

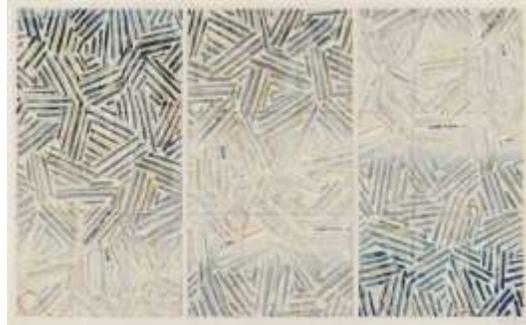
**Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present *Jasper Johns: Usuyuki***

Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo

November 1–December 21, 2019

Opening Reception: Friday, November 1, 6–8pm

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to present *Jasper Johns: Usuyuki*, an exhibit of nine prints and drawings by the celebrated American artist, opening at the gallery's Tokyo location on November 1, 2019. Produced between 1979 and 2004, the eponymous *Usuyuki* series is composed of four paintings, fifteen drawings, and five prints. The Japanese word *usuyuki*,



which translates to “thin or light snow,”

refers to the transience of weather—metaphorically, the term implies a sudden arrival and, subsequently, unexpected departure. This presentation points to Johns's progression through themes of impermanence and renewal inherent to the term.

For six months in 1952–53, Johns was stationed in Sendai, Japan, during the Korean War; there, he produced posters for films and educational campaigns for the United States Army. When he returned to New York he continued to engage with Japanese culture through his friendship with composer John Cage, who attended lectures by Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki at Columbia University. In 1959, Johns met Japanese critic Yoshiaki Tono in New York, who subsequently wrote extensively on Johns's practice, introducing his work to the Japanese public. In 1964,



Johns returned to Tokyo and obtained a studio in the Japan Artists' Center in the Ginza district for two months, befriending artists Jiro Takamatsu, Tomio Miki, Ushio Shinohara, and gallerist Kusuo Shimizu, the owner of Minami Gallery in Tokyo. Throughout the late 1960s and 70s, Johns exhibited with Minami Gallery and returned to Japan often for exhibition openings.

The term *usuyuki* first came to Johns's attention in connection with the eighteenth-century Kabuki play, *Shin Usuyuki Monogatari*. The twists in this narrative conveyed "the fleeting beauty of the world" to Johns—love, love lost, ambition, sabotage—, revealing a poetic metaphor inherent to the term *usuyuki*. The *Usuyuki* series revolves around subtle variations in a system of gridded cross-hatched lines, based on a numbered scheme Johns rotated, mirrored, cropped, and repeated throughout the series of twenty-four works. Each work embodies an acute variation of the compositions Johns used for the paintings—the foundations of the series—and suggests the meditative power of the motif. The earliest



screenprint from the *Usuyuki* series, presented in this exhibition, is a lithograph produced in 1979. The triptych embodies the series' characteristic cross-hatching, daring attention to surface texture, and nuanced manipulation of color. Like a film reel or Japanese woodblock from the Edo period, Johns creates an introspective narrative evolving in space, over time.

In 1980, Johns produced screenprints at the newly-established Simca Print Artists in New York, founded by master printers Hiroshi Kawanishi, Kenjiro Nonaka, and Takashi Shimada. *Usuyuki* (1981) is one of several works in the exhibition produced with Simca Print Artists, which shows the complexity of Johns's vision. Screenprinted newspaper text is a substrate for painterly strokes of blue, black, purple, orange, and beige pigment. The mixed media drawing from which this print was produced—*Usuyuki* (1979–83)—is also on-view. Voluminous shifts in hue in *Usuyuki* (1982), a screenprinted triptych toying with relationships between complementary colors, are punctuated by deliberate circular imprints and marks on the canvas that bind sections of the design together, suggesting areas of scrolling or rotation within the

composition. Works on paper from 2002 utilize solely black and white pigment to formulate crystalline structures—a departure from the vivacious, animated tones found earlier in the series. Despite their apparent simplicity, these later works sustain conditions for self-reflection. Each shift in color and medium suggests the fluidity of feeling, of mood, throughout the series, not unlike the turbulent love story that inspired the series' name.

While the *Usuyuki* series progressed, Johns was celebrated throughout Japan with major retrospective exhibitions including *Jasper Johns: A Print Retrospective* (MoMA, New York, 1986; traveled to Japan in 1988), *The Jasper Johns Print Exhibition* (Isetan Museum of Art, Tokyo, 1990), and *Jasper Johns: A Retrospective* (MoMA, New York, 1996–97; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, 1997). He ultimately received the



Praemium Imperiale Award in 1993, an annual global award for lifetime achievement in the arts presented by the Japan Arts Association. The artist's sustained investigation of *usuyuki* affirms a crucial connection between his engagement with abstraction and Japanese philosophy that carried into the twenty-first century. In *Jasper Johns: Usuyuki*, the artist's interest in the meditative power of the motif is an opportunity to reflect upon the ephemeral human experience.

On the occasion of *Jasper Johns: Usuyuki*, Fergus McCaffrey has produced the first fully comprehensive catalogue of the *Usuyuki* series. This publication has been edited by Roberta Bernstein, the foremost scholar on the art of Jasper Johns, and features a selection of newly published photographs of the artist at work, by Katy Martin. The publication is available for purchase online and at the galleries.

### About Fergus McCaffrey

Founded in 2006, Fergus McCaffrey is internationally recognized for its groundbreaking role in promoting the work of postwar Japanese artists such as Sadamasa Motonaga, Kazuo Shiraga and Jiro Takamatsu. The gallery also exhibits the work of emerging and seminal Western artists including Marcia Hafif, Birgit Jürgenssen, Richard Nonas, Sigmar Polke and Carol Rama. In keeping with the gallery's commitment to Japanese art and culture, McCaffrey opened its Tokyo outpost in March 2018 with an exhibition of paintings by Robert Ryman. The gallery's 2019 program features solo exhibitions by Ari Marcopoulos and Jasper Johns, among others.

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### Images:

1. Jasper Johns, *Usuyuki*, 1981. Screenprint, 54 1/2 x 37 inches (138.4 x 94 cm), Edition of 85 © Jasper Johns
2. Jasper Johns with Tōru Takemitsu at the Gutai Pinacotheca, Osaka, 1964; Courtesy of Jasper Johns Studio, Sharon, Conn.
3. Jasper Johns, *Usuyuki*, 1981. Ink on plastic, 49 1/4 x 18 1/8 inches (125.1 x 46 cm) © Jasper Johns
4. Photographs of Jasper Johns and Hiroshi Kawanishi working at Simca Print Artists, New York, 1980; Photograph by Katy Martin

### Map:

(Omotesando station A3 exit)

