

Sounds of Norio Imai – ACG 20th Anniversary Vol.3

今井祝雄の音 – 開廊20周年記念展 Vol.3



[1] *Two Heartbeats of Mine* 1976 | Speaker, heartbeat | Installation size (speaker: φ20.2x19.5cm) | Photo: Akio Takimoto

ARTCOURT Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by Norio Imai. Imai has continued to express himself, attuned to the changing times, in a wide range of media and art forms, from his monochromatic white semi-3D canvas works and sculptures of the 1960s to his time-based works in film, video, and photography from the 1970s through the 1990s and onwards, as well as his performances in which he and the performers corporeally intervene into the works. From the earliest stages of his artistic career, the presence of sound has been one of his prominent preoccupations. In the 1970s, Imai created and exhibited works that rendered sound into an artistic material, using heartbeats and audio equipment. This exhibition will be a comprehensive presentation of his sound-based works from the 1970s and related referential materials with technical and conceptual cooperation by Yukio Fujimoto, an artist and longtime friend of Imai. We will introduce a variety of Imai's endeavors in expression from the perspective of 'sound' through his works from the 1970s as well as his most recent installations that allow visitors to experience audio recordings and cassette tapes visually and physically.

When I went to my first rock concert as a junior high school student, I was amazed at how the sound reverberated from my feet through my body. I learned that sound was not only something to listen to but that it could also be experienced physically. It was around the same time that I observed the vibrations of the speaker's cone while listening to records and learned that sound could also be experienced visually. Later, when I learned about the existence of musique concrète, a new musical genre that used electronic devices and technological audio equipment, I vaguely began to visualize the trajectory of my future. However, I felt slightly unsettled about the emotive expression of music. I had been wondering if it was possible to use sound as a tool for philosophical reflection, but at first, I could not envision a concrete method. One day, after entering university to study electronic music, I was leafing through the pages of Bijutsu Techo, and I came across an article about some artists who were transmitting the sound of their heartbeats on the streets of Namba in the heart of Osaka City; this was my first encounter with Norio Imai.

By Yukio Fujimoto, exhibition collaborator

| Exhibition |

Exhibition Title: **Sounds of Norio Imai – ACG 20th Anniversary Vol.3** 今井祝雄の音 – 開廊20周年記念展 Vol.3

Duration: May 13 (Sat.) - June 24 (Sat.), 2023 *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]

| Event | May 20 (Sat.)

2:00pm - 3:30pm Talk [Norio Imai x Yukio Fujimoto (Artist)]

3:30pm - 5:00pm Reception

*RSVP required (Email 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.

| Biography |

- 1946 Born in Osaka.
- 1965 Graduates from Osaka Municipal High School of Art and Industry, department of fine art, yōga (Western-style painting) program. Joins Gutai Art Association (until breakup in 1972).
- 1966 Receives 1st prize at Shell Art Award (Tokyo).
- 1979 Starts "Daily Portrait" series. Continued to the present.
- 1991 Receives 2nd Osaka City Environment Amenity Award. Currently Norio Imai is a professor emeritus at the Seian University of Art and Design, Ōtsu.

