

Walker Art Center to Premiere the Late Japanese Artist Tetsumi Kudo's First U.S. Solo Museum Exhibition; Garden of Metamorphosis Reveals the Artist's Radically Transcultural and Cosmopolitan Vision

Tetsumi Kudo's room-size work titled *Philosophy of Impotence*, a culmination of his early radical performances and installations, stunned the Tokyo art world in 1962 and came to be known as one of the most iconic works in postwar Japanese art history. *Tetsumi Kudo: Garden of Metamorphosis*, the late artist's first solo museum exhibition in the United States, premieres at the Walker Art Center October 18-March 22. Curated by Walker visual arts curator Doryun Chong, in close collaboration with Hiroko Kudo, the artist's widow and executor of the estate, the retrospective exhibition features more than 100 works of diverse media-objects, sculpture, installation, drawing, and painting-covering the entire trajectory of Kudo's productive career, from 1956 through 1986. A study room within the installation will include a timeline of the artist's life and work, historical documentation, posters, and ephemera, as well as studies for some of his larger-scale works. Many works are borrowed from important museums in Japan and Europe, as well as from private collections. The Walker is publishing a comprehensive catalogue to accompany the exhibition, the first full-length study of the artist's work in a Western language.

Tetsumi Kudo: Garden of Metamorphosis introduces the artist to American audiences while expanding our understanding of possible alternative narratives of 20th-century art. Kudo bridged many disparate artistic tendencies in the latter half of the 20th century-French *Nouveau Réalisme*, Fluxus, Pop art, among others-without specifically belonging to or identifying with any of them.

While his art and vision were consistently and uniquely transcultural, international, and cosmopolitan, he remained, in his private thinking and public persona, an eternal outsider. Ultimately, what Kudo hoped to discover and develop was a universal humanist language of creativity and regeneration in a post-nuclear world, a hope that resonates, perhaps even more critically in this new century, almost 20 years after his death.

Born into an artistic family, Tetsumi Kudo (1935-1990) was raised first in Aomori, located in the northern end of Honshu, the main island of Japan, and then in Okayama, in its western end. He belonged to the generation that came of age in the late 1950s, when Japan had emerged from the rubble of World War II and the subsequent American occupation (1945-1952) and was beginning to enjoy rapid economic growth and relative political stability. At the same time, the forced postwar demilitarization and refashioning of society in a pacifist guise left many youths politically disenchanted and intellectually confused. Although Kudo received a traditional education at the

Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, he began, even before his graduation in 1958, to react to the restless social climate. For the above-mentioned Philosophy of Impotence he filled an entire gallery in the Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum with objects that resembled either phalluses or chrysalises and symbolized the "pathetic despair of human efforts." Shortly after the exhibition, Kudo headed to Paris and made it his base for the next quarter century. Ever a provocateur, he quickly developed a practice that challenged and critiqued the Western dualistic way of viewing humanity in opposition to nature or technology.

Kudo's previously abstract work grew figurative, and his lurid, even morbid and grotesque objects began incorporating sculptural fragments of the human body-face, hands, brain, penis, skin-inside bird cages, fish tanks, and wooden boxes. Often, he mixed in found everyday objects. Calling these works *Your Portrait*, the artist declared, "I wanted to tell Europeans that humanism and love and sex are virtually on the same dimension as such mundane commodities as instant soup or cigarettes." Kudo's diagnosis of the ills and contradictions of the uncontrollable consumerism and technologization of postwar society gradually evolved into another idiosyncratic, artistic vision of symbiosis between humans and nature, which they have irreversibly polluted, and between humans and the technology that infiltrates and dominates their lives. Believing that all of us are undergoing the process of "metamorphosis," he argued that "pollution" is not simply destructive, but rather, through "cultivation," could give rise to new hybrid forms of existence and turn the landscape of humankind and civilization into a "new ecology." In the last decade of his life, Kudo sharply shifted the orientation of his art, turning away from belligerent confrontation to a more self-reflective stance toward his own identity, origin, and culture. His work grew less visceral and more abstract and contemplative.

Although Kudo's work has been featured in benchmark historical exhibitions, such as *Japon des avant-gardes 1910-1970* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1986) and *Japanese Art After 1945: Scream Against the Sky* (Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1994), the artist has never been the subject of a one-person exhibition outside Europe and Japan. The only comprehensive retrospective of his work, organized by the National Museum of Art, Osaka, took place in 1994.

Tetsumi Kudo: *Garden of Metamorphosis* aims not only to introduce this important artist to new audiences, but to contribute to the ongoing revision of the narrative of postwar international art.

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