

Press release

Jay Chung & Q Takeki Maeda  
GNOMONS 髀  
July 14 – November 24, 2024

*GNOMONS 髀*, an exhibition of new works by Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda at Kunsthaus Glarus, revisits an artistic approach employed in the 1980s and 1990s, most prominently by artists such as Janine Antoni, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, and Roni Horn. Defying clichés of artistic originality, these artists intentionally adopted the formal language of the more established, institutionally recognized artists associated with minimalism. By mimicking “classically ‘straight’ aesthetic genres,” they sought, “to infiltrate the exclusive structures of a majoritarian art sphere that was effectively predicated upon their exclusion.”

For Chung and Maeda, this strategy continues in the present, albeit as convention, a mainstay within the prevailing representational conditions facing artists today. The subversiveness of the work of the artists of the eighties and nineties has become codified in a dualistic form, in which an artist’s practice is held to be rooted simultaneously in their own subject position and a historically recognized artistic style. In this context, *GNOMONS 髀* straddles both and yet neither, relying instead on the misidentifications of racial stereotyping and the ambiguity of objects of indeterminate artistic value.

Making wry allusion to the modernist search for spiritual origins in the arcane, *GNOMONS 髀* centers on a classical text thought to have been compiled between 1000 BCE and 200 CE, known as the *Nine Chapters of the Mathematical Art*. This early Chinese guide to mathematics consists of 246 story problems relating to practical matters in engineering, agriculture, and logistics. In *GNOMONS 髀*, selected problems from the *Nine Chapters* form the basis for a group of interrelated drawings, sculptures, and photographs. *The Rate of Foxtail Millet for Black Beans* visualizes the rate of exchange between two commodities as a pair of volumes, while *A Field Measuring 94 by 144 Paces* depicts a field whose area might be calculated by walking around its perimeter. *Arrows* uses aluminum bars to depict the relative speed at which a person can craft one of three parts of an arrow, the shaft, head, or fletching. Another series in the exhibition reconsiders the rate of exchange problems in works on paper, portraying word piles that recall Robert Smithson’s seminal piece from 1966, *A Heap of Language*.

The *Nine Chapters* offers its readers rare insight into Chinese life two millennia ago, at the beginning of the Common Era. The world indirectly described by the book’s word problems—one of bartered goods, massive earthworks for irrigation, and the need to organize thousands of workers for large-scale projects—would have been entirely unlike our own. Yet in *GNOMONS 髀*, Chung and Maeda’s use of commonly found materials such as sand, concrete, and straw, as well as their photographic depictions of unspectacular subjects in rural Germany, transposes the problems of the *Nine Chapters* to the contemporary reality of the everyday. The apparently enigmatic character of these works belies their role as visualizations of simple geometric calculations, lines and angles, and elementary arithmetic.

Born in Madison, Wisconsin, and Nagoya, Japan, Jay Chung and Q Takeki Maeda have collaborated since 2003. Their work has been described as addressing “the post-conceptual condition,” which refers not to “the name for a particular type of art, so much as the historical-ontological condition for the production of contemporary art in general.” In recent solo exhibitions, Chung and Maeda have focused on how socially constructed, “quasi-institutional” narratives, both real and imagined, are employed in the production, consumption, and distribution of art. These include: *The Auratic Narrative*, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, *New Images*, House of Gaga, Mexico City and *Dull and Bathos*, Galerie Francesca Pia, Zurich. Exhibitions of their work have also been presented at Maxwell Graham/Essex Street, New York, statements, Tokyo, 356 Mission, Los Angeles, and in group shows at galleries and museums.

A brochure featuring an interview with Jay Chung & Q Takeki Maeda by John Beeson will accompany the exhibition.