| Major early and sound-related works from the 1960s to the 1990s |

- 1963 Exhibited 2 two-dimensional works arranged with numbers and letters [*Image 2 and 3 on right] at the 14th Ibaraki City Exhibition (Ibaraki Municipal Yosei Elementary School, Osaka). Received Mayor's Prize.
- 1967 **Circle**: a work created by punching a hole in each frame of 16mm film, at the *1st Sogetsu Experimental Film Festival* (Sogetsu Hall, Tokyo/Yasaka Hall, Kyoto). This was the first time Imai incorporated sound into his work and realized that sound has a great influence on the perception of images.
- 1972 **This Accidental Co-action as an Incident...**: was an event held on the street by Imai, Toru Kuranuki, and Saburo Muraoka. 3 trumpet speakers on the roof of a 3-story building emitted their respective heartbeats on Midotsuji avenue (Namba, Osaka).
- 1973 **Dancing Heart**: an installation in which Imai's heartbeat was emitted from a bare speaker placed on the floor facing upwards. A piece of paper with the word "IMAI" printed on it bounced around from the vibrations of the paper cone. *Experiments with Sound Devices and Flying Musical Notes* (Gallery Pete, Osaka).
- 1974 **The Braun Tube**: Imai uses a video camera to record a TV broadcast on a cathode-ray tube so that the sound of the TV overlaps with sounds from the site, and the image overlaps with its mirror image on the cathode-ray tube. *Impact Art / Video Art '74* (Galerie Impact, Lausanne, Switzerland).
- 1975 **The Party**: a collaboration between Imai, Keiji Uematsu, and Saburo Muraoka. In this installation, three heartbeats were emitted from three separate speakers placed diagonally on the floor and were accompanied by the metallic sounds of Man Ray's metronome work *Indestructible Objects*. (Galerie 16, Kyoto).
The Heart Beat: a video work in which a bare speaker is placed on its back and a piece of paper with the word "IMAI" typed on it vibrates to the sound of a heartbeat emitted from the speaker.
8th Exhibition of Contemporary Art: 50 Artists Contemporary Art Show (Daimaru Department Store, Kyoto).
- 1976 **Two Heartbeats of Mine**: an installation in which two speakers are suspended facing each other, each emitting the artist's heartbeats recorded at two different times. *Contemporary Artists of Japan: Through the Lens of Duchamp*, A series of Solo exhibitions (Gallery Pete, Osaka) [*Fig. 1 on the previous page].
6/8 time: in a dark space, the sound of a heartbeat transitions to the sound of a metronome and every 6/8ths beat, the artist photographed the audience using a strobe light. *Expression in Film and Laser '76* (KBS Laserium Center, Kyoto).
- 1977 **Four Sounds**: four record discs, contributed by four people, were cut evenly into four pieces, and reassembled.
- 1993 **Sound stone in Harada**: Collaboration with Yukio Fujimoto. An outdoor sculpture created by shaping aluminum into a trumpet-shaped hole in the front of a "megalith." The sounds of the sky resonate through a pipe that extends vertically from the top of the stone and passes down through to the trumpet-shaped hole. (Toyonaka City Elderly Care Center, Osaka).
The installation of *Two Heartbeats of Mine* (produced in 1993), and two memorial panels of *This Accidental Co-action as an Incident...* (1972), and *The Party* (1975) were presented at the MUSIC Exhibition (Xebec Hall, Kobe) organized by HEAR (Takako Okamoto, Yukio Fujimoto).

| Selected Solo Exhibitions |

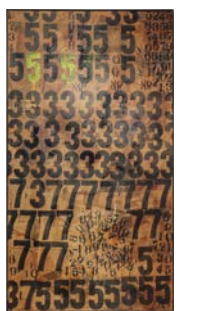
- 2022 *Norio Imai - Sphere of sound*, +1 art, Osaka
- 2021 *Norio Imai - SQUARE*, Yumiko Chiba Associates viewing room shinjuku, Tokyo
- 2019 *Norio Imai - Action on Film*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka
- 2018 *Norio Imai: Material Ecstasy*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery Antwerp, Wijnegem, Belgium
- 2016 *Norio Imai Retrospective – Time in Square*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka
- 2014 *Norio Imai Retrospective – Reflection and Projection*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka
- 2013 *Norio Imai: White Event*, Axel Vervoordt Gallery Antwerp, Belgium
- 2012 *Norio Imai - My Days at 'Gutai University'*, Seian University of Art and Design, Ōtsu
- Norio Imai Retrospective – From 17 to 22 Years Old*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka
- 2005 *Daily Portraits of a Quarter Century*, Mssokhan, Kōbe
- 1996 *Back & Forth - Norio Imai / White Space 1964-1966*, galerie 16, Kyoto
- 1981 *Solo exhibition with video works*, The Bank, Amsterdam, The Netherlands
- Norio Imai – Videotape Performance*, Video Gallery SCAN, Tokyo
- 1980 *Rectangular Time*, Galerie Kitano Circus, Kōbe
- 1979 *Solo exhibition of self-portraits*, Ban Garow, Osaka
- 1971 *Solo Exhibition*, Walker Gallery, Tokyo
- 1966 *Solo Exhibition*, Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka
- 1964 *Testimony of a 17-Year-Old*, Noonu Gallery, Osaka

| Major Public Collections |

Ashiya City Museum of Art and History / Osaka Prefecture / Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka / The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto / The National Museum of Art, Osaka / The Museum of Modern Art, Shiga / Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art / The Miyagi Museum of Art / Seian University of Art and Design / Fukuoka City Public Library / Axel and May Vervoordt Foundation, Wijnegem / The Getty Center, Los Angeles / Pharmascience Collection, Canada / Rachofsky Collection, Dallas / By Art Matters Museum, Hangzhou



