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Blum & Poe's Survey Touches Off Mono-Ha Mania — And It's Coming to New York



Photo by Joshua White; Courtesy the Artists and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA

An installation view of "Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha" at Blum & Poe

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Museum exhibitions frequently travel from one institution to another, but it is almost unheard of for a major gallery show to travel to an unaffiliated gallery hundreds of miles away. Lucky for New Yorkers, Los Angeles's **Blum & Poe** is breaking with that tradition. On June 21, highlights from its critically acclaimed survey, "Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha," will open at **Barbara Gladstone's** 21st Street gallery.

The exhibition brings together 100 artworks by ten key figures of the little-known Japanese postwar movement, which lasted for only five years, between 1968 and 1973. Mono-ha — roughly translated as "School of Things" — sought to explore the relationship between natural and industrial materials in a country that had recently been torn apart by WWII and was in the midst of reconstructing itself. Though the group's most famous member, **Lee Ufan**, was the subject of a **Guggenheim** retrospective last year, most of its other members had never shown in the United States before Blum & Poe's exhibition.

"It's been the most successful show in the gallery's history," said **Tim Blum**, co-founder of Blum & Poe. "From [art historian] **Yve-Alain Bois** to two-year-old kids, the response was, to a one, perfect."

The exhibition, which was curated by **Mika Yoshitake**, now an associate curator at Washington's **Hirshhorn Museum**, was the gallery's largest to date, as well as its most difficult. Because much of the original art from the Mono-ha movement was lost or destroyed, Blum & Poe had to commission dozens of authorized reconstructions of the originals. "Even the people who study this work, postwar Japanese art specialists, hadn't really seen it before this," said Blum. "They'd only seen it in reproduction, and the reproductions suck." Among the highlights coming to New York are **Susumu Koshimizu's** boulders wrapped in large sheets of paper and **Nobuo Sekine's** massive twin containers filled to the brim with water.

One reason this artwork was rarely preserved is because the movement didn't have a devoted base of collectors or institutions to act as custodians at the time. "There was just no place for the artists to put it," said Blum. Some Mono-ha artists also regarded impermanence as an important part of their practice. Artist **Shingo Honda**, for example, was particularly vocal about not wanting his work recreated, and his art is therefore included in Blum & Poe's forthcoming book about Mono-ha, but not in the exhibition.

Blum & Poe's show has drummed up more institutional and private interest in Mono-ha than the movement has ever seen, according to Blum. "None of the artists had really been actively collected in any way, shape, or form before this," he explained, noting that he sold much of the work in the show to institutions. (The **Dallas Museum of Art**, the **Tate**, and the **Museum of Modern Art** in New York have all reportedly taken an interest in the movement.)

The work's market freshness also posed a challenge — how does a gallery go about setting prices for historical pieces with no market history? Blum said the median price for a work in the show was about \$300,000, though some of that figure was determined by the cost of the materials necessary for the works' reconstruction.

Though the gallery represented Ufan well before the Mono-ha exhibition, it has now added four other major figures from the movement — Sekine, Koshimizu, **Kishio Suga**, and **Katsuro Yoshida** — to its stable. It isn't the last you'll see of them: The gallery plans to stage in-depth, individual exhibitions of each of these artist's work in years to come, and will present their art at a focused booth at **Frieze Masters** in the fall. "We've got a lot more to do," Blum said.