

ARTS

In the eyes of the beholder

By Cristoph Mark

Daily Yomiuri Staff Writer

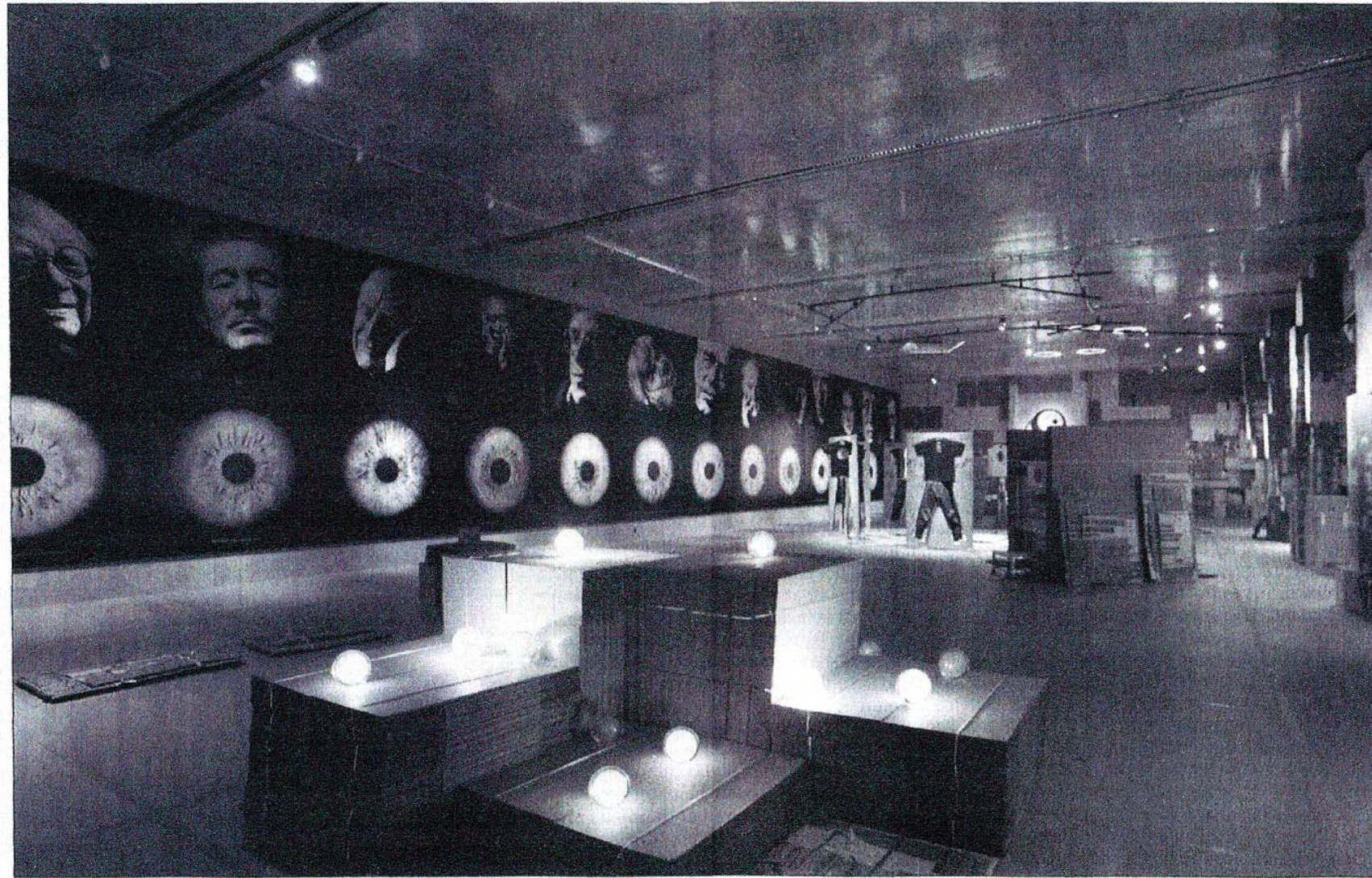
“It’s all in the eye of the beholder.” “The eyes are the window to the soul.” There are any number of expressions in English that deal with the eyes, most of which will also pertain to the latest exhibition at Issey Miyake’s 21_21 Design Sight at Tokyo Midtown, *Bulls Eye Special 2008: 21_21 Design Sight + Corporate Partners*.