[2] *work I* 1963
Stencil on wooden board with plastic
169.5 x 88 cm



[3] *work II* 1963
Collage with newspapers, stenciled with lacquer
169.5 x 92.8 cm

| Selected Group Exhibition | *Participated in all Gutai Art Exhibitions from 1964 to 1972.

- 2021 *Movie will speak! 2021: Thought and trial of the streaming era*, Galerie 16, Kyoto
- 2020 *250 Years of Kyoto Art Masterpieces*, The Kyoto City KYOCERA Museum of Art, Kyoto
- 2018 *Exposition Gutai*, l'espace et le temps, Musée Soulages à Rodez, France
- 2016 *Performing for the Camera*, Tate Modern, London
- 2015 *Re: play 1972/2015—Restaging "Expression in Film '72"*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
- 2014 *PROPORTIO*, Palazzo Fortuny, Venice, Italy
- 2013 *Gutai: Splendid Playground*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York
- Parallel Views: Italian and Japanese Art from the 1950s, 60s, and 70s*, The Warehouse, Dallas
- 2012 *Gutai: The Spirit of an Era*, The National Art Center, Tokyo
- 2011 *Nul=0: The Dutch Nul Group in an International Context*, Stedelijk Museum Schiedam, The Netherlands
- 2009 *Vital Signals – Early Japanese and American Video Art*, touring exhibition to Japan Society, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Yokohama Museum of Art; The National Museum of Art, Osaka and other locations, continuing into 2010.
- 1995 *40 Years of Japanese Experimental Films*, Kirin Plaza Osaka, then Tokyo and other locations
- 1994 *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky*, Yokohama Museum of Art, followed by Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, continuing into 1995.
- 1993 *MUSIC – Every Sound Includes Music*, Xzbec Foyer, Kobe
- 1990 *A Genealogy of Optical Movies*, The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, Urawa
- 1983 *Photography in Contemporary Art – The Works from the 1970s*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, followed by The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto.
- 1972 *Image Expression '72 - Equivalent Cinema*, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art
- 1970 *Gutai Group Display*, Midorikan Pavilion Entrance, Expo'70 World's Fair, Suita, Osaka
- 1968 *Contemporary Space 1968: Light and Environment*, Sogo Department Store, Kobe
- 1967 *5th Biennale de Paris*, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris, France
- 1966 *From Space to Environment*, Ginza Matsuya Department Store, Tokyo
- Trends in Contemporary Art*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto Annex
- Kyoto Independent '66*, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art [*73, 75, 77, 78, 91]
- Zero on the Sea*, Internationale Galerie OREZ, The Hague, The Netherlands

On his new work: Audio Garden

In conversation, our voices produce many sounds. The vast majority fade outside the scope of recollection, and some penetrate the depths of our memory. When those sounds are captured, there is an intent to record for the purpose of reproduction; this applies to surveillance cameras or even telephone calls. While some of those sounds might be played back once, most will never be played back at all and are sealed as data in some media but, in many cases, are discarded. Ultimately, what happens to unrecorded conversations and their sounds?

Since the autumn of 2022, my fascination with this question has led me to record individual conversations with 12 different people onto cassette tapes under the premise that they would not be replayed. In this exhibition, I have endeavored to utilize sound as media residue to orchestrate a space that can be experienced visually and physically.

Norio Imai

| Description of Work |

In the early 1960s, at the age of 17, Norio Imai produced two-dimensional works in which he arranged numbers and letters onto pasted newspapers. For his relief-like works, he salvaged discarded metal baskets that support the paper cones in speakers and covered them with a white cloth to produce a three-dimensional undulation effect onto his pictorial planes. In Imai's early works, the concept of 'information society' was at the forefront of his mind. He said in retrospect, "Information isn't only written characters though - it's sound, too. So, what if I could express the inundation of sound in a visual way?"¹ This statement conveys Imai's keen awareness of the importance of 'sound' as a symbolic aspect of society at the time.

