

Press Release

Masaomi Yasunaga
Treading the Earth

22 February – 19 April 2025
2/F, 27 Huqiu Road, Shanghai

For his first solo exhibition with Lisson Gallery in China, the Japanese sculptor Masaomi Yasunaga presents a new body of experimental and expressive vessel sculptures along with recently developed tablet works comprised of hand-made mosaic tiles forming intricate images. Renowned for his unprecedented production methods, Yasunaga's work offers a re-evaluation of ceramic's technical traditions and the vessel's role in cultures across millennia, positing new expressive potential.

Inspired by cobblestone streets — which are shaped over time by countless footsteps — the exhibition centres around the notion of 'stepping on the earth,' conjuring a meditation on how human interaction and movement leave lasting traces and memories. Inspired by his upbringing within Japan's Catholic minority and ensuing appreciation for aesthetics of Western origin, Yasunaga honours a global range of vessel forms and ritual objects. With titles referencing physical states of being — *empty, melting, fused, molted, shedding, skeleton, flesh and bone* — the artist evokes nature's physicality and spirituality's ascension into earthenware, eliciting an emotional connection with the viewer.

Yasunaga's new *Mosaic* series is a nod to an artistic style of far-away places and long-ago times. The works extend Yasunaga's exploration of multiple techniques, both ancient and cutting edge. Yasunaga's pixelated tablets, which depict compositions of vessel containers in various arrangements, extend the vessel metaphors achieved by the raw and rough texture of his three-dimensional works.

To enhance the more than thirty works displayed on walls and pedestals, the gallery floor is covered with an organic material that absorbs the footprints of visitors. As the audience moves through the space, the floor gradually accumulates footprints and marks, forming a shifting trail that alludes to the passage of time and to the impermanence of human presence. The presentation invites viewers to experience the depth of Yasunaga's conceptual and material investigations and his unique approach to the intersection of time, body, and object.

Masaomi Yasunaga was a student of Satoru Hoshino, a protégé of the avant-garde ceramic group Sodeisha: a post-war (1940s – 1990s) movement that questioned the mandate of functionality within the ceramic medium and pioneered a new sculptural philosophy. The artists of Sodeisha, which translates as 'crawling through the mud society', rebelled against the prevalent ceramic traditions in Japan to create emotionally driven artworks. By focusing on the process of creation, centred around the sculptural form rather than the functional use of the object, Yasunaga extends the legacy of Sodeisha group's experimental ethos and is faithful to the existential concerns of its founders.

A historic achievement of Masaomi Yasunaga's practice is his unprecedented use of glaze, elevating ceramic's surface treatment material to become his primary material. While pottery is typically formed from clay, fired in a kiln and sealed with a finishing coat of glaze, Yasunaga build his sculptural works with specially adapted glaze. Combined with unique raw materials such as feldspars, whole rocks, metal or glass powders, Yasunaga's glaze forms are buried in various strata of sand or kaolin (unrefined porcelain clay) to preserve their structure in the firing stage. After cooling, Yasunaga's sculptures are excavated from their beds in a studio process analogous to archaeological excavation and discovery. The yielded objects appear honed and shaped by earthly elements over centuries, some whole and others curiously fragmented. Aesthetically, these sculptures are simultaneously primitive and contemporary; objects of human culture

which appear as if lost and found, seeming to confirm the supremacy of nature's order over the world of mankind.

At the heart of Yasunaga's practice is the elemental force of fire. In pursuit of 'fundamental beauty', the artist considers the flames as a filter and the kiln that controls the flame as a time machine. This represents Yasunaga's intention to remove his will and ego, making room for a return to nature. Through meticulous manipulation of his singular glaze forms and firing techniques, Yasunaga transforms a decorative element into an expressive force that embodies both intention and unpredictability. The layered, organic surfaces of his works reflect the tension between control and chance, where the firing process reveals intricate textures and forms organically shaped by natural forces rather than artistic artifice. This distinctive approach to glaze sets Yasunaga apart from other ceramic artists, allowing for a nuanced exploration of materiality and temporality.

About Masaomi Yasunaga

Masaomi Yasunaga (born 1982) lives and works in Iga-shi, Mie Prefecture, Japan. He holds a Masters Degree in Environmental Design from Osaka Sangyo University. His recent solo exhibitions include Pierre Marie Giraud, Brussels, Belgium (2024); *Empty Vessel* at Gallery 85.4, Tokyo, Japan (2024); *Clouds in the Distance* at Lisson Gallery, London (2023), UK; 石拾いからの発見 / *discoveries from picking up stones* at Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, USA (2023); *In Holding Close* at Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts, Auburn, USA (2023); *Looking Afar* at Lisson Gallery, New York, USA (2022); *Masaomi Yasunaga* at Lisson Gallery, East Hampton, NY, USA (2021); *Empty Parade* at wad Café, Osaka, Japan (2020); *To things that exist, to things that don't exist* at gallery YDS, Kyoto, Japan (2020); *Empty Landscape* at Libby Leshgold Gallery, Vancouver, Canada (2020); *Masaomi Yasunaga* at Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2019); *Masaomi Yasunaga: A Shadow of the Eternity* at Utsuwakan, Kyoto, Japan (2019); *Memory of Orient* at Gallery Utsuwa Note, Kawagoe, Saitama, Japan (2018); *Masaomi Yasunaga Exhibition* at Garb Domingo, Okinawa, Japan (2017); and *arid landscapes* at pramata, Tokyo, Japan (2017).

Selected group exhibitions include *Unearthed*, Orange County Museum of Art, Costa Mesa, USA (2025); *Objects for a Heavenly Cave*, Marta, Los Angeles, USA (2024); *CHAOS curated by Alex May*, Carpenters Workshop Gallery, Los Angeles (2023); *Enamel & Body / Ceramics*, Ginza Maison Hermès Le Forum, Tokyo (2023); *OBJECT & THINGS* at The Noyes House, Connecticut (2022); *Romantic Progress*, Museum of Modern Ceramic Art, Gifu (2022); *Sterling Ruby and Masaomi Yasunaga* at Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, CA, USA (2020).

Masaomi Yasunaga's work is included in the permanent collections of the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Arts, Auburn, USA, the Ariana Museum, Geneva, Switzerland and The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX, USA.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and promotes the work of more than 70 international artists across spaces in London, New York, Los Angeles, Shanghai and Beijing. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, John Latham, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. It still works with many of these artists and others of that generation, from Carmen Herrera and Olga de Amaral to Hélio Oiticica and Lee Ufan. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors to the public for the first time, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie. Since 2000, the gallery has gone on to represent many more leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Liu Xiaodong, Otobong Nkanga, Pedro Reyes, Sean Scully, Hiroshi Sugimoto and Wael Shawky. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists including Dana Awartani, Cory Arcangel, Garrett Bradley, Ryan Gander, Josh Kline, Hugh Hayden, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost and Cheyney Thompson.

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