

BLUM

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Thirty Years: Written with a Splash of Blood
Curated by Tim Blum and Mika Yoshitake

BLUM Tokyo
January 20–March 10, 2024
Opening reception: Saturday, January 20, 5-7pm

Kazunori Hamana
Yukie Ishikawa
Susumu Koshimizu

Yukiko Kuroda
Yoshitomo Nara
Yu Nishimura

Akane Saijo
Kishio Suga
Yuji Ueda

Tokyo, Japan, January 16, 2024—BLUM is pleased to present *Thirty Years: Written with a Splash of Blood*, a milestone exhibition celebrating the gallery's thirtieth anniversary, installed across its three locations—Los Angeles, Tokyo, and New York. Co-curated by Tim Blum and postwar Japanese art historian Mika Yoshitake, this presentation is an inter-generational survey of Japanese art from the 1960s to today.

The title is excerpted from a line in Nobel Prize-nominated author Yukio Mishima's *Runaway Horses*, a celebrated novel that touches on themes of national identity, self-actualization, and the power of reincarnation. Impossible to encapsulate in its entirety, this exhibition strives to present a snapshot of the tremendous influence Japan has had on the gallery, reflecting on Blum's first trip to Japan forty years ago and the relationship that has grown since. This vital exchange catalyzed the gallery's groundbreaking work with Japanese and international artists, including foundational exhibitions of artists Yoshitomo Nara and Takashi Murakami; the acclaimed 2012 survey *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*; and *Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s* in 2019. In these thirty years open to the public, the gallery has hosted some sixty-five solo and group exhibitions of Japanese postwar art, alongside live music and performance. The exhibition features work by key artists from Gutai, Hi-Red Center, Mono-ha, New Painting, and Superflat movements through today, traversing the decades from the immediate aftermath of postwar Japan, onward. The second installment of this multi-location project opens in Tokyo.

Tim Blum first visited Japan in 1984, returning various times before moving to Tokyo in 1989, during which time he worked at several galleries and a private museum for the five years that followed. This period marks a pivotal moment art historically, following the death of the Showa emperor in 1989, when artists were confronting the postmodern through subversive political, subcultural, and spiritual perspectives alongside the rise of pop culture. Blum's exposure to some of the most iconic artistic practices that emerged during this time informed the key shows and exhibitions that shaped the gallery's history. Notably, in 1991, Blum met Takashi Murakami at his first solo exhibition in the Ginza district of Tokyo ("*Takashi, Tamiya*," Gallery Aires). The two became friends, and each taught the other about artists from their respective countries. Blum was transformed by his discovery of the postwar movements of Gutai and Mono-ha, and by contemporary work by artists such as Murakami and Yoshitomo Nara, as well as Yayoi Kusama and Yukinori Yanagi who regularly showed at Fuji Television Gallery in the early '90s. This dynamic era in Japan saw new critical engagement and expansions in art, installation, performance, and multi-genre practices, as well as the nascent scene of noise, sound, and

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electro-acoustic music experimentation. Blum was able to see early performances by now-legendary music artists Keiji Haino, Boredoms, Merzbow, Otomo Yoshihide, and others.

In 1994, Blum returned to Los Angeles to open the gallery, soon thereafter staging the US solo exhibition debuts of Yoshitomo Nara's *Pacific Babies* (1995) and Takashi Murakami (1997), the latter eventually coining the term "Superflat" in 2001 to describe not only the imperceptibly flat slickness of his paintings, but also a symbolic nod to the flattening of the divide between fine art and pop culture that would come to define a new generation of contemporary Japanese art. In 2010, the gallery invited postwar Japanese art historian, Mika Yoshitake—who helped organize the ©MURAKAMI retrospective at MOCA, Los Angeles (2008) and advised Lee Ufan's solo show at the gallery (2010)—to curate *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha* (2012). This exhibition reconsidered the history of sculpture and the object through the 1960s and 1970s artistic practices of the Mono-ha (School of Things) movement. Considering the gallery's history of presenting the contemporary works of Nara, Murakami, and the Superflat generation, Yoshitake then curated *Parergon: Japanese Art of the 1980s and 1990s* (2019), focusing on the pivotal two decades between Mono-ha and Superflat that introduced the history of postmodern art in Japan and its intersections with underground music and performance.

