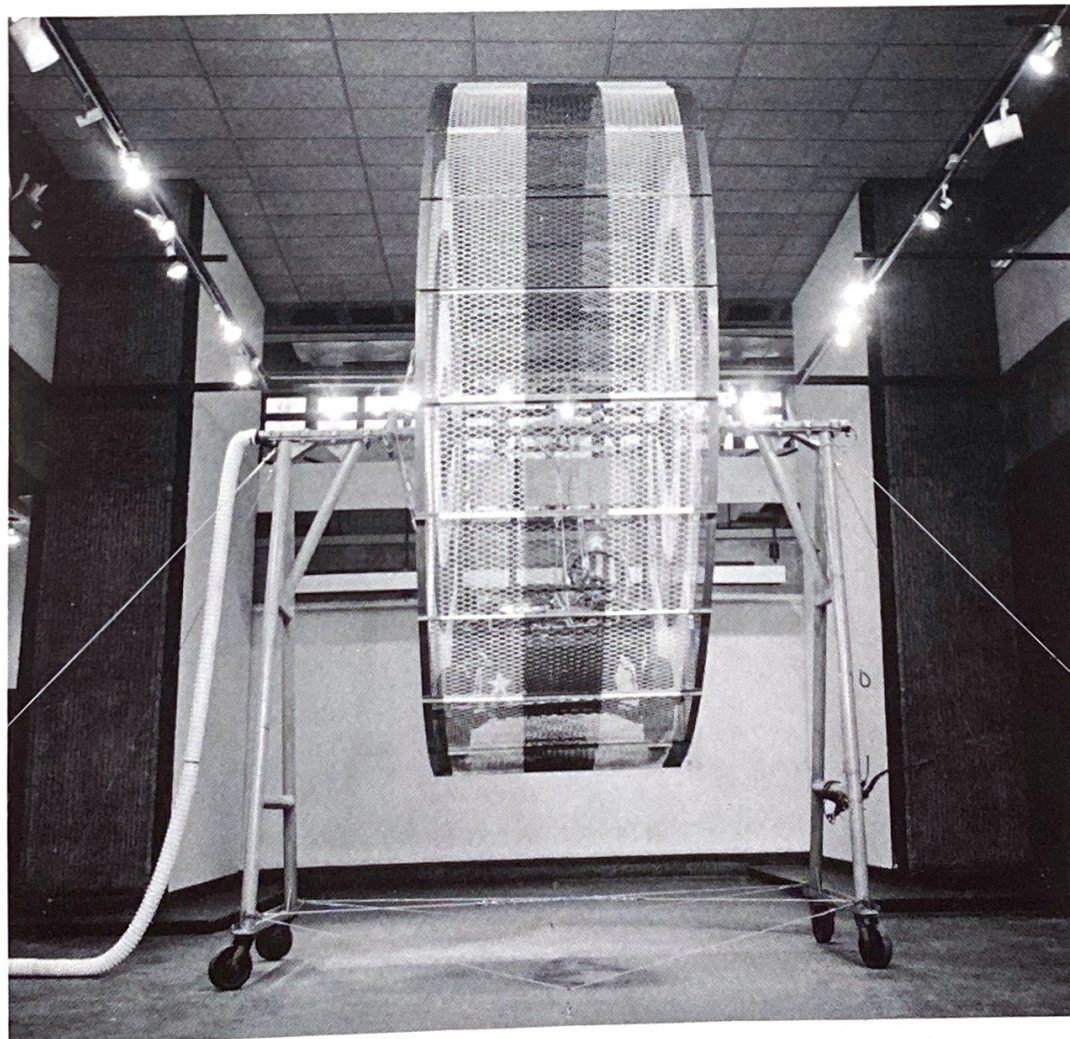


LEHMAN
COLLEGE
■ ART
GALLERY

YUKINORI YANAGI
THE WORLD FLAG ANT FARM
AND
WANDERING POSITION:
PROJECT—RED, WHITE AND BLUE



Yukinori Yanagi, PROJECT—RED, WHITE AND BLUE—WANDERING POSITION (gasoline car, steel)

