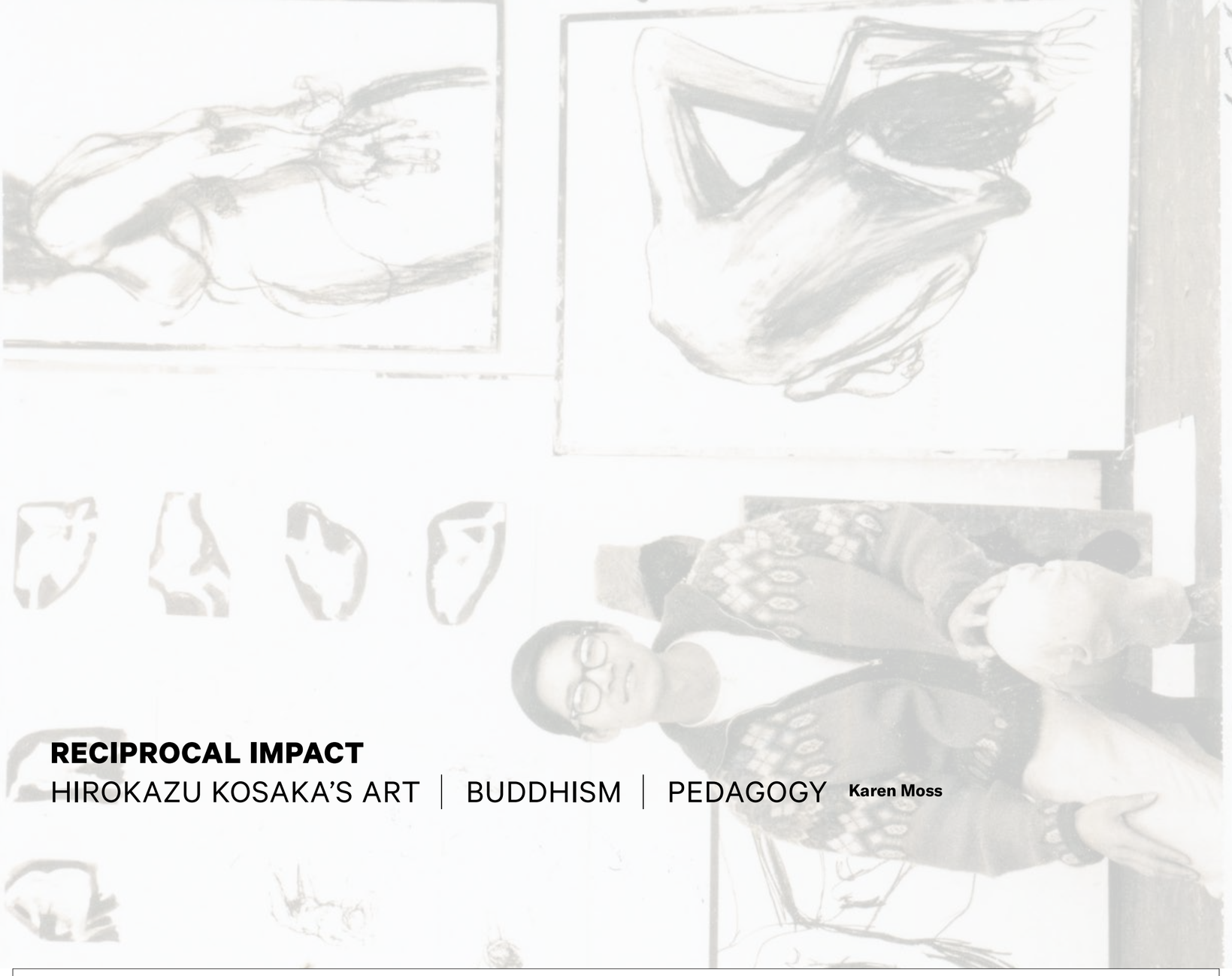


RECIPROCAL IMPACT

HIROKAZU KOSAKA'S ART | BUDDHISM | PEDAGOGY

Karen Moss

Kosaka in Watson Cross's figure drawing class at Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, 1967

During Hirokazu Kosaka's life, he has integrated a range of hybrid identities, including Japanese/American, artist/priest, and student/teacher. Born in Wayakama, Japan, he embodies the historical legacy of his family's eight-century practice of Shingon Buddhism in an epigenetic sense—in his blood and his psyche. From his studies at Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles (1966–70) to his current role as Master Artist in Residence at Japanese American Cultural & Community Center (JACCC), Kosaka consistently embraces the Buddhist belief of "and/both," wherein his artistic, spiritual, and pedagogical practices—his art and life—are interdependent.

A primary vehicle for this inextricable link is Kosaka's ongoing engagement with performance. He has deftly incorporated traditional Japanese cultural traditions and Buddhist concepts into avant-garde, contemporary performances. His art is iterative: he reprises works across decades and genres, repeating actions and themes, again and again, like a mantra. Kosaka's performances emanate from different sources—literary, social, and biographical—but his intention remains the same: to integrate his art with his Buddhism.

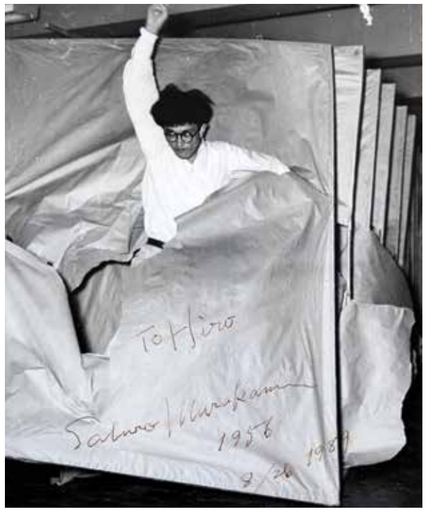
This essay begins with Kosaka's early work in the late 1960s and 1970s, as viewed through his affinities with the Gutai Art Association, John Cage, Fluxus, and performance art. After being ordained as a Buddhist priest in Japan in 1974, Kosaka came back to LA in 1983 and began to collaborate with other artists on large-scale productions in theaters and cultural centers. In the late 1980s and in the 1990s, he continued producing collaborative performances while also making installations and exhibitions in museums. In the 2000s, Kosaka's performances became more community-based, socially engaged, and pedagogical, and they often related to his role at the JACCC, where he teaches and organizes exhibitions, public programs, and his extensive archive.[1]

At Chouinard and around Los Angeles

Kosaka attended the Chouinard Art Institute from 1966 to 1971, when it was considered the most progressive art school in Los Angeles.[2] He studied with Abstract Expressionists Watson Cross Jr., Robert Chuey, Herbert Jepson, and Matsui "Mike" Kanemitsu and produced figurative abstract works in their drawing and painting courses. He also took a course from art historian and critic Julies Langsner, who introduced him to Allan Kaprow's book *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* (1969), an important document of performance art by Gutai, Fluxus, and other avant-garde artists and groups. While Kosaka knew of Gutai as a teenager in Japan, he learned more about the movement at Chouinard, and its influence led him away from traditional drawing and painting and toward experimental work.

