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GABRIUS

## tabaimo

akiko miki



Akiko Miki: "Tabaimo" is an unusual name, mysterious even. Most people won't be able to tell whether you are a man or a woman or a group. Where does it come from?

**Tabaimo:** I am the middle of three sisters and all of us went to the same preparatory school. There, it was confusing to use the same name, "Tabata," for all three of us. So naturally, my

older sister got the nickname "Taba-ane" ("ane" means "older sister") and I got "Taba-imo" ("imo" is an abbreviation of "imo-to" which means "younger sister," and is used for all of the sisters after the first). I used this name for my very first show and I am simply still using it. So, it was for practical reasons with a bit of joke. There was no serious

thought or intention behind.

**AM:** You majored in graphic design at Kyoto Zokei Geijutsu University and you still continue to do graphic design work for books and other projects.

**T:** Not so much to be able to call it my job so far. But I want to do it more seriously, so I'm thinking of studying further in the UK. For me, graphic design and video works are somehow different, although they are deeply interconnected with each other. I believe I can be in the best balance when I do both art, which is limitless, and graphic design work, which is like playing puzzles within certain regulations and limits.

**AM:** Your animation video is characterized by its unique colors, its flatness or extreme two-dimensionality, and peculiarly slow pace which creates a chilly, yet strangely peaceful, daydream-like atmosphere. Do you draw all the images by yourself by hand? Do you limit the number of scenes intentionally by choice?

**T:** When I made a series of installation videos for the first time in my senior year at the university, all the ideas came from trying to convert the negative factors into positives.

For example, I could not make enough satisfying work by creating a single image at a time, so I made an animation video with multiple images. I had no assistants, so I could only do a limited number of scenes. I had no money to produce it in film, so I did it by computer. I had no good sense of exploiting the computer's color variations, so instead I created my own original color variations. I had no special skills or specialized field, so I chose the installation form in order to put everything I learned at the school into my work.

So I reached the result of these video installations by struggling to find the solutions each time I confronted difficulties.

**AM:** What do you mean by original colors? How did you make them?

**T:** These are colors that I felt somehow were "most Japanese." I referred to the colors found in Hokusai prints. I found interesting effects after some trials by mixing those Hokusai colors. Again, I had no confidence in my color sense or ability either. So I tried to gather colors from the images that I believed had remarkable color sense.

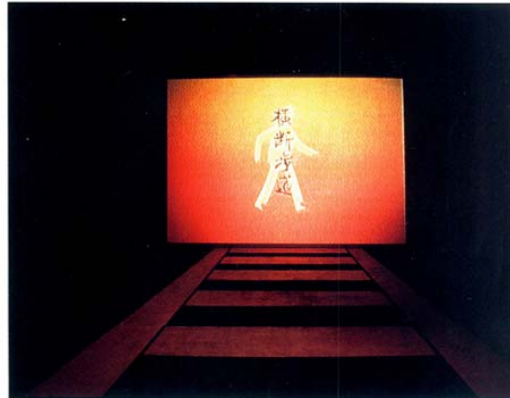
**AM:** In your works, we can see certain relationships, not only with traditional arts such as Japanese prints, but also with contemporary popular culture, particularly Japanese Manga.

**T:** The relationship between my works and Manga is not so obvious. Or at least it is not intentional like the works of Takashi Murakami. But, yes, there are certain influences.

◀ **Tabaimo Japanese Commuter Train**, 2001, still from video.

▼ **Tabaimo Japanese Zebra Crossing**, 1999, Installation view.

