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Hirata Minoru

Born in 1930 in Tokyo, Hirata Minoru has been active as a freelance photojournalist since 1955. His themes range from Okinawa to air sports, with cell-phone photography recently added to his repertoire. Among them, “art in action” that he followed in the 1960s is indispensable to examine Anti-Art performance art. This summer, he was nominated for a Discovery Award and exhibited his photos of Okinawa and “art in action” at the prestigious Arles photo festival.

The current exhibition includes his photographs of Hi Red Center’s *Dropping Event*, which the collective staged on October 10, 1964 at the Ikenobō Kaikan in Tokyo by dropping such objects as suitcases, suits, and bras from the building’s rooftop; Nakanishi Natsuyuki’s *Clothespins Assert Churning Action* in a self-performance version and a model version; and Collective Kumo’s street performance in February 1970, in which it protested the use of the group name without consent in *Kyūshū Renaissance: A Grand Festival of Heroes* by attempting sexual intercourse at a busy urban intersection.

Hirata came to know these performative works that he calls “art in action” through Ushio Shinohara, *the* action guy of Anti-Art. He first came to know the artist at the Yomiuri Independent Exhibition in 1958. Subsequently, in 1959 or '60, he received an assignment to shoot Shinohara’s *Boxing Painting* for the American news agency Nana Press. Subsequently, he was introduced by Shinohara to Neo Dada and Hi Red Center. Impressed by their energy and intellect as they literally “jumped out” of the conventional space of art such as museums and galleries, he became a “conspirator” who would witness and photograph their “art in action.”

Hirata’s photographs of “art in action” display several salient characteristics.

First, his coverage was broad and deep. As demonstrated by his photobook, *Chō-geijutsu/Art in Action* (2005), he followed numerous artists and collectives, from the cool Tokyo Fluxus to the indigenous Ritualists. Hirata’s engagement was particularly intense with Hi Red Center and Zero Dimension. His effort with the latter is evident in *Zero Dimension*, a photobook of 2006. Within Hi Red Center’s short period of activity over two years, he photographed *5th Mixer Plan* of 1963 and three of their four major events of 1964, excepting *Shelter Plan* (e.g., *Closing Event*, *Dropping Event*, and *Cleaning Event*).

Second, his photographs reveal his consistently sharp photographic eye and his sure compositional ability to capture decisive moments. In performance art, what counts is the artist’s act. However, some photographs go beyond “mere records” and “historical preservation.” Although not included in the present exhibition, a tableau-like scene he shot of Hi Red Center’s *Cleaning Event*, in

which seven performers were neatly positioned, has come to mark an indelible moment of 1960s art. In capturing *Dropping Event*, Hirata's camera pursuing dropping objects from the rooftop or the ground hints at his surrealistic sensitivity.

As a proactive conspirator, Hirata ran alongside Moriyama Yasuhide, leader of Collective Kumo, and a female performer, as they bolted from the intersection upon hearing the siren of a police car. Hirata's camera captured their runaway, turning it into a memorable scene. However, it should be noted that Hirata, too, was running away from the police, for if he should be caught and his film seized, it would have become evidence of their crime. He had to run as fast as possible in order to protect them. Such tenacity would later allow him to photograph air sports and birdmen's activities while himself flying with a hang glider.

Third, Hirata promoted "art in action" in the magazine media through his photojournalism in the 1960s when there were few conventions in place to study performance art. He pitched article ideas to editors, photographed the works, and prepared draft texts. His passion and effort resulted in the publication of nearly thirty magazine articles, including some in such popular magazines as *Shūkan taishū* (Weekly masses). If Anti-Art performers attempted to transgress the boundary of art and life, Hirata pushed their works farther into the public sphere through his photojournalism.

In sum, he memorialized "art in action" in art history and promoted it in the print media. In these two roles, he served as a symbiotic historical agent, instrumental in affording "art in action" its immediate and enduring "afterlife."

—Reiko Tomii, August 23, 2011
(Translated by author from the Japanese original)