

## **Takashi Makino: Involuntary Memory or The Art of Premonition**

We have Takashi Makino.

We are living in the same age as Takashi Makino.

We can experience the works produced by Takashi Makino.

Don't miss the miracle happening here and now.

A blissful experience. I am speaking of the *Takashi Makino Retrospective 2002-2020*, which was held at the BankART Station Theater in Yokohama from August 25 to September 3, 2023. The six programs consisted of 20 film works selected from a total of about 40, ranging from early to recent ones. The screenings were a splendid presentation to the whole world of the unparalleled, overwhelming quality imbuing his works. The experience of watching his films is like that of a dream within a dream, and at the same time, like that of waking up in a waking state. For the 10-day run, BankART Station Theater was definitely at the top of the world as a screening space. I am convinced of this, and proud of it.

I cannot find the words. The sheer bliss of watching a remarkable 20 wonderful films of Makino's within such a short time. Even if seen before, not to mention if seen for the first time, each and every one of these works has a devastating impact that comes as a real experience every time. Even if you think you are prepared for this impact, you find yourself helplessly pulled into the dizzying whorl of flashing lights and sound, and end up drifting in the space and time of a different world, entranced. You don't know what you are seeing, how much time has passed, or where you are. When you come to, you have been returned to the real world. The moment that the work ends is always enveloped in the sensation of having traveled through a world in a different space and time.

Anyone can hurl fragments of thought. The images presented by Makino that look like abstract noise, however, are based on footage shot with a camera. When filming, he makes extensive use of multiple exposure, and applies acrobatic techniques in the process of conversion from film to digital imaging. The elements of light, coloration, and speediness are edited in accordance with the temporal axis while manifesting their own uniqueness (at present, the shooting is also done digitally). The pictures obtained through the shooting have shading, but this is finely cut up by the superposition of other pictures due to multiple exposure and digital processing. With the repetition of this process, the picture shading is cut up even more finely, so that it ends up looking like particles of light.

Impulse and desire seeking thesis and antithesis at the same time. A film produced with the intention of generating a perfect chaos by applying techniques based on multiple exposure to the ultimate degree arrived at the birth of a cosmos that was the opposite of the

objective. The work in question, which was completed in 2009, was titled *still in cosmos*. The impulse to see a chaos gave birth to a cosmos. Herein, one can discern a baroque-type desire to simultaneously seek thesis and antithesis. The footage is like feedback noise resulting from the looping of input and output, and brings to mind the concept of “psychedelic baroqueism” put forth by Yuzuru Agi in his magazine *EGO*, in an issue which took an overview of music during the transition from punk and new wave to noise and industrial sounds.

Cosmos and anti-cosmos. The title of this solo exhibition is *Collage and Anti-cosmos*, and the centerpiece is the newly-made film titled *Anti-cosmos*. Both the book *Cosmos and Anti-Cosmos* by Toshihiko Izutsu that inspired Makino and Makino’s *still in cosmos* and *Anti-cosmos* may resonate with the baroque-type simultaneous pursuit of both thesis and antithesis. Curtailing the impression of blinding speed, *Anti-cosmos* is characterized by the sensation of walking into a fog radiating from the center of the screen. At times, the viewer vaguely catches scenery and other subjects. Surprisingly, what I recalled from the dazzling sensation was *EVE*, an early work from 2002.

It is overwhelming right from the start. The particles of light induced by extensive use of multiple exposure look like filtered sunlight, raindrops, or flakes of powdery snow, and recall the sparkle of trees and surfaces of water shot by Makino. In his case, filming and editing could perhaps be regarded as having a nested structure or a relationship of coupled (opposite) mirrors. This attribute is already apparent in *EVE*, the early 2002 work that Makino, who then did not have editing equipment, completed merely by shooting with a 16-millimeter camera and developing the resultant film. The process of editing is incorporated into the act of filming, such that one could say filming=editing. With the loveliness of the glossy, smooth, and sometimes hard light, the work is suffused with stunning sensations. It is almost as if the film were breathing. Right from the start.

It could not possibly look like this. At the aforementioned BankART screenings, two 3D works were shown: *2012* (2013) and *cinéma concret* (2015). A perceptual time lag arises when one eye is darkened. A 3D image is perceived as flowing from left to right if the right eye is darkened and from right to left if the left eye is darkened. This film is brimming with an amazing transparency, and the aforementioned flow in one direction and the opposite direction comes into view in the rear. The viewer is bowled over by the footage, which spins like a carousel inside a huge tank of water. Before you know it, you are riding on this carousel in the middle of a whirlpool of dynamically spinning images. It could not possibly look this way. Is this a dream or a premonition?

Dreams are collages of memories. Some of Makino’s early collage works (2002-2003) were

displayed at *The Art of Transposition*, the 11th Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions 2019. In a talk session during this festival, Makino mused that dreams might be collages of memories, and said that his early collages were created before he began making films in earnest. The interesting thing here is that *still in cosmos*, *Anti-cosmos*, and *Cosmos and Anti-Cosmos* can all be linked to his perspective on collage works, which are another one of the key points in this exhibition. (Please see Makino's statement for an explanation of the new films and collage works.)

