

Yutaka Matsuzawa

Psi Towards Vanishing

By Alan Longino

In 1988, Yutaka Matsuzawa (1922–2006) published the first edition of *Quantum Art Manifesto* bilingually in Japanese with his own English translation. Two more printings would follow, both in 1990. For Matsuzawa, Quantum Art was a “concept which is similar to that of the quantum in quantum physics,” one that would “finally break through the stagnation in the conceptual arts.”¹ Created as an artist’s book, *Quantum Art Manifesto* represented the culmination of a long career: a focused, highly conceptual art practice as an architect in the 1940s, a poet in the early 1950s, and as an artist from then on until his death in 2006 at the age of 84.²

Through Quantum Art, Matsuzawa invited future readers, viewers, and participants to conceive of a world where objects, bodies, images, and matter become less defined, more permeable, and bound together in limitless intimacy. The art critic Midori Ishikawa writes, “the reason why Matsuzawa calls it ‘Quantum Art’ is because theoretical phys-

ics at last fortified his earnest wish to contact the higher reality in the spiritual world... the manifestation is literally a call to mankind for the purpose of community in this spiritual method.”³

This exhibition at Yale Union, Matsuzawa’s first solo exhibition in the U.S., focuses on the contemplative possibilities in the work. The works span much of the artist’s career, from his concrete *Symbol Poems* from the 1950s, in which Matsuzawa began his exploration into communication without the barriers of language, to his more decisive and mature works, such as *Psi Corpse* (1964), *My Own Death* (1970), *The Nine Meditation Chamber* (1977), and *Swan Song* (1976), each marking a progressive step towards his final Quantum Art moment.

The publication of *Quantum Art Manifesto* in 1988 is auspicious, arriving just one year before the creation of the internet as well as Francis Fukuyama’s journal essay “The End of History?”⁴

1 Yutaka Matsuzawa, *Quantum Art Manifesto* (Tokyo: Okazaki Tamako Gallery, 1988; Portland, OR: Yale Union, 2019), 1.

2 For the life and art of Matsuzawa, there are three important publications. *Matsuzawa Yutaka: Supirichuarizumu e / To Spiritualism: Yutaka Matsuzawa 1954–1997*, exh. cat. (Kawaguchi: Kawaguchi Museum of Contemporary Art, 1997); Reiko Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness: International Contemporaneity and 1960s Art in Japan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016); and Yoshiko Shimada, et al., eds. *Niruvāna kara katasutorōfī e: Matsuzawa Yutaka to kyōkūkan no komyūn / From Nirvana to Catastrophe: Matsuzawa Yutaka and His “Commune in Imaginary Space”*, exh. cat. (Tokyo: Ota Fine Arts, 2017).

3 Midori Ishikawa, “Quantum Art: Post Hiroshima Psychotechnique,” in *To Spiritualism*, 86.

4 Francis Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, no. 16 (Summer 1989), 3–18. The book based on this essay is *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

The essay, which served as a starting point for his 1992 book *The End of History and the Last Man*, questioned—through a Hegelian lens—the concept of history having reached its end through the universalization of Western liberalism as the final form of human government and ideology, representing a complete takeover of mind and consciousness and eventually of the real and material world. Fukuyama did not proclaim that affairs and issues in the world would end, but contended that their realizations as moments of historical progress would no longer be a consideration due to the fact that they were already conceptually determined in an idealist universalization of the world.

Fukuyama's essay influenced political discourse through the next decade, and while his writings were primarily political and economic in nature, his ideas resonated with the earlier ideas of Matsuzawa and his concept of a universal, unbarred form of communication. Matsuzawa's *Symbol Poems* of the 1950s were the beginning realization of this dream to construct an "operational hypothesis on universal language."⁵ In his note on "Scrap for the Temporary Construction of Symbol Poem" of 1954, he equated this idea of universality with the idea of vanishing, using the analogy of chemistry: "when two divided parts of a vessel are filled with oxygen and nitrogen, and the partition is taken away, the gases mix and become something sim-

ilar to air. As the two diffuse, the whole entropy increases to the maximum point where it eventually increases no more. Here, oxygen and nitrogen mix evenly in a balanced manner, and no change is seen. This state! Nil!"⁶ As Ishikawa writes, this state is encapsulated in Matsuzawa's principle of vanishing, where "fusion = vanishment."⁷ The artist's focus on Vanishing would itself diffuse into all of his beliefs and concepts from then on.

