

In one of his first posters, which appeared in 1966, a youthful Tadanori Yokoo proclaimed his own death. The poster depicted the body of a young man swinging from a rope that was suspended from a curved strip with his name on it in large Roman letters. Behind the body, and dominating the poster, were the rays of a red sun that presumably referenced Yokoo's Japanese identity. At the bottom of the poster was a box containing a text that read "Having reached a climax at the age of 29, I was dead."

However, Yokoo arose triumphant from the ashes of his proclaimed death and went on to build a career as one of Japan's most illustrious graphic designers. Now just over 70 years of age, he is the creator of hundreds of posters, paintings, prints, collages and books. Yokoo emerged as a designer in the mid 1960s amidst worldwide social turmoil and the formation of a youth culture that would henceforth invent its own means of expression. His sources were and continue to be multifarious. The eclecticism of Milton Glaser, Seymour Chwast, and other designers from the Push Pin Studio is evident in his earliest posters and the Push Pin influence has persisted in his later work although to a fairly large extent it has been replaced by other more experimental techniques.

Yokoo's drawing style would seem to owe something to the thin lines and flat colors of Seymour Chwast rather than the more nuanced and textured style of Glaser. His range as a draftsman extends from cartoon characters, similar to those seen in contemporary Japanese animated films, to more gestural portraits that display his technique as a painter. Other influences range from the 1960s San Francisco rock posters to the dreamy multicolored posters and prints of Peter Max and the harsh clashing image fragments of Dada photocollage and photomontage. Yokoo's typography, both in English and Japanese is eclectic and sometimes scattered across the poster surface just as his images are. Compared to Milton Glaser, whose sense of control is evident in all his work, Yokoo's designs sometimes appear unhinged and excessive. He might repeat an image endlessly or present a disarray of fragments that can be chaotic. And unlike any of his American sources, Yokoo sometimes enters into unsettling emotional territory. He was a friend of the late novelist Yukio Mishima and produced one poster that showed Mishima holding a sword and standing beneath a hand with a finger cut off. The hand is surrounded by splattered red paint depicting blood. The violence shown in this poster is

likely a reference to Mishima's participation in a samurai cult that led him to commit suicide by plunging a sword into his stomach.

The 116 full-page posters in this oversized book are beautifully reproduced in three sizes. Most occupy a single page but in some instances there are two to page and several two-page spreads of a single image are included as well. Although I have nothing but praise for the design and printing of the book, I was bothered by the paucity of information about the artist and the posters. Martin Friedman, former director of the Walker Art Center and co-curator of an exhibit on Japan to which Yokoo was a major contributor, wrote a short introductory text that celebrates Yokoo's posters but provides little insight into the artist or his working methods. Likewise, the poster captions, give the poster title, the date, and the client but say nothing about the content of the images. This is frustrating since Yokoo works with extremely complex narratives that are difficult if not impossible to decipher without some explanation. Nonetheless, the book is a valuable record of Yokoo's visual production and should be a welcome addition to the library of anyone who appreciates his work and the development of the modern poster in Japan.

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