

Genichiro Inokuma: Foundations of a life in painting —from art school to France

Sun. 26 January 2025 – Sun. 30 March 2025

[The struggling young artist]



Genichiro Inokuma, *Night*, 1937

Exhibition title	Genichiro Inokuma: Foundations of a life in painting —from art school to France
Date	Sun. 26 January 2025 – Sun. 30 March 2025
Closed	Mondays (except 24 February), Tue. 25 February
Venue	3F Gallery C

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— About the exhibition

The later paintings of Genichiro Inokuma (1902–1993) were a freewheeling mix of forms, from human faces to animals, circles and squares, and nameless abstract shapes, all on a single canvas. This vibrant, carefree style with its exquisite balance of forms was a direct manifestation of Inokuma's own nature: positive, straightforward, and exhibiting a great love of beauty. However revealing one's entire true self in a work of art is far from easy, and it took many years for Inokuma to reach this point in his expression.

This exhibition unpacks Inokuma's creative journey through his twenties and thirties, the formative years of his painting career, from entering the Tokyo Fine Arts School to his Teiten (Imperial Art Academy Exhibition) period, founding of the Shinseisaku-ha Kyokai (New Creation Society), and relocation to France. Here we trace the explorations and insights of the young painter during the late Taisho and early Showa eras, consistently forward-looking, and earnest in his interrogation of the meaning of beauty, as he endeavors to open up his own unknown worlds even amid the growing threat of war in a troubled outside world.

— About Genichiro Inokuma

- 1902 Born in Takamatsu, Kagawa Prefecture, where he spent his youth.
- 1921 Graduates from Marugame Middle School (now, Kagawa Prefectural Marugame Senior High School).
- 1922 Enters Tokyo Fine Arts School (now, Tokyo University of the Arts), where he studied under Takeji Fujishima.
- 1926 First selected for inclusion in the Imperial Art Academy's 7th Art Exhibition. (Until 1934, Inokuma would mainly be active in the exhibition.)
- 1927 Leaves oil painting program at Tokyo Fine Arts School.
- 1935 Organized the Dainibu-kai group with like-minded associates who also pledged not to submit work to the new Teiten as a protest against government interference, and showed work in the group's first exhibition.
- 1936 Joined artists of a similar age to form the Shinseisaku-ha Kyokai (now the Shinseisaku Kyokai), where he subsequently presented any new work.
- 1938 Studies in France (until 1940), and receives some instruction from Henri Matisse.
- 1950 Designs "Hana-hiraku" wrapping paper for Mitsukoshi department store.
- 1951 Paints mural *Freedom* in main hall of Japanese National Railways Ueno Station (now the central concourse in JR-East Ueno Station).
- 1955 Traveled to the US and set up a studio in New York.
- 1975 Gives up his New York studio, and begins spending winters in Hawaii and working the rest of the year in Tokyo.
- 1989 Donates 1,000 of his works to the city of Marugame.
- 1991 Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art opens.
- 1993 Dies in Tokyo at the age of 90.



Genichiro Inokuma
photo: Akira Takahashi

The struggling young artist

Genichiro Inokuma listed fostering young artistic talent among the roles MIMOCA ought to play. The MIMOCA EYE open-call exhibition launched in 2022 reflects this, and to complement the concurrent exhibition “Akane Saijo: Double Touch” commemorating the first MIMOCA EYE Grand Prize Winner, “Foundations of a life in painting” focuses on the painting of Inokuma himself during his 20s and 30s, introducing the struggling young painter engaged in a quest for his own unique expression.

Echoes of the era

The print *Shooting*, on show at MIMOCA for the first time here, was Inokuma’s entry in the art competition of the 1936 Berlin Olympics staged by the Nazi regime. On the back panel is the label “XIth OLYMPIAD BERLIN 1936 Art Competition and Exhibition,” and records from the time also confirm that Inokuma submitted work in the print category. *Shooting* is also a genuine piece of history, as a vestige of the Olympic art competition that was subsequently discontinued.



Genichiro Inokuma, *Shooting*, 1936
Gift of Mizoe Art Gallery, Tokyo / Fukuoka



Shooting, back of the forehead

Told by Takeji Fujishima: “Your drawing is bad”

At the Tokyo Fine Arts School, Inokuma chose a class taught by painter Takeji Fujishima (1867–1943). Apparently Fujishima’s habit was to turn up twice a week and simply tell every student that their drawing was bad, before leaving again. Inokuma’s personal interpretation of these words was that painting was not about simply copying the form of things, but depicting their essence, and phenomena associated with them. His attempts to show his emotions in pictures are evident in the self-portraits he drew as a form of diary during this period.



Genichiro Inokuma, *Self-portrait*, 1924
“I’m aware it’s going to be rejected”



Genichiro Inokuma, *Self-portrait*, 1924
“The heat is something else”

Establishes the Shinseisaku-ha Kyokai

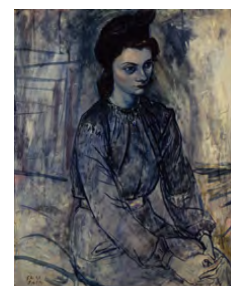
The growing militarism of Japan during the 1930s also had an impact on art. In 1935, seeking to bring the art world into line with its policy of national unity, the government abruptly pushed through changes to the Teiten (Imperial Art Academy Exhibition). It was here that Inokuma parted ways with the official exhibitions. Out of a desire to pursue art in a purer fashion, in 1936 he launched the Shinseisaku-ha Kyokai (New Creation Society) with Ryohei Koiso (1903–1988) and other companions of a similar age, presenting his new work through the Society from that point on.



