

Miyajima Tatsuo: Art and Technology

By Iseki Masaaki

During the period of Japan's booming economy, domestic artists produced a wide range of techno-art, such as kinetic and environmental art, using innovations in technology as a motive force. These styles developed alongside similar trends in Europe and the United States, and many unique artists gained prominence, including internationally renowned so-called "video artists" such as Yamaguchi Katsuhiko, Yamamoto Keigo and Iimura Takahiko to name a few. Now, Miyajima Tatsuo has inherited the limelight to become one of today's top "techno artists."

Miyajima does not use video as a direct medium in his works. Simply put, the media of his art are numbers generated by an automatic digital counter. Digital number displays have deeply permeated our everyday lives, seen everywhere from watches and electronic calculators to message boards. What is interesting about Miyajima is the modern feel of his work, which uses digital technology itself as a means of expression.

In Miyajima's series of installations entitled "133651," a digital counter (light-emitting diode) generates repeating digits that blink on and off along with a geometrical image, creating a cosmic symbol that extends beyond the concept of time.

The digital counter is set up on a printed-wire circuit controlled by a single integrated circuit. Each unit of the digital counter is called a "gadget," and Miyajima's first was created in 1988. His "13365" series is composed of 10 gadgets arranged in a line which generate precisely 13,365 possible combinations of numbers, hence the title.

After spending some time with this work, one realizes that the numeral zero is absent and that each different combination remains lit for a different period of time before blinking off to be

replaced by another. In the ever-revolving cycle of numerals 1 through 99, one can imagine a representation of the Buddhist concept of *samsara*, the soul's endless journey through the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Miyajima has given spatial dimensions to his concept of time. For techno-art, this relationship between time and space seems to be a basic and intrinsic element of artistic expression.

One may question, however, whether groups of numbers lined up on the wall or floor are, in fact, true art. Miyajima responded when he explained the fundamental concept behind his work in 1987: "It is eternal. It is eternally changing. It is interrelated with all things." Put another way, his art directly symbolizes the entire universe or every possible form of communication. He seems to be presenting a new definition for the future "borderless" world.

To simply include modern technology in art is no guarantee that the works produced incorporating technology will bring something new to art. It is now recognized that science should not necessarily be identified as technology, but that science can stand on the same stage as art. The possibility inherent in Miyajima Tatsuo's high-tech art is that it may be recognized as an expression of the modern destruction of the concept of nature as at opposite poles from science.

Miyajima drew international attention with his exhibits at the 1988 Venezia Biennale's Aperto Exhibition. In recent years, he has been invited to represent modern Japanese art in many overseas exhibitions and is now well-known on the international stage. ■

Iseki Masaaki, an art critic mainly in the field of history of Japanese and Western modern art, is a professor at Meisei University in Tokyo.



"Region No. 106754—No. 106802," 1991, photo by Yazumi Hiroyuki



"Opposite Circle," 1991, photo by Yazumi Hiroyuki