



Daisuke Miyatsu in his book-lined living room. Conceptual artist Taro Shinoda designed the shelves, whose color and lines were inspired by the packing crates used to ship art. The standing lamp is by Choi Jeong Hwa.



# Daisuke Miyatsu: The Salaryman Collects

**With limited means, unlimited passion, and a little help from his artist friends, a Japanese collector builds a home like no other**

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY YOUSUKE TAKEDA

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ICHIKAWA IS A MODEST TOWN OUTSIDE Tokyo, close enough to the capital to be convenient for commuters but far enough away to feel like a village. On a Sunday afternoon this spring I arrived at Ichikawa railway station and made my way up through narrow streets in search of the home of one of Japan's most notable collectors, Daisuke Miyatsu. I found the house not far from the pride of Ichikawa, the Buddhist temple of Nakayama Hokekyō-ji, which on this sunny day was crowded with visitors drawn to the perfection of the blossoms on the temple's cherry trees. After so traditional a setting, the last thing I expect to encounter is the joyous pink and blue "facade of the simple, angular residence that Miyatsu calls his "dream house."

Begun in 1999 and still a work in progress, the house was created in collaboration with French installation and video artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, whom Miyatsu cajoled into taking on the role of architect for the first time. Together they conceived the house as "one big artwork," and every corner bears the stamp of an artist whom Miyatsu knows and collects. On a sliding screen in a traditional Japanese-style



room, Yoshitomo Nara has painted one of his trademark feisty girls, eschewing his usual acrylics and oils for traditional ink and wash in this commission for his old friend and longtime collector. The bathroom is wallpapered with sketches by the conceptual artist Shimabuku, each referring to one of his whimsical works. In the main bedroom there is a trompe l'oeil ceiling by the young Japanese artist Teppei Kaneuji in which strange creatures created from hand-dyed and collaged papers peek out from the knots in the wood. And on the landing stands a mirror whose frame was created especially for Miyatsu by Yayoi Kusama.

This is art made domestic and intimate. “The house is a place for my family’s life, so I wanted to build it with my friends,” Miyatsu explains. His formal holdings of more than 300 works are miles away, in a temperature-controlled, earthquake-proof Tokyo warehouse. Last summer the collection was celebrated in the well-received exhibition “Invisibleness Is Visibleness” at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Taipei, which featured 61 works by an international roster of artists (Vito Acconci, Jan Fabre, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Kusama, and Apichatpong Weerasethakul among them).

Miyatsu happily calls collecting an addiction, and he has fed his habit for the past 18 years, even though he has nothing that approaches the wealth that many of today’s global collectors bring to the table. In fact, he is widely known in Asia as the Salaryman Collector for having financed his impressive array of international contemporary art with just the earnings from his job as a Tokyo office worker. He has devoted every spare yen to art, and at times he has even taken a second job to fund his collecting.

Miyatsu’s passion for contemporary art was first sparked when he was still a teenager by an encounter with the art of Andy Warhol. “Before I saw his works, I was familiar only with traditional Japanese art, where the subject might be a beautiful woman or a flower or a landscape, all rendered in a refined style. And suddenly there were these pictures showing a car crash or an electric chair. Looking at these, I experienced a really strong shock. It was totally different from the art I knew.”