He created his signature series of white semi-3D canvas works and sculptures when he was a member of the Gutai Art Association from 1964 to 1972. He casts a white veil that hides something yet gives form to undulating shapes on the interface between the front and back of his canvases. These protrusions give birth to the amorphous phenomenon of shadows, an additional aspect integral to the works. In the later years of his career with Gutai, he projected slide images onto those surfaces. He attempted to augment the work's existence and the viewer's experience by combining the material and immaterial. In 1967, he incorporated sound for the first time in *Circle*, a video work he created by punching holes in each frame of 16mm film,² and he discovered that sound had a significant effect on the way the circle was perceived as it flickered around the screen.

From 1972, when Gutai disbanded, to 1976, Imai experimented with new artistic expressions, including sound-based works that primarily utilized the sound of heartbeats and other various sound media. Imai says that he endeavored to create a "reciprocal permeation between the noise of the city and the organic rhythm of humanity"³ in *This Accidental Co-action as an Incident* (1972)⁴ in which Imai and two other artists played their heartbeats over speakers from the roof of a building located at an intersection in Dotonbori on Midosuji Avenue in central Osaka. In the installation, *Two Heartbeats of Mine* (1976),⁵ Imai plays the sound of his heartbeat, recorded on two different occasions, through a pair of suspended speakers facing each other, each playing the sound of one heartbeat. The sound of his heartbeat shifts to the sound of a metronome ticking at six eighth note beats per measure, which echoes in a dark dome-like space, as he flashes a strobe light at the audience in sync with the rhythm in *6/8 Time* (1976).⁶ Imai's work expands the viewer's sensibilities to a kind of rhythm created by the discrepancy or resonance between the self and others, humans and machines, or the myriad 'here and nows' that exist between the present and past. This theme is a through-line from his early white semi-3D canvas works and sculptures that encourage the viewer to contemplate what can be perceived by the superimposition of that which is inherently different.⁷ He uses the fluid existence of 'sound' as a material, transforming the work from something to be confronted by the viewer to an environment that surrounds the viewer, which in effect blurs the line between the two, an endeavor rich in its experimental spirit.

"Information overload may be the consequence of indirectly experienced information. In our everyday lives, it not only makes us forget genuine encounters but also buries us in the emptiness of quotidian life."⁸ Given Imai's conflicting curiosity and anxiety regarding humanity's pursuit of technology, the thematic material he has chosen for his sound works, the sound of heartbeats emanating from a living body, is highly symbolic. Since the 1970s, Imai has continually grappled with each emerging technological era, seamlessly incorporating a diverse range of media into his works, which can be said to have functioned as masterful 'devices' that reveal the actual material characteristics and limits of representation hidden in the media employed for the transmission of information. In our current digital age, where technology has progressed far beyond analog media, Imai's work is composed of the repetition of the paradoxical dialogue between his own voice and another's, through obsolete mediums like cassette tapes, "under the premise that it will not be reproduced." What kind of experiences and questions does the time-space of his latest work offer us?

