

Kokuta Suda *Okukō* 憶劫

April 15 – May 27, 2023

Nonaka-Hill is pleased to present Kokuta Suda: *Okukō*, the first American solo gallery exhibition for the artist. Suda (須田 剋太, 1906-1990) was a pioneer for merging abstraction and calligraphy, for his raw spontaneity with various media; and for maximizing their tactile potentials with embossing, impasto, and even affixed stones. His paintings and works on paper do not pull us into pictorial space as much as affirm their objecthood: they are records of physical phenomena born at the junction between chance, intervention, and material.

A difficult artist to categorize by virtue of his shifting practices, Suda worked in figuration for twenty years before transitioning to abstraction in the 1950s. In 1952, he founded Genbi (Modern Art Discussion Group), which included Jiro Yoshihara (1905-1972), the future leader of Gutai. Yoshihara later invited Suda to join Gutai, but he declined, choosing to forge his own path instead; this included several shifts in style over the decades, including a lasting engagement with calligraphy and re-engagement with figuration.

By contrast, Suda's abstractions on view from the early 1960s have a worn and handled quality devoid of line-work. Which is to say, the paper supports were perforated, scarred, scratched, or even shaped atop stones and other objects, a form of embossing. The paint was slathered, washed on, or wiped into the crevices of the paper; and it was mixed with earthen materials like lithic flake (rock shavings), minerals, and metallics. His works thus have organic appearances, weathered and self-inducing. They were eruptions from Suda's being as it catalyzed the interaction of pigment, stones, and minerals.

These effects were partly owed to Suda's deep commitment to Zen Buddhism, which influenced his life and work philosophy (to such a degree, apparently, that he was referred to as *Kyoojin Kokuta*, or "Madman Kokuta" by a colleague). His paintings were thus emphatically invested in the unfoldment of natural phenomena and minutiae as it filtered through his hands. He allowed materials to commingle and alchemize into a third form of representation, independent of external appearances and his "inner world."

A work from 1958 titled *Active Nothing-Like Thing*, encapsulates his ethos (and the contradictions of Zen Buddhism): he sought to activate nothing into a thing. This dovetailed with the idea of the *kokoro*, which means "heart" or "soul" or "thought," the essence of a thing. As the *kokoro* is the "psychometaphysical aspect of the inward way," to quote Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki (1870-1966), it is not something readily identifiable: It is the abyss from which all things emerge and return. One might think of

Suda's paintings in this manner, as outward manifestations of spontaneous becoming from nothing. As such, they do not yield to any precise meaning, structure, or art historical narrative. Fittingly, the character koku 剋, which translates to "overturn" or "upheaval" is the same character he used to sign his paintings, nodding to the underlying philosophy that made his work alluring yet slippery to our cognition.

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6917 Melrose Ave, Los Angeles, CA, 90038.

Hours: Tuesday- Saturday, 12noon – 7pm or by appointment

For images or more information regarding the exhibition, please contact Nonaka-Hill at gallery@nonaka-hill.com

Kokuta Suda

Biography

- 1906 Born in Fukiage town, Saitama Prefecture
- 1927 Failed the entrance exam of Tokyo Academy of Fine Arts
- 1935 Exhibited at the 1st Dainibu-kai but was shocked by the suicide of his friend who was not being selected
- 1948 Joined Tenseki-kai (a group of Kyoto, Kobe and Osaka based artists and scholars) through Sugimoto Kenkichi. Met Hasegawa Saburo at the Tenseki-kai and was greatly affected by him in terms of shaping and mental side, and later on changed his style to abstract painting
- 1950 Published an article *Genshi to Sho* [Primitive and Calligraphy], and continue the discussion of painting theory with Hasegawa Saburo
- 1952 Founded Genbi [Contemporary Art Discussion Group] with Tsutaka Waichi, Yoshihara Jiro, Ueki Shigeru, Yamazaki Takao, Nakamura Makoto, and Tanaka Kenzo
- 1970 Became the illustrator of Asahi Weekly serial column '*Kaido wo yuku*' [On the roads] and visited a lot of places with the author Shiba Ryōtarō
- 1981 Published the original picture collection of '*Kaido wo yuku*.'
- 1984 Published a gouache collection *Watakushi no Mandara - Suda Kokuta no sekai* [My Mandala: the World of Suda Kokuta] and a book entitled *Watakushi no zoeki: Gendai bijutsu* [My Shaping: Modern Art]
- 1990 Passed away at the age of 84

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2023 *Okuko* 憶劫, Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles
- 2006 Retrospective exhibition. Traveling exhibition until 2007 in Hyogo, Osaka, Saitama and Aichi Prefecture
- 1964 Solo exhibition, Gallery Beni, Kyoto
- 1960 Solo exhibition, Formes Gallery, Osaka
- 1950 First solo exhibition Suda Kokuta European Art, Asahi Gallery, Kyoto

Selected group Exhibitions

- 1983 *Modern Artists Calligraphy Exhibition*, Gallery Haku, Osaka
- 1975 *Four Abstract Artists: Suda Kokuta, Tsutaka Waichi, Motonaga Sadamasa, and Shiraga Kazuo*, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art, Kobe
- 1963 *Trend in Contemporary Art*, The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Kyoto
- 1961 *Pittsburgh International Exhibition of Contemporary Painting and Sculpture*, Pittsburgh
- 1957 4th São Paulo Art Biennial
- 1955 *Japan America Abstract Art Exhibition*, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo
- 1954 *1st Modern Art Fair*, Daimaru Shinsaibashi (also in 1955 and 1956), Osaka

Kokuta Suda

Permanent Installations, Museum and Public Collections

Sogetsu Museum of Art
the Kahitsukan Kyoto Museum of Modern Art
Los Angeles County Museum of Art
The Metropolitan Museum of Art
Minneapolis Institute of Art
Museum of Modern Art, Saitama
Aichi Prefectural Museum of Art
Osaka Prefecture (Osaka Prefectural 20th Century Art Collection)
Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka
Shinseikan – Kokuta Suda, Tatsuzo Shimaoka Museum Hokkaido
Iida City Museum of Art, Nagano
Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art
Hikaru Museum
Miho Museum, Shiga
Otani Memorial Art Museum, Hyogo
Nara Prefectural Museum of Art

Publications

1992 *Kokuta Suda Exhibition 50 Years of Exploding Life Painting*, Asahishimbun, Japan.
1988 Suda, Kokuta. *Suda Kokuta*, Korinsha, Japan.
1984 Suda, Kokuta. *My Modeling: Contemporary Art*, Osaka Shoseki Books, Japan.
1981 Suda, Kokuta. *Original Artwork Going on the Highway*, Asahishinbunsha, Japan.
1964 Suda, Kokuta. *My Mandala-a*, Japan.