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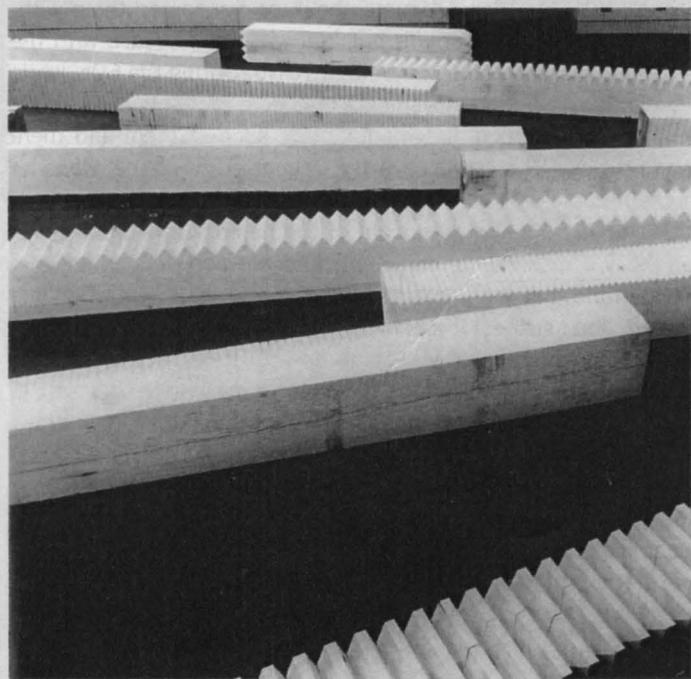


What Is Mono-Ha?

This exhibition, "What is Mono-ha?" is the first of its kind to introduce to a Chinese audience the work of the Mono-ha artists whom the Tokyo Gallery has been representing for so many years. BTAP's show aims to consider the meaning of the term Mono-ha and brings together pre-existing and remade works by the principal members of Mono-ha: Lee Ufan, Nobuo Sekine, Koji Enokura, Susumu Koshimizu, Kishio Suga, Katsuro Yoshida, Katsuhiko Narita and Jiro Takamatsu. Furthermore, at BTAP Annex in the Xiedao area, there will be a display of works by Chinese artists who have been influenced by Mono-ha, such as Zhu Jinshi, Shi Hui and Sui Jianguo. Four internationally active art critics and curators, Yusuke Nakahara (Japan), Huang Du (China), Simon Groom (England) and Charles Merewether (America) have written essays for the exhibition catalogue.

Most active between the late 60s and early 70s, Mono-ha was a group of artists who sought to challenge pre-existing perceptions of material and space. The origin of the name Mono-ha is unclear. Although it would be translated roughly as "school of things," the works of the Mono-ha artists are as much about the space and the interdependent relationships between those "things" as the "things" themselves. Using materials such as earth, water, wood, metal, cotton, paper, stone and mirrors, the juxtaposition of natural and man-made materials—left as far as possible in an unaltered state—allowed materiality speak for itself, almost entirely free of artistic intervention. Through this process, the Mono-ha artists aimed to abandon the creation of things and instead rearranged things into artworks, drawing attention to complex relationships between material, space and viewers. □

Koshimizu Susumu, *From Surface to Surface*, 1971. Wood



Encounters with Landscape

Charles Merewether

Between the opening of Nobuo Sekine's *Phase—Mother Earth* in Suma Rikyu Park, Kobe, in October 1968 and the close of the Japan World Exposition (Expo '70) in Osaka two years later, the social and cultural landscape of the country went through a period of tumultuous change.

In the years leading up to and immediately after 1968, numerous political groups were formed, events organized and ideas expressed that coalesced in their profound skepticism towards the Japanese state and continuing ratification of the US-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) that endorsed US military and imperialist interests in Asia and the war in Vietnam. This provoked widespread demonstrations and violent clashes with the police across Japan and an increasingly volatile political and social situation. Significant to this movement were artistic groups who saw these events as part of a larger problem concerning Western modernity and a technocratic imagination that was increasingly shaping the character and values of modern Japanese society and culture. This critique fostered a vital challenge to the values and conventions of art practice within Japan and flourishing of experimentation in anti-art and non-art practices. Amongst those formed during this period were two short-lived groups: the artistic movement or school known as Mono-ha and small number of photographers and writers who gathered around *Provoke* magazine. While operating within radically different conceptual frameworks, they shared a profound skepticism about the systems and language of art and, with it, disenchantment towards the social values of the time and contemporary art in an age of information technology. In the following remarks, I wish to explore the point of intersection and difference between these two groups in their challenge to the dominance of modernism and the regime of the visible.

Disenchantment with Modernity

Sekine's *Phase—Mother Earth* was composed of a 2.7-meter cylindrical mound of earth besides which was an identically sized hole from which the earth had been removed. In an article on Sekine published in 1971, the artist and theorist Lee Ufan wrote of how *Phase—Mother Earth* had "presented the earth within the being of the world....[that] does not mean to turn the world into an object of cognition as with the case of 'objet' but, to liberate it amidst nonobjective phenomena, into the realm of perception; that is, to let the world be in its own being." Sekine had "revealed the world as-it-is, an encounter that had rendered the earth as the earth."

Expo '70 stood in diametrical opposition to this sense of engagement with the natural environment through art. Succeeding to attract artists from all over the world including artists from within Japan whose practice until that moment had challenged the conforming boundaries of art practice, Expo transformed the scene of contemporary art into a massive scale entertainment event.

