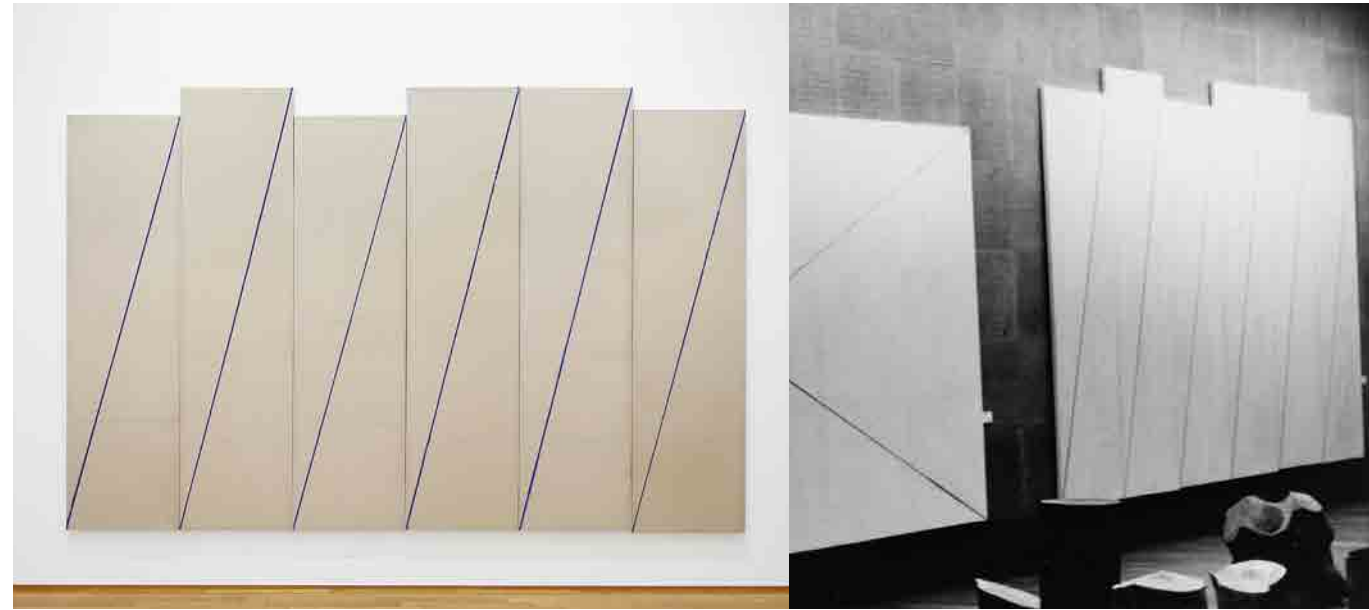


# Hitoshi Nakazato: 1968-1971 Tokyo

中里斉:1968-1971 東京



ARTCOURT Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by Hitoshi Nakazato (1936-2010).

Born in Machida, Tokyo, Nakazato graduated from Tama Art University in 1960 with a BFA in oil painting, and moved to the US in 1962. While attending graduate school at the University of Wisconsin, he was inspired by the methodologies of printmaking and systems engineering to pursue a career in abstract painting. After returning temporarily to Japan from 1968 to 1971, he went back to the US and was subsequently based in New York City. He was active in experimental printmaking at the graduate school of the University of Pennsylvania, where he taught, and explored new possibilities in two-dimensional expression by incorporating printmaking theories into painting as a primary means of realizing his ideas.

Throughout his life Nakazato pursued abstraction characterized by intelligence of line and brilliance of color, and he is known as an artist with affinities for the Color Field painting movement that flourished in the US in the 1950s and 1960s, but early in his career, during the three years he was back in Japan, he consistently produced monochromatic works composed entirely of straight lines. This body of work was created amid worldwide resistance against established values during those years, in the context of which the artist critically examined his own stance toward his art and deconstructed the existing framework surrounding painting, while also adopting the systematic approach to production he had learned in the US to create his own original style. This was also a point of departure for the development of his subsequent works composed of lines and planes of color.