Lehman College Art Gallery

September 26 - November 9, 1991

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Thirty-two-year-old Yukinori Yanagi was already recognized as one of Japan's most interesting young artists when he decided to come to the United States to study at Yale three years ago. There, Yanagi began to work with the American flag as a symbol of what he called "stability of place and/or nationalism."¹ He soon expanded this concept to include flags of all nations, as in *The World Flag Ant Farm*, an installation made with the intention of dissolving "the symbolic signs of stasis into an organic form that changes with time and circumstance."²

Yanagi's *World Flag Ant Farm*, is made up of 170 transparent plastic boxes, connected by tubes, mounted on the wall, and filled with colored sand; the boxes are replicas of the flags of the 170 current members of the United Nations. Within, thousands of ants toil incessantly, oblivious to the political implications of the partitions of their world. The ants carry grains of sand through the tubing from one box to the next, and by their wanderings, gradually transform all the flags into a single new image. In this work Yanagi is addressing the reality of the interdependence of nations versus the illusion of their separateness. He has said that his sculpture "looks toward a simple, equal, and hopeful way of expressing the world's gradual unification of all its nations."³ As events in Eastern Europe continue to unfold, the present *World Flag Ant Farm* will soon be obsolete, and Yanagi will need to reconfigure his piece to reflect current events. However, no matter how many flags he adds or deletes, the total number of flags will always add up to just one finite planet.

The concept of movement has occupied Yanagi for some time, and was important to his earlier works. Yanagi once stated, "I am interested in plans that will pave the way for the kind of installation and performance work that public museums can no longer accommodate."⁴ Past projects have included a series in which he brought huge soil balls into museum galleries. One of these he rolled into the gallery in imitation of a dung beetle; another was actually a large, helium-filled balloon

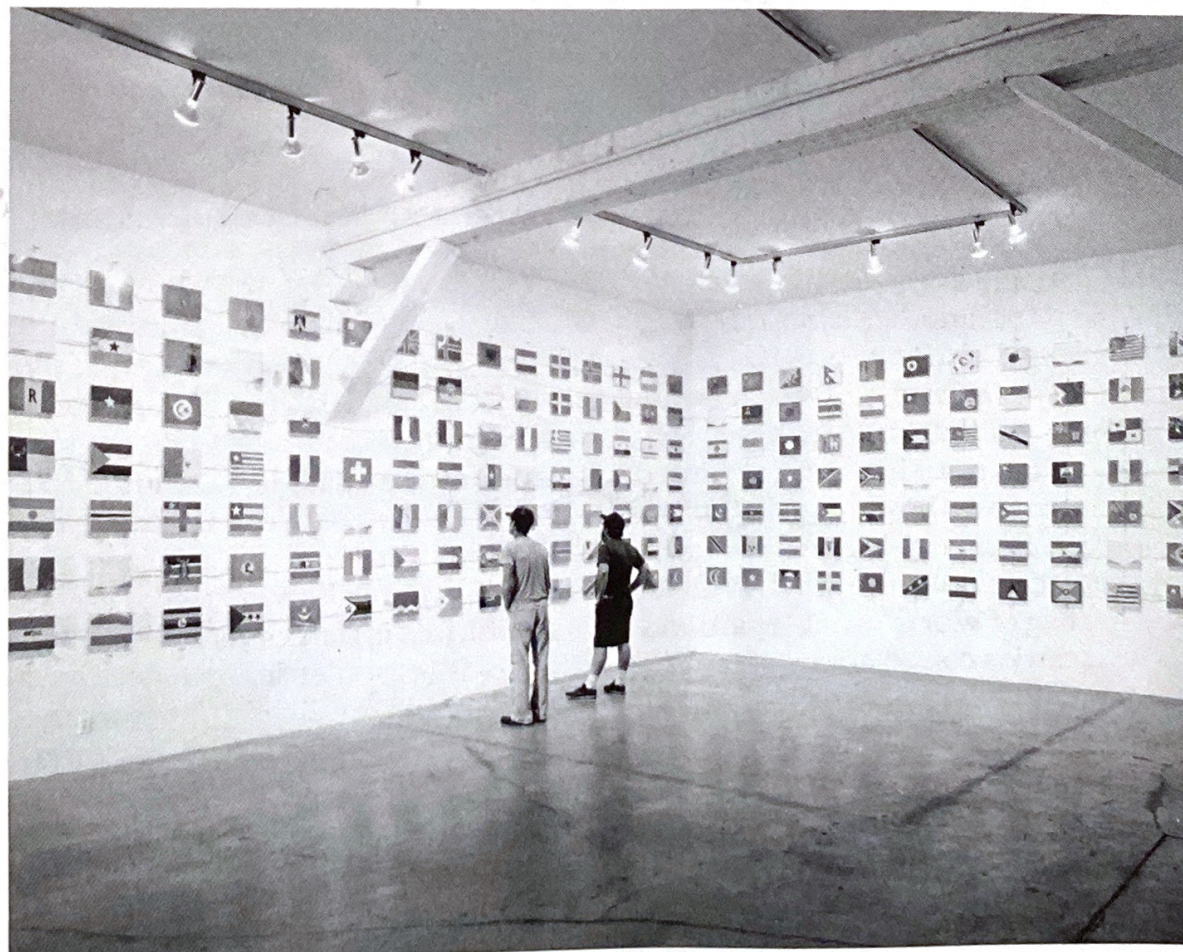
covered with dirt that threatened to invade neighboring galleries when released. As part of a series of "coloring projects", Yanagi transported drums of colored smoke to a gallery and released their contents into a sealed glass chamber, saturating everything including himself with color. For a project at the Kanagawa Kenmin Gallery, he drove a four-ton truck loaded with coffin-shaped boxes filled with dirt and ash into the museum, leaving the truck and boxes on display. The piece called attention to the act of transportation which is an essential, but unnoticed component of any art exhibit.