Collages are weightless. This exhibition also displays some early collages, but the focus is on those whose production was concentrated in the pandemic period. I understand that a considerable number will be on display. I was able to see about 10 images of the collages slated to be shown, and each was masterful. Makino is dynamite in this genre as well. His collages are marked by an awesome power of cohesion pulling toward the inside of a rectangular frame and filling the picture with a mineral-type texture. And when this power reaches its zenith, it reverses, and soft and smooth images that seem to be floating in zero-gravity space gently stroke the skin, while staying permeated with their hard texture. The sensibility behind these works could only be termed amazing.

Utopia and dystopia. While immersed in the sensations springing from the collages, I let my mind contemplate artists producing them and thought of Q Ei for cohesive power and Toshiko Okanoue for flights into zero-gravity space. The collages of the two won praise in other countries as well as Japan. Works by the former were displayed at *Drawing Surrealism* (2012-2013), which was organized by the County Museum in Los Angeles, and works by the latter, at *Utopia/Dystopia: Construction and Destruction in Photography and Collage* (2012), which was organized by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston. (The latter museum also held a solo exhibition of Okanoue's works in 2002.)

"Restrained by accident". The title of one of the critiques contained in the catalogue of the latter exhibition where collages by Okanoue were shown likewise presents a contrast: "Dream and Disaster." The contrasts of utopia and dystopia, construction and destruction, and dream and disaster can be viewed as parallel to that of cosmos and anti-cosmos, and constitute a concept for taking an overview of collages and montages. In an approach to Makino's collage works, this concept could also function as a discussion point suggesting the nested relationship between thesis and antithesis. In this context, I would also like to reference *guzen no kosoku* ("restrained by accident"), a term used by Okanoue that brilliantly pinpoints the essence of and principle behind collages.

Collages made by hands in motion. The cohesive power in collages derives from restraint, and the flight into zero-gravity space derives from that of imagination brought by chance.

This is why collages are accidental restraints. As Makino noted in his statement, collages are made by putting the hands in motion. Nevertheless, he should be regarded as “lending a hand” to the creation of collages. The essence of collages lies in having plural images themselves take the leading role, control the collision and friction among them, and form a single picture. Collages are involuntary memories that surpass the productive acts of the expresser and are revealed by a process akin to automatic writing.

Films made by hands in motion. In his statement, Makino mentions the pandemic period, and writes that he “kept his hands in motion.” This remark reminded me of *Endless Cinema* (2017), a work that was shown in *IGNITION BOX 2016/17* at the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum. While absorbed in the images projected onto three screens, I got a strange feeling. Looking more closely, I noticed that the images on the left and right screens were moving a little at a time to overlap with those on the central screen. Eventually, the three sets of images were all superimposed on the central screen. Subsequently, those on the left and right began to move away, until there were again three screens with mutually different images. When the film was over, I was told that the effect was created by manually moving two projectors, and was astounded at the application of this analogue technique for what could be termed “multiple projection.”

Collages are multiple exposure. Makino set about making collages before he embarked on full-fledged production of films, and says that his discovery of possibilities in multiple exposure came from the principle behind collages. Made by physically combining and overlaying pictures, collages are opaque. But with multiple exposure, however many images are superimposed, the flashing lights merely become more complex; the images remain transparent. I should add that I received a fresh jolt from the technique of collage imaging, a new frontier blazed by Makino this time around. I am referring to *Microcosmos*, a new film made with collages. A sparkling surface of water appears and disappears behind a collage rendered semitransparent. Freed from materiality, the collage flies dynamically in the zero-gravity space of film.

Screening and exhibition. Makino has been putting effort into not only the production of films but also the practice of screening them. He has likewise been taking approaches to creating opportunities for shows on his own initiative. In addition, he has been given opportunities to exhibit films, as exemplified by his participation in the aforementioned Yebisu International Festival for Art & Alternative Visions (including the pre-event program) at the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, his solo exhibition at URANO (2018), and the *New Photographic Objects* exhibition (2020) at the Museum of Modern Art, Saitama. The film screening and exhibition that Makino is coming to grips with involve a fundamental issue, in the form of temporal axis films versus spatial axis films. This is an issue that must be

seriously addressed by not only the film producer but also the party organizing the program. Meanwhile, we must devote more energy to principle-based film criticism encompassing both screening and exhibition.

Ever climaxing. Makino has won numerous awards at film festivals around the world. He has been given many opportunities to screen works overseas, and has a sterling reputation internationally. He is also taking approaches to the exhibition of films, and will undoubtedly acquire a reputation befitting his unparalleled films in the museum domain as well. While voicing some perplexity about film “exhibits” in which it is difficult to control the act of viewing, he also said that all he had to do was to make films that are climaxes from beginning to end. I must add that, although I will have to wait until the start of the exhibition to actually experience it, this time too, the works will be accompanied by music / sound he directed, according to his statement. This has always been excellent, and I have no doubt that it will blow me away in this latest exhibition, too.

A blissful experience, again. *Takashi Makino: Collage and Anti-cosmos* is going to be held at ANOMALY in Tokyo from October 7 to November 4, 2023. This exhibition will show early and recent collage works, and two new films. It will be a splendid presentation to the whole world of the unparalleled, overwhelming quality imbuing his works. For its run, ANOMALY will definitely be at the top of the world as an exhibition space. I am convinced of this, and proud of it. At the end of this text echoing its beginning, I am surprised to see that the words of the “we” noted below are those of the “works of Takashi Makino.” Listen carefully to the what they whisper to you.

We have you.

We were born in the same age as you.

Takashi Makino gave birth to us, and you can experience us.

Do not miss the miracle happening here and now, inside you.

Gen Umezu