



Universität  
Zürich <sup>UZH</sup>

Chair of East Asian Art History

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Institute of Art History  
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## Zurich Lectures in East Asian Art History

May 5, 2026  
18:30–19:45

University of Zurich  
Rämistrasse 59  
8001 Zürich  
Room RAA-G-15

## Charismatic Concrete: Artistic Transformations of an Industrial Material in 1980s Japan

**Prof. Dr. Bert Winther-Tamaki**  
University of California, Irvine

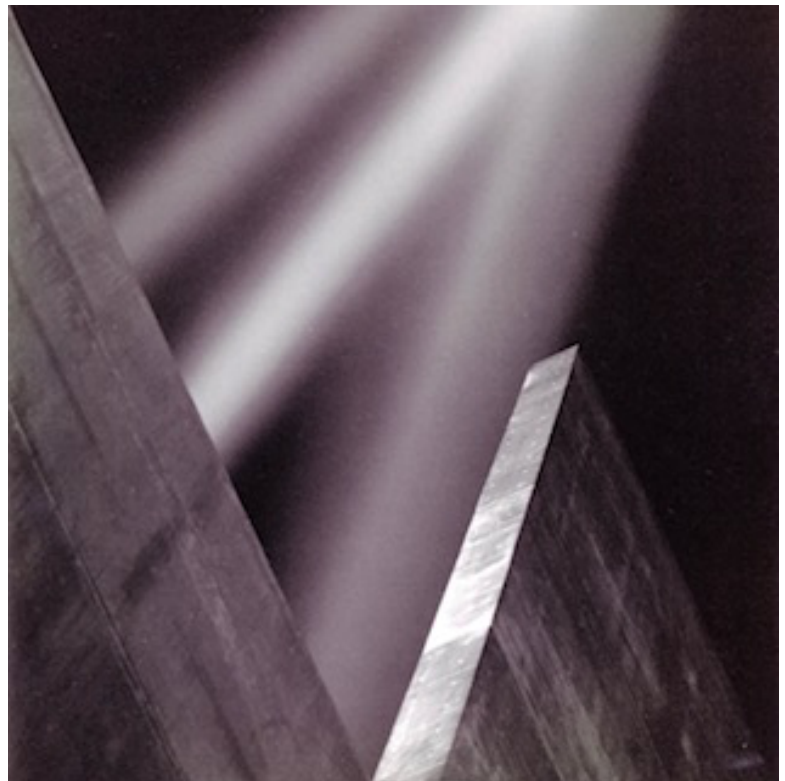


Image:  
*Breathing the City*, Architect Takeyama Kiyoshi and photographer Suzuki Masaru, 1994.



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# Charismatic Concrete: Artistic Transformations of an Industrial Material in 1980s Japan

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## **Abstract**

During Japan's boom years, an extraordinary appetite for concrete transformed cities, coasts and mountainsides into grey expanses. Photographers, architects, animators, and other visual artists responded by imbuing this hardening of the environment with unexpected beauty. They drew on tropes of indigenous tradition, reverence for nature and the sublime power of disaster. Yet the charisma they cultivated could not dispel deeper unease: concrete also came to symbolize the anxiety and monotony of a landscape dominated by drab, unforgiving infrastructure. This lecture explores how architect Andō Tadao, photographer Shibata Toshio, and other artists negotiated those tensions—discovering new aesthetic potentials for an industrial medium while exposing its harsh impacts on daily life.

**Bert Winther-Tamaki** is Professor of Art History at the University of California, Irvine, specializing in modern and contemporary Japanese art history and visual studies. He is the author of *Tsuchi: Earthy Materials in Contemporary Japanese Art* (University of Minnesota Press, 2022), *Maximum Embodiment: Yōga, the “Western Painting” of Japan, 1910–1955* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2012), and *Art in the Encounter of Nations: Japanese and American Artists in the Early Postwar Years* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2001). In 2023, he curated “Return to Earth: Art and Ecology in Japan from the 1950s through the 1980s” at the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. Forthcoming articles assess open-air clay firing by Koie Ryōji and other artists in the 1980s, the land art of Tonoshiki Tadashi (1942–1992), and the photography of Shibata Toshio (b. 1949). He is currently an Academic Associate at the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures in Norwich, UK, where he is completing a book on Japanese art of the 1980s and 1990s tentatively titled *Promethean Excesses of Contemporary Art in the Bubble*.