

Kazuo Kadonaga *Silk*

by Daisuke Murata

Kazuo Kadonaga is an internationally active contemporary artist based in the United States.

Kadonaga's art is characterized by his elimination of arbitrary elements in the use of common materials such as paper, wood, glass, and silk. Throughout his career, he has assigned the leading role to the material and its inherent qualities and displayed objects and phenomena in transitional states, thereby casting light on the relationship between human beings and nature. His SILK series holds particular importance among his themes, for it deals with a material animated by the phenomenon of life.

In the 1980s, Kadonaga committed to art the process by which silkworms spin cocoons, and exhibited the artworks in the United States. In 2006, he committed to art the entire process by which silkworms form a cocoon, become moths and die, in a gallery at Nizayama Forest Art Museum in Toyama. This time, at 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa, he has chosen to consolidate the raw silk extruded by silkworms in a "plane cocoon," then return the worms to nature among mulberry trees. SILK is a story of silkworms and a story of people.

Some 20,000 silkworms hand-raised at a Niigata silk farm were transported into the museum for the project. Inside a gallery, Kadonaga established a large 9x15m net and contrived a system of rotating it to an upside-down position. He then released countless silkworms on the net. Employing the worms' instinct to climb to the highest elevation, he rotated the net to an upside-down position and back several times a day. This act was the artist's sole intervention. During three days and nights, the thousands of silkworms spun a broad silk surface. About half of them weakened and died midway. Some among the survivors will likely pupate and mature. Even if the mature worms should mate, however, so that the females produce eggs and the eggs hatch, the next generation of silkworms will probably lack sufficient strength to live. An animal artificially developed by mankind over a period of 5,000 years, silkworms depend entirely on humans for reproduction and can only survive for one generation. The limited life energy of the silkworms Kadonaga decided to return to the mulberry trees.

In the harsh heat of early September, after the silkworms had finished extruding silken thread, Kadonaga quietly returned them to the ground among the mulberry trees. Standing among the trees, he touched the worms to confirm their softness and temperature. The figure of Kazuo Kadonaga, thus, his SILK project complete, seemed to embody a query to us as people of 21st-century society—about art creation, about human behavior, and about the ways of nature.

English Translation by Brian Amstutz

(Curator: 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa)

Project report on Silk, "Silent Echoes: Collection Exhibition II"

http://www.kanazawa21.jp/data_list.php?g=26&d=10