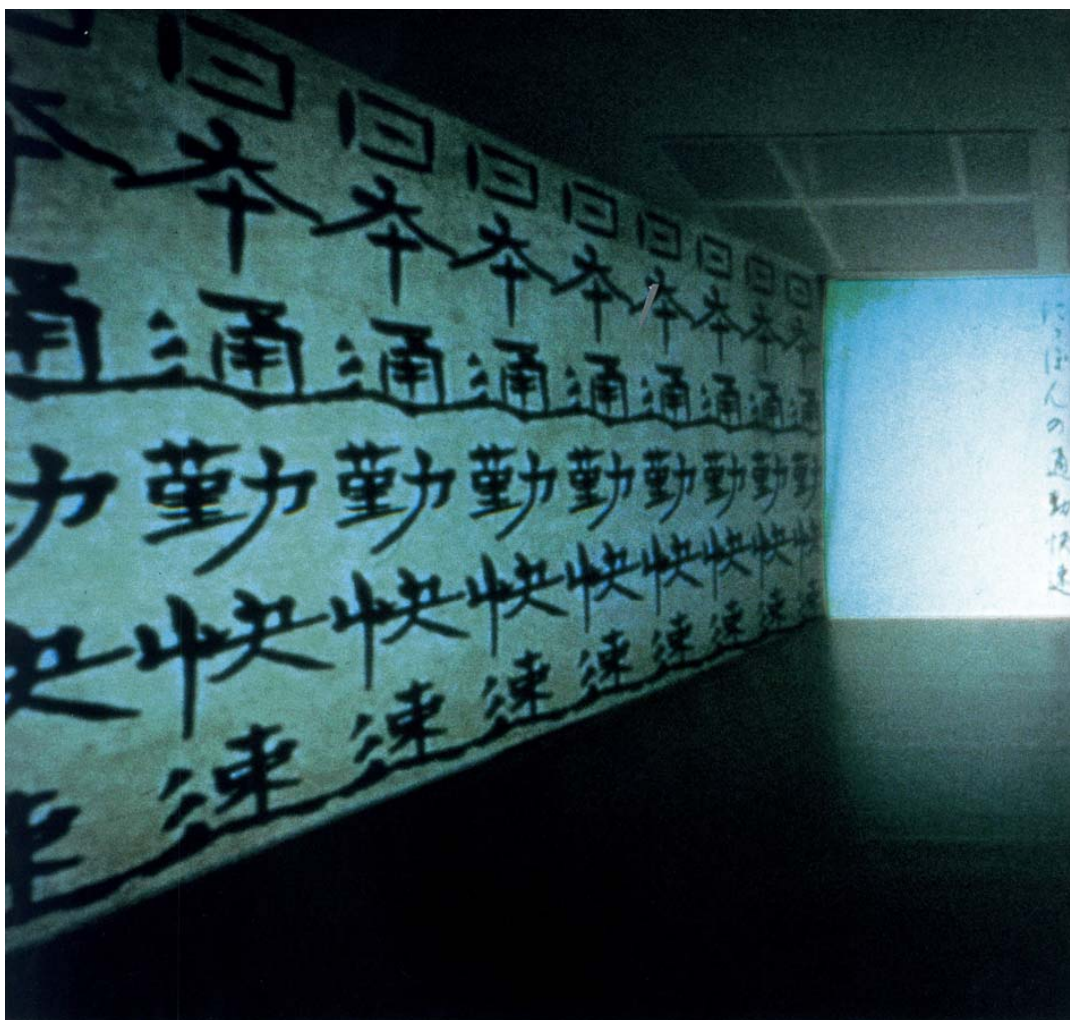
▼ **Tabaimo Japanese Little Kitchen**, 2003, mixed media.



In fact, I was a big fan of Horror Manga since childhood, particularly of authors such as Junji Ito and Kazuo Umeda. Some of their Mangas have also been adapted into feature films or television movies, but these remakes lack the essence of the original Manga. I believe only high quality animation video can keep the essence of the Horror Mangas of these great

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masters even in different works with different expressive means.

AM: Contrary to the two-dimensionality of the image, you meticulously conceive the three-dimensional display, realizing the space with projected images.

