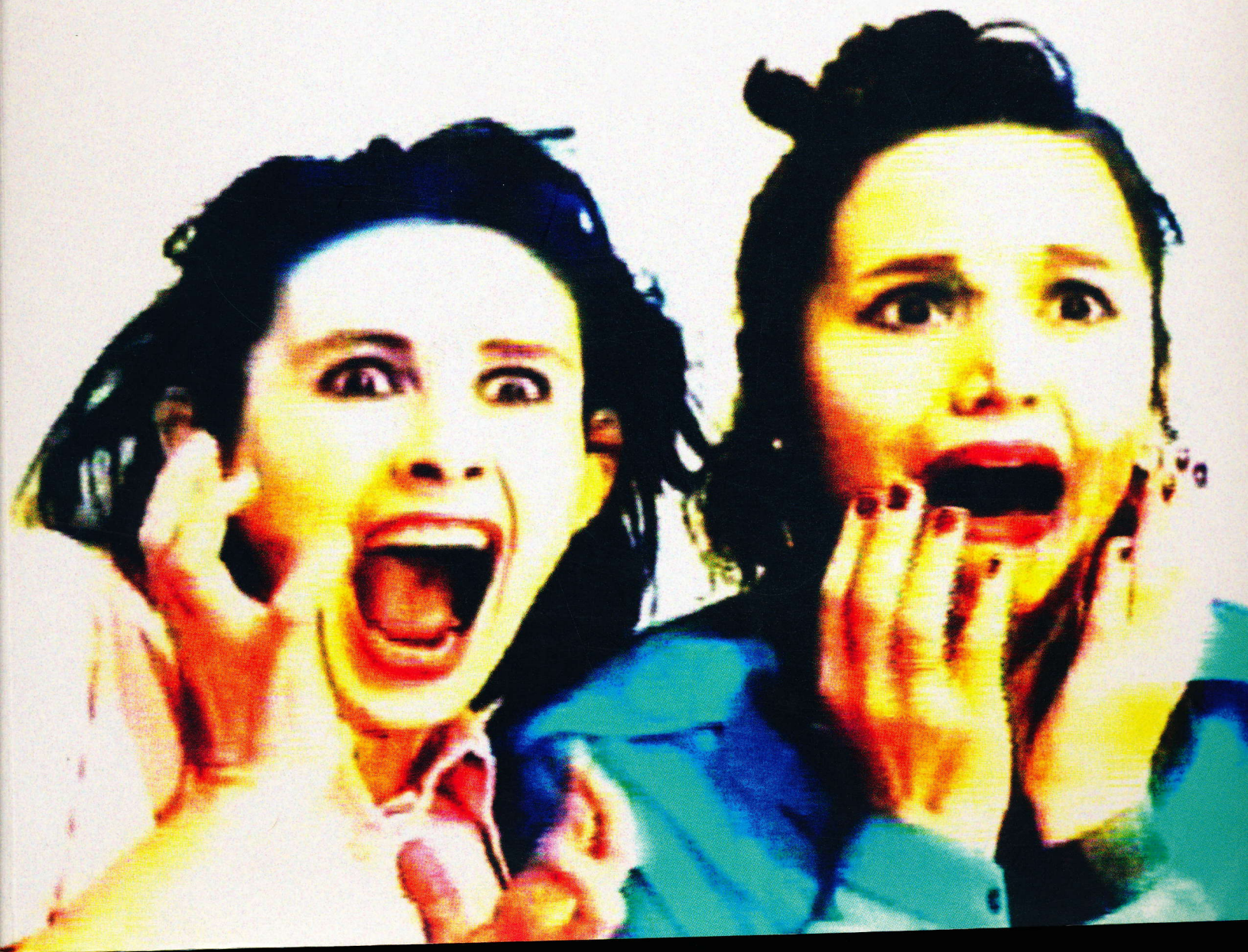


global feminisms

NEW DIRECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY ART



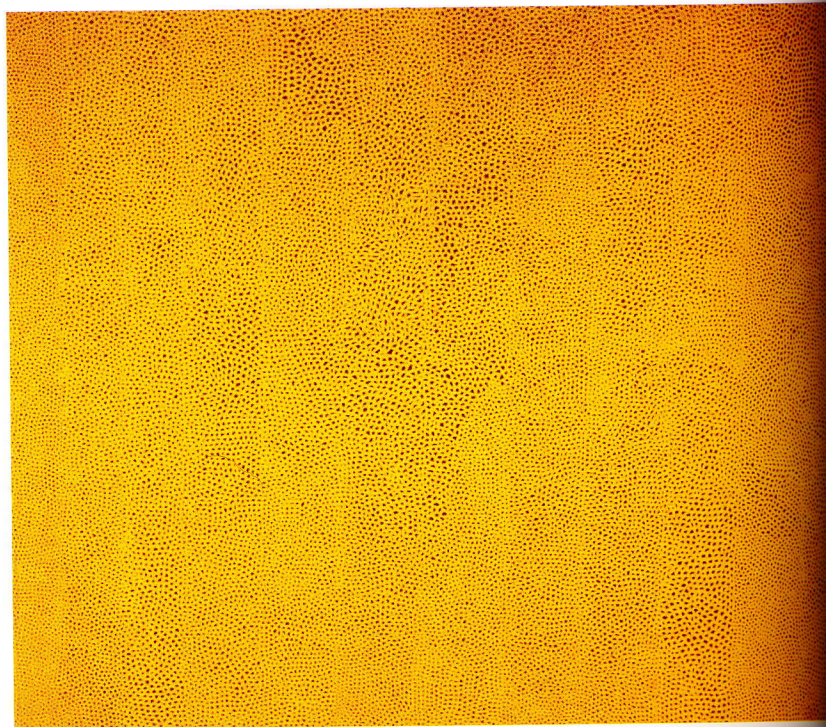
practices and their biographies. Yet the initial stimulus for such revisionist commentary still arises out of the artists' association with groups, movements, or male artists already ordained into the avant-garde.

The works of Tanaka, for example, have attracted critical attention as part of a larger wave of interest in the Gutai group, whose own celebrity was founded on their works' alleged formal and structural similarity to the action paintings of Jackson Pollock and the happenings of Allan Kaprow.¹¹ When the significance of Kusama's work (fig. 1) was first acknowledged by her contemporaries in the 1960s, they validated the work almost in spite of her identity as a Japanese woman: Kusama, as Donald Judd wrote in 1959, had the ability "to transcend the question of whether [the art] is Oriental or American."¹² More recent interpretation has recast Kusama's works, especially her phallus-covered sculptures, as critiques of contemporaneous styles and the attitudes underlying their perpetuation.¹³ Yet in reinterpreting her works according to style, they are seen as a unified and, in some ways, a totalized, body of expression attributable to the hand of a particular individual. The dangers of such an interpretation are well known: as the Hong Kong-based artist Phoebe Man implicitly observes, trying to define style, and particularly the style of "feminist" or "feminine" art, only reinforces a kind of authoritarian logic that does not always change the way people think.¹⁴

In Ono's case, however, as much attention has been lavished on the capacity of her works to evoke social meaning as on her connections with the Fluxus group.¹⁵ The recuperation of Ono actively coincides with a much broader concern, among critics, curators, and art historians, with women artists from Asia. In this case, exemplifying the second kind of interpretation mentioned above, the focus is on excavating and, in many instances, attributing a social, political, or historical meaning to the artwork, rather than on the evidence of an established vanguard style. In this way too, the activities of women artists tend to be marginalized.

