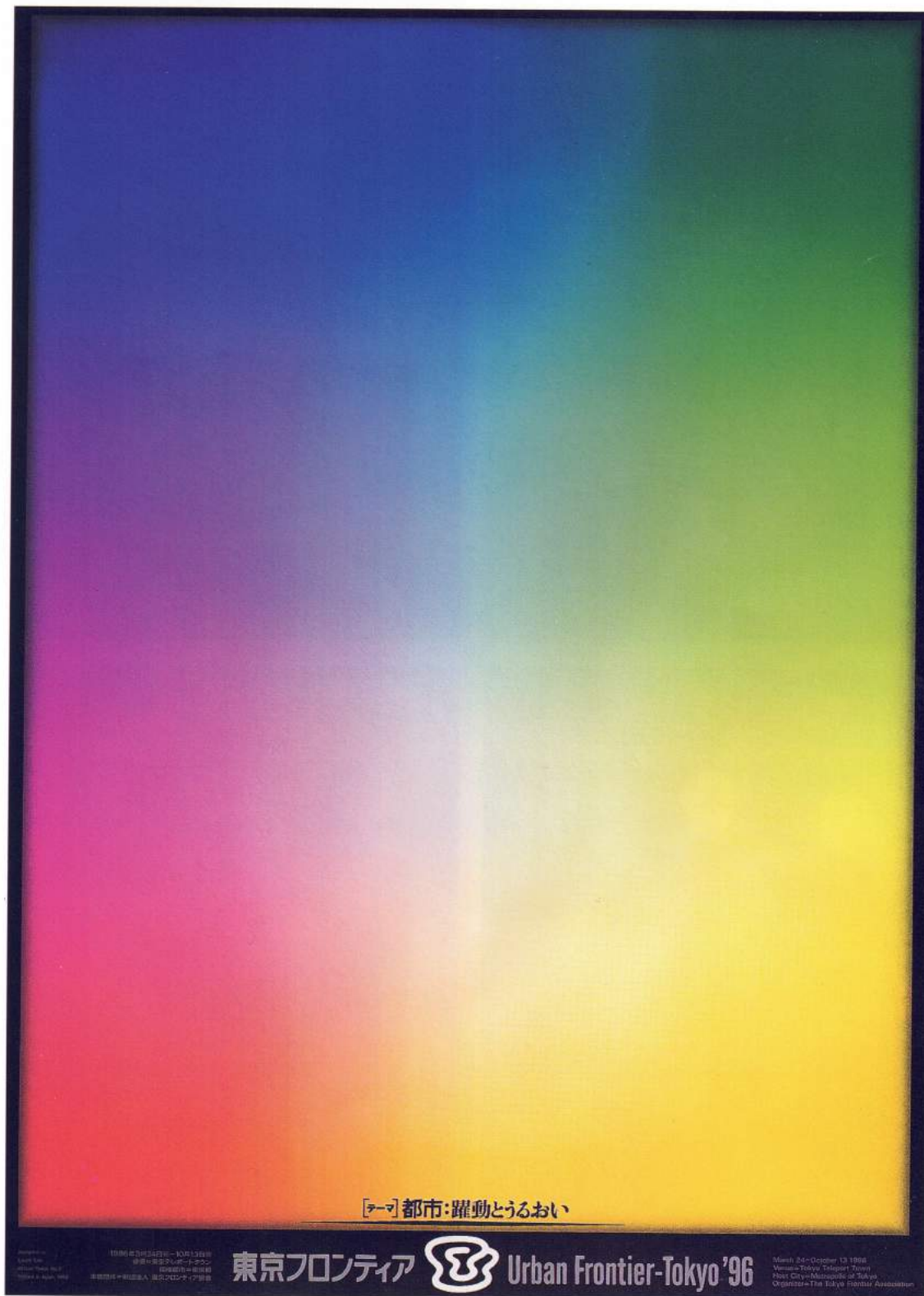
(PREVIOUS SPREAD, LEFT PAGE) POSTER DESIGNED FOR A CONCERT, "NEW MUSIC MEDIA," 1974. ■ (PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT PAGE) VARIATIONS OF SATO'S "LIP" POSTERS, 1985. ■ (OPPOSITE, TOP) "MT. FUJI IN WINTER," ONE OF FOUR POSTERS



BASED ON THE DIFFERENT SEASONS, 1988. ■ (OPPOSITE, BOTTOM) "MT. FUJI IN SPRING," PART OF A SERIES OF FOUR POSTERS BASED ON THE DIFFERENT SEASONS, 1988. ■ (THIS PAGE) "THE MODERN POSTER," POSTER FOR AN EXHIBITION, 1988.



(PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT PAGE, TOP ROW) TWO POSTERS CREATED FOR "BACCHUS," AN EXHIBITION, 1992. (PREVIOUS SPREAD, RIGHT PAGE, BOTTOM ROW) TWO POSTERS DESIGNED FOR A SPECIAL EXHIBITION ENTITLED "LIFE," 1994, CREATED



FOR A JAPANESE DESIGN COMMITTEE. ■ (OPPOSITE PAGE) POSTER FOR THE TOKYO ART DIRECTORS CLUB EXHIBITION, 1996. CLIENT: TOKYO ART DIRECTORS CLUB. ■ (THIS PAGE) POSTER FOR "URBAN FRONTIER-TOKYO '96," CREATED IN 1993.

