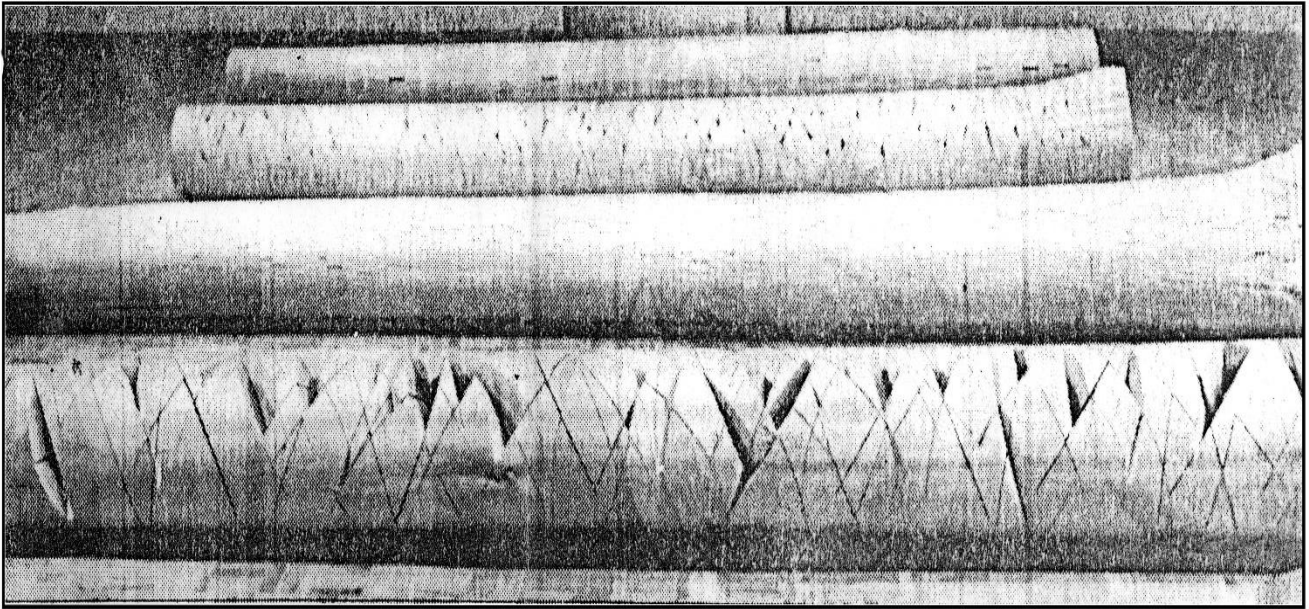




# The Honolulu Advertiser

HAWAII'S NEWSPAPER • HonoluluAdvertiser.com

Through Jan. 2, 1985.



## *Man, Nature and the Soul of a Tree*

- By Marcia Morse,  
*Star-Bulletin Art Reviewer*

---

**KAZUO KADONAGA, Recent work.**  
**Contemporary Arts Center. Through Jan. 2, 1985.**

---

There is first the tree, fulfilling its own natural inclinations to grow-year after year adding visibly to its mantle of age, wrapping itself in the laminations of time.

There is then the man, who cuts down the tree and cuts into the tree in order to reveal its heart and release its soul.

This is a zen-like conundrum that achieves the force of visible logic in the work of Kazuo Kadonaga.

What might at first seem like an imposition of human will, a gratuitous transformation of substance that is already true to its own formal laws of perfection, comes in Kadonaga's work to have a double truth-that of nature and that of art.

It is only one of a number of dualities in the

work.

We know, to begin, that Kadonaga's choice of materials and process was not the result of a quest for the arcane or exotic but a supremely pragmatic and even inevitable sort of natural selection. Access to stands of trees many decades old, and to a technology which allows one to cut them into veneer-thin vertical slices was simply part of what was at hand for the son of a family that owns a large sawmill in Japan.

Kadonaga's use of these materials and processes alters the balance between raw substance and the tools of change; while many refinements have clearly taken place, the tree remains a tree, the saw is subdued.

These subtleties of balance also exist between orders of natural marking and human mark-making; Kadonaga has again chosen to reinforce rather than subvert what is within his materials.

The tree itself, once stripped of its bark, polished and seasoned, reveals quiet linear patterns, running its length, concentric at its cut ends. Its history is seen in slightly variant layers, responsive to changes in atmosphere and environment.

Kadonaga's formal echo to this natural linearity is also linear, and is manifested in several ways. There are those tree trunks which are cut completely or partially into extremely thin layers running the length of the log (No. 5 CK, No. 5 CH, and the smaller No. 5 CD). These layers are reassembled, stacked again to conform to the original contours of the trunk. The resulting difference is more sensory than visual; these thin layers are now exquisitely responsive to changes in humidity and will warp and flex as they adjust to those changes.

