

## KEY HIRAGA / TETSUMI KUDO

Curator: Stéphane Corréard

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Given that they had so much in common, it is surprising that the works of Tetsumi Kudo (1935–1990) and those of Key Hiraga (1936–2000) have never been brought together. Obscene in appearance, their phantasmagorical worlds were hit by the same original trauma, the same monstrously real obscenity: nuclear folly, which disrupted both their macroscopic vision, that of man in his terrestrial and cosmic environment, and their microcosmic vision, that of the contemporary body, its mutations and its ineluctable dismemberment.

Having arrived in Paris in the first half of the 1960s, Kudo and Hiraga evidently came up against the same wall of incommunicability, profound mutual incomprehension, insatiable desires and incompatible cultures.

Consequently, their works expressed the same oppressive sensation of confinement, which Kudo summed up in 1976: “We are born in a box (womb), live in a box (flat) and, after death, end up in a box (coffin). In fact, one produces small boxes oneself from one’s birth to one’s death, that is, one produces boxes in a box. These small boxes are those that contain our prayers (wishes) and curses.”

In Hiraga’s paintings, this confinement is that of Euclidean perspective, the shackles that systematically gripped his literally confined compositions in the early 1970s. But, in Kudo’s work the box turns into a cage, letting the gaze penetrate it, or, worse, into an aquarium, offering itself to a chilling surveillance. And Hiraga took care to put in “windows” (*Window* is the generic title of most of his paintings from 1964 to 1968, a series including the painting *The Window*, dated 1964, now in the Museum of Modern Art in New York), apparently impressed by Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window*, the pinnacle of sadistic voyeurism.

Having settled in the Pigalle neighbourhood after his arrival in Paris, Hiraga, who came alone (unlike Kudo, who accompanied his wife, Hiroko), apparently found it difficult to deal with the proximity of permanent temptation, and no doubt the impossibility of decoding or responding to the erotic enticements and the evolution of the balance of power between men and women, which was particularly rapid in the late 1960s.

In both Hiraga’s and Kudo’s art, this hormonal and cultural shock centres on universal and obsessional motifs, which a play of combinations allows to be examined ad infinitum – hairiness, sperm, crosses, flowers, make-up, eyes, ears and so on – are identifiers whose difference in meaning or usage between Japan and the West, allows them to give vigorous expression to a sepulchral metaphysical anxiety, the ontological incertitude that hollows an emptiness in them that life on earth fails to fill.

Among these symbols, the phallus plays the leading role. A reproductive organ, it crystallises the process of transformation, mutation or even of sloughing, in which the world, man and the human, and, more specifically, the male, was engaged at the time.

By penetrating cells, microscopic radioactive particles encounter DNA chains that take part in genetic reproduction, sowing in the organism the seed of a mortiferous evolution of the species.

The critic Anne Tronche recounted how Kudo, on the occasion of formal performances, gave “phallic figures to young women in traditional dress to iron, [asking] them to distribute wax penises decorated with pastel ribbons with the ceremonial gestures reserved for the preparation of tea”.

In the work of Hiraga, too, the male organ is either reduced to a pipe (from which escape mutant, fluorescent, worried-looking spermatozoids), or represented by an appendix, generally nasal, wearing a condom that, like Kudo's ironed phalluses, merges, like the flattened slough of a snake, with the organ in volume that it was supposed to cover, or even protect.

While they lived in Paris – in the ten years spanning the 1960s and 1970s, of which May 1968 was the tipping point – Kudo and Hiraga simultaneously invented, without knowing each other (as far as we know), a contorted and aggressive art that some call cyberpunk (and which the novelist Bruce Sterling defines as “a cultural Petri dish where writhing gene lines splice”), whose strident chromatic scale greatly increases the power of irradiation.

Stéphane Corréard

## EXHIBITION PROGRAMME 2017–2018 “AFFINITIES”

#1. **MARCEL DUCHAMP / JEAN DUPUY**  
28 APRIL–27 MAY 2017

#2. **KEY HIRAGA / TETSUMI KUDO**  
2 JUNE–29 JULY 2017

#3. **RENÉ MAGRITTE / PHILIPPE MAYAUX**  
22 SEPTEMBER–14 OCTOBER 2017. Opening, Thursday, 21 September.

(...)

A catalogue will be published for each of the exhibitions  
in this programme, by Éditions Loevenbruck, Paris.

### Further information:

Alexandra Schillinger, [alexandra@loevenbruck.com](mailto:alexandra@loevenbruck.com), tél. 01 82 28 38 22  
assisted by Lola Ector, [lola@loevenbruck.com](mailto:lola@loevenbruck.com).

Gallery open Tuesday–Saturday, 11 am–7 pm or by appointment.