Yanagi has acknowledged the influence of a Mono-ha artist, Nobuo Sekine, on his work. Mono-ha ("The School of Things") and was a reaction to Western-inspired Pop, figurative, and illusionistic art of the late '60s. Like minimalism and Arte Povera, Mono-ha focused on sculpture and materiality, but its artists found their inspiration Eastern, not Western, concepts about art and life. Yoshige Saito, a pioneer of abstract painting in postwar Japan, taught several of the Mono-ha artists at Tama Art University, including Nobuo Sekine. Employing a teaching style

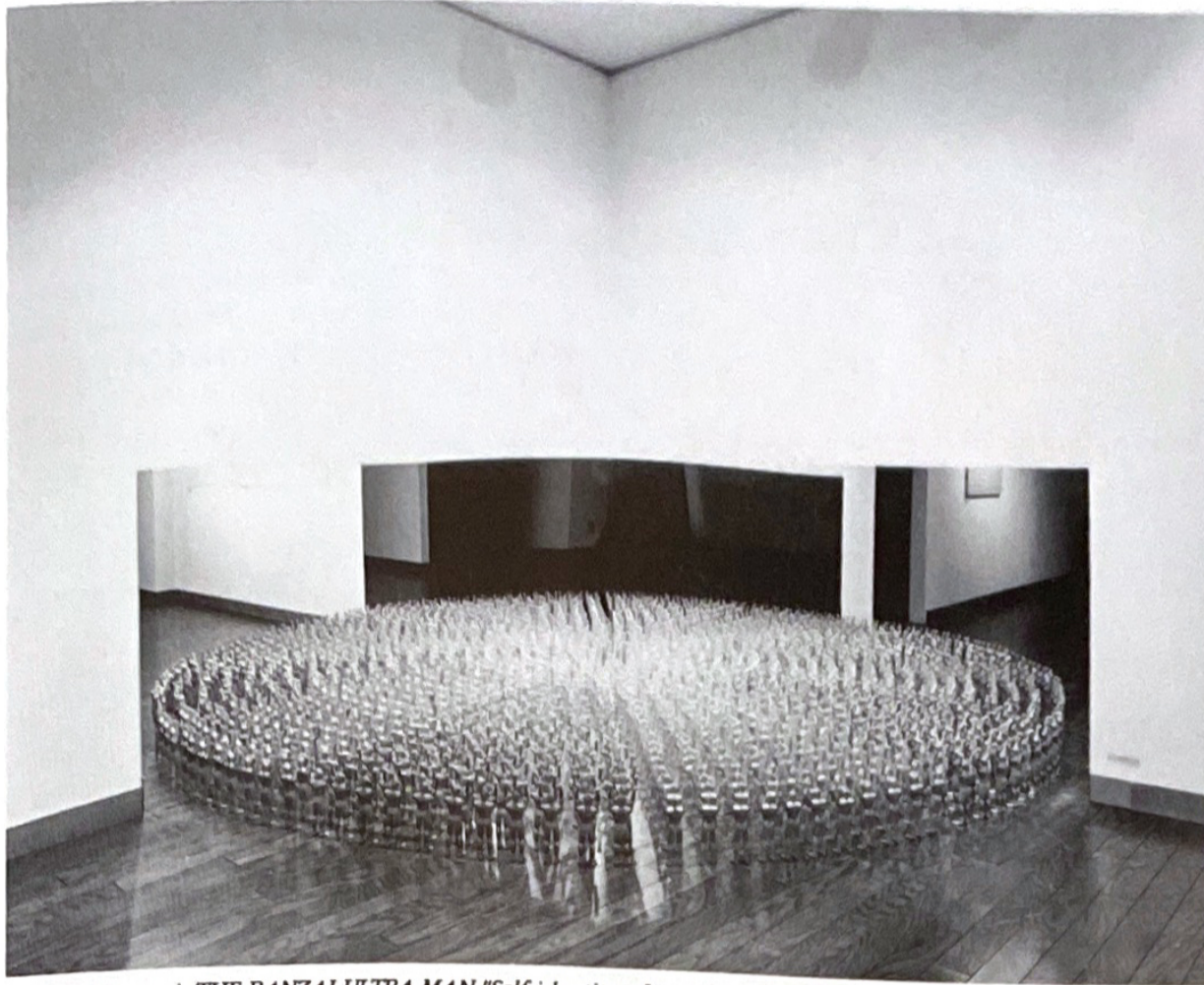
very different from the usual *sensei* style, Saito encouraged his students to question and think analytically rather than accept his teachings dogmatically. Nobuo Sekine, a site-specific sculptor, believed that artists do not actually "create" with materials so much as emphasize the truth of existing materials by rearranging them for presentation.

