



TAM OCHIAI, *ETERNAL SOUP AND SUDDEN CLARITY (DETAIL)*, 1996-2006. ACRYLIC, COLOR PENCIL, AND PENCIL ON PAPER, DIMENSIONS VARIABLE. COURTESY TOMIO KOYAMA GALLERY, TOKYO.

Asia

TOKYO

THE DOOR INTO SUMMER: THE AGE OF MICROPOP

CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER, ART TOWER MITO

One of Japan's leading art critics, Midori Matsui, introduces her concept of "micropop" in this group exhibition featuring the work of 15 artists, thus framing a new generation of Japanese artists emerging from the shadows of Sugimoto and Murakami. In the catalogue, Matsui describes the micropop tendency as being a highly sensitive and subjective aesthetic driven by private thoughts and desires, and mentions its reactionary stance against institutionally acceptable mainstream art that follows Western postmodern models. In a nutshell, this means that in Japan the sleek, hyperdesigned artworks of the previous generation are being replaced with more personal, casually expressive works. Yoshitomo Nara and Hiroshi Sugito have a minor role to play in the exhibition, showing only a few of their large-scale paintings; the majority of the artists have created room-size installations composed of drawings, objects, photos, video clips, and sundry other materials—perhaps produced in response to an overflow of information encountered in daily life. Tam Ochiai, for instance, presents hundreds of the childlike drawings he has been making since 1996. Unframed and descriptively titled, they are informally mounted underneath a taut pink string stretched over the gallery's walls. Taro Izumi's startling work stands out in the otherwise calm exhibition. One of his videos, titled *Curos Cave*, shows the artist's hand trying to contour an announcer's face as it appears on a TV monitor. This repetitive twisting action resembles a solitary child's attempts to entertain himself. At the same time, his gesticulations hint at something more sinister, sexual, and disturbing. The effect is doubled by the work's chaotic installation amid monitors and projections within a cluttered room. Whereas many of the personal, subjective works in "Micropop" could be accused of navel gazing, Izumi's work presents bitter social criticism—a welcome change.

—MAYUMI HIRANO