

Contemplative simplicity

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Set aside Western cynicism for the Kadonaga exhibit

By Dave Gagon

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You can't walk into the Kazuo Kadonaga exhibit at the Salt Lake Art Center (through Nov. 25) and look at it with suspicious, Occidental eyes not if you want to enjoy it.

Instead, temporarily lay aside the bias of traditional Western realistic/narrative art and open your mind to the Japanese idea of reductive simplicity; if you can, "Kazuo Kadonaga: Wood, Bamboo, Paper, Glass" will give you a heightened appreciation for the beauty of nature's raw materials.

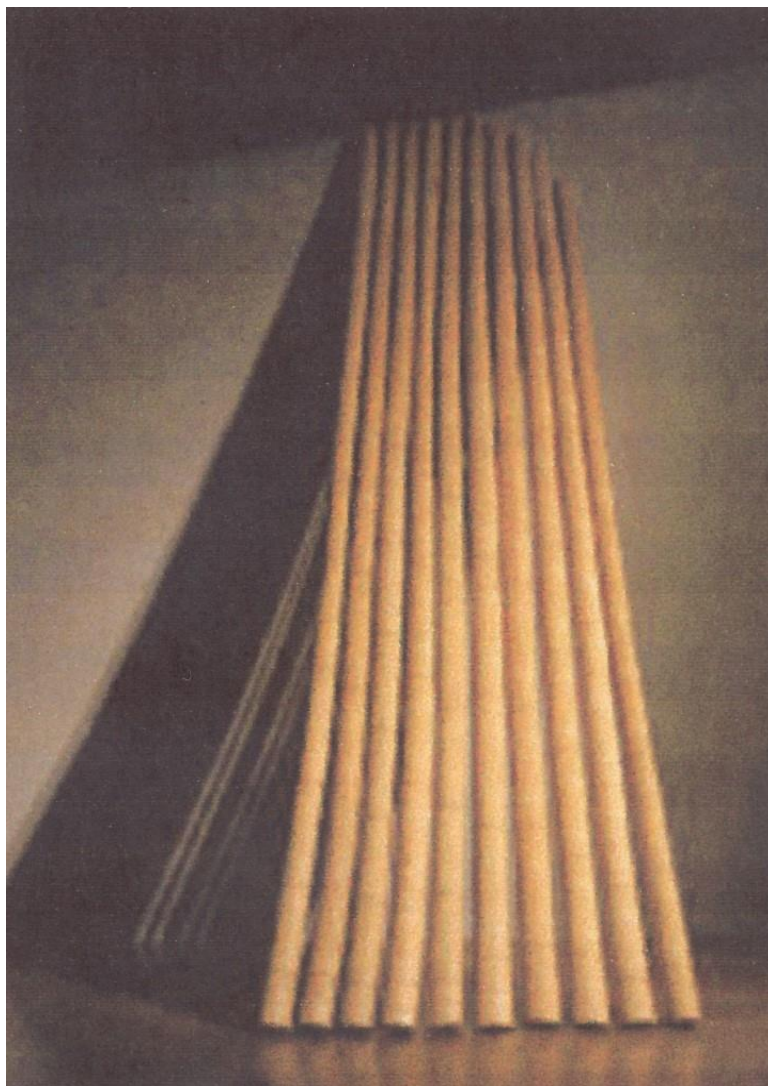
If you can't make the necessary mind shift, a rictus of "who do they think they're kidding?" will crease your face and the exhibit will leave you upset and dissatisfied.

Kadonaga has sometimes been referred to as a "late blooming" *Mono-ha* artist. (*Mono-ha* art was concerned with the relationship between materials and the artist, between the materials themselves and between the materials and the exhibition space. The movement was active between 1968–70.)

However, Yukio Kondo, in his exhibition essay on the artist, considers Kadonaga more a Post-Mono-ha artist because he "is chiefly concerned with developing a system that lets the material determine form by itself."

In the exhibit's accompanying catalog, art critic Josine Ianco-Starrels says Kadonaga's work "quite naturally evolved in a way that fused Asian reverential and contemplative attitudes with Western minimalist aesthetic and conceptual ideas."

The exhibit - which comprises work in wood, bamboo, paper and glass - spans 20 years of Kadonaga's art. It utilizes the SLAC's main gallery space with such visual efficiency it calls to mind



"Bamboo No. 2D" (bamboo, 19 pieces, each 5 by 177 inches) Paul Barker, Deseret News

words from the Tao Te Ching: Although a wheel is made of 30 spokes, it is the space between the spokes that determines the overall form of the wheel.