Continues on www.artfairsinternational.com

7刊)

文化 批評と表現

アンボ、大阪万博、学園紛争など、1970年頃の騒然たる世情の中で静かに異彩を放っていた現代美術界の「もの派」そのもの派の実態が、関根伸夫、李禹煥、菅木志雄、小清水漸ら8作家の当時の作品(多くは再制作ないし復元)によって中国で初めて紹介された。5年前から北京郊外の大山子芸術区に拠点を置いて「芸術のアジア時代」の到来に備えてきたBTAP(東京画廊主宰の北京東京アートプロジェクト)が、時やよしとばかり、同画廊長年の蓄積を掘り起こす形で「もの派とは?」展を催したのである(24日まで)。

「時やよし」といっても、今の中国、言い過ぎになるかも知れないが、物欲と功利に走り過ぎて、同じ物といっても、儒学が古くから大切にしていた格物致知、つまり物事本来の理を窮めるところに、

「もの派」展に見えは、中国の若い批評家、黄(体験にのみ根差していたようだが、その体験は商業性で動いている今日の中国美術には重要な指針である。)

もの(と人)が在り、ものを見るとはどういうことを哲学的に問い、そのために手垢のつかない物質・物体の本来の在り様をさまざまに演出し、たいわば現代版「格物精神」の実践者たちであった。

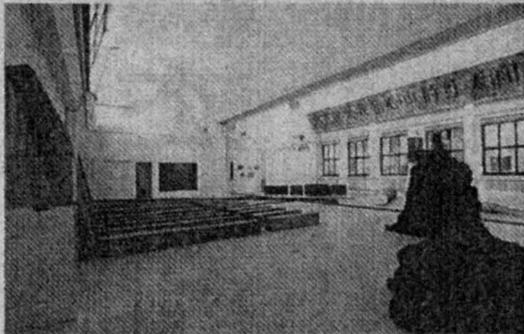
両者の遭遇、いかにもミス

「もの」をめぐる経験の違い

北京の「もの派とは?」展を見て

峯村 敏明

北京のもの派展会場(手前の油土の塊は関根伸夫、左後方の角材群は小清水漸の作品) 一佐藤毅撮影



り続けるはずだ」という趣旨の発言を熱く繰り返していた。とはいえ、その指針は非直接的にゆっくりに利用してくるものがない。日対するに日本は、善かれあしは、資本主義の経験の違いを、戦後の60年代いっは

地下活動でそれまでの公認社会主義リアリズムの絵画からいっきよに秩序攪乱的な身体表現へ、そしてシニカルなポツッ絵画に移行したけれど、既知の物体を知的・遊戯的に操作してその意味体系の変化を築きむといった、シュルレアリスムのオブジェ作法を経験する余裕を持たなかった。対するに日本は、善かれあしは、資本主義の経験の違いを、戦後の60年代いっは

いを通してオブジェの深化・退廃を経験した。もの派は、まさにこのシュルレアリスム由来の知的・遊戯的なオブジェ観を人間中心主義思想の残滓としてきっぱり振り捨てたときに成立した。まさに関根伸夫の言う「ほこりを払ってモノを見る」覚悟の表明であった。西国間で経験の中身と厚みはかなり違いがあるということがある。

いまが建設ラッシュと爆食の盛りである中国では、オブジェとの対決はもう少し先のことであろう。ものを見ること、この世界にもっとも在ることの意味を、静かに問う格物精神がよみがえるのは、さらさら……。とはいえ、展覧会場で個々の作品を静かに見て回る若い観客の姿を見れば、ここから何かが始まらな

(みねむら・としあき「美術評論家」)

A modern Japanese Stonehenge in Cambridge

Last year the Japanese avant-garde sculpture group Mono-ha held a rare exhibition at Kettle's Yard in the University of Cambridge. It ran from 26 May to 22 July 2001 and was extremely well received. People came from all over the UK to see the exhibits, which formed part of the celebrations of 'Japan 2001'. At the time the British organizers of the exhibition wished to show my work *Phase-Mirror*, but in the end this project proved to be too expensive and was not in the end realized.

While in Cambridge I visited a number of college gardens and the Master of Sewlyn College, Professor Richard Bowring, expressed great interest in my work. Since then the fellows of the college have agreed that if enough funds can be raised for the project they would like to place my work in their gardens and they have to date raised £5000 to this end. Since they have shown such interest and understanding of my work, I would like to help them succeed in placing my work in Cambridge. There are not many pieces of modern Japanese art in the UK.

It has given me a possibility that I may be able to place my work.

My *Phase-Mirror* consists of a tall column of highly polished steel surmounted by a huge stone. It reflects and refracts the changing light of the world around it underneath a solid stone that often appears to be floating in the sky. I like to think of it as a modern Japanese Stonehenge.

Since there are very few pieces of contemporary Japanese art exhibited outside in the UK, this is an opportunity not to be missed. To be able to show *Phase-Mirror* permanently in the garden of a Cambridge college will mark an important moment not only in my own career but in the development of modern Japanese art in general. I would like to think that

this sculpture could stand as a permanent commemoration of Japan 2001 and of the enduring friendship between our two countries. I hope you will be able to help me bring this project to a satisfactory conclusion.