Matsuzawa slowly and precisely laid out these concepts, or decisions towards a system of belief beginning in the mid-1940s when the young artist had moved on from being an architect and started to explore poetry. As the artist recalls, ". . .at first I was writing poems. Then, I realized it could be understood only by the Japanese people. [. . .] since I wished to create the kind that could be understood by global people, I began to use signs."⁸ The poems that resulted were not based in any language, but instead were composed of diagrams or symbols, arranged loosely but with an eye to relationships and associations. If looked at as code or secret language, these *Symbol Poems* would be as difficult to crack or comprehend as any enigma or encrypted dataset. At this early point, Matsuzawa was developing a language that let go of the parameters and syntax of any known language, where the message is instead received internally, quietly, letting the universe envelop from within.

For Matsuzawa, an important approach in conveying this sense of immateriality was his adoption of the Greek character Psi (Ψ). Psi is the ever-presentness, both of psychic and physical forces, that is never seen but only sensed, coalescing minds with images and objects and every moment of information in between. For him, its prefix to psychic or psychological properties placed the mental and conceptual qualities of the work and the visitor as the primary concern. However, what pushed the symbol into a new realm of consideration was Matsuzawa's interest in the character as also representing the wave function and the shifting, uncertain states at subatomic levels within quantum mechanics. Ψ was a symbol that conveyed the shifting nature of the universe, between real and non-real.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Matsuzawa had attempted to show these concepts of Psi (read *Pusai* in Japanese) in material form—through the use of sculpture, installation, and paintings. It was not until 1964 that the true conceptual turn took place for Matsuzawa. On June 1, 1964, he received a voice telling him to "vanish matter."⁹ Thinking on the impact of this revelation, he then began to formulate *Psi Corpse* (1964), on view in this exhibition.

For years, Matsuzawa dedicated time to building out and forming in an area of his home what

became known as *Psi Zashiki Room*. This room, which is covered floor-to-ceiling and cheek-by-jowl in collaged items, sculptures of found and created objects that lay on the floor or hang from rafters, and previous paintings or works by the artist, becomes, in its completeness, a single body of work. *Psi Zashiki Room* was, as experimental video artist and photographer Kō Nakajima recalls it, the artist's concept of the "world after death."¹⁰ I was fortunate enough to visit the artist's home in Shimo Suwa in November of 2018 and experienced within the room a fuller sense of the universe passing through and beyond me and the images surrounding me. This idea of a "world after death" was not just an off-hand remark by Matsuzawa to the younger Nakajima, but a core concern of the artist's work.

Death is indeed the main subject of his 1970 work, *My Own Death*, which consists of one or two panels, marking the entrance(s) to an empty room. The text on the panel, both in Japanese and English, asks the viewer to reflect on the artist's death along with the trillions of previous, and future, deaths of humans to come. In its original form at *Tokyo Biennial 1970: Between Man and Matter*, Matsuzawa understood that the visitor would pass through his room demarcated by two panels at two entrances and most likely not linger. The form of the work shown here reflects the

5 Matsuzawa, "Jihitsu nenpu" [Auto-chronology], *Kikan* [Organ], no. 13, special issue on Yutaka Matsuzawa (1982), 45; quoted in Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness*, 48.

6 Matsuzawa, quoted in Ishikawa, *To Spiritualism*, 84.

7 Ishikawa, *To Spiritualism*, 84.

8 Matsuzawa, in conversation with Mokuma Kikuhata, "Pusai no hako no naka de" [In the box of Psi], in *Kikan*, no 13, 14; quoted in Ishikawa, *To Spiritualism*, 84.

