



KAZUO KADONAGA

at Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, Downtown

by **Mario Cutajar** / Previews of Exhibitions **June 10 - July 29, 2001**

The essence of Kazuo Kadonaga's art is his making visible the hidden life of seemingly inanimate matter. Because the cycle of human life--birth, reproduction, death, decay--runs so much faster than that of the materials we use to fabricate our environment, it is easy to forget that these materials, too, are in flux and subject to the same pitilessly impersonal processes that rule our lives. Kadonaga's entire career as an artist has been devoted to devising strategies for



Installation view of cast glass sculptures at artist's studio.



"Glass No.4E," cast glass,
33 x 34 1/2", 1998.

trapping the moments of transition between physical states that give things like glass, wood, and paper their characteristic qualities.

In the case of a series of paper pieces Kadonaga did in the early '80s, the transition from one state to another is recorded as an actual fault line in the material. In these works, which typify the artist's working methods, Kadonaga first familiarized himself the process of large-scale paper manufacture, then developed a concept for adapting the process to his own ends, and finally had the pieces fabricated by others according to his specifications. The finished products took the form of stacked reams of paper--some as much as six feet long--that abruptly transition from a single compressed block to a swollen layering of numerous,

separated sheets, almost as if one were witnessing the transformation of raw paper pulp into that quintessential human artifact, the book. The themes of layering, accumulation, growth and their inversions (delamination, erosion, destruction) recur in Kadonaga's work despite the shift of his attention from one material to another. He has turned squared-off logs into stacks of wood sheets that warp and curl as they dry out, charred logs buried in pyramids of ash to reveal the gradual transformation along the length of the logs of wood into charcoal, split the ends of bamboo poles into giant whisks, and orchestrated "conversations" that were an exchange of noises given off by the cracking of wood and bamboo.

Sometime in the late '80s Kadonaga started experimenting with poured molten glass and has since produced the ever-expanding series of works that is most closely associated with his name. Characteristically, these works started with the artist spending an extended period of time hanging around a glass factory. Kadonaga then devised an automated process for melting, pouring, and cooling. The slow pouring can extend over a period of days. The cooling of the viscous mass of white-hot glass has to be very gradual and



"Wood No.7A," oak, 35 1/2 x dia. 5",
10 pieces, 1976

can take up to 100 days. Like the mineral formations they resemble (stalagmites and lava flows come to mind), the solidified glass taffy (some weighing over a 1,000 pounds) shows infinite variation within a single form.

Kadonaga's fascination with process reveals a close affinity to Post Minimalism, arte povera, and their Japanese version, mono-ha (the school of things). Inevitably, in this age of vanishing cultural identity and the compensatory obsession with cultural identity, some writers want to find vestiges of animistic Shintoism in his work. In his catalogue essay, Yukio Kondo demolishes this idea and notes that Kadonaga's work is marked by a "cleareyed attention to material facts supported by precise

calculation." I would suggest that what comes through in Kadonaga's work is what comes through process art in general: a post-industrial romanticism that reveres the impersonality of industrial fabrication the way the original romantics revered the raw power of nature. Tacit in that reverence for heavy industry is an acquiescence to the limited control man has over his technological creations.



"Silk No. 1, 2 Series", silkworms, pine and cedar,
dimensions variable, artist's studio view, 1986.