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"Kazuo Kadonaga: Elemental Materials in Contemporary Art" is a first San Diego museum Exhibition for the Japanese artist. Here, his "log" is actually 500 thin slices of wood.

The paradox man

**Kazuo Kadonaga's works at Mingei International Museum
reflect an artist's response to different mediums**

By Robert L. Pincus / ART CRITIC-The San Diego Union-Tribune

It looks like an ordinary log. Move in close, however, and that assumption evaporates. The log is actually 500 thin slices of wood, reassembled to resemble the log they once were.

The concept is simple, the labor extensive. But Japanese artist Kazuo Kadonaga isn't trying to dazzle you. His art has a different emphasis. He coaxes you to think about the qualities of each

material he employs, be it wood, paper or glass.

"Kazuo Kadonaga: Elemental Materials in Contemporary Art," on view at Balboa Park's Mingei International Museum, is a first San Diego museum exhibition for the artist. (He had a solo show at Palomar College's Boehm Gallery in 1982.) The artist has also had considerable exposure in West Coast and Southwest venues as

well as some shows in Europe.

The Mingei is featuring a spectrum of his art, stretching back to the late 1970s. Wood was his first material, and while his art isn't autobiographical, the choice of wood carries associations with his childhood. His family ran a lumber mill when he was a boy.

The beauty in some of his strongest sculptures hinges on paradox: The slices of wood are delicate, while the object as a whole conveys solidity. He obviously relishes this effect, working variations on it. The shape of the sculpture (or log) can be squared and rounded. Sections of wood can be long or squat.

The drying of the wood, after it's sliced, can create warping effects, which Kadonaga considers to be part of his aesthetic. It's simply part of the process.

He performs a different formal paradox in "Wood No. 111 DB" from 1989. The cuts have jagged lines at one end of the wood block and straight edges at the other.

Each shift in material seems to prompt a different type of work. Kadonaga doesn't worry himself with creating a unified style in his art so much as a stylistic response to each different medium.

For bamboo, he's used kiln drying, which gives its surfaces a burnished orange look. There are 50 15-foot sections in "Bamboo No. 1B," propped at an angle against a wall. The angled rectangle has an understated elegance, but walk under it and the shadows create an intricate composition on the wall.

Shapes remain simple in Kadonaga's art. In this respect he was influenced by minimalism and art povera, both significant movements in his formative years. (His first show was in 1971.) But the artist's fascination with the intrinsic qualities of any given material links him with Isamu Noguchi and Japanese

modernism in general.

His stacked and bound sheets of handmade paper are rectangular or triangular. The individual sheets are numerous: 1,500 in "Paper No. 1 BB" and 1,700 in "Paper No. 1 X." (These compositions date from the 1980s.) The mass in each work has a soft, sensuous quality, created by separating the individual sheets and letting them dry.

Kadonaga does something different in "Paper No. 1 BF," which evokes an asymmetrical book. On one side, he separates the sheets and lets them swell. On the other, he doesn't, so the stack remains far flatter. The contrast is dramatic.

Glass is his favored medium in recent years. The examples in this medium are both strange and lovely, their surfaces a shifting spectrum of greens and whites. They look like poured shapes, which is true to their method of creation. They appear almost fluid, too, as if they might alter with the slightest touch.

The artist's method is what creates these qualities. It requires the melting of plate glass, which is then poured for 48 hours into a cooling furnace. Temperature is slowly reduced to prevent cracking. Then, the final form sits for 100 days before it can be removed from the furnace. Gravity and viscosity determine the final shape, which varies considerably from sculpture to sculpture.

There are three of them on view. One is wide and bulbous. Another has three cylindrical segments. The third is akin to an irregularly shaped tower. Like all of his work, they don't clamor for your attention. Their effect is more like a whisper. Yet their voice, if you listen closely, offers the sound of restful poetry.