Kosaka in Watson Cross's figure drawing class at Chouinard Art Institute, Los Angeles, March 1967





Artists in Kosaka's class included Charles "Chuck" Arnoldi, Laddie John Dill, William Leavitt, Tom Wudl, and Kikuo Mori, another Japanese student. He also met Allen "Al" Ruppersberg, a recent Chouinard graduate; Jack Goldstein, who became his studio mate; and Chris Burden, who attended Pomona College in nearby Claremont, California.[3]

The region's burgeoning network of art schools and university art departments, nonprofit art spaces, alternative galleries, and artist-run spaces fostered radical new forms of art.[4] Chouinard's professors fully expected their students to immerse themselves in this artistic community outside the school. Kosaka became exposed to minimalism, Conceptual art, and performance art from both professors and students in his Chouinard cohort and in the thriving artistic milieu of Los Angeles.

Toward Gutai, Cage, and Fluxus

In Osaka, artists Jiro Yoshihara, Saburo Murakami, Akira Kanayama, Kazuo Shiraga, and Shozo Shimamoto formed the *Gutai Bijutsu Kyokai* (Gutai Art Association) (1954–72).[5] Gutai, which translates as "concreteness," described their direct, action-oriented, embodied work, which aimed to demonstrate freedom and vitality to a society still recovering from the trauma of war.[6] Gutai's Period of Actions (1955–58) focused on interactive, process-oriented works and site-specific installations in unusual places. For *First Gutai Art Exhibition* (1955),

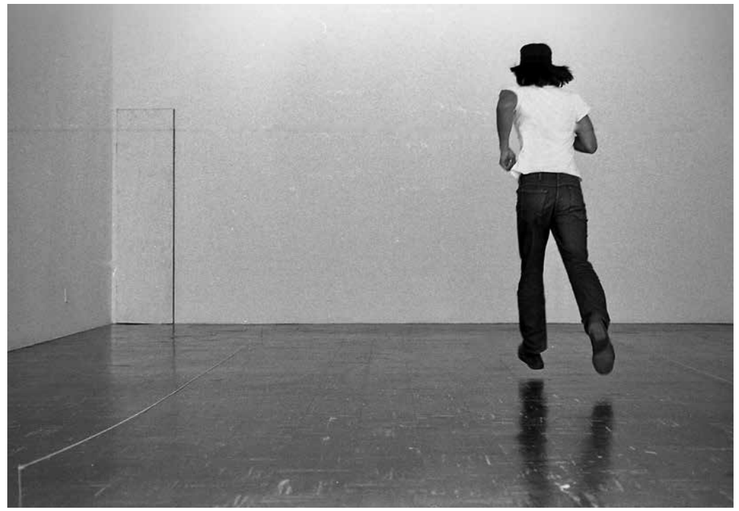


Murakami catapulted his body through kraft paper stretched across a succession of six wooden frames (*Muttsu no ana [Six Holes]*, 1955). This *kami-yuma* (paper-breaking) action referred to the rupture of the picture plane of traditional painting and signaled the "breakthrough" of art in this new era.[7] Outside the hall, Shiraga performed *Doro ni idomu* (*Challenging Mud)* (1955), jumping half naked into a huge mound of mud and molding it with his body—a daring test of strength and endurance.[8]

TOP LEFT: Poster for Monday Night Performance Series, Pomona College Art Gallery, Claremont, CA, 1972

TOP RIGHT: Saburo Murakami, *Muttsu no ana* (Six Holes), *First Gutai Art Exhibition*, Ohara Hall, Tokyo, 1955, signed 1989

BOTTOM: Kazuo Shiraga, *Doro ni idomu* (Challenging Mud), *First Gutai Art Exhibition*, Ohara Hall, Tokyo, 1955





In his statements, Kosaka repeatedly notes that the Gutai artists, particularly Murakami, "helped guide me to a different plane of looking at art and life."[9] Just after graduating from Chouinard, Kosaka began to do his own corporeal actions, testing his endurance and incorporating ideas derived from Buddhism. In 1971, his classmate Kikuo Mori established the gallery Mori's Form at 5271 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles. On September 1, 1972, Mori organized an exhibition by Shimamoto and invited Kosaka to do a project before the opening. Kosaka laid a track on the gallery floor and performed *Five Hour Run* (1972). "When I ran for five hours," he explained, "I changed the entire air in the space in the gallery. That action energized that space and created a new space. I didn't leave anything visible, but it's there. What is the difference between the final product of a painting that hangs on the white walls of the gallery and the work of a five hour run?"[10]

Like Murakami and Shiraga, Kosaka engaged in an endurance test, but he performed his action in private, repeating the laps like a meditation. He recalled how in Japan he often saw Buddhist monks running around temples and performing rituals to consecrate sacred spaces. When visitors arrived at Mori's Form, some noticed that Kosaka had left a trace of his action: his perspiration permeated the air, consecrating the gallery.[11] A detail of *Five Hour Run* appeared in *Avalanche*, an important New York City-based art magazine that focused on documenting Conceptual art, performance, land art and other practices in the early 1970s.[12]

TOP: *Five Hour Run*, Mori's Forum, Los Angeles, 1972

BOTTOM: Flyer for performance with Kosaka and Shozo Shimamoto, Mori's Form, Los Angeles, 1972

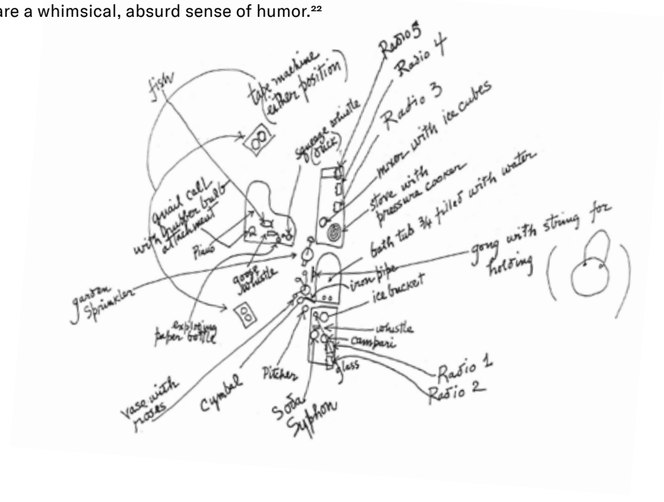




In 1973, Mori's Form presented an exhibition of thirty-five photographs of Gutai performances, an unprecedented opportunity for Los Angeles audiences to see their work.[13] The images documented *Outdoor Exhibitions* (1956–58); *First Gutai Art on the Stage* (1957); interdisciplinary experiments using actions, objects, film, music, and light; and *Gutai's Art Festival* at EXPO '70 World's Fair in Osaka, which included an exhibition, films, and performances.[14] The New York–based *Experiments in Art and Technology* (E.A.T.) also exhibited at Expo '70, which became a bridge between Japanese Gutai artists and US avant-garde artists such as John Cage, Merce Cunningham, and Robert Rauschenberg.

