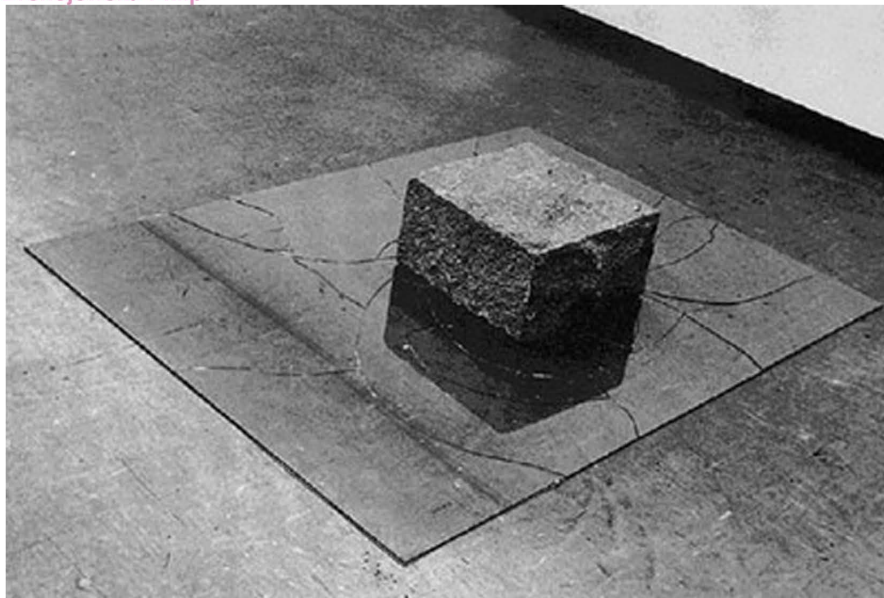




Mono-Ha Revisited

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Mono-Ha doesn't translate well into English but a close approximation is the School of Thing. Critics used the term pejoratively to describe an upstart and loosely knit group of Japanese artists in the late 1960s who were making art in opposition to American and European Modernism. Nearly a quarter of a century after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, these artists strove to achieve art attuned to a Japanese sense of space and materials. Operating between 1968 and 1973, much of their work has not been seen since it was made, but there is a fresh opportunity in a large scale, museum-quality exhibition at Blum & Poe Gallery: ***Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-Ha***, through April 12. The show was organized by Mika Yoshitake of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, DC. Her title refers to "the attitude of aesthetic detachment and renewal of matter in response to the immanent loss of the object as a sun in Japanese postwar art practice."

The artist most associated with this group Lee Ufan is Korean but was educated in Japan and as an outsider, perhaps, felt a strong need to make a statement. He wrote essays and books about the intentions of the artists. His ***retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum*** last summer was one of my favorite exhibitions in some time. The restraint and tension in his paintings and sculptures there were truly masterful. This exhibition includes *Relatum*, a square block of stone dropped upon a sheet of glass to produce a web of cracks. First performed in 1969, it was recreated by the artist at Blum & Poe. Many of such works were meant to be temporal but, documented as they were in photographs, some of the artists agreed to recreate them for this show. This includes the first official Mono-Ha piece, *Phase-Mother Earth*, 1968, by Nobuo Sekine: a cylinder of earth, about eight by eight feet, excavated from the earth and standing neatly to one side of its enormous hole in the gallery's garden. Inside the gallery is *Phase of Nothingness-Water*, 1970, rectangular and cylindrical black steel containers, each the size of a dining table, filled with identical amounts of water.

Though produced around the time of Process art and Earthworks in the United States, these pieces have distinct identities: elegant and exacting and distinctly Japanese. Proof of their success may lie in the fact that the younger generation of Japanese artists then rebelled against these artists and their ideas. There has been little opportunity to see the work until recently so kudos to the gallery, which will publish a comprehensive catalog in May.