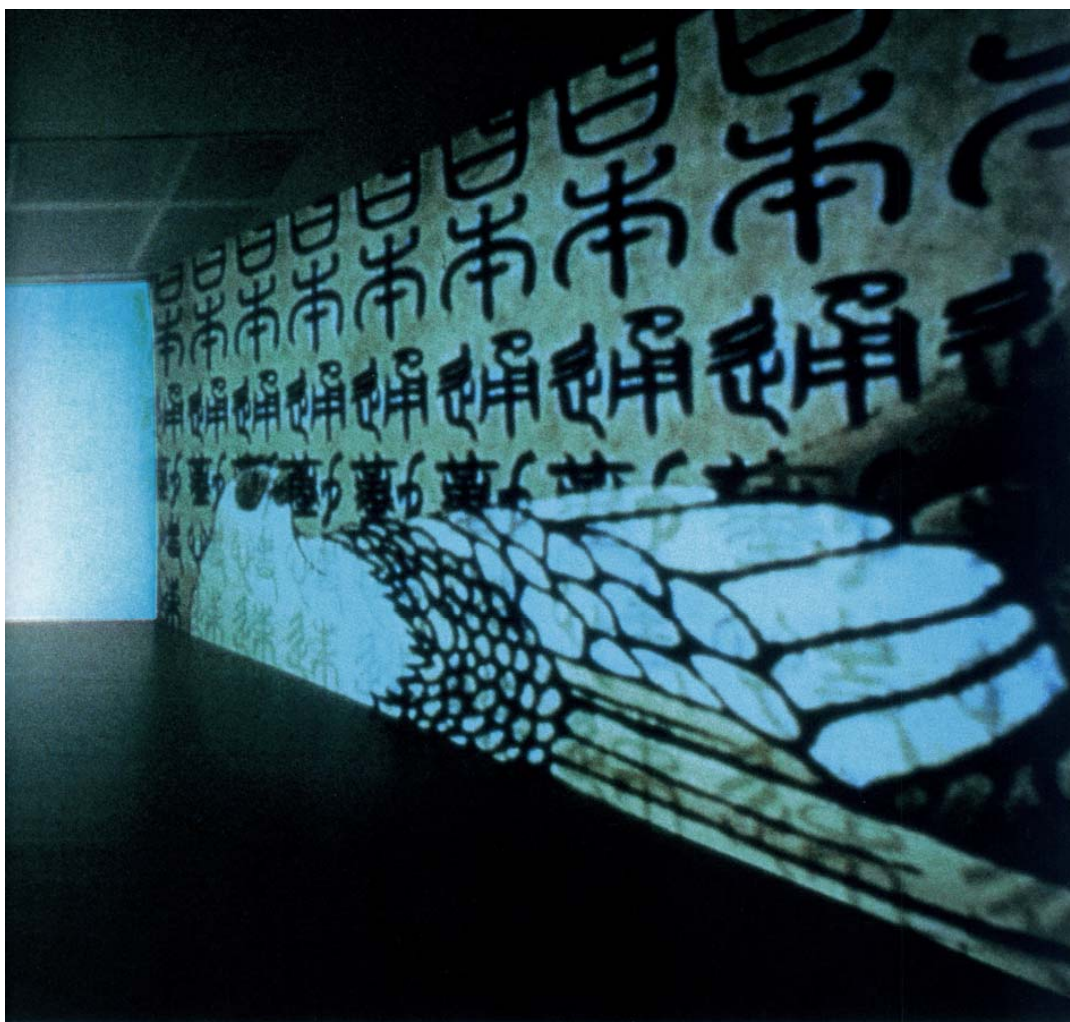
T: I want to bring the visitors inside my work. You cannot touch most artworks with your hands. I often feel a distance with artworks even though they are right in front of my eyes. I hope that the spectators feel very close to my works. Also, by inviting them into a sort of unstable space, both visually as well as physically, I want them to experience

watching the animation video through feeling some "suffering." Watching an animation video silently for ten minutes is already painful. I wanted to add more pain so the visitors are forced to feel my work by using all of the senses, not just watching with their eyes. For me as an artist, it is such a pleasure to see that people go through certain necessary pains to feel my work. Basically, I am making my work for my pleasure. Maybe this is why I choose this kind of display.

