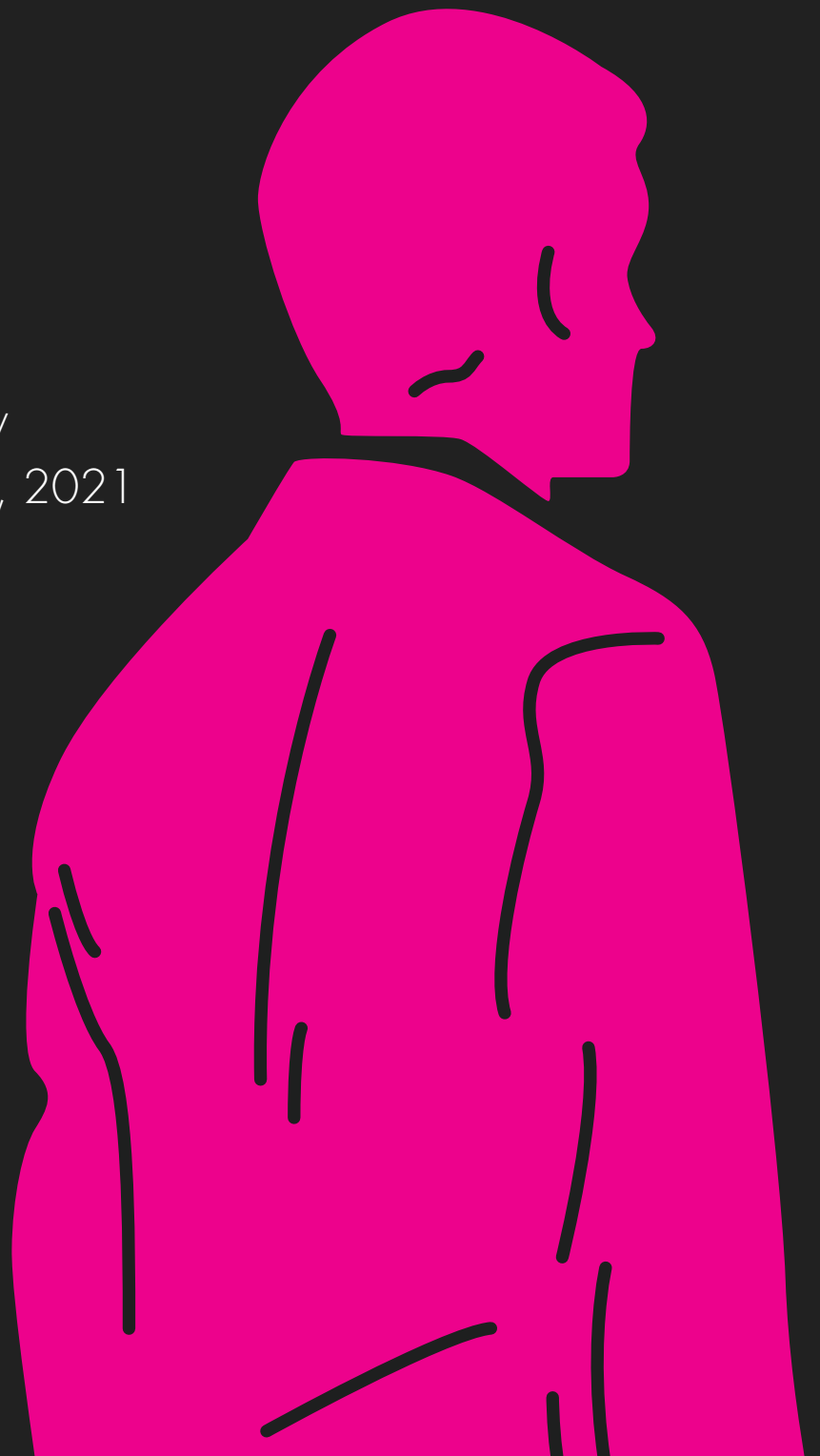


# SHIGEO FUKUDA

:A RETROSPECTIVE

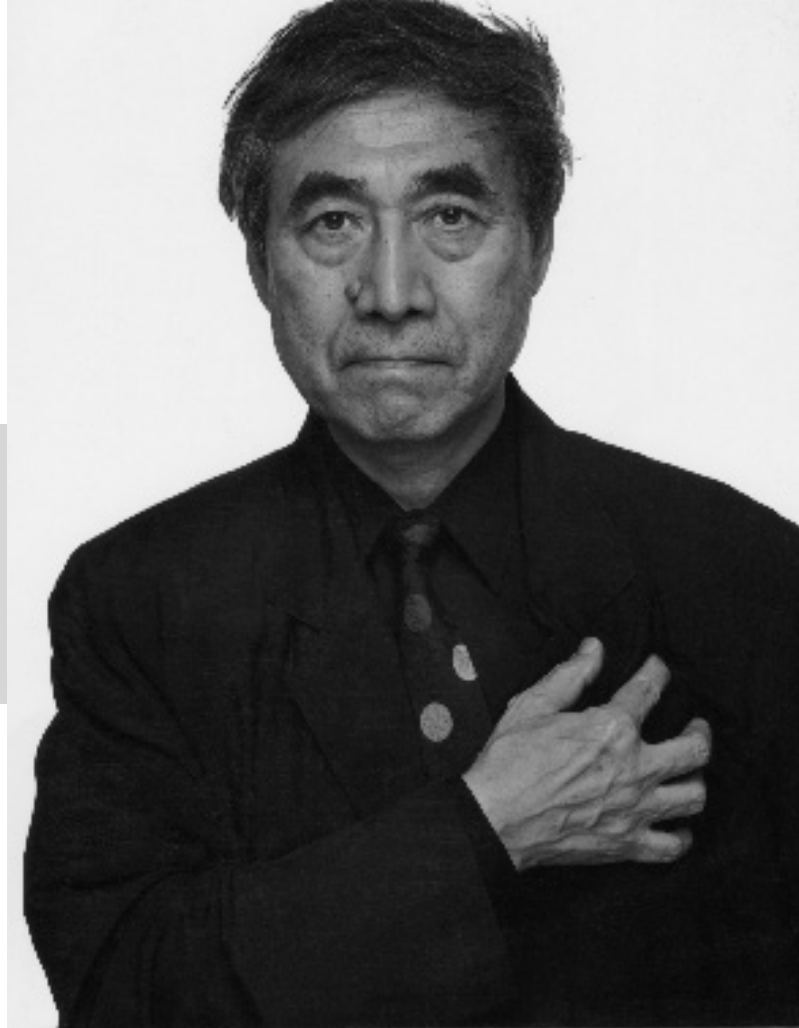
AIGA National Design Gallery  
November 5 to December 15, 2021



