

# ULTERIOR

## Minoru Yoshida

*Epicurism of Space Universe*, 1974–75

January 13–22, 2017



Minoru Yoshida at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York, 1974. Courtesy of Midori Yoshida, photographer unidentified.

Ulterior Gallery is pleased to present a screening of video documentation of the Japanese artist Minoru Yoshida's New York-based performances of 1974 and 1975, which include Yoshida's performances at Artists Space in SoHo, at the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York, and his *Epicurism of Space Universe* conducted on a street corner in SoHo. The videos in this screening were recently discovered in the late artist's studio and have never been shown publicly. The exhibition opens on January 13, and the gallery will be open from noon to 7 pm every day through January 22. There will be a performance by Gendai Kazoku, Yoshida's family art troupe, featuring Yoshida's signature work *Synthesizer Jacket* (1974/2000), from 4 to 5 pm on January 16 (please RSVP to [info@ulteriorgallery.com](mailto:info@ulteriorgallery.com) or 917-472-7784).

Minoru Yoshida (1935–2010) was born in Osaka and studied painting at Kyoto City University of Fine Arts, Kyoto, Japan. He emerged as an artist in Kyoto in the early 1960s and joined the legendary post-war Japanese artists collective Gutai Art Association in 1964. During those years Yoshida incorporated forms resembling flower petals and primitive organisms into his paintings. These abstract works featuring minimal hard-edged shapes and forms were reviewed with great acclaim in Japan.

Around 1967, Yoshida's abstract forms started to develop into the third dimension. He introduced Plexiglas as a material and began to explore the kinetic possibility of sculpture through complex movements created by electronic motors. He experimented with lighting by using black light and included electronic sounds made by transistors. A notable example of his work during this era, *Bisexual Flower* (1969), was exhibited in 2013 at *Gutai: Splendid Playground* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York.

In Japan Yoshida quickly became an icon of the time with works that captured images and ideas inspired by 1960s science fiction and the psychedelic movement. His ambition motivated him to look to the United States as his next destination.

In February 1970, Yoshida moved first to Los Angeles, then later crossed the country and arrived in New York. Cross-pollinating developments in conceptual, performance, and video-based art in the New York art community of the 1970s inspired him to develop one of his most important themes of

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the time, a speculative guide to practice he called *Epicurism of Space Universe*. Yoshida began producing a series of performances in which he aimed to substantiate his philosophy of extraterritoriality—a way to adopt the viewpoint of a visitor from another planet and scrutinize humans on Earth. *Epicurism of Space Universe* was the focus of Yoshida’s artistic activity from 1974 until his return to Japan in 1978. During these years in New York, Yoshida experimented with merging his own body with electronic sounds and sculptural elements to create a performance. The videos in the screening capture the moment when Yoshida, influenced by currents in the New York art world, radically transformed his practice.

In his performances, Yoshida attempted to transform himself into an alien by donning his *Synthesizer Jacket* and emitting electronic sounds somewhat resembling an alien form of Morse code. The videos show a number of these performances. In one video, Yoshida suspends himself in mid-space as part of an aerial performance at Artists Space in 1974. In a performance for the 11<sup>th</sup> Avant Garde Festival of New York, Yoshida attempts to launch himself into space as if he were in zero gravity. Another video depicts a second launch attempt on a street corner in SoHo in 1975. In the video of a performance at the 12<sup>th</sup> Avant Garde Festival of New York entitled *An Invitation Card to Space Universe*, we see Yoshida expanding on his themes to include more of a dialogue with his audience. This idea of dialogue is further explored in a 1975 performance on Long Island during which Yoshida, clad in his *Synthesizer Jacket* and a transparent spherical helmet equipped with a microphone and speaker, wandered the seashore and asked strangers, “What do you think about space universe?”

These performances in which Yoshida disguised himself as an alien allude to the third-person viewpoint that he experienced as a foreign national living in New York, struggling with difficulties in communication and a sense of estrangement. As a result, he invented the use of an alternative audio-visual language as a tool for performance, relying on intuitions rather than linguistic capacity. His performances aimed to act upon and be acted upon by the audience without the interference caused by existing languages, culture, and race.

Yoshida’s use of performance and technology resonates with the practices of the core members of the Annual Avant Garde Festival of New York such as Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik, as well as with the artists associated with Fluxus. Although Yoshida’s artistic life in New York ended in 1978, these performance videos are evidence of how much international artists were a part of the flourishing art community of New York, outsiders among outsiders.

After returning to Kyoto, Yoshida continued to develop the performance theory that he had established in New York. Working across mediums and forms, he produced many events involving art, music, poetry, and Butoh. In the 2000s, with his family members Midori Araki, Shonen Yoshida, and Asao Yoshida, Yoshida formed Gendai Kazoku (Contemporary Family) and performed nationally as a unit. Yoshida died at the age of 75 in 2010. This will be the first screening of *Epicurism of Space Universe* in the United States.

For further inquiries, please contact: [info@ulteriorgallery.com](mailto:info@ulteriorgallery.com) or 917-472-7784.