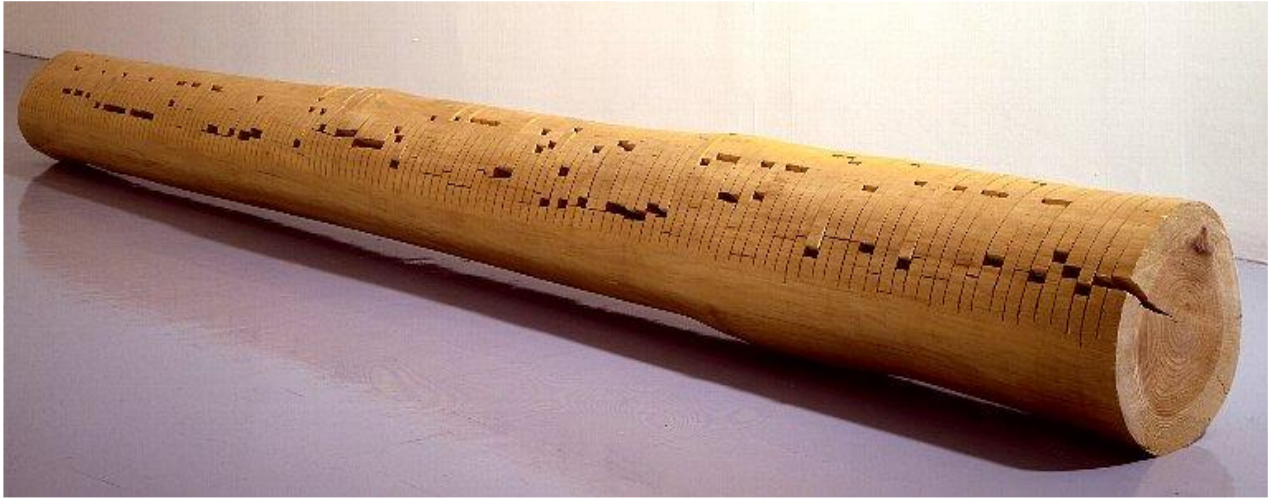


ARTWEEK

Los Angeles / Joan Hugo

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Kazuo Kadonaga. "Wood No.8d," 1977, Wood, 350mm h., at Space gallery, Los Angeles

Kazuo Kadonaga's work at Space gallery combines a traditionally fastidious attitude about materials with a contemporary conceptualization. His intention, he says, is to reveal nature, both in the traditional Sense of releasing imprisoned forms and in the Japanese sense of respecting natural process. These concerns have found expression as an ongoing series, numbered and lettered consecutively and titled, simply Wood. Each piece in the series offers us the possibility of admiring qualities such as color and texture, which are intrinsic to the materials, and also of considering the wood itself as subject matter. A recent piece, for example, is a large, wall-hung slab — a vertical slice chiseled from a whole log — whose polished striations and undulating

surface, suspended horizontally, reveal the tree's naturally occurring torsion. In another piece, ten thin, partially charred, bark-covered log can be read, at first, as a minimalist set. But in Japan, apparently, slices from the blackened, heat-shriveled ends are displayed against white paper and admired as we would admire dried flowers.

Two small blocks of Hinoki cypress have been systematically scored and split, one radially, the other on a grid produced by quartering, then halving each quarter, then quartering each half. The cuts are no more than a quarter-inc deep; it is the Splitting that divides the block into a bundle of uneven sticks. Stacked and laid on its side, the section's target like pattern of perfect rings, so evenly hatched on one end and so jaggedly split on the other, reminds us of the

