

Production Note 1949-1972

During the first half of his painting career, Yamada filled 56 notebooks with “Production Notes.” He diligently sketched the paintings he was working on in these notebooks, and next to the sketches wrote about the progress of the work and the challenges involved. Idiosyncratic phrases such as “contract with painting” and “all colors gaze upon the painting” occur frequently in these notes. They are full of descriptions of his artistic and personal struggles, including his day-to-day doings, various exhibitions he saw, romances, painful memories of the war, and the trials of not being acknowledged as a painter. However, it is often difficult to read his writing. (Some images of the notebook are included in the exhibition catalog, accompanied by printed text transliterations.)

Work D 1970-1979

In the 1970s, Yamada’s paintings evolved to a style that divides the canvas into a grid of subtle color tones approaching gray. Brushstrokes are hardly in evidence, and there are none of the irregularities formed by thick layers of underpainting seen up until the 1960s. Planes of color drift like clouds, as if hovering atop a light box. The hardened, yet airy and unassuming nature of the paintings is somehow reminiscent of the 1970s as a decade.

Work D.3 1970 oil on canvas 97×97cm	Work D.112 1972 oil on canvas 130×43cm	Work D.p 206 1974 conté on paper 79×49cm	Work D.230 1976 oil on canvas 162×130cm	Work D.294 1978 oil on canvas 80.5×60.8cm
Work D.44 1970 oil on canvas 91×80.3cm	Work D.114 1972 oil on canvas 130×43cm	Work D.p 226 1974 color pencil on paper 72×90cm	Work D.231 1976 oil on canvas 116.8×91cm	Work D.296 1978 oil on canvas 80.5×61cm
Work D.87 1972 oil on canvas 227.3×162cm The National Museum of Art, Osaka	Work D.116 1972 oil on canvas 130×43cm	Work D.184 1975 oil on canvas 80.3×116.8cm	Work D.234 1976 oil on canvas 89.5×130.2cm	Work D.297 1978 oil on canvas 194×194cm Takamatsu Art Museum
Work D.92 1972 oil on canvas 227.2×162cm Nagoya City Art Museum	Work D.119 1972 oil on canvas 130×43cm	Work D.186 1975 oil on canvas 80.3×116.8cm	Work D.253 1976-77 oil on canvas 72.8×53cm	Work D.301 1978 oil on canvas 116.7×80.3cm
Work D.100 1972 oil on canvas 227.3×162cm Takamatsu Art Museum	Work D.142 1973 oil on canvas 60×162cm	Work D.210 1975 oil on canvas 194×194cm	Work D.259 1977 oil on canvas 130.3×89.5cm	Work D.315 1979 oil on canvas 72.8×53cm
Work D.109 1972 oil on canvas 130×43cm	Work D.144 1973 oil on canvas 60×194cm	Work D.p 248 1975 color pencil on paper 77×50cm	Work D.262 1977 oil on canvas 182×182cm	Work D.321 1979 oil on canvas 194×130cm Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art
Work D.111 1972 oil on canvas 130×43cm	Work D.163 1974 oil on canvas 194×130cm	Work D.p 263 1975 conté on paper 74.5×105cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work D.264 1977-78 oil on canvas 194×194cm	Work D.325 1979 oil on canvas 194×130cm Fukushima Prefectural Museum of Art
	Work D.170 1974 oil on canvas 194×130cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work D.p 264 1975 conté on paper 74.5×105cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work D.277 1977-78 oil on canvas 162×112cm Fuchu Art Museum	

Work E, Work F 1980-1995

In 1978, Yamada was catapulted to prominence with a large-scale solo exhibition at the Koh Gallery in Ginza, Tokyo, gaining considerable attention and becoming the man of the moment. It had been about 40 years since he started painting. After this, his style underwent another significant change. The color surfaces came to have strongly emphasized brushstrokes, creating a dynamic feel, and the canvases became much larger. Compared to many of his radically understated paintings thus far, these works feel liberated, as if the artist is giving free rein to self-expression. Seen a certain way, the lines and spots of color come to look like people or trees. However, crosses, rectangles, and vertical and horizontal lines continue to structure the paintings as in the previous works.

