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Tokyo ADC

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The Tokyo ADC and the Decline of Pure Design

Text by Maggie Kinser Saikie

When the Tokyo Art Director's Club was founded in 1952, Japan was still in shambles from the war. Nippon Design Center wouldn't be founded for another eight years, and the English word "design" was new to the Japanese vocabulary. From a mere twenty members at inception, to a select seventy-eight in 1999, the Tokyo ADC hasn't grown much in size, for that was never a goal, but it has aged to the point where its future today is less than clear.

The generation of what are called here "pure" graphic designers, including such masters as Kazumasa Nagai, Ikko Tanaka, and Shigeo Fukuda, is collectively in its late 60s. Three generations down the line, designers are not only unfamiliar with the work of their forefathers, but they don't even work in the same media. This third wave doesn't know design without computers, and is most comfortable in a world of Web pages and PlayStation game characters. Their immediate seniors, however, are still working in the traditional media and winning awards from the ADC. The awards for both 1998 and 1999 represented a clear shift from pure design (i.e. exhibition posters by great masters) to advertising.

Takayuki Soeda is the 48-year-old art director for the explosively popular Suntory whiskey TV commercial featuring retired Sumo Grand Champion, Hawaii-born Konishiki. "Until recently, about half of the awards were graphic designers' works, unknown to the average person," says Soeda. "They were beautiful, so they took the awards, but they didn't have much to do with the real world."

Soeda's ad (ADC 1999 Member's Award) was a particularly striking example of work that would not have won a decade ago. Konishiki was the first Sumo wrestler to be allowed to appear in a TV ad. Since his debut, he has most emphatically become a "talento," someone who makes a living appearing in TV shows and commercials. Soeda says the ADC, which is heavily weighted in the over-fifty age group, would normally dismiss a talento ad, because these rest on the individual's popularity. "But Konishiki isn't just another pretty face. He's been known as sort of a bad guy among sumo wrestlers. In the commercial, he's made into everybody's idol. I think the award recognized creative power."

The bottom line was also recognized. Western "logic" was formally imported about a decade ago, when market research and corporate identities became the buzzwords in advertising and P.R. But only today, as corporations make their first real acquaintance with bankruptcy on a large scale, have the advertising budgets been scrutinized—all the way to the designer's door. The time a campaign is given to prove itself has shrunk from a leisurely two years to three months. This unforgiving attention to the bottom line, driven by Japan's worst recession since the end of World War II, is decidedly not what graphic designers have grown up with. The freedom they were allowed in the past both inspired creativity and rewarded star designers with a position of privilege that will never exist again.

Still, the changes leading to the decline of pure design aren't all economic. Kazunari Hattori, 35, art director for the "Kewpie Half" magazine ad, says that ten years ago advertising was where designers went for excitement, but changes in both the culture and the business of advertising have diverted talent to games and other monitor-oriented design. "With that change, I think the general visual sense will change as well." The larger question is whether these young designers—some of whom don't know Ikko Tanaka from their mothers—can truly produce anything new, anything as original as that pioneering first generation.

Keizo Matsui, 56, an internationally active member of the ADC, grew as a designer as Japan grew as an international power, and is painfully aware of the gaps in the education of younger Japanese designers. The design Matsui learned was a step removed from

European design, a hybrid of Bauhaus and American advertising tailored to fit the Japanese market and mindset. The clients of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s were also particularly "understanding," and allowed Japanese culture to seep into their advertising.

"So as we came down from the first, through the second, and into the third generation, an originality emerged," explains Matsui. "Then, at the same time, the computer burst onto the scene. Now all the work looks the same, whether it's done by a Japanese designer, a designer in London, or America." He doesn't blame the computer, but the people who manipulate it. "The young people sit in front of the computer and wiggle the mouse. That's where they do their imagining. It's just the world of the monitor. They end up doing surface design."

The ADC is actually considering a category for monitor-based work, but there are conceptual barriers. Older designers seem nearly incapable of accepting new media design and younger designers haven't discovered an appropriate way to package their work for submission to ADC competitions. In a typically Japanese attempt to avoid confrontation, Takayuki Soeda suggests, "maybe it's best if the new people make a new association."