Nobuo SEKINE

NOTE

Mono-ha is the name given to a group of artists working in Japan from 1968 to 1973, whose work had a tremendous impact on Japanese Contemporary Art. They use such everyday 'things' such as stone, glass, iron sheets, ropes, wood and earth, and at the time were both acclaimed and denounced by contemporary critics for their radical revision of traditional assumptions about art. Their use of natural materials and their questioning of the boundaries of art share many affinities with movements in the West such as Minimalism and Arte Povera. They have held many exhibitions throughout the world, including the University Annex Museum of Art, Rome, and the Musee D'Art Moderne in Saint-Etienne, France

the five best shows nationwide

THE TIMES 2/6/01



OUT OF LINE
York City Art Gallery, until Jul 15
(01904 551861)

THIS COLLECTION of drawings from the Arts Council Collection boasts pencil studies by David Hockney, Henry Moore and Bridget Riley alongside works by the cream of the hip young art world, including Graham Gussin and Michael Landy. Richard Hamilton's *Swinging London* is a colour study of Mick Jagger, while pages from Eduardo Paolozzi's *Drawings from Rembrandt* sketchbooks are also on display.

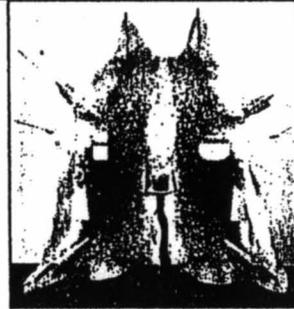
Amber Cowan



REMBRANDT'S WOMEN
National Gallery of Scotland,
Jun 8-Sep 2 (0131-624 6200)

REMBRANDT'S LIFE was dominated by the influences of his mother Cornelia, his wife Saskia and his mistress Hendrickje Stoffels. In this first major exhibition of Rembrandt's portraits of women, his changing stylistic approaches are illustrated. He unsentimentally viewed the uglier features of women's bodies, yet his portraits were infused with an emotional depth that Van Gogh praised as "heartbroken tenderness".

AC



THE SILK PURSE PROCEDURE
Arncliffe and Spike Island, Bristol,
until Jul 8 (0117-929 9191)

"MAKING A silk purse from a sow's ear" is the motto behind this group show of creations made from junk. Cornelia Parker has converted a pornographic film into intriguing drawings, Simon Wood has contributed a plan to convert his dead body into a diamond and Dario Robleto's *There's an Old Flame Burning in Your Eyes* is created from matchsticks capped with melted-down country and western records.

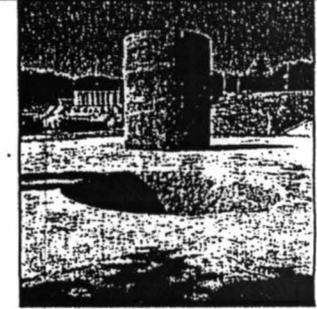
AC



NOBUYOSHI ARAKI:
TOKYO STILL LIFE
Ikon Gallery, Birmingham,
until Jul 8 (0121-248 0708)

ARAKI IS one of Japan's pre-eminent photographers, though stereotypical notions of oriental artfulness are conspicuously absent from these pictures. Instead, Araki has trawled the dark underbelly of Tokyo clubland for snapshots that flit from flagrant erotica to urban exotica. Shot between the Sixties and the Nineties, his more controversial pictures hang calmly next to traditional works.

AC



MONO-HA: SCHOOL OF THINGS
Kettle's Yard, Cambridge,
until Jul 22 (01223 352124)

THE MONO-HA first leapt to prominence towards the end of the Sixties and were the first wave of Japanese avant-garde artists to achieve international acclaim. Comprising a group of disparate artists whose philosophy was to work with natural materials, the movement fizzled out due to the ephemeral nature of many of their installations. This show resurrects the work of the surviving members of the clique.

AC

Sculptor returns to Cambridge

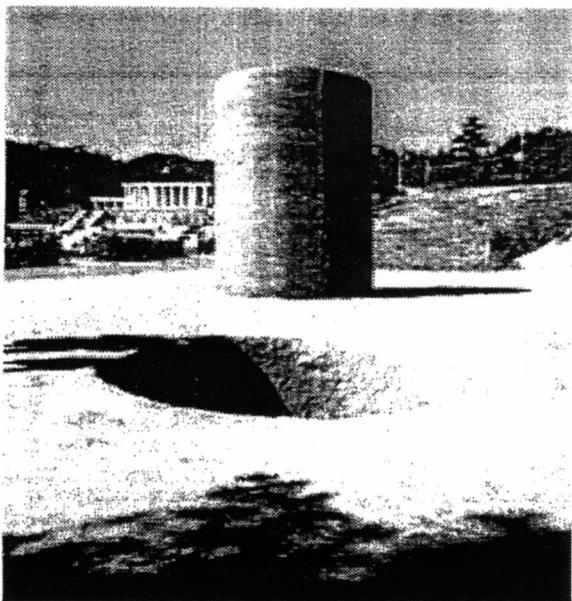


Photo courtesy of Kettle's Yard

Kettle's Yard will be welcoming an old friend on Saturday 7 July when Professor Phillip King CBE RA, sculptor and President of the Royal Academy of Arts, visits the gallery to give a talk on his passion for Japanese art.

