

The Art of Money

Wakaki Kurumi's deconstruction of the Yen

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Conclusions: Value Beyond Monetary Means

All forms of currency act as symbols for power. Generations apart, both Akasegawa and Kurumi questioned the ascribed value of money through their art. While Akasegawa's "Model 1000 yen incident" confronts themes of authority and control, Kurumi's "Yen" explores the impact of currency on identity.

Their commentaries on capitalism are richly informed by their chosen medium of performance. Unable to be bought and sold in the same way as other material works, Kurumi and Akasegawa utilized their medium to intercept the capitalist values of the art market through the subject of currency.



Fig. 6 Kurumi, Wakaki, "Yen," 2013, performance, Sakamoto Zenzo Museum of Art.

Despite this, these artworks cannot be completely separated from the art market as they remain active influences within it. Nonetheless, performance works like Kurumi's "Yen" signify the fundamental importance of art as something not to own but to witness. In a global climate of entrenched capitalism and consumer society, this is an acutely political view.

Legal Boundaries of Artistic Expression

Akasegawa's copies of 1000 yen bills were printed only on one side. Despite this, he was convicted for money imitation. The Imperial State court recognized Akasegawa's work as both artistic expression and criminal activity only when his prints were cut to size.

Kurumi's yen are printed at large-scale with clear adaptations from its original image. "Yen" features the 1000 yen note issued from 2004-2024 with the face of Hideyo Noguchi. However, the value has been adapted and the artist's name and presence has been included.



Fig. 2 Kurumi, Wakaki, "Yen," 2013, performance, Kumamoto, Sakamoto Zenzo Museum of Art.

"Yen" was performed at the Sakamoto Zenzo Museum of Art where a museum shop was also on location. Visitors were encouraged to collect a pencil rubbing of a 10 yen coin from Kurumi's head to be used as a voucher at the shop. With the intention of using the rubbing as currency, Kurumi challenged the concept of currency replication without committing fraudulent activity.

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Fig. 4 "Genpai Akasegawa" Mitsutoshi Hanaga, 1966.

Re-facing and De-facing the Yen

Akasegawa's created "Great Japan Zero Yen Banknote," in protest of his conviction. The zero yen note illustrates a faceless Japanese Statesman on one side and profiles of Western thinkers on the reverse, poignantly criticizing Japan's westernization.

Kurumi's "Yen" also stresses the two-faced nature of state currency representing currency as an arbitrary product of society. The image of the 10 yen coin is replicated on the artist's face on the reverse of the print mirroring the coin activated by the frottage participants.

Despite the imagery of the Japanese yen, Kurumi's work addresses the system of currency in general and its role in society. Here Kurumi portrays humanity morphed into commodity through its artificial values.

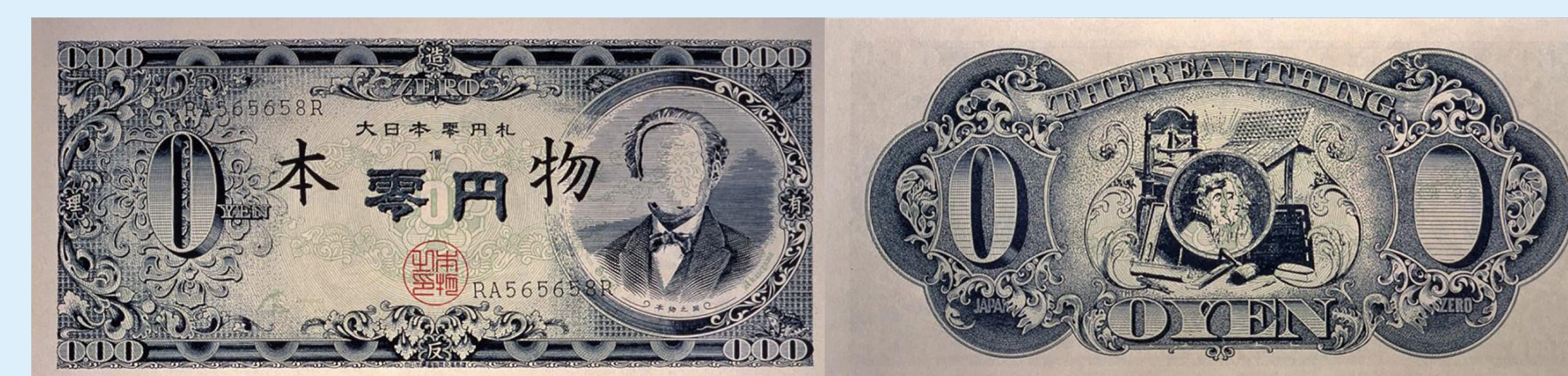


Fig. 5 Akasegawa, Genpei, "Great Japan Zero Yen Banknote," 1967, 14x30 cm, London, The British Museum.

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After thinking about what I can do to be liked by everyone, I came up with the answer: make money.

Kurumi



Fig. 1 Kurumi, Wakaki, "Yen," 2008, performance, Minato, Taro Okamoto Memorial Museum.

Introduction: Face to Face

Wakaki Kurumi's works with the Japanese yen deconstruct its symbolism and insert herself onto its image as an intervention of its materiality.

Genpei Akasegawa also featured the Japanese bill notoriously in his work. From 1963 - 1974, Akasegawa's work utilizing the imagery of the 1000 yen bill resulted in his legal prosecution by the state. The event is referred to as the "Model 1000 yen note incident."

The works of these two performance artists offers a valuable intersection showcasing the intrinsic politic nature of the imagery of currency and its use in art. Through a comparative lens with Akasegawa's banknotes roughly 50 years prior, this research seeks to investigate the impact of Kurumi's "Yen" despite her non-political agenda.