

Press Release

LENORE TAWNEY & TOSHIKO TAKAEZU: A REMARKABLE FRIENDSHIP

15 November – 21 December 2024

Private View: Thursday 14 November, 6-8pm



Lenore Tawney and Toshiko Takaezu, Contemporary Museum, Honolulu, 1996

Alison Jacques presents 'Lenore Tawney & Toshiko Takaezu: A Remarkable Friendship', a two-person exhibition dedicated to the work and lifelong friendship of Lenore Tawney (b.1907, Ohio; d.2007, New York) and Toshiko Takaezu (b.1922, Hawaii; d.2011, Hawaii). This is the first exhibition of Toshiko Takaezu's work in the UK; Tawney has been represented and exhibited by Alison Jacques in London since 2017. Through showing the work of both artists together, in testament to their 50 year enduring friendship, this exhibition emphasizes how both artists, as pioneers and innovators, made their work in an ongoing spiritual quest to express an intangible truth.

ALISON JACQUES

The two artists first met in 1957 at an American Craft conference in California, and remained close friends until Tawney's death in 2007, aged 100. They often showed their work together and had shared interests, which shaped their artistic trajectories and led them to adopt intensely personal and experimental paths. After returning from a trip to India, Tawney moved to Quakertown, New Jersey and set up an adjoining studio to Takaezu's home, staying for 4 years. In 1974, the artists travelled together to Guatemala visiting indigenous weavers. The exhibition highlights how these two women shaped craft history in the US by expanding and redefining the possibilities of their preferred mediums: Takaezu in clay, fibre and bronze; Tawney in woven forms and thread, assemblages, drawing and collage.

Both Takaezu and Tawney were interested in mystical and religious philosophies from both the East and West, and imbued their work with a deeply felt spiritual content. Tawney's extensive global travels exposed her to a multitude of ancient cultures and religious traditions — especially those of India. Her vision and spirituality was interlinked with the Zen concept that all things are connected, and her view of life in its entirety. Hawaiian born Takaezu was of Japanese descent, and made numerous visits to her parent's birth land. Her work is profoundly linked to the spiritually-infused traditions of East Asia, including the tea ceremony and Zen Buddhism, nature and the seamless integration of art and life.

Both artists dealt with space. In Tawney's case, open space and a redefinition of weaving as a sculptural art form. In Takaezu's work, the enclosed and hidden, her signature closed ceramic forms sometimes contained poems or rattles inside. For both artists, the works act as metaphors for the human spirit and an evocation of a spiritual universe — powerful and mysterious in presence.

During their lifetime, Takaezu and Tawney had important joint exhibitions. More recently, they were the subject of a dialogue show at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville. In Takaezu's recent survey show at The Noguchi Museum, New York, a large woven form by Tawney entitled Heart was shown alongside an installation of 'moon' sculptures by Takaezu, as a reference to the instances when the two artists showed their work together. Tawney's work Little River is currently on display at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, as part of the collection display 'The Artists of Coenties Slip'.

A filmed conversation between American curator, author, and historian Glenn Adamson, whose research and work focuses on the intersections of design, craft, and contemporary art, and Ann Coxon, who until recently was long term Curator of International Art at Tate, will be on the gallery website from 25 November.

For further information:

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