The overall form of "Kazuo Kadonaga: Wood, Bamboo, Paper, Glass" is frank minimalism, enveloped with a reverence for all living matter.

Because his family ran a lumber mill, Kadonaga chose wood as his first sculpting material. This was



"Glass No. 4M" (glass, 27 by 36 1/4 inches, 1,350 lbs.) Paul Barker, Deseret News

in 1971. Combining wood with stainless steel and transparent acrylic, he produced three dimensional minimal pieces.

In the current SLAC exhibit, the artist has utilized wood only.

His "Wood No.8 k," a stripped and sanded log that has been incised with myriad cuts of incredible precision, initiates a visual discussion of an alternative system of tree ring dating. It is sumptuous.

The next material Kadonaga worked with was bamboo. He has charred it, split it, stacked it, hung it and combined it with other materials. In this show, Kadonaga's best bamboo piece shows how multiple splitting of the wood, halfway up the stalk, speaks of a material's potential duality in nature.

In 1982, Kadonaga exhibited his first paper works. Unfamiliar with the material, the artist visited paper dealers and then began making his own paper, which he sculptured into large, fulsome squares or rectangles that he pressed together and then peeled. In "Paper No.1 bb," the artist gives us two triangles, several inches thick, that are too geometric to be natural --- perhaps a break with his philosophy to demonstrate man's occasional interference.

As he did with paper, Kadonaga became acquainted with glass by visiting a glass factory for three years, establishing a familiarity with the material's properties.

At first, he tried glass casting. "He was interested in the sticky quality of melted glass, like candy syrup, and the green tone produced by the refraction of light in ordinary cheap glass as well as the transparency, delicacy, fragility and heaviness," writes Kondo.

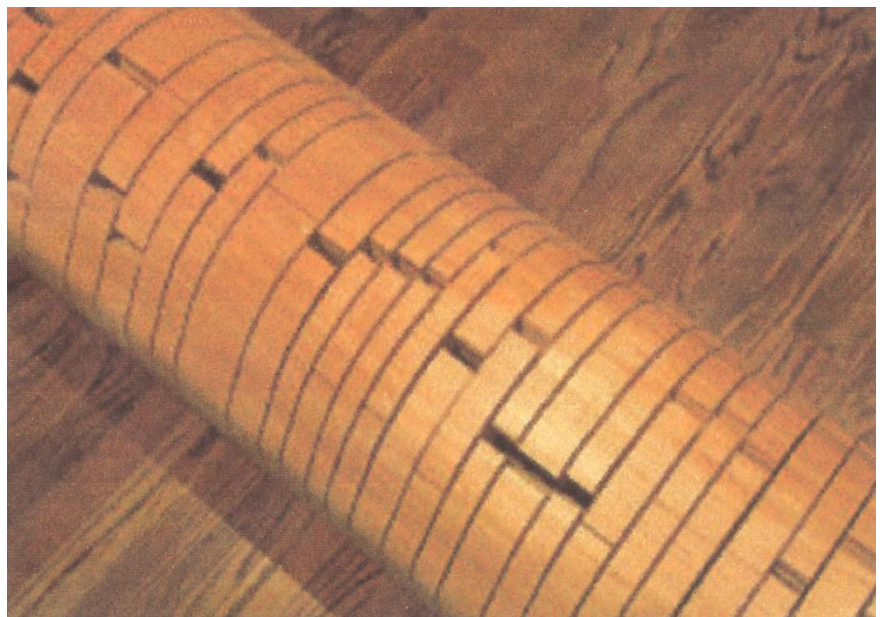
Kadonaga spent the next 10 years developing a system that would allow the glass to show its own characteristics without his intervention, thereby underscoring his artistic beliefs

The glass is melted in a furnace. Using the molten material's viscosity and gravity, it is dropped in thin threads onto cooler, hardening the glass, adding new layers, creating a sumptuous, translucent stalagmite.

After cooling for 100 days, the resulting sculptures are hypnotic and seductive, as in his "Glass No.4 M," one in a series of four works at the SLAC.

The Japanese believe a work of art cannot be truly understood (or even finished) until the viewer completes what the artist has intentionally left incomplete -- this is to be done in the viewer's mind.

Kadonaga's minimalism demands such a partnership. And if you can join with him and complete the art, "Kazuo Kadonaga: Wood, Bamboo, Paper, Glass" will be a unique and spiritual experience.



"Wood No.8 k" (detail) Paul Barker, Deseret News