AM: As clearly indicated in titles such as *Japanese Kitchen*,

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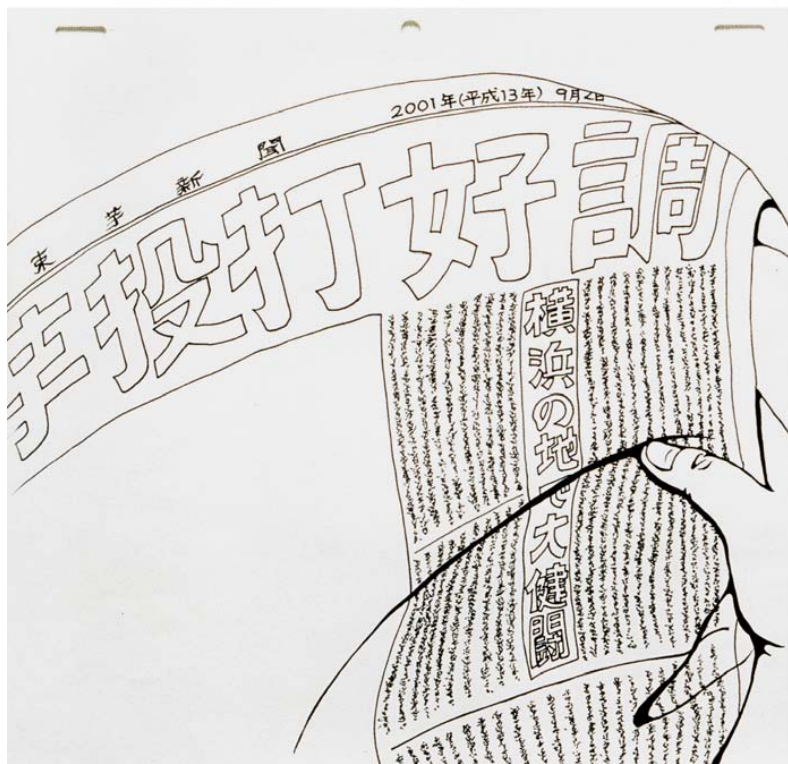
Tabaimo *Japanese Zebra Crossing*, 1999. Installation view.

*Japanese Bathhouse-Gents*, *Japanese Commuter Train*, your works explicitly deal with everyday Japanese reality. Why is that? By playing with stereotyped cultural icons or symbols, your videos expose a certain strangeness in our very ordinary living environment as well as addressing social problems such as layoffs due to restructuring, suicide, molesters in the trains, and so on, without really falling into the category of so-called "socially engaged art."

**T:** Firstly, because I like Japan and I only know Japan. Also, these ordinary subjects are interesting material for me.

I am not trying to assert my opinions or transmit certain messages against the society through my works. Maybe I am too dependant on others or don't understand well the environment I live in. For me, producing work is an act of trying to understand my reality. Also, I want that my work makes each spectator question themselves: "What do I think about the environment I live in?"

**AM:** The images are based on very ordinary scenes in our everyday life, but they are surrealistic and have an uncanny, weird, or sometimes even fearful atmosphere. How do these