“Why paint?” “What does painting that rejects existing concepts of painting look like?” Nakazato continued to confront these fundamental questions throughout his life, both as an artist and as a member of society. This was a process in which an artist working in the two media of painting and printmaking, and with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Japan and the US, Japanese and English) sought to construct his own artistic vocabulary by comparing the characteristics and weighing the disparities of these, and to orient his own life through creative action based on this vocabulary. This endeavor was united at a fundamental level by intelligence, curiosity, and a stance of constantly relativizing his place in the world and trying to imagine other possibilities for what he saw before his eyes.

The first solo show of his work in 12 years, this exhibition will present for the first time a comprehensive selection of early works, created while he was back in Japan, in which he first engaged with these issues. The exhibition also explores the essence of Nakazato’s work and its significance in art history by surveying his works from the 1970s and 1980s, when he explored the possibilities of color field abstraction beyond the bounds of formalist theory.

Left: Yo, Color on canvas, 316 x 485.5 cm (set of 6) | 1971 | Right: Installation view of 10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum, 1971

**| Exhibition |** \*Duration and event may change depending on the spread of COVID-19.

Exhibition Title: **Hitoshi Nakazato: 1968-1971 Tokyo** 中里斉: 1968-1971 Tokyo

Duration: September 24 (Sat.) - October 22 (Sat.), 2022 \*Closed on Sundays and Mondays

Venue: ARTCOURT Gallery 1F, 1-8-5 Tenmabashi, Kita-ku, Osaka 530-0042

Hours: 11:00am - 6:00pm [Sat. -5:00pm]

**| Talk event |**

**Akira Tatehata (Director of The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, President of Tama Art University)**

**September 24 (Sat.) 2:00pm -3:30pm**

\*RSVP required (Email [info@artcourtgallery.com](mailto:info@artcourtgallery.com)) \*Free admission (First 20 applicants)

Organized by ARTCOURT Gallery (Yagi Art Management, Inc.)

Sponsored by Mitsubishi Estate Co., Ltd., Mitsubishi Materials Coporation, Mitsubishi Jisho Property Management Co., Ltd.

## | Related Information |

**The exhibition of Hitoshi Nakazato is also held in Tokyo;**  
9/17 (Sat.) - 10/16 (Sun.), 2022

Venue: MEM

NADiff A/P/A/R/T 3F, 1-18-4,

Ebisu, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0013 Japan

<https://mem-inc.jp/en/>

## | Selected biography |

1936 Born in Machida, Tokyo.

1960 Tama Art University, Department of Painting, Majored in Oil Painting (BFA).

1962-64 University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Majored in Painting and minored in Printmaking (MS).

1964 First solo exhibition at St. James Gallery, Milwaukee.

1964-66 University of Pennsylvania. Studied with Piero Dorazio and Neil Welliver (MFA).

Created *Penn Series* systematically composing colors and shapes (lines).

1966-68 Received John D. Rockefeller III Foundation Grant, lived and worked in New York City.

1968 Traveled through Europe and the Middle East, returned to Japan.

In October, became senior lecturer in charge of dessin drawings at Tama Art University, assisted Komai Tetsuro’s printmaking class.

At the time, Tama Art University faculty included Yoshishige Saito, Jiro Takamatsu, Yoshiaki Tono, Yusuke Nakahara, and Ichiro Haryu.

In December, Tama Art University went under lockdown due to student protests (Bikyōtō). Participated in independent seminars held near campus.

1970 In March, created a mural in the Furukawa Pavilion at the World Expo ’70 in Osaka, Japan. Carl Andre, participating in the Tokyo Biennale, is invited to an independent seminar by Yusuke Nakahara. In response to Ichiro Haryu’s question, “Is it possible for art to become obsolete?” Carl Andre responded, “To make art is to imagine, and imagination is the agent of history. If we stop imagining, tomorrow will be a repetition of today.”

Upon hearing these words, Nakazato reaffirmed his ethos of expression.

In July, submitted *Chi Su Ma*, a work on canvas with sumi ink lines made using traditional Japanese carpenter tool, similar to chalk line used in west, to *The 5th Japan Art Festival Domestic Exhibition* held at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Received Excellence Prize (Minister of Education Award).

In August, received honorable mention at the 14th Shell Art Award.