Work E.p 105 1980 conté on paper 72×90cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work E.p 447 1984 watercolor on paper 79×109cm	Work E.280 1987 oil on canvas 259×388cm The National Museum of Art, Osaka	Work F.20 1990 oil on canvas 259×388cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work F.131 1992 oil on canvas 182×259cm
Work E.151 1983 oil on canvas 182×456cm Takamatsu Art Museum	Work E.p 526 1985 watercolor on paper 72×90cm	Work E.p 666 1987 oil and conté on paper 78.5×107cm	Work F.p 3 1990 conté on paper 78.5×107cm Color Museum	Work F.220 1994 oil on canvas 227×364cm
Work E.p 324 1983 oil and conté on paper 70×100cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work E.250 1986 oil on canvas 194×486cm The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo	Work E.p 803 1988 watercolor on paper 72×90cm GALLERY KASAHARA	Work F.116 1992 oil on canvas 182×259cm	

Biography

- 1929:** Born on January 1, 1929, as the youngest of five children.
- 1943:** Enters the Draftsman Training School at the Army Weaponry Administrative Headquarters in Kokubunji-cho, Tokyo. Spends six months in the general course and six months in the advanced course.
- 1944:** Becomes assistant master in the Educational Affairs Office at the training school. Begins studying mechanical engineering at the Tokyo Metropolitan Mechanical Technical School in Koganei-cho, as an Army Weaponry Administrative Headquarters scholarship student.
- 1945:** His home is destroyed by fire in an air raid. The place he is evacuated to is also hit in an air raid. The war ends. He ceases working at the Army Weaponry Administrative Headquarters.
- 1949:** Begins to participate in Japan Indépendant exhibition and *Ji-ju-bijutsu* exhibition.
- First half of 1950:** Is in and out of hospital after contracting tuberculosis.
- 1958:** First solo show at Kyobunkan Gallery.
- 1978:** Large scale retrospective at Koh Gallery.
- 2005:** Solo show at Fuchu Art Museum.
- 2005:** Receives Commissioner for Cultural Affairs Award.
- 2010:** Dies at home from bile duct cancer.

Exhibition catalog: 336 pages, contains many reproductions of works and Production Notes and five essays. Design by Ohmizo Hiroshi. Japanese-English bilingual edition, 2,700 yen + tax. Published by Bijutsu Shuppan-sha. Also available at general bookstores and online.

endless: The Paintings of Yamada Masaaki

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 Cooperation: Estate of Yamada Masaaki

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(Translated by Christopher Stephens)

endless:

The Paintings of Yamada Masaaki

March 1 - April 9, 2017

The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

Welcome to the world of painter Yamada Masaaki: enjoy the visual fruits of his decades in the studio.

Yamada Masaaki*(1929-2010) was a man who entered into a “contract with painting.”** Underlying this lifelong dedication were his harsh childhood experiences during World War II. Yamada, who had witnessed the unreasonable deaths of many innocent people, sought an unshakeable set of values and chose to pursue them by dedicating himself to painting, which he continued unabated for more than half a century. For Yamada, the creation of each work was a serious endeavor with high stakes. Even in his long series of stripe paintings, which at first glance all seem similar, each work has a unique aspect and personality, and the many layers of paint invite the viewer to a rich visual experience. We hope that through this exhibition, featuring 219 paintings selected from the more than 5,000*** he created, you experience the undimmed power of his painting and sense the bottomless depths of the art of painting itself. Just beware of vertigo.

*Although the kanji in his given name are pronounced “Masaaki,” he was also often called “Seiryō,” an alternate pronunciation.

** A phrase found in the Production Notes that Yamada kept.

*** Yamada numbered all his works and records them in the ledger. Obviously, he was an extremely meticulous person.

Color 1997-2001

On the left and right walls of the entrance to the exhibition are works from the series “Color,” which Yamada produced in his final years. Why show the last first? “Color” is shown at the beginning of the exhibition because color was always an underlying force in his paintings. Yamada said, “For a painter, color is like a first memory.”

Color no.20 1997- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm	Color no.39 1997- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm	Color no.56 1998- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm	Color no.93 1999- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm	Color no.132 2000-01 oil on canvas 65×53cm
Color no.34 1997- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm	Color no.51 1998- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm	Color no.66 1998- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm	Color no.98 1999- oil on canvas 65×53cm	

Still Life 1948-1955

Yamada’s early works were still lifes, apparently painted not from life but from memory. The shape of the sugar container that appears repeatedly in the first section somehow reminds us of a human being. The subjects gradually begin to merge into the surrounding space, and the circle of the mouth of the bottle gradually comes to face the front and resonate with the shape of the fruit.

