

## LOS ANGELES

### Nobuo Sekine

#### Blum & Poe

A seminal figure in the Mono-ha movement, Nobuo Sekine is particularly associated with its emergence, which was marked by his large-scale earthwork *Phase—Mother Earth* (1968). For this work, he dug a cylindrical hole in the ground, approximately seven feet wide and nine feet deep; then he placed the excavated earth, made into a cylinder of roughly the same dimensions, next to it. This positive and negative juxtaposition stressed the thingness and relatively unaltered, raw materiality of both the hole and the mound. Like many Mono-ha works, *Phase* was also about space, its relationship to these "things," and their combined relationship with the viewer.

This show, which featured a decade of Sekine's work, appeared at first glance to include contributions by a number of different artists. There were works from the "Topology" series, including *Phase No.9* (1968/2012), a low relief made of bent plywood and painted in vivid, electric colors. Here, Sekine expresses his interest in topological shape-shifting in very Pop terms. Then, there were many more works from the "Phase of Nothingness" series, including *Phase of Nothingness—Black No.31* (1977), in which a goopy black substance (fiberglass-reinforced plastic) erupts into seething, offal-like splays disturbed by highly polished crystalline extrusions that defy the amorphous mass from which they arise.

Sekine's work makes the viewer aware of a shift from apparently constructed things to evidently arranged things. He seems interested in pushing us to take an active stance on

what these things are doing in front of us in space, irrespective of their relative finish or surface qualities. Nowhere is that clearer than in *Stone and Neon* (1971/2011), a group of stones that have been split, smoothed perfectly along the split, and then cored in such a way that bare neon bulbs run through them like some kind of channeled energy. That the such-ness of this work is part of a larger metaphor was demonstrated by its placement near a window looking out over the traffic on busy La Cienega Boulevard. Sekine seemed to be provoking a consideration of the connections that exist between all kinds of energy flows piercing differently configured solids.

There was little shared consensus among the Mono-ha artists as to what could or should be done to bear the mantle most often translated as "School of Things." In retrospect, it is clear that, in mirroring movements such as Arte Povera or post-studio practice, they were no longer simply creating new things as artworks, but were also directly arranging raw materials into artworks. The result is that viewers are forced to turn their attention to the interdependent relationships connecting everything around them, as well as to the space surrounding them. The effect of the work is meant to prompt an awakening from the undifferentiated field of visual phenomena that usually goes unnoticed until its rediscovery through the displacement and estrangement of the ordinary.

—John David O'Brien

