

AY-O (愛嘔)

Born 1931, Ibaraki, Japan

Lives and works in Japan and New York

Biography

AY-O (愛嘔), born Takao Iijima in 1931 in Ibaraki, Japan, is a pioneering Japanese avant-garde artist whose practice encompasses painting, printmaking, sculpture, installation, performance, and environmental art.

After graduating from the Tokyo University of Education in 1954, AY-O became associated with the Demokrato Artists Association and participated in the Japanese postwar avant-garde. He moved to New York in 1958 and became closely involved with the international Fluxus movement, establishing relationships with artists including George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Yoko Ono, and other members of the international avant-garde.

From the mid-1960s, AY-O developed his distinctive Rainbow works, transforming the spectrum of colors into paintings, prints, environments, objects, and performances. His practice expanded the concept of the artwork beyond the visual field toward tactile, spatial, and participatory experience.

AY-O represented Japan at the 1966 Venice Biennale and subsequently developed an extensive international career through exhibitions, biennials, museums, public projects, and large-scale Rainbow events.

His work is held in major international collections including The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Whitney Museum of American Art; Centre Pompidou, Paris; British Museum, London; and M+, Hong Kong. MoMA currently lists more than 90 works by AY-O in its online collection.

Education / Early Career

1954

Tokyo University of Education, Department of Fine Arts, Tokyo, Japan

1953

Joined the Demokrato Artists Association.

1953

Participated in the Japan Independent Exhibition.

1955

First solo exhibition at Takemiya Gallery, Tokyo.

1957

Participated in the 1st Tokyo International Biennale of Prints.

1958

Moved to New York.

1962

Met George Maciunas and became involved with the international Fluxus movement.

AY-O's early career developed within the Japanese postwar avant-garde before expanding into the international experimental art networks of New York and Fluxus. His early chronology is also documented by Japanese museum collections and institutional biographies.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

1955 — Takemiya Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1963 — Gordon's Fifth Avenue Gallery, New York, USA

1966 — Zwirner Gallery, Cologne, Germany

1971 — Minami Gallery / Minami Tensei Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

1977 — World Trade Center, New York, USA

Rainbow Laundry Event

1979 — Ikeda 20th Century Museum of Art, Shizuoka, Japan

The World of AY-O

1980 — Fukuoka Art Museum, Fukuoka, Japan

AY-O Print Exhibition

1987 — Paris, France

Rainbow Eiffel Tower Project

1991 — Emily Harvey Gallery, New York, USA

1992 — New Museum, New York, USA

Rainbow Happening Series

1994 — Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany

1997 — Shimo-yama Museum of Art, Nyuzen, Japan
AY-O: Beautiful Hometown / For Nyuzen

2006 — Fukui Prefectural Museum of Art, Fukui, Japan
Over the Rainbow: AY-O Retrospective 1950–2006

2009 — Mitaka City Gallery of Art, Tokyo, Japan
Rainbow Kiju: AY-O Exhibition

2010 — Ibaraki Museum of Art, Tsukuba, Japan
AY-O 1950s–2010

2012 — Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan
AY-O: Over the Rainbow Once Again

2012–13 — Niigata City Art Museum / Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Japan
Traveling retrospective

2019 — Karuizawa New Art Museum, Nagano, Japan
AY-O: Rainbow 88

2023 — Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C., USA
AY-O's Happy Rainbow Hell

2023–24 — M+, Hong Kong
AY-O: Hong Hong Hong

Selected Group Exhibitions

1966 — 33rd Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Represented Japan

1967 — Vancouver International Biennale, Canada
Special Prize

1972 — Krakow International Print Biennale, Poland
Łódź Art Museum Prize

1973 — Fluxshoe, Oxford, United Kingdom

1974 — Japan Show, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark

1975 — Ljubljana International Biennial of Graphic Arts, Slovenia

Secretary General's Prize

1976 — The Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA
Ay-O Mr. Rainbow is Drunk — 38 Screenprints