Yanagi's concentration on installations, his respect for the integrity of his materials, and his concern with illusion, all connect Yanagi to Mono-ha and Nobuo Sekine. His works are as much related to that Japanese art movement as they are to the new brand of conceptual art being practiced internationally.

Yanagi's use of movement in his works, has usually also included the concept of constraint. "Wandering" occurs, but within proscribed boundaries. *Wandering Position: Project - Red, White, and Blue* is one such work, consisting of a real automobile chassis painted blue with white stars confined within a steel-mesh wheel striped red and white. Like a hamster in its cage, the car can run furiously while remaining in one place. When traveling by car we, too, paradoxically remain in one



Yukinori Yanagi, *THE WORLD FLAG ANT FARM* 1990 (ants, colored sand, plastic)

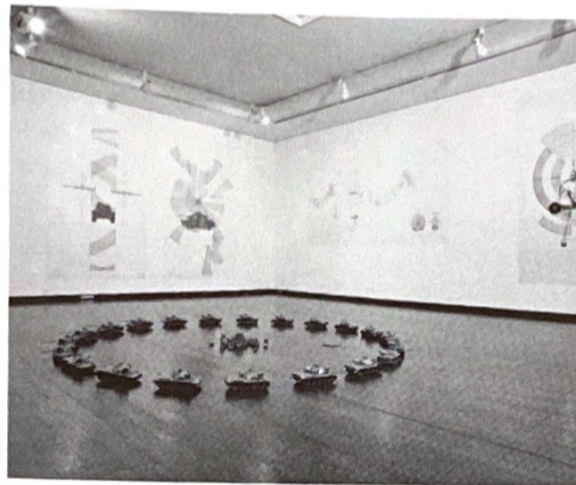


Yukinori Yanagi, *THE BANZAI ULTRA MAN "Self-identity-of-an-abs,ite-contradiction"* (500 toys, mirror)