1. Imai, Norio "An Interview with Norio Imai" (Moderated by Shoichi Hirai on October 13, 2012), trans. Seth Yarden in *Norio Imai - Gutai and Later Work*, ARTCOURT Gallery, 2014, p. 28
 2. At the time, the responsibility for the sound belonged not to Imai but to Satoshi Yamamoto, who was working at the broadcasting company.
 3. Excerpt from the statement posted in the show window facing the street on the first floor of the building where the event took place.
 4. A street event by Norio Imai, Toru Kuranuki, and Saburo Muraoka (with cooperation by Kazuo Taniguchi), July 20-30, 1972. From 9 AM to 1 AM, this event occurred at a three-story building on the corner of Midosuji and Dotonbori. Endless tapes, placed in a coffee shop on the second floor, played the heartbeats of the three participants that reverberated from three trumpet speakers on the roof of the building. The speakers were connected to an oscilloscope displayed in the show window on the first floor of the building, offering a visual representation of the sounds.
 5. First exhibited in *the Contemporary Artists in Japan: Through Duchamp* series of solo exhibitions at Gallery Pete, Osaka in 1976, and the *MUSIC* exhibition organized by Yukio Fujimoto at Xebec Foyer, Kobe in 1993.
 6. At *the Visual Expression '76*, 1976, KBS Laserium Center, Kyoto. A set of 34 photographs of the auditorium using strobe light (gelatin silver prints) and the sound recorded at the time (both original sound sources and digitized versions) have been preserved.
 7. The interpretation of Imai's approach of "superimposing the inherently different" is discussed in detail in the following text by Kinichi Obinata. Obinata, Kinichi, "Towards lens-based expression - circa 1970," *Imai Norio - Time Collection*, Suisseisha, Tokyo, 2015.
 8. Imai, Norio. "Between Concept and Everyday," trans. Reiko Tomii in Ming Tiampo and Alexandra Munroe, eds. *Gutai: Splendid Playground* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 2013), p.285. Originally published as "Kannen to nichijo no aida," *Oru Kansai* Monthly Magazine, June 1970, pp. 138-139. Ref., Ming Tiampo, "Video Killed the Radio Star: Imai Norio and the Moving Image," *Norio Imai: Gutai and Later Works*, ARTCOURT Gallery, Osaka, 2014, p. 59.

| Selected works and historical materials |

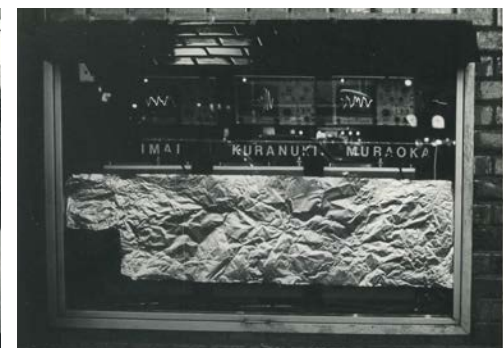
*About the content and composition of each work, see the "Major early and sound-related works from the 1960s to the 1990s" in the biography.



Two Heartbeats of Mine
 1976 | speaker, heartbeat
 Installation size (speaker: φ20.2x19.5cm)
 Photo: Akio Takimoto
 The installation with the two original speakers will be exhibited.
 Sound supervision by Yukio Fujimoto

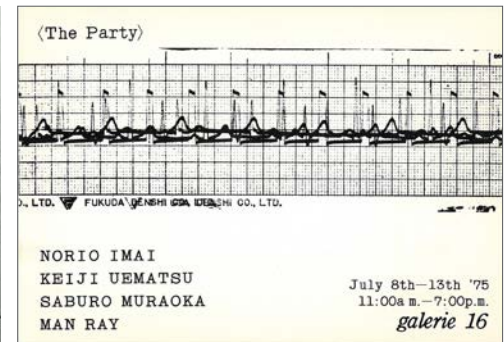


Audio Garden
 2023
 New installation piece composed of 12 cassette tapes.



This Accidental Co-action as an Incident.....
 1972 | Horn speaker, oscillograph, heartbeat | Installation at the intersection of Dotonbori and Midosuji

The Original open-reel tapes in which heartbeats of Imai, Toru Kuranuki and Saburo Muraoka are recorded, photos of installation views and the exhibition DM etc. will be exhibited.



The Party
 1975 | Speaker, metronome, heartbeat | Installation size variable ("The Party" at Gallery 16, Kyoto)

The oscillograph records of Imai, Keiji Uematsu, Saburo Muraoka and a metronome; photos of the original speakers; the exhibition DM and photos of installation views will be exhibited.



6/8 Time
 1976, Heartbeat, sound of metronome | Performance (Expression in Film & Laser '76 at KBS Laser Rium Center, Kyoto)



The sound of this work will be exhibited and played as a vinyl record newly produced using the original sound source. (Sound supervision and technical cooperation by Yukio Fujimoto) The three photographs from the set of 34 that are of the audience and taken by the artist using strobe lights will be exhibited along with the vinyl record. (Gelatin silver print, 24 x 30 cm each)