Soeda believes there's no fundamental difference between the design of characters in computer games and the work of traditional designers: "The basis is still graphic design. It makes all the difference whether it's a charming character that's moving, or just a thing moving. The original drawing and idea have to be good. It's exactly like our work."

The work may be based on the same principles as the design done in the early days, or even ten years ago, but the world has changed, and this dramatically affects the position of the designer. As Kazunari Hattori points out, in contrast to the first generation, which for the most part still operates as if design were a special language it must teach the man on the street, "the existence of design for us is a matter of course."

Not only has design been a given since all the really active designers today were in school, but computers and the computer's graphic capabilities are facts of life for the consumer as well. The exceptionally gullible Japanese consumer, who loves quality, gadgetry, and novelty, is also unhindered by critical judgment. He's anxious to try out any new hobby, including web page design—if that's what's happening. In a world in which every member of the twentysomething public can make a poster or create a website, design is more democratic, more accessible than it's ever been.

Professional design, then, is affected by the ubiquity of today's basic tool, the computer. When the older, more primitive tools were used by designers steeped in their culture, national flavor saturated the work. Today design is less nationally determined, less culturally explicable, less rarified. Matsui mourns the loss of character in design now that "the materials, the motifs, everything is becoming international." Hattori notes an improvement in the visual sensibility of the audience, but adds, "Just because the audience has matured doesn't mean that the creative side is getting better."

At the end of the twentieth century, toppled from the pedestal erected fifty years ago, Japanese design is mingling with the man on the street. Advertising campaigns that are produced under tight budget restrictions and stiff sales expectations take ADC awards, and are more familiar to the people than any creative poster fashioned in the studio of a star designer of the old school. The youngest designers here are split over whether they want to enter—and change—the organization established to promote the concept and function of design in society, or whether they will just leave it to wilt and die, and meet their critics elsewhere. ■

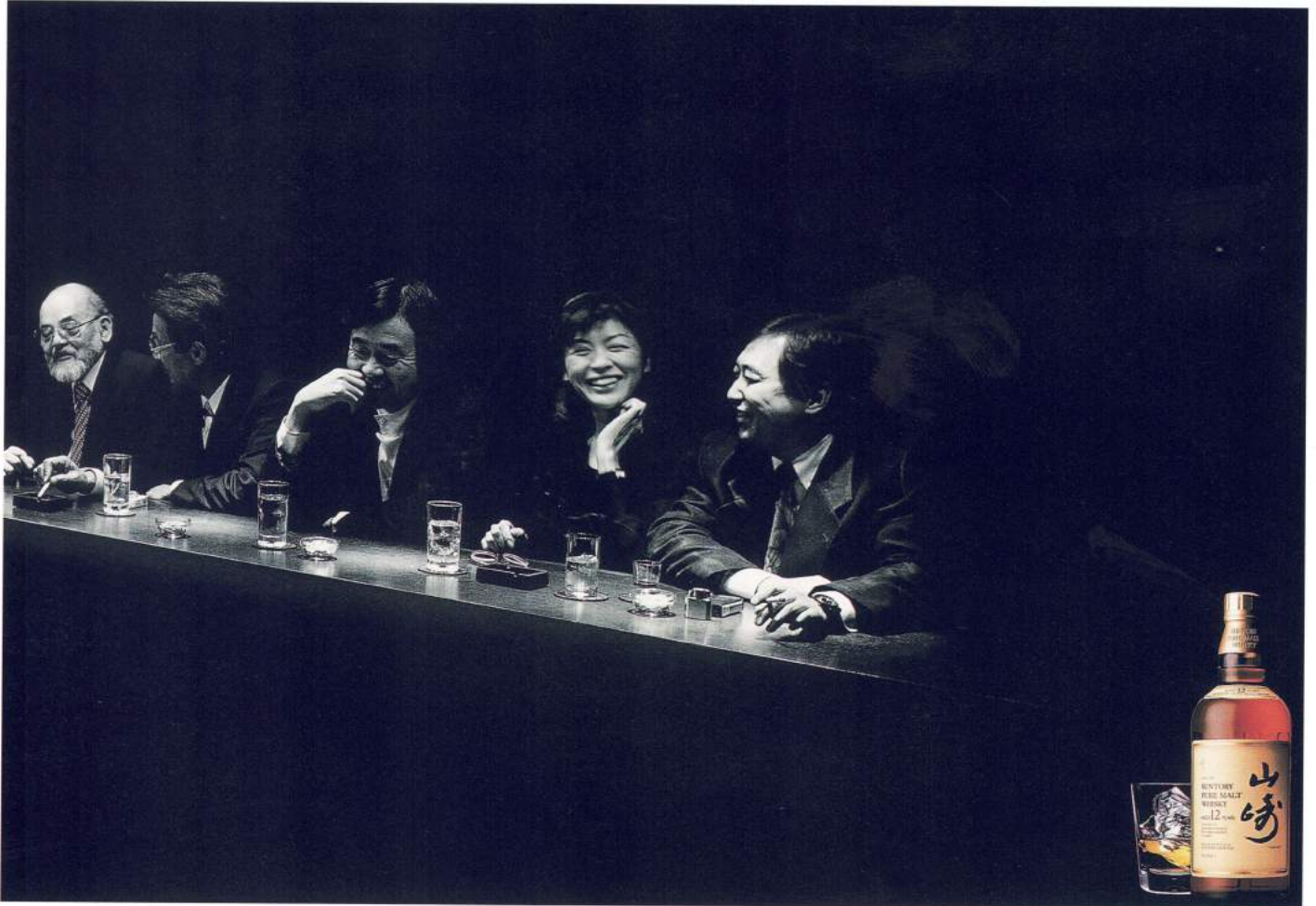
(This spread)
"Pure Malt Whisky 'Yamazaki'
Aged 12 Years," Sundry Ltd.
1998 ADC Award, Poster Design.
Art Director: Hiroki Segawa.
Photographer: Eiichiro Sakata.

