

# ArtDirectorsClub

## 2000 HALL OF FAME



### TADANORI YOKOO

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#### *Design/ Illustration*

Tadanori Yokoo was born in Nishiwaki, Japan in 1936. As a teenager, his modest dreams were to work at a post office and to paint. He entered the profession by replicating paintings, designing store wrapping paper, and drawing posters for the Chamber of Commerce. His first notable work, a self-titled poster at the Persona group's 1965 joint exhibition, attracted attention because it diverged from contemporary graphic styles. This shocking poster featured a hanged man against a blue sky with red rays emanating from a rising sun. His name appeared at the top; the bottom corners held childhood photographs and the simple ironic statement, "having reached a climax at the age of 29, I was dead." The rising sun motif, considered old-fashioned at the time, recurs throughout his body of work and has become emblematic of "Yokoo style" and an international symbol of Japanese pop art.



Following this success, Yokoo participated in the Brno Biennial and collaborated with **Shigeo Fukuda**, Kazumasa Nagai, and **Ikko Tanaka** at the Nippon Design Centre In Tokyo. Through the poet Mutsuo Takahashi, he became involved in the Japanese avant-garde scene of the 1960s and began designing for a number of dance companies. His 1968 poster for the Tokyo Gekio Theatre Company was named the work best encapsulating the spiritual atmosphere of the decade at New York's

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Museum of Modern Art's 1968 Word and Image exhibition.

In the 1970s, after injury in a traffic accident and the hara-kiri suicide of his close friend Yukio Mishima, Yokoo stopped work to reflect. He became fearful of death and increasingly fascinated by Indian culture, Buddhism, UFOs, and extraterrestrial civilizations, and began to create collages using images of the universe and various religious symbols. Through his spiritual quest, Yokoo became acquainted with rock and folk musicians who often asked him to design their posters and album covers, including the Beatles, Emerson, Lake and Palmer, Carlos Santana, and Cat Stevens. Yokoo was especially close to John Lennon and Carlos Santana. His cover for Santana's triple album "Lotus" was awarded the special jury prize at the sixth Brno Biennial in 1974.



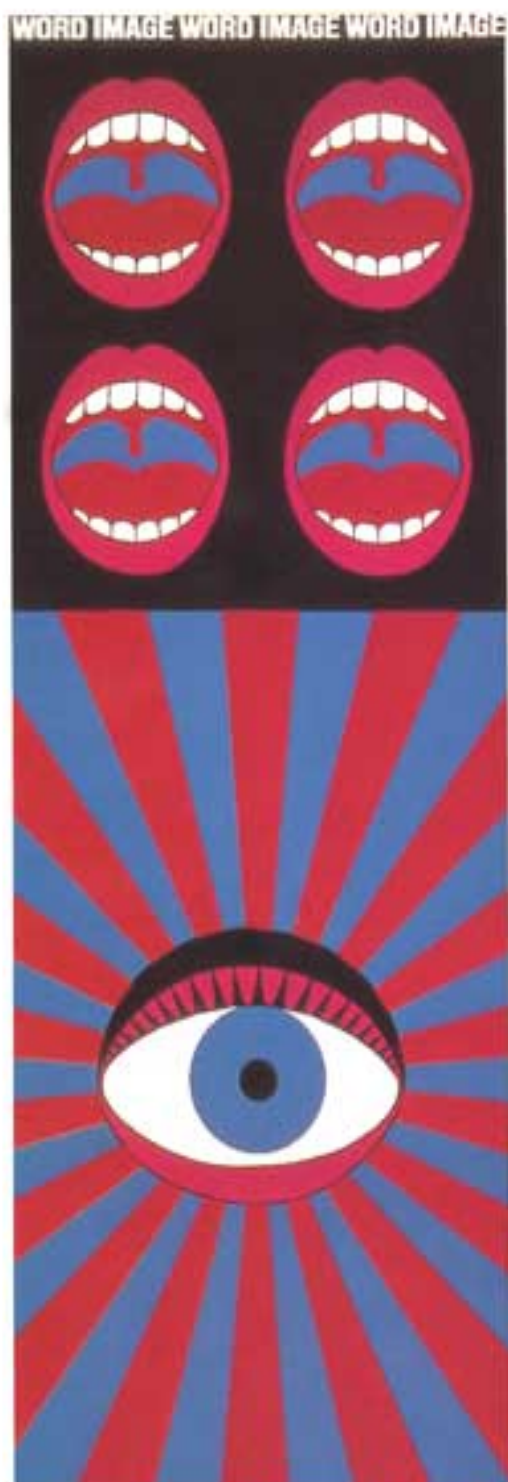
By the early 1990s, Yokoo added computer design to his technique vocabulary and changed his style even further, by reassembling previous works digitally. For the first time in many years, a large-scale exhibition of Yokoo's posters was held in 1998 in Japan. Forty thousand people crowded the thirteen-day event, exposing a whole new generation to his work.

Several motifs recur in Yokoo's work. His fascination with waterfalls borders on obsession. In 1999, in a group exhibition titled "Ground Zero Japan" at the Mito Museum of Art, Yokoo filled an entire room

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from floor to ceiling with postcards of waterfalls which were reflected in a black mirrored floor. Other exhibitions on the subject include "Craze for Waterfalls" at the Kirin Art Space Harajuku and "Tadanori Yokoo's Magical Make a Pilgrimage Round" exhibition. In 1992, Absolut Vodka commissioned him to design an advertisement titled Absolut Yokoo featuring twenty-five of his waterfall paintings.

Yokoo is also known for his science-fiction posters and Ken Takakura gangster-film posters, and his designs have been used for theater sets in Japan and Italy.

Tadanori Yokoo's work, while highly successful commercially, is deeply personal. Employing his own themes, pictures, and references to himself and his anti-modernist collage style, his approach is instantly recognizable and individual. He has said that he learned in the late 1960s "to escape from compromise when designing by linking my creations directly to my lifestyle."

Yokoo's work crosses the border between design and fine art. Seemingly devoid of limitations or rules, his paintings are warm, autobiographical, and mystical and draw on a variety of seemingly incongruous influences such as spiritualism, Japanese aesthetics, the psychedelic posters of the '60s, science fiction, and comic art. It also

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consciously draws on Ukiyo-e, or "the art of the floating world," whose themes express the impermanence of life.

Tadanori Yokoo's work has appeared in exhibitions every year since 1965, as well as dozens of books, magazines, and advertisements. "He is unique," says his longtime friend and colleague, **Paul Davis**. "There isn't any other artist like him. Instead of taking a subject and just presenting it, he opens it up; and in finding so many ways to express himself and his passions, he has changed graphic design in the process."

Please note: Content of biography is presented here as it was published in 2000.

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