Professor King has a special interest in Japanese art, having visited and lived in Japan. He spent three months in Japan while he was preparing an exhibit for Expo '70 in Tokyo and in 1993 his work took on Japanese influences, when he began to work in ceramics, producing unglazed vessel-themed pieces. He continues to exhibit in, and visit Japan.

Phillip King's talk is timed to coincide with the current exhibition of Japanese art, Mono-ha: School of Things. Mono-Ha is the name given to a group of artists who came to critical attention in Japan in the late 1960s. Meaning literally 'school of things', Mono-ha refers not only to the material things from which their work is made - such as clay, stones, glass, iron plates, ropes and earth - but also to the character of the works themselves. Neither quite sculptures nor installations, their very existence appears to confound traditional artistic genres. This is the first exhibition by Mono-ha in the UK.

Philip King

Philip King is one of Britain's most restless and innovative sculptors. Just as the work of Mono-ha challenges through its use of materials, so too King has been long associated with an experimental attitude to materials. In the 1960s his use of fibreglass, plastic and fluorescent colours marked a major departure with the classical materials of the preceding period.

Although King studied Modern Languages at Cambridge, he made his first sculptures while an undergraduate here in the 1950s, afterwards studying sculpture at St Martin's School of Art in London. He was elected President of the Royal Academy in December 1999.

Further details

Phillip King's talk will be on Saturday 7 July, 2001 at 4.00pm in Kettle's Yard Gallery. Admission is free.

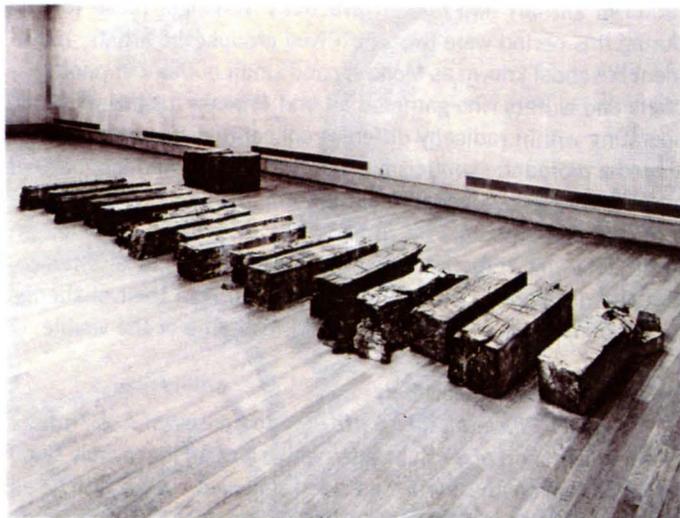
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Japanese Mono-ha in China

Huang Du

Mono-ha is considered a branch in modern art that emerged between 1968-1971. Even though it is difficult to trace back to the origin of the concept in Mono-ha, its significance and meaning in Japanese art history should not be ignored. As the Japanese art critic Toshiaki Minemura has pointed out, "The original founding of Mono-ha is still unclear. However, we cannot disapprove the fact that, on a broad or specific level of meaning, its function was a common tendency during the 70s, and in that process, a group formed without saying." In fact, the debate that evolved around Mono-ha has gone beyond that short period. Mono-ha has found Asia to be the center of experimentation in contemporary art, and this has redefined the identity of culture and the direction of Japanese art's development. Most Mono-ha artists were born in the 40s, and so are influenced by American postwar thinking and culture. They are against blindly appropriating contemporary American hegemony, and promote unique meaning and form in contemporary Asian art.

Since the Meiji Restoration, Japanese art has been following American avant-garde art in terms of absorption and assimila-



tion. In the late 60s, the emergence of Mono-ha changed this situation. Mono-ha redirected the discussion of "Easternizing" art. Lee Ufan is thought to be the founder of Mono-ha theory. Theoretically, Lee Ufan is influenced by Japanese Zen thoughts, promoting the mutual dependence of consciousness and existence, which is the relationship between Mono-ha and its given space. He believes, "We must learn to look at objects with their original appearance, rather than to objectify this world with human rationalization." Lee Ufan's view sufficiently reveals the most lucid criticism on occidental centrism in Japanese contemporary art history, since Lee himself was once influenced by philosophers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Michel Foucault, who were also critical of Western ideas.

Continues on www.artfairsinternational.com



Mono-ha's Origins

Yusuke Nakahara

I remember the name "Mono-ha" appearing in around 1967, but it has not been verified what month of the year that was. Nevertheless, even now it is not clear who came up with the name or what they had in mind when they created it. However, today the term Mono-ha has become known even in Europe and America.

There is a precedent for a case like this, where a name spread all over the world and was accepted without explanation despite its unknown origins, and that is the case of "Pop Art." The term was born in London in the 50s and, in its successive realization as a movement in New York during the 60s, it suddenly went international. However, it is unclear who invented the term or how exactly the term Pop Art emerged.

It was the same with "Dada." There were many opinions about the term's origin with no clear consensus over who came up with the name "Dada" or why they chose it. I was not around in the places where (or the times when) the terms of Dada or Pop Art came about, so I accepted them without questioning their origin, but that was not the case with the emergence of the name Mono-ha in Tokyo. During the 60s, while observing various the movements that were products of that age, I was making critical judgments about each of them and there was no way I could not have the accepted the name Mono-ha without question.