cut off from the environment. Technological advances provide us with access to the whole world, but only as long as we remain close to our televisions, telephones, and fax machines. Yanagi says the work "portrays a mobile society standing still within the revolving sign of the flag.... America is a new society developed by people who wandered to find a new life. This newness is unique in the world and contrasts with the old secular culture of Japan. I am interested in observing travel which becomes permanent symbols of stability and personal histories."⁵

Project - Red, White, and Blue is the first of a planned series of works that will cloak icons of power and mobility within national flags. Yanagi has made drawings for another spinning flag, *Wandering Position: Project - Hi-nomaru, Self-Defense - S*, which would enclose a tank from Japanese Self-Defense Forces within a cage painted with a Japanese hinomaru flag. This hinomaru flag, a rising red sun with rays radiating out onto a white field, was the flag of World War II Japan, and as such carries connotations of imperialism and the Emperor system. While it is not the legal flag of contemporary Japan, it is still a powerful and controversial symbol. Although it is generally considered taboo as subject matter for artists, it has been the focus of a number of recent works by Yanagi. His investigations of the hinomaru have included:

Project Hinomaru, models of the Self-Defense tanks encircling a pile of miniature oil drums, a reference to the possibility of Japan's sending forces to



Yukinori Yanagi, *HI-NO-MARU 1990 (Self-defense) Wandering Position (mixed materials)*

Persian Gulf to protect oil sources;⁶ and *Hinomaru 1/36*, an installation at the Storefront for Art and Architecture, which changed the gallery's unusual shape from a triangle to a full circle through the use of mirrors, creating the flag by illusion. In a recent installation at the Hosomi Gallery in Tokyo, Yanagi used mirrors in the corner of the room, Robert Smithson-style, to reflect hundreds of red and silver Ultraman toys, (a figure with arms raised in bonzai greeting popular with Japanese children) to again create the illusion of the hinomaru. In a recent essay on Yanagi's work, critic Azby Brown has written:

Surprisingly, Yanagi is the only Japanese artist I am aware of today

who has chosen to investigate this symbol in a sincere manner. In this sense, it is no exaggeration to say that he is one of the only Japanese artists currently working with overtly political themes.... A small piece of the hinomaru can be multiplied by mirrors so as to seem immense and complete. The same is true for nation-states, particularly in this age of media. Other works, like the flag images made entirely of hanko or "Ultraman" toys, hint at nationhood as, on the one hand, based on the combined identities of individuals and, on the other, of childish fantasies of unlimited power.⁷

The Lehman College Art Gallery is extremely pleased to be able to present this exhibition. In today's complex world, Yukinori Yanagi's timely and thought-provoking works can help us to understand the illusions of our differences.

Jane Farver
Director,

Lehman College Art Gallery

1) Yanagi, Yukinori, from an artist's statement printed in an announcement for an exhibition at The Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York, N.Y., December 18, 1990 - January 19, 1991.

2) *ibid*

3) *ibid*

4) Yanagi, Yukinori, from a pamphlet, *Yanagi: Project 1986-1988* documenting various projects executed by the artist: artist's statement for a "Ground Transportation", a project at the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts, Feb. - Mar., 1987.

5) Yanagi, Yukinori, from an artist's statement printed in an announcement for an exhibition at The Storefront for Art and Architecture, New York, N.Y., December 18, 1990 - January 19, 1991.

6) The Japanese do not use the word *army* in referring to their military forces, calling them instead, the Self-Defense Force. Article IX of the Japanese constitution (as drafted by the United States but adopted by the Japanese in 1947) says that the Japanese forever renounce war and will keep no land, sea or air forces. However, as early as 1948 the U.S. National Security Force recommended the formation of a 150,000 man paramilitary police force, which became the Self-Defense Force (SDF) in 1954, and has since approximately doubled in size. It would take a revision of the law to allow any member of this force to travel overseas - even to take part in a U.N. peace-keeping mission.