Genichiro Inokuma, *Two Women*, 1936
Work submitted to the first Shinseisaku-ha Kyokai exhibition

Lesson from Matisse: “Your paintings are too good”

In 1938 at the age of 35, Inokuma traveled to France, where he spent two years in Paris. During this French interlude he received an opportunity to show his work to the great master Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Matisse’s comment that his work was too well executed struck Inokuma as a caution that his paintings were not his own. This experience prompted him to strive as a painter to “portray all of his true self” for the rest of his life.



Genichiro Inokuma, *Mademoiselle M*, 1940
Inokuma’s last oil painting completed in Paris

— Hours & Admissions

Exhibition title	Genichiro Inokuma: Foundations of a life in painting – from art school to France
Organized by	Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, The MIMOCA Foundation
Venue	3F Gallery C
Date	Sun. 26 January 2025 – Sun. 30 March 2025
Hours	10:00 - 18:00 (Admission until 30 minutes before closing time)
Closed	Mondays (except 24 February), Tue. 25 February
Admission	Adults ¥950, Students (college, university) ¥650, Children (0 years to highschool) free *Ticket valid for admission to concurrent special exhibition and the permanent collection.

Concurrent Exhibition

Special exhibition “Commemorating the 1st “MIMOCA EYE” Grand-prize Winner Akane Saijo-Double Touch”

Venue: 2F Gallery B

Permanent collection “Genichiro Inokuma: Play in three dimensions”

Venue: 2F Gallery A

— Related Programs

Curator Talk

The exhibition's lead curator (Kanakano Furuno) will discuss its highlights in the galleries.
Date: Sun. 9 February 2025, 14:00- / Sun. 9 March 2025, 14:00-
Admission free, but Special exhibition admission ticket required. No application required.

MIMOCA Family Day

Up to two adults will be admitted free with each high school or lower grade student, or visitor aged 18 or younger.
Date: Sat. 1-Sun. 2 February 2025, 10:00–18:00

*Other related programs will be announced on the Museum's website as soon as they are confirmed.

— Exhibitions in 2025

We are pleased to announce the exhibitions scheduled to be held in the first half of fiscal year 2025.

“EXPO INOKUMA”

Date: Sat. 12 April 2025 - Sun. 6 July 2025

“Shinro Ohtake: Ratina”

Date: Fri. 1 August 2025 - Mon. 24 November 2025

— Images for Press Use

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- 01 Genichiro Inokuma, *Self-portrait*, 1924
- 02 Genichiro Inokuma, *Self-portrait*, 1924
- 03 Genichiro Inokuma, *Portrait of a Woman*, 1926
- 04 Genichiro Inokuma, *Sea and Women*, 1935
- 05 Genichiro Inokuma, *Two Women*, 1936
- 06 Genichiro Inokuma, *Shooting*, 1936
- 07 Genichiro Inokuma, *Night*, 1937
- 08 Genichiro Inokuma, *Daytime*, 1937
- 09 Genichiro Inokuma, *Twilight*, 1937
- 10 Genichiro Inokuma, *Trio*, 1937
- 11 Genichiro Inokuma, *Three Girls and Bicycles*, 1938
- 12 Genichiro Inokuma, *Mademoiselle M*, 1940

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— About MIMOCA

Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art

The Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art (MIMOCA) was opened November 23, 1991 as a project commemorating the 90th anniversary of the city of Marugame, Kagawa Prefecture and with the full cooperation of the artist Genichiro Inokuma, who spent his youth in and around Marugame. The beautiful station-front museum designed by architect Yoshio Taniguchi has a permanent collection introducing some 20,000 works personally donated by Inokuma and holds special exhibitions focusing primarily on contemporary art. A diverse program of lectures, concerts, and other events, including workshops to foster sensitivity and creativity among children, are part of the Museum's dedication to education.

These features of the Museum are the result of discussions held by Inokuma with the city of Marugame. It was Inokuma's fervent wish that MIMOCA be a facility for contemporary art that would actively introduce new art. The sunlight-filled and spacious spaces of the building fulfill the aspiration architect Taniguchi shared with Inokuma for beautiful spaces in an art museum. Inokuma also wanted to encourage opportunities to expose children to art, advocating free admittance to the Museum for children and proposing the establishment of the "Creative Studio" space for children.

Inokuma wanted the Museum to be a place people would visit frequently. The experience of beautiful spaces and the sight of quality works of art are the source, he believed, of the fresh and exhilarating stimuli that is healthy and energizing. He even thought of MIMOCA as a kind of "health resort for the spirit." We hope everyone will think of MIMOCA, which embodies the ideals Inokuma held dear, as that kind of "resort" for mind and spirit.



Photo by Yoshiro Masuda



Photo by Akira Takahashi

On the founding of the Museum

I am delighted that the Museum has been built in Marugame, the place that is associated with many vivid memories of my youth. Specializing in contemporary art, the Museum is unique in Japan and has been realized with the support of all the citizens of Marugame. I hope the Museum will help the city as a whole to become a rich cultural environment.

Genichiro Inokuma 1991

[Access] 1 min. walk from Marugame Sta.

