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| Mono-ha |
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| Mono-ha refers to a unique art movement, its artists active in Japan most visibly from 1968 to 1975. Translating as the *school of things*, these artists brought ‘things’ [*mono*] — earth, wood, metal, glass, cotton, stone, paper and the like — together, usually with minimal artistic intervention and in an essentially unaltered state. Following a reductive logic, arrangement was integral to Mono-ha activity, which posited the artist as a coordinator attempting to bring about new perceptions of matter, materials, and the spatial relationships between them. Centred around approximately ten young artists, whose outcomes were frequently sculptural and site-specific, the emergence of Mono-ha is usually thought to have coincided with the creation of *Phase — Mother Earth* in Suma Rikyu Park, Kobe by Tama Art University or ‘*Tamabi*’ graduate Nobuo Sekine (b.1942--), as part of the first Open Air Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition in October, 1968. It comprised a cylinder-shaped hole dug in the ground, 2.2 metres wide and 2.7 metres deep, beside which stood a tower of the hole’s excavated earth, compacted into the same cylindrical shape and mirroring the void from where it came. Later recalling it, Sekine remarked on being mesmerised by the sheer physicality of what stood before him upon its completion. |
| Mono-ha refers to a unique art movement, its artists active in Japan most visibly from 1968 to 1975. Translating as the ‘school of things,’ these artists brought ‘things’ [*mono*] — earth, wood, metal, glass, cotton, stone, paper and the like — together, usually with minimal artistic intervention and in an essentially unaltered state. Following a reductive logic, arrangement was integral to Mono-ha activity, which posited the artist as a coordinator attempting to bring about new perceptions of matter, materials, and the spatial relationships between them. Centred around approximately ten young artists, whose outcomes were frequently sculptural and site-specific, the emergence of Mono-ha is usually thought to have coincided with the creation of *Phase — Mother Earth* in Suma Rikyu Park, Kobe by Tama Art University or ‘*Tamabi*’ graduate Nobuo Sekine (b.1942--), as part of the first Open Air Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition in October, 1968. It comprised a cylinder-shaped hole dug in the ground (2.2 metres wide and 2.7 metres deep) beside which stood a tower of the hole’s excavated earth, compacted into the same cylindrical shape and mirroring the void from where it came. Later recalling it, Sekine remarked on being mesmerised by the sheer physicality of what stood before him upon its completion.  Image: PhaseInTheSky.jpg  Table 1 Nobuo Sekine, *Phase in the Sky Sky (空相)*,stone, polished metal, 2004. Tama Art University, Tokyo. Photo: Neilton Clarke  Prior to that exhibition, Sekine shared a Yokohama warehouse space with then *Tamabi* students Susumu Koshimizu (b.1944--) and Katsurō Yoshida (b.1943--) while the university was on lockdown during a period of nation-wide student activism in the late 1960s. Sekine met Korean-born artist Ufan Lee (b.1936--) in Tokyo some weeks after the 1968 Kobe exhibition, the latter who, after moving to Japan in 1956, studied philosophy at Nihon University. They and two other *Tamabi*-schooled artists — Kishio Suga (b.1944--) and Katsuhiko Narita (1944-1992) — assisted in the formation of Mono-ha by beginning regular meetings at Top, a cafe in Tokyo’s Nishi-Shinjuku area, where their discussions reportedly focused on ways to transcend Western Modernism among other topics. With his background in philosophy and aesthetics, Lee would become the group’s elder statesman and spokesperson. Other artists forming the circle included Tokyo National University of Fine Arts & Music (now Tokyo University of the Arts) graduates Kōji Enokura (1942-1995) and Noburu Takayama (b.1944--), and Nihon University graduate Noriyuki Haraguchi (b.1946--). The idiosyncratic tendencies and stylistic variety among these artists was underpinned by a shared minimalism and the poignant simplicity of their artistic solutions. |
| Further reading:  (Blum and Poe Gallery, Los Angeles)  (Groom, Lee and Tatehata, Mono-ha – School of Things)  (Kamakura Gallery)  (Lee)  (Munroe, Tatehata and Yoshitake)  (Nakai and Minemura)  (Nobuo Sekine)  (Rawlings)  (Studio Lee Ufan)  (Yoshitaka, Jack and Dotan) |