

# Bruce and Norman Yonemoto

From October 2011 to February 2012, over 60 southern California arts organizations banded together to mount “Pacific Standard Time,” an unprecedented examination and celebration of Los Angeles art that had been ten years and USD 10 million in the making. Backed by the Getty Foundation, the initiative included over 60 cultural institutions across southern California. For its part, LA><ART gallery focused on video art with two presentations of works by the California-born Japanese-American brothers Bruce and Norman Yonemoto.

Younger brother Bruce Yonemoto’s solo presentation, “The Time Machine and Asexual Clone Mutation,” in the first of the exhibition’s two spaces, featured a reiteration of his 1999 installation *The Time Machine*. Two tightly framed flowers, shot side by side on black-and-white 16-mm film, are projected on a small screen. On the left, a lush, live carnation slowly begins to wilt in concert with a stop-motion Claymation carnation blooming on the right. The nonstop film loop is paired with *Asexual Clone Mutation (for our father)* (1995–2004), an installation of an actual carnation in a clear stem holder on a wall shelf. This flower is jarringly scarlet, with one single petal gilt in brilliant gold, a reference to the Yonemoto patriarchs—the brothers’ father and grandfather—who were both horticulturalists. And as its title alludes, the carnation is no ordinary plant, but one that has been cloned and mutated to rid itself of all disease and imperfection. In HG Wells’ famous 1895 novella *The Time Machine*, the source of inspiration for Yonemoto’s work and its title, a futuristic community is rendered listless from living in a perfect society made possible through technological tinkering. Similarly, there is something spooky, strange and even undesirable about the pristine stem of *Asexual Clone Mutation*; there is an apathy and lack of passion in its so-called perfection.

Also on view, “Soap Operas 1979–1990” were the soap-opera movies that the brothers collaborated on from 1979 to 1990 under the KYO-DAI production company moniker (meaning “brothers” in Japanese). Seven films—from as little as ten minutes to an hour and a half long—were screened in the second gallery, all focusing on fictional romantic relationships. Bruce has been quoted as saying that “all media is fiction,” but for the Yonemoto brothers, the format of the dramatic Hollywood soap opera is a clear example of fabrication at its most extreme. *Made in Hollywood* (1990) is full of trite falsehoods, which the Yonemotos deem so inanely ubiquitous and familiar as to have pervaded the consciousness of their entire generation (Norman was born in 1946, Bruce in 1949). It is a clichéd rags-to-riches Hollywood tale, interspersed with a fictional

behind-the-scenes backstory of its own making. American actress Patricia Arquette plays the heroine, an innocent blond babe hailing from idyllic farm country, and her narrative arc takes a dramatic yet predictable course: a small-town girl makes her way to Hollywood in the hope of becoming a movie star and ends up falling in love with a handsome heartthrob who cheats on her with another man. All the while, the young girl’s vivacious innocence is a symbolic fountain of youth on which various cunning lechers—directors, producers and other Hollywood types—seek to sup as though it will save their souls, not to mention their careers. The ending takes an unexpected and somewhat farcical turn, with an abrupt cut to our erstwhile ingenue declaring with great conviction that her desire is now to make commercials, because that is where “nothing bad ever happens.”

The pairing of works and their focus on a search for quixotic perfection, whether in plants, love or life, makes blatantly clear that such a thing is only to be found on the silver screen. Despite being just a small part of “Pacific Standard Time’s” battery of other presentations, the Yonemotos’ exhibitions left the impression of being a central player, because there is really nothing more “LA” than Hollywood and its fictions.

JENNIFER S. LI

**BRUCE YONEMOTO and  
NORMAN YONEMOTO**  
*Made in Hollywood*  
1990

Color film with sound, 56 min 2 sec.  
Courtesy the artists, Electronic Arts  
Intermix, New York, and LA><ART,  
Los Angeles.

