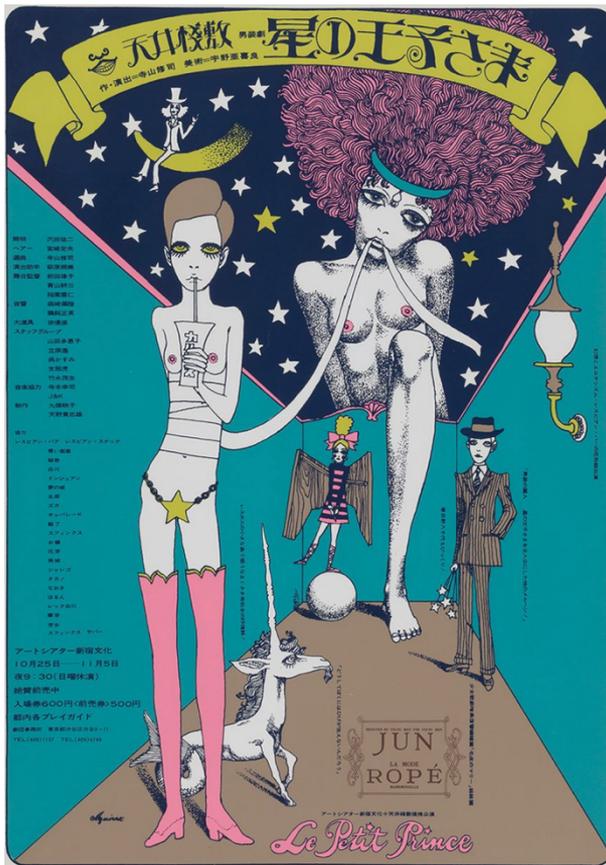


# Press Release | Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery

19, February, 2024

## AQUIRAX UNO



Poster for *Le Petit Prince*, Experimental Theater Lab Tenjo Sajiki Performance, 1968 ©AQUIRAX  
Original picture for *The Golden Axe*, 2017, text by Mimi Hachikai, Iwasaki Shoten ©AQUIRAX  
Poster for "Mitsui Trust Bank," 1971 ©AQUIRAX

Uno Akira (1934–) remains one of Japan's leading illustrators and graphic designers. A legendary figure credited with causing the terms "illustration" and "illustrator" to gain currency in Japan in the 1960s, he is constantly evolving. Since his debut in the early 1950s, the scope of his work has expanded without constraint, and his creations now span a range that includes illustration, posters, picturebooks and other books, animated films, paintings, and stage design.

This is the largest ever exhibition of Uno's work, covering everything from his early days to his latest works. It features a wide variety of precious original drawings and other materials, including corporate advertising from the 1950s; underground theatre posters, picturebooks and children's books from the 1960s; and drawing of haiku and girls that he has produced in recent years.

The exhibition takes visitors into the flamboyant aesthetic world that has sprung from Uno's "spellbinding southpaw", transcending time.

### AQUIRAX UNO

Period: Thursday, 11 April – Sunday, 16 June, 2024 \*58 days  
\* Press preview Wednesday, 10 April, 2024

Venue: Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery

Open hour: 11:00 - 19:00 (Last admission at 18:30)

Close on Mondays (Tuesday if the Monday is a public holiday)

Admission: adults 1400 [1200] yen, university and high school students 800 [600] yen, free for junior high and under

Organisers: Tokyo Opera City Cultural Foundation, The Asahi Shimbun

Sponsor: Japan Real Estate Investment Corporation

Special Cooperation: Kariya City Art Museum

\*Rates include admission to "From the Terada Collection 079 Nambata Fumio Fifty Years On" and "project N 94 Oshiro Natsuki".

\*Rates in brackets indicate discount. Free for person with a disability certificate along with an attendant.

\*Only one concession or discount can be applied at a time.

\*Nonrefundable.

#### ■Inquiries

Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery [Curator] Takigami Hana [Press] Ichikawa Yasuko, Yoshida Akiko  
Tel:03-5353-0756 / Fax:03-5353-0776 / Email:ag-press@toccf.com

## Exhibition highlights

### With more than 900 works on display, this exhibition presents Uno's oeuvre on the grandest-ever scale

This will be the first major retrospective exhibition of Uno's work since his 2010 exhibition at the Kariya City Art Museum fourteen years ago, and it is the first ever in Tokyo. This exhibition will display even more pieces than the solo exhibition at the Kariya City Art Museum, presenting a comprehensive overview of Uno's vast body of work through a collection of more than nine hundred works.

### Flamboyant, exquisite works

The exhibition will display many examples of Uno's original artwork. Visitors will be able to see for themselves flamboyant, exquisite drawings that provide a sense of the artist's ability to capture his subjects, and the attention to detail demonstrated by his detailed instructions written on the proofs.

### Extravagant use of space for posters

Posters created by Uno from the early 1960s to the present will be displayed together. The space includes an area where visitors can look at fluorescent posters under blacklights to experience the atmosphere of the 1960s.