In October, exhibited five works of his *Ichinchiani* Series in the *Artists To-day* exhibition ’70 at Yokohama Civic Art Gallery.

In November, held first solo exhibition in Japan at Pinar Galleries in Akasaka, Tokyo.

In December, included in *Contemporary Japanese Art* at the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The group show traveled to the University of California, Berkeley and Philadelphia Civic Center.

1971 In May, invited to exhibit a large six-panel work titled *Yo* and other works in *10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* at the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum.

Became ill due to stress from student protests. Doctor encouraged for him to leave Japan.

Traveled across Europe, and returned to the United States.

In September, becomes professor of printmaking at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Fine Arts. Taught until his retirement in 2008, served as Chair of the Fine Arts Department for five years in the 1990s.

1974-75 Received grant from New York State Creative Artists Public Service.

1982 Received grant from the U.S.-Japan Foundation for Environmental Urban Planning and Design Education, Ohio State University.

2010 On July 15, 2010, fell from a ladder in his studio and taken to the hospital.

Passed away at 11:31 p.m. on July 17 (July 18, Japan time). He was 74 years old.

## | Selected Solo Exhibitions |

2010 *NAKAZATO Hitoshi: New York/ Machida - Line Outside/ Black Rain*,

Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, Machida, Tokyo

2009 *After 55 Years*, Keikando Gallery, Obirin University, Tokyo [-’10]

*Hiroshima Revisited - Black Rain*, Pageant : Soloveev, Philadelphia [’05]

2007 *Hitoshi Nakazato - Painting Series*, The Ice Box, Philadelphia

2004 Muramatsu Gallery, Tokyo [’78, ’80, ’86]

2002 *Hitoshi Nakazato “Line Outside” from the Monado Series*, The Montpelier Cultural Arts Center, Maryland

2001 *Geo-Prospective*, The Ericson Gallery, Philadelphia [’99]

1999 Galleria Juliet, Trieste, Italy

1998 *50 Drawings*, Gallery Kuranuki, Osaka [’92]

1997 Tokyo Gallery, Tokyo [’77, ’79, ’82, ’89, ’93]

1987 *Hitoshi Nakazato/ Today and Yesterday*, Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

1986 AIP Gallery, Philadelphia

1981 “*Nakazato Hitoshi: Recent Work*”, organized by Yoshiaki Inui, Konan High School Art Salon, Hyogo

1970 Pinar Galleries, Tokyo

1968 Cheltenham Art Center, Philadelphia

1964 Saint James Gallery, Milwaukee

## | Selected Group Exhibitions |

2008 *The 30th Anniversary: Collection of the National Museum of Art, Osaka*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka

1995 *About Lines : Non-existing Modernism and Invisible Realism*, Itabashi Art Museum, Tokyo

1994 *Cross and Square Grids*, The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama

1987 *Painting 1977-1987*, The National Museum of Art, Osaka

1984 *Japanese Contemporary Paintings, 1960-1980*, Gunma Prefectural Museum of Modern Art

1979 *Contemporary Drawings: Philadelphia II*, Philadelphia Museum of Art

1977 *Prints in Series: Idea into Image*, Brooklyn Museum, New York

1973 *Japanese Artists in the Americas*, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo,

and National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

*The Art of Surface - A Survey of Contemporary Japanese Art -*,

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; traveled to Perth and other.

1971 *The Exhibition of Tokyo Gallery 1971*, Tokyo Gallery

1970 *10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan*, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum

*Contemporary Japanese Art*, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York,

Art Museum at the University of California, Berkeley, Philadelphia Civic Center [-’71]

*Artists to-day Exhibition ’70*, Yokohama Civic Art Gallery, Kanagawa

*Shell Art Award Exhibition*, Tokyo

*The 5th Japan Art Festival Domestic Exhibition*, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo

*“Outdoor Festival for Contemporary Art”*, Kodomo-no-kuni, Kanagawa

The exhibition titles of which official English translations are undefined are indicated in quotes (“ ”).

