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EDWARD ALBEE is the three-time Pulitzer Prize-winning author of more than twenty-five plays. He is the recipient of three Tony Awards, and was granted the Gold Medal in Drama from the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1980, and the Kennedy Center Honors and the National Medal of Arts in 1996. Albee's essays have been published in *The New York Times*, *Art in America*, *The Village Voice*, and *The Saturday Review*, among other publications. He lives in New York City.



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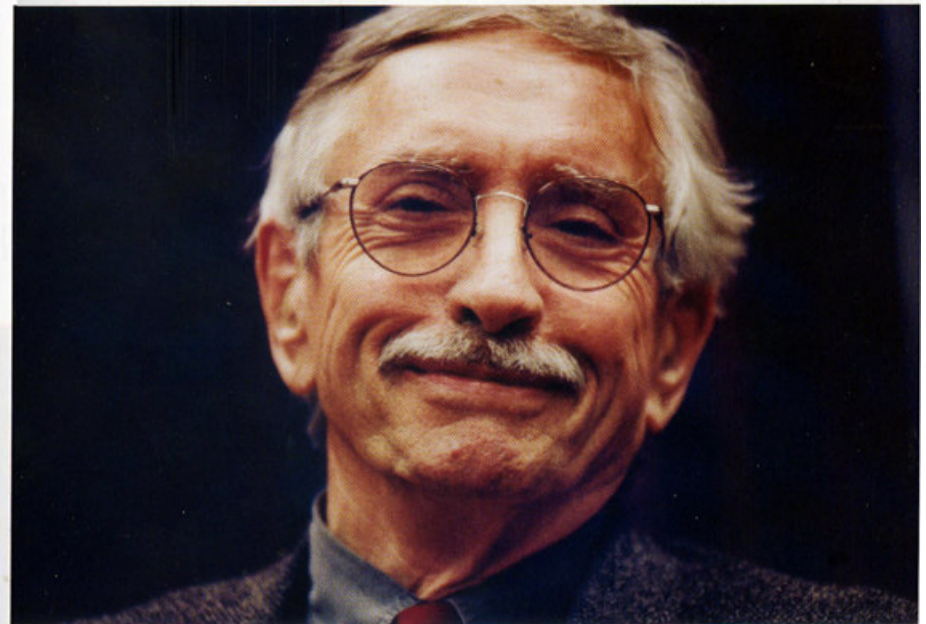


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ZERO HIGASHIDA

1991

I WAS WANDERING around Greenwich Village one day a couple of years ago—three, perhaps—minding my own business, by which I mean I had dropped into the New York Studio School to look at a faculty exhibit and had decided to wander about there further, to see what the painting and sculpture students were up to. The stuff was okay—the paintings a little large-gestural figurative for my taste, the sculpture more in a state of idea than realization, perhaps.

Then I turned a corner and came upon some work which stopped me cold, as they say—four or five wooden pieces of various sizes, some assemblage, others disassemblage, all painted dull black. Two thoughts came to mind at once: this is good work!—and, at the same moment—I bet this artist is Japanese! I asked about and got the answer—oh, this guy just uses the space here; he's a Japanese guy.

My instinct having been proved right, I was intrigued. I tracked him down, found he spoke almost no English—and my Japanese,

even after four trips to Japan, is limited to survival essentials and superb sushi ordering—but managed to arrange a studio visit, in Brooklyn, nearly under one of the bridges.

There I found—in his tiny space above an auto repair shop—that he worked both huge and small, and in metal as well as in wood. I put three pieces of his in a group exhibit I was curating at the Millwood Gallery on Long Island, and am happy that his worth has been realized by the Philippe Staib Gallery here in New York.

It is not difficult, looking at Zero Higashida's work, to track seeming influences: black painted wood? oh, that's Nevelson; the brutality of gesture? oh, that's Serra. Indeed, a too-quick glance by the instant categorizer at Zero's pieces might lead to such superficial conclusions, but these other artists' ideas are not what Higashida's work is all about. I'm not certain, for that matter, that he knew of either Serra or Nevelson—or a host of other artists—when he fashioned the bed of his aesthetic in Japan.

It is not easy to explain what seems so Japanese about his work to anyone who has not experienced Japan. It all has to do with topography, with landscape, with Zen, with the object as philosophical statement—as unique as isolated, mute, and resonating experience.

Higashida turns the world topsy-turvy as well; gravity in its physical sense is defied, all balances are askew; the gravity of the work itself, its balances are paramount.

Higashida is young; promises are not guarantees; he may eventually abandon isolate work for site experiment—I suspect he will move in that direction. Nothing is sure, but I find this exciting work.