We are on the fast train from Okayama to Tokyo, spend the next day & a half there then fly home. Mr. Fujii will be rising on our left in a little while, but I won’t be attempting any cliches. After a thousand or more digital shots, I'm shot out. Besides, today is our first genuine rainy day.

Yesterday we woke up just before dawn & took the cable car to the top of the hill above Benesse House, where we spent the last two nights, staying in a futuristic museum of contemporary art on the rocky southern coast of Naoshima Island, which lies tucked away between Japan's two westernmost & southernmost islands. The view from the top is superb, across the Inland Sea to a ring of spectacular mountains. It makes me think of the Bay of Naples or so many spots in Italy & Greece. Ferries constantly criss-cross & below us great fields of buoys mark farms of the fish & kelp we've been eating all month. The sun came over a mountain & fired up the clouds, which reflected in the oval pool of the building. Architect is called Tadeo Ando, uses concrete in great slabs & rocks, builds around & into the lay of the land. The whole place an enchantment.

Before that spent the day in Okayama at the Benesse Corporation itself (they publish Japanese school books, conduct preparatory examinations for the university, & own Berlitz International). We were visiting the museum of Tasuo Kuniyoshi, a painter born in Japan, contemporary of Hopper, made his career in New York: painted in a wonderful mannered style that recalls American folk painting, later turned to femmes fatales, then to grim fantasies & allegories during the Pacific War as they remember it over here.

That was Monday, when museums are formally closed. Sunday we had reached our furthest distance from Tokyo: Hakata-Fukuoka. Not somewhere I'd ever heard of but Gail was scheduled to talk on American art in the 20th century after a luncheon with museum curators. We arrived on Saturday night after fleeing a snowstorm up in Nagoya, where Gail had lectured on Hopper & his influence to a very big & appreciative crowd in the prefectural museum.

Fukuoka blew us away. Our hotel in a development called Canal City seemed like a leap into the universal Disneyland of the future: buildings built in weird curves & fantastic colors & shapes, water spouts that blew off in sequence with great popping noises, crowds of shoppers in a three story mall lined with shops like Gucci, Brooks Brothers, Valentino, McDonalds, & looming over it all a giant figure that looked like Felix the Cat.

Next day while Gail spoke about art, I walked into the city, which I found very impressive in the scope & variety of modern buildings. I searched out two big computer stores but failed to find a proper adapter to let me work on the flight.
home. Then I discovered a kind of Babylonian hanging garden in the center of town: fifteen stories of terraced plantings, no elevator. I went first to eat a bowl of the local specialty, ramen, a noodle served with slices of pork in pork broth. Reinforced, I made the climb & was rewarded with a view out to the port, good reminder that this is Japan's shortest distance from the mainland, about ten miles. The region has a long record of contacts, including recent archaeological finds (shades of Phoenician & Mycenean remnants found on the coasts of Italy & site of Rome). On my way back I found other canals (branches of the river? hard to tell the difference, rivers are so channeled & controlled here, like the trees pruned to tortuous shapes or reduced to bonsai). Suddenly I was in an area of narrow streets & old, low buildings but bright new signs, lone men standing like sentinels outside glitzy doors, but quick to disappear if I pointed the camera. It became clear that this was a center of the oldest of professions, virtually in the shadow of the empire of international commerce where we were lodged two blocks away.

My prying camera did not get me lynched, however, & when Gail got back from her work, we made supper in the hospitality lounge to which the hotel admitted us.

The three days before this run south, we did Kyoto & Osaka, Gail with lectures & I a little freer to explore. We spent our first day going to two gardens, one wholly devoted to moss, the other an imperial villa that imitates the sea & the mountains in a miniature landscape that is among the most exquisite we've seen anywhere, very calculated with screening hedges to unfold gradually the little prospects of the place. I spent an afternoon just walking along the riverbank taking pictures of egrets, herons, ducks, & kites (they hover in large numbers for such a big predator over every city we've visited so far). Another day two acquaintances took me looking for old books: I found one with illustrations of old Kyoto, when it was the capital & another, apparently a notebook made by a student of the art of arranging flowers. Its drawings were so sinuous I wish I had bought it, but I held back. Did find a pickle maker & get some pictures of the long white roots, the greens, & every other color of vegetable that they cure in big wooden vats of rice bran, sometimes with salt. We also visited one Zen temple where great stones on islands of brown moss rise from a sea of sand that is meticulously raked to look like waves. Appropriation from nature they call it, imitation. All the use of rocks & moss made us feel right at home.

Today, then, in the rain & fog we took the 7 a.m. ferry for Shikoukou, sailing past trawlers & other ferries to Takamatsu (Tall Pine Town). We taxied to see the studio of Noguchi, who also has a museum in Queens & a table & lamp in our house. As we entered the neighbor, we saw rows upon rows of stone lanterns, Buddhas, grave markers. It dawned on us that this was a quarter of stone workers & our guide pointed out the quarries in the ridge above the town. The Noguchi
establishment itself stands in the midst of stone yards hard at work. They now import stone from all over the world in addition to what they cut here (it's just like Carrara in Italy, only that there the stone is white marble). In the wide yard dotted with Noguchi's work, the rain made polished surfaces glisten & reflect other sculptures & the craggy surrounding trees. We also visited the 250 year old house where he lived & admired the moss garden & the paper lamps (like ours). My favorite site was a flight of steps in massive stone up a steep hillside above the house, to where Noguchi spent five years creating an earth mountain, exquisitely mounded & planted with red grass. It spoke to the mountains above & to the great stones he had placed nearby. The last shot I wanted to take was a huge stone shaped like the head of a giant bird, with humped head & tapering beak, but my camera protested no more memory. Mine would have to do.

We retreated to the workshop to meet Noguchi's successor, where we were offered hot coffee & cake. It seemed the right moment to mention our Cornish ancestors & their stone quoits & how I, too, arrange stones. I turned on this little computer & showed them my photograph of one of our quoits with Christmas rose blooming beside it (as it probably is this minute back home). That interested them so much that they brought out a catalogue of stone works as a gift for us & autographed it to us. Ah the pleasure & pain of gifts on route. Besides books, Gail has also acquired a paper mache mask with a long nose, like some Kuniyoshi painted. It is supposed to be a guardian of the house, bring good fortune. It won't be able to ward off the flood of books.

It has been a remarkable trip. I spent the morning learning to express my name in Japanese. I can't sign it that way here, so love for now.

John