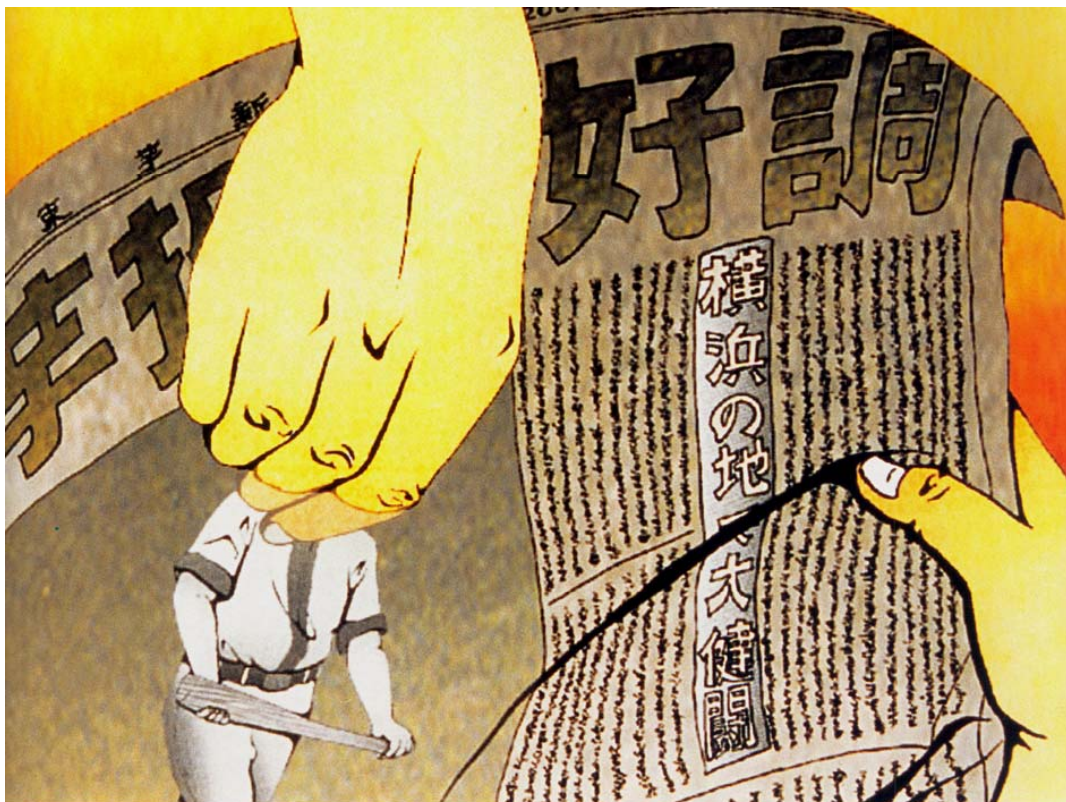
images come into your head?

T: Precisely when I am taking trains, working in the kitchen, taking a bath... But it is not like that many ideas spring out one after another in my head. It takes a long time to complete one image before stepping toward the real production. I am carefully observing people all the time, their sort of stereotyped attitudes or movements in different settings and occasions in everyday life. I synchronize these stereotyped attitudes or movements and the things that I want them to do. That is my imagination.

AM: How about the process of the production?

T: Ideally, first I decide on a setting and the characters' movements. Then I try to do it in real movements and record them on video. Based on the recorded images, I make color drawings one by one, then scan these hundreds or thousands





▲ Tabaimo Japanese Commuter Train, 2001, still from video.

◀ Tabaimo Japanese Commuter Train, 2001, drawing.

▼ Tabaimo Japanese Commuter Train, 2001, still from video.

of color, hand-drawn pictures into the computer and edit them to make an animation video. Separately from these, I make some structures or objects for three-dimensional display. So most of the time, I don't know how the work will really look at the end since I can only see it in completed form after it is finally displayed.

AM: You studied in Kyoto. Kyoto is the place where artists like Miwa Yanagi or the group Kyupi Kyupi are creating interesting photography and video installation works. Even before them, there was the group Dumbytype. Their works are also very keen on the use of the body or physical experience in relation to video and its projected space, as well as the subtle irony of contemporary society. Do you think there are particular shared sensibilities in this area or maybe some influence from them?

T: I had never seen Dumbytype's work until I moved to Tokyo recently. On the contrary, I certainly was interested in the works of Miwa Yanagi and Kyupi Kyupi since the time when I lived in Kyoto. I like their works a lot, so there might have been some influence. But I don't know if there is any particular sensibility in this area.

AM: There have been very few presentations of your work outside of Japan until now. This year there will be some occasions to see your video installations overseas. What kinds of projects have you been working on recently?

T: I am conceiving completely different work now. A different direction from the past works. It should be surprising.

Tabaimo was born in 1975 in Hyogo (Japan). She lives and works in Tokyo.  
Photo Credit: Gallery Koyanagi, Tokyo.