Still Life no.7 1948 oil on cardboard 24×32.5cm	Still Life P.no O10 1948 oil and conté on colored paper 24×32cm	Still Life no.15 1950 oil on canvas 45.6×38cm Fuchu Art Museum	Still Life no.35 1951 oil on canvas 45.6×53cm The National Museum of Art, Osaka	Still Life no.64 1953 oil on canvas 41×53cm
Landscape no.8 1948 oil on canvas 60.5×72.8cm Fuchu Art Museum	Still Life P.no 4 1948 oil, conté, and pencil on paper 30×41cm	Still Life P.no O9 1950 pencil and conté on paper 35.5×46cm	Landscape no.44 1951-52 oil on board 53.5×41.5cm	Still Life no.71 1953 oil on canvas 80.3×65.2cm
Still Life no.10 1948 oil on cardboard 28×40.5cm	Still Life A.no 11 1949 oil on canvas 53×45.5cm Fuchu Art Museum	Still Life no.24 1950-51 oil on canvas 45.6×53cm Miyashita Akira	Still Life no.51 1952 oil on canvas 53×72.8cm Ashiya City Museum of Art & History	Still Life no.83 1954-55 oil on board 38×45.5cm Fuchu Art Museum
Still Life A.no 6 1948 oil on cardboard 36.5×26.5cm	Still Life P.no O10 1949 oil, conté, and color pencil on paper 40×32cm	Still Life no.25 1951 oil on canvas 50×40.2cm	Still Life no.53 1952 oil on canvas 100×80.3cm Utsunomiya Museum of Art	Still Life no.95 1954-55 oil on canvas 116.8×91cm Fuchu Art Museum
Still Life P.no O4 1948 oil and conté on colored paper 23×32cm	Still Life no.6 1950 oil on canvas 53×45.6cm Fuchu Art Museum	Still Life no.26 1951 oil on canvas 53×45.6cm Fuchu Art Museum	Still Life no.58 1952 oil on canvas 65.3×53cm Fuchu Art Museum	Still Life P.no 71 1954-55 oil and conté on paper 38×45.5cm Chiba City Museum of Art
Still Life P.no O9 1948 conté on paper 23.5×32cm Color Museum		Still Life no.34 1951 oil on canvas 38×45.6cm		

Chronology 1948-2001

This one-room summarization of Yamada Masaaki’s more than a half-century of painting is presented for those encountering the artist for the first time. Yamada’s actual works are exhibited, and although they are small, each one is an excellent, thoroughly realized work. The quotes come from Yamada’s Production Notes. This is all the preparation you need for the main body of the show.

Still Life no.45 1951-52 oil on canvas 26×16cm Miyashita Akira	Work B.O50 1958 oil on canvas 39.5×35cm	Work C.O41 1964 oil on canvas 33.3×24.2cm	Work D.136 1973 oil on canvas 25×91cm	Work E.289 1987 oil on canvas 41×65cm
Work B.O8 1956 oil on canvas 27.3×41cm	Work B.O77 1959 oil on canvas 24×33.3cm	Work C.O73 1967 oil on canvas 27.5×45.6cm NOMADIC STUDIO YOSHITAKA UCHIDA	Work D.O74 1976 oil on canvas 24.2×41cm	Work F.29 1990 oil on canvas 33.3×46cm Miyashita Akira
Work B.O38 1957 oil on canvas 33.3×24.5cm	Work C.O6 1960 oil on canvas 33.3×24cm The Ishii Collection, University of Tsukuba	Work C.O O26 1968 oil on canvas 27.3×19cm	Work D.O82 1977 oil on canvas 45.6×53cm	Color no.106 1999- oil on canvas 65.2×53cm

Work B 1956-1959

Yamada gave the name “Work” to his seris lasting from 1956 to 1995, and assigned mechanical-sounding alphanumeric titles to all its works. “Work B” are the paintings from 1956 to 1959, and the letter changes with each decade thereafter, with “Work C” lasting from 1960 to 1969, “Work D” the next ten years, and so on until “Work F” in the 1990s. “Work B” began at the point where the subjects of his still life paintings were completely dismantled. From the arabesque patterns resembling a whirlpool, a rectangle gradually emerges, and eventually, paintings featuring only a simple rectangular shape appear.

