

Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle

Kikuo Saito

Various Others 2022

in collaboration

with James Fuentes Gallery

Sep 09 – Nov 05, 2022

Opening: Friday, Sep 09, 2022, 6–8 pm



Kikuo Saito, *Brown Drum*, 2003, oil on canvas, 137 × 114 × 5 cm (54 × 45 × 2 inches)

Galerie Rüdiger Schöttle and James Fuentes Gallery are pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by the Japanese-born American artist Kikuo Saito (1939-2016) drawn from the artist's estate. This is the gallery's first exhibition with the artist's estate.

Often overlooked in canonical art historical discourses during his lifetime, Saito's work is rooted in the tradition of American Color Field Painting after Helen Frankenthaler and Kenneth Noland, as well as Abstract Expressionism and Lyrical Abstraction. Significantly informed by his personal experience with experimental theater and his own inter- and intracultural biography, Saito's gestural works reflect the dialogic relationship between painting and performance while exploring ways in which painting, similar to theater, can solidify action and emotion. Upon migrating to New York in 1966, the artist initially turned to the performative. At "La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club", he designed sets, costumes, lighting and props, and developed stage productions that combined the qualities of the Japanese avant-garde with his own reduced aesthetic. He later worked with noted theater directors Robert Wilson and Jerome Robbins on national and international productions. After several years of fruitful mutual influence between the two spheres, Saito devoted himself entirely to painting beginning in 1979. The graceful movements, concise forms and lighting qualities of stage productions had a lasting impact on Saito's painting practice.

Using various modes of paint application, some of which activated the entire body – such as pouring and dragging paint across the canvas – Saito eventually created works in which gestural brushstrokes, cryptic signs, letter shapes, fluid color shapes and gradients, coalesce into autobiographical abstractions that reflect the hybridity and complexity of the concept of personal identity. The alphabet paintings, for instance, fathom the formal qualities of the Latin alphabet on which the English language is based. In varying degrees of legibility, in sometimes stricter, sometimes more open grid structures, strikingly compositionally present and gently-isolated letters are placed on the canvas, whose placement does not follow any obvious logic of arrangement. Saito came to the U.S. with initially limited knowledge of English, so language was not simply read by the artist, but seen and transposed into painterly phenomena. The exhibition shows five works of different work cycles by the artist, honoring the complexity and versatility of his oeuvre.

Kikuo Saito's work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at James Fuentes, New York, NY; Fort Lauderdale Museum, Fort Lauderdale, FL; Duke University Museum of Art, Durham, NC. Group exhibitions include McNay Art Museum, San Antonio, NY; Boca Raton Museum of Art, Boca Raton, FL; Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR; San Antonio Museum, San Antonio, TX; Edith C. Blum Art Institute, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY; Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Canada; Medellin Biennial, Medellin, Colombia; and Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT. Works by the artist are, amongst others, in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY; the Nasher Art Museum, Durham, NC; the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, CT; and the Edmonton Art Gallery, Edmonton, Canada.

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