

ARTFORUM

“The Group 1965 - We Are Boys!”

KUNSTHALLE DÜSSELDORF

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The Group 1965, aka *Showa 40 Nen Kai*, occupies a central place in Japanese contemporary art, although the six-man collective is largely unknown in the West. The group's name absurdly evokes the banal fact that the members were all born in the fortieth year of Emperor Hirohito—a generation that matured during the creative foment of Japan's late-1980s economic “bubble” and its dramatic, decadent aftermath. For seventeen years they have made sporadic collaborations, performances, and off-the-wall experimentations, self-styled as the last in a long line of neo-Dada avant-garde artists.

The Kunsthalle Düsseldorf offers an expansive, highbrow location to showcase these Tokyo urban legends. Of the many works featured, the most interesting historically are the smallest: a generous set of Tsuyoshi Ozawa's *Nasubi* (Eggplant) galleries, tiny blue milk boxes offering a reduced-scale white cube in which the other artists are invited to exhibit. In one, there is a rare showing for Makoto Aida's downright nasty painting of a sarin poison gas bottle. He hung this outside his house in the Tokyo suburbs a year before the fatal underground terrorist attack of 1995. There is also the original miniature “group show,” again from 1994, and a new box by Ozawa, its empty walls lacquered by a famous artisan from the region near the Fukushima disaster zone.

Elsewhere, Aida's massive jigsaw wall painting *Monument for Nothing III*, 2009, is a visceral explosion of bile about everything tasteless and tacky in Japanese consumer culture. Alongside sit Parco Kinoshita's naive paintings of tsunamis, made in 2010 as a premonition (he says) of what was to come, and Oscar Oiwa's sweet and soulful paintings about travel and identity loss. Hiroyuki Matsukage's farcical video *Hole Yoko*, 2010, visualizes a suspiciously young Yoko Ono striding in high heels along a beach, even as she falls serially into a line of sand traps. Funniest of all, Aida's triple video performance *Art and Philosophy II*, 2011, pours scorn on Western art theory, as he mimics the evolution of typical “French,” “German,” and “English” abstract art, while declaiming famous philosophical quotes from textbooks in a dreadful Japanese accent. The title of the show is also an intentionally bad joke, one made in honor of Joseph Beuys, Düsseldorf's most famous longtime artist resident.

— Adrian Favell



Ozawa Tsuyoshi and Kinoshita Parco, *Nasubi*, 1994, mixed media, 13 x 7 1/2 x 5 1/2."

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