Work B.112 1956 oil on canvas 116.8×91cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work B.134 1956 oil on canvas 80.3×100cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu	Work B.145 1957 oil on canvas 65.3×80.2cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu	Work B.182 1958 oil on canvas 91×116.8cm Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art	Work B.219 1959 oil on canvas 50×72.8cm
Work B.114 1956 oil on canvas 91×73cm	Work B.136 1956-57 oil on canvas 100×80.2cm	Work B.149 1957-58 oil on canvas 73×61cm	Work B.183 1958 oil on canvas 97×130.3cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu	Work B.220 1959 oil on canvas 65.3×100cm GALLERY KASAHARA
Work B.115 1956 oil on canvas 72.8×60.7cm	Work B.139 1956-57 oil on canvas 91×65.3cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu	Work B.154 1957-58 oil on canvas 91×72.8cm NOMADIC STUDIO YOSHITAKA UCHIDA	Work B.192 1959 oil on canvas 130×194cm	Work B.227 1959 oil on canvas 53×80cm
Work B.118 1956 oil on canvas 91×72.8cm	Work B.141 1957 oil on canvas 100×80.3cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu	Work B.163 1958 oil on canvas 80.3×100cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work B.205 1959 oil on canvas 72.9×117cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work B.228 1959 oil on canvas 65×100cm
Work B.125 1956 oil on canvas 116.8×91cm Utsunomiya Museum of Art		Work B.169 1958 oil on canvas 97×130.4cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work B.214 1959 oil on canvas 72.8×117cm	

Work C 1960-1969

Yamada has been often been called the painter of stripes. Before him, several painters created stripe paintings, including Paul Klee, but perhaps none have dedicated themselves so thoroughly to the motif for years, almost as if possessed. Why stripes? One thing we can say is that Yamada’s stripes were not just series of bands of color lined up on a single plane, but were overlaid atop one another, the many layers creating a sense of depth. Microscope photographs of cross sections of the paint layers in these stripe paintings, taken as part of investigative surveys for this exhibition, are presented at the venue, and they show the superimposed paint layers that give rise to a complex and subtle visual experience which could never be derived from a flat digital display. In about 1965, the stripes gave way to contemplative monochromatic paintings, a tranquil aspect of Yamada emerging after the flood of stripes subsided. These delicately painted canvases are tinged with faint color and have a texture almost like human skin.

Work C.12 1960 oil on canvas 65×50cm Color Museum	Work C.33 1960 oil on canvas 145.8×97cm Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art	Work C.40 1960 oil on canvas 162×97cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work C.60 1960 oil on canvas 65×50cm	Work C.62 1960 oil on canvas 162×97cm Aomori Museum of Art
Work C.27 1960 oil on canvas 72.8×53cm	Work C.34 1960 oil on canvas 117×56cm	Work C.57 1960 oil on canvas 145.7×89.5cm Osaka City Museum of Modern Art	Work C.61 1960 oil on canvas 130×80.3cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu	Work C.70 1960 oil on board 91×91cm

Work C.73 1960 oil on canvas 180×68cm The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo	Work C.94 1961 oil on canvas 162×112cm Utsunomiya Museum of Art	Work C.122 1962 oil on canvas 116.8×73cm	Work C.208 1964 oil on canvas 130.3×80cm	Work C.p 384 1966 conté on paper with embossing 82.5×65cm Chiba City Museum of Art
Work C.75 1960 oil on canvas 100×65.2cm Ashiya City Museum of Art & History	Work C.96 1961 oil on canvas 162×97cm The National Museum of Art, Osaka	Work C.p 140 1962 oil on paper 54.2×32.5cm	Work C.210 1964 oil on canvas 117×72.8cm	White Object 15 1966 magnesium carbonate powder and acrylic box 73×52×8.2cm
Work C.77 1960 oil on canvas 180×68cm The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo	Work C.100 1961 oil on canvas 145.6×97cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu	Work C.138 1963 oil on canvas 162×130cm Niigata City Art Museum	Work C.211 1964-65 oil on canvas 162×130cm	White Object 17 1966 styrol and acrylic box 73×52×6.4cm

