

Edgington, Colin. "Kishio Suga." *Brooklyn Rail*, April 4, 2018.



## KISHIO SUGA

By Colin Edgington

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Kishio Suga, installation view, 2018. © Kishio Suga, Courtesy the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

To see in artifice a natural yet invisible gesture is to be open to more than what is most obviously present. It is to feel the intentional placement of objects, of marks, of actions, in the stillness of a work itself. And through this sensory experience, one extracts a latency placed into a work of art by an artist. Kishio Suga's latest show at Blum & Poe is filled with these revelatory moments in works that are compounded from everyday materials such as prefabricated wood, stones, rope, branches, and metal scraps. A member of the mid-20th century artist movement Mono-ha ("School of Things"), Suga has spent more than four decades building structures and installations that play industrial and natural materials off of one another. The work often presents an easily dismissible facade (uncomplicated, minimal pieces) not unlike the work of his contemporary Richard Tuttle but on a much larger scale. And that is very much what is happening in this exhibition. The facade is the point—the exhibition about the experiential nature of space through the harnessing of subtleties between things. It is a dance between thing-ness and nothing-ness in the space of perception, between object and eye.

Suga's works are carefully curated in opposing rooms covering two floors of the gallery. Light cascades into each room mimicking the geometrical agglomerations that hang on the walls and provide their shadow play. Artifice is on display. Hot glue is easily seen. Screws and other forms of adherence are out in the open. Paint strokes seen closely reveal casual application and from afar they point to minimalism par excellence. Black, red, white rectangles; smooth wood and carefully crafted structures; geometry and simplicity. Yet, the works disallow perfect balance, a practice that subverts formalism in lieu of a "thing-ness" that reveals the object's manufacture so that he may point to that friction between industry and nature. For example, *Nature of Elapsing Sites* (2017) is an expression of this force in the form of a visual abacus. A light uncoated wood

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is fronted with fourteen white painted 2×4's jutting out from the panel on their long side, cut and spaced with black stones. The black stones appear to be stacked between the white-painted wood, an alterity of balance and compression. This is the goal of these zen-like constructions: to present the traditions of balance and symmetry so as to reveal through invoked tension the nature of physical existence, that is matter and what binds it. Pushing and pulling, balance and imbalance, energy and collision. The surface work, of which its construction is obvious, only exists to show the viewer space, a suggestion of the microcosmic and macrocosmic movement of particles, of which the viewer is one. As such, Suga's work can be seen as a dialectics of physical existence, structures made to force a synthesis for the achievement of what Kitarō Nishida called "Pure Experience," that is experience "in accordance with facts by completely relinquishing one's own fabrications"<sup>1</sup> Except here, the fabrications are necessary to realize one's own fabrications which often obscure the space in which perception shifts and energy moves.



Kishio Suga, installation view, 2018. © Kishio Suga, Courtesy the artist and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles/New York/Tokyo. Photo: Genevieve Hanson.

viewer's sensibility: is the stone inhibiting the frame from closing? Or is it releasing the paint into a zone it has otherwise been cut off from? This is a matter between oppression and freedom. The wood is a boundary and there is tension at the border.

Suga has created these works much like a philosopher might approach a philosophical problem. He constructs for the potential phenomena that occurs between his works and the viewer's perception, if they're so inclined to sense it. In this sense, Suga's practice becomes a self-detournement. Without the disruption of his symmetrical works, they would simply be harmonious—that is normal, banal, insignificant. *Scene of Elapsed Cause* (2017) consists of vertical wood panel, painted white, with a red rectangle painted within it. Across it, a 2×8 board, dark in tone, is also painted red but only within the space of the red rectangle beneath it. As the viewer moves so does the alignment of these two red spaces—the red rectangle only complete when the viewer stands directly in front of it and yet it is still not quite whole despite its visual uniformity. As Kitarō Nishida writes, "The moment of seeing a color or hearing a sound . . . is prior not only to the thought that the color or sound is the activity of an external object or that one is sensing it, but also to the judgment of what the color or sound might be."<sup>2</sup> It is the elapse, the movement of the viewer, and the shift in perception from one moment to the next that makes this work significant. That interaction, that dance slowed to a lull between Thing-ness and Nothing-ness, draws power that sticks in the quietude of a patient mind.

#### Notes

1. Nishida, Kitarō. *Inquiry into the Good*. Translated by Masao Abe and Christopher Ives (Yale University Press, 1992), p.3.

2. Ibid.