"I believe that in design, 30 percent  
dignity, 20 percent beauty and 50  
percent absurdity are necessary"



# Shigeo Fukuda



**S**higeo Fukuda was a sculptor, medallist, graphic artist and poster designer who created optical illusions. His art pieces usually portray deception, such as Lunch With a Helmet On, a sculpture created entirely from forks, knives, and spoons, that casts a detailed shadow of a motorcycle.

Fukuda was born on February 4, 1932 in Tokyo to a family that was involved in manufacturing toys. After the end of World War II, he became interested in the minimalist Swiss Style of graphic design, and graduated from Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1956.

While intensely serious about the responsibility of design to convey clear concepts, he could be visually elusive. “Fukuda is not a communicator who conforms to the principles of accessibility,” the American designer Seymour Chwast wrote in the introduction to “Masterworks” (Firefly Books, 2005), a monograph about Mr. Fukuda. “With few exceptions, his purpose is to mystify.”

In addition to posters, Mr. Fukuda created exhibit displays using wryly composed sculptures. For a coffee company’s marketing showroom in Tokyo, he designed a mixed-media sculpture of Mount Fuji made from hundreds of coffee cans, with multicolored, expressionless mannequins holding steaming cups of coffee or burlap sacks filled with precious beans.

In 1987, Fukuda was inducted into the Art Directors Club Hall of Fame in New York City, which described him as “Japan’s consummate visual communicator”, making him the first Japanese designer chosen for this recognition. The Art Directors Club noted the “bitingly satirical commentary on the senselessness of war” shown in “Victory 1945”, which won him the grand prize at the 1975 Warsaw Poster Contest, a competition whose proceeds went to the Peace Fund

---

**Fukuda was the  
first Japanese  
designer to be  
inducted into the  
Art Directors Club  
Hall of Fame.**

---

Movement. He was also the subject of a major show at the I.B.M. Gallery in New York in 1967 organized by Paul Rand, designer of the I.B.M. logo. The Asian Art Museum of San Francisco mounted an exhibition in 1987, and in 1999, the Japan Foundation in Toronto presented the show “Visual Prankster: Shigeo Fukuda.”

While intensely serious about the responsibility of design to convey clear concepts, he could be visually elusive. “Fukuda is not a communicator who conforms to the principles of accessibility,” the American designer Seymour Chwast wrote in the introduction to “Masterworks” (Firefly Books, 2005), a monograph about Mr. Fukuda. “With few exceptions, his purpose is to mystify.”

Mr. Fukuda was indeed a prankster throughout his life. To reach the front door of his house, on the outskirts of Tokyo, Mr. Chwast recalled, a visitor had to walk down a path to a door that appeared to be far away. In fact, appearances were deceiving because the front door was only four feet high. Inside, Mr. Fukuda would emerge from a concealed white door exactly the same color as the wall to offer the visitor a pair of red house slippers.

Fukuda died January 11, 2009, after suffering a subarachnoid hemorrhage.



**S**<sup>higeo</sup>**F**ukuda is Japan's consummate visual communicator. His induction into the Art Directors Hall of Fame marks the first time for a Japanese designer. Born fifty-five years ago in Tokyo, Fukuda received his design education at that city's National University of Fine Arts & Music. In 1966, his work first gained prominence at a Czechoslovakian graphic design competition. One year later, Fukuda's work graced many posters specially commissioned for Montreal's Expo '67.

It wasn't until later in that year however, that Fukuda's career began to snowball. Fellow Hall of Famer Paul Rand initially caught sight of his work in an issue of Japanese Graphic Design Magazine. Realizing Fukuda's great potential as a world-class designer, Rand helped arrange his first United States exhibition at New York City's IBM Gallery. This, incidentally, also coincided with Fukuda's honeymoon and his first trip to New York! The exhibit featured his extraordinary, puzzle-like wooden sculptures originally created as playthings for his young daughter. His successful gallery exhibit brought Fukuda even more widespread recognition, resulting in Rand's interview with him on Public Television.