7) Brown, Azby, from an essay for a brochure for an exhibition at the Hosomi Contemporary Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, March 22 - April 17, 1991.

YUKINORI YANAGI

YUKINORI YANAGI

Born in Fukuoka Prefecture, Japan

EDUCATION

- 1990 Yale University
Research Fellowship in Arts (Sculpture).
1985 Musashino Art University, Tokyo, Japan
Master of Fine Arts in Painting.
1983 Musashino Art University, Tokyo, Japan.
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting.

GRANTS AND PROJECTS

- 1988-90 Research Fellowship in Arts.
Yale University School of Art and Architecture
Artist in Residence.
1989 Yale School of Art and Music at Norfolk,
Connecticut
1987 Art Document '87, Grand Prize.
Tochigi Museum of Fine Arts, Tochigi, Japan.

SELECTED INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS

- 1991 Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions, Los
Angeles, CA.
Hosomi Contemporary, Tokyo, Japan.
Soh Gallery, Tokyo, Japan.
1990 The Storefront for Art & Architecture, New
York, NY.
Hillside Gallery, Tokyo, Japan.
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.
1988 Gallery am, Tokyo, Japan.
Fukuoka Museum of Art, Fukuoka, Japan.
Gallery 21, Fukuoka, Japan.
Ten Gallery, Fukuoka, Japan.
Soh Gallery, Tokyo, Japan.
Sohkasya, Shimane, Japan.
Michiko Fine Art, Hiroshima, Japan.
1987 Hillside Gallery, Tokyo, Japan.
1986 Gallery Natuka, Tokyo, Japan.
Gallery Center Point, Tokyo, Japan.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1991 New York Diary, P.S. 1, Long Island City, NY.
1990 Museum City Tenjin, Fukuoka, Japan.
1989 Outdoor Project in Norfolk, Norfolk, CT.
Drawing Show, Hillside Gallery, Tokyo, Japan.
Art Project in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi, Japan.
1987 Two-Person Exhibition, Soh Gallery,
Tokyo, Japan.
Party-2, Tokyo, Japan.
Group Show, Gallery Yoh, Tokyo, Japan.
Art Move in Ohkurayama '87, Kanagawa, Japan.
7th Open-Air Exhibition in Hajmamatu,
Sizuoka, Japan.
Art Document '87, Tochigi Museum of Fine
Arts, Tochigi, Japan.
The 1st Kanagawa Art Annual.
Kanagawa Prefectural Gallery, Kanagawa,
Japan.
1986 Underground Art Exhibition in Ohya, Tochigi, Japan.
Group Show, Gallery Yoh, Tokyo, Japan.
Open-Air Exhibition in Tokorozawa, Memorial
Park of Tokorozawa Airfield, Saitama, Japan.
17th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan,
Metropolitan Museum of Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan.

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1990 Park, Kyong D., "Wandering Position," *Essay for a
catalogue for an exhibition at the Hillside Gallery,
Tokyo, Japan* (September 19 - 30).
Sasyama, Hiroshi, "The Transport Relation between a
substance and a Concept," *Ikebana Ohara*,
(November).
1989 Kurabayashi, Yasushi, "An Ant Invades Gravity on the
Ground," *Bijutsu Techo*, (November).
1988 Yasuda, Hiroshi, "For the Place of Critical Observa-
tion," *Essay for a catalogue for an exhibition at the Soh
Gallery, Tokyo, Japan*.
Tani, Arata, "The Dung Beetle and Shelter," *Essay
for a catalogue for an exhibition Gallery am, Tokyo,
Japan*.
1987 Takeyama, Hirohiko, "Man Lives on the Earth. Insect
Lives There, Too," *Essay from a catalogue for an
exhibition at the Hillside Gallery, Tokyo, Japan*.
Fujishima, Toshie, "Thoughts on a Big Japanese Dung
Beetle," *Essay for a catalogue for an exhibition at
the Hillside Gallery, Tokyo, Japan*.

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