These artists, among others, participated in Cage's *Theater Piece #1* (1952), widely considered the first Happening, at Black Mountain College.[15] After studying Zen Buddhism with D. T. Suzuki at Columbia University in 1947, Cage became increasingly interested in indeterminacy, which led to his use of "chance operations," such as throwing dice or the I-Ching, to compose and score his work. Often his visual "event scores" provided instructions to explore everyday objects; discover nonmusical, found sounds; and engage in experiential learning.[16] While no photographs exist for *Theater Piece #1*, a diagram by M.C. Richards maps the simultaneous events: Cage lectured on Zen Buddhism at a podium; Charles Olson and M.C. Richards read poems; Cunningham danced, Rauschenberg played records on an old phonograph, and Nicholas Chernovitch screened a film.[17]

Kosaka knew of Cage while at Chouinard, and when he studied Shingon Buddhism at Columbia University, he became more aware of the composer's artistic and Zen practice.[18] Kosaka's *Stage Piece* (1970), performed at San Fernando Valley State College in Northridge, California, evidences the influence of Cage.[19] He used a visual score to compose a sound performance made with everyday objects, such as marbles, broken plates, air pumps, and wind-up toys, creating an indeterminant "auditory landscape."[20] This recalls Cage's *Water Walk* (1959), which uses household and water-related items—pressure cooker, watering can, ice cubes in a blender, bathtub, and even a rubber duck—to create a solo event presented on stage and television.[21] Both *Stage Piece* and *Water Walk* involve chance, combine everyday sounds and noise as music, and share a whimsical, absurd sense of humor.[22]

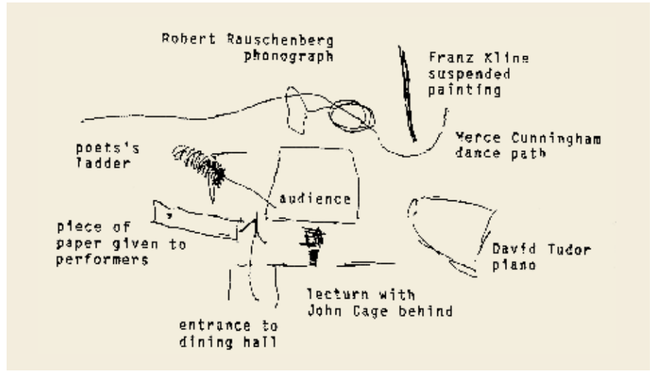


TOP LEFT AND RIGHT: *Stage Piece*, San Fernando Valley State College, Northridge, CA, 1970

BOTTOM: John Cage, diagram of *Water Walk*, 1959

Cage's composition class, which he taught at the New School for Social Research in New York from 1956 to 1960, combined conventional theory and experimental, aleatory procedures to compose scores.[23] He invited visual artists George Brecht, Al Hansen, and Dick Higgins, as well as poet Jackson Mac Low, to attend the class. In 1962, they were among the founders of Fluxus, a network of interdisciplinary artists who used Cage-inspired event scores in their performances.[24] Fluxus events—open scores that anyone can perform—are instructions to interact with objects and/or engage in a multisensory experiences. Brecht's *Drip Music* (1959) calls for pouring water from one vessel to another; Higgins's *Danger Music* (1962) instructs: "Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream! Scream!" Alison Knowles's *Proposition: Make a Salad* (1962) prompts convivial, participatory events that engage all the senses. La Monte Young's *Composition #1* (1960), "Draw a straight line and follow it," was famously interpreted by Nam June Paik in *Zen for Head* (1961). Paik dipped his head in ink and dragged it down a scroll; the result resembles a *sumi* brush painting.[25]

Kaprow brought several of these New York–based Fluxus artists to teach at the new local art school—CalArts. Kosaka's close friend Maggie Lowe (now Tennesen) studied with Kaprow, and Kosaka likely was aware of Fluxus when he wrote his short, hand-typed



Mary Caroline Richards, diagram of John Cage's *Theater Piece no. 1*, Black Mountain College, 1952, reconstructed 1989

scores in *Suicide Note, March 18, 1970* (1970).[26] Some of the scores specify quotidian actions: "Letters are sent to every state in America." Others are more difficult: "Everyday a picture is taken from above the freeway." And a few, such as "Infinite interval of distance between two points," which inverts a principle of physics, cannot be performed at all and thus are as perplexing as a Zen koan. In addition to being inspired by Masahiro Shinoda's film *Double Suicide* (1969), the title *Suicide Note* relates to a story Kosaka recounts often.[27] When his father taught him Japanese archery *(kyudo)*, he would shout: "Kill Yourself, Kill Yourself!," imploring his son to "kill" his ego, a difficult act that is necessary to master *kyudo*. In Fluxus, artistic authorship and egos are eradicated, since anyone can perform a score. Kosaka noted: "At an early stage of my life I became aware [of the] impermanence of all things, of ego, the separation between entities, and interdependency, all because of my Buddhist training. My work in the early 70's signifies all these sentiments."[28]



Suicide Note (details), March 18, 1970



With the Body

In Kosaka's performances from the early 1970s, he sets up situations to test how bodies, often his own, would react under different conditions and in specific sites. For *Body Conditioning* (1970–71), for example, Kosaka set up parallel bars in his studio, then slowly raised and lowered his feet repeatedly onto two surfaces: light-colored foam rubber and a dark pile of dirt. He recorded each of the exercises on film. Intended to be presented side-by-side, the films show tight shots of his feet touching and leaving depressions on the surfaces, then rising again. What is unseen is the extreme strength required to accomplish this arduous task. Mori included a video still of this work in *Jam & Butter*, his gallery's monthly bilingual English-Japanese art magazine, with a caption that read: "To show immediate body adjustment from the material; To show immediate material conditions from the body."[29] This idea of reciprocal impact on both body and material relates to the Buddhist idea of conditioning—using extreme attention, awareness, and focus to understand and overcome patterns of reactive behavior.[30]

Kosaka then embarked on a series of private performances in his studio with Lowe Tennesen that combined dirt with an electric blanket. In an interview with Glenn Phillips, Kosaka described his first encounter with this modern invention: "I didn't know what it was, but I was fascinated. We had never seen this in Japan. We had huge cotton blankets over us. I was just amazed by the electric blanket. It was so

Body Conditioning, 1970–71, cover of *Jam & Butter* 14, published by Mori's Form, Los Angeles

warm! I had a dream the first night, with this incredible floating sensation."[31] In *Earth Position* (1971), he covered Lowe Tennesen's recumbent form with an electric blanket and piled a mound of dirt on top. Appearing to meditate or sleep, she seemed to rest comfortably, impervious to the heat and weight upon her body.

