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JB Blunk

With Work by Gordon Onslow Ford

BLUM Los Angeles

May 18–June 29, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, May 18, 6–8pm

Los Angeles, CA, April 25, 2024—BLUM is pleased to present an exhibition of more than twenty ceramic works alongside salvaged old-growth redwood tables by the legendary Northern California-based artist JB Blunk. Exemplifying his output from the 1970s through the 1990s, this solo show is the artist's fourth with the gallery.

In the 1940s, while specializing in ceramics at UCLA, Blunk attended an international exhibition at Scripps College that exposed him to the traditional art of Japanese *mingei* (folk) pottery. This experience firmly instilled in him a desire to visit Japan, which, after being drafted into the Korean War, he was able to fulfill when the service sent him there for a brief training trip. During this visit, Blunk, by chance, met renowned artist Isamu Noguchi. Noguchi introduced Blunk to acclaimed ceramicists such as Rosanjin Kitaoji, with whom Blunk would go on to study with for several months. This position as apprentice mentee to a master ceramist allowed Blunk to move to Japan. Committed to furthering his journey with traditional Japanese pottery, Blunk also apprenticed (*deishi*) for fourteen months with the celebrated ceramicist Toyo Kaneshige—who has been credited with reviving the unglazed technique essential to fifteenth-century Bizen ware.

Before his departure from Japan, Blunk had a farewell solo exhibition of his ceramics at the Chuo-Koron Gallery, a space which Noguchi had designed and in which he had exhibited his famed Akari light sculptures. Upon Blunk's return to the United States in September 1954, he became a pioneer in the ceramic field—the first American artist to gain deep, firsthand experience with the revered Japanese tradition of unglazed, woodfired stoneware ceramics. "I'd like to show the people in the States this material and way of using just earth, water, and fire. It's very different from any concept or use of material to be found elsewhere," Blunk said.

Despite Blunk's enthusiasm for creating and exhibiting his Bizen-style ceramic work in California, his efforts were often thwarted. At the time, an American audience was more accustomed to glazed ceramics and struggled to understand both the modernity of this work and its ties to Japanese tradition. As such, in the early 1960s, Blunk turned to wood—the medium for which he is now most known—as a different means by which to make his art. The artist would, however, continue to prolifically make and exhibit his ceramics for the entirety of his career.

The two grandiose wood furniture works presented here were commissioned for the home of esteemed landscape architect Lawrence Halprin and his wife, the prominent choreographer and dancer Anna Halprin. Active figures in the creative sphere of Northern California at the same time as Blunk, the Halprins considered the sculptures to be integral parts of their interior landscape. Anna once said, "These pieces are primary figures in our home." Made from salvaged old-growth Redwood burls, these objects represent the personal relationship and creative exchange between Blunk and Halprin, as well as the "spiritual and ecological sustenance" that Blunk took from the local environment of Marin County

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in the 1960s and 70s, culling endless inspiration from the natural landscape and incorporating its raw materials into his work.

Also included in this exhibition is the work of another Northern California luminary—Blunk’s fellow Inverness resident of nearly forty years, Gordon Onslow Ford. Onslow Ford shared Blunk’s passion for their natural surroundings as well as Japanese philosophy and aesthetics. Onslow Ford studied Zen Buddhism with Alan Watts at the American Academy of Asian Studies and Chinese calligraphy for five years with Hodo Tobase Roshi, both in San Francisco. Furthermore, it was Onslow Ford who enlisted Blunk to assist with the construction of his home in 1958, and subsequently offered the artist a parcel of land on Bishop Pine Preserve. This site is where Blunk would go on to build his famous artist-made residence.

JB Blunk’s (b. 1926, Ottawa, KS; d. 2002, Inverness, CA) work has been exhibited widely, including a retrospective exhibition at the Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA (2018) and a two-person show with sculptor Alma Allen at the Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, CA (2018). The first European retrospective of Blunk’s work will be mounted at the Martell Foundation, Cognac, France this summer, June 2024. A major monograph on the artist was published in 2020 by Blunk Books and Dent-de-Leone. Blunk’s work is featured in public collections worldwide, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; M+ Museum, Hong Kong, China; Museum of Arts and Design, New York, NY; Oakland Museum of California, Oakland, CA; Palm Springs Art Museum, Palm Springs, CA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, CA; and the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C., among others.

Gordon Onslow Ford’s (b. 1912, Wendover, UK; d. 2003, Inverness, California) work was featured in the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, Paris (1938) and Salon des Independents, Paris (1939), and has been included in group shows at such institutions as the San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA (1951); The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY (1968); Grand Palais, Paris (1982); Musée national d’art moderne, Paris (1990); Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris (1997); Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY (2009); and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA (2012). He has been the subject of numerous solo presentations, including those at the San Francisco Museum of Art, San Francisco, CA (1948, 1964) and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago, Chile (1995).

About BLUM

BLUM represents more than sixty artists and estates from eighteen 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

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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.

Press Inquiries

Nicoletta Beyer
Communications and Editorial Director, New York
nicoletta@blum-gallery.com

Christie Hayden
Communications and Social Media Editor, Los Angeles
christie@blum-gallery.com