I do not know who thought of the name, but I think it was probably a disparaging comment, and an inconsequential one. At the time that the name appeared, there were few critics like myself, and I suspect it was for that very reason that many people failed to take notice of who came up with it. In fact, at no time did I ever use the name Mono-ha in any of my writing. In a sense, perhaps that was due to what some would think of as my narrow-minded attitude, but there was one other reason.

The decade of the 60s was a time during which there was the constant appearance of "Such-and-Such Art" or "Such-and-Such-ism," and perhaps one can say that Pop Art was a very popular example of that time.

Continues on www.artfairsinternational.com

Suga Kishio, *Hochiritsu*, 1971. Wood, stone, woodchips, 280x600x500cm

Encountering Mono-ha

Simon Groom

One cannot help but be struck by a sense of irony when confronting Mono-ha and their works. Our first, and natural response, is to ask ourselves what these strange objects and assemblages before us are. Why are they here? What do they mean? How are we to understand them? Despite, or perhaps because of, the simplicity of their works, both in form and material, the charge of incomprehensibility has often been leveled against the group. It seems the simpler a thing is, the more difficult it becomes to understand. This is unfortunate, but serves to underscore the legitimacy of the group's various approaches to one of the most fundamental questions concerning art: the relation between reality and perception.

It is thus somewhat fitting that the gap between reality and perception should also operate at the level of their name, "Mono-ha," which translates as "school of things." Coined by critics some years later, the name was slightly misleading, not only because there never was a unitary group, composed of a fixed

number of adherents with a manifesto, but also because, although the artists made use of "things," they were never limited to them. Things were not simply presented in and of themselves, as autonomous and self-contained (and to this extent their work differed from that of the Minimalists), but were conceived as an intermediary between the viewer and the world around him, just as the human body as a physical thing is the point of contact between the inner and outer world. Furthermore, the very act of naming, of appropriating "being" through language, was precisely the kind of colonial desire that the artists were so intent on countering. Their interest in "things," and their concern to foreground the materiality of the work itself through combinations and assemblages of heterogeneous elements, must be seen as part of their resistance to the gradual colonisation of the artwork by the idea, whose logical outcome was the complete de-materialisation of the work associated with Conceptualism, which was so prevalent at the time.

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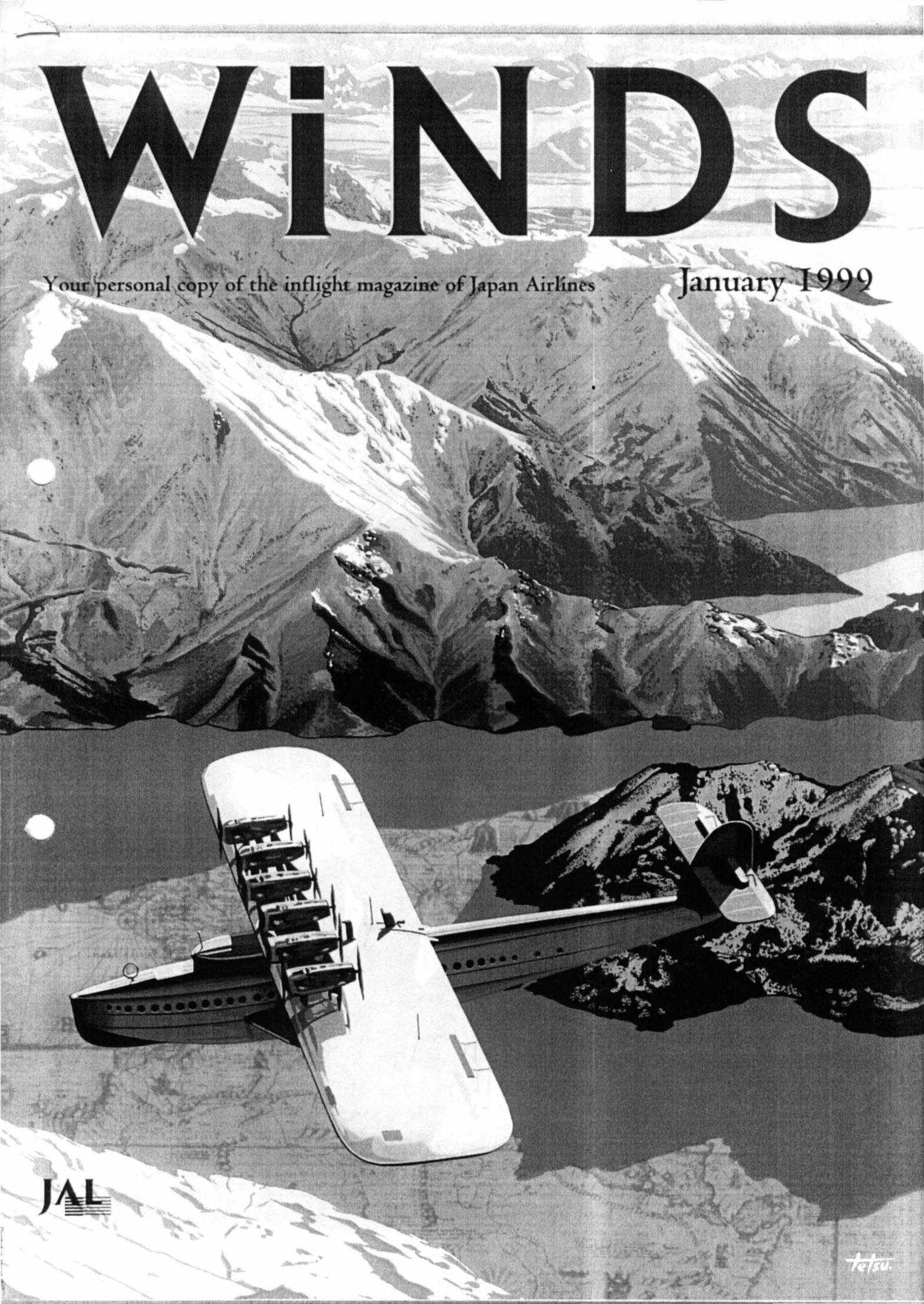


Sekine Nobuo, *Phase of Nothingness* – Oil Clay.