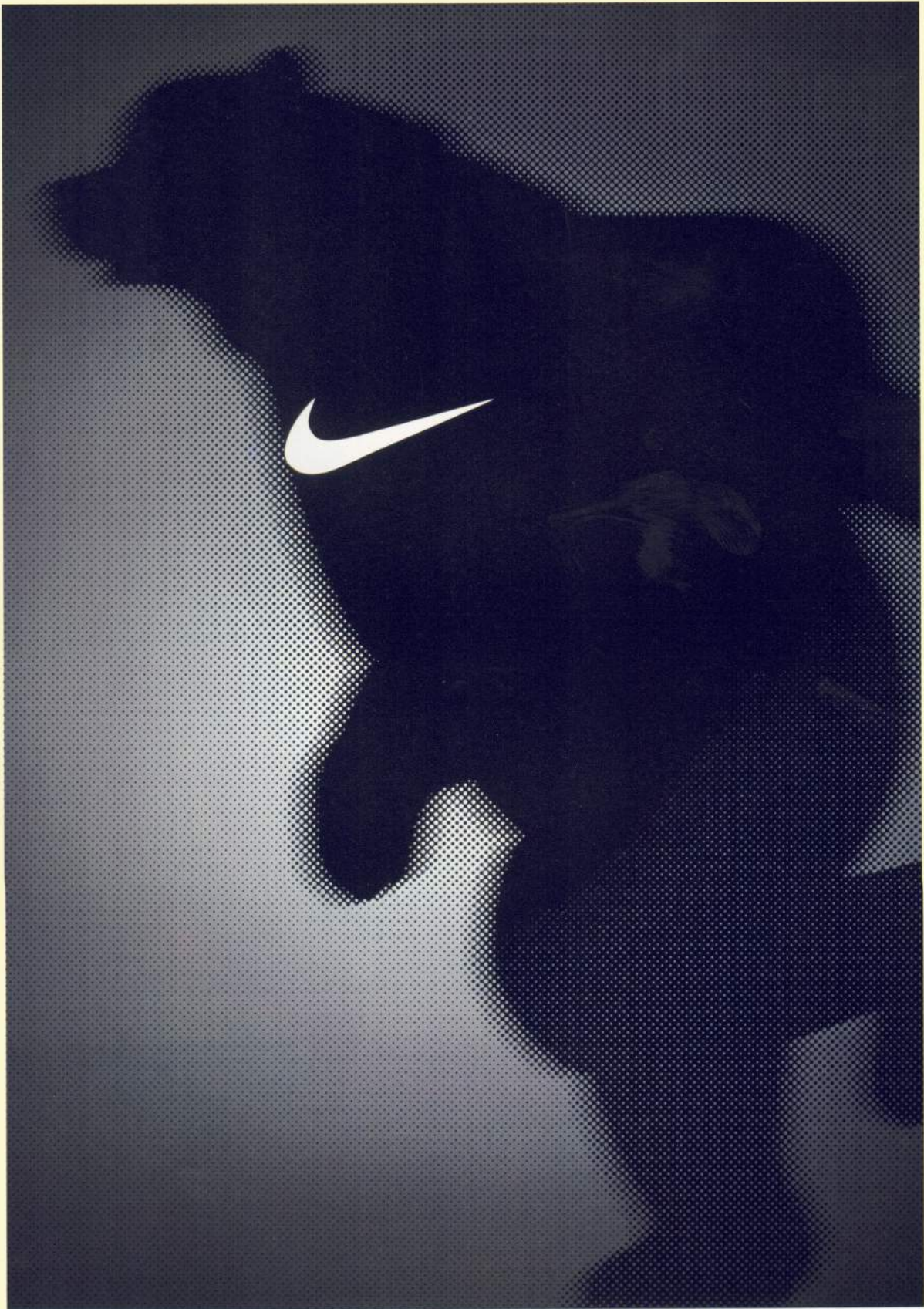


政治学。経済学。文学。恋愛論。今夜も大人の授業が始まる。

The older generation, still working in traditional media, are winning the awards. "Until recently, about half of the awards were graphic designers' works, unknown to the average person," says art director Takayuki Soeda. "They were beautiful, but they didn't have much to do with the real world."

According to ADC member Keizo Matsui, the computer has hurt originality. "Now all the work looks the same," he says, "whether it's done by a Japanese designer or a designer in London. Young people sit in front of the computer and wiggle the mouse. That's where they do their imagining."





HOKKAIDO MARATHON 8.31

(Opposite)
 "Hokkaido Marathon."
 Nike Japan Corp.
 1998 ADC Award,
 Poster Design.
 Art Directors: Yukio Okada,
 Mamoru Suzuki.

Eudermine combines new ingredients to soothe your skin's daily needs and maintain its moisture balance in all climatic extremes. Developed with a special response mechanism that gives your skin the ability to respond to changes in your environment, Eudermine is the perfect solution for every woman's skincare challenge. Whether faced with

