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SUDA, Issei, *Sho*, 1969-1972. Vintage gelatin silver print.
Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation.



YAMAMOTO, Kansuke *Stapled Flesh*, 1949.
Vintage gelatin silver print. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation.

Surrealistic Effects of War
The New Modern Look at Japanese Photography at SBMA
On View January 13 – April 1, 2007

November 21, 2006 – With the Western Pacific Rim remaining an important area of focus within the world of photography, the Santa Barbara Museum of Art presents *The New Modern: Pre- and Post-War Japanese Photography*, an exhibition derived from 21 prints of SBMA's growing permanent collection of photographic works, showcasing several leading Japanese artists who were primarily active in pre- and post-war Japan. Spanning more than 70 years, from the early 1920s to mid 1990s, the photographs provide a view of Japanese culture before and after the effects of World War II and a progression in style, from the high-art of pictorialism to the avant-garde of surrealism.

The exhibition begins with a look at pre-war photography with pictorialist techniques reflecting the inward-looking culture of Japan's society before the war. These earlier images, though pleasant and appealing, seem to place a kind of hazy film between the viewer and the object.

The exhibition takes a dramatic turn with the post-World War II images, distinctive in their raw, exposed, and dark character. In these prints, the post-war photographers present an insider's view of the state of Japan after the devastation of the war and the atomic bomb drops at Hiroshima and

Nagasaki, while at the same time underscoring the effects that industrialization, urbanization, and the American occupation had on this once insular society.

Concurrently during this time period, Japanese photographers also began to explore the western idea of surrealism, though from an eastern perspective. Unlike the high art style of pictorialism, surrealism attempted to express the workings of the subconscious, typically characterized by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtaposition of subject matter.

Based on Freudian psychology, surrealism was to lead to an understanding of the "blueprint of thought." However, in Japan, Freudian psychology was not widely practiced or understood, so Japanese photographers mainly drew inspiration from haiku, a traditional form of Japanese poetry. In this sense, the Japanese artists were a kind of second-generation reaction to the initial experimentation of the Westerners, but their unique interpretation produced inspiring results.

Kansuke Yamamoto, active in Japan from 1931 until 1987, was one of the leading lights of Japanese avant-garde photography with surrealistic leanings. Yamamoto's highly aesthetic imagery can be seen as a Japanese interpretation of the language of European surrealism with many works in dialogue with artists such as Salvador Dali, Yves Tanguy, and Joan Miro.



Kansuke's attention to composition is evident in his manipulation of collage, in which there is a familiarly surreal juxtaposition but with his individuality imprinted on it by the choice of objects.

However, the strangeness and transgressive nature of his imagery at that time were considered threatening, inviting persecution by the Japanese *Tokko* (Thought Police). Furthermore, because it was believed that the Japanese artists did not have authority to speak on the topic of surrealism given their unconventional source of inspiration, Westerners largely ignored Japanese surrealism due to disinterest or lack of exposure. *The New Modern* provides an opportunity to view many of these hidden treasures in the world of photography.

Image: YAMAMOTO, Kansuke, *Magnifying Glass-Rendez Vous*, 1970. Vintage gelatin silver print, black thread. Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Museum purchase with funds provided by the Wallis Foundation.

This exhibition is presented in collaboration with the University Art Museum at the University of California, Santa Barbara which will be presenting *Crafting a Modern World: The Architecture and Design of Antonin and Noémi Raymond*. The UAM's exhibition will document the architectural design careers of the married couple, active both in pre-war and post-war Japan as well as in wartime America.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that provides internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

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