

ARTWEEK

WORKING WITH NATURAL PROCESSES

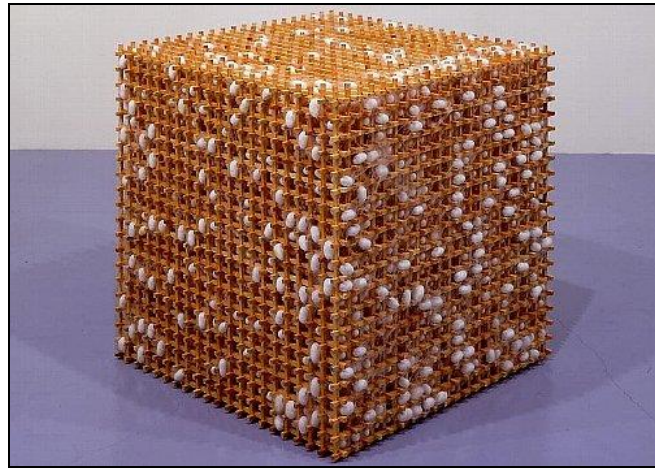
March 21, 1987.

Los Angeles /
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Since the early 1970s Kazuo Kadonaga has been devising ingenious ways to reveal the essence of natural materials. His first and most extensive exploration was with wood; he then examined paper and bamboo. The material and subject matter of his latest sculptures is silk—its color, texture and process of creation. Like his previous works, those, now filling the rooms at Space allow us quietly to contemplate and experience natural forms and processes in entirely new ways.

As do his previous works, these show an elegant blending of opposing characteristics, suggesting the Eastern belief in the union of opposites and the interrelatedness of all things. They combine simplicity and strength of form with complexity and delicacy of detail, stability with suggested movement and the balance of completed form with the potentiality of raw material. The complex interplay between man-made and natural, geometry and irregularity, order and randomness is especially strong. As usual, Kadonaga marvelously blends the traditional Japanese attention to craftsmanship and desire to act in harmony with nature with the modern esthetics of conceptual and process art. This interest in concept and process has allowed him to produce unique works while de-emphasizing his role as a maker of forms. Although the natural colors, textures and forms of these silk works are not quite as sensuous or striking as those of his works in wood or bamboo, the use of natural processes is much more dramatic.

To produce these works he first built intricate frameworks of pine or cedar, then purchased a hundred thousand silkworms and carefully placed them on the structures. During the forty-eight hours it took for all the worms to settle into their spaces, the frameworks had to be turned frequently so that the cocoons would be evenly distributed (the worms tend to travel toward the



Kazuo Kadonaga, Silk No 2 D, 1986. silk and pine, 29"×29"×29", At Space, Los Angeles

top of the structures to find empty slots). Then, as in the harvesting of silk, heat was used to kill the worms and preserve the cocoons.

Undoubtedly the simple geometric shapes of the frameworks are inspired by and reflect the structures actually used in sericulture. Although they are carefully constructed, slight variations given them a handmade, functional character. They project a subtle tension between industry and artistry which provides a perfect background for the "artistic" activity of the silkworms.

One of the most interesting aspects of these works is the remarkable variety Kadonaga has achieved, given the limited amount of control he allowed himself. Most of the square or rectangular spaces in the grids are occupied by a single cocoon; occasionally there are two cocoons in one opening, and some cocoons are woven on the structure's exterior. The cocoons themselves usually show subtle differences, but in a few works they have an almost machinelike uniformity. The number of spaces left empty also varies from sculpture to sculpture. Another interesting variation is provided by dense layers of threads covering the outside of some pieces, as if many worms had crawled back and forth over them looking for empty spaces in which to spin their cocoons.

The majority of the eighty-four works are wall-hung and consist of one or a very few layers. Most effective, however, are the larger, more three-dimensional pieces, some of which are freestanding. These provide the most dramatic contrasts between monumental scale and delicacy of detail, between geometric and random structure. They also produce a heightened sense of texture—the most important physical characteristic of the works.

The exhibit has been installed with most of the works in one room, which makes an extremely crowded display. Although this allows for easy comparison of the wide variety of framework shapes and subtle variations of texture, it seriously detracts from the impact of individual.