



Koji Kamoji, Still Life, 2003/2013  
 glass of water, aluminium sheet  
 property of the artist  
 photo: Hans-Wulf Kunze

Returning from Poland after 66 years

Koji Kamoji |

Don't let the unnecessary overshadow the whole

Exhibition Term: April 8th (Tue.) - June 22nd (Sun.), 2025

Closed on Mondays (open on May 5th) Open Hours: 11:00-19:00

Admission Fee: Adults 1,500 yen / Pair discount 2,600 yen / Student (high school to 25 years), Seniors (70 years and over), Visitors with disabilities, their caregiver (up to 1) with ID 1,300 yen / Children (elementary to junior high) 500 yen

Organizers:

Zachęta - National Gallery of Art / Adam Mickiewicz Institute /  
 WATARI-UM, The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art

Cooperation: Polish Institute in Tokio / Razem Pamoja foundation

This exhibition is organized under the honorary patronage of Hanna Wróblewska, Minister of Culture and National Heritage of the Republic of Poland.

Venue: WATARI-UM, The Watari Museum of Contemporary Art

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Conservator: Naoko Kamoji

Exhibition communication: Zofia Koźniewska / Milena Liebe / Aleksandra Sienkiewicz / Alicja Sznajder / Justyna Wydra /  
 Joanna Andruszko / Justyna Laskowska

## My work

What is the right position?

Searching for the right position.

Returning to the act of searching.

Perhaps it is the most important thing in my work.



It was around 1970 – I was struggling with the question of how to transfer the existence of stone to the flat surface of a painting. Sitting in front of a fairly large white canvas propped up against the wall and a stone, I was searching for a particular, single point that would correspond to the existence of this stone, putting different points on the canvas by using a pencil. Searching for this single point was the only thing I did at that time as my work. One day I moved it 2-3 cm to the right, then to the left. I was searching for the position of the point that corresponds to the big stone I thought was correct. Then on another day, I drew a vertical line that passes through this single point. For me, this particular point seemed to be the clue for expressing the existence of this stone as well as the air and the space that surrounded the stone. The four works created in this way were exhibited at the Foksal Gallery in Warsaw, and I named them Two Poles.

The four works were born as the opposite poles of the stone placed on the floor of the gallery, but it would be impossible to objectively prove if it was successful or not. However, I think that since then, searching for the right position has become the single purpose of my work.

All the works that are presented here have been born out of the same purpose, in the process of searching for the right position. For me, works are my reception of the existence of the stone, and I would say it is the collective body of my feelings. The vertical line is the direction of mental concentration.

Aiming at transparency

and simplicity

not letting the unnecessary overshadow the whole.

A certain day in 2025

Koji Kamoji

## Main exhibits

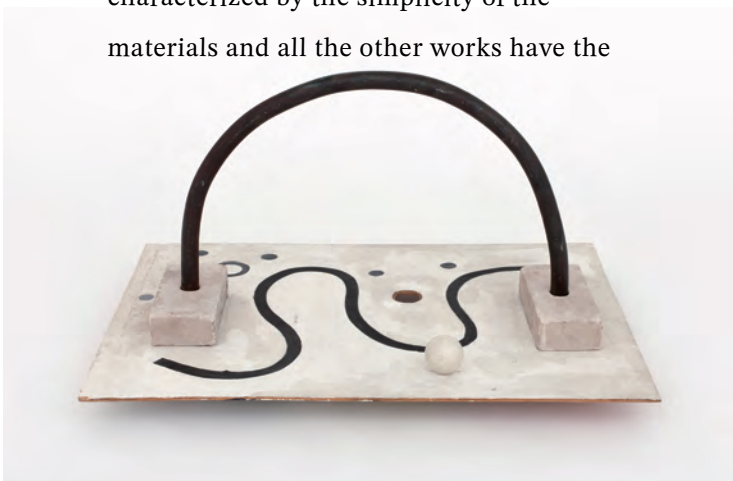
This is the first major exhibition in Japan of Koji Kamoji, who is based in Poland and turns 90 this year. 20 paintings, 9 sculptures, 80 drawings, and 3 installations created from the 1960s to the present day are on display in this small retrospective exhibition of Kamoji's work, which is organized by Zachęta – National Gallery of Art and the Adam Mickiewicz Institute in Poland.