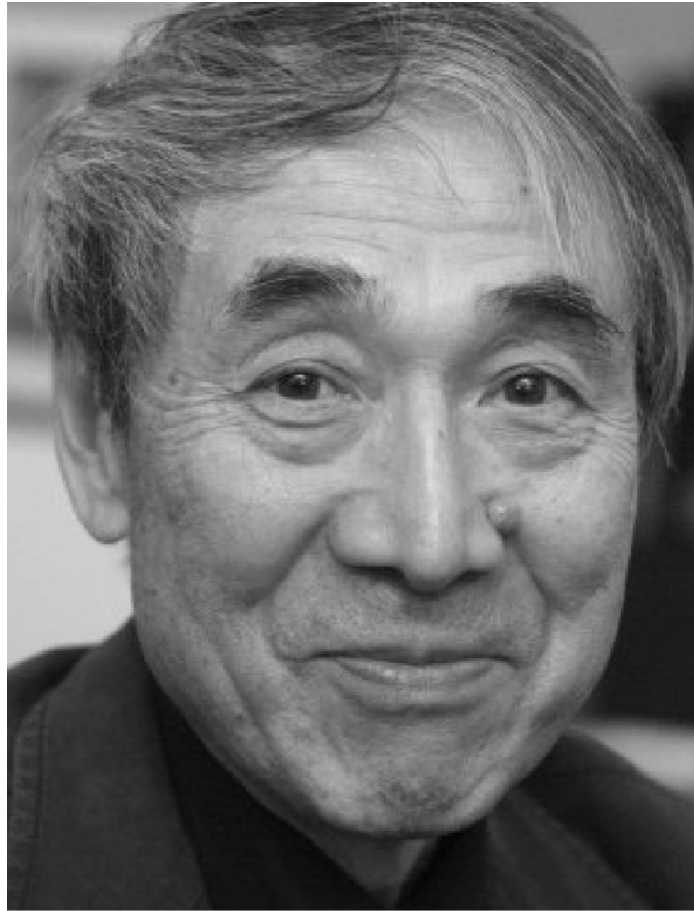
Shigeo Fukuda's work is deeply influenced by Takashi Kohno; a pioneer in modern Japanese graphic design, Kohno was purported to be Japan's

first designer possessing a distinct objective along with a creative personality. His posters heralded a new era of visual expressionism. Kohno's work was always controversial, yet visually inspiring. His posters were an exhilarating prelude to Fukuda's own imprint on communication design.

During the 1960's, Shigeo Fukuda became interested in illusionism. He illustrated a column on visual magic for the daily Ashai Newspaper called: "Ryu Mita Ka?" ("Have You Seen the Dragon?") and he presently presides over Idea Magazine's "Visual Circus," an entertaining, bi-monthly feature injected with boyish wit and enthusiasm.

When it comes to illusionism, Fukuda practices what he preaches. The countless awards he continues to win worldwide are a living testament to his power of graphic legerdemain. Fukuda's brand of magic and illusion never ceases to amaze and enchant. In an Idea Magazine interview, he explains the motivation behind his technique:

"I believe that in design, 30% dignity, 20% beauty and 50% absurdity are necessary. Rather than catering to the design sensitivity of the general public, there is advancement in design if people are left to feel satisfied with their own superiority, by entrapping them with visual illusion."



Contrary to Western styles of expression, Japanese communication is more emotional than rational. Such emotion is profoundly linked to art. Fukuda dramatically shatters all cultural and linguistic barriers with his universally recognizable style.

Shigeo Fukuda's sense of high moral responsibility as a graphic designer is undertaken with firm conviction. His work effectively mirrors and embraces the worldly causes he believes in. Coupled with his fine flair for color and layout, along with advanced Japanese reproduction techniques, Fukuda always manages to get his points across. His 1982 Happy Earth Day posters are prime examples. One is a drawing of an upside-down axe, the tool of destruction spoiling the earth's wilderness. The wooden handle, ironically, sprouts a branch of its own! The second in the series is an illustration of the earth in the shape of an opening seed awash in a pristine sea-blue background. Fukuda's pro-environmental concepts are indeed abstract, yet globally familiar.

Fukuda's most famous poster, entitled Victory 1945, is a biting satirical commentary on the senselessness

of war. It's an illustration of a cannon barrel with its shell pointing downward, back towards the opening, sealing it forever. In a world where war is big business, Fukuda's chilling, simplistic concept of peace and the containment of nuclear proliferation is absolutely brilliant. It won him a grand prize at the 1975 Warsaw Poster Contest. All proceeds from the competition went to the Peace Fund Movement. As always, Fukuda goes far beyond the bounds of plain function to express a universal plea for peace.

---

### **The Japan Foundation in Toronto presented the show "Visual Prankster: Shigeo Fukuda."**

---

In 1980, Fukuda did another marvelous illusionist poster for Amnesty International. It features a drawing of a clenched fist interwoven with barbed wire. That's not all! The copy at the top simply

reads "Amnesty" with the character 's' shaped like a linked shackle. It's work like this that makes Shigeo Fukuda an impeccable communicator.

One of Fukuda's personal favorites is a 1982 poster announcing a ten-man international poster exhibition. He beautifully proclaims the event by showing ten different pairs of colorful hands embraced in friendship. Fukuda's notion of an international forum of design through brotherhood and fraternity is quite a visual feat.



Shigeo Fukuda's abundance of talent goes far beyond his fabulous poster designs. In 1976, Tokyo's Seibu Department Store commissioned him to re-design areas of its selling floors. Fukuda rose to the occasion with flying colors. He created shopping rest areas disguised as huge leather briefcases. He linked the store's main wings with gigantic, intricate floor mosaics of Lincoln and Beethoven. The piece de resistance was, however, a rooftop beer garden complete with eighty model sheep grazing to the piped-in strains of Country & Western music.

Fukuda took his keen sense of design even further with his remarkably futuristic UCC Coffee Pavilion in Tokyo. The entire theme is coffee. From floor to ceiling, the UCC Coffee Pavilion is a swirling marvel of synergistic design. Whether it's the simplicity of the logo, the mixed-media sculpture of Mt. Fuji made of hundreds of coffee cans, the multi-colored, expressionless mannequins holding steaming cups of coffee or the countless burlap sacks containing the mythical bean, Fukuda has created one of the most spirited design wonders the world will see. One can, just by looking at it, smell the delicious aroma of fresh, roasting coffee beans.

Such inventiveness also 'spills' over into Fukuda's home as well. His lawn, shaded by a plastic, fried egg, is

adorned with deceptively realistic bulldog sculptures. Inside, he lives in a Rube Goldberg world of gadgetry no doubt helping him express his peerless individuality.

Shigeo Fukuda is also very involved with education. Aside from attending seminars and being on numerous design committees, he is a Visiting Professor of Design at Yale University. Fukuda is a staunch supporter of teaching art and design in an enjoyable, relaxed manner. He believes that a compulsory, regimented curriculum deters students from developing a personal sense of aesthetics that should otherwise flow freely from within.

Traditionally, Japanese designers looked to the West for innovative solutions. This is no longer the case. The winds are shifting toward an easterly direction. Shigeo Fukuda, Japan's Houdini of Design, is a welcome part of the shifting breeze. His visual originality and deep dedication to worthwhile causes help keep the sun shining brightly over our ever changing, complex world.



Shigeo Fukuda's abundance of talent goes far beyond his fabulous poster designs. In 1976, Tokyo's Seibu Department Store commissioned him to re-design areas of its selling floors. Fukuda rose to the occasion with flying colors. He created shopping rest areas disguised as huge leather briefcases. He linked the store's main wings with gigantic, intricate floor mosaics of Lincoln and Beethoven. The piece de resistance was, however, a rooftop beer garden complete with eighty model sheep grazing to the piped-in strains of Country & Western music.

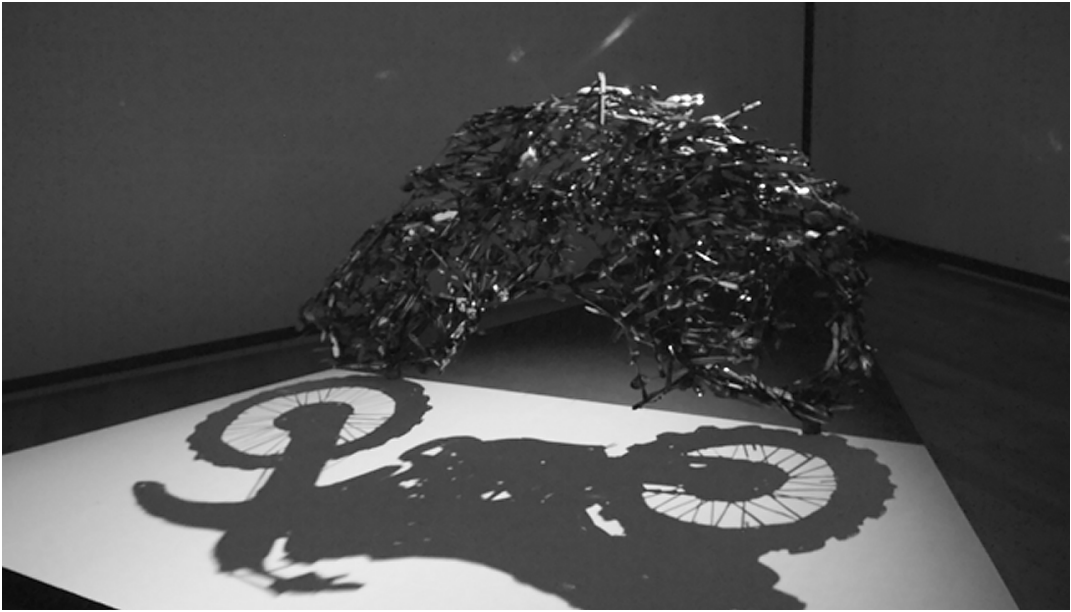
Fukuda took his keen sense of design even further with his remarkably futuristic UCC Coffee Pavilion in Tokyo. The entire theme is coffee. From floor to ceiling, the UCC Coffee Pavilion is a swirling marvel of synergistic design. Whether it's the simplicity of the logo, the mixed-media sculpture of Mt. Fuji made of hundreds of coffee cans, the multi-colored, expressionless mannequins holding steaming cups of coffee or the countless burlap sacks containing the mythical bean, Fukuda has created one of the most spirited design wonders the world will see. One can, just by looking at it, smell the delicious aroma of fresh, roasting coffee beans.

Such inventiveness also 'spills' over into Fukuda's home as well. His lawn, shaded by a plastic, fried egg, is

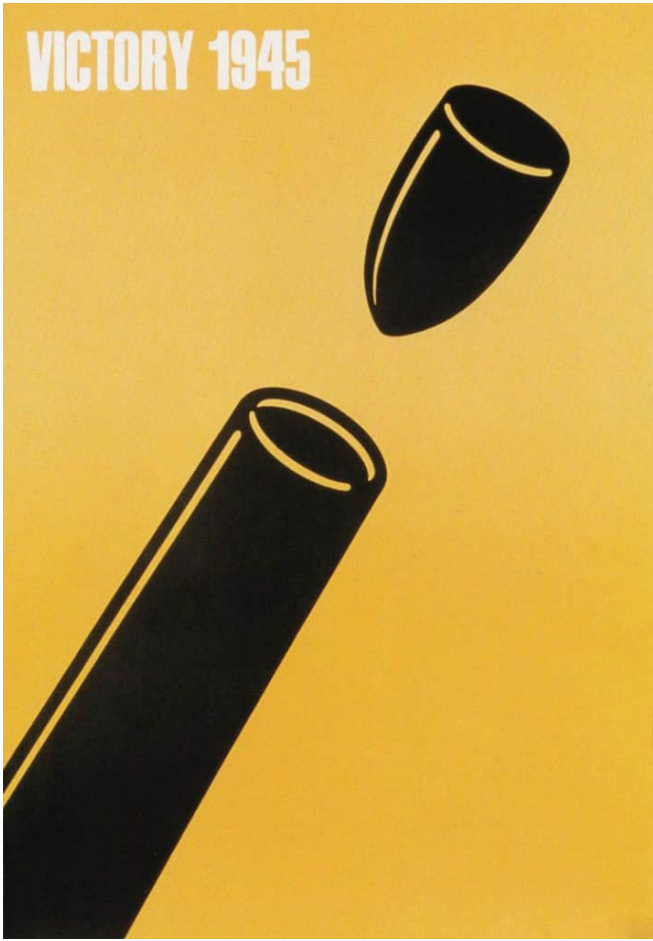
adorned with deceptively realistic bulldog sculptures. Inside, he lives in a Rube Goldberg world of gadgetry no doubt helping him express his peerless individuality.

Shigeo Fukuda is also very involved with education. Aside from attending seminars and being on numerous design committees, he is a Visiting Professor of Design at Yale University. Fukuda is a staunch supporter of teaching art and design in an enjoyable, relaxed manner. He believes that a compulsory, regimented curriculum deters students from developing a personal sense of aesthetics that should otherwise flow freely from within.

Traditionally, Japanese designers looked to the West for innovative solutions. This is no longer the case. The winds are shifting toward an easterly direction. Shigeo Fukuda, Japan's Houdini of Design, is a welcome part of the shifting breeze. His visual originality and deep dedication to worthwhile causes help keep the sun shining brightly over our ever changing, complex world.



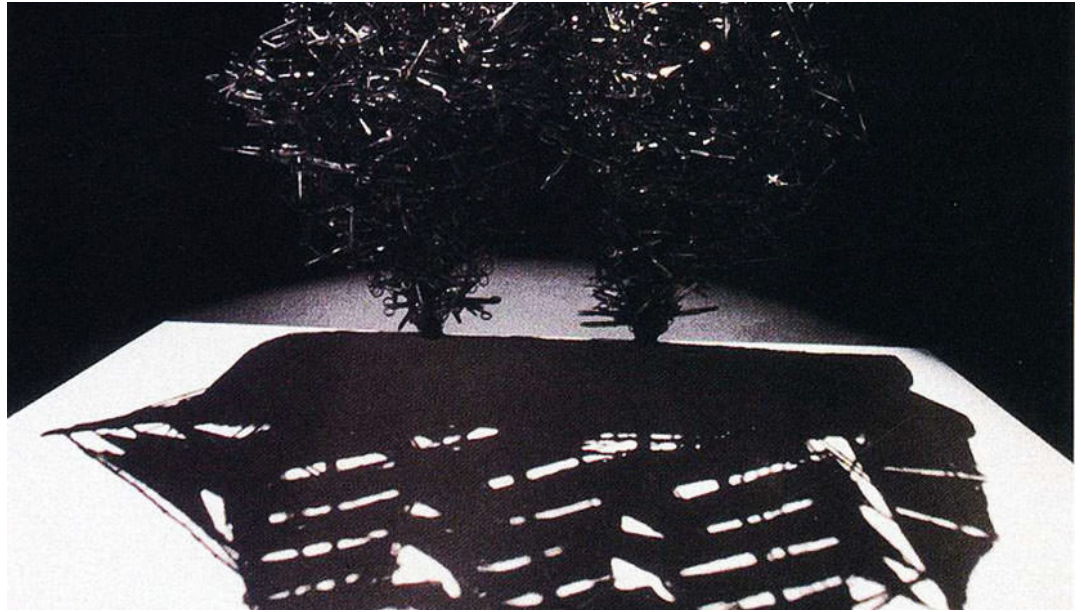
In his later years, Fukuda took his exploration of illusion even further and created work that used light projections and sculpture to create tricks of the eye. His most famous work, "Lunch With a Helmet On," is a sculpture made entirely of forks, knives, and spoons which casts a shadow that is a detailed image of a motorcycle.



