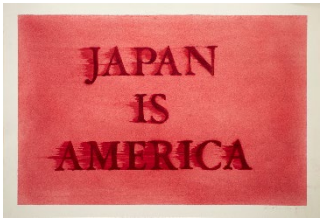
Seven/Seven: The Fraught Landscape

Fergus McCaffrey Tokyo
January 22 – March 19, 2022

Fergus McCaffrey is pleased to announce *Seven/Seven: The Fraught Landscape,* opening at the gallery's Tokyo location on Saturday, January 22, 2022.



This exhibition serves as a conceptual sequel to Fergus McCaffrey's historic 2019 New York exhibition, *Japan Is America*. Continuing *Japan Is America*'s exploration of the Japanese-American creative exchange, *Seven/Seven* furthers this transatlantic narrative, applying a cinematic lens to the joint cultural landscape, taking its title from Akira Kurasawa's Japanese epic *Seven Samurai* (1954), and the iconic Western film by John Sturges, *The Magnificent Seven* (1960), that followed suit.

Focusing on a selection of works made by artists predominantly from 1985 to 2021, *Seven/Seven* considers the ways in which conscience and self-assertion manifests core concerns for both Eastern and Western contemporary artists. Departing from the archetypes of the epic and the Western, *Seven/Seven* contemplates the transformative process by which a sequence of static images becomes a moving film; presenting works that engage with the dynamism, drama, and individualistic nature of these genres by artists whose committed path to their craft and vision is the stuff of which epics are made.

Several of *Seven/Seven*'s artists explicitly comment on the historical—political—relationship between Japan and the United States in their work. To contextualize this contemporary framework—embedded in the historical, social DNA of both countries—outlined in this decades-spanning cross-cultural presentation, the exhibition begins with the politically engaged work of postwar Japanese artists, Tatsuo Ikeda and Hiroshi Nakamura. Tatsuo Ikeda's *Untitled,* 1957, comes out of a body of work—showing swollen, mutated animal and human figures—that the artist created in response to U.S. nuclear bomb tests in the Pacific, as well as the rapid reindustrialization of Japan in the post-nuclear era. His painting *Toy World,* 1967, part of a series of the same name created between 1966 and 1970, mounts a surrealist critique of changes in Japanese society following the signing of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, which occurred in 1960, despite widespread protests. Likewise, Japanese artist Hiroshi Nakamura's work is also deeply politically involved. Although Nakamura was trained in social realism techniques as a "reportage" painter, the paintings included in *Seven/Seven,* such as *Drip*, 1974, and *Cyclope girls orgy,* 1969, represent much more surrealist and pop culture-inspired interpretations of the fraught climate of postwar Japan.

American artist Ed Ruscha's drawing, *Japan Is America*, 2020—a series that Ruscha began in the mid-1980s and from which the presentation's predecessor took its title, comments retrospectively on the similar material and social conditions of Japan and the United States during the 1980s, as observed by the artist—when mass media, gross materialism, and celebrity marked a significant shift in the realm of contemporary art. A more contemporary social commentary can be seen in artist David Hammons'

Orange is the New Black, 2015—sardonically titled after the popular television series—which takes the form of an African ceremonial mask that has been coated with orange paint. With this evocative sculpture and title, Hammons seems to comment on the pervasive appropriation of Black culture, which co-exists with the American prison-industrial complex and other pervasive manifestations of anti-Black racism in American society.

Interdisciplinary artist and musician Milford Graves has long created work stemming from extensive cross-cultural research, travel, and collaboration, first visiting Japan in 1977 and working for many years with celebrated Japanese dancer and performer, Min Tanaka. In his painted work on paper, *Japan*, 2020, Graves seems to reference the gestural style of Japanese postwar abstraction, evoking a fully frontal figure charged with playful musicality. *Big Bang*, 2020, a painted bronze and copper wind gong replete with tone generator and transducers, shifts Graves' corporeal investigation into the relationship between percussive vibrations and the rhythms of the human heartbeat in addition to collecting the ambient murmurs and hums found throughout the gallery. Graves' fascination with natural rhythms is complemented by that of Japanese-born video art pioneer Shigeko Kubota, whose work often draws from both her Buddhist background and her principal involvement in the Fluxus movement of New York in the 1960s and 70s. These two aesthetics collide in Kubota's iconic, new-fashioned video sculpture, *Rock Video: Cherry Blossom,* 1986, which demonstrates the poetic temporality of natural and electronic processes alike.