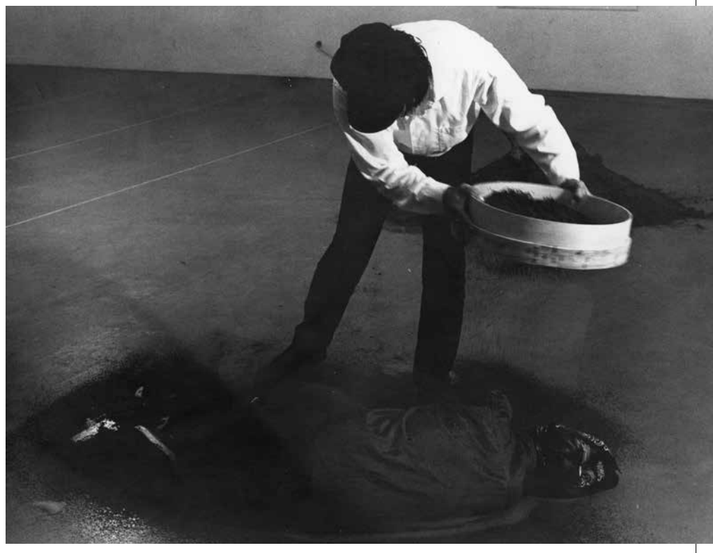
When invited to participate in a performance series at Pomona College, Kosaka wanted to extend his memory of the electric blanket's "floating sensation" into "astral projection."[32] In an untitled work from 1972, Kosaka covered his own body with a very hot electric blanket and hundreds of pounds of dirt piled on top. He stated that he was "trying to project my body to someplace else." After enduring extreme heat and weight, he crawled out and went to another location in the gallery, where a student sifted dirt on him. When he arose, he left behind a silhouette in the shape of his body. His friend Wolfgang Stoerchle said this work reminded him of a photograph of a person's shadow burned onto the wall after the atomic bomb blast of Hiroshima.[33]

That same year, Kosaka engaged in a private performance in protest against the utter futility of war, specifically in reference to the escalating conflict in Viet Nam. For *Buffer Zone* (1972), he ran back and forth along a rope path in his studio, knocked down Lowe Tennesen, then carefully sifted dirt over her fallen body. Kosaka's physically challenging task of running is followed by a gesture of violence and then what might be a ritual of conciliation. He repeated the scenario again and again, like the endless cycle of wars in the past and present.

Kosaka's endurance performances and body work are both related to and different from those of his peers. In 1972, Jack Goldstein buried himself alive with a stethoscope attached to his chest, breathing air from plastic tubes while a red light flashed to the rhythm of his beating heart. For his MFA thesis exhibition at the University of California, Irvine (1971), Chris Burden confined himself in his locker for five days, then continued to subject his body to numerous masochistic challenges. While these artists aimed to shock spectators and question what constitutes art, Kosaka's intentions are different. In an interview, Lowe Tennessen compared Kosaka to Goldstein, noting that "Hiro's performances are like a private compulsions" and her work with him was "more meditational." In contrast, she observed that Goldstein "really wanted to reach out and grab the audience and take them emotionally."[34] Kosaka's repetitive, meditative actions are aimed not only to test his endurance and strength but also to understand how to condition/recondition both his body and mind by assuming different levels of consciousness. Ultimately, his performances demanded strict discipline, focus, and attention; awareness of nature and his environment; and experiential learning, all of which were integral to his Buddhist practice.







TOP: Kosaka with Maggie Lowe, *Earth Position*, Kosaka's studio, Los Angeles, 1971

BOTTOM LEFT: Untitled, Monday Night Performance Series, Pomona College Art Gallery, Claremont, CA, 1972

BOTTOM RIGHT: Kosaka with Maggie Lowe, *Buffer Zone*, Jack Goldstein and Kosaka's studio, 1972

Between Art and Buddhism in Japan

In 1973, following his immersion in avant-garde art practices in L.A., Kosaka returned home to Japan. He reconnected with Gutai artist Saburo Murakami, who invited him to do a performance at the Signum Gallery in Kyoto. Kosaka studied Flamenco guitar when he was fourteen in Spain and learned *soleares*, a type of traditional Flamenco song with melancholic rhythms. Through his research on Flamenco, he learned that in the fifteenth century, Roma nomads from Punjab, India, brought Buddhist traditions to China, Korea, and Japan, but also to Pakistan, Turkey, Greece, and Spain.[35] This legacy inspired Kosaka's Kyoto performance, *Soleares* (1973), during which he played Flamenco guitar onstage for forty continuous minutes with a razor blade inserted into his index finger, which bled onto a piece of paper on the floor.[36] Kosaka has said this bleeding ritual reflects the peripatetic life of the Roma, their role in the history of Buddhism, and his ongoing interest in economic, cultural, and religious interactions between the East and the West.

Immediately after his *Soleares* performance, Kosaka embarked on his own nomadic sojourn, *88 Temples* (1973). He undertook this three-month, thousand-mile Zen pilgrimage on foot to sacred sites, starting on Shikoku Island off the coast of Japan, with a group of Buddhist monks. He initially thought of this as an art project and acknowledged inspiration from Richard Long, the English artist who refers to his work as "art made by walking in landscapes."[37] Similar to Long's practice, Kosaka's artistic endeavor included taking photographs and writing during the trek. But it was also a spiritual journey that clearly influenced his decision to become a Buddhist priest. After this "initiation," he focused on his Buddhist studies, was ordained as a priest, and stayed in the monastery for a few years. His teachers ultimately decided "he should leave the sheltered life for a more difficult training beyond the temple walls."[38]



Rehearsal for *Amerika Maru,* Flamenco dancer Sylvia Morales and guitarist Philip Boroff, Koyasan Buddhist Temple, 1980



On Stage and among Collaborators

In 1980, Kosaka returned to Los Angeles, where he served as a priest at the Koyasan Buddhist Temple in Little Tokyo. In 1983, he started working at JACCC, teaching classes on traditional arts, organizing programs, and managing the art gallery. As Julie Lazar notes, Kosaka listened to his Buddhist teachers and "decided to serve a larger public ministry but infused what he had learned as a priest into process-oriented, large-scale artworks."[39]

Moving away from private solo or duo performances, Kosaka began writing and directing theatrical, stage-based productions that involved collaborating with choreographers, dancers, composers, and musicians. He incorporated traditional Japanese archery; folk tales; and *bunraku*, Kabuki, and Noh theater into his work, and he explored subjects such as immigration and his own biography. Kosaka's performances on proscenium stages, often defined by minimal backdrops and architectural elements, became animated by the gestures of the players, while the dramatic lighting, Japanese costumes, and props added colorful visual elements. These performances took place in the mid-1980s at the Japan America Theatre (now the Aratani Theatre at JACCC); at smaller theaters, often as part of collaborative series; and, occasionally, in Buddhist temples.