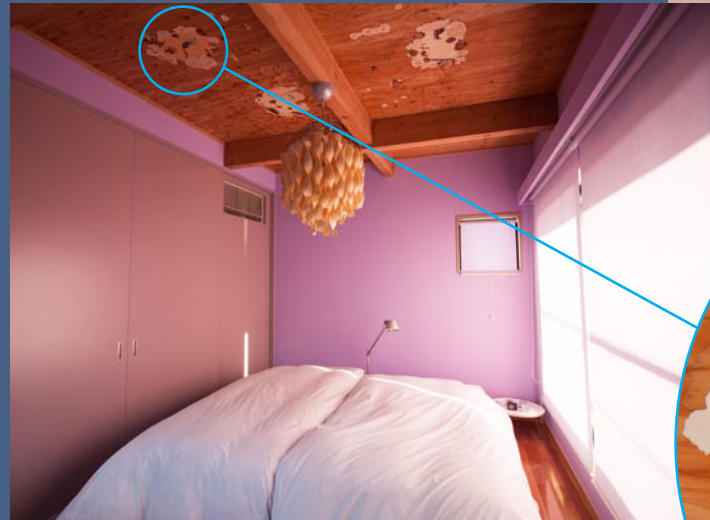
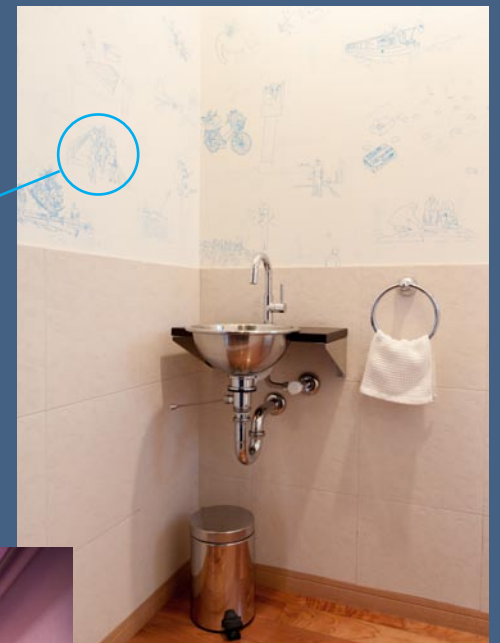
But it was an artist closer to home who transformed Miyatsu into a collector. While at university he fell in love with the work of Kusama, Japan’s eccentric genius. “Do you know the film 2001: A Space Odyssey?” he asks. “Do you know how the astronaut feels when he encounters space? That’s how



I felt when I first stood in front of a work by Kusama. I could never forget her.” A few years later, in 1994, when he had a steady job, Miyatsu found the gallery that represented the artist. “They had a very small drawing,” he recalls. “It was very reasonable in comparison with now but still not cheap. It was very beautiful. I started my career as a collector with that small drawing by Kusama from 1953.”

In the years that followed, Miyatsu’s holdings of Kusama grew to 10 pieces that ranged from the 1950s to the ’70s. For a while he took a second job as a night porter so he could afford her works. But in 1996 his taste leapt far beyond his budget: He fell—hard—for a large 1965 painting from Kusama’s “Infinity Net” series. Priced at \$65,000, it was worth more than he earned in a year. Miyatsu’s family was aghast to learn that he had put a deposit on the work. Japan’s magazines were full of ads for





The interior of the Miyatsu home, where art is not so much installed as incorporated. From top: silkscreened wallpaper in the bathroom by Shimabuku, 2001; a trompe l'oeil collage, *Muddy Stream* from a *Mug*, 2009, by Teppei Kaneuji, on the bedroom ceiling, which also features a light fixture by the mid-century Danish designer Verner Panton; and *Fusuma of HEYHO LET'S GO!*, 2011, rendered in ink and wash on a sliding screen by Yoshitomo Nara. Opposite: The exterior of the Miyatsu home, designed by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. Construction of the house began in 1999, and is ongoing.