Kamoji has been active in the Polish art scene since the 1960s until today, creating paintings, installations and objects. His artistic achievements have forever taken a place in the pages of Polish art history and its cultural heritage, and his works can be seen in major Polish museums. Kamoji has his artistic roots both in the tradition of contemporary art (Western European and Polish post-war art) and in the Japanese tradition.

The series of early works which will be shown in this exhibition are very important as they recall the starting point of the artist's practice and have a deep relationship with the Foksal Gallery, a legendary gallery in Warsaw that opened in 1966 and where Kamoji has exhibited his works from 1967. Among the works, the so-called **Pruszków Paintings** which were created in the mid-1960s, the series of paintings like a relief with holes on painted board, including the series of **'For a Temple Wall'** (1963-1967) and **'Lagoon'** (1964-1967), are very important in his artistic practice. These works are characterized by the simplicity of the materials and all the other works have the



Koji Kamoji, first solo exhibition at Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, 1967



Koji Kamoji, Rainbow, 1965, oil, wood, metal, plywood, bricks, property of the artist, photo by Maciej Landsberg



Koji Kamoji, For a Temple Wall, 1967, oil, plywood, wood, coll. Studio Gallery, Warsaw, photo by Maciej Landsberg





Koji Kamoji, *Dwa bieguny (Two Poles)*, 1972, installation, Museum of Fine Arts, Lodz, photo by Maciej Landsberg

same feature in common.

The installation '*Two Poles*' (1972) which combines abstraction with a centrally placed stone, is influenced by the Japanese tradition. This installation is the center point of his search for the "appropriate", or right position of line and stone and can be said to be the culmination of the process of the search.

In addition, Kamoji's works often contain elements that carry traces of personal experiences. One example is the element related to the space, air and water that he experienced during a long boat trip to Poland in the late 1950s. And in '*Sasaki's Moon*' (1995), the reminiscent of the suicidal death of a friend is expressed as an artwork. What Kamoji values is the attitude toward the things around him, and this is expressed in '*Still Life*' (2003) which consists of small things, memory, and story.



Sasaki's Moon, 1995, pencil, electric wire, plywood, aluminium sheet, Muzeum Sztuki Łódź, photo: Hans-Wulf Kunze



Koji Kamoji, *Still Life*, 2003/2013, glass of water, aluminium sheet



Koji Kamoji, Drawings, 2011-2018,  
chinese ink, acrylic paints, stones, paper,  
photo by Marek Krzyżanek



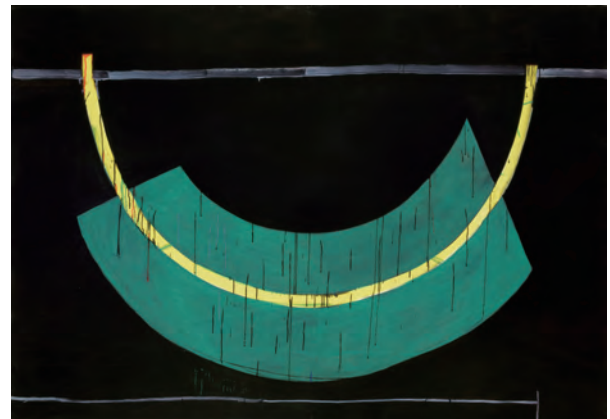
Koji Kamoji, Draught, 1975, Japanese paper, black thread, property of the  
artist, photo by Maciej Landsberg

In the series of **'Drawings'** (2011-2015) which Kamoji worked on for several years, he explores the simplest method and forms using only paper, brush, Chinese ink, and white paint. Such a method of creation refers not only to the traditional medium of Chinese ink but also to the origin of European abstract painting and the exploration of spirituality in art. Spiritual aspects including repetition in production, thorough concentration and minimalism can be seen in his works. The works are the result of the artist's desire to touch the essence of life, things and the world. His practice to express the infinity of space, the nature of water, and air can be said as an attempt to intuitively understand the essence of nature.