The show opens with Yukie Ishikawa's *Impermanence – Setting Sun in Autumn* (2023). Ishikawa represents a major figure from the 1980s New Painting genre that critically reconsidered the practice of modernist painting and pushed its criteria further through various perceptual devices. Ishikawa began her practice by abstracting an image captured by photograph and blowing it up through a slide projector, applying it onto the flatness of the picture plane. She has since then developed a technique that is conscientious of spatial layers while simultaneously allowing for post-painterly brushwork and gestures to emerge onto the surface—as in *Impermanence – Setting Sun in Autumn*, where the form of a spine hovers in a ghostlike montage. Nara, whose early work was inspired by Ishikawa, presents a new drawing of a large head whose form takes up the entire composition. A house rests atop this head like an island in the middle of a sea searching for dwellers. The show also features younger generation painters such as Yu Nishimura whose autumnal landscape, *Persimmon* (2022), is a kindred spirit to Ishikawa's seasonscape and the vivid orange, white, and teal palette of Kishio Suga's reliefs and assemblage works. Suga's work is attentive to the delicate balance between geometric and organic forms and provides a counterpart to the ceramic works displayed on the floor.

As with the Los Angeles iteration, the exhibition places work by Mono-ha generation artists in critical dialogue with several young ceramicists. Koshimizu's carved pine wall reliefs, *From Surface to Surface-Lattice* (2015) and *From Surface to Surface-Stairs* (2015), each comprise five sections that make up a Fibonacci-like pattern drawn from converting the artist's name into numbers ("5-4-3-2-3"). In the artist's signature approach, he presents these in a perpendicular arrangement—one horizontal, one vertical—to disorient the viewer's perception of these identical works. These hang above Yuji Ueda's thick fired pots and the large gourd-like vessels by Kazunori Hamana and Yukiko Kuroda that rest sideways, succumbing to their own gravitational weight. Hamana's exposed interiors allude to Akane Saijo's intimate ceramic wall piece, *Unclosed ear* (2023-2024), which doubles as a musical instrument, connecting body and environment. This presentation, which traces moments from BLUM's history over the past thirty years, indicates an alternative and more fluid narrative to that of a formalist aesthetic

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agenda. Intimate spaces and sensibilities of everyday life are in fact profoundly integral to this art historical chronicle.

The first installment of this project opened at BLUM Los Angeles on January 13. A final chapter will be presented as the inaugural exhibition to open BLUM New York in Tribeca, fall 2024. A publication released later this year will memorialize this milestone and expand upon the histories presented.

About BLUM

BLUM represents more than sixty artists and estates from sixteen countries worldwide, nurturing a diverse roster of artists at all stages of their practices with a range of global perspectives. Originally opened as Blum & Poe in Santa Monica in 1994, the gallery has been a pioneer in its early commitment to Los Angeles as an international arts capital.

The gallery has been acclaimed for its groundbreaking work in championing international artists of postwar and contemporary movements, such as CoBrA, Dansaekhwa, Mono-ha, and Superflat, and for organizing museum-caliber solo presentations and historical survey exhibitions across its spaces in Los Angeles, Tokyo, and New York. Often partnering with celebrated curators and scholars such as Cecilia Alemani, Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake, the gallery has produced large-scale exhibitions focusing on the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of the 1980s and 1990s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020); and a survey of portraiture through a democratic and humanist lens (2023); among others.

BLUM's wide-reaching program includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, video series, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. BLUM Books, the gallery's publishing division, democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists' books.

Across the three global locations, BLUM prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, it was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry's collective carbon footprint. BLUM is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in its physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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