

# BLUM

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Kazuo Kadonaga**

**BLUM Los Angeles**

**April 5–May 17, 2025**

**Opening Reception: Saturday, April 5, 5–7pm**

April 1, 2025, Los Angeles—BLUM is pleased to present a survey exhibition of Kazuo Kadonaga, an artist who worked extensively in Los Angeles during the early 1980s and has exhibited throughout the US, Europe, and Mexico. Kadonaga's practice draws from a holistic approach to natural forms, where he unveils the essence of material properties. Deviating from sculpture as a repository of projected ideas, the artist exposes the phenomenological transformation of materials. The exhibition includes seventeen works from 1976 to 2019, spanning bamboo, oak, cedar, cypress, handmade paper, and glass.

Kazuo Kadonaga was born in 1946 and is based in Ishikawa Prefecture, where generations of the Kadonaga family have owned a cedar forest and lumber mill. A self-taught artist, Kadonaga first moved to Tokyo in 1966 to learn architectural drawing and later study architectural techniques such as welding at small factories. Immersing himself in the contemporary art scene, he frequented many galleries and attended major exhibitions of the time, such as the *10th Tokyo Biennale: Between Man and Matter* and the Osaka Expo (both 1970). He studied under avant-garde painter Hironao Toyoshima, who would bridge him to Tsubaki Kindai Gallery, where Kadonaga held his first solo exhibition in 1971. Kadonaga's earliest works combined wood with stainless steel (*Wood No. 1*) as well as with transparent acrylic (*Wood No. 2*) in which he would cut curves into squared lumber and produce a duplicate shape in a different material and place the forms side by side. These were shown at Tsubaki Kindai Gallery (1971) and Muramatsu Gallery (1973–77, and 1981) respectively, where Mono-ha artists, Kishio Suga, Nobuo Sekine, and Lee Ufan were actively exhibiting. During this time, his work was also included in several museum annuals, such as the *10th Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan* (1971) and the 7th, 8th, and 10th *Japan Art Festival* (1972, 1973, and 1975), which toured to Mexico, Slovenia, Germany, New Zealand, and Australia.

In 1974, Kadonaga was invited to participate in a hundred-day symposium on stone in Sweden. During his visit he had the opportunity to see Italian sculptor Giuseppe Penone's carved and stripped tree trunks at the Museum of Modern Art, Stockholm, and was greatly inspired by his ability to use the medium of the tree itself. This experience provided an impetus for him to begin focusing on the singular materiality of wood, studying its unique organic properties. He often sliced or split cross sections of the logs, drying sections separately, and reassembling them into a solid form. The artist's process would begin in his family's cedar forest, cutting the base of a tree just above the root flare, while the wood is still wet. He then sent the logs to a sawmill to have them professionally cut into paper-thin layers of wood with a veneer mill—usually used for building houses and furniture—gluing each skin back to its original form, letting the thin wood buckle and flare out while drying. At the Kanagawa Prefectural

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Gallery exhibition *From Method to Method* in 1975, he unraveled a cedar log, leaving its paper-thin pieces of bark directly on the floor as if shedding skin like a snake. The two large cedar logs currently on view at BLUM were first exhibited at the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery in 1985 and display live cuts against the grain of the wood. The rectangular holes along the surface are the result of natural splitting. The jagged lines across the tree rings are prominent in *Wood No. 11 DB* (1999), a large, gnarled cedar trunk. Kadonaga created these splits by first cutting the face of the trunk using a chainsaw just a few inches and then striking the wood with a mallet to allow for the jagged splits to naturally occur.

Kadonaga was hired by Yoshishige Saito (1904–2001), a pioneer of modern Japanese constructivism, to assist with his solo exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, in 1978. Saito, who taught at Tama Art University from 1964 to 1973, was a key mentor to Nobuo Sekine and Kishio Suga. Sharing Saito's conviction that illusion and individual expression were obsolete, Mono-ha artists often combined natural and industrial materials to articulate the relational structures through which these forms revealed themselves. While Kadonaga's early works are in direct dialogue with Mono-ha as well as Minimalist repetition in both process and display to deviate from the objecthood of sculpture, the artist's interests lay in exposing the intrinsic qualities and natural transformation of materials, and activating the threshold between formation and deformation that was specific to the materiality of wood. This was in stark contrast to Mono-ha's focus on the in-between structure among subject, materials, and site.