A second extension of process is seen in two smaller works (No. 11 BG and No. 11 BH) in which straight cuts are started in one end of log section. The section is then struck with a mallet and the mild shock wave extends the original, man-made lines of cleavage into natural ones--not truly random, but no longer regular and rectilinear.

Two more visibly formal cutting patterns which recur in Kadonaga's work are also seen in several of the large log pieces which are set on the gallery floor. Each suggests the creation of small windows, perhaps for us to see in, perhaps for the tree to see out.

he Contemporary Arts Center in

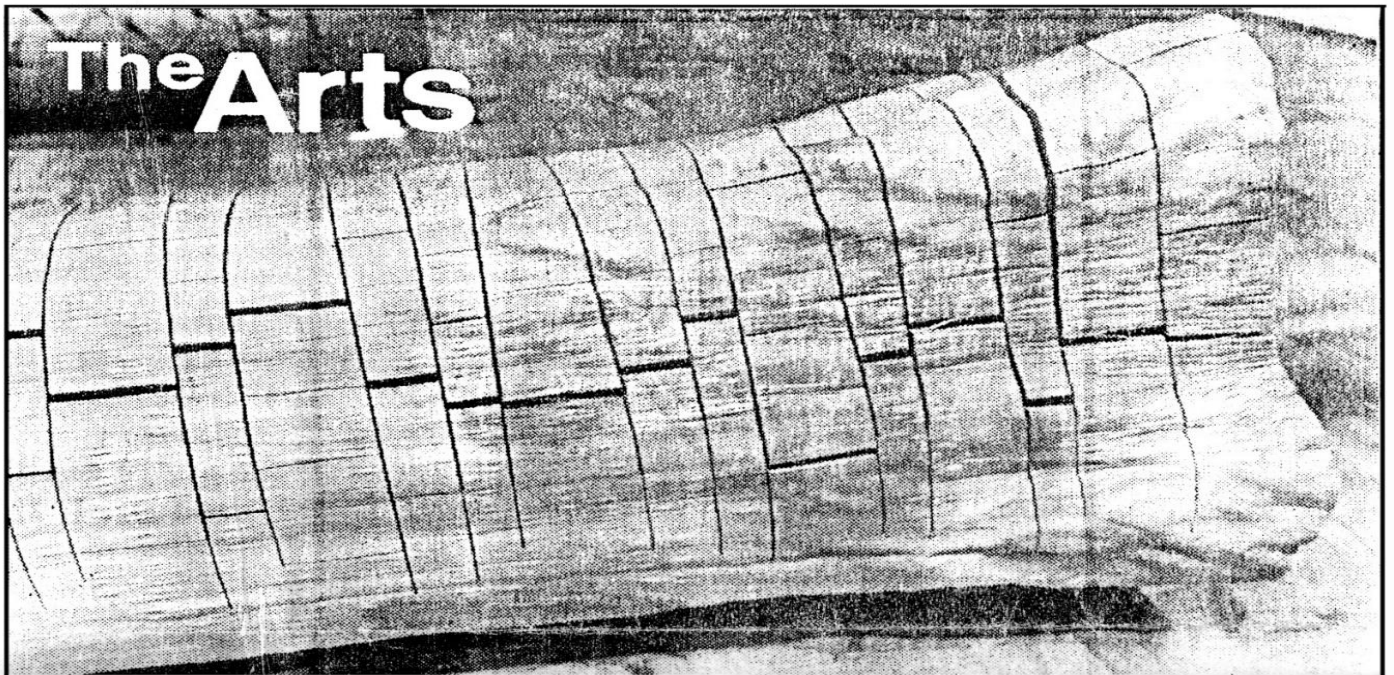
In some works (No. 8 K, No. 8Q, No. 8R) the pattern of cutting creates bands running parallel to the natural base of the tree. These partial cuts which do not sever the circumference of the log are punctuated by small vertical cuts (ones aligned with the length of the log) that are blade-thin up to an inch or more in width.

In what is one of Kadonaga's most assertive responses to the wood, diagonally crossing slices seemingly lacerate the log, and where they cross several triangular wedge sections have been removed, revealing the concentric inner layers and the subtly graded colors of the heartwood. These incisions, whether horizontal or diagonal, also set in motion the wood's natural tendency to flex.

If Kadonaga has arrested the untrammelled process of natural growth, he has also preserved much of the organic energy of wood in allowing it to move responsively in concert with the atmosphere.

If Kadonaga has been surgically precise, even clinical in his strategies for cutting and shaping each log, it has been done with a keen sense of the anatomy of tree-ness.

If Kadonaga has seemed to impose his own patterns of mark-making on the fine-grained wood, it is because he, as Craftsman with cutting tools, has been respectful and observant of nature's own patterns.



**Tree sculpture, above, top and right,  
the Contemporary Arts Center in**

**by Kazuo Kadonaga currently on display at  
the Hawaii Newspaper Agency building**