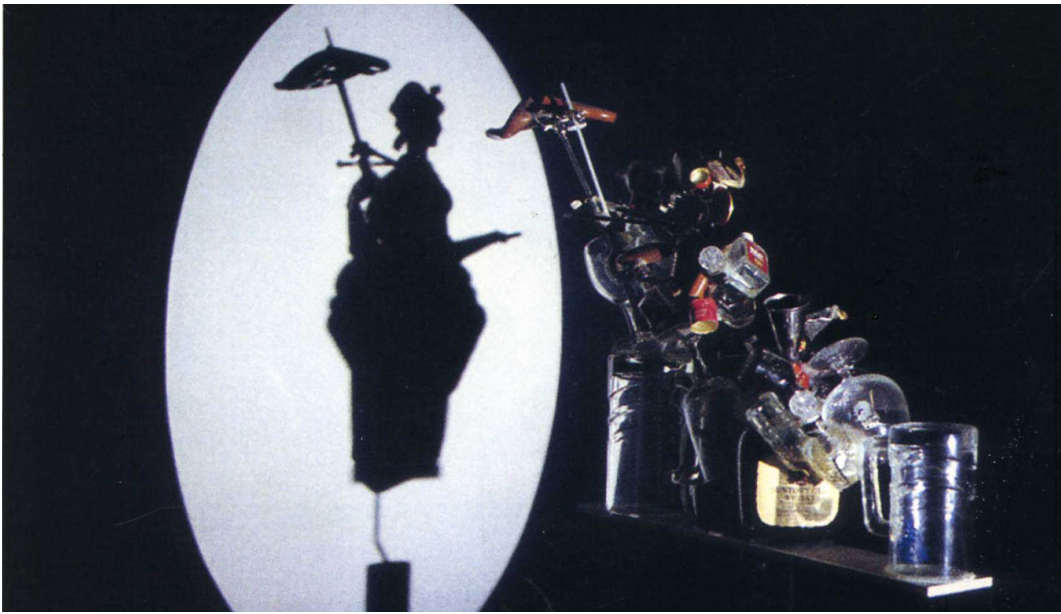
'Victory 1945' is a statement on the senselessness of war. At the time war was a big business, and the simplicity of the poster and his simplistic idea of peace is what won him the grand prize at the 1975 Warsaw poster contest" A poster dedicated to Amnesty International presents a clever illusion of a clenched fist interwoven with barbed wire. The letter "S" in the word "Amnesty" at the top of the poster forms an inked shackle.



In his later years, Fukuda took his exploration of illusion even further and created work that used light projections and sculpture to create tricks of the eye. His most famous work, “Lunch With a Helmet On,” is a sculpture made entirely of forks, knives, and spoons which casts a shadow that is a detailed image of a motorcycle.



“Victory 1945” is a statement on the senselessness of war. At the time war was a big business, and the simplicity of the poster and his simplistic idea of peace is what won him the grand prize at the 1975 Warsaw poster contest” A poster dedicated to Amnesty International presents a clever illusion of a clenched fist interwoven with barbed wire. The letter “S” in the word “Amnesty” at the top of the poster forms an inked shackle.

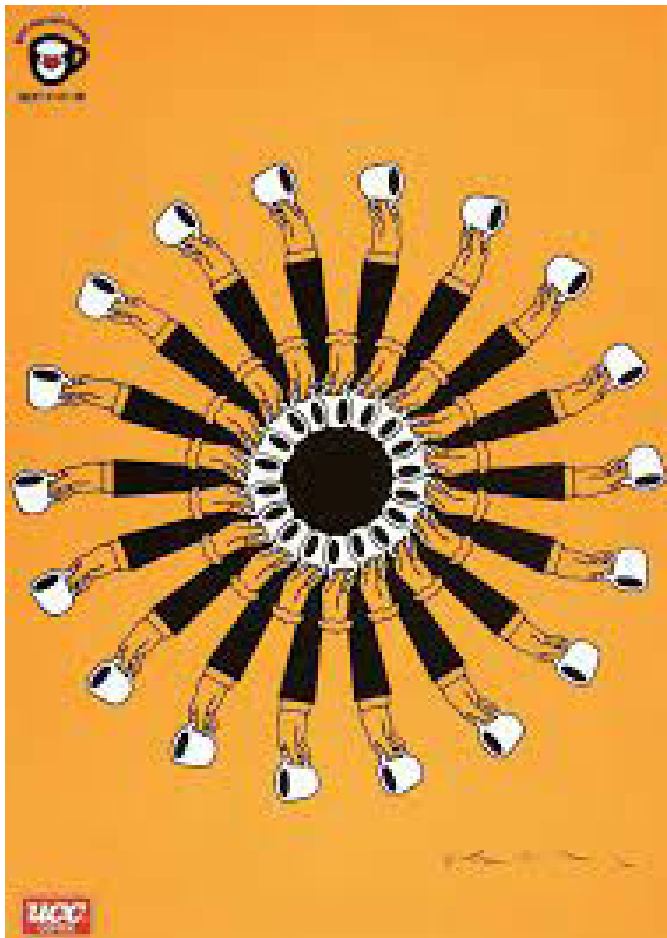


It's said that Fukuda developed a keen interest in three-dimensional art in the early 80s after his daughter Miran (also an artist) was born. He would create wood block sculptures and toys for his daughter, which eventually led to a fascination with M.C. Escher-like illusionistic art.



Fukuda was an environmentalist and anti-war. Twice commissioned to celebrate Earth Day, he designed two posters, one that presents the Earth as a seed opening against a solid sea-blue background and the “1982 Happy Earth Day,” which shows an axe with its head against the ground, having a small branch sprouting upwards from its handle.

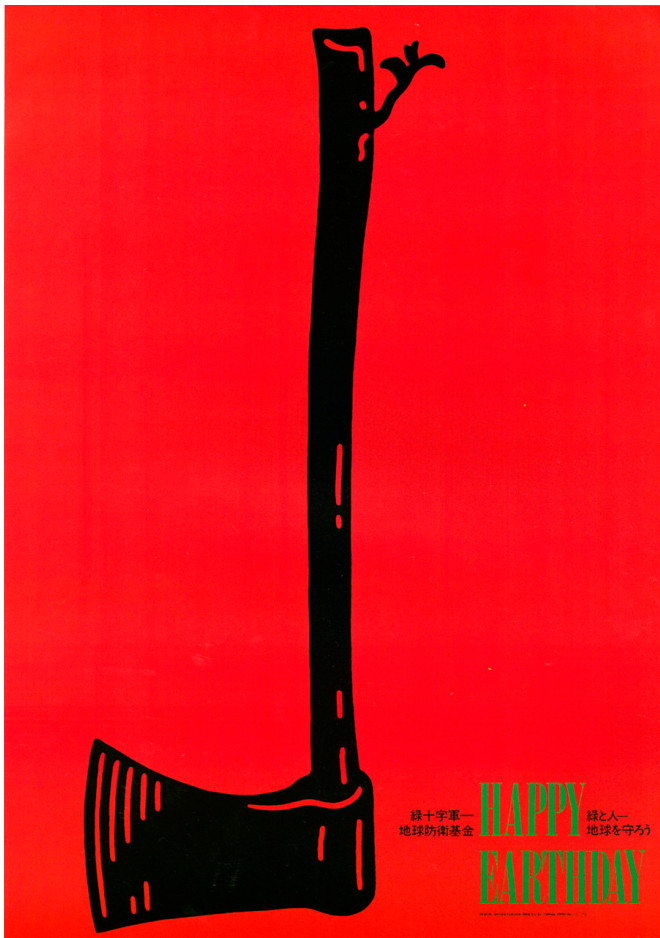
It's said that Fukuda developed a keen interest in three-dimensional art in the early 80s after his daughter Miran (also an artist) was born. He would create wood block sculptures and toys for his daughter, which eventually led to a fascination with M.C. Escher-like illusionistic art.



Fukuda was an environmentalist and anti-war. Twice commissioned to celebrate Earth Day, he designed two posters, one that presents the Earth as a seed opening against a solid sea-blue background and the “1982 Happy Earth Day,” which shows an axe with its head against the ground, having a small branch sprouting upwards from its handle.

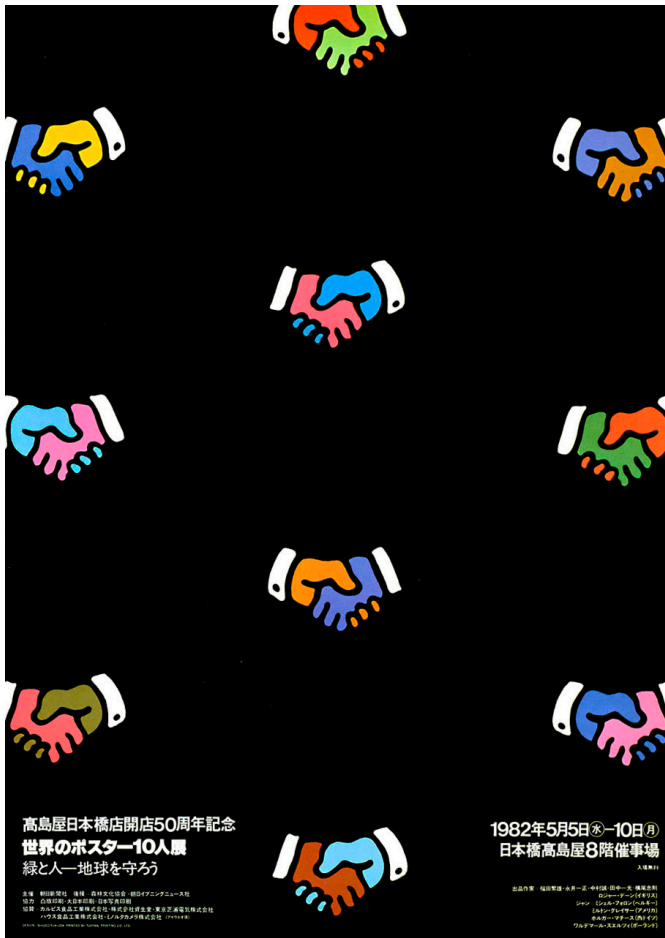


It's said that Fukuda developed a keen interest in three-dimensional art in the early 80s after his daughter Miran (also an artist) was born. He would create wood block sculptures and toys for his daughter, which eventually led to a fascination with M.C. Escher-like illusionistic art.