## | Main Collections |

Ohara Museum of Art, Okayama | Okayama Prefectural Museum of Art | Kyushu Sangyo University Museum, Fukuoka | The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto | The Japan Foundation | The National Museum of Art, Osaka | Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art | Setagaya Art Museum, Tokyo | Takamatsu Art Museum, Gagawa | Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo | Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts | Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo | Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art | Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, Tokyo | The Museum of Modern Art, Wakayama | Tikotin Museum of Japanese Art, Israel | National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. | The Museum of Modern Art, New York | Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery, Alabama | Philadelphia Museum of Art | Brooklyn Museum, New York | Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia | Moore College of Art & Design, Philadelphia | University of Montebello, Alabama



YAGI ART MANAGEMENT, INC.  
ARTCOURT Gallery



1970, photograph of solo exhibition at Pinar Galleries in Tokyo, Japan. The long canvases were exhibited in two tiers on several walls.



1970, photograph of solo exhibition at Pinar Galleries in Tokyo, Japan. 2000 drawings are stacked and displayed in two piles.



1970-71, photograph of *Contemporary Japanese Art* group exhibition at The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The two works on the right, hanging on the wall are by Nakazato. From left to right: *Ma Su Chi* and *Chi Su Ma*.



Nakazato circa 1970





## | Description |

Around the time he returned to Japan between 1968 and 1971, Nakazato encountered the anti-Vietnam war movement in the US and student protests at Tama Art University, where he was teaching. He experienced firsthand the spirit of a time when people sought to reject existing authority and values, and became skeptical about the very act of painting. Meanwhile, through his interaction with avant-garde artists, including those affiliated with Mono-ha, and art critics such as Ichiro Haryu and Yusuke Nakahara, he “understood the anti-establishment stance as a reexamination of established concepts of painting,”<sup>1</sup> and as an artist, he sought responses to problems facing society and directions for his own creative expression.

In Nakazato’s words, “I rejected figurative objects, abstract forms and colors, and even paint as a material.”<sup>2</sup> In this context, he limited the act of painting to drawing lines, and in an attempt to systematize the production of images, he used a Japanese carpentry tool, the *sumitsubo* (ink marker), and an American tool, the chalk liner, to make lines by applying a string dipped in ink or powdered chalk to the picture’s surface, or created two-dimensional works using methods that do not rely on conventional painting techniques, such as drawing lines on a long roll of canvas or 2,000 sheets of paper.<sup>3</sup> The seemingly rigid surfaces of the paintings incorporate elements reminiscent of accidents during physical movement or noise affecting technical systems, such as ink blotches, powdered chalk splashes, slanting lines inserted in the midst of parallel lines, and traces that have been erased and redrawn, pulling the viewer into spaces imbued with a certain fluidity that anticipates awareness of the act itself, temporality inherent in the flat surface, and deviation from control.

Nakazato’s endeavor to approach the essence of painting by deconstructing it to the most fundamental level, and carrying out the most basic, almost instinctive act of drawing lines, was highly acclaimed at the time. In 1970, his work *Chi Su Ma* was awarded the Excellence Prize at the domestic exhibition of the 5th Japan Art Festival (National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo), and from 1970-71, his works were featured in *Contemporary Japanese Art*, which traveled to the Guggenheim Museum in New York and elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> His stance of emphasizing action resulted in a system of engaging with rectangles of canvas by drawing diagonal lines to create two-dimensional planar spaces from material surfaces. *Yo* (1971), which was shown in the Invitational Section of the 10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan 1971 (Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum), is a concise and powerful work that evokes the origin of the artist’s goal: “a plane that is not for illusionistic purposes, and not material as a phenomenon in and of itself, but a plane that is only a plane.”<sup>5</sup>

Nakazato’s focus later shifted to coloring areas divided by lines and redefining the pictorial spaces he had deconstructed, through relationships between lines and planes of color and between color planes and other color planes. In the US, abstract painting was running up against the limitations of formalism, entering a state of crisis in which all painting was reduced to formal conditions. Under these circumstances, Nakazato deliberately readopted line and color as his working vocabulary, aiming in the 1970s and 1980s to create works that do not express specific meanings but also cannot be reduced to formal elements, rather expressing “Gestalt images, images as planes”<sup>6</sup> that can be experienced in terms of the contents of the paintings themselves.