Work C.78 1960 oil on canvas 80×53cm	Work C.p 91 1961 oil and wax on paper 25×17cm	Work C.142 1963 oil on canvas 194×97cm	Work C.216 1964-65 oil on canvas 162×97cm	Work C.219 1967 oil on canvas 162×112cm
Work C.O1 1960 oil on canvas 41×53cm	Work C.p 101 1961 oil on paper 79.5×54cm	Work C.147 1963 oil on canvas 130.3×97cm	Work C.217 1964-65 oil on canvas 100×65cm	Work C.322 1967 oil on canvas 162×112cm
Work C.O8 1960 oil on canvas 46×38cm	Work C.92 1961-62 oil on canvas 116.8×91cm Yokohama Museum of Art	Work C.158 1963 oil on canvas 100×73.2cm	Work C.218 1964-65 oil on canvas 194×130cm	Work C.329 1967 oil on canvas 162×130cm Coutesy Gallery Yonetsu

Work C.p 2 1960 oil and conté on paper 52×39cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work C.93 1961-62 oil on canvas 145.7×97cm Takamatsu Art Museum	Work C.p 183 1963 oil and wax on paper 18×17cm	Work C.223 1965 oil on canvas 116.8×80.3cm	Work C.339 1967 oil on canvas 112×145.7cm
Work C.p 11 1960 oil on paper 54.5×39cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work C.99 1961-62 oil on canvas 130.3×80.3cm GALLERY KASAHARA	Work C.p 184 1963 color pencil on printed page 30.5×22cm	Work C.224 1965 oil on canvas 91×65cm	Work C.342 1967 oil on canvas 162×130cm The Miyagi Museum of Art
Work C.p 16 1960 oil on paper 67×48cm	Work C.102 1961-62 oil on canvas 162×112cm The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto	Work C.151 1963-64 oil on canvas 162×97cm	Work C.225 1965 oil on canvas 162×162cm Takamatsu Art Museum	Work C.343 1967 oil on canvas 162×112cm Osaka City Museum of Modern Art

Work C.p 19 1960 oil and conté on paper 54.5×39cm	Work C.105 1961-62 oil on canvas 162×112cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work C.154 1963-64 oil on canvas 117×54cm	Work C.258 1965 oil on canvas 117×117cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work C.349 1967 oil on canvas 162×112cm Osaka City Museum of Modern Art
Work C.p 25 1960 oil on paper 41×31.5cm	Work C.107 1961-62 oil on canvas 162×112cm Fuchu Art Museum	Work C.163 1963-64 oil on canvas 91×65cm GALLERY KASAHARA	Work C.268 1965-66 oil on canvas 117×117cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work C.353 1967 oil and conté on paper with embossing 79×47cm Color Museum
Work C.p 43 1960 oil on paper 36.5×25cm	Work C.108 1962 oil on canvas 162×112cm The Museum of Modern Art, Toyama	Work C.169 1964 oil on canvas 72.8×33.3cm Color Museum	Work C.273 1966 oil on canvas 162×130cm The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama	Work C.355 1968 oil on canvas 162×112cm

Work C.p 59 1960 oil on paper 35.5×25cm	Work C.109 1962 oil on canvas 91×65cm	Work C.171 1964 oil on canvas 72.8×33.3cm Color Museum	Work C.289 1966 oil on canvas 116.8×91cm	Work C.358 1968 oil on canvas 130.3×89.5cm
Work C.85 1961 oil on canvas 91×65cm Color Museum	Work C.111 1962 oil on canvas 145.8×97cm	Work C.180 1964 oil on canvas 162×130cm	Work C.308 1966 oil on canvas 162×130cm Chiba City Museum of Art	Work C.400 1969 oil on canvas 162×112cm Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
Work C.86 1961 oil on canvas 162×115cm Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo	Work C.113 1962 oil on canvas 80.3×61cm	Work C.191 1964 oil on canvas 117×80cm GALLERY KASAHARA	Work C.p 286 1966 oil on silver-coated paper with embossing 72.5×54cm	Work C.368 1968 oil on canvas 130.3×89.5cm

Work C.88 1961 oil on canvas 162.2×97cm GALLERY KASAHARA	Work C.114 1962 oil on canvas 162×115cm The Miyagi Museum of Art	Work C.201 1964 oil on canvas 80.5×65cm	Work C.205 1964 oil on canvas 72.8×41cm	Work C.373 1968 oil on canvas 162×112cm Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
Work C.89 1961 oil on canvas 117×91cm Yokohama Museum of Art	Work C.120 1962 oil on canvas 162×130cm			Work C.383 1968 oil on canvas 162×112cm Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo