DEVALS

Biography

I create works with the perspective of admiration for nature. I believe that my job is to convey the richness of nature to viewers.

— Nobuo Sekine

Nobuo Sekine was born in Saitama, Japan, in 1942, and over the course of his life emerged as one of the most radical and quietly transformative figures in postwar Japanese and international art. A sculptor by practice but, in many profound ways, a philosopher of matter and perception, Sekine redefined the relationship between the essence of the object, space, and beholder, forging a visual language that still reverberates across contemporary art today.

His work, deeply rooted both in Eastern sensitivity and in a rigorously analytical intellect, stands at the nexus of Zen reflection, topology, and elemental physicality, a union that became the driving force behind the movement he helped originate and sustain: Mono-ha, the School of Things.

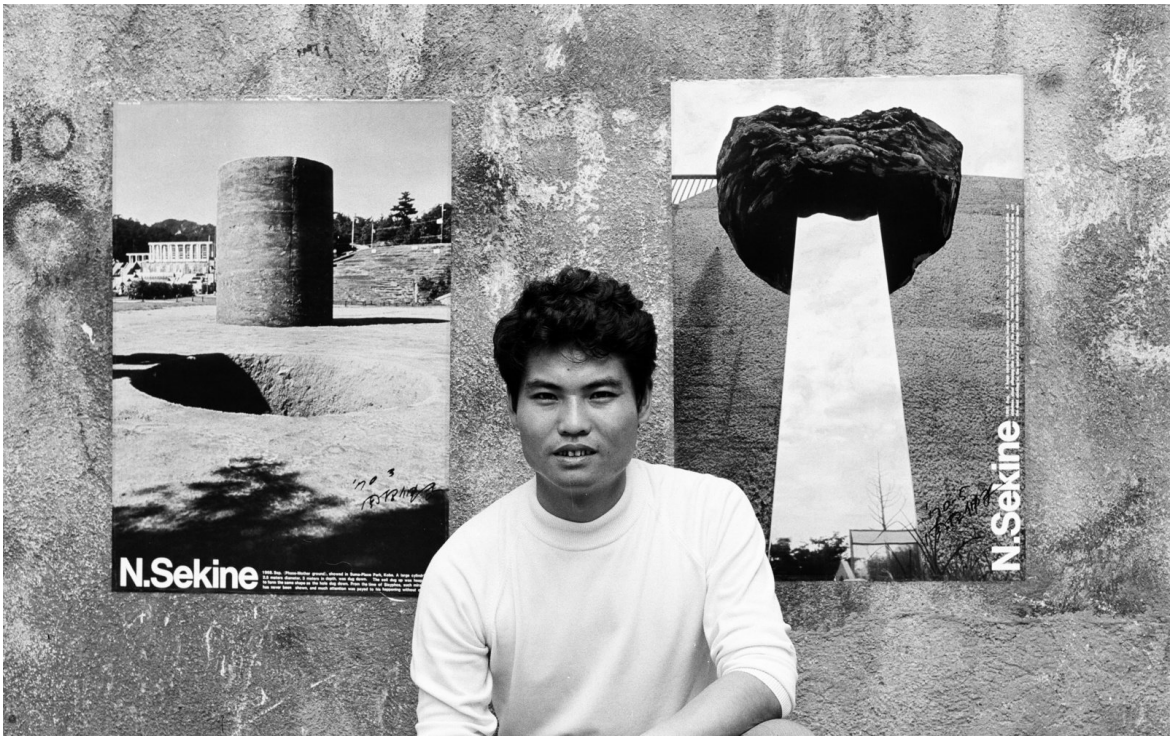


Fig. 1 Sekine outside of Galleria La Bertesca, Genoa, Italy, 1970, Photo: Yoriko Kushigemachi.

