

MILAN

Pirelli HangarBicocca

KISHIO SUGA

SITUATIONS

Opposite page

ALICE CREISCHER

To Camille B.

2016

Costume, A3 brochure, collage installation and single-channel video: 24 min. 40 sec.
Installation view of "Jerusalem Show VIII: Before and After Origins" at al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art, Jerusalem, 2016.
Courtesy the artist, KOW, Berlin, and al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art.

This page

KISHIO SUGA

Fieldology

1974/2016

Rope, dimensions variable.

Courtesy the artist, Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan, and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York.

Japanese artist Kishio Suga's 2016 exhibition at Pirelli HangarBicocca in Milan marked the first time that a retrospective of his work was held outside of Japan. For the show, which was entitled "Situations," curators Yuko Hasegawa and Vicente Todolí brought together 23 installations, mostly re-creations of earlier works that Suga reinterpreted for the architecture and mood of the industrial HangarBicocca.

Suga began his career as a founding member of Mono-ha—literally, "school of things" in Japanese—an avant-garde group active in Japan in the late-1960s and early '70s. Mono-ha centered on works that used simple, mostly unprocessed materials, such as wood, concrete, rocks and metal, with artistic intervention reduced to a minimum. The group rejected the idea that art is a form of subjective expression, and instead presented materials and objects as they were, to establish unusual interrelations and elicit alternative ways of looking at reality.

When Mono-ha disbanded in 1972, Suga continued developing a practice based on the group's original philosophy, focusing on interactions between materials and their surroundings and generating what the artist calls a specific *jōkyō* ("situation"). Drawing from this concept, the show at HangarBicocca unfolded as a series of "situations" set up within the museum's cavernous main hall, which in a previous life was a space used for assembling and testing high-powered electrical machinery.

Opening the show was a large-scale installation entitled *Critical Sections* (1984/2016), comprising five strips of fabric—four white and one black—that hung from a large metal ring on the ceiling. At HangarBicocca, the strips reached down the building's entire height of approximately 25 meters, and were entwined to form a single rope that was also interwoven with small tree branches.

At floor level, the rope split again to connect to five zinc plates that kept the installation in place through tension. Leading one's gaze upward, this impressive piece elicited awareness of the viewer's position with respect to the museum's overwhelming architecture.

Soft Concrete (1970/2016), meanwhile, focused on the contrast between two raw industrial materials. Four standing metal plates, arranged in a rectangular formation in which their edges do not touch, were partially submerged in a mass of soft concrete that kept the entire structure steady. The soft concrete was a compound of cement and motor oil, which will take longer than a year to set permanently. The installation deftly incorporated the opposing concepts of stability and instability, connected to the building's history, and conjured the transformation processes of industrial materials.

Some pieces juxtaposed organic and industrial elements, as in *Conditions of Situated Units* (1975/2016). Here, steel rods sprout from an intricate tangle of tree branches; though congenitally different, the two materials coexist in a harmonic synthesis. Other works on view reflected on diverse manifestations of the physical and functional qualities of a material. This was the case with *Fieldology* (1974/2016), in which ropes were presented in different forms: stretched and grouped together to form a compact, waist-high wall; cut into small pieces and lumped into shapeless heaps; and rolled up in coils. The work seemed to suggest that our definitions of "material" may be contrived, and that individual materials have the potential to elicit varied sensations once we manipulate their physical forms.

A highlight of the show, the largest-ever version of *Left-Behind Situation* (1972–2016), was installed in a high-ceilinged room adjacent to the main exhibition hall. A single metal cable connected to hundreds of points on the walls, and was the drive element of several pulleys situated at 50-centimeter and 5-meter heights. Rectangular blocks of stone or wood rested atop every diagonal intersection of the cable. These blocks appeared to be floating—a visual deception that was amplified by the shadows they cast on the floor.

Beyond the interest of the individual pieces, the merit of "Situations" prevailed in a sensual and intellectual experience. Suga and the curators successfully created interrelationships between his artworks and the space in which they were exhibited—and in some cases continue to transform. His installations of raw materials recalled minimalist landscapes, where objects and matter were reduced to their essence and connected in manifold ways to their surroundings.

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