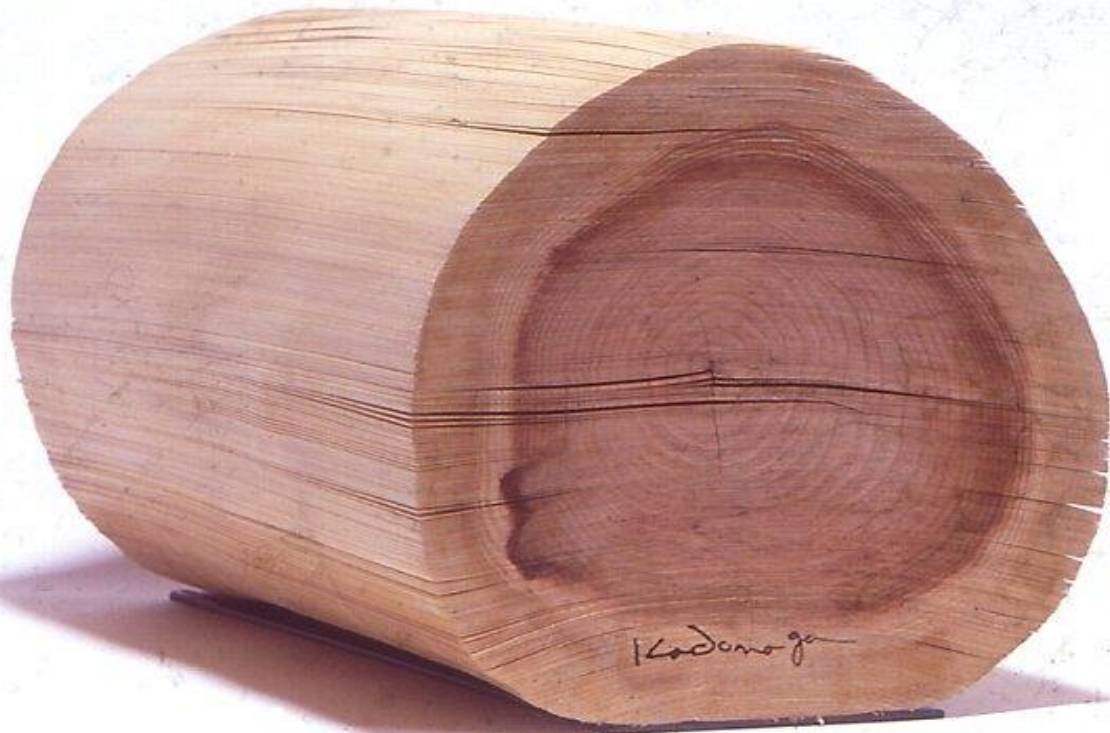


Kazuo Kadonaga. "Wood No.5 A," 1974, Wood, 3,750mm L., at Space gallery, Los Angeles

wood's own internal order. When we learn that Kadonaga, (whose family owns a cedar forest and mill in a village formerly renowned for its samurai,) used a blade forged from a sword as a tool for this work, we begin to perceive some of the fastidious attention to the "rightness" of each detail which we have learned to associate with the Japanese esthetic tradition. This is even clearer a striking group of work involving sections or whole trunks of cedar (*sugi*, that is, *cryptomeria*, a wood whose use in temples and

it resumes its original density and profile, then wrapped in layers of paper and plastic.)

In the dampness of Japan or Holland, where the work was recently shown, this activity is less evident; in our climate the change is more radical. It is eminently visible in another eighteen-foot solid log which has been sliced halfway through at regular intervals. The rim of each semicircular cut is developing cracks ranging from a hairline to an inch wide, gaping wider and wider apart into patterns reminiscent



Kazuo Kadonaga. "Wood No.5 G," 1978, Wood, Space gallery, Los Angeles

shrines, some of them ritually rebuilt from generation to generation, confers on it almost sacred status in Japan).

Machine-cut into paper-thin slices, the sections have been reassembled to follow their original contours, some simply stacked loose, others held together by vegetable glue or dowels. One piece, a solid-looking trimmed beam, is actually four hundred separate sheets, glued and heat-pressed together, two-by-two, to form a whole again. Another, a sliced, trimmed, free-stacked, one-foot-wide, eighteen-foot length (which had to be fork-lifted through the window, since the gallery is on the second floor) is slowly curling and separating more each day that it spends in the dry California air. This is the process Kadonaga wants us to observe; each of these pieces is alive, bowing and warping in response to each new environment breathing. (After each show, the work is moistened so that

of player piano rolls — patterns governed by the wood's own reaction to inner tensions and the stress of climate.

The long, unbroken cultural tradition of Japan has always maintained a strong contact with the concept of *anima mundi*, the vital force. (Since Western culture ruptured that contact centuries ago, our strongest expressive tradition is the figure.) Kadonaga sees himself as a facilitator of the continuous revelation of the process of nature. Whether asking us to admire the honey-colored sheen of cedar, the buttery smoothness of cypress, the pinwheels of charred wood, the structural processes or the life cycles of trees themselves, he gives us the means to focus down, to consider aspects easily overlooked in the hurried, casual way we tend to view the world. □