

To Capture Time

By Ric Collier (Director Salt Lake Art Center)

Kazuo Kadonaga consistently chooses common materials, not to disguise their familiarity, but to call attention and give worth to their inherent qualities. Then he methodically identifies the simplest manipulation and, like an alchemist, proceeds to reorder the natural order of the materials so they take on new significance and meaning. Because of this approach, time becomes his most important medium, both as a tool and a vital element within each piece. He wrestles with materials that are particularly susceptible to unpredictable environments and joyously acknowledges chance; for example, the flaws and imperfections found in his glass works embody chance and fragility in the environment.

Kazuo, from his earliest sculptures made in the mid-seventies, has chosen materials, perhaps banal to some viewers, that are readily available. He utilizes well-known materials like wood, paper, bamboo, and silk—materials common in his everyday surroundings as well as that of his audience. His choices have been clear and simple—cedar or pine wood, handmade mulberry paper, native bamboo and the exquisite silkworm. In doing so, he maintains the simplicity of the materials in the finished work, he keeps clear the process for making it, and in the end, he keeps the work from looking “Japanese.” In the late eighties he chose glass, simple clear window glass, as the new material with which to collaborate. Interestingly, of all the materials he has chosen to date, glass is the only inorganic substance he has utilized.

Time is an enduring characteristic of Kazuo and his work. Without expectation of the outcome, he grants time to explore and recognize the inherent limitations of selected materials, to select an appropriate process and to determine the extent of his own knowledge and endurance. To him perhaps it is *time*—time to do the necessary research, time to experiment, time to make mistakes, time to seek advice and examine the information—that constitutes the “art.” The recognition of time as a significant element of the work allows him to become comfortable, at ease, intuitive with each material. Time also allows a maturity of the work, of himself, and potentially the viewer. These pieces require a real expenditure of time on the viewer’s part to appreciate the evidence of time embedded in the work.

As with the other materials, finding ease with glass

took time. For nearly fifteen years, Kazuo has been thinking, researching and working with glass. It was not until the mid-nineties, after several attempts, that he was able to produce a piece through a technique of his own design with which he was comfortable. This process entails patience and time—forty-eight hours to pour a continuous string of molten glass from a furnace located ten feet above a preheated kiln. The glass threads through a twelve-inch opening in the top of the kiln onto a steel plate inside. There, in a closed, computer-controlled environment, the approximately 1,500-pound random accumulation of liquid glass will rest, slowly cooling for 120 days to room temperature before it is removed. More so than with the other materials that Kazuo uses, glass has its own peculiar characteristics and is not so controllable. But just as with his chosen materials, the environment contributes significantly to the look of the finished glass work. The melted window glass flows in a liquid thread from the furnace to the kiln through an environment of studio air that varies in relative humidity, ambient temperature, and air-borne pollutants from minute to minute, day to night for two twenty-four hour days. Close examination of each green translucent mound will reveal the random nature of this dramatic activity, including the resulting imperfections and bubbles caused by the unstable air captured within the glass over the length of the pour. A large bubble of air in one of the works, captured for a lifetime, is reminiscent in spirit of an important work by Marcel Duchamp, *Air de Paris (50 cc of Paris Air)*. For each, Duchamp and Kadonaga, this “event of capture” adds a sense of intrigue for what we cannot see but only imagine.

The glass works assembled for this exhibition present the viewer with confirmation of the artist’s successful collaboration with a common material, a simple process, and an unpredictable environment. He has achieved equilibrium among these three elements, as well as between control and mystery, that stretches the limits of time. These works, with their visible hard ripples, are calendars imprinted with the subtle events of a specific forty-eight hours. Because of the impervious characteristics of glass, these events will be harbored, still and safe, for the longest of times—an eternity.