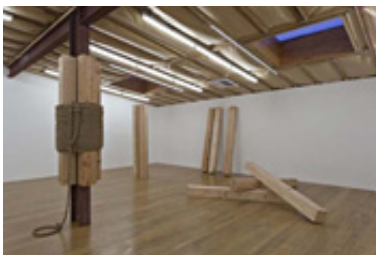




## Print Article



"Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha," installation view, 2012, Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles



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**Lee Ufan**  
*Relatum (formerly Phenomena and Perception B)*  
1969/2012  
Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles

# Mono-ha

## TENSION AND RESTRAINT

by Hunter Drohojowska-Philp

Walking into Blum & Poe gallery in Culver City, Los Angeles, is like falling through the rabbit hole to a parallel world of art made in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The works apparently are related to Minimalism and Process Art, but they also have a meaningful and welcome dollop of poetic grace. Welcome to Mono-ha, a label that doesn't translate well into English, though a close approximation is the "School of Things."

Operating between 1968 and 1973, much of their work has not been seen since it was made -- but now there is a fresh opportunity to experience it in "Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha," Feb. 25-Apr. 12, 2012, organized by Hirshhorn Museum curator Mika Yoshitake. The title refers to "the attitude of esthetic detachment and renewal of matter in response to the immanent loss of the object as a sun in Japanese postwar art practice," Yoshitake said.

The artist most associated with this group, **Lee Ufan**, is Korean, but he was educated in Japan, and, as an outsider, perhaps felt a strong need to make a statement. He wrote essays and books about the intentions of the artists participating in the movement. His retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum last summer was one of my favorite exhibitions in some time. The restraint and tension that manifested in his paintings and sculptures in that show can be seen in his earliest works, which are on view in this exhibition.



**Lee Ufan**  
*Relatum*  
 1974/2012  
 Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles

*Relatum* (formerly *Phenomena and Perception B*) (1969/2012), a square block of stone dropped upon a sheet of glass to produce a web of cracks, was recreated here by Lee. Another piece called *Relatum* (1974/2012) is a large stone supporting an electrical cord and a light bulb, and on the second floor of the gallery, Lee has bound four beams to a column with heavy rope for *Relatum III (a place within a certain situation)* (1970/2012). All of these works, using the most rudimentary of materials, are imbued with a power that is hard to describe and even harder to comprehend. There are a number of other pieces by Lee in the show, and his reputation alone will bring attention to his contemporaries.



**Nobuo Sekine**  
*Phase-Mother Earth*  
 1968/2012  
 Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles

Much of the Mono-ha work was meant originally to be temporal -- existing only for a moment -- but, they were documented in photographs, and many of the artists have recreated them. That goes for the first official Mono-ha piece, *Phase-Mother Earth* (1968/2012), by **Nobuo Sekine**: a cylinder of earth, about eight by eight feet, excavated from the earth and standing neatly to one side of its enormous hole in the gallery's garden.



**Nobuo Sekine**  
*Phase of Nothingness-Water*  
 1969/2005  
 Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles

Inside the gallery is the artist's *Phase of Nothingness-Water* (1969/1994), rectangular and cylindrical black-steel containers, each the size of a dining table, filled with identical amounts of water that read as reflective black surfaces. Not to forget the subtle humor available in much Japanese art, another gallery features Sekine's *Phase-Sponge* (1968/2012), a plump cylindrical sponge covered in ivory fabric, about four-feet tall, slightly collapsed by the pressure of a heavy black steel square on its top.

Susumu Koshimizu's massive granite boulders resting inside containers of fragile paper, and Katsuro Yoshida's long steel pipe filled with cotton, are charming works which offer juxtapositions of contrary, contrasting materials. Another revelation in the show is **Kishio Suga's** *Parallel Strata* (1969/2012), a rectangular box built of paraffin blocks and containing more stacked blocks of paraffin -- an ethereal structure with an enticing odor, that appears to be melting before our eyes.

The same artist also flattened wooded steps so that the staircase is transformed into a steep ramp



**Nobuo Sekine**  
*Phase-Sponge*  
 1968/2012  
 Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles



**Susumu Koshimizu**  
*Paper (formerly Paper 2)*  
 1969/2012  
 Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles

covered in thick sand. Also on view in the show are works by **Koji Enokura**, **Noriyuki Haraguchi**, Katsuhiko Narita, **Jiro Takamatsu**, Noboru Takayama and Katsuro Yoshida. Rarely are so many individually revelatory works brought together in a single show.

While the Minimalist, Process and Earthworks art produced in the United States has the confident, unambiguous quality of American language itself, these Mono-ha works display the oblique, mannered politesse of the Japanese, and illuminate the country's cultural relationship to poetry and the natural world going back many centuries. Elegant and exacting, this work surely manifested a need to reclaim their national culture, and even their identity, after a quarter century of sorrow and self-reproach.

It seems all the more moving given that the exhibition coincides with the one-year anniversary of the terrible earthquake and tsunami in Japan. There has been little opportunity to see this work until recently -- so kudos to the gallery, which will publish a comprehensive catalog in May, 2012.

"Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha," Feb. 25-Apr. 14, 2012, Blum & Poe gallery, 2727 S. La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles, Cali. 90034.

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**Katsuro Yoshida**  
*Cut-off*  
1969/2007  
Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles



**Kishio Suga**  
*Parallel Strata*  
1969/2012  
Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles



**Koji Enokura**  
*Untitled*  
1970/1986  
Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles



**Katsuhiko Narita**  
*SUMI*  
1968  
Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles



**Noburu Takayama**  
*Underground Zoo (Part)*  
1969/2003  
Blum & Poe gallery, Los Angeles

