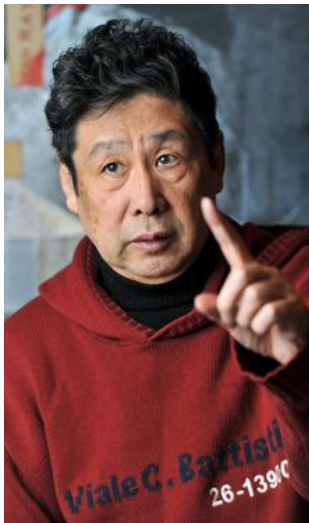


## Artist Yokoo, four others win 2011 Asahi Award



*January 1, 2012*

Artist Tadanori Yokoo, internationally acclaimed for his pop art posters drawn with vivid colors, is among five recipients of the Asahi Award for 2011.

The other recipients are composer Isao Tomita; sociologist Chizuko Ueno; Hidetoshi Katori, researcher of engineering physics; and immunologist Shimon Sakaguchi.

The annual award, presented by the Asahi Shimbun Foundation, honors recipients for distinguished achievements in academia, arts and other fields that have contributed to advancements in Japanese culture and society.

Yokoo, 75, was selected for "producing avant-garde graphic designs and paintings that have always resonated with the times." The posters he has produced since the 1960s typically feature humans and objects in bright colors, some against the background of rays reminiscent of the Rising Sun Flag.

"I don't like things pre-modern, and I dislike the Rising Sun Flag," Yokoo said. "I was influenced by the American culture of the 1960s, but I have let out the (Japanese) indigenously ingrained in myself."

Yokoo declared that he would become a painter in 1981 after seeing a Picasso exhibition. "Painting has become fun after I turned 70," Yokoo said. "I am painting, using my five senses plus body sense."

Tomita, 79, was chosen for his "activities as composer and acoustic creator on the world stage." Tomita has composed music for the synthesizer and performed tunes on the electronic instrument since the 1970s. He is best known for his achievements in this field around the world.

"For me, electronic sounds are extensions of natural sounds, and they are perfectly natural," he

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said. A young Michael Jackson once visited his home to listen to his sounds, without an appointment.

This year, Tomita will release an "Ihatov Symphony," based on the themes of poet and author Kenji Miyazawa (1896-1933). "Whenever I write music, I think this will be my last. We had better not think about the next work or the future," Tomita said. "I want to be always engrossed with the present, feeling being a child at heart."

Ueno, 63, was selected for her "research and practice of women's studies, feminism and the issue of care-giving." Ueno has developed a genre of women's studies and feminism in Japan since the 1980s, raising questions in a provocative manner and with a clear-cut logic. "Theory and practice are inseparable from each other," she said. "Women's studies are a theoretical weapon of the feminism movement."

She has recently broadened the scope of her research to issues of the elderly. Her book "Ohitorisama no Rogo" (The old age of those who live alone), has become a best-seller. A book published last year, "Kea no Shakaigaku" (The sociology of care), is a compilation of her research and practice of the issue over the past 10 years. "I have written on my experiences. When my experiences change, my themes will also change," Ueno said. "Next, I may shift to 'Ohitorisama no Saigo' (The end of those who live alone)."

Katori, 47, a professor at the University of Tokyo, was chosen for his "research on optical lattice clocks." He has developed a high precision atomic clock that does not vary a second even if it is in operation for 10 billion years.

In an optical lattice clock, atoms are cooled to extremely low temperatures and held in a container called an optical lattice. Electrons, which move around inside atoms, function as a "pendulum," and laser beams are used to read their oscillations.

Katori developed a laser cooling method in 1999 that can lower the temperatures of atoms to absolute zero.

Scientists said the method does not work well with optical lattices. But Katori solved the problem by discovering "magic wavelengths," which cancel out the influence of light. "I wanted to become an Edison," Katori said. He is close to developing an optical lattice clock that can count a second with an accuracy of 18 decimal places. "I have had a longing for precision measurements since childhood," he said.

Sakaguchi, 60, a professor at Osaka University's Immunology Frontier Research Center, was selected for "clarifying immune tolerance through the discovery of regulatory T cells."

In the immune system, distinctions between self and non-self are ambiguous. Sakaguchi's discovery of regulatory T cells, which discriminate self from non-self, is sometimes called "the last major discovery in immunology." The process of immune tolerance, in which the immune system does not respond to self-antigens, is not complete. It sometimes causes autoimmune diseases, including a type of rheumatism.

Sakaguchi said the discovery of regulatory T cells, announced in 1995, initially went largely unnoticed. But it gained much attention in the 2000s after he announced detailed studies. "I want to pursue studies on the immune system and develop new ways to treat diseases," Sakaguchi said.

The five winners of the Asahi Award will each receive a statuette and a cash prize of 5 million (\$64,800) yen at a ceremony in Tokyo on Jan. 27.

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