Seven/Seven artists share aesthetic considerations with the medium of film, and especially the epic genre. Cecily Brown's *Strange Magic*, 2020–21, typifies the alchemical motion and drama of moving images, combining the energetic brushstrokes of postwar American expressionism with complex, densely layered narrative. Joseph Olisaemeka Wilson's mixed-media tableau *Another Angry Bull*, 2021, is a complex, evocative dreamscape in which the titular animal seems to be clothed in a frock assembled from an array of sources both real and imagined; among them, a social media-like feed of posts and commercial advertisements, polychromatic logos, a stray traffic cone. Wilson's work gives us the impression that we have been deposited in the midst of this bull's epic journey; either he has wandered from the urban skyline, seen in the background, to the desert, or city dwellers have passed through and left their mark on his rural abode. Tomoko Konoike's *Pendulum*, 2021, a deceptively primitive, constantly in-motion buoy, serves as a visual marker of time, as the weighted head is swung back and forth using an electric motor. Revealing its simple structure, it invites viewer to trace its humble gravitational thrust hypnotically operated by cosmic tension. For Konoike, time is cyclical, hauntingly wired for repetition in contrast to the linear narrative arc represented by epic or Western films.

For Anna Conway's taut narrative painting, *Mrs. Lance Cpl. Shane Toole and Mrs. Staff Sgt. Brandon Stevens*, 2007, two wives of American Army soldiers are depicted, engaged in exercise together in a living room. The canvas's dim, cinematic lighting gives us the impression that we are being granted access to a hidden domestic scene, yet even within this intimate setting, the women echo the body language of American military culture, bringing to mind the physical intensity required of a typical hero(ine). Japanese photographer Shoji Ueda's photographs, originally shot in the late 1940s and 1950s, draw upon the drama and

emotional volatility of childhood. A silhouetted brigade of youth makes their way up a hill in the photo from the artist's *Children in the Year Around* series, 1950–77, printed between the late 1970s to '80s, while a young girl in black stands pensively amongst a stark landscape in *Kako*, 1949, printed ca. 1990. As in Conway's painting, Ueda's photographs show that the effects of war on one's psyche are never limited to the experiences of those on the front lines. A rare untitled 1993 work, by Richard Nonas, with oil stick on C-print rounds out the exhibition; the image, showing five men that the artist likely met during his time as a field anthropologist, invoke the sculptor's investigations to conjure people and places caught in moments of transformation and emergence.

The dozen or more artists whose work is presented throughout *Seven/Seven* represent widely aesthetically varied perspectives on the social, political and artistic milieus of both Japan and the United States. *Seven/Seven* is both historical and contemporary, while remaining rooted in filmic concepts—drawing important, urgent connections between today's most compelling Japanese and American artists.

Artists include: Cecily Brown, Anna Conway, Francesca Gabbiani, Milford Graves, David Hammons, Tatsuo Ikeda, Tomoko Konoike, Shigeko Kubota, Hiroshi Nakamura, Richard Nonas, Ed Ruscha, Shoji Ueda, Joseph Olisaemeka Wilson; with a special screening by Francesca Gabbiani (dates to be announced)

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 2019–2021 program featured exhibitions by Matthew Barney, Carolee Schneemann, Kazuo Shiraga, Min Tanaka, Jasper Johns, and Richard Serra, among others.

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Images: 1. Ed Ruscha, *Japan Is America*, 2020. Dry pigment and acrylic on paper, 15 1/8 x 22 inches (38.4 x 55.9 cm) © Ed Ruscha; 2. Hiroshi Nakamura, *Cyclope girls orgy*, 1969. Oil on canvas, 28 3/4 x 35 3/4 inches (73 x 90.8 cm) © Hiroshi Nakamura; 3. David Hammons, *Orange is the New Black*, 2015. Wood, metal, natural fibers, acrylic, 24 1/4 x 9 1/2 x 8 inches (61.6 x 24.1 x 20.3 cm) © David Hammons; 4. Cecily Brown, *Strange Magic*, 2020-21. Oil on linen, 17 x 23 x 1 1/2 inches (43.2 x 58.4 x 3.8 cm) © Cecily Brown; 5. Shoji Ueda, *Mountain Festival* from the series *Children the Year Around,* 1955–70, printed late 1970s–mid 80s © Estate of Shoji Ueda; 6. Richard Nonas, *Untitled*, 1983. Oil stick on C-print, 11 x 17 inches (27.9 x 43.2 cm) © Estate of Richard Nonas