air travel, variations in climate, or other fatiguing conditions, skin remains comfortably moist, beautifully supple. Eudermine is formulated to encourage your skin to perform at its best under any conditions, so it is the right treatment for any destination, any time of year. Eudermine. Nothing makes beauty simpler. SHISEIDO EUDERMINE

Two hundred years ago, women of Japan were given the secret to beauty in a skincare lotion called Eudermine. Taking its name from the Greek "eu" meaning "good" and "derma" meaning "skin", this extraordinary lotion was created for its power of hydration and became a revelation for those in the pursuit of healthy-looking complexions at the turn of the century. Today, as the world awaits

the approach of the twenty-first century, a new Eudermine again redefines skincare, combining the technological resources of Shiseido with unparalleled scientific ingredients to bring new possibilities to the complexion of women everywhere. Eudermine embodies all the aesthetic and scientific advances of years of Shiseido research and development in one simple formulation. SHISEIDO EUDERMINE

(This page)
 "Eudermine." Shiseido Co., Ltd.
 1998 ADC Award,
 Poster Design.
 Art Director: Toshio Yamagata.

(Opposite, top)

"Step WGN." Honda Motor Co., Ltd.
1998 ADC Award, Magazine
Advertisement Design.
Art Director: Kashiwa Sato.

(Opposite, middle)

"Step WGN." Honda Motor Co., Ltd.
1998 ADC Award,
Magazine Advertisement.
Art Director: Hiroki Segawa.