### Stage art from Project Nyx's *The Little Prince* and other productions

The exhibition will bring together a collection of Uno's art works for the stage, which have rarely been put on display. These include the artist's drawings of original set and costume, as well as scenery, props, dolls, and costumes that Uno had a hand in creating.



Poster for *Shinjuku ban sen'ichiya monogatari* [Shinjuku Version of One Thousand and One Nights], Experimental Theater Lab Tenjo Sajiki 5th Performance, 1968 ©AQUIRAX  
Poster for "Keiko's," 1967 ©AQUIRAX

## Exhibition layout

The exhibition divides Uno's wide range of work into twelve topics for presentation by genre.

### 1. PROLOGUE The Nagoya years

This section presents some of his early creative work, including sketches and croquis from his student days. Uno's talent blossomed early, and his works were selected for a number of design competitions sponsored by the Mainichi Shimbun. At the age of nineteen his work was accepted for the Japan Advertising Artists Club (NISSEMBI) Exhibition, and this became his gateway to success as a graphic designer.



### 2. Graphic designer Uno Akira

After moving to Tokyo, Uno's career as a graphic designer got off to a brilliant start. This section showcases precious original drawings including frog illustrations for Kowa Shinyaku Company, for which he shared a first prize with Wada Makoto, and a newspaper ad drawn for Calpis Food Industry Co.,

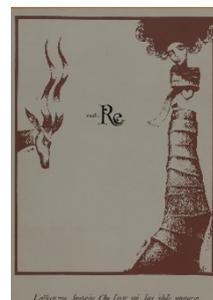
Original picture for ad for "Calpis" (Calpis Co., Ltd), c. 1956, Kariya City Art Museum ©AQUIRAX

### 3. Corporate Advertising

Uno was involved in the creation of many ads. At Nippon Design Center, he handled corporate advertising for companies like Toshiba Corporation and Toyota Motor Corporation. His poster for "Cashmilon", a synthetic fibre made by Asahi Kasei Corporation, won the Members' Award at the 10th NISSEMBI Exhibition. He was also involved in the creation of a series of ads for cosmetics company Max Factor.

Poster for "Studio Re," 1965 ©AQUIRAX

Poster for "Renaissance Collection" (Max Factor), c. 1965 Kariya City Art Museum ©AQUIRAX



### 4. Animated films

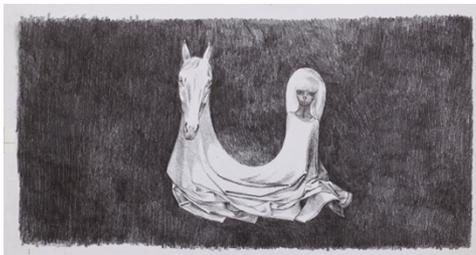
In the 1960s, Uno released three animated short films, *La fête Blanche*, *Toi et Moi*, *Don*. All three films will be screened at the exhibition.

### 5. Posters

Uno has created a vast number of posters. This section displays a collection of posters that amply demonstrates Uno's extensive knowledge of printing and his descriptive prowess, conveying his unique style of fantasy, elegance, and eroticism.



Poster for "Words of Michelangelo," 1968 ©AQUIRAX



## 6. Picture books, Children's literature

At this point, Uno has been involved in the creation of more than seventy picturebooks, and has illustrated many children's books. From adorable animals to precocious girls, he has adroitly changed his style of drawing to suit the tale or the text, creating a wide variety of book art. His books include *Dobutsu e to ohanashi* [Animal Pictures and Stories] (circa 1957); *Aoitori* [Bluebird] (circa 1957); *Umi no komusume* [Girls of the Sea] (1962), with Tadanori Yokoo; and *Anoko* [That Girl] (1966), with Imae Yoshitomo.

Original picture for *Anoko* [That Girl], 1966, text by Yoshitomo Imae, Rironsha ©AQUIRAX

## 7. Collection of Lithographs, Silk-screen Prints and Other Works

Fed up with working for clients who demanded that he work in styles of the past, in the 1970s and into the 1980s Uno cut down on such creative projects and published a collection of prints and other works, allowing him to reexamine his own style of expression. His works from this time are characterised by realistic physical expression, such as nude female figures drawn in outline and only lightly tinted, generating a unique sense of eroticism.

## 8. Newspaper and Magazines

Uno has long been involved in newspaper and magazine work, and here he has been able to express himself in many genres, from the erotic to fairy tales. By paying close attention to factors like the content of an article, the author's preferences, and printing specifications, and taking advantage of the flexibility to use different styles and drawing materials, Uno has created a wide breadth of illustrations.



