

JAPANESE ARTIST PROBES NATURE IN DRAMATIC NEW SHOW AT MUNICIPAL ART GALLERY

Every once in a while an artist emerges who forces us to look at our world a little differently. Japanese sculptor Kazuo Kadonaga is just such a person. Beginning March 12th,-- when his show in tandem with Los Angeles sculptor Jud Fine opens at the Municipal Art Gallery in Barnsdall Park, Los Angeles will have a rare chance to view an important body of his work. With an aesthetic rooted in the Japanese tradition of creating harmony with nature, he explores the intrinsic character of wood, bamboo, and handmade paper in a thoroughly contemporary way, collaborating with nature as he coerces his materials into yielding their secrets.

It's no accident that the Municipal Art Gallery is hosting this unusual exhibit, which runs to April 7; gallery director Josine Inco-Starrels has a flair for identifying and showcasing gifted newcomers. For while Kadonaga has found affirmation in the museums and galleries of Europe, at home and in America he remains an obscure, if significant, talent. A native of Ishikawa-ken, Japan, and the heir to a prosperous family lumber business, Kadonaga exploits the artistic rather than the commercial possibilities of wood, making bold statements about what it is, what it was, and what it can become. Unlike Western artists, who tend to tame the materials they work with, Kadonaga is their liberator, the catalyst to his enigmatic forms but not their architect. He selects the trees he wants to work with while they are still living, then harvests them, strips their bark away, and subjects them to the rigors of sawing, pounding, charring, carving, and incising. They, in turn, respond by cracking, warping, discoloring, and twisting unpredictably into works of striking beauty.

Among the most captivating forms are logs that he has cut into wafer-thin slices, then reconstructed with glue into their original configuration, now flaky as croissants and revealing their inner essence.

As the atmosphere changes the sculptures change. Like all of his work, this is kinetic art, never

static but always in flux and reacting to its environment as surely as aspens in autumn.

Kadonaga's approach to bamboo is similarly mutable but devoid of the savagery that marks some of his wooden works. He shreds the bamboo into graceful, broom like pieces that retain thorny projections on each strand where the joint was cut. He slices it lengthwise in chopstick-size increments, then binds it with copper wire and leaves it to split further. He bakes long poles in a kiln, causing them to develop a rich chestnut hue and a subtle luster.

The Municipal Art Gallery exhibit, which includes only works in wood and bamboo, is a sensual as well as a visual experience. The fragrance of cedar wafts through the gallery, and the polished surface of the bamboo promise tactile delight. Dramatic lighting heightens the impact of the shapes, underscoring the idea that Kadonaga's work is no random exercise but a painstaking, calculated process.

It's tempting to read more and more into his forms the longer you look at them, and questions abound. Is he setting up an edgy dialectic between the brutality and serenity of nature? Where does his touch end and nature's take over? Is this a statement about human interaction with nature or an affront to artistic sensibilities?

Answers may remain as elusive as the spirit he's trying to capture, for Kadonaga's is an art that soothes, grates, amuses, puzzles, disturbs, and angers. But as Los Angeles audiences will be able to learn firsthand, it is also an art of substance, and viewers seldom from it unmoved.

Kazuo Kadonaga will be available for interviews for the duration of the exhibit. For further information, please contact ;

SPACE GALLERY, at (213) 461-8166,
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