

LISSON GALLERY

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Sterling Ruby & Masaomi Yasunaga, installation view, 2020. Courtesy of Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles.

Sterling Ruby & Masaomi Yasunaga

SEPTEMBER 19 – OCTOBER 31, 2020
NONAKA-HILL / LOS ANGELES / ART

California-based artist Sterling Ruby and Japan-based artist Masaomi Yasunaga are separated by the Pacific Ocean, but this show brings them together as two innovative masters of ceramics. Made of earthen matter, the basins, baskets, vessels, bowls, animals, shells, and flowers on display are fabulously delicate and otherworldly. And no wonder, both artists have been inspired by archaeology and excavation. Recalling his roots in Amish Pennsylvania, Ruby sees humility in the preservation and use of objects transformed by the earth. Yasunaga sees excavation as a way to understand and produce finished work. The idea of accretion—in terms of color, patina, and surface matter—is alive in this art. —*E.C.*

VISIT

Nonaka-Hill

720 N Highland Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90038

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The Los Angeles Times
5 July 2019

Los Angeles Times

Review: Gravel, glass and glaze: The radical ceramics of Masaomi Yasunaga



The Masaomi Yasunaga installation at Nonaka-Hill. (From Nonaka-Hill)

By LEAH OLLMAN

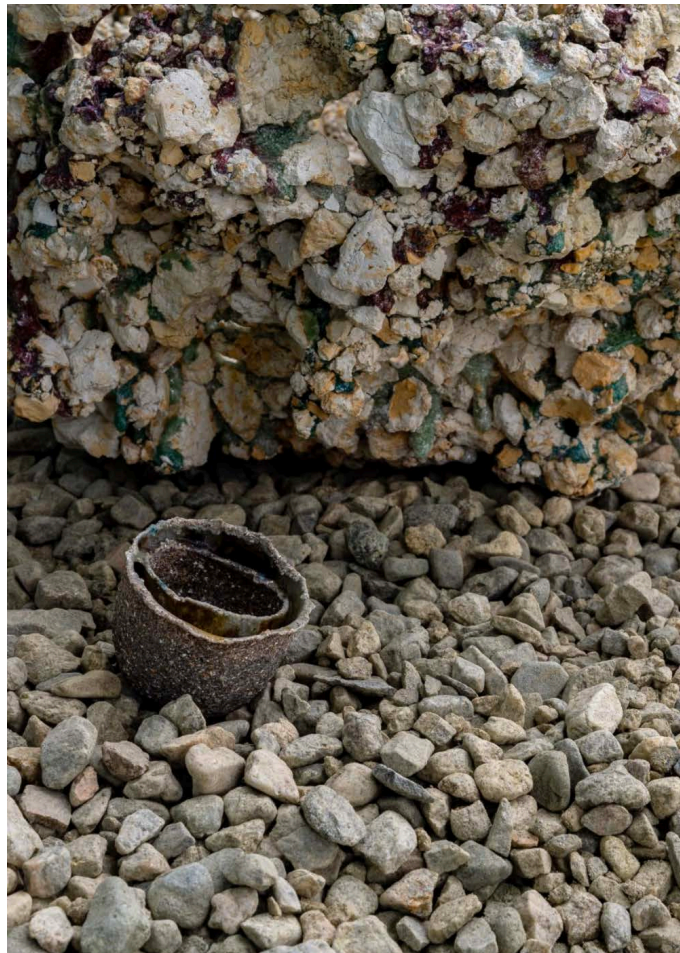
JULY 5, 2019 10:54 AM PT

If Masaomi Yasunaga's astonishing ceramic sculptures were parts of speech, they would be at once both nouns and verbs. They are extraordinary objects, tactile things with insistent, engrossing physicality. They are also so process-oriented, so action-driven, that they seem in some sort of continuous temporal motion, existing simultaneously in multiple tenses: present and past, conditional and subjunctive.

Some 30 vessels rest on a raised bed of gravel running the length of Nonaka-Hill gallery in L.A. The installation evokes a raised tomb, reinforcing an impression of the works as excavated, unearthed. Many have surfaces encrusted with stone bits. One large bowl appears entirely comprised of rubble, its walls a thick, white, rocky crust, pocked with voids and graced with passages of glassy jade and violet. Other pieces are more delicate — a little cup, for instance, with walls like a fine, crisp shell, nests within another, just slightly larger, to yield an intimate meditation in umber and taupe.



Detail of the Masaomi Yasunaga installation at Nonaka-Hill (From Nonaka-Hill)





Detail of the Masaomi Yasunaga installation at Nonaka-Hill (From Nonaka-Hill)

For every rugged and raw gesture, there are others with roots in refined tradition, jars with graceful silhouettes and finely shaped handles. Relics from ancient Rome come to mind — urns and oil lamps. Across a long shelf in the adjoining space parades a lyrical little menagerie: vessels in the form of birds, a turtle, perhaps a snail. Nearby sits a stunning, small cup of aqua glass with a white-rimmed lip and grit-barnacled base, suggesting oceanic salvage and organic decay. Yasunaga titles this piece, and several others, “Sai,” meaning to break or collapse. “Tokeru Utsuwa,” defined as melting vessel, is the name of a few other pieces. The forces of erosion act here as a kind of generative impulse, unmaking as inspiration to make.



