

The Simple Complex

An overlooked moment in art is revisited through the work of Nobuo Sekine.

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The birthplace of [Mono-ha](#), the conceptual art movement that dominated the fledgling galleries of Tokyo from the late 1960s to the early 1970s, is widely considered to be [Nobuo Sekine's](#) *Phase Mother Earth*, a stoic cylindrical column of earth shadowed by its negative—an adjacent hole in the ground with the same dimensions. First installed in Suma Rikyu Park in Kobe, Japan, in 1968, the conceptual sculpture launched Mono-ha, or “School of things.” Misinterpreted as a hybrid of Land Art and Post-Minimalism, the movement was lost in time, but thanks to some dedicated fans—including gallerist Tim Blum and independent curator Mika Yoshitake—Mono-ha has been rediscovered in recent years, through exhibitions like 2012's *Requiem for the Sun*, organized by Gladstone Gallery in New York and Blum & Poe in Los Angeles; Punta della Dogana's “Prima Materia” at the [2013 Venice Biennale](#); and the Dallas Museum of Art's *Silence and Time* exhibition in 2011. [Blum & Poe](#) has also staged a series of solo shows highlighting the movement's key figures, which now includes a major survey of Sekine that opened last Saturday and runs through February 15.

Installed by the artist, Sekine's first solo show in North America includes elemental sculptures that invite zen-like mediations. With only subtle hints of the artist's hand like a knotted rope or an off-kilter placement, series like *Phase of Nothingness—Cut Stone* (1970) and *Phase of Nothingness—Cloth and Stone* (1970) harmonize the natural and the industrial. The focused, wide-sweeping exhibition emphasizes the quiet extremes that characterize Mono-Ha, as well as the depths to which Sekine and his contemporaries explored these ideas.