



Kazuo Kadonaga at Samuel Freeman

By Annie Buckley for GLASS Magazine

Fall 2008

The opposing forces of development and decay has been the subject of artist Kazuo Kadonaga's work in various media for nearly 40 years, but this exploration is most widely associated with the glassworks the artist has been making since the 1980s. Drawing on both intense study and deep fascination, Kadonaga has developed a unique automated process for melting, pouring, and cooling glass. The resulting sculptures are both serious and fanciful. From afar, they resemble the tops of fairy-tale castles or giant mounds of fluffy whipped cream, but up close the works take on a meditative quality. Minute variations in color, shape, and light ripple through the striated patterns in an echo of the time-based processes used to create them.

Each form begins as molten glass, often clear. Poured in a gradual, steady stream over a period of time- normally up to 48 hours- the largest pieces weigh over 1,000 pounds and can take several months to cool. The bulbous cone shapes, topped with tiny drips of glass in a kind of nest, are heavily dependent on the way in which glass responds to heat. At Samuel Freeman Gallery in Los Angeles, four of the largest of Kadonaga's glass sculptures were exhibited on the patio gallery in the spring, allowing the California air and sunshine to penetrate and reflect the dense, light-filled forms, an installation that accentuated the power and fragility of the sculptures.

Kadonaga has approached wood, paper, and silk in a similar way, letting the process and structure of each material dictate the final form. Because of this, his works have been associated with various Western movements, including Arte Povera, Process Art, and even Fluxus. However, Kadonaga himself is not directly associated with these movements, and his process maintains a uniquely Japanese dedication to time and specificity.

Before developing his current mode of working with glass, the artist studied the material, its properties, and the mechanics of glass fabrication for many years. So while the spontaneity of the pour itself is evident in each organic shape, his is not a process born of experimentation and performance but of deliberation and planning. Kadonaga's relationship to materials has also been misconstrued as a kind of spiritual work, whereas his devotion is more concrete. In this way, it can be more readily associated with two Japanese contemporary art movements- Gutai and Monoha. The Gutai Art Association began in Osaka, and most of the works were completed in the 1950s, when Kadonaga was a child. Gutai can be seen as a forerunner to performance and other kinds of pre-Conceptual work; take, for example, Murakami Saburo's 1955 work in which he flung himself through a large sheet of paper, evoking both performance and materiality. Monoha is translated as the "object school" and flourished in the sixties and seventies. Monoha artists' relationship to materials relates to that of Arte Povera artists, with a deeper investment in human's relationship to matter.

Kadonaga's work resonates with each of these approaches to contemporary art, and yet he is an idiosyncratic vision that developed predominant out of his experience and material investigations. He was born in the Ishikawa Prefecture of Japan in 1946 to a family that owned a lumber mill. Rather than entering the family business, he studied painting but eventually decided that this was not his forte and began to experiment with wood. By paring away the surface of logs, he revealed their inner structure. His works in paper and silk, preceding the glass sculptures, take similarly Thoughtful and process-oriented approaches. In each medium, whether large or small, Kadonaga's sculptures maintain a consistent sense of beauty and innovation.