In the artist’s words, “Painterly action means painting with greater spontaneity.”<sup>7</sup> By actively altering his established system of lines and planes, such as by leaving borders unpainted, shifting drawn lines with an oil stick, or displacing grids, during this period he produced numerous planar spaces brimming with dynamic tension in which the painting’s structure and the specific lines and colors mutually connect and interact. In a solo exhibition at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art in 1987, he presented a series of works<sup>8</sup> in a unique style, in which he juxtaposed pictorial spaces composed of bright colors and bold strokes with other 2D works known as “companion pieces,” which incorporate numbers, letters, and linear diagrams, enabling the viewer to experience two-dimensional images as richer and more complex spaces through their correlations while at the same time maintaining their autonomy. Those works conveyed Nakazato’s objective yet pliable sensibility toward images nurtured through the printmaking medium, in which images in his mind appeared on paper as a multitude of variations through an indirect process, and the recurring process of trial printing gave him a bird’s-eye view of thoughts and emotions transmuted in the making of images. This mode of expression, which seems to imply that images before one’s eyes are never fixed and always open to change, later led to the *Line Outside* series, which expressed a yearning for what lies “beyond the known world” using the motif of ○△□, which he consistently employed from the late 1980s into his later years.

1. Hitoshi Nakazato, “Intabyū: B zemi wo otozureta ātiso tachi” [Interview: Artists Who Came to B-Zemi], in *B zemi: “atarashii hyōgen no gakusyū” no rekishi 1967-2004 / B-Zemi: History of “an Alternative Art School” 1967-2004*, B-Zemi Learning System ed., BankART 1929, May 2005, p. 42.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
3. In his first solo exhibition in Japan (November 24 – December 5, 1970), at the Pinar Galleries in Tokyo, he showed a work in which he drew zigzag lines with white chalk and other materials on a canvas that was 50m or 100m long when all the sections were added together, and *Two Thousand Drawings*, in which he filled 2,000 sheets of paper with various line drawings in pencil. In the exhibition catalogue, the long canvas work is listed as *50m Plane*, but in a later interview (*Mizue* no. 897, 1979) and in the catalogue for his solo exhibition at the Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts (2010), the artist refers to this work as a “100-meter canvas” and says he used 100 meters of canvas in all.
4. *Chi Su Ma* and *Ma Su Chi* (1970), works created using the Japanese carpentry tools known as ink markers, were exhibited. The former is in the collection of the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, and the latter in the collection of the Takamatsu Art Museum.
5. Hitoshi Nakazato, “Tokusyū: Hatsugen ‘72 = Sōzō no genten” [Special Feature: Statement ‘72 = Sources of Creation], *Mizue* no. 804, Bijutsu Shuppansha, January 1972, p. 48.
6. “Nakazato Hitoshi + Fujieda Teruo: Heimen no kūkansei ni tsuite – Gendai tonō taiwa PART II-4” [Hitoshi Nakazato + Teruo Fujieda: On Planar Spatiality – Dialogue with the Contemporary, Part II – 4], *Mizue* no. 897, Bijutsu Shuppansha, December 1979, p. 77.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 75. Before this statement, Nakazato said the following: “Those called Color Field painters often use tape and small brushes to make the corners neat. That act of making edges neat is for me not part of the painting process, but something else altogether.”
8. Several sets of works produced in the same way, including *Color from Minas de “Oro”*, *7s, 8s and a 9* (1987), which appears in the 2022 solo exhibition at ArtCourt Gallery, were shown in a solo exhibition at the Hara Museum of Contemporary Art.

