

## Press Release

Masaomi Yasunaga

*Looking Afar* / 遠くを見る

September 8 – October 29, 2022

508 West 24th Street, New York

For his first exhibition in New York, the sculptor Masaomi Yasunaga presents a large body of new, experimental ceramic works. The gallery space features over 50 avant-garde vessel forms, including his largest to date, displayed on beds of gravel and flanked by structures fastened to the walls. Yasunaga's unique practice and outright omission of clay offer a re-evaluation of ceramic tradition and reposition the works beyond ceramics to constructions that encompass sculpture, installation and even performance. *Looking Afar* explores the artist's unprecedented process and the sentimentality that guides it.

The act of firing lies at the core of Yasunaga's practice. While pottery is typically formed from clay, fired in a kiln and sealed with a finishing coat of glaze, Yasunaga adopts glaze as the primary material from which to build his sculptural works, incorporating a pliable foundation that deforms when fired. The initial shapes are combined with raw materials—feldspars, whole rocks, metal or glass powders—before they are buried in various strata of sand and kaolin to preserve aspects of their structure in the firing stage. The physical process is an indication of the natural over the artificial. "I consider the process of firing as an act to retain a certain level of sensory distance between the creator and the material," says Yasunaga. "After projecting the ego upon the material and creating a sculpture that stands against gravity, the firing process reverts that action by melting the material and letting gravity take hold of its shape once again, eradicating the ego along the way."

Once cooled, Yasunaga's sculptures are excavated from their beds in a studio process analogous to archaeological excavation and discovery. The display in the exhibition mirrors the unearthing process. The yielded objects appear honed and shaped by earthly elements over centuries, some whole and others curiously fragmented. The sculptures are simultaneously primitive and contemporary; objects of human culture which appear as if lost and found, seeming to confirm the supremacy of nature's order over the world of humankind.

The pastoral landscape that surrounds Yasunaga's studio in Japan's Mie Prefecture influences his perspective. The distant views and the act of seeing afar conjure both physical and psychological experiences. He is interested in how one approaches something far remote, such as time, space, and thought. The kiln is a time machine and fire filters what remains. Thirteen years ago, following the death of his grandmother, Yasunaga incorporated her ashes into the glaze for an arrangement of white porcelain urns. Through the fire the artist's memories of his grandmother were crystalized. The hollow walls within the artist's unorthodox vessels echo senses of melancholy and nostalgia. Featuring an assortment of proportions, the works dig into the scale of past ruins, from insect bones to derelict buildings. They offer a reevaluation of the potential of the ceramic tradition, examining remembrance, highlighting the ambiguous nature of observing a distant setting, and identifying what's left once filtered through the fire.

Works by Masaomi Yasunaga are included in an exhibition focusing on ceramic art at the Museum of Contemporary Ceramic Art in Gifu, Japan, opening September. Yasunaga will also be the subject of a solo exhibition at the Palomar Foundation in Como, Italy, opening October 2022.

## About the artist

Masaomi Yasunaga was a student of Satoru Hoshino, a coterie of the avant-garde ceramic group Sodeisha: a post-war (1940s – 1990s) movement that questioned the mandate of functionality within the ceramic medium and pioneered a new sculptural philosophy. Translated as ‘crawling through the mud society’, artists of Sodeisha rebelled against the prevalent ceramic traditions in Japan to create existentially and emotionally driven artworks. Yasunaga extends the legacy of Sodeisha group’s experimental ethos by focusing on the process of creation, centred around the sculptural form rather than the functional use of the object. Inspired by his upbringing within Japan’s Catholic minority and ensuing appreciation for aesthetics of Western origin, Yasunaga honours a global range of vessel forms and ritual objects. With titles referencing physical states of being — *empty, melting, fused, molted, shedding, skeleton, flesh and bone* — the artist evokes nature’s physicality into earthenware, eliciting an emotional connection with the viewer.

Yasunaga (born 1982) lives and works in Iga-shi, Mie Prefecture, Japan. He has a Masters Degree in Environmental Design from Osaka Sangyo University. Recent solo exhibitions include *Masaomi Yasunaga* at Lisson Gallery, East Hampton, NY, USA (2021); *Empty Parade* at wad Café, Osaka, Japan (2020); *To things that exist, to things that don’t exist* at gallery YDS, Kyoto, Japan (2020); *Empty Landscape* at Libby Leshgold Gallery, Vancouver, Canada (2020); *Masaomi Yasunaga* at Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2019); *Masaomi Yasunaga: A Shadow of the Eternity* at Utsuwakan, Kyoto, Japan (2019); *Memory of Orient* at Gallery Utsuwa Note, Kawagoe, Saitama, Japan (2018); *Masaomi Yasunaga Exhibition* at Garb Domingo, Okinawa, Japan (2017); and *arid landscapes* at pramata, Tokyo, Japan (2017). Selected group exhibitions include *Sterling Ruby and Masaomi Yasunaga* at Nonaka- Hill, Los Angeles, CA, USA. His work is included in the permanent collections of the Ariana Museum, Geneva, Switzerland and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, USA.

## About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 60 international artists across two spaces in London, three in New York, and one in Shanghai, as well as forthcoming galleries in Beijing and Los Angeles. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists as well as others of that generation from Carmen Herrera to the renowned estate of Leon Polk Smith.

In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller, Tatsuo Miyajima and Sean Scully. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Ryan Gander, Van Hanos, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes, Wael Shawky and Cheyney Thompson.

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