WINDS

Your personal copy of the inflight magazine of Japan Airlines

January 1999



JAL

tetsu.

Nobuo Sekine Terror

Just about the time the term “conceptual art” was finding its way into the vocabulary of Western contemporary art, Nobuo Sekine found himself suddenly the toast of Japan’s contemporary art scene thanks to a — quite literally — groundbreaking work that was the execution of a single concept. In his quest for a viable direction for painting as a postgraduate at Tama Art University in Tokyo in the later part of the 1960s, Sekine had become fascinated with the implications of the concepts of topology. Given that the laws of physics dictate it is impossible to create new matter, all our actions are limited to rearranging what already exists. Thus, the products of an artist’s actions, Sekine reasoned, could be considered “phases” in the rearrangement of things and spaces, aimed at a deeper understanding of their essential nature.

Determined to submit a work to the 1st Japan Contemporary Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition in 1968, but lacking both the money and technical skills to create a sculpture in traditional media like stone or bronze, Sekine decided to apply the principles of topology to the Earth itself. He opted to do this in a form that could be executed with the only resources he had — a capacity for physical labor and a group of similarly motivated friends.

He submitted a plan for a “phase conversion of the planet Earth,” in which he would dig a



Cone of an Egg, 1992

in the Bronze

by Robert Reed

cylindrical hole, 2.7 meters deep and 2.2 meters in diameter, in the soil of the park where the exhibition was being held. The excavated soil was to be piled up in an identical cylindrical shape standing several meters away and returned to the hole at the end of the show. In concept, the work would represent a "phase" in a topological equation, whereby if you began digging towards the Earth's center, in time the resulting pile of excavated material would exceed the mass of the original Earth itself and eventually result in a new, inverted Earth of the same mass.

To Sekine's surprise, the plan was accepted, and to his even greater delight the resulting work, titled *Phase — Mother Earth*, won the exhibition's coveted Asahi Shimbun Award. Japan's art critics were anxious to praise his work, though they seemed somehow to lack the right critical framework in which to do so. Ironically, it was a Korean artist, Lee U Fan, who amazed Sekine one day at a Tokyo gallery by launching into a philosophical analysis of Sekine's work that touched on almost all the ideas the Japanese artist had been considering. Sekine, Lee and a group of other artists began to meet regularly at a café near Tokyo's Shinjuku Station. There, over a period of nearly two years, they hashed out the premises for a truly Eastern contemporary art movement that would in time be called the Mono-Ha (literally, "Thing School"), arguably the most

influential of Japan's indigenous postwar art movements.

Besides introducing principles from the traditional Eastern philosophies of Taoism and Zen, one of the central themes to emerge in the works of the Mono-Ha artists involved something close to traditional Oriental animism, in which every object of nature has its own spirit. In Mono-Ha works, one of the aims became empowering the materials, or "things" the artists used, to speak for themselves about their own nature. Sekine readily admits his consciousness of animism and fascination with ancient monuments like Stonehenge. "When I see a great rock or boulder or a magnificent old tree, I actually tremble with excitement," he has written.

His next important work involved such a rock. When chosen to represent Japan at the 1970 Venice Biennale, he planned a monumental work that would put a large rock atop a stainless steel pillar, polished to a mirror-like finish. Friends rallied to help the young artist raise money for the project. Eventually, corporate sponsors were found, and Sekine recalls feeling like a conqueror of old as he rode a ferry in Venice on the Biennale's opening day with a crane and truck carrying the 16-ton rock to be mounted on the already installed stainless steel pillar.

This work was immediately acquired by the Louisiana Museum of Art in Denmark, where



Top to bottom: *Ripple Stone*, 1992; *Pedestal of the Sky*, 1992; *Cone — Mother Earth*, 1984 (photos this spread, Kansuke Tachibana)



it would be installed in the sculpture court and eventually supplemented by other works to form a "Sekine Corner" at this pioneering contemporary art museum. As for Sekine himself, he stayed on for 18 months in Europe, meeting and working with other artists.