1978 — International Original Drawing Exhibition, Rijeka, Yugoslavia

1980 — International Painting Triennial, Warsaw, Poland
Warsaw National Museum Prize / Wrocław National Museum Prize

1980 — Krakow International Print Biennale, Poland
Bronze Medal

1980 — Listowel International Graphic Art Biennial, Ireland
First Prize

1985 — Taiwan International Print Biennial
Bronze Medal

1986 — Seoul International Print Biennial, South Korea
Excellent Prize

1990 — Japan Art Grand Prize

1994 — Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany

2023 — Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C.
AY-O's Happy Rainbow Hell

2023–24 — M+, Hong Kong
AY-O: Hong Hong Hong

AY-O's international career includes major biennials, Fluxus exhibitions, print exhibitions, and museum presentations across North America, Europe, and Asia. His institutional chronology is consistent with Japanese museum records and AY-O's own institutional archive.

Selected Projects / Major Events

1964–65
Rainbow Environment / Rainbow Tactile Staircase Environment, New York

1965 onward
Development of the Rainbow series and Rainbow Environments

1977

Rainbow Laundry, World Trade Center, New York

1986

Rainbow Event, Eihei-ji, Fukui, Japan

20-meter Rainbow project

1987

Rainbow Eiffel Tower Project, Paris

Approximately 300-meter Rainbow installation/event

1990s–2000s

Expansion of Rainbow works into large-scale prints, paintings, installations, environments, and participatory projects

2023

AY-O's Happy Rainbow Hell, Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C.

The Rainbow practice is central to AY-O's international identity, but it developed alongside his tactile works, Fluxus activities, performances, and environmental projects. The Smithsonian exhibition specifically presents the Rainbow works in relation to his broader avant-garde practice.

Awards / Prizes

1967

Special Prize, Vancouver International Biennale

1970

Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art Prize, 7th Tokyo International Biennale of Prints

1972

Łódź Art Museum Prize, Krakow International Print Biennale

1975

Secretary General's Prize, Ljubljana International Biennial of Graphic Arts

1975

Japan Art Festival — Minister for Foreign Affairs Prize

1980

Warsaw National Museum Prize, International Painting Triennial

1980

Wrocław National Museum Prize, International Painting Triennial

1980

Bronze Medal, Krakow International Print Biennale

1980

First Prize, Listowel International Graphic Art Biennial, Ireland

1985

Bronze Prize, Taiwan International Print Biennial

1986

Excellent Prize, Seoul International Print Biennial

1990

Japan Art Grand Prize, 22nd edition

2011

Gen Yamaguchi Grand Prize

AY-O's awards include recognition from major international print biennials in Canada, Poland, Slovenia, Ireland, Taiwan, and South Korea, as well as major Japanese art awards.

Selected Museum Collections

International

United States

- The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
- Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, D.C.
- Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York
- Art Institute of Chicago
- Walker Art Center, Minneapolis
- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
- Brooklyn Museum, New York
- Detroit Institute of Arts
- Portland Art Museum
- Harvard Art Museums
- RISD Museum

United Kingdom

- British Museum, London

France

- Centre Pompidou / Musée national d'art moderne, Paris

Hong Kong

- M+, Hong Kong

Australia

- Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
- Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA), Brisbane

Ireland

- Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin

Taiwan

- National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts

Japan

- The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
- The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto
- The National Museum of Art, Osaka
- Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
- Mori Art Museum, Tokyo
- The Museum of Modern Art, Ibaraki
- Chiba City Museum of Art
- Miyazaki Prefectural Art Museum
- Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts
- The Museum of Modern Art, Toyama
- Meguro Museum of Art, Tokyo
- Hakone Open-Air Museum
- Yokohama Museum of Art
- The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama
- Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art
- Niigata City Art Museum
- Fukui Prefectural Museum of Art
- Mitaka City Gallery of Art
- Fukuoka Art Museum
- Ikeda 20th Century Museum of Art

Institutional collection records confirm AY-O's works in the collections of major Japanese museums, including the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, the National Museum of Art, Osaka, and other public institutions.