Kosaka's dual roles at Koyasan Temple and JACCC supported the links he strove to make between Japanese culture and Buddhism in his own performance work and pedagogy. For example, *Contemplations on the Asymmetry of a Bow: Arrow-track Bestriding the Retina* (1983), part of the Exploration series,[40] featured Kosaka's Los Angeles Kyudo Kai archery group, Ikkyu (one bow).[41] The title of the performance referenced the proper asymmetrical placement of the archer's hand on the bow, while its subtitle, evokes the arrow's path as it crosses the eyes of the audience and makes a line like a drawing that disappears in space.





Contemplations on the Asymmetry of a Bow: Arrow-track Bestriding the Retina, Japan America Theatre, JACCC, Los Angeles, 1983



Kosaka's contemporary opera *Kuzu No Ha* (The Fox-Wife of Shinoda Woods, 1985), based on a legendary folk tale performed in traditional Kabuki and *bunraku* puppet theater, was part of the Angel's Flight performance series at the Wallenboyd Theatre in Los Angeles.[42] The work, which included two sculptures by former Gutai artist Watanabe Hiroshi, is a story of love and transformation: a nobleman prevents a hunter from killing a white fox, who becomes a beautiful woman, bears a child, then reverts back to her original animal body.

Kosaka reconfigured his 1973 solo performance *Soleares* under the title *Solares* in 1985 at the Japan America Theatre (now the Aratani Theatre at JACCC), as part of a celebration of the Buddha's birthday.[43] Consisting of three parts—purification, festival, and resonance—it featured an eclectic mix of Flamenco dance, classical Spanish guitar, and Buddhist priests chanting onstage. Once again, Kosaka united the East and West, as he began to see the multicultural megalopolis of L.A. as a "contemporary version of the Silk Road, a route for the commerce, culture, language, and arts, that intermingle as [people] migrate."[44]



Kuzu No Ha (The Fox-Wife of Shinoda Woods), Wallenboyd Theatre, Los Angeles, 1985



Sylvia Morales, Philip Boroff, LA Buddhist Federation, *Silkroad*, Getty Center, Los Angeles, 2000. Pictured: Sylvia Morales, Cynthia Morales, Philip Boroff, LA Buddhist Federation







Kosaka continued exploring the theme of East–West migration with *Amerika Maru* (1993), a performance that also took place at the Japan America Theatre.[45] To make this work, which is named for a ship that carried Issei (first-generation) immigrants from Japan to the United States in the early 1900s, Kosaka interviewed two hundred people about their journeys and lives. Many gave him pre-World War II objects, including old suitcases, that he then used on stage as props.

The *Amerika Maru* program notes began with a haiku written by Kosaka's maternal grandfather, Morio Hayashida:

Ribbons of farewell
I hold between my fingers
Feeling blood flow through.[46]

The poem refers to the paper streamers thrown from the pier by those who came to bid farewell to the passengers. In the performance, a collage of scenes conveyed their emotional departure from Japan, the hardships they endured in their new lives, and their hopes and dreams for the future. Combining Flamenco dance and music, *taiko* drumming, *kyudo*, and monks chanting in front of a wall of suitcases, *Amerika Maru* unpacked memories of immigrants' experiences and, like *Soleares*, referenced Buddhism and cross-cultural exchange.

TOP LEFT: *Asama Maru* leaving the Port of Los Angeles after the Los Angeles Olympics, 1932

TOP AND BOTTOM RIGHT: *Amerika Maru*, Japan America Theatre, JACCC, Los Angeles, 1993



In 1994, curator Julie Lazar organized *In the Mood*, an installation of Kosaka's work at the Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles that expanded upon the artist's themes of cultural identity and the recollections of immigrants in *Amerika Maru*.[47] For *In the Mood*, he repurposed the Issei's suitcases, stacking them on a platform at the front of the gallery near a wall of wood backpacks with vintage Singer sewing machines on top.[48] In the center, a vitrine with Kosaka's large wooden model of a steamship similar to *Amerika Maru* sat atop rolls of multicolored farewell streamers. Kosaka also included oversized woodblock prints of his stage-set drawings and photographs of the *Amerika Maru* performance. The museum installation allowed visitors to view static artifacts from the ephemeral stage piece more carefully and to spend time contemplating the historical Issei experience, which would have been pertinent even to recent immigrants in the mid-1990s. Lazar observed, "Kosaka's work connects his respect for individual history and culture with the reality of the dynamic present."[49]

Hirokazu Kosaka: In the Mood, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1994



ABOVE: Sewing machines used in *Amerika Maru*, 1993

RIGHT: Steamer trunks and suitcases used for *Amerika Maru* (1993) and *Hirokazu Kosaka: In the Mood*, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1994



Kosaka and Body Weather Laboratory, *In Between the Heartbeat*, Japan America Theatre, JACCC, Los Angeles, 1996

In Between the Heartbeat and From the Verandah

In Between the Heartbeat (1996), a collaboration between Kosaka, choreographer and dancer Oguri, and composer Yuval Ron, premiered at the Japan America Theatre as a work in progress. It revisits Kosaka's memory of using an electric blanket on his first night in the United States, where in addition to the warm, floating sensation, he also had a nightmare that his bed would catch on fire. Blankets of many colors hung on the wall and formed a patchwork pattern on the floor. Oguri performed Butoh movements on top of a copying machine that was timed to intermittently shine bright lights in surreal juxtapositions of body/machine and dream/reality. As the artist wrote in the program notes: "The warmth of electric current cascades over bodies as we sleep and the ubiquitous spirit arises through the light of the copying machine."[50] At one point in the performance, Kosaka suddenly shot an arrow that flew by the performers and hit a large target on the stage, adding an element of surprise and potential danger. As the artist explains, the archer must first focus so intently that they become "one" with the bow and arrow. In order to make a perfect shot, they must shoot exactly "in between the heartbeats."[51]

I initially met Kosaka at MOCA during his *In the Mood* exhibition, and I was fortunate to re-meet him at *AWAKE: Art, Buddhism and the Dimensions of Consciousness*, a two-year project about Buddhist influences on contemporary art.[52] On October 25, 2001, less than six weeks after the tragic events of 9/11, Kosaka performed a version of *In Between the Heartbeat*. What I recall best about the performance was the feeling of shock when he shot the arrow—a jarring and stark reminder of the Buddhist principles of the temporality of life and the precarity of material things, which was especially powerful during that angst-ridden period.