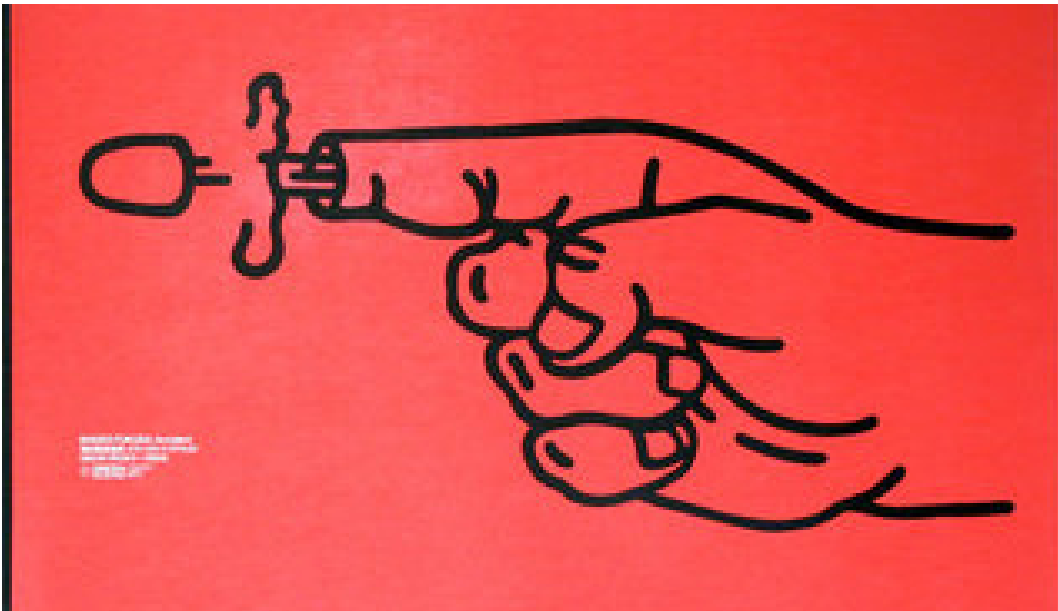


Fukuda was an environmentalist and anti-war. Twice commissioned to celebrate Earth Day, he designed two posters, one that presents the Earth as a seed opening against a solid sea-blue background and the “1982 Happy Earth Day,” which shows an axe with its head against the ground, having a small branch sprouting upwards from its handle.

It's said that Fukuda developed a keen interest in three-dimensional art in the early 80s after his daughter Miran (also an artist) was born. He would create wood block sculptures and toys for his daughter, which eventually led to a fascination with M.C. Escher-like illusionistic art.



Fukuda was an environmentalist and anti-war. Twice commissioned to celebrate Earth Day, he designed two posters, one that presents the Earth as a seed opening against a solid sea-blue background and the “1982 Happy Earth Day,” which shows an axe with its head against the ground, having a small branch sprouting upwards from its handle.



'Victory 1945' is a statement on the senselessness of war. At the time war was a big business, and the simplicity of the poster and his simplistic idea of peace is what won him the grand prize at the 1975 Warsaw poster contest" A poster dedicated to Amnesty International presents a clever illusion of a clenched fist interwoven with barbed wire. The letter "S" in the word "Amnesty" at the top of the poster forms an inked shackle.

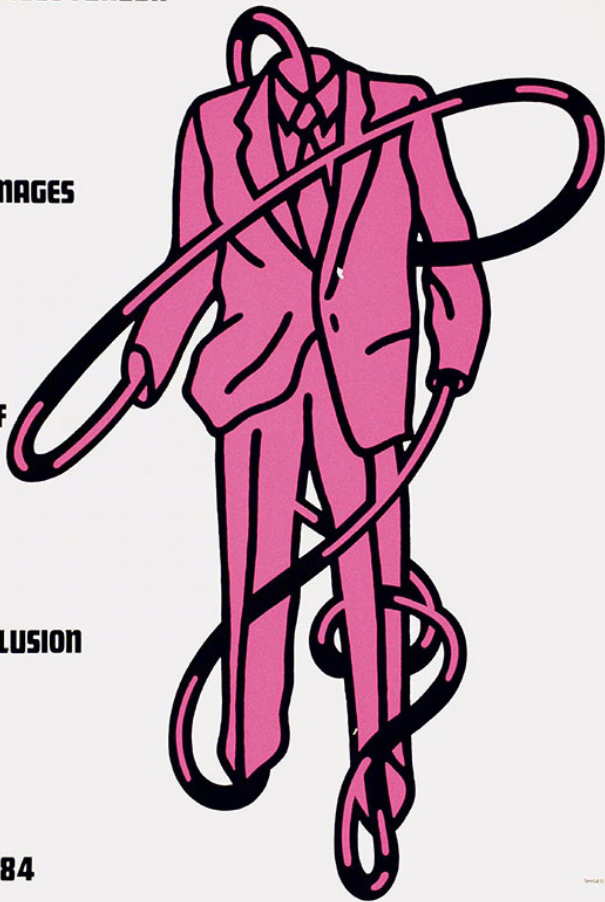
SHIGEO FUKUDA

IMAGES

OF

ILLUSION

1984



'Victory 1945' is a statement on the senselessness of war. At the time war was a big business, and the simplicity of the poster and his simplistic idea of peace is what won him the grand prize at the 1975 Warsaw poster contest" A poster dedicated to Amnesty International presents a clever illusion of a clenched fist interwoven with barbed wire. The letter "S" in the word "Amnesty" at the top of the poster forms an inked shackle.



"Never state what can be implied."

Qur'an Richardson

