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Tadanori Yokoo

Waterfall Installation



★★★★★★

Friedman Benda, through Oct 18
(see Chelsea)

One of the most celebrated Japanese pop artists, Tadanori Yokoo has had 50 major one-person shows worldwide since 1972. But that same year, when he showed at the Museum of Modern Art, also marked his last solo outing in New York.

Best known for colorful posters of characters engulfed in rising suns and crashing waves, Yokoo was one of the go-to graphic designers for the '70s rock music scene, creating album covers for the Beatles, Santana, and Emerson, Lake and Palmer. However, like the Surrealist artist Man Ray, who was most praised for his photography while he yearned to be appreciated as a painter, Yokoo has long fought to keep his foot in the fine-art door.

The artist's return to New York has all of his cultural flags waving, but little of his graphic punch. Coming closest to his printed past is an obsessive installation of 8,000 found postcards of waterfalls, displayed in a mirrored space that extends its visual reach. His paintings, though, are the main attraction and some are quite compelling—particularly the "Y Intersection" series, which features buildings at forks in the road as the focal point of dramatic nighttime scenes. The best of these, *A Dark Night's Flashing: N City-V* (2000), possesses a noir ambiance.

He fails, however, in another series, "Bath House," which suffers from the comical handling of its nude female subjects. Yokoo is an artist of many talents, but too often he confounds viewers by working in a multiplicity of styles.—*Paul Laster*