9 Matsuzawa's account of what exactly he heard in his Revelation changed over the years, as Tomii notes. However, she extrapolates from his post-Revelation works that "matter" was more at stake than *objets* in his thinking in the mid-1960s. See Tomii, *Radicalism in the Wilderness*, 62–67, 24n57. (The French *objets* was adopted in Japan to mean "readymade or junk objects.")

10 Matsuzawa's words, as recollected by Kō Nakajima in his public conversation with guest-curator Reiko Tomii for *Radicalism in the Wilderness: Japanese Artists in the Global 1960s*, an exhibition at Japan Society Gallery, New York, on March 10, 2019. Nakajima visited Matsuzawa in Shimo Suwa to photograph his *Psi Zashiki Room* in 1969.

LIST OF WORKS

All works are by Yutaka Matsuzawa and in the collection of Kumiko Matsuzawa.

1 *Contemplate a White Circle on This White Sheet of Paper (Swan Song)*
この一枚の白き和紙の中に (白鳥の歌)
1976
Silkscreen print
90 x 90 cm (35¼ x 35¼ in.)
Framed: 104.1 x 104.1 cm (41 x 41 in.)
First exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1976

2 *Vitrine*
Quantum Art Manifesto
量子芸術宣言
1988/1990
Artist's book, published by Okazaki Tamako Gallery, Tokyo
Original edition, 2nd printing
25.4 x 17.9 x 0.6 cm (10 x 7⅙ x ¼ in.)

Matsuzawa Yutaka Solo Exhibition V.1010
松澤宥 個展 V.1010
1967
Letterpress print
39.1 x 30.2 cm (15⅜ x 11⅞ in.)
English translation by Reiko Tomii

The Nine Meditation Chamber
(instruction sheets)
九想の室
1977
2 handwritten and typed sheets
18 x 25.6 cm each (7⅞ x 10⅙ in.)
Instruction for the installation at São Paulo Biennial in 1977

3 *The Nine Meditation Chamber*
九想の室
1977
Wall: 12 handwritten and typed sheets
18 x 25.6 cm each (7⅞ x 10⅙ in.)
Framed: 27.9 x 34.3 cm (11 x 13½ in.)

Floor: 9 sheets of white paper on plinths
Paper: 90 x 90 cm each (35⅙ x 35⅙ in.)
Plinths: 110 x 110 x 25.4 cm each (43¼ x 43¼ x 10 in.)
First exhibited at São Paulo Biennial in 1977

4 *Psi Corpse*
プサイの死体遺体
1964/1995
9 sheets; offset lithograph, 2nd printing
38.4 x 26 cm (15⅛ x 10¼ in.)
Framed: 53.6 x 40.9 cm (21⅛ x 16⅞ in.)
English translation by Reiko Tomii
First exhibited at Independent '64, Tokyo

5 *Vitrine*
Catechism Art
1973
Artist's book, published by Art & Project, Amsterdam
21 x 9.8 cm (8¼ x 3⅞ in.)

Art & Project Bulletin 84
1975
Letterpress print
29.7 x 21 cm closed (11⅝ x 8¼ in.)