(Opposite, bottom)

"Step WGN." Honda Motor Co., Ltd.
1998 ADC Award,
Magazine Advertisement.
Art Director: Hiroki Segawa.

(This page)

"Mineral Vegetables." Mos Food
Services, Inc.
1998 ADC Award, Poster Design.
Art Director: Mitsubiro Tomita.
Photographer: Yukihiro Uda.



雨と風と太陽を登りこめるために、大地から空を飛ぶ。



HONDA Step Wagon

子どもいっしょにどこいこう。
ステップワゴン! たのしいぞ。
where shall we go with the kids?

HONDA

ホンダカード 会員専用
0120-112010 03-3760-1900

NEW Step Wagon

あたらしいのがやってきた。
子どもいっしょにどこいこう。
where shall we go with the kids?

HONDA

シートアレンジとリアアップ! インテリア充実だぞ。*いろいろできるよ、やってみて。 シートアレンジ充実だぞ。*さらに便利に、快適に、ほんど、楽しませようらしいぞ。*

ホンダカード 会員専用
0120-112010 03-3760-1900

Step Wagon *Whitee!

子どもいっしょにどこいこう。
ステップワゴン! たのしいぞ。
where shall we go with the kids?

HONDA

ホンダカード 会員専用
0120-112010 03-3760-1900

(Opposite)
"Salvatore Ferragamo Exhibition."
Salvatore Ferragamo Italia S.p.A.
1998 ADC Grand Prize, Poster Design.
Art Director: Ikko Tanaka.



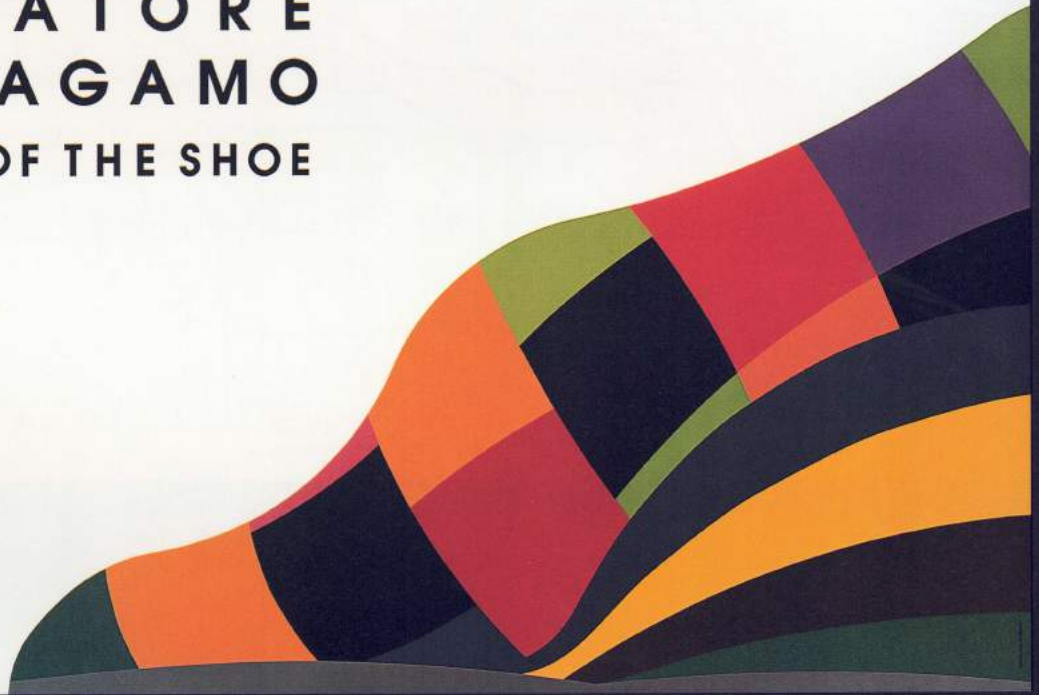
(This page)
"Ozawa Kenji dogs."
Toshiba-EMI Ltd.
1998 ADC Award, Package Design.
Art Director: Keiko Hirano.