Another goal of the *AWAKE* project was for attendees to organize exhibitions and programs in their own institutions in order to bring new modes of public engagement to the arts.[53] One of the projects that emanated from *AWAKE* was *From the Verandah: Art, Buddhism, Presence* (2003–4), a collaboration between the Fowler Museum at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the Hammer Museum at UCLA, and JACCC.[54] For this program, Kosaka produced an installation and a performance at the Fowler, working for the first time with architect Michael Rotondi, artist Wolfgang Laib, choreographer Joe Goode, and composer Nathan Birnbaum, as well as with his long-time collaborators Oguri and Ron.





Hirokazu Kosaka, Michael Rotondi, and Wolfgang Laib, *From the Verandah: Art, Buddhism, Presence*, Fowler Museum at UCLA, Los Angeles, 2003–4

For Kosaka's performance, entitled *Muddy Robe* (2003), he asked UCLA scientists to analyze the DNA of rice he had harvested. When the artist received the genetic analysis, instead of writing the letters ACGT in the traditional format, he wrote them in calligraphy and made a video of the characters, adding motion and time. This constantly moving calligraphic "code" was projected onto Oguri's body as he made controlled, attenuated Butoh movements.

Kosaka, Laib, and Rotondi conceived the installation of *From the Verandah* as a large rectangle divided into two recessed squares by a thick wall. A wooden pathway around the space evoked a veranda (covered porch). Ubiquitous in Japanese architecture, the veranda acts as an interstitial space between indoors and outdoors and is commonly used for conversation and contemplation. For his installation, *Verandah* (2003), Kosaka filled his recessed square with red mud that cracked as it dried. Reiterating the veranda's liminality, he wrote in the program notes that it represents "infinite shades of gray…not a yes or a no, but infinite maybes."[55] For his side of the installation, Laib, who is known for using everyday materials such as milk, rice, and pollen, made *Rice House* (2003)—a small, rectangular, peaked-roof house of white marble with rice piled up along its edges. Like Kosaka, Laib has studied world religions, and he intended for this geometric house to reference Muslim tombs and medieval reliquaries.[56]

The artists in *From the Verandah* all shared the common goal of creating a meditative environment to be experienced in person. When entering, visitors heard Ron's music and Birnbaum's sound installation of "falling snow," a barely perceptible, calming white noise. Meditation cushions along the veranda encouraged audiences not to view the art passively but rather to sit down and have an embodied experience with it: to quiet their bodies, maintain attention, and relax, practicing the mindfulness that is key to Buddhist meditation.[57]



KALPA: Time, Montalvo Arts Center, Saratoga, CA, 2009

In Community and into Pedagogy

Kosaka's community-based practices and teaching best exemplify the interdependent practices at the fulcrum of his art and life. In 2009, the Montalvo Arts Center in Saratoga, California, asked Julie Lazar to organize a new community-based curatorial initiative. Initially entitled AGENCY: The Work of Artists Exploring Ecologies of Interdependence, the project aimed to connect artists with a community, explore interdependence from different vantage points, and demonstrate how art has the power to change perceptions.[58] Knowing Kosaka's commitment to art, community, and the Buddhist belief in interdependency, Lazar invited him to participate in this project.

For AGENCY, Kosaka made a new iteration of a work titled *Ruin Map* (2009). As with the original project, he revisited a third-grade assignment from his childhood in Japan, in which the students asked their grandparents to draw a map of their childhood home from memory. For this new work, Kosaka invited a group of local residents who were sixty-five or older to delve deep into their own memories to draw their childhood houses and neighborhoods. Next, he engaged them in discussions about the process, which revealed not only what they recalled but also what had *not* been preserved in the intervening years. Then, Kosaka carved their map drawings into wood and made block prints on handmade rice paper, "imprinting" their cultural memories of home.[59] He bound the prints together to make artists' books, including a large volume that he donated to the library at the Joan Pisani Community Center in Saratoga, where the work is accessible to the public.

As part of AGENCY: The Work of Artists Exploring Ecologies of Interdependence, Kosaka had an exhibition at the Montalvo Arts Center gallery, entitled *KALPA: Time* (2009). For this installation, he added poppy seeds to the surfaces of the woodblock prints from *Ruin Map* and hung them from the ceiling. Gradually, the seeds fell off, evoking the passage of time. In an interview, Kosaka shared a Buddhist parable about the meaning of *kalpa* (Sanskrit for *eon*). If a 16-mile-square cube was filled with poppy seeds, he explained, and a single seed was removed each century, it would take an infinite amount of time—*kalpa*—to empty it.[60] Kosaka's work in AGENCY demonstrates his dialogical process and generous social practice, which emulate traditions of ethics and morality in engaged Buddhism.[61]





TOP: Kosaka making prints for *Ruin Map* in his studio at JACCC, 2005

BOTTOM: Kosaka teaching kindergarten students at the JACCC, Los Angeles, 2018

For more than four decades at JACCC, Kosaka has taught classes in the important Japanese cultural traditions of calligraphy, ikebana (Japanese flower arranging), and *kyudo* to students of all ages. In the video *Portraits of Radical Generosity*, produced by Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Kosaka discusses how his direct and process-oriented pedagogical approach—which emphasizes understanding materials and experiential learning—mirrors his artmaking.[62] Kosaka's comments recall educator John Dewey's concept of "learning by doing" and belief that the function of art has always been to break through the crust of conventional and routine consciousness.[63] Dewey's philosophy parallels the Buddhist concepts of utilizing focused attention and meditation to counteract behavioral conditioning.

Kosaka practices calligraphy every morning as another form of meditation (*hitsuzendo*). In a video made for the AGENCY exhibition, he explains how calligraphy embodies Buddhist oneness and interdependence: "The brush is not an object apart from you, it *is* your hand and your heart, so the ink and the paper need to become oneness with each other… . It is not just me who is doing the calligraphy, it is the brush maker, the paper maker, the ink maker, the person who taught me, an 800-year lineager… . A continuous interdependency."[64] He notes how calligraphy requires not just practice with the hand but also the use of the whole body: "[T]he posture must be straight and the breath subtle" to properly form the letters.[65] Kosaka also teaches that since the ink is made from charcoal, it is a byproduct of both fire and water, and is not black but rather in-between, with "infinite shades of gray," just like the veranda.[66]

When Kosaka is teaching ikebana, he talks about the significance of each component: the blossom symbolizes heaven, the artist/arranger is the human being, and the vase is the earth. Even though a cut flower will eventually die, it has a "second renewed life" when it is united with the vase and the arranger—another form of oneness. Kosaka also believes: "The person is not really choosing the flower, but flower is choosing you.... The self becomes the arranger of one's own life."