The installation work **'Draught'** (1975), in which simple holes are punched in a hung Japanese paper, represents time. It signifies the passage of time, the process that we will be exposed forever. Kamoji has worked at the crossroads of various cultures, including his Japanese roots, deep knowledge of contemporary art, and artistic self-awareness. Kamoji is an international artist and it is not an exaggeration to say that his art reaches a universal dimension. This small retrospective in WATARI-UM can be said as an homage to the artist.



Koji Kamoji, Under Water, 1992, acrylic on canvas, Upper  
Silesian Museum in Bytom, photo: Hans-Wulf Kunze



Koji Kamoji, Night Rain, 1992, acrylic on canvas, Upper  
Silesian Museum in Bytom, photo: Hans-Wulf Kunze

## Koji Kamoji (1935-, Japan)

Koji Kamoji (1935-, Japan) is one of the leading artists of the 1960s-70s who built the mainstream of the post-war Polish art.

Born in Tokyo in 1935. Studied under Saburo Aso and Takeo Yamaguchi at the Musashino Art University from 1953 to 1958. Inspired by his uncle, Ryochu Umeda (East European historian, translator of Polish literature, and Japanese teacher at the University of Warsaw) he decided to study in Warsaw. In 1959, went on board to Poland. The sense of space, water and air that he felt during the two-month voyage had a great influence on Kamoji's later works.

Enrolled in the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw in 1960. Began studying under a famous painter Artur Nacht-Samborski and graduated in 1966. Held his first exhibition with Leszek Walicki at the Krzysztofory Gallery in Krakow. In 1967, after graduating, he began his career at the legenday Foksal Gallery (founded in 1966) and his practice played an important role in the historical development of Polish contemporary art. He actively created the avant-garde art scene in Poland together with the leading artists in Poland of the time, including Henryk Stażewski, Edward Krasiński, Tadeusz Kantor and Zbigniew Gostomski.

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

1967 Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

1971 Powietrze, Pomieszczenie, Przestrzeń/ Air, Room, Space, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

1972 Dwa bieguny/ Two poles, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

1975 Cykl czterech wystaw: Otwór, Przeciąg, Linia, Lustro/ A Series of four exhibitions: An Hole, Draugh, A Line, A Mirror; Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

1978 Teren/ Site, Galeria Sztuki Nowoczesnej Pawilon DESA Nowa Huta, Cracow, Poland

1984 Człowiek/ A Man, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

1986 Średniowiecze/ The Middle Ages, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

1988 Basho, Galeria Rzeźby, Warsaw, Poland (with Włodzimierz Borowski)

Kamień Oświęcimski/ The Auschwitz Stone, Galeria Rzeźby, Warsaw, Poland

1990 Dziura-Wiatr-Kamienie/A Hole-Wind - Stones (retrospective exhibition), Muzeum Sztuki w Łódź, Łódź, Poland

1991 Jezioro w Piramidzie/ Lake in the Pyramid, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

Letnie popołudnie/ Summer Afternoon, Galeria Rzeźby, Warsaw, Poland

1992 Noc/ Night, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

1993 Haiku „Deszcz”/ Haiku “Rain”, Galeria Biblioteka, Legionowo, Poland

1994 Haiku „Woda”/ Haiku “Water”, „, Galeria Biblioteka, Legionowo, Poland

W cieniu/ In the shadow, Galeria Foksal, Warszawa

Dno Nieba/ The Bottom of the Sky, the terrace of Edward Krasiński's studio, Warsaw, Poland

1996 Księżyc S. Sasakięgo/ S. Sasakięgo's Moon, Galeria Miejsce , Cieszyn, Poland

1997 Łódki z trzciny i inne prace 1963-1997/ Leed boards and other works 1963-1997 (retrospective exhibition), Center of Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland

1998 Rysunki zimowe/ Winter drawings, Galeria Stara , Lublin, Poland

Works - in seven rooms. Koji Kamoji 1998/ Prace- w siedmiu pokojach. Koji Kamoji 1998, Muzeum Górnośląskie, Bytom, Poland

2001 Dziura- Księżyc-Cisza/ The Hole-the Moon-the Silence/, Galeria 86, Łódź, Poland

2003 Martwa natura/ Still life, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland

Steinerner Sitz, Georgium Park, Dessau

Wasser, Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieben Frauen, Magdeburg

Woda - Cysterna/ Water - Cistern, Center of Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland



2004 Niebieski pasek i cień/ The blue tape and shadow, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland, (with Edward Krasiński)  
2006 Wieczór- Łódki z trzciny/ Evening - Boats of Reeds, Galeria Starmach, Cracow, Poland  
2008 Obrazy pruszkowskie/ The Pruszków Paintings, Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, Poland  
2013 Ścieżką ogrodu/ The Garden path (retrospective exhibition), Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieben Frauen, Magdeburg, Germany  
2018 Cisza i wola życia/ Silence and the Will to Live (retrospective exhibition), Zachęta-National Gallery of Art, Warsaw and Muzeum Sztuki i Techniki japońskiej Manggha, Cracow, Poland  
2020 Kamyczki/ Koishitachi, Foksal Gallery Foundation, Warsaw, Poland  
2021 Rysunki ziemi i powietrza/ Drawings of the Earth and the Air, Signum Foundation Gallery, Łódź, Poland  
2021 ZNACZENIE MIEJSCA/ SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLACE, Muzeum Nadwiślańskie w Kazimierzu Dolnym, Kazimierz Dolny, Poland  
2022 Zgnioty/ Crushes, Galeria Foksal, Warsaw, Poland (with Mirosław Bałka)

#### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

1972 Atelier -72 , Richard Demarco Gallery, Edinburgh, Scotland  
1979 Włodzimierz Borowski, Koji Kamoji, Edward Krasiński, Henryk Stażewski, Dom Artysty  
1981 Contemporararz Painting in Eastern Europe and Japan, Kanagawa Prefectural Gallery, Yokohama, The National Museum of Art in Osaka, Japan  
1982 Echange entre artistes 1931-1982 Pologne- USA, Musee d' Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France  
1983 An Artistic Conversation 1931-1982 Poland-USA, Ulster Museum, Belfast Znak Krzyża, Parafia Miłosierdzia Bożego, Warsaw, Poland  
1988 Geometria es metafora, Kallitas a Chelmi Korzeti Muzeum Anyagabol, Budapest Galeria, Budapest  
1991 Kolekcja sztuki XX wieku w Muzeum Sztuki w Łodzi/ The collection of 20th century art at the Museum of Art in Łódź, Zachęta-National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland  
1992 Actualite, Musee d' Art Contemporain de Lyon+ELAC, Lyon, France  
Kolekcja międzynarodowej sztuki XX wieku, Muzeum Sztuki/ The international art. Collection of 20th century, Łódź, Poland  
1997 Art from Poland 1945-1996, Mucsarok, Budapest; Vilnius siuolaikinio meno centras, Vilnius; Maksas muzeja Arsenal, Riga; Tallina Kunstihoone, Tallina Granice obrazu.  
The 90's Paintings in Poland, Center of Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland  
1999 Generacje. Sztuka polska końca/ początku wieku/ Generations. Polish art of the end/early century, Centralny Salon Wystawienniczy "Maneż", Sankt Petersburg, Russia  
2003 Labirynt. Labirynt 2 Gallery presents Contemporary Polish Art, UH Galleries, Hartfield; Folly Gallery, Lancaster, United Kingdom  
2007 Wasser. Ströme. Zeiten Die Elbe [in ] between, Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieben Frauen Magdeburg, Magdeburg, Germany  
2015 Rozmowa z Ukiyo-e, Muzeum Podlaskim Białystok and Muzeum Sztuki i Techniki japońskiej Manggha in Cracow, Poland