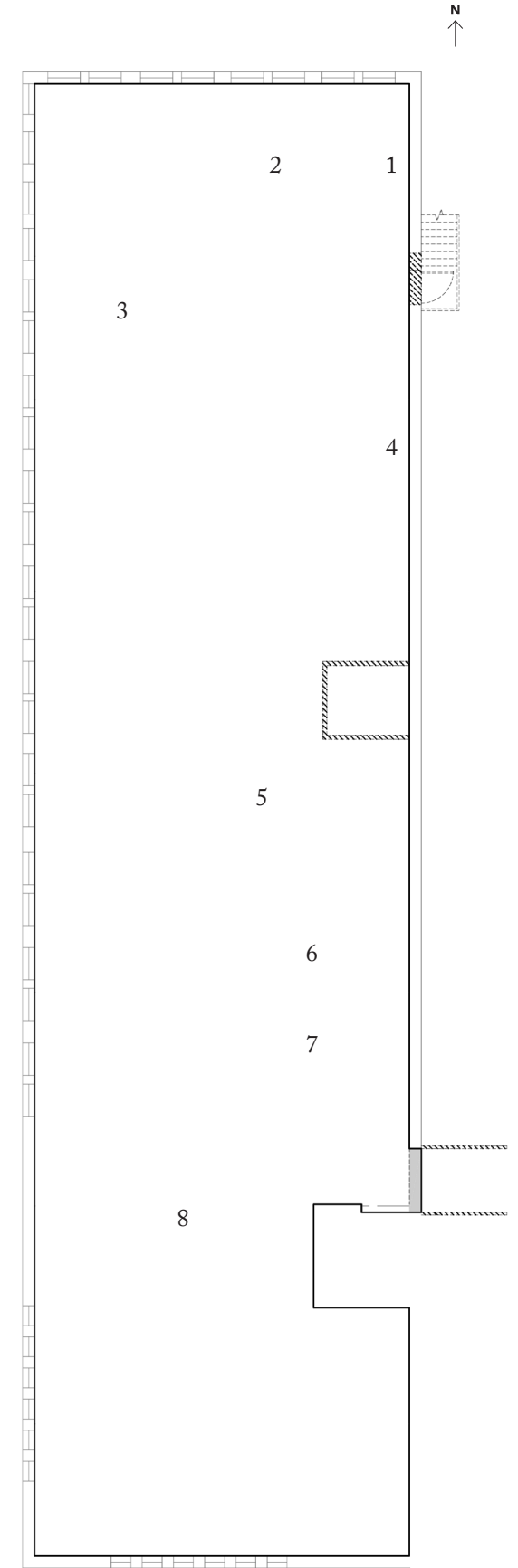
5 *Vitrine (cont.)*
Art & Project Bulletin 42
1971
Letterpress print
29.7 x 21 cm closed (11⅝ x 8¼ in.)

Art & Project Bulletin 21
1970
Letterpress print
29.7 x 21 cm closed (11⅝ x 8¼ in.)

6 *Vitrine*
Matsuzawa Yutaka: ψ Box
松澤宥 ψの函
1983
Artist's book, published by Zōkeisha, Tokyo
Box: 30.5 x 30 x 5.5 cm (12 x 11¾ x 2½ in.)
Selections from *Art via Color*, *Art via Matter*, *Art via Act*, and *ψ Chamber* folios

7 *Vitrine*
Matsuzawa Yutaka: ψ Box
松澤宥 ψの函
1983
Artist's book, published by Zōkeisha, Tokyo
Box: 30.5 x 30 x 5.5 cm (12 x 11¾ x 2½ in.)
Complete *Poem via Symbol* folio

8 *My Own Death*
私の死
1970
Photostat panel
91 x 91 x 3.2 cm (35¾ x 35¾ x 1¼ in.)
First exhibited at Tokyo Biennial 1970: Between Man and Matter



second iteration shown in Bologna and Tokyo in 1992; with just one entrance/exit, it is a room one might enter and pass through briefly or linger in contemplation on this coalescence of souls.

Its somber nature may be immediately understood by the visitor, but its practical and conceptual information represents merely the surface of the artwork. What is important in *My Own Death*, as well as other works by Matsuzawa, is what transpires after the exhaustion of the body's sensory recognitions which, in themselves, do not complete it as an artwork. Sense data can only be the initial foray into an understanding of a work's life beyond its objecthood. As Matsuzawa's friend and art critic Yūsuke Nakahara wrote for the artist's first *Art & Project Bulletin* in 1970, "his aim is to separate the physical qualities of the object from the invisible essence of its matter, which Matsuzawa calls Psi (Ψ)."¹¹ Nakahara went further to describe this art as a "meta-art"—one that "does not present anything to people, but instead inspires them."

Going further, I would say that Psi is what connects minds and bodies with each other and the world around them.

Thirty pieces of fabric and nine concrete and wood plinths in this exhibition are a curatorial sugges-



Matsuzawa performing with his *Banner of Vanishing (Humans, Let's Vanish, Let's Go, Let's Go, Gate, Gate, Anti-Civilization Committee)* (1966) at Mount Misa, Shimo Suwa, Japan in 1970. Photo © Mitsutoshi Hanaga

tion of the presence of this connection to the world. Frequently used by Matsuzawa—whether in his *Invitation to Psi Zashiki Room* (1963) or most famously in his pink fabric *Banner of Van-*

ishing (1966)—the color pink denotes this connection with the world beyond the material. The nine low plinths are composed of concrete and thick maple plywood. The concrete, an industrial material, is almost ready to fall apart and reintegrate back to the soil, while the maple tree, that of nature and the world, holds firm and lifts the spirit upwards.