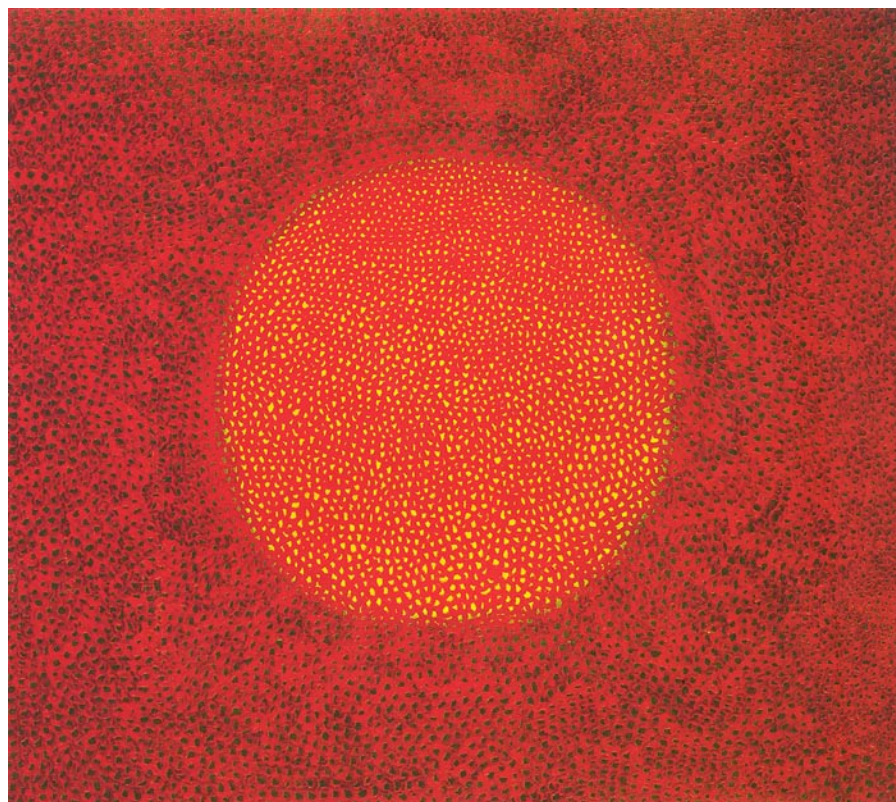




Three videos from the Miyatsu collection, installed in a 2011 exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei: *Honey*, 2003, by Yang Fudong, above; *Ham & Cheesomelet*, 2001, by Ming Wong, at the end of the hallway; and, on the floor, *Documentary IV-Little Mince Cloth*, 2010, by Wu Chang-Jung. Opposite: *Infinity Net*, 1965, a 52-by-60-inch oil on canvas by Yayoi Kusama. Miyatsu owns 10 pieces by Kusama, one of which is the first artwork he ever purchased.







companies offering financing to all comers, and his wife knew he was just mad enough about art to go into debt. One day she called him and asked that he hurry to the family home, where she was waiting with his mother and grandmother. To keep him out of the clutches of loan sharks, they had pooled their funds to advance him the money he needed. In 1998 Miyatsu had the pleasure of lending the painting to the first major Kusama retrospective, which opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, subsequently traveled to New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Walker Art Center, in Minneapolis, and finally arrived at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo. Seeing the painting hanging in a museum in the capital, his family finally conceded that perhaps he wasn't so crazy after all.

"I am very lucky," Miyatsu reflects. "I started my career with Kusama. And then I began to meet artists of my generation, like Olafur Eliasson and Nara. Now they are very established, but 15 years ago they weren't. They were just emerging—cheap but very interesting. It is a very special generation." With these artists he established a pattern of building a network of relationships through his collecting. "For me it's very important to communicate with artists as well as to collect them," he explains. "One of the very big charms of contemporary art is that I can communicate with each of the artists I've collected, from Kusama to the youngest ones. If I wanted to talk to Vermeer, for example, I couldn't do it. So every art work I own is attached to a memory and a communication."

Miyatsu has never sold a work, and he continues to finance his collecting with his salary. In recent years he has become interested in the younger generation of Taiwanese artists, and in video and new media in particular. His collection of the latter is particularly strong and includes work by Cao Fei, Takagi Masakatsu, Weerasethakul, and Yang Fudong. During Art Show Busan 2012, the Asia-Pacific contemporary fair that debuted in June at the Korean city's just-opened convention center, Miyatsu presented a focused exhibition of 20 new-media works by Asian artists from his collection.

We talk about all this in the welcoming living room of his house, facing walls of books and catalogues from which he constantly selects volumes to point out the works of artists he admires. Even in this casual setting, almost every object possesses an artistic pedigree, including the bookshelves, which were designed by conceptual artist Taro Shinoda and inspired by the shape and color of the packing cases that have delivered many artworks to Miyatsu's door. The curtain that hangs across the room's window tells a more intimate story. It was created by Nakagawa Sochi, a group of Japanese fashion designers who are inspired by the possibilities of recycling old clothes, in collaboration with Hong Kong artist Lee Kit. The materials they worked with were gathered from members of Miyatsu's family, all of whom were asked to donate something old and well-worn. An ongoing project, the curtain is like a portrait of the collector's extended family rendered in vibrant Japanese fabrics.

Miyatsu tells me this is not the only part of his home to incorporate traces of his family. In the simple garden created by his friend Shimabuku are a weathered stone lantern and some stones salvaged from the garden of his grandparents' old home. The idea was Shimabuku's: He went with Miyatsu to search for what remained of the old house, and although the original was long gone, they found some fragments for the new garden.

"You know, there is something egotistical about being a collector," he tells me at the end of the day. "And that is why it is my responsibility to keep the collection safe in storage, so that one day it can be passed on." But for Miyatsu the "dream house" is a different matter. He is happy to see signs of wear appearing around the place, even as it remains unfinished, because although the house is undoubtedly a work of art in itself, it is all the better for being lived in and loved. 田