#### Public collections:

- National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland
- National Museum in Wrocław, Wrocław, Poland
- Muzeum Sztuki in Łódź, Łódź, Poland
- Museum of Contemporary Art in Kraków, Cracow, Poland
- Upper Silesian Museum in Bytom, Bytom, Poland
- Wiktor Ambroziewicz Regional Museum in Chełm-72 Gallery, Chełm, Poland
- the Manggha Museum
- Zachęta-National Gallery of Art, Warsaw, Poland
- Centre for Contemporary Art Ujazdowski Castle, Warsaw, Poland
- Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieben Frauen Magdeburg, Magdeburg, Germany
- The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA
- Foksal Gallery, Warsaw, Poland
- Studio Gallery, Warsaw, Poland

#### Awards, decorations:

1975 Cyprian Kamil Norwid's Award  
2015 Jan Cybis Award  
2020 Katarzyny Kobro Award  
2024 Medal „Zasłużony Kulturze Gloria Artis”/ Gloria Artis Medal for Merit to Culture

## Koji Kamoji – Why Poland.

Kōji Kamoji was born in Tokyo in 1935 and has lived and worked in Poland since 1959. He is a Japanese who became a Polish artist. From 1953-58 he studied at the Musashino Academy of Fine Arts in Tokyo (graduating in 1958) in the atelier of professors Saburo Aso and Takeo Yamaguchi. Koji Kamoji's Japanese family had a long-standing connection with Polish culture; the artist's mother's elder brother Ryōchū Umeda and uncle Yukio Kudo translated Polish literature into Japanese. When twenty-four-year-old Koji Kamoji decided to leave Japan after completing his studies, his choice fell on Poland. He had behind him the tragic experience of the suicidal death of his friend S. Sasaki, whose memory would later inspire many of the artist's works. Uncle Ryōchū Umeda was a great authority for Koji Kamoji. They talked a lot; it was he who organised his first exhibition and, influenced by these stories and conversations, Koji Kamoji travelled to Poland.

At that time, many Japanese artists went to Europe to polish their talents, except that they usually chose Paris - as the capital of world art at that time. Kōji himself said years later: 'I was a little bit shy and thought that since everyone else was there, I should go to Poland. Besides, I thought it wouldn't be far from here to Paris'.

On 24 April 1959, Koji Kamoji set sail for Poland on a merchant-passenger ship named Stefan Okrzeja. After a two-and-a-half-month voyage, he arrived in Poland on 16 July 1959 in the port of Gdynia. The long voyage, the experience of water, air and sky had a huge impact on the artist's later work. In the port of Gdynia, Kamoji was welcomed by Prof. Wiesław Kotański (a distinguished Japanese scholar from the University of Warsaw) and Prof. Kazuo Yonekawa (translator and lecturer). After arriving in Poland, Koji Kamoji spent a year studying the Polish language at the Foreign Language College for Foreigners in Łódź. He then went on to study at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts (graduated in 1966) in the atelier of Professor Artur Nacht-Samborski. His studies in Poland were possible thanks to a 5-year scholarship from the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art.

The story of Koji Kamoji's journey is linked to an earlier journey of his uncle Ryōchū Umeda (梅田 良忠, 1900-1961). In 1922, Ryōchū Umeda (brother of the artist's mother), as a 23-year-old graduate in the philosophical study of Zen Buddhism, set out by sea for further philosophical studies in Europe. He was to undertake his studies in Berlin on a scholarship from the Buddhist University in Tokyo. During the voyage, he met Stanisław Michowski (1900-1952), the son of a civil servant working on the construction of the Trans-Siberian and East China Railway, who later became a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force during the Second World War. Michowski, who had lived in Shanghai since 1920, spoke Japanese and talked a lot about Poland during his travels. They became friends and Umeda later decided to settle in Warsaw. He remained here for many years, until September 1939.

