

Los Angeles Times

Kadonaga's Work Focuses on Process of Transition

Monday, July 16, 2001

Art Review

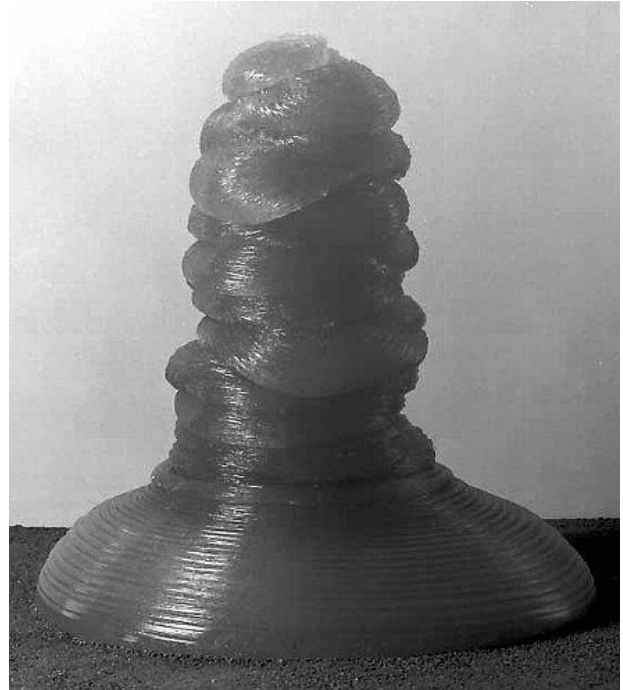
By Holly Myers ,

In describing a body of artwork, the term "process-oriented" has a wide range of possible implications. At worst, it is a label that excuses an artist from the responsibility of creating a coherent final product. At best, however, it describes a holistic approach to art-making that de-emphasizes the concept of finality and at the same time uses the status of the final object to encourage contemplation of the artistic process and the cyclical order of nature.

The work of Japanese artist Kazuo Kadonaga, currently on view at the Japanese American Cultural and Community Center, is process-oriented in the best sense. Painstakingly crafted from elemental materials--bamboo, wood, paper and glass--the sculptures call attention to the meditative labor involved in their construction yet also reflect the organic patterns of nature. In one group of works, Kadonaga has chiseled logs into long planks of wood that twist and curve as though moving to some inner harmony. Although the handiwork of these objects is admirable in itself, their forms seem not to have been devised by the artist but simply released by him from some other shell. Most of the works in the exhibition have a similar feeling of natural expression.

The materials Kadonaga uses were among the first to be turned by human beings to utilitarian purposes. Kadonaga calls attention to their changeability and the transitions they undergo between physical states. One work is comprised of about a dozen three-foot wooden rods that have been burned black at one end, embodying the move from wood to charcoal. In another, a tree trunk has been sliced into extremely thin sheets that lie together as though still part of the same log--a clever encapsulation of the transition from wood to paper. Another group involves large stacks of paper that are compressed into a tight block on one end, as though part of a book, but that swell abruptly on the other end into a large, pillowy mass, as if resisting the confines to which the other half submits.

Kadonaga's most recent works consist of green glass that has been melted and poured into spiraling piles several feet high, an automated process that, according to press materials, takes several days to complete and up to four months to cool and solidify completely. Lit from above, the four works on display look like otherworldly stalagmites, each similar in structure but unique in form. One is almost



For "Glass No. 4E,"

glass was melted and poured into spiraling piles.

perfectly round and nest-like, as though shaped on a pottery wheel; another is rebelliously asymmetrical, a pile of fleshy folds that vaguely resembles a pot-bellied Buddha figure. Each is topped with a pile of very thin glass strands that resembles a bowl of clear rice noodles. Though clearly solid and motionless, the works still seem liquid in nature; the hypnotic flow of molten glass that is depicted in a video nearby seems, in the final product, not stopped but merely suspended in motion.

Sadly, the gallery in which the sculptures are installed is a poor venue for conveying the work's subtle elegance: An awkwardly shaped, windowless space with badly stained gray carpet, it makes the exhibition seem a bit like a lumber yard at first glance. Individually, however, each work has a powerful, meditative presence--the clear result of Kadonaga's solemn, even spiritual investment in the process of the work's creation--that lulls the viewer into a harmonious state of identification.

* * * * *

*George J. Doizaki Gallery at the
Japanese American Cultural and Community Center,
244 S. San Pedro, Los Angeles, (213) 628-2725.
Through July 29. Closed Mondays.*