Sekine arrived in Tokyo in the early 1960s to study painting at Tama Art University, during a period of dramatic cultural flux. Japan was reshaping itself, politically, socially, and aesthetically, as a generation of artists sought alternatives to both traditional craft and the imported forms of Western art. At Tama, Sekine studied under influential teachers such as Jirō Takamatsu and Yoshishige Saitō who themselves challenged conventional approaches; it was here that he began to probe questions of form, presence, and spatial relation with increasing intensity.

By the late 1960s, Sekine had shifted his attention from two-dimensional surfaces to the physical presence of sculptural matter. Crucially, his early experiments were not about shaping material into classical forms but about exploring the idea of presence itself, not as an imposed shape but as something revealed in direct encounter. This philosophical orientation, later articulated as *"not making"* (*tsukuranai koto*), became one of the guiding principles of his practice and helped lay the conceptual groundwork for Mono-ha: an art of *things as they are*, not as transformed.

In October 1968, Sekine completed the groundbreaking work that marked the beginning of the Mono-ha movement and defined a new era in Japanese contemporary art. At the First Open Air Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition in Kobe's Suma Rikyū Park, he embarked on an undertaking of extraordinary simplicity and depth: *Phase—Mother Earth*. Rather than sculpting an object, Sekine dug a cylindrical hole 2.7 meters deep and 2.2 meters wide and, working alongside fellow artists, compacted the excavated earth into a cylinder of exactly the same dimensions placed beside the void.



Fig. 2 Installation view of *Phase—Mother Earth (1968), 1st Kobe Suma Rikyū Park Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition,* October 1–November 10, 1968, Photo: Osamu Murai.

Unlike any conventional sculpture, this pair of void and mound existed in a tense equilibrium, a perfect inversion of presence and absence, inside and outside, form and formlessness. Sekine conceived it as a type of "thought experiment in topology", a way of making physical the abstract patterns of space itself. The work was also an embodiment of his belief that art should not *make* something out of nature but rather reveal the world in its own terms. In many respects, *Phase—Mother Earth* engages with a dialectic that the American pioneer Michael Heizer would explore two years later in a different way, through the lens of the opposition between negative and positive space in *Double Negative* (1969–70).

Following this foundational work, Sekine developed a series of related investigations under the rubric of "Phase." These pieces explored various materials, water, sponge, oil clay, not as transformed objects but as presence-bearing phenomena revealing their own conditions of being. *Phase of Nothingness—Water* (1969) juxtaposed two containers holding identical volumes of water, despite differing external forms, underscoring hidden continuity beneath perceptual difference.

These pieces were not isolated curiosities but part of a coherent intellectual project: to explore material autonomy and presence without aesthetic imposition, a core tenet of Mono-ha. The term itself, "School of Things", underscores the group's shared commitment to the thing-in-itself, encountered unmediated by symbolism or narrative.



Fig. 3 Nobuo Sekine, *Phase of Nothingness—Water*, 1969
Photo: Joshua White

By 1970 Sekine was already recognized as a major figure in international art. That year he was invited to represent Japan at the Venice Biennale, where he installed *Phase of Nothingness*: a massive stone balanced atop a mirrored stainless-steel column that reflected the world around it, making the stone seem to float. Here, the artwork became a complex negotiation with space itself.

Critics of the time noted that Sekine did not "make" a sculpture in the traditional sense but rather precipitated an awareness of material and space as inseparable and coexistent. This insight resonated deeply with philosophical traditions, from East Asian conceptions of emptiness and presence to Western inquiries into topology and phenomenology, situating Sekine's work at a rare crossroads of aesthetic and conceptual depth.[1]



Fig. 4 Nobuo Sekine, *Phase of Nothingness—Black*, 1978
Installation view, Städtische Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, 1978

Sekine's own practice evolved through public sculpture, installation, and continual investigation of space and matter. His work has been shown in major exhibitions worldwide, from solo shows in Tokyo, Humlebaek, Milan, and Nagoya to landmark surveys such as *Minimal* at the Bourse de Commerce, *Japanese Art after 1945: Scream Against the Sky* at the Guggenheim Museum of New York.
In 1978, the exhibition *Nobuo Sekine: Sculptor* traveled to the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in Düsseldorf, Germany; the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, Denmark; the Kröller-Müller Museum in Otterlo, the Netherlands; and the Henie Onstad Art Center in Høvikodden, Norway.
His pieces have also been included in *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant Garde* at MoMA, New York, and *Japon des Avant-Gardes* at the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

[1] More Recently, art critic Sawaragi Noi theorized Mono-ha in relationship to the principles of mono no aware "the pathos of things." See Sawaragi Noi, "Mono-ha and Mono no Aware" (Mono-ha to mono no aware) in *Japanese Contemporary Art* (Shincho-sha: Tokyo), 141-171.



Fig. 5 Sekine working, 1970, photographer unknown.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2024

Nobuo Sekine: Phase of Nothingness—Skin, YOD Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2023

Nobuo Sekine Sculptures 1970, Devals, Paris, France

Toki-no-Wasuremono, Tokyo, Japan

2019

Phase of Nothingness—Skin, Asia Art Center, Taipei, Taiwan

Nobuo Sekine 1942–2019, Kamakura Gallery, Kamakura, Japan

2018

Gallery Seiho, Tokyo, Japan

2017

Phase of Nothingness—Skin, YOD Gallery, Osaka, Japan

2015

MOCA Pacific Design Center, West Hollywood, CA

2014

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA

2011

Re-creations 1970/2011, Kamakura Gallery, Kamakura, Japan

Monogatari, Shanghai Sculpture Space, Shanghai, China

2010

BE-UP-ART, Tokyo, Japan

2009

Center Gallery, Yokohama, Japan

Kawagoe Gallery, Kawagoe, Japan

2008

Gallery Bijutsu Sekai, Tokyo, Japan

Gallery Art Composition, Tokyo, Japan

PYO Gallery, Seoul, South Korea

2007

Center Gallery, Yokohama, Japan

Gallery Bijutsu Sekai, Tokyo, Japan

Shina Gallery, Kyoto, Japan

2006

Saint Paul Gallery, Maebashi, Japan

Gallery Bijutsu Sekai, Tokyo, Japan

2005

Gallery Bijutsu Sekai, Tokyo, Japan

MANIF 11! '05 SEOUL, Seoul Art Center, Seoul, South Korea

2004

Movement, Feeling, Environment, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Beijing, China

Art Dune, Hamamatsu, Japan

Phase of Nothingness—Black from '78–'79, Kamakura Gallery, Kamakura, Japan

2003

Kawagoe City Art Museum, Saitama, Japan

2001

Art Dune, Hamamatsu, Japan

1999

Museum Shokyodo, Aichi, Japan

1998

Saint Paul Gallery, Maebashi, Japan

1997

Kawagoe Gallery, Kawagoe, Japan

Art Dune, Hamamatsu, Japan

1996

Archaeology of Phase—Mother Earth, Otani Memorial Art Museum, Nishinomiya, Japan

1995

Gallery Art Point, Tokyo, Japan

Galleri Akern, Kongsberg, Norway

1994

Art Dune, Hamamatsu, Japan

1993

Sakura Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Onishi Gallery, Kyoto, Japan

1992

Museum Shokyodo, Aichi, Japan

Soko Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1991

Kawagoe Gallery, Kawagoe, Japan

Tenmaya Department Store, Okayama, Japan

Anshindo Gallery, Shizuoka, Japan

Art Dune, Hamamatsu, Japan

1990

Tenjuen, Niigata, Japan

Soko Museum, Niigata, Japan

Atelier Gallery, Niigata, Japan

Sogo Department Store, Hiroshima, Japan

Seibu Department Store—Studio 5, Tokyo, Japan

Mitsukoshi Department Store, Tokyo, Japan

1989

Kodosha, Ichinoseki, Japan

Gallery Lamia, Tokyo, Japan

Chikugo Gallery, Kurume, Japan

Mitsui Gallery, Matsudo, Japan

Gallery TAK, Yokohama, Japan

Susono Art House, Susono, Japan

Kozaido Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Kobundo Gallery, Obihiro, Japan

Gojuichiban-kan Gallery, Aomori, Japan

Gallery Picasso, Maebashi, Japan

Katsuyama Isozaki Hall, Fukui, Japan

Stempfli Gallery, New York, NY

Umeda Modern Art Museum, Osaka, Japan

1988

Gallery M, Obama, Japan

Art Dune, Hamamatsu, Japan

Kozaido Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Nishida Gallery, Nara, Japan

Soh Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Anshindo Gallery, Shizuoka, Japan

Gallery Kura, Kitakyushu, Japan

We Gallery, Omiya, Japan

1987

Ginza Jiyugaoka Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Gallery Te, Tokyo, Japan

Kawagoe Gallery, Kawagoe, Japan

Sakura Gallery, Nagoya, Japan

Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1985

Akiyama Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1983

Sekine and Environment Art Studio, Stripe House Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1982

Sekine's Prints and Sculptures: Cross Country 7500Km, Kaneko Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1981

Kaneko Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Sakura Gallery, Nagoya, Japan

1980

Kaneko Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1978

Nobuo Sekine: Skulptor 1975–1978, Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf, Germany; traveled to Louisiana Museum of Art, Humlebæk, Denmark; Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands; Henie-Onstad Art Centre, Høvikodden, Norway

1977
Kaneko Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Sakura Gallery, Nagoya, Japan

Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1976
Gallery Dori, Tokyo, Japan

1975
Sakura Gallery, Nagoya, Japan

1973
Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1971
Gallery Krebs, Bern, Switzerland

Gallery Birch, Copenhagen, Denmark

1970
Galleria La Bertesca, Genoa, Italy

Genoa Gallery Modulo, Milan, Italy

1969
Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Selected Group Exhibitions

2025
Minimal, Bourse de commerce - Fondation Pinault, Paris, FR

2024
Thirty Years: Written with a Splash of Blood, BLUM, Los Angeles, CA

2023
Inhabiting Time, Pinault Collection, Laennec Chapel, Paris, France

Push, Vibrate, Scrape, Crash, Move, Stephane Simoens Contemporary Fine Art, Knokke, Belgium

Fusion in Serendipity, The Yang Arts Collection, Taipei City, Taiwan

Re: Startline 1963–1970/2023 Sympathetic Relations between the Museum and Artists as Seen in the Trends in Contemporary Japanese Art Exhibition, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan

2022

Form in Formlessness, Powerlong Art Center, Shanghai, China

Open Storage: 25 Years of Collecting, curated by Allan Schwartzman, The Warehouse, Dallas, TX

Visual Natures: The Politics and Culture of Environmentalism in the 20th and 21st Centuries, Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology, Lisbon, Portugal

2021

The Time Capsule, Cang Art Museum, Hangzhou, China

2020

To Be Determined, Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX

2019

DECODE: Events & Materials—The Work of Art in the Age of Post-industrial Society, Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Japan

Tribute to Mono-ha, Cardi Gallery, London, UK

Mono-Ha: The Art of Nothingness, Aki Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan

2018

The Surface of Things, Kamakura Gallery, Kamakura, Japan

Minimalism: Space. Light. Object., National Gallery, Singapore

1968 Art of Turbulent Times, Chiba City Museum of Art, Chiba, Japan; traveled to Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Kitakyushu, Japan

2017

Who Can Be Strangers? The Art of Mono-ha and Dansaekhwa, Blum & Poe at Adrian Rosenfeld Gallery, San Francisco, CA

Art and Space, Guggenheim Bilbao, Spain

Dark Style, Kamakura Gallery, Kamakura, Japan

Two Rocks, Baahng Gallery, New York, NY

2015

Geometries On and Off the Grid: Art From 1950 to the Present, The Warehouse, Dallas, TX

Gatherings, Fergus McCaffrey, New York, NY

Mono-ha, Fondazione Mudima, Milan, Italy

Mono-ha: Works on Paper, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

Takahashi Collection: Mirror Neuron, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Material and Perception: In Search of the Roots of Mono-ha, Yukososya and Impact Hub Kyoto, Kyoto, Japan

Proportio, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, Italy

2014

The Hara Museum Collection at 35, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan

Mono-ha Artists, Museum of Contemporary Art, Karuizawa, Japan

Group "Genshoku" and Ishiko Junzo 1966–1971, Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan

Mono-ha, Tabloid Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Mono-ha by Anzai: Photographs 1970–1976, Zeit-Foto Salon, Tokyo, Japan

Other Primary Structures (Others 2: 1967–1970), Jewish Museum, New York, NY

2013

Prima Materia, Punta della Dogana, Venice, Italy

Tricks and Vision to Mono-ha, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

Parallel Views: Italian and Japanese Art from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, The Warehouse, Dallas, TX

2012

Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, CA; traveled to Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany

Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde, Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA

2011

Gallery's Collection Exhibition: Mono-ha, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

The World of Ishiko Junzo: From Art via Manga to Kitsch, Fuchu Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

2010

Masan Munsin International Sculpture Symposium, Munsin Art Museum, Masan, Korea

Tokyo Gallery + BTAP 60th Anniversary Exhibition, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

Yanpyon Environment Festival, Korea

Printing Exhibition of Shanghai World Expo 2010, Shanghai, China

Micro Salon 60, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

2009

Drawing Story I 1960–1990, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

2008

Tamagawa Art Line Project, Tokyo, Japan

Art Scene Revived, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

2007

What is Mono-ha?, Beijing Tokyo Art Project, Beijing, China

Nobuo Sekine & Mitsukuni Takimoto, Yokohama Portside Gallery, Yokohama, Japan

2006

Public Art, Gallery NOVITA, Aomori, Japan

Memorial for Yoshiaki Tono, Gallery TOM, Tokyo, Japan

Mono-ha: Lee Ufan, Kishio Suga, Nobuo Sekine—from the 1970s, Soh Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

2005

Reconsidering Mono-ha, National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan

2004

Kim Tschang-Yeul, Sekine Nobuo & Susumu Sakaguchi, Gallery Bijutsu Sekai, Tokyo, Japan

The New Tokyo Gallery Exhibition, Tokyo Gallery + BTAP, Tokyo, Japan

A Secret History of Clay: From Gauguin to Gormley, Tate Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

2003

The 20th Anniversary of Gallery Q, Gallery Q, Tokyo, Japan

2002

Sculpture Project, Busan Biennale, Busan, Korea

Memorial for Yoshishige Saito, Kawamura Gakuen Art Hall, Tokyo, Japan

2001

Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis, Tate Modern, London, UK

Mono-ha, Kamakura Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Mono-ha, Kettle's Yard Art Gallery, Cambridge, UK

Retrospective Exhibition for Nagaoka Museum Prize 1964–68, Niigata Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Niigata, Japan

2000

Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, Korea

Modern Art of Japan, Monet de Paris, French National Mint Bureau, Paris, France

1998

Lumieves—Light—Rediscovery of Stained Glass, TN Probe, Tokyo, Japan

1997

Modern Art from a Collector's View Point: Yamamura Collection, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe, Japan

Street Museum, Kawagoe, Japan

1996

Inside and the Outside of Art, Itabashi Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1995

Archeology of Phase—Mother Earth, Otani Memorial Art Museum, Nishinomiya, Japan

Japanese Culture: The Fifty Postwar Years, Meguro Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan; toured Hiroshima, Fukuoka and Hyogo prefectural museums

46th Venice Biennale: ASIANA Contemporary Art from The Far East, Palazzo Vendramin Calergi, Venice, Italy

Matter and Perception 1970: Mono-ha and the Search for Fundamentals, Museum of Fine Arts Gifu, Japan; toured Japan and France

1994

Landscape of Stone, Dockyard Garden, The Landmark Tower Yokohama, Japan

Mono-ha, Kamakura Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Different Natures, La Virreina, Barcelona, Spain

Memorial for Yaeko Fujita: Artists and Sakura Gallery, Nagoya, Japan

Japanese Art after 1945: Scream against the Sky, Yokohama Museum of Art; traveled to Guggenheim Museum SoHo, New York, and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

ASIANA Contemporary Art from the Far East, Italy

1993

Imura Art Gallery, Kyoto, Japan

Konishi Gallery, Kyoto, Japan

Oomitsu Collection, Niigata City Art Museum, Niigata, Japan

Différentes Natures, Visions de l'Art Contemporain, Paris, France

Exposition Différentes Natures, Galerie Art La Défense, Paris, France

Reconstructed and Quotation, Itabashi Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1992

Avantguardie Giapponesi degli anni 70, Galleria Comunale d'Arte Moderna di Bologna; traveled to Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1991

Gallery Gen-Group Show, Tokyo, Japan

70's–80's Contemporary Art: Mono-ha, Kamakura Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1990

Yokohama Business Park, Yokohama, Japan

1989

Japanese Open-Air Sculptures, Middelheim Museum, Antwerp, Belgium

1988

Mono-ha: La Scuola delle cose, Museum Laboratorio di Arte Contemporanea, Rome, Italy

Seen by Hands, Seibu Department Store, Yurakucho, Tokyo, Japan

1987

Art in Japan since 1969: Mono-ha and Post Mono-ha, Seibu Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan

Nobuo Sekine and Koji Enokura Recent Print Works, Naruse Murata Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Gallery Group Exhibition, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1986

Mono-ha, Kamakura Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Lee Ufan, Nobuo Sekine, Kishio Suga: Methods of the 1970s, Soh Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Le Japon des Avant-Gardes, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

1984

Human Documents '84/'85-3, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Art of Present Time: Wood and Paper—Dialogue with Nature, Gifu Prefectural Museum, Japan

Development of Contemporary Sculpture, Gallery Seiho, Tokyo, Japan

Sculpture Japonaise Contemporaine, Galerie Jullien-Cornic, Paris, France

1983

Figure of Wood and Esprit, Saitama Prefectural Museum, Japan

1981

The 1960s: A Decade of Change in Contemporary Japanese Art, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; traveled to Kyoto

Modern Japanese Sculpture, Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Japan

Japanese Contemporary Art, Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, Seoul, Korea

1980

History of Contemporary Sculpture, Kanagawa Prefectural Hall Gallery, Japan

1977

Japan Art-Festival, Tokyo Central Museum, Tokyo, Japan

Voices in the Modern Age, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1976

10th International Biennale Exhibition of Prints in Tokyo, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan

1975

Contemporary Art Exhibition from 1950 to 1975, Central Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1974

Two-Man Show with Kuniichi Sima, Gallery Coco, Kyoto, Japan

11th Tokyo Biennale, Tokyo, Japan

Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition of 20 Artists, Tokyo Central Museum, Tokyo, Japan

Japan Art Exhibition, Germany

Contemporary Sculpture Symposium, Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Japan

1973

8th Japan Art-Festival, Tokyo, Japan

11th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1971

10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

Tokyo Gallery 1971, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1970

Fine Arts Exhibition, Expo Museum of Fine Arts, Expo '70, Osaka, Japan

35th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy

Human Documents '70-3, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1969

6th Paris Biennale, Paris, France

9th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1st International Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition, Hakone Open-Air Museum, Japan

9 Visual Points, Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Tricks & Vision: Stolen Eyes, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Trend of Japanese Contemporary Art, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan

Japanese Artist Drawing, Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1968

OOXPLAN, Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

8th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan

1st Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition, Suma Palace Park, Kobe, Japan

5th Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Nagoya, Japan

1967

Two-Man Show, Tsubaki Kindai Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

11th Shell Art Exhibition, Tokyo, Japan

OOOPLAN, Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

Universiad, Tokyo, Japan