“Sai,” Masaomi Yasunaga at Nonaka-Hill (From Nonaka-Hill)

Material transformation is fundamental to ceramics, but what Yasunaga does with clay, glaze, ash and glass is radically inventive as well as profuse in metaphorical resonance. Many pieces are identified as made only of glaze. Through a process involving burial in sand, soil or stone, Yasunaga turns what is conventionally used as a skin to sheathe a clay body into a body itself, both bone and flesh. Extracting the works from the kiln and placing them atop a bed of gravel furthers the notion of reciprocity between what is below ground and what is above, between archaeological time’s expansive breadth and the immediate now of touch, utility and sensual reverie. The work feels at once primal and urgent.

Yasunaga has exhibited extensively in his native Japan, but this is his first solo show in the U.S. In turns raw and elegant, it is never less than thrilling.

Nonaka-Hill, 720 N. Highland Ave., L.A. Tuesdays-Saturdays, through July 20.
(323) 450-9409, nonaka-hill.com



"Empty Creature" by Masaomi Yasunaga, 2019. Glaze, 3-9/16 inches by 3-9/16 inches by 3-3/16 inches. (From Nonaka-Hill)

LISSON GALLERY

Art Viewer
9 July 2019

Art Viewer

Masaomi Yasunaga and Kunié Sugiura at Nonaka-Hill

July 9, 2019



Artists: Masaomi Yasunaga and Kunié Sugiura

Venue: Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles, US

Date: June 1 – July 20, 2019

Photography: images copyright and courtesy of the artists and Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles

Masaomi Yasunaga

(Born 1982, Osaka Japan. Living and working in Iga, Mie Prefecture, Japan)

In a gesture which has little precedence, Masaomi Yasunaga removed clay from his ceramic forms, and builds his sculptures using glaze as the primary structural element. At Nonaka-Hill, the artist's first solo exhibition outside of Asia, Yasunaga presents numerous recent sculptures expressing a variety of vessel forms, placed on a bed of common gravel.

Yasunaga studied ceramics under Satoru Hoshino, a second-generation proponent of the avant-garde ceramic group, *Sodeisha* (in kanji, 走泥社 literally means, crawling through the mud). Founded in Kyoto in 1948, in the aftermath of WWII, Sodeisha broke away from long-established conventions of Japanese ceramics, resolving to create non-functional sculptural works. Continuing with this ethos, Yasunaga's sculptures of vessels may or may not be functional, and explore an instable boundary between functional and fine arts.

By sculpting in glaze, Yasunaga's works reimagine the use of ceramics' conventional materials. Glaze, most commonly used to apply color, luster and finish onto the surface of clay-built ceramics, responds to different variables and often produces unexpected outcomes. Unlike clay objects which maintain their original form when fired in the kiln, Yasunaga's glaze objects melt, so they must be buried in trays of sand, soil or rocks to retain their form. Once inside the kiln, the viscous molten glaze adheres to the surrounding earthen material. After firing and cooling, Yasunaga unburies his objects in a studio process which parallels the surprises of archeological excavation, and painstakingly removes the excess sand and rocks from the interstices of the objects. The resulting artworks range from smooth to heavily encrusted.

Yasunaga's presentation, which verges on camouflage, resembles the beds of stone from which the works emerge after the kiln. It also embraces the narratives which his objects conjure for most viewers; that the sculptures resemble artifacts excavated from the bottom of the ocean floor or buried underground amongst ancient ruins. As such, these objects, imagined to have been lost for vast periods of time and now found, retain the global vessel styles and handiwork of imagined ceramics makers (other than Yasunaga) from eons before. Some objects seem whole, while others seem broken, arousing phenomenological thinking reflected in the artwork's titles, all which infer something that was, or is no longer; *Sai* (砕) means to break or collapse, *Tokeru Utsuwa* (溶ける器) translates to melting vessel, *Dakkaku* (脱穀) is defined as threshing, and *Hako No Kekkaku* (箱の骨格) signifies a skeleton.

Feeling that with new life or death, comes a moment when many things may change, Yasunaga responded to the passing of his grandmother ten years ago by incorporating her cremated bone remains into the glaze of his hand-crafted funerary urns. This gesture compelled him to appreciate the emotional and expressive potentials in ceramics. Three years ago, with the joy of the birth of his eldest son, Yasunaga began to hybridize his empty container forms with depictions of animals from around where he was born. Rendered in Yasunaga's earthen materials, these *Empty creatures* conjure associations to numerous histories and places, and collectively form an unlikely geologic menagerie.

Yasunaga's exploratory approach to ceramic making delves deeper than its experimentative application of materials, his sculptures give perspective to the human relationship to time.



Masaomi Yasunaga and Kunié Sugiura, 2019, exhibition view, Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles



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