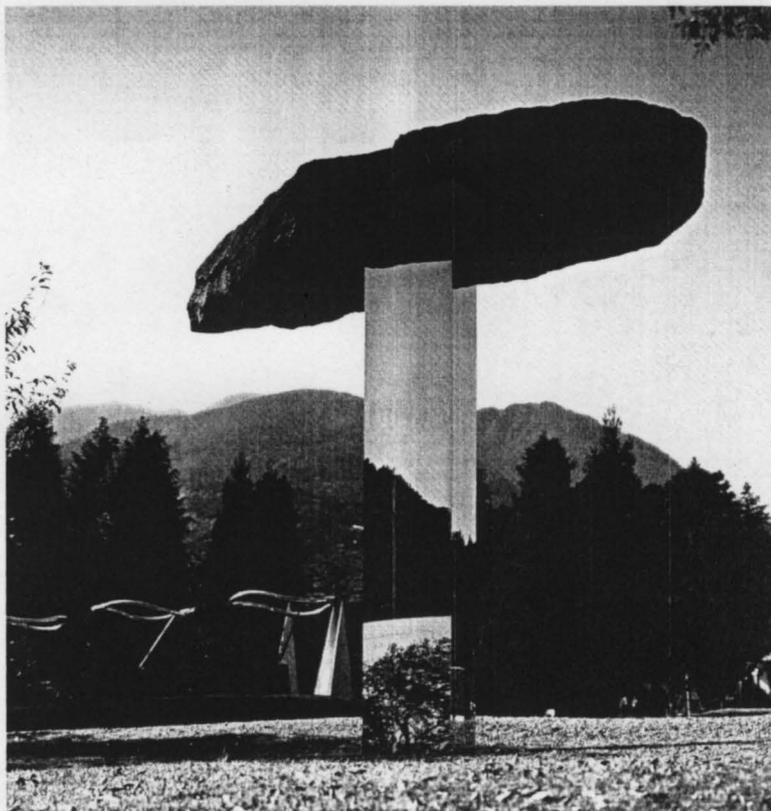
His return to Japan brought a sort of reverse culture shock. In Europe, he had seen how art could function to shape and enrich the urban environment, a *Phase of Nothingness, 1980*

concept almost nonexistent in modern Japanese cities. The success of a series of conceptual works of outdoor sculpture had turned the young painting student into a sculptor, and his experiences in Europe had given him a mission. In 1972, shortly after returning to Japan, Sekine established his Environment Art Studio, which to date has erected park and plaza monuments and created artistic spaces (environments in the 1970s sense of the term) in cities throughout Japan.

In the quarter century since the birth of the Environment Art Studio, Sekine has of course matured as an artist. He has become a reluctant master of the, as he terms it, "terrifying" art of bronze sculpture, where every slight mistake is cast for eternity in the bronze. He has ventured back to two-dimensional work with his *Phase Conception* series, in which he wreaks artful topological havoc on "canvases" formed of four thicknesses of handmade Japanese paper. Here,



Terumichi Nakazono



Koji Okumura

he cuts or gauges out pieces of the paper and then reapplies them in other places on the surface. Finally, the finished "paintings" are covered with a beautiful layer of gold leaf.

In getting to the heart of his more recent efforts as well, words are of little use to the artist. "Most of my works lately come to me in dream-like visions, as fleeting images that pass suddenly before my eyes," says Sekine as he walks around his studio, surrounded by plaster molds from past bronzes and miniature models of outdoor monuments, which are in themselves exquisite little sculptures. "Don't ask me to explain them."

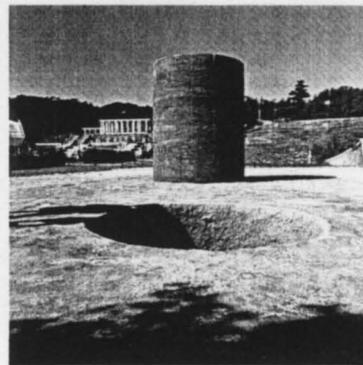
Indeed, it might be hard to "explain" a sharply pointed cone

Phase Conception — A Tale, 1989 (left); Phase — Mother Earth, 1968 (right)

in the center of a large egg shape, made transparent by seemingly random perforations. With these recent works, Sekine's art is in the realm of pure creation, by an artist who has stopped trying to conceptualize his inspirations. He has a

visual language, of course, consisting of several fundamental shapes like the cone, which he explains is "the shape you would get if the earth's surface were of a pliable material like rubber and you pinched one point and pulled it upwards." And he retains his Mono-Ha respect for the spirit in his material.

Of his future, the 56-year-old Sekine comments, "I am still young enough to have the energy and patience that these large public works demand. But I won't be for long. After that, I think I will concentrate on smaller, more personal works." So it would seem that he still has a few years yet to build his own Stonehenge. **W**



Osamu Murai

Reviews

■ Mono-ha – School of things

Kettle's Yard Cambridge May 26 to July 22

Step back in time to 1968, Europe and America are in political turmoil, the horrors of the Vietnam War are inciting fierce protests and demonstrations. Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King are assassinated in the same year, everywhere student riots and workers barricades symbolise the battle for democratic justice and protest against the strengthening grip of capitalism. In artistic circles the atmosphere is no less oppositional. Recall something of the now well-recounted scene: in New York, Richard Serra is defying gravity with his improbably propped lead sheeting, Robert Morris eschewing solid sculptural form is busily hacking up felt for his soft sculptures and, in Italy, a corresponding assault is convened by the proponents of what became categorised as Arte Povera, harnessing a wide variety of materials to challenge traditional sculptural conventions. Most western cultural commentators interpret the artistic revolutions of this time both as a direct reflection of social and political unrest and as a reactionary stance against the institutional authority of Modernism, bringing to an end the weary notions of the artist genius and the uniquely homogenous art object. Few critics though extend their enquiries beyond western boundaries to the art and culture of eastern countries.

