

# Art in America

LOS ANGELES

## KISHIO SUGA

Blum & Poe

Kishio Suga's exhibition offered a careful choreography of sticks leaning against wood panels, ropes wrapped around rocks, fabric strips twisted around curved metal plates, and concrete blocks sandwiching blades of grass. The interdependency of organic and industrial objects was characteristic of Mono-ha, a movement (whose name means "school of things") that counts Lee Ufan among its most well-known artists and is often compared to Arte Povera for its use of unconventional materials.

Kishio Suga:  
*Critical Sections*,  
1984/2017, cloth,  
sticks, and zinc  
plates, approx. 19  
by 31 by 20 feet; at  
Blum & Poe.



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Mono-ha artists, emerging amid the civil unrest of postwar Japan and disillusioned with available modes of art-making, turned to placing banal objects, typically quite large in scale, next to, atop, or propped against each other, creating a refreshing new art language endowed with a philosophic aura. These works were often meant to be site-specific and temporary, and many were destroyed soon after their debut. But, with the backing of international galleries and museums in the last six years or so, the movement is now being revisited with great vigor. Re-created and remounted for a contemporary audience, Suga's installations from the 1970s and '80s, which were shown alongside a couple of recent works, found new relevance in this show.

Two large installations dominated the first gallery. Black handmade paper was stretched taut over rectangular stone blocks to form an expansive polygon in *Differentiated Orders* (1979/2017). Suga sprayed the paper with water so that it adhered to the blocks. In *Critical Sections* (1984/2017), several wide swaths of black and white fabric cascaded from the skylights of the gallery and twisted around each other like ribbons on a maypole. Three small twigs intersected the cloth column, and the fabric flowed down to curved zinc sheets on the floor.

Works on paper, all from the 1970s, dotted the walls of each room, giving visitors insight into Suga's thought process. He ripped pieces of paper, tore off lengths of vinyl tape, and drew with marker to create long and short lines for these works, which activate space through his arrangements. In the third gallery, Suga arrayed rocks of different shapes and sizes on a rectangular zinc sheet for *Edges of Gathered Realms* (1993/2017). Instead of the raked sand of a traditional Japanese Zen garden, cutouts on the zinc panel accented the careful choosing and placement of the rocks.

Four other installations, in the upstairs gallery, demonstrated Suga's masterful deployment of objects. Like the hardy weeds that grow through cracks in the pavement, fringes of dry grass peeked through long, low walls of concrete blocks in *Units of Dependency* (1974/2017). In *Contorted Positioning* (1982/2017), a jumble of industrially hewn wooden slabs were connected to one another with natural twigs at their end points. Further illustrating the interrelatedness of nature, industry, and mankind, a single rope looped together rocks and large branches leaning against the wall in *Continuous Existence* (1977/2017). *Order of Condition* (2017) featured a flat stone plate on the floor, attached with a rope to a freestanding wooden column. A deviation in any of the elements involved would result in a shift—perhaps catastrophic. Suga's balletic positioning of materials reminds us of the interdependency of individuals and cultural systems, and the trepidatious balance that we all strive to maintain.

—Jennifer S. Li