In 1976, Kadonaga began investigating the metamorphic process in which oak and bamboo were separately transformed by charring half of each piece into a pyramid of ashes in a specialized furnace at intense heat (approximately 1,500 degrees Fahrenheit). Burning oak into charcoal is a ritual often used in Japanese tea ceremonies in preparation to heat tea, in which the oak burns evenly and its cross section dries in a starburst pattern that radiates out from the center (*sakura zumi*, or cherry blossom charcoal). First exhibited at Muramatsu Gallery in 1976, each oak piece in *Wood No. 1A* shows the unburned to charcoal gradation, displayed in a row of over a dozen pieces. Praised by artist Lee Ufan, *Wood No. 1A* was shown in tandem with *Bamboo No. 7A*, charred bamboo poles propped against the wall. In the current exhibition at BLUM, the two 1976 works are brought together, and installed under skylights. The bamboo work, in particular, creates an arresting pattern of shadows from the rays of natural sunlight.

In *Conversation between Bamboo and Wood*, Kadonaga activated sound by installing bamboo and wooden logs around a visitor who sat in the middle of the installation, experiencing the materials cracking in real time in response to shifts in temperature.

In 1988, he began working with *washi* (handmade Japanese paper), layering thousands of sheets and using a veneer press to condense and dry the papers into a solid block in a high frequency wood dryer machine. Each piece of paper is then separated one-by-one at one end of each work. These condensed

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layers of pulp are hung along the wall in long columns or triangular forms, where the fibrous, feathery edges of the paper are left exposed at the bottom. Rather than subjecting the materials to convey a concept, Kadonaga works with the natural properties of the paper to allow their form to come alive.

In 1999, Kadonaga began his long-term process of working with recycled glass from fluorescent light fixtures resulting in translucent green glass from iron oxide. For years, Kadonaga went through many trials and errors experimenting with molten glass using a custom-made furnace. The recycled glass is melted at 1,250 to 1,450 degrees Celsius (2,282 degrees Fahrenheit) in a melting furnace, and this melted glass slowly drips a single stream of hot liquid glass into the slow cooling furnace, letting the form take its own shape by steadily decreasing the temperature between three to six months depending on their size. They result in solid, squat mounds that swell like a Buddha's belly and taper towards the top. The glass sculptures exhibited at BLUM range in weight from 1,000 to 1,200 pounds. Through these sculptures, one can observe how the transparent fragility of glass is apparent through the surface formation of the coils, which belie their weight and heft.

Each material is approached with the fresh eyes of a studied observer. Eschewing his artistic hand, Kadonaga unravels each work from the inside out as if the materials take on their own life and form. As one critic noted about Kadonaga's process, "In a serial manner, each element became the topic of his scrutiny. He analyzed their component parts, tested their attributes, and examined their intrinsic characteristics, noting their change in environmental characteristics like fluctuations in humidity or reaction to forceful impact."

Kazuo Kadonaga (b.1946, Ishikawa, Japan) is a contemporary sculptor celebrated for his material-driven practice. Coming from a family of foresters, he developed a deep appreciation for the natural properties of wood. While he initially explored painting and architecture, Kadonaga shifted his focus in the early 1970s, rejecting overt artistic expression in favor of processes that allow materials to shape their own form. Since then, he has worked with wood, bamboo, paper, and glass, using methods that emphasize the natural behavior of each material. From coiling molten glass into sculptural forms to reassembling cedar logs, his works reveal the subtle interplay between natural structures and transformational processes. While his practice resonates with the philosophies of Japan's Mono-ha artists and Western process art, Kadonaga's approach remains distinctly his own—one of observation, patience, and reverence for materiality.

Kadonaga continues to live and work in Ishikawa, Japan. His artwork has been exhibited including significant solo presentations at the Mingei International Museum, San Diego, CA (2005); Salt Lake Art Center, Salt Lake City, UT (2001); The Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX (1988); and Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (1985). In 1983, he was an artist-in-residence at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. His work is held in numerous public collections worldwide, such as the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Toyama City, Japan; Albuquerque Museum, Albuquerque, NM; Art Museum of South Texas, Corpus Christi, TX; The Honolulu Museum of Art, Honolulu, HI; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City, Mexico; The Museum of Glass, Tacoma, WA; the Museum of Modern Art, Toyama, Japan; Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo, the Netherlands; and the University of California Santa Barbara Art Museum, CA.

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## About BLUM

BLUM represents more than sixty artists and estates from twenty 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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