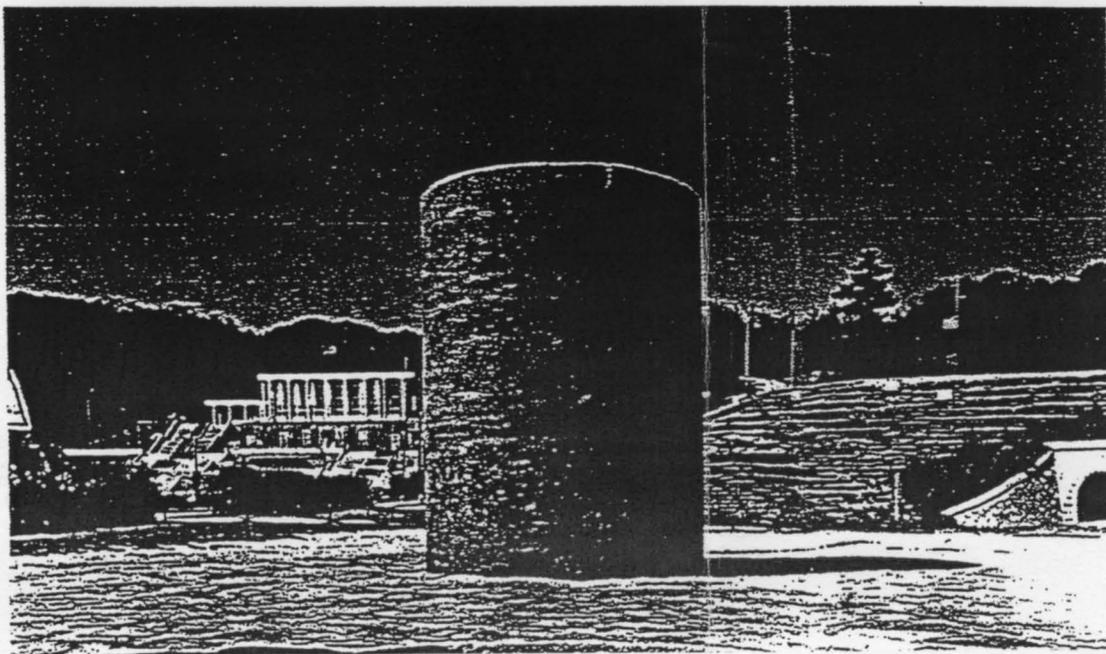
'Mono-ha – School of things' redresses this balance a little, allowing an opportunity to broaden our typically western-centric version of artistic development by turning critical attention to a group of artists working in Japan in the late 60s. The group's proponents were predominantly students and recent graduates of Tokyo

University, emerging at a time of severe political unrest in Japan with student riots sweeping Tokyo. The group's sculptural irreverence reflected the zeitgeist of revolution and social upheaval that characterised their era and shares many affinities with developments in western art movements of this time; as a visit to Tate Modern's current Arte Povera show will testify.

Literally translated as 'school of things', the name Mono-ha was retrospectively coined to describe the artists' shared fascination with the sculptural and philosophical potential of matter. Their works employ both traditional and innovative materials often in raw and un-formed states with only minimal intervention on the part of the artist. Contributing artist Lee Ufan succinctly encapsulates one of the underlying principles of the group: 'The highest level of expression is not to create something from nothing, but rather to nudge something which already exists so that the world shows up more vividly'. Sekine Nobuo's *Phase of Nothingness – Oil Clay*, 1969, dominates the central gallery space, consisting of huge formless lumps of clay rendered eternally malleable by their combination with oil. The irregular pitted surface of the slouching mounds attests to a multitude of Plasticine-starved visitors who have prodded and pawed the surface into a perpetual state of flux. The work makes visible an irresistible human urge to leave a physical mark in the world, as if making an imprint could somehow confirm our own existence in the physical realm.

The viewer is constantly steered to such ontological interpretations, confronted by works and philosophical statements that question the relationships between the material world and human interaction with it. In Sekine Nobuo's earlier work *Phase – Mother Earth*, 1968, constructed for the 'Open Air Sculpture Exhibition' in Kobe, a hole was dug into the earth some three metres deep and over two metres in diameter. The displaced soil was then sculpted into a cylindrical tower, identical in

Sekine Nobuo
Phase – Mother Earth
1968



dimensions to the adjacent hole. The impact, although lessened by our one-dimensional experience of it here as a photographic record, is nonetheless powerful. The soil column although difficult to construct appears to have been effortlessly bored from the earth in a feat of genius-excavation, as if it were somehow a predetermined phenomenon that smoothly happened itself into existence. A similar sense of fatalism inhabits many of the Mono-ha works. In *Relatum*, 1968, Ufan lets fate determine the crazed pattern of broken glass, interfering only to lift a boulder onto the surface to initiate the process. Koshimizu Susumu suspends a piece of stone from the gallery ceiling allowing gravity to draw its own line in space. The unrefined physicality of many of the works here, with their emphasis on anti-form transition and process, although compelling, seems somehow confined by the pristine gallery space of Kettle's Yard. The selection of photographic works on display seem better suited to the immaculate gallery environment. In Enokura Koji's timeless image *Symptom-Sea Body*, 1972, a figure lies stretched at the sea edge, curved in an elegant arch at the limits of the tideline, poignantly encapsulating the excruciating enigma of a world beyond man's control and unaffected by his efforts to embellish or contain it. ■

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