### Selected Bibliography

Ichiro Haryu, “The Plane Rebels Against the Painting!” *Hitoshi Nakazato One Man Show* (exh. cat.), Pinar Galleries, November 1970.  
 Jennifer S. Byrd, “At the Galleries,” *The Japan Times*, December 2, 1970.  
 Hitoshi Nakazato, “Tokusyū: Hatsugen ‘72 = Sōzō no genten” [Special Feature: Statement ‘72 = Sources of Creation], *Mizue* no. 804, Bijutsu Shuppansha, January 1972.  
 Yusuke Nakahara, “Kaisou” [Thoughts], *Hitoshi Nakazato* (exh. cat.), Tokyo Gallery, November 1977.  
 “Nakazato Hitoshi + Fujieda Teruo: Heimen no kūkansei ni tsuite – Gendai tonō taiwa PART II-4” [Hitoshi Nakazato + Teruo Fujieda: On Planar Spatiality – Dialogue with the Contemporary, Part II – 4], *Mizue* no. 897, Bijutsu Shuppansha, December 1979.  
*B zemi: “atarashii hyōgen no gakusyū” no rekishi 1967-2004 / B-Zemi: History of “an Alternative Art School” 1967-2004*, B-Zemi Learning System ed., BankART 1929, May 2005.  
*Hitoshi Nakazato – Today and Yesterday* (exh. cat.), Hara Museum of Contemporary Art ed., Foundation Arc-en-Ciel, July 1987.  
 Sandra Ericson, “Ambiguity as a Source of Creativity,” *Hitoshi Nakazato: Mahakara Series* (exh. cat.), Gallery Kuranuki, July 1992.  
*Hitoshi Nakazato: From Line Outside, to Monadology, then Black Rain* (exh. cat.), Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, Tokyo ed., Cogito Inc., June 2010.  
 Hitoshi Nakazato, *Conceptual Sketches: a Chronology of Exploration*, Muhlenberg College, Frank Martin Gallery, Philadelphia, 1994.

## | Selected Works |



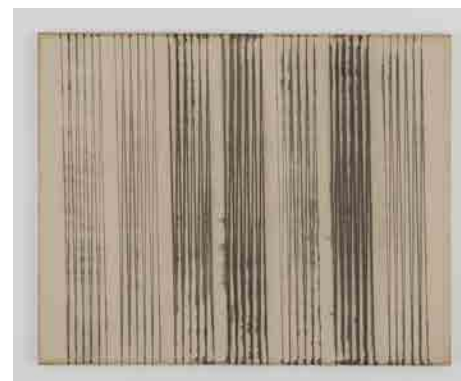
### Untitled | Ichinchiani series

Color on unprimed canvas | 174.2 x 183.5 cm each | 1970

This series consists of a total of five pieces, ranging from a work with a single line to one with five lines. They were produced using an American carpentry tool known as a chalk liner. For the *Ma Chi Su* series, which preceded this one, he used an ink marker, a Japanese carpentry tool.



Installation view of *Artists to-day Exhibition '70*, 1970, Yokohama Civic Art Gallery



### Untitled

Sumi ink on unprimed canvas | 130.5 x 162.5 cm | 1970

This work was made using a Japanese carpentry tool known as an ink marker. In a later interview with Teruo Fujieda, Nakazato spoke about his works made with ink markers and how he incorporated chance into his process, relating an episode in which he attempted to draw five parallel horizontal lines, the lines accidentally became slanted, and from then on he frequently drew slanting lines. (*Mizue* no. 897, Bijutsu Shuppansha, December 1979, p. 75).



### Two Thousand Drawings

Pencil on paper | 43 x 33 cm | 1970

\*Photo taken at the time when the work was made.

This work consists of 2,000 sheets of paper filled with line drawings, 100 of which are featured in this exhibition. Nakazato later said of this work, “More than what was drawn on the sheets of paper, I wanted to present the sheer volume of the act of drawing.” (*Mizue* no. 897, p.75).



### Color from Minas de “Oro”

Acrylic, oil on canvas | 176 x 368 cm (set of 2) | 1987



### 7s, 8s, and a 9

Acrylic, oil stick on canvas | 87 x 91 cm | 1987

A “companion piece” incorporating numbers is juxtaposed with a vivid composition of color planes. While the companion piece is a highly conceptual image, traces of erasure and redrawing in some places reveal an unpredictable flow of thought. Nakazato once said that “the most productive image making could be on the blackboard in a classroom,”\* and this set of pieces can be seen as a schematic development plan of the open-ended act of painting itself, in which an image in the mind goes through a process of selection, transformation, and renewal and then materializes as a work of art, which leads in turn to the next image or work. (\**Hitoshi Nakazato: From Line Outside, to Monadology, then Black Rain*, Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, Tokyo ed., Cogito Inc., June 2010, p. 97).

All historical images: courtesy of the Estate of Hitoshi Nakazato  
 Texts by Michiko Kiyosawa, English translation by Christopher Stephens and Gene Nakazato