Finally, Kosaka calls *kyudo* "the cord and anchor of my artistic life." In an interview, he speaks about the problem of trying to teach Japanese archery. He says, "When pupils first learn the *kyudo* skills, they inevitably ask questions. How do you do it? How do you hold the bow? An inherent part of human nature is to ask questions; it's our ego's constant need for confirmation. By asking a question we are creating a self. In teaching the art of *kyudo*, you aim to destroy that self. That means you learn not to ask questions but to embrace the experience instead."[67] Kosaka's words underscore how, as with calligraphy, to practice *kyudo* one must be fully attentive and present and learn how to engage in an embodied action without intervening thoughts. He stresses his father's admonition that the self/ego must be "killed."

Conclusion

Most of my artworks combine the heightened experience of space with the present moment. The work is solitary and meditative, evoking contemplation.[68]
–HIROKAZU KOSAKA

This essay began with a discussion of Hirokazu Kosaka's connection to his Buddhist ancestors as "epigenetic." Whether inherited biologically or environmentally, Kosaka has developed an embodied, engaged art practice informed by esoteric Shingon Buddhism and his years as a pedagogue. Kosaka's comment that his "artworks combine the heightened experience of space with the present moment" is especially evident in his early performances, where he investigated the body in various conditions and spaces. His "meditative" work, informed by the Buddhist intentions of awakeness and mindfulness, aims to break our preestablished patterns and conditioning. Working in collaboration with others across disciplines, melding traditional Japanese and Buddhist themes with experimental forms and contemporary subjects, Kosaka's work is contemplative; he wants his audiences to think and learn from the past to be more present in the moment. Whether working on socially engaged community projects or teaching *kyudo*, Kosaka's goal is the intertwining of his art, Buddhism, and pedagogy, always in collaboration with his ancestors and his contemporaries.

NOTES

1. Hirokazu Kosaka's archives, housed at the Japanese American Community & Cultural Center, Los Angeles, are also online at www.kosakacenter.org.

2. Chouinard Art Institute and the Los Angeles Conservatory of Art merged to become the California Institute of the Arts (CalArts) in 1961. See https://calarts.edu/history/chouinard-art-institute.

3. See *Artist Talk: Laddie John Dill and Hirokazu Kosaka*, The Mistake Room, public program, December 3, 2014, https://www.tmr.la/evartisttalkdillkosaka2014.

4. For further discussion of this, see Constance Lewallen and Karen Moss, *State of Mind: New Art Circa 1970* (University of California Press, 2011).

5. Hiroko Shimizu, "The Gutai Group: Intervention into Materials, Time, Site and Public," unpublished MA Thesis, University of Southern California (May 1994), 12, https://digitallibrary.usc.edu/archive/The-Gutai-group—Intervention-into-materials—time—site—and-public—2A3B-F15O4Q75.html.

6. Jiro Yoshihara, "Gutai Bijutsu Sengen" (The Gutai Manifesto), *Geijutsu Shincho* 1 (December 1956), 202–4. Yoshihara was the first to use the term *gutai* to indicate how the group engaged directly with concrete materials.

7. In an interview with Hiroko Shimizu in 1994, Shiraga said his two-year old son broke through a Japanese paper sliding door, and he appropriated this for his action. Kosaka reconstructed Murakami's piece for MOCA's *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949–1979* (1998) at the request of Murakami's widow.

8. Shiraga's molded clay and Murakami's ripped paper remained on display in *First Gutai Art Exhibition* as artifacts of their actions.

9. Hirokazu Kosaka, quoted in Rebecca McGrew and Glenn Phillips, eds., *Project Series 46 Hirokazu Kosaka: On the Verandah, Selected Works from 1969–1974* (Pomona College Museum of Art, 2013), 41.

10. Kosaka, quoted in *Hirokazu Kosaka: On the Verandah*, 41.

11. Kosaka performed *Enso* (1972) at Dockweiler State Beach at El Segundo, California, where he ran for thirty minutes in the sand to make a circle or 0, the Buddhist symbol for void or oneness (*enso*).

12. *Avalanche* 5 (Summer 1972): 2.

13. This exhibition was curated by Mori with installation assistance from Kosaka. After the exhibition, Mori gave Kosaka the photographs printed from the original Gutai negatives, and they are in Kosaka's archive at the Japanese American Cultural & Community Center.

14. "Expo '70," in Alexandra Munroe and Ming Tiampo, eds., *Gutai: Splendid Playground*, exh. cat. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 2013), 232. Performances included performers floating on giant balloons, remotely controlled toy dogs, and bubble-blowing firetrucks.

15. Allan Kaprow first used the phrase *happenings* six years later in his article "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," *ARTnews* 57, no. 6 (October 1958): 24–26 and 55–57.

16. Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the Event Score," *October* 95 (Winter 2001): 57. Kotz refers to the pedagogical function of event scores as "rubrics" (educational guidelines) or "tools" for production.

17. Richards's diagram was published in James Fetterman, *John Cage's Theater Piece #1* (New York, 1996). For a detailed description of the performance, see Eva Diaz, *The Experimenters: Chance and Design at Black Mountain College* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 79–83.

18. Kosaka studied Shingon Buddhism at Columbia University with Dr. Yoshito Hakeda about twenty years after Cage studied Zen with Suzuki.

19. San Fernando Valley State College is now known as California State University, Northridge.

20. Glenn Phillips, "Kill Yourself: The Art of Hirokazu Kosaka," in *Hirokazu Kosaka: On the Verandah*, 16.

21. Cage performed this three-minute piece on television in Italy and again in the United States during the primetime television show *I've Got A Secret*. Both televised performances took place in 1959, which is surprising given the work's avant-garde nature.

22. *Stage Piece* extended into the university's hallways, where Kosaka released three live chickens. *For Work* (*Colored Chickens*) (1956), which Kosaka surely knew, Yoshihara painted three live chickens.

23. Cage re-named his class "Experimental Composition" in 1958 and used event scores in his teaching.

24. Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia," *Something Else Press Newsletter*, 1–2 (1966). Higgins described Fluxus work as "intermedia," existing between interdependent artistic disciplines.

25. Nam June Paik first performed *Zen for Head* at Stockhausen's *Originale*, October 27, 1961.

26. In an email to the author, Kosaka stated that he met Fluxus artist Nam June Paik through Jack Goldstein in 1969 (November 19, 2024).

27. Shinoda's film *Double Suicide* is based on *The Love Suicides at Amijoma* (1721), a Japanese puppet theater play by Monzaemon Chikamatsu.

