

ROUGH AND REFINED JAPANESE ART

1960s

May 24 – June 29, 2007

1990s to the Present

July 10 – August 3, 2007

LEO CASTELLI GALLERY

In collaboration with the
Sezon Museum of Modern Art, Japan

18 E 77 Street New York 10021

I would like to express deep thanks to Leo Castelli Gallery for organizing this exhibition of Japanese contemporary art entitled *Rough and Refined*.

The term *Rough* relates to the works from the 1960s exhibited in the first part of the show, and *Refined* relates to the works from the 1990s to the present in the second part. In a broader way, the two ideas 'rough' and 'refined' are a duality that has always existed in Japanese art.

From the battle against the revision of the US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960 to the *harakiri* suicide of the novelist Yukio Mishima in 1970, there were wide ranging changes in Japan. This period was defined by an economic boom in which the Japanese GNP jumped to the second highest in the world. Despite the many advancements, the majority of the contemporary artists, such as Mishima, were not happy with the cultural status quo and their art reflected this position.

In the visual arts, during the late 1950s, *l'art informel* and Abstract Expressionism swept Japan. This began when Michel Tapié, Sam Francis and Georges Mathieu visited in 1957, consequently beginning the so-called 'informel whirlwind'. The most distinguished group of artists during the early 60s was Gutai, founded by Jirō Yoshihara in 1954. Tapié saw the work of Gutai during this visit, and valued it highly. As a result, Gutai became part of the very fashionable *informel* movement. The avant-garde artists of the time were faced with a rigid society unable to handle their new ideas on one side and a very 'trendy' and accepted art on the other.

In this context a new art movement arose. The Yomiuri Newspaper began to sponsor a series of independent exhibitions where artists could create and show works in any way they wished. The critic Yoshiaki Tōno applied the terms 'anti-painting' and 'anti-sculpture' to the works being exhibited as they had a tendency toward 'junk art', using ready-made goods and waste materials which ultimately suggested a type of 'anti-art'.

The term Anti Art is not very precise but it is an accurate description of this movement in the sense that it was a definitive break with all previous concepts of art. Anti Art emerged in direct opposition to *l'art informel*, embodied by Gutai. Japanese society, as a whole, was not ready for this kind of art; consequentially many of the artists chose to move to New York or Paris to continue working. The works exhibited in the first part of *Rough and Refined* truly represent 'anti-art' and Neo-Dadaism as it was defined by Tōno.

It is difficult to categorize the art of the 1980s and 90s at the present time as the work of many of these artists is still evolving. In any case, if works like *Ear II* by Tomio Miki, *Shadow of a Hanger* by Jirō Takamatsu or *Portrait D'Artiste dans la Crise* by Tetsumi Kudō in the first exhibition can be seen as 'rough', the works in the second show are clearly more 'refined'. In contrast to the 1960s which were defined by Japan emerging as an international economic power and a period of great change

within the country, the decade from 1980 to 1990 saw the economic bubble burst and are a sort of 'lost ten years'.

In the beginning of the 1980s many successful female artists emerged such as Mika Yoshizawa and Yumiko Sugano, and were called 'super girls'. They consistently exhibited at both galleries and museums showing mostly installation art. With the sudden economic crisis of 1991, the galleries and museums lost the means to fund these spaces. During the 'lost ten years', many multi-talented artists began to work in the comic, game, computer and television industries where they achieved great success and created a new market place for *otaku* culture, however, there is a feeling that this type of art may not last. In the second half of the exhibition we are showing works that will stand the test of time and are representations of the antithesis of 'entertainment art'.

- Hideo Nanba

1960s

Shūsaku Arakawa

Work A, 1960
concrete, cement, cotton, glass ball,
cloth, straw in wooden box
25 x 17 x 5 in
Collection of Sezon
Museum of Modern Art, Japan

Tetsumi Kudō

Portrait D'Artiste dans la Crise, 1977
mixed media and birdcage
33 x 15¾ x 9 in

Yayoi Kusama

Accumulation of Faces #2, 1962
newspaper and ink on paper
24 x 29 in

Shoe, 1963
mixed media
8 x 9 x 3 in

Yukihisa Isohe

Work '61-7, 1961
oil, powdered marble, paper and
canvas on wood
51 x 36 in

Tomio Miki

Ear II, 1972
cast aluminum
21½ x 14 in

Ear, date unknown
cast aluminum
12 x 8 x 4 in
Collection of Jasper Johns

Jirō Takamatsu

Shadow of Hanger, 1971
oil on wood
25¾ x 36¾ in
Private collection

Shadow No. 190, 1969
lacquer, wood
23½ x 18 x 4½ in
Collection of James Corcoran,
Los Angeles

Ushio Shinohara

Drink More, ca. 1964 (?)
oil on canvas with objects
18¾ x 14 x 6½ in
Collection of Jasper Johns

Natsuyuki Nakanishi

Compact Object, 1962
bones, watch and clock parts, bead
necklace, hair, eggshell, lens and
other manufactured objects embedded
in polyester
5½ x 8¾ x 5½ in
Collection of the Museum of Modern
Art, New York. Frank Crowninshield
Fund, 1965

1990s to the Present

Emi Fukuzawa

Shaila III, 2004
graphite on paper
14 x 17 in

Shaila IX, 2005
graphite on paper
14 x 17 in

Shaila VII, 2004
graphite on paper
14 x 17 in

Vermillion XII, 2006
shu ink on paper
11 x 17 in

kUrma III, 2006
ink on paper
38 x 74 in

Yoko Mizukami

River -Alternate Stripes from Momoyama,
2007
acrylic on canvas
35¾ x 35¾ in

Fall -Alternate Stripes from Momoyama,
2007
acrylic on canvas
35¾ x 35¾ in

Dots from Edo, 2007
acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 in

Ridges of Waves running over the shore,
2007
acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 in

Ridges of Waves lapping on the rock,
2007
acrylic on canvas
24 x 24 in

Meo Saitō

*Wreaths for Nameless Inhabitants of
Tokyo*, 2005

Werewolf in Shinjuku
Sacred Prostitute in Uguisudani
Gigolo in Ikebukuro
Abandoned Child in Kamata
Angel in Sunamachi

acrylic, pigment on cotton canvas on
panel
five works, each: 33½ x 19½ x 2 in

Yumiko Sugano

Hot System, 1985
acrylic, sumi ink, paper on cloth
94½ x 94½ in

It's sitting, 1989
wood, mixed media
39½ x 6 x 3¼ in

It's thinking, 1989
wood, wooden clay
9½ x 6 x 4¼ in

The White Ocean, 1986-7
wood, lead, washi paper
26 x 6¼ x 6¼ in

Mika Yoshizawa

nu-75, 1998
aqueous crayon on synthetic paper
43 x 31 in

nu-87, 1999
aqueous crayon on synthetic paper
43 x 31 in

ru-5, 1999
aqueous crayon on synthetic paper
43 x 31 in

nu-86, 1999
aqueous crayon on synthetic paper
43 x 31 in