サルヴァトーレ・フェラガモ展「華麗なる靴」

生誕100周年記念 1998年4月14日(土)～5月14日(木) A.M.10:00～P.M.5:00 会期中無休 草月会館

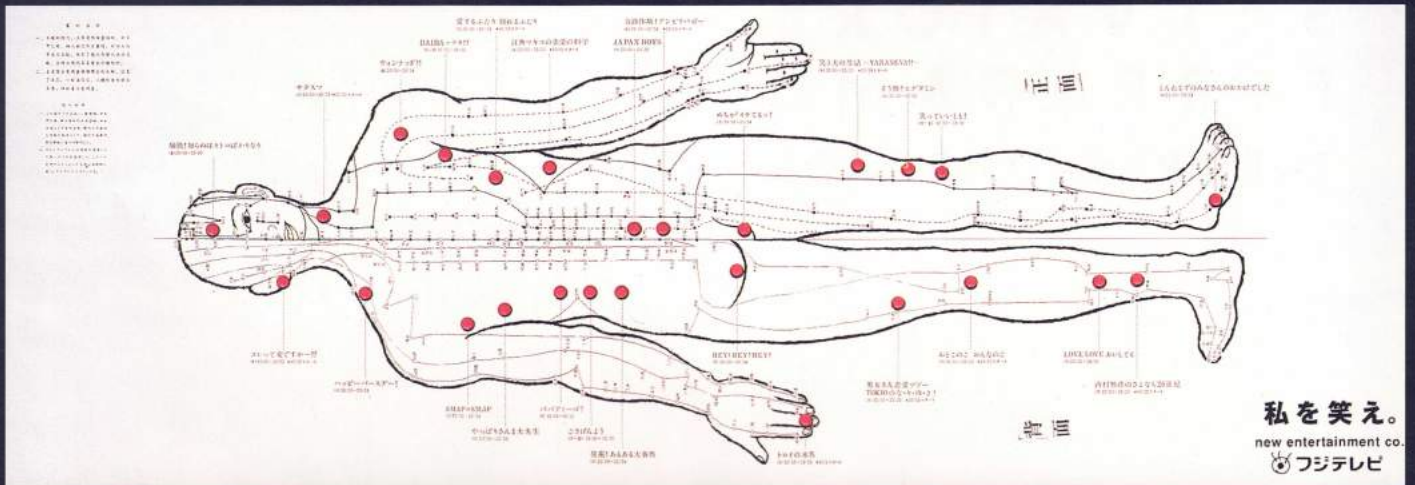
主催・サルヴァトーレ・フェラガモ展「華麗なる靴」実行委員会
TEL: 03-327-8888 FAX: 03-327-8889
〒100-0001 東京都千代田区千代田1-1-1 草月会館
03-327-8888