Ryōchū Umeda studied the Polish language. Around 1924, as a student, he moved into the basilica of an abandoned inn on his own, where he looked after a kennel of hunting dogs. He was visited by a friend, Konstanty Galczyński (an eminent poet and writer), who gave the building its current name of 'Yellow Inn'. Umeda became the first Japanese language teacher in Poland at the University of Warsaw. From 1926 to 1939, he worked at the Eastern Institute in Warsaw. He was also involved in translating Polish literature (he translated *Quo vadis* by Henryk Sienkiewicz into Japanese). He was associated with the Warsaw literary milieu centred around the avant-garde literary group Kwadryga.

Ryōchū Umeda spent the Second World War in Bulgaria, after which he was unable to come to communist Poland for a time. Before his death, he expressed his wish that one of his sons Yoshiho Umeda (梅田 芳穂, 1949-2012) should permanently settle in Poland and continue his mission. Ryōchū Umeda was baptised and given the Polish name Stanisław before his death in 1961. His ashes are buried in the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw.

According to Ryōchū Umeda's will, his son Yoshiho Umeda came to Poland after his father's death, where he settled permanently. He was thirteen years old at the time; he settled in Łódź with Prof. Konrad Jażdżewski's family (renowned archaeologist). From 1968 to 1975, he studied Polish philology and art history at the University of Warsaw, and worked in the Polish representative offices of Japanese companies. From 1976, he was involved in opposition activities (Poland was then a communist country) as a collaborator of the Workers' Defence Committee and the Social Self-Defence Committee "KOR". He was involved in importing printing materials to Poland for the needs of the second (underground) circulation. Since 1980, he has been involved with the 'Solidarity' workers' movement; he participated in the 1st National Delegates' Congress in Gdańsk and co-founded Radio 'S' in the Mazovia Region. He organised the Polish Central Archive in Tokyo. After martial law was imposed, he was expelled from Poland. But in France he was involved in helping the underground Solidarity movement. At the end of the 1980s, he returned to Warsaw, took up business and worked for the introduction of the ecological Kyoto Protocol. Yoshiho Umeda was married to the well-known Japanese writer Agnieszka Żuławska (daughter of the poet and writer Juliusz Żuławski). He had three children, Tomoho, Julia and Hana, a visual artist and teacher of classical *jiutamai* dance. He is buried in the Powązki Wojskowe cemetery in Warsaw.

Yukio Kudō (工藤幸雄, 1925 - 2008) was Koji Kamoji's uncle, a Japanese poet, romanist, Polish scholar and professor at the Tama Academy of Fine Arts (多摩美術大学 Tama Bijutsu Daigaku) in Tokyo. He studied French literature at the University of Tokyo. From 1967 to 1974, he worked as a Japanese language teacher at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the University of Warsaw. In 1995, President Lech Wałęsa awarded him the Commander's Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland. In 1999, he received the Yomiuri Literary Prize for translating the complete literary works of Bruno Schulz (an outstanding Polish writer) into Japanese. In addition, he has translated many works of Polish literature, including those by Witold Gombrowicz, Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska.



## Zachęta – National Gallery of Art

Zachęta – National Gallery of Art is an institution whose mission is to popularise contemporary art as an important element of socio-cultural life. A place where the most interesting phenomena of 20th and 21st century art are presented. The gallery stages temporary exhibitions. Zachęta also has an impressive collection, which consists of almost 3700 works in the field of painting, sculpture, installation, video, graphics and performance. For over 70 years, Zachęta's task has been to supervise and organize exhibitions in the Polish Pavilion in Venice at the Art Biennale and the Architecture Biennale — one of the most important art reviews in the world.

[www.zacheta.art.pl](http://www.zacheta.art.pl)

## The Adam Mickiewicz Institute

The Adam Mickiewicz Institute (IAM) connects Polish culture with global audiences. As a state institution, IAM nurtures long-term interest in Polish culture and the arts, bolstering the presence of Polish artists on the international stage. It initiates innovative projects, supports cross-border collaboration, and promotes both acclaimed and emerging Polish creators, showcasing the diversity and richness of the country's cultural landscape. IAM also manages Culture.pl, a comprehensive online resource on Polish culture.

## CONTACT

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Any updates or changes to the content will be published on the official website / SNS as soon as possible.