Installed on the nine plinths and on the surrounding walls, *The Nine Meditation Chamber* (1977) offers a less severe, more serene consideration of Psi. In this work, Matsuzawa invites the visitor to reflect on nine individual ideas outlined on the instructions on the walls, while gazing at nine sheets of white paper laid out on the floor arranged in the form of a 3x3 Diamond World mandala. The first four ideas are elemental: Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind. The remaining five are conceptual: Space, Consciousness, Time, Catastrophe, and Nirvana. With this odd yet precise list, Matsuzawa creates an equivalence between the most primal of materials with the most ethereal of concepts for contemplation. Matsuzawa decisively arranges their becoming: Placing the elementals first, he then ties space and consciousness together, and time with catastrophe. In the end there is Nirvana. One must travel through each, and understand their relative progression, to see how one ends at Nirvana.

In Matsuzawa's oeuvre, perhaps the most spiritually evocative work is *Swan Song* (1976). The text in the work asks that the viewer may, at its end, "Hear a swan song at this very site." This exhibition, in many ways, is conceived as an experience of finality, a swan song, of sensing a spiritual connection to that which has moved on from the world and meditating on the essence it leaves behind. Within the past year, both the small team at Yale Union and I have experienced great loss through the deaths of important people in our lives: YU, their executive director, Yoko Ott; myself, my sister, Lauren Longino. Matsuzawa understood that catastrophe follows with time, and in the immediacy of time today, where history almost seems nonexistent, we are met constantly with trauma. In relationship to this increase of informational catastrophe, Matsuzawa sought instead to give space and consciousness to those around us, to consider them more deeply and intimately, and to connect with each other more fully. Matsuzawa hypothesized that humanity would vanish by 2222,¹² as by that time bodies and minds would understand each other so fully, and be in such close proximity to each other in all their shifting nuance and identity, that equivalence and intimacy would be felt immediately. Spirits, from past, present, and future, would be experienced at a level proclaimed within Matsuzawa's *Quantum Art*.

11 Yūsuke Nakahara, "Matsuzawa and 'Meta-Art,'" in *Art & Project Bulletin 21* (Amsterdam and Tokyo: Art & Project, 1970), 4.

12 After he first formulated the idea of Vanishing of Humankind in 1966, Matsuzawa used different dates for the eventual vanishing. However, on February 2, 1971, via his second *Postcard Painting* series, he announced this date, 2222, according to a numerological significance based on his date of birth, February 2, 1922.

Yutaka Matsuzawa

Co-curated by Alan Longino and Reiko Tomii

June 30–August 18, 2019

Thursday–Sunday, 12–6pm

The curators wish to thank the Matsuzawa family—Kumiko, Yoko, and Haruo—for their support and guidance for this project. They also wish to thank Jeff Rothstein, Rachel Valinsky, Nebahat Avcioglu, Louwrien Wijers, Paul Goede, Yoshiko Shimada, Misa Shin, Daniel Kiss, Jan Kaps, Rodney & Taka Nonaka-Hill, Namiko Kunimoto, Matt Jay, Go Hirasawa, and Ann Adachi-Tasch from Collaborative Cataloging Japan.

Alan Longino wishes to thank his co-curator, Reiko Tomii, for sharing her scholarship in preparing this exhibition and essay as well as Lisa Radon for her insightful editorial suggestions.

Yale Union wishes to thank its supporters and volunteers, as well as Emily Collier Johnson, Rose Mackey, Chris Chandler/Neu Haus Press, Neville Radon-Kimball, Lisa Radon, and Michael Getz. This program is subsidized by the the Japan Foundation, the James F. and Marion L. Miller Foundation, and the Oregon Arts Commission.



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