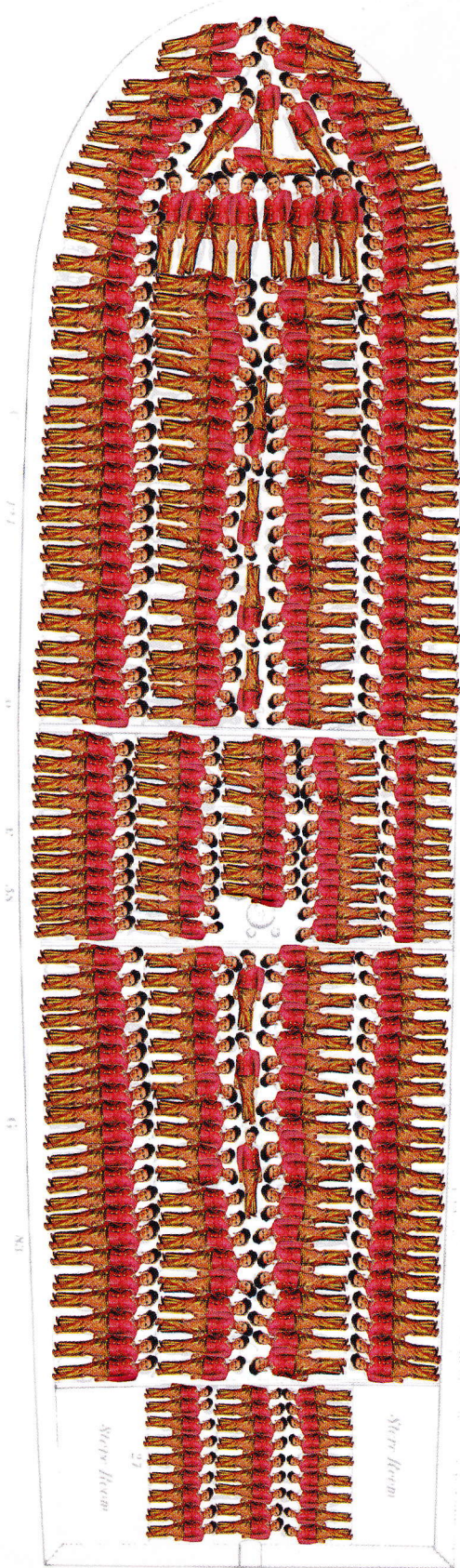
Central to these interpretations based on social, political, or historical meaning are three tropes, or themes, all of which are regularly summoned by works of more recent vintage. One trope concerns the artwork as an object whose most immediately discernible capacity is to delineate a problem having broad social implications. An example is Skowmon Hastanan's series of inkjet prints titled *Fever* (fig. 2). The series illustrates the problem of Asian women and their commodification in a larger capitalist world order. Each work in the series depicts female Thai flight attendants grouped together in a configuration reminiscent of slave ships used to transport African bodies to the New World. The parallels are clear: the plight of Asian women transported to various parts of the world as objects of desire or capital echoes the past of Africans forcibly brought to the Americas. Representation of the body as an object is abetted

Fig. 1
Yayoi Kusama (Japan, b. 1929)
Yellow Net, from the *Infinity Nets* series, 1960. Oil on canvas, 7' 10½" × 9' 8" (2.4 × 2.95 m). National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. © Yayoi Kusama. (Photo: courtesy of the artist)



on Hastanan (Thailand,
Red Fever, from the
 series, 2000. Inkjet print,
 dimensions variable. Courtesy
 of the artist. (Photo: courtesy
 of the artist)

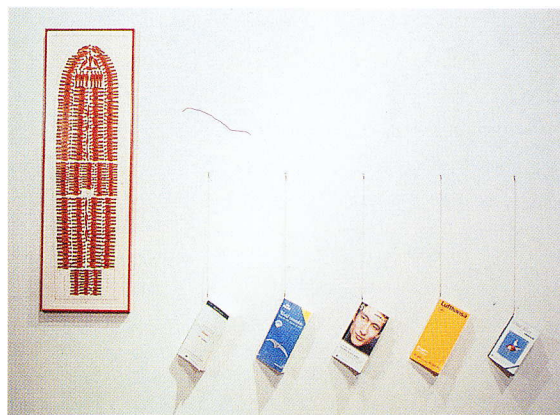
on Hastanan (Thailand,
 . Installation view of *Red*
 from the *Fever* series, 2000.
 tint, airline pamphlets,
 dimensions variable; overall:
 (91.4 x 152.4 cm).
 of the artist. (Photo:
 of the artist)



by the presence of commercial pamphlets issued by
 airline companies (fig. 3).

The second trope concerns the artwork as a
 challenge to the systems that attempt to order women
 according to imposed agendas. Artworks are judged
 to be especially successful when they are able to reveal
 how such orderings have been carried out. In this regard,
 the media of performance and photography offer special
 opportunities. Performance enables artists such as
 Arahmaiani viscerally to incorporate the viewer into her
 world, albeit for a brief time. In *Offerings from A to Z*
 (fig. 4), black-and-white photographic images of
 heterosexual couples in various amorous poses both
 surround and challenge the seemingly lifeless body of
 the artist, lying on a stone plinth situated deep inside a
 square open pit. Standing at ground level and looking
 down at her body, the viewer unwittingly becomes
 complicit in the death of the artist. The subsequent
 documentary photograph, the main source of evidence
 attesting to the performance's occurrence, only
 confirms the centrality of sacrifice. It neither offers
 nor corroborates other interpretative possibilities.¹⁶

The third trope concerns the artwork as an object
 that physically intervenes in the world beyond the
 parameters of the work's conception, execution, and
 display. For example, the cyborg works of Lee Bul



Skowmon Hastanan (Thailand, b. 1961)



Les femmes en route: Magnificent Journey, 2003. Light box with inkjet cutouts adhered to layered Plexiglas sheets, fluorescent light, 11 5/8 x 55 x 4 1/4" (28.6 x 139.2 x 10.8 cm). Lent by the artist