For artist/curator Vassilis Zidianakis, whose *Op the Cyclops* has become the unofficial mascot of the event, the eye—and the image of the eye—has a uniquely Greek and Mediterranean significance. All over the Mediterranean, blue eyes are carried as talismans to ward off evil spirits. “I don’t have one with me now, but I usually have one in my pocket,” he explains. “But yesterday, I gave 21_21 my eye...and [then] Alitalia lost my luggage,” he laughs.

His work, *Op the Cyclops*, stands at the head of the main room of the exhibition, keeping an eye, as it were, over everyone, protecting them. A giant characterization of a living blue-eye talisman, complete with arms and legs fashioned from hastily cut paper, the stylized *Op* can be seen throughout the exhibition emblazoned on the T-shirts worn by gallery staff, something that had come as a surprise and honor to the artist, much of whose work is made possible through a small group in Greece called ATOPOS Cultural Organization.

“There’s a saying in Greece,” Zidianakis explains. “[It goes:] ‘We don’t need mirrors. Standing in front of someone, looking into their eyes—that is our mirror.’ For me this is democracy and the ideas of the Greeks. Without the other person, we are nothing.”

Along the facing wall stands the massive—it covers the entire wall (30 meters long, four meters high)—*Hymn* by Francis Giacobetti. The piece, which has been an ongoing project since 1982, lets the viewer look into the eyes (the irises, to be exact) of famous people in a variety of fields, including Stephen Hawking, Nobel Peace Prize-winner Aung San Suu Kyi and architect Tadao Ando, among others. But much less than the Greek idea of a mirror, the irises here—each blown up to



Installation view of Bulls Eye Special 2008 under way in Roppongi, Tokyo

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nearly two meters across—resemble something more like extraterrestrial landscapes, or in the case of Woody Allen’s iris, a sunflower.

Each of the artworks on display is sponsored by a corporation that, in some way, makes the work possible. With *Hymn*, Canon Marketing Japan Inc. provided the technology that allowed the artist to

print such amazing detail on such a grand scale, making *Hymn* impressive and worth the visit in its own right, both as a moving piece of art and a technological marvel.

Tokyo-based filmmaker Pascal Roulin agrees. “I think the masterpiece is the *Hymn* series. It was a big shock when I saw just one of the photos sep-

arately, and when you see the 15...,” says the artist, who has two of his own high-definition animations on display at *Bulls Eye* and was responsible for many of the exhibits’ graphics. “Their [irises] look 3-D, like a moon landscape or Mars.”

Roulin has been involved in films and animation (among a host of other disciplines) since he

Bulls Eye Special 2008: 21_21 Design Sight + Corporate Partners

Through March 16, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m., closed Tuesdays.

21_12 Design Sight, a short walk from Roppongi Station on the Toei Oedo Line, or a five-minute walk from Nogizaka Station on the Tokyo Metro Chiyoda Line.

Admission: ¥1,000 for adults, ¥800 for university students, ¥500 for high school and middle school students. Younger children are free.

Information: (03) 3475-2121

was 19, when a feature film director visited his art school in Belgium and offered him a job as an assistant.

Also on display are *PLEATS PLEASE outfits with Tim Hawkinson’s artwork*, made in cooperation with longtime collaborator Issey Miyake, and *Bridging Views*, made in cooperation with Mitsui Fudosan under what both the organizers and the artist himself refer to as a very tight deadline.

While *Bridging Views* depicts an ukiyo-e style Edo-period Nihonbashi, Tokyo—the birthplace of Mitsui Fudosan Co.—alongside a stylish, modern view of the city, *PLEATS PLEASE* appears as if it is a precursor to fashion shows of the future, with the clothing taking on its own human form, while allowing a full, detailed view of the product.

“We may have to see a mannequin [wearing the clothing] in the future, I don’t know,” explains the artist, whose *Space Elevator*, on show at the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation in Tokyo, depicts fashion shows changing to reflect the individual—literally. “It depends on the clothes you have to show. In this case, we try to avoid showing a living person, because it’s a bit disturbing and it’s becoming very old very quickly. This is a more timeless, pure image.”

Despite the high technological concepts on show at *Bulls Eye*, the individual artworks are tied together with decidedly lo-fi art direction by cardboard artist Katsuhiko Hibino. Roulin affectionately calls the exhibit’s design “disturbing,” while Zidianakis says it is on the cutting edge of exhibition techniques, a hybrid exhibition design that binds a variety of disciplines together. Whatever it is, just like the exhibit itself, it’s all in the eyes of the beholder.