Original picture for cover of *Haha no tomo* (September 1964 issue), 1964, Fukuinkan Shoten Publishers, Kariya City Art Museum ©AQUIRAX

Original picture for "Katsuro" (Means of Escape), *Weekly Gendai* (July 30, 1994 issue), 1994, text by Kenzo Kitakata, Kodansha, Kariya City Art Museum ©AQUIRAX



## 9 Books

Uno has also been involved in designing many book covers from the 1960s to the present. Having begun his career as a graphic designer, book projects, like book illustration, represent an area of expression where he can indulge in the excitement of book and book cover design. For a booklover like Uno, it is an area where his creative motivation never tires.



Original picture for frontispiece of "Kotowaza ha osuki?" [Do You Like Proverbs?], *Koisuru Majo* [Female Demon in Love] (*For Ladies Series*), 1966, text by Erika Tachihara, Shinshokan ©AQUIRAX

Original picture for "Ballad=mominoki to hanashita" [Ballad=I Spoke to the Fir Tree], *Hadashi no koi uta* [The Barefoot Love Song] (*For Ladies Series*), 1967, text by Shuji Terayama, Shinshokan, Kariya City Art Museum ©AQUIRAX

Original picture for "Kofuku ni tsuiteno nanatsu no shi" [Seven Poems About Happiness], *Hitori-botchi no anata ni* [For Lonely You] (*For Ladies Series*), 1965, text by Shuji Terayama, Shinshokan, Kariya City Art Museum ©AQUIRAX

## 10. Painting and Three-dimensional Art

On mounting a solo exhibition in 1987, Uno discovered the fascination of creating an exhibition space. Since then, he has continued to select themes and put together solo exhibitions. Unlike his work for clients, these exhibitions are not restricted to specific motifs or styles of expression, and Uno says that the freedom of being able to make all the decisions himself is a real joy. Since the 2000s, he has also been creating human figures out of stone clay.



Gyoza Princess, 2013 ©AQUIRAX



## 11. Stage Art

Uno has worked on stage sets, costumes, and makeup, directing and scriptwriting, and even entire stage productions. Especially since the 1990s, he has been intensively involved in theatre productions. The art that Uno creates for the stage has the allure of making it appear as if the world that he has envisioned in two dimensions is transmogrified into three-dimensional space.

Original picture for costume for *Le Petit Prince*, Project Nyx 4th Performance, 2009 ©AQUIRAX

Original picture for stage backdrop in *Le Petit Prince*, Project Nyx 4th Performance, 2009 ©AQUIRAX

## 12. Recent and New Works

Uno has an affinity for *haiku*, writing under the *haigo* (haiku pen name) Satei. In recent years he has been creating new works based on *haiku* written by Matsuo Basho, Terayama Shuji and others. The world that Uno depicts enjoys support across a broad range of generations and genres. He actively collaborates with other creators and companies, creating posters and merchandise for SHAKALABBITS, BUCK-TICK, Sheena Ringo, and working with Shiseido on the caricature generator Majori-ga (2016) for its *Majolica Majorca* product line. The power of his creativity never ceases.



*The Unexpected Child of the Seahorse*, 2020 ©AQUIRAX



photo: Daido Teppei

### **Aquirax Uno/Uno Akira**

Illustrator and graphic designer.

Uno was born in 1934 in Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture and graduated from the design Course of Nagoya City Industrial Arts High School. In 1955 he moved to Tokyo, where he worked at Calpis Food Industry Co., Nippon Design Center, Studio Irufiuru and Studio Re before going freelance. His career as an exceptionally talented illustrator began in the 1950s, working on corporate advertising, theatre posters and book illustration projects. In the 1960s he leapt into the limelight as a wunderkind handling posters and stage design for underground theatres such as Experimental Theatre Lab Tenjo Sajiki. He has served as a curator of exhibitions and an artistic director for stage productions since the 1990s. More recently, he has been creating collaborative works involving haiku, and he remains active in a broad range of areas today. Awards received include the 1956 Japan Advertising Artists Club (JAAC) Special Selection, 1960 JAAC Members' Award, 1982 Kodansha Cultural Illustration Award, 1989 Sanrio Art Award, 1992 Akai Tori Illustration Award, 2008 Japan Picture Book Award, 2013 JAF (Japan Advertising Federation) Japan Advertising Awards Yamana Prize and 2015 Yomiuri Theater Awards Selection Committee Special Prize. In 1999 he received the Japanese Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon and in 2010 he received the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays with Rosette.

Major publications include *Akira Uno Masquerade* (Bijutsu Shuppan, 1982), *Bara No Kioku* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2000), *Oku no Yokomichi* (Genkishobou, 2009), *Akira Uno Chronicle* (Graphic-sha, 2014). Books illustrated include *Anoko* (by Imae Yoshitomo, Rironsha, 1966), *Boku wa Heitaro* (by Ozawa Tadashi, Fukuinkan Shoten, 1994), and *Maimai to Nainai* (by Minagawa Hiroko, Iwasaki Shoten, 2011). Numerous solo exhibitions include presentations at Kariya City Art Museum, Bunkamura Gallery and Ginza Graphic Gallery).