

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Yukinori Yanagi

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles

July 17–August 14, 2021

June 5, 2021, Los Angeles—Blum & Poe is pleased to present the first major U.S. survey of work by Onomichi, Japan-based artist Yukinori Yanagi. This is Yanagi's fourth presentation with the gallery, following his solo show at Blum & Poe Tokyo in 2019 and his participation in the group exhibitions *Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s* (Los Angeles, 2019) and *Mountains Carrying Suns* (Tokyo, 2021).

Having resided in the U.S. in the late 1980s and 1990s, obtaining his MFA in sculpture from Yale University School of Art in 1990, Yanagi was first recognized on the world stage at the 45th Venice Biennale in 1993 with *World Flag Ant Farm* (1990). As a monumental process-based installation, this work featured 180 national flags—recognized by the United Nations, including colonized countries—each made out of acrylic panels of painted sand and connected by plastic tubes through which ants burrowed and effectively broke down both physical and geo-political borders. First presented at LACE (Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions) in 1991, *World Flag Ant Farm 2020* will be featured in the current exhibition in an updated version, comprising approximately 200 national flags that reflect radical shifts in world politics over the last thirty years. As his former professor Vito Acconci once stated in 1990, Yanagi "attempts to join natural processes with cultural mechanisms . . . that then go on to have a life and duration all their own."

Yanagi's machine-perfect sculptures and installations probe the contested boundaries or limits of politically and ideologically constructed territories and national myths. In *Banzai Corner 2020* Yanagi uses the Ultraman figurine, a half-extraterrestrial and half-Japanese superhero who fights to save Japan from aliens. In this installation, Yanagi aligns the figures in perfectly alternating rows of red and silver forming a quarter of a circle, positioned toward two adjacent mirrors lining the right angle of a room. The reflections of the figures on both mirrors create the illusion of a 360-degree circle which forms the pre-war imperial flag, a red circle with radiating white lines. Both arms of each figurine are raised in a "banzai" gesture, recalling wartime kamikaze pilots, soldiers, and citizens hailing to the emperor. The irony behind this work is that the original creator of Ultraman is from Okinawa (the southernmost island of Japan), and according to Yanagi, likely critical of the use of national myth to retain ethnic homogeneity to promote Japanese nationalist identity. By using mirrors to indicate the constructed quality of national unity, Yanagi deconstructs the *illusion* of Ultraman's contribution to national unity, revealing the incompleteness of Japanese identity.

Yanagi's work also investigates borders or the spaces at the edges of a boundary, where oppression is felt most by inhabitants and the manipulation of myth and control is exerted

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over citizenry and minorities. *Wandering Position - Alcatraz* comprises three large-scale drawings in the size of prison cells from Alcatraz Federal Penitentiary. Yanagi conducted fieldwork at the prison for two weeks in 1996 after learning about a second-generation Japanese-American, Tomoya Kawakita, who was charged for treason during World War II, sentenced for life at Alcatraz, but eventually pardoned by President Kennedy in 1963. The drawings are traces of red crayon made from following ants in each of these prison spaces. Another work created during this residency, *Broken Glass on Map* (1996), is a U.S. map culled from discarded glass shards from the site.

Article 9 (1994) is a floor installation of multiple beams dispersed with red Japanese neon text that break up the infamous Article 9 clause in the Japanese Constitution declaring the renunciation of war. The text exposes the fraught history of the clause, which was originally written in English and administered by the U.S. during the American Occupation, delimiting Japan's military capacity. Later translated into Japanese and retranslated into English, this clause reveals the continued ambiguities in the meaning, intent, and agency of national law and international communication. Similarly, the language of patriotism is interrogated in *Loves me / Loves me not*, which features a chrysanthemum—the Japanese imperial seal—at the center with its brass petals, dispersed over a blood-red carpet, each accompanying the artwork's title in multiple languages.

Finally, following *Pacific* (1996) and *Akitsushima 50-III* (2019) previously exhibited in Los Angeles and Tokyo spaces of the gallery respectively, this presentation will feature a brand-new installation of *Nagato* (2020), a cast-iron replica scaled at 1:70 of a World War II dreadnought battleship. First commissioned by the Imperial Japanese Army in 1920, this was one of the last surviving battleships that became a detonation target and sank at Bikini Atoll in 1946. Initially taken from a plastic model kit and retaining the sand mold on the frames, this installation forces us to consider the artistry of violence through the cultural obsession with the technical craft of war machinery.

The impact of Yanagi's work is his dual stance in which as Acconci also stated, "he takes on the position of both victim and surveyor, and he urges his audience to assume a similar posture . . . of being both amused and at the same time possibly intimidated." Yanagi appropriates and deconstructs myths, signs, and symbols to provoke the fraught visual and cultural languages of war, violence, national identity, and technological advancements that continue to haunt us today.

Yukinori Yanagi (b. Fukuoka, Japan, 1959) lives and works in Onomichi, Japan. Yanagi's work is represented in notable public collections worldwide, including the Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, OH; Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Boston, MA; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Nusantara, Jakarta, Indonesia; Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, Austria; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, Australia; Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; Queensland Art

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Gallery, Brisbane, Australia; Tate Gallery, London, UK; and the Yokohama Museum of Art, Yokohama, Japan; among many more.

About Blum & Poe

Blum & Poe was founded by Timothy Blum and Jeffrey Poe in Santa Monica in September of 1994 as a space to show local and international contemporary art in all media. Blum's extensive experience in the Japanese art world combined with Poe's keen knowledge of emerging artists in Los Angeles, together resulted in an international program of influential artists. Throughout a twenty-six-year history, Blum & Poe has shaped the trajectory of contemporary art by championing artists at all stages of their careers—cultivating the lineages that run between emerging and established practices, and working with artist estates to generate new discourse surrounding historical work.

In 2003 the gallery moved to a larger space in Culver City, and in 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated its current 22,000 square foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard. In this location the gallery has since held museum-caliber surveys, examining the historical work of such movements as the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of 1980s and '90s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); and a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020). To produce these exhibitions, Blum & Poe has worked with celebrated curators such as Joan Kee, Mika Yoshitake, Sofia Gotti, and Alison M. Gingeras.

In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects in tandem with an expansive program of exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. In 2015, Blum & Poe was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. Blum & Poe's own publishing division focuses on sharing aspects of its program via original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, and artists' books. In 2020, the gallery launched Blum & Poe Broadcasts, an online platform showcasing artists' projects in conjunction with physical installations or as standalone digital endeavors.

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