28. Hirokazu Kosaka's artist statement in *Hirokazu Kosaka: On the Verandah*, 41.

29. *Jam & Butter* 14 (1972): 1. See Rika Hiro, "Jam & Butter Paper Gallery: Mori's Form Artists' Magazines, Toward a Site for West Coast-Kansai Artistic Exchanges," *Bulletin of Graphic Culture Research Grants* (2023).

30. Kosaka premiered his *Body Conditioning* dual-projection films in public in 1972, at a film screening at Pomona College that was organized by his friend and fellow artist Wolgang Stoerchle.

31. Hirokazu Kosaka, interview by Glenn Phillips, in *It Happened at Pomona: Art at the Edge of Los Angeles, 1969–1973* (Pomona College Museum of Art, 2011), 202.

32. Helene Winer, Pomona College's gallery director at the time, organized the program as part of a Monday night series featuring young artists from Southern California.

33. Phillips, "Kill Yourself: The Art of Hirokazu Kosaka," in *Hirokazu Kosaka: On the Verandah*, 17.

34. See Keenan Jay's interview with Maggie Lowe Tennesen, February 22, 2023, in "Conversations," in this volume.

35. Hirokazu Kosaka notes in his artist statement that *soleares* derives from the Spanish word *soledad* (sorrow), Hirokazu Kosaka Archive, Japanese American Cultural & Community Center, box 3.

36. Hirokazu Kosaka Archive, JACCC, box 3.

37. See Richard Long, "Richard Long," http://www.richardlong.org/index.html.

38. Julie Lazar, Hirokazu Kosaka biography, in AGENCY: The Works of Artists (Montalvo Arts Center, 2009).

39. Lazar, Kosaka biography.

40. First performed at the Higashi Honganji Buddhist Temple in Los Angeles in 1976, this revision of *Contemplations on the Asymmetry of a Bow* was coproduced by the JACCC, Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Los Angeles, and CalArts.

41. See Hirokazu Kosaka, *Los Angeles Kyudo* (Ikkyu, 2023). This book was published on the occasion of the Los Angeles Kyudo Kai archery group's 108th anniversary.

42. *Kuzu No Ha* (The Fox-Wife of Shinoda Woods) was produced by Pipeline Theater and MOCA.

43. *Solares* was presented with the Los Angeles Buddhist Church Foundation as part of a Hanamatsuri festival on April 14, 1985.

44. Hirokazu Kosaka, artist statement, Hirokazu Kosaka Archive, JACCC, box 3.

45. Later performances of *Amerika Maru* took place at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Lee, Massachusetts, in 1993, and at the Macky Auditorium, University of Colorado Boulder, in 1995.

46. Morio Hayashida wrote this haiku about his own migration experiences. See program notes in the Jacob's Pillow Performance Programs 1934–Present Collection, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival Archive, Becket, Massachusetts, https://archives.jacobspillow.org/Detail/objects/44764.

47. Press release for *In the Mood* (1994), MOCA, Los Angeles, Hirokazu Kosaka Archive, JACCC, box 4.

48. Sewing machines were a favored gift for immigrant women so they could make clothing and items for their new homes and earn money. See *Los Angeles Times*, "Hirokazu Kosaka—In the Mood, Opens on Aug. 7th at MOCA," press clipping, Hirokazu Kosaka Archive, JACCC, box 4.

49. See press release for *In the Mood*.

50. Hirokazu Kosaka, program notes for *In Between the Heartbeat*, Sushi Contemporary Performance and Visual Arts Archive, UC San Diego Library, Geisel Special Collections MSS 741.

51. An early version of this performance was part of *John Cage: Rolywholyover: A Circus* at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, in 1993. This was a more complete work with sixteen photocopy machines, Oguri's full Renzoku dance group, and Ron's score.

52. Curators Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob invited artists to perform and solicited curators and scholars to present white papers at a series of retreats at the Green Gulch Farm Zen Center in Marin County, California, from 2001 to 2003. See Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob, "Project Summary," in *AWAKE: Art, Buddhism and the Dimensions of Consciousness*, https://www.artandbuddhism.org. Baas and Jacob published these papers in *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (University of California Press, 2004).

53. For *AWAKE*, I co-curated *TOUCH: Relational Aesthetics: From the 1990s to Now*, with Nicolas Bourriaud, and *Alison Knowles: Secrets of Ordinary Things*, at San Francisco Art Institute McBean Gallery, both in 2002.

54. See *From the Verandah: Art, Buddhism, Presence*, October 5, 2003–January 4, 2004, Fowler Museum at UCLA, https://fowler.ucla.edu/exhibitions/from-the-verandah-art-buddhism-presence/.

55. Hirokazu Kosaka, program notes on Verandah (2003), for *From the Verandah: Art, Buddhism, Presence*.

56. Brent Good, "Still Points: The Quiet Spaces of Wolfgang Laib," *Image Journal* 53 (2004), https://imagejournal.org/article/still-points/.

57. This approach predates the current phenomenon of museums organizing public programs aimed to promote mindfulness through meditation, such as those held regularly at the Hammer Museum and Wende Museum in Los Angeles.

58. Montalvo Arts Center, press release for AGENCY: The Work of Artists, 2009.

59. Ariel Swartley, "Hirokazu Kosaka: One Way and Another," Montalvo Arts Center, June 16, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20160821043909/http://montalvoarts.org/blogs/ariel_swartley/kosaka_one_way_and_another/.

60. Hirokazu Kosaka, "Artists Notes," in McGrew and Phillips, *Hirokazu Kosaka: On the Verandah*, 5.

61. See Suzanne Lacy, "Having It Good: Reflections on Engaged Art and Engaged Buddhism," in Baas and Jacobs, *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*, 97–112.

62. See *Portraits of Radical Generosity*, produced by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in conjunction with artist Cauleen Smith's exhibition *Give It or Leave It* (2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHP9BbOILSc.

63. John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Henry Holt and Company, 1927), 184.

64. Kosaka, in AGENCY: The Work of Artists (video), Montalvo Arts Center's 2009 Arts Initiative, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D-QzX7DR5RNQ. See also https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hx61mRvLAx-o&t=18s.

65. Kosaka, AGENCY video.

66. This and the subsequent quotes about teaching in this section are from the video *Portraits of Radical Generosity*.

67. Alessandra Moctezuma, "Conversation with Hirokazu Kosaka: In Search of In Between," *Framework: A Journal on Images and Culture* 9, no. 1 (1997): X.

68. Kosaka, in McGrew and Phillips, *Hirokazu Kosaka: On the Verandah*, 71, 81.

FOLLOWING PAGES, LEFT AND RIGHT:
Kosaka and Body Weather Laboratory, *Caddy! Caddy! Caddy!*, The Tobias Theater at Indianapolis Museum of Art, Spirit & Place Festival, 2009