

On Ma

Curated by Brandy Carstens

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In the writings' glossary of the artist Kishio Suga¹ (b. 1944, Morioka, Japan), "ma (間)" is translated as "interval/space between" and depicted as "a structural element of natural as opposed to artificial space." At the end of the entry, it is suggested to look at the note "nature" ("shizen" (自然)), described as "the place where things can be found as they are, in contrast to artificial space; the intervening space between [thing] and [thing]." These concepts are depicted and described, but not *defined*, for not containing themselves in a strict conceptual detonation; they are not forged as categorical terms but integrated in a purposefully ambiguous, fluid way. Non-Western epistemologies allow us to question the fictitious solidity of our terms, concepts, and definitions, demonstrating the praiseworthy complexity of interrelated and impermanent systemic thinking and overcoming a blind binarism between nature and culture.

An empty structure or a structural void, the active agency of a negative space, an illuminating darkness. From a Western perspective, a broader mental exercise is needed not to understand a vacant entity as a deficit property. In a voracious, segregationist, and excessively hegemonic system, contemplative idleness and pauses are synonymous with unproductivity and inefficiency. What is understood as emptiness in a productive logic is, in fact, an essential matter of balance in more sustainable epistemologies, which encourage perception and reflection about the world around us in the magnetic distances that simultaneously separate us and bring us together.

Concepts analogous to ma appear in other contexts, such as the notion of void in American Minimalism, the interval inherent in *jiān* (間) in Chinese and Taiwanese thoughts, and the space where relationships are established between individuals in a collective commitment in African and Amerindian cosmologies. The twenty artists present in this show come from very different geographies, such as South America, the Middle East, Eastern Asia, Europe, and the United States, many carrying with them their own stories of diasporas, such as contemporary resistance to the open wounds inflicted by African enslavement in the colonial period or the war exodus in the Orient. In their artistic and agenda pluralities, their gathering incites the pertinent of the revisitation by the youth of ancient concepts, encouraging us to value silence, to respect the inwardness of each individual, and to praise the shadows equally as we do with light².

¹ Kishio Suga, *Writings (Vol. I: 1969-1979)*. Milan: Skira, 2022, p. 245.

² Jun'ichirō Tanizaki, *In Praise of Shadows*. Stony Creek: Leete's Island Books, 1977.

Holistically, the clarity provided by the pause, negative space, and emptiness centers the concept of *ma*, which is present in the order of objects, places, beings, thoughts, and other unattainable entities by linguistic categorization. Structural to this group exhibition is the series of intervals that transcend space-time apprehension and invade other fields of existence as a fresh wellspring, scaping conventional notions of presentation and reception and stating that human cognitive comprehension is, in fact, a limited – and perhaps ungraspable – barrier of perception of reality as it is.

Concreteness and levity are not mutually exclusive, just as the full and the empty, the defined and the formless, silence and sound, light and darkness. *On Ma* seeks to demonstrate that impermanence and constant metamorphosis present themselves as alternatives to a constrained environment that is baffled by multiplicity and fragmentation, alive in a space-in-between, in a fulfilled and structured emptiness.

Text by Mateus Nunes, PhD