

HAUSER & WIRTH

Press Release

Tetsumi Kudo

Hauser & Wirth Zürich

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'In Kudo's sculptures and assemblages [...] there was a prevailing obsession with the theme of impotence linked to nuclear attack, a penchant for grotesque renderings of the body, cut into pieces or dissolving into puddles of goo, and a science-fictional dystopian picturing of the body as part machine... Kudo's works looked less like sculpture than like movie props from lurid science fiction films [...] I admired them greatly.'

– Mike Kelley, 'Cultivation by Radioactivity'

Tetsumi Kudo: Garden of Metamorphosis, Walker Art Center, 2008

Hauser & Wirth Zürich is proud to present the first ever exhibition of works by Tetsumi Kudo (1935 – 1990) in Switzerland. The exhibition is mounted in conjunction with Andrea Rosen Gallery and is a new configuration of an exhibition previously installed at Hauser & Wirth in London.

The exhibition presents a selection of work dating from the first ten years that Kudo spent in Paris (1963 – 1972). The seminal, room-size installation 'Garden of the Metamorphosis in the Space Capsule' (1968) forms the exhibition's focal point and is shown alongside examples from his cube and dome series.

Developed in the context of post-war Japan and France, Kudo's practice, which encompasses sculpture, installation and performance-based work, is dominated by a sense of disillusionment with the modern world – its blind faith in progress, technological advancement, and humanist ideals. His oeuvre transcends formal categorisation yet his work was consistently universal in its language.

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A key figure of Tokyo's Anti-Art Movement in the late 1950s, Kudo's performative paintings and installations marked the beginning of his preoccupation with the impact of nuclear catastrophe and the excess of consumer society associated with the post-war economic boom. Relocating to Paris in 1962, Kudo gained recognition for his Happenings, but this exposure to the European intellectual scene also intensified his aversion to the modern agenda. This manifested in the biomorphic sculptures and assemblages that Kudo produced from 1963, in which he sought to expose the limitations of the modernist and humanist values that defined the post-war era.

In his cube series, small boxes contain decaying cocoons and shells revealing half-living forms – often replica limbs, detached phalli or papier-mâché organs – that merge with man-made items. These sculptures were intended as a comment on the individualistic outlook and eager adoption of mass-production which he found to be prevalent in Europe. The mutations are unnatural and impotent – a product of a post-apocalyptic world in which the synthetic triumphs over nature. The cube exteriors are painted as dice, a nod to the idea that it is the random forces beyond our control that dictate life, rather than individual agency as western philosophy teaches.

'Garden of the Metamorphosis in the Space Capsule' is a dice enlarged to over 3.5 square metres, with a small circular door allowing the viewer to climb into the dark interior lit with UV light. The elements within fluoresce in black light: molten cotton skin, penises and silhouettes of body parts litter the floor beneath giant artificial flower stems and a lurid green sign reads 'for nostalgic purpose'.



Kudo's dome works appear as futuristic terrariums: perspex spheres fed by circuit boards or batteries house artificial plant life, soil, and radioactive detritus. His use of acrid greens and yellows suggest a highly polluted environment. What is being cultivated in these mini eco-systems is a grotesque fusion of the biological and mechanical. That it is decomposing is illustrative of Kudo's feeling that with the pollution of nature comes the decomposition of humanity.

Whilst Kudo's presence in North America and Europe was marginal for many years, his influence on subsequent generations of artists has been profound and far-reaching. The simultaneously political, yet highly aesthetic, characteristic of his sculptural work is at the centre of the contemporary oeuvre. Allan Kaprow included

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photographs of Kudo's performances in his 1965 compendium 'Assemblages, Environments & Happenings', images that would go on to inform Mike Kelley's practice. Paul McCarthy also cited Kudo as a significant influence in his autobiography 'Low Life Slow Life' (2010).

About the Artist

Tetsumi Kudo was born in 1935 in Osaka, Japan, and spent a large portion of his youth in the town of Okayama, neighbour of Hiroshima. He graduated from the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts in 1958. In 1957, he began exhibiting his work at the Salon of Independents, Yomiuri and had his first solo exhibition at the Galerie Blanche, Tokyo. He was awarded the Grand Prize and a travel grant to Paris through his participation in the 1962 Second International Young Artists Exhibition in Tokyo. He subsequently spent 25 years in Paris from 1962 to 1987 before returning to Japan. He died in Tokyo in 1990.

Notable solo exhibitions include 'Your Portrait: A Tetsumi Kudo Retrospective' at The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan (2013) which toured to The National Museum of Art, Tokyo, Japan (2014) and Aomori Museum of Art, Aomori, Japan (2014); 'Tetsumi Kudo: Garden of Metamorphosis,' Walker Art Center, Minneapolis MN, (2008); 'Tetsumi Kudo – La montagne que nous cherchons est dans la serre [The Mountain We Are Looking for Is in the Greenhouse],' La Maison Rouge, Paris, France (2007); 'Tetsumi Kudo – Contestation/Création,' The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan (1994); 'Tetsumi Kudo, 1935 – 1990,' The Van Reekum Museum, Apeldoorn and the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands (1991). His works have also been included in landmark group exhibitions, 'Japon des avant-gardes 1910 – 1970,' at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France (1986); 'Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky,' at Guggenheim Museum, New York NY (1994) and 'Out of Action: Between Performance and the Object, 1949 – 1979,' Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles CA (1998).

Kudo's work is held in the collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou, the Musée Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Chiba City Art Museum, Kurashi City Art Museum, Aomori Museum of Art, the Stedelijk Museum, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Vienna, Musée des Beaux Arts de Montréal, MoMA Museum of Modern Art and Walker Art Center, amongst others.

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Gallery hours:

Tuesday to Saturday, 10 am – 6 pm

www.hauserwirth.info

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Votre Portrait T
1965 – 1966
Wood, paint, plastic, egg carton,
wire and cotton
29.8 x 29.8 x 29.7 cm / 11 3/4 x
11 3/4 x 11 3/4 in

Cultivation of Nature & People Who Are Looking
At It
1970 – 1971
Plastic, artificial soil, glass, cotton and resin
33 x 26 x 26 cm / 13 x 10 1/4 x 10 1/4 in

Grefte '72 (Graft '72)
1972
Plastic, metal, soil, thermometer, resin, adhesive,
paint, hair and rope
88.9 x 58.4 x 38.1 cm / 35 x 23 x 15 in

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Estate of Tetsumi Kudo, Hiroko Kudo
Courtesy Hauser & Wirth and
Andrea Rosen Gallery
Photo: Jessica Eckert