A Centennial Exhibition
**SALVATORE
FERRAGAMO**
THE ART OF THE SHOE





BIG RELAX
BIG HAWAII



私を笑え。
new entertainment co.
フジテレビ

発表します。

21世紀の辞苑

広辞苑

環境税
夫婦別姓
行政改革
携帯電話
分譲
サブリミナル
効果
救急士
抗菌
MRS

損失補填
インフラ
環境
ホルモン
活性化素

ストール
七人の侍
冬駒
話半分
コホスト
里山
クリントン

ア
イシヤマト
環境
ホルモン
活性化素
抗菌
MRS

世界遺産
遠征制作
セブチー
社仲茶
分譲
サブリミナル
効果
救急士
抗菌
MRS

冬駒
話半分
コホスト
里山
クリントン
サブリミナル
効果
救急士
抗菌
MRS

行政改革
携帯電話
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携帯電話
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抗菌
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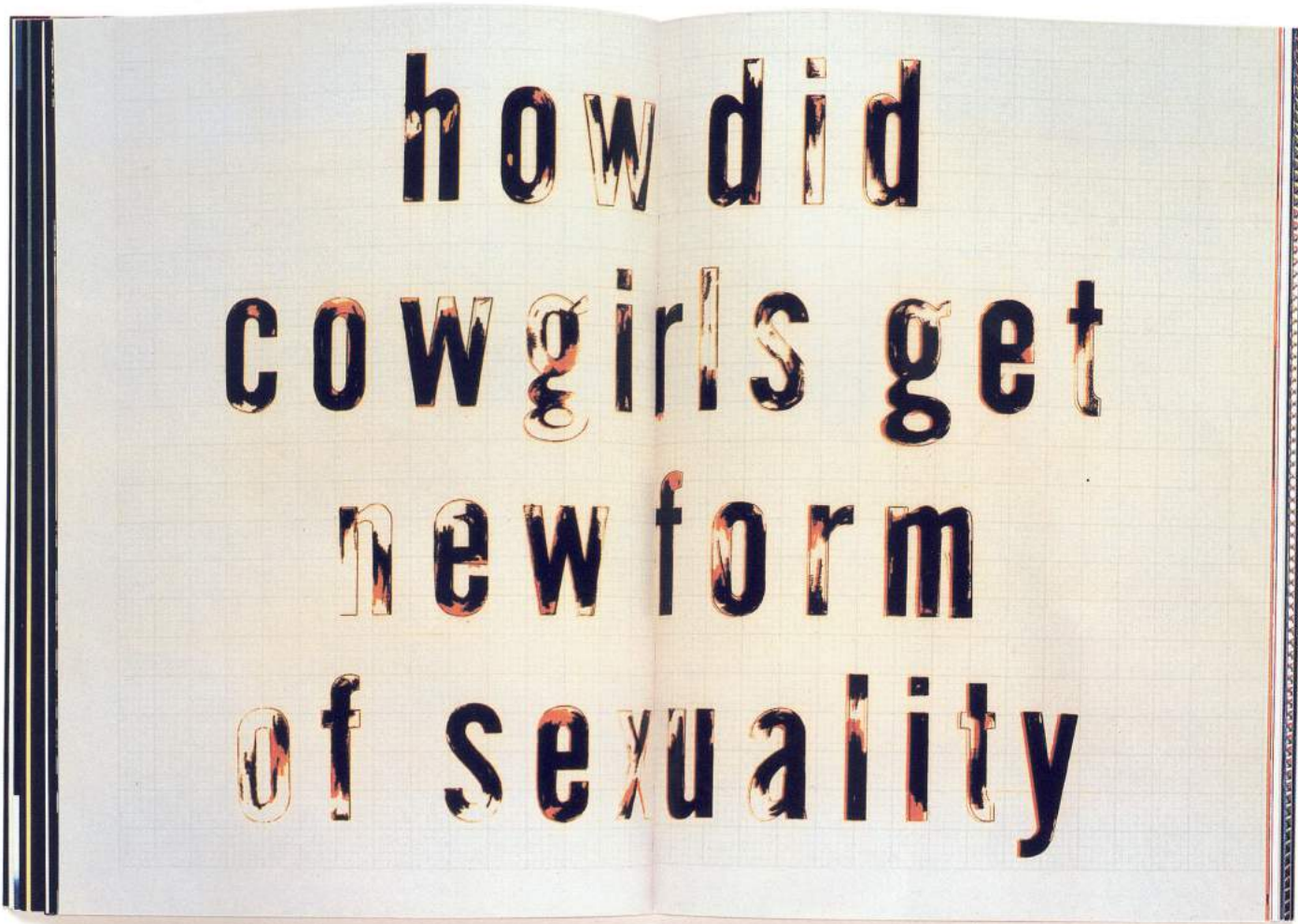
救急士
抗菌
MRS

抗菌
MRS

MRS

(Opposite, top)
"Big Relax Big Hawai'i."
Hawaii Visitors & Convention Bureau.
1999 ADC Award, Poster Design.
Art Director: Masahiko Gonda.
Photographer: Binshun.

(Opposite, middle)
"Laugh at Me."
Fuji Television Network, Inc.
1999 ADC Award, Poster Design.
Art Director: Seijo Kawaguchi.



how did
cowgirls get
new form
of sexuality

(Opposite, bottom)
"Kojien 5th Edition."
Iwanami Shoten, Publishers.
1999 ADC Award,
Poster Design.
Art Director: Masayoshi Kubo.

(This page)
"Revival." Rockin' on Inc.
1999 ADC Award, Book and
Editorial Design.
Art Director: Hideki Nakajima.