

DOSSIER

1969
HIDETOSHI
NAGASAWA
2018

curated by
Giorgio Verzotti



Casa degli Artisti

08.05.2024 – 04.06.2024

BUILDING presents, from April 4th to July 20th, 2024, *Hidetoshi Nagasawa. 1969-2018*, a comprehensive retrospective curated by **Giorgio Verzotti**, dedicated to one of the greatest artists working in Italy since the late 1960s, located in three exhibition venues in Milan: **BUILDING, Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, Casa degli Artisti**.

The latter venue hosts, from May 8th to June 4th, 2024, a further exploration of the exhibition project, opening the doors of what was **Nagasawa's studio** from 1978 to 2007.

On the occasion of the opening on **Wednesday, May 8th, 2024 from 7PM**, Casa degli Artisti dedicates **the studio** on the first floor **to the artist's memory** with an official ceremony open to the public.

Since 1978, giving new impulse to the activity of the Casa, **Hidetoshi Nagasawa, Luciano Fabro, Jole De Sanna**, and other artists, such as Paola Brusati and Giuseppe Spagnulo, occupied the building – which was abandoned at that time – and they **restored it to its original function as a public space for the promotion of contemporary art**, as the Bogani Brothers had envisioned it in 1909. For this purpose, **over the years**, there have been **exhibitions of young artists** of international renown, as well as **moments of debate on art theory**, which have made the **Casa degli Artisti an essential point of reference on the art scene of the time** – it is sufficient to think about the important restoration initiative of Giorgio De Chirico's *Bagni Misteriosi* [Mysterious Baths] (1994), which can be seen today in the garden of the Palazzo della Triennale in Milan.

On the first floor of the Corso Garibaldi building, Hidetoshi Nagasawa, like Fabro and other artists, had a studio for about 30 years. In this very place, BUILDING, in collaboration with the current management of Casa degli Artisti, opens the third venue of the exhibition *Hidetoshi Nagasawa. 1969-2018* **by proposing a small collection of works intended to convey the more project-based dimension of the artist's daily work.**

Among the works on display in the exhibition, an important sculpture, *Compasso di Archimede* [Compass of Archimede] (1991), well articulates Nagasawa's poetics, **aimed at revealing the relationships of tension and balance in the body of the sculpture itself.** This work is complemented by a **selection of drawings, maquettes and preparatory casts** - such as those for *Albero* [Tree] (1983), *Lampo* [Lightning] (1989) and *Casa del Poeta* [Poet's House] (1999)-which give an idea of the artist's conceptual and creative process and most of which are presented to the public for the first time.

The exhibition at Casa degli Artisti is thus part of the larger exhibition project *Hidetoshi Nagasawa. 1969-2018* promoted by BUILDING, where a selection of **33 artworks, synthetically documents the entire span of the artist's activity:** from the **videos testifying his early performances** (in some respects similar to the Land and Body Art projects from the same period), passing by way of the **first sculptures** in which the **gesture** is always implied as the **primary matrix** and arriving at the **large-scale sculptures**, frequently based on daring acts of equilibrium, which were the works most frequently associated with Nagasawa.

Hidetoshi Nagasawa (1940-2018), Japanese in origin although born in Manchuria (People's Republic of China) **and Italian by adoption**, lived in Italy for more than 50 years, arriving in **Milan in 1967.** He encountered artists such as **Enrico Castellani, Antonio Trotta, Mario Nigro**, and above all **Luciano Fabro**, with whom he founded the Casa degli Artisti in Milan.

In those early years, he played an active part in the most radical research of the time, before devoting himself to the specifically sculptural idiom, albeit with an inexorably innovative outlook. **Nagasawa's greatest contribution to the languages of western art was his attempt to create a fusion between the Oriental culture and our own**, a wholly successful attempt that produced works of great formal value.

The works presented at BUILDING were conceived and realised by the artist on the basis of the principle of "Ma", a concept that belongs to Zen philosophy and which may be identified with our idea of interval or void, a void that rather than being inert generates energy and form. This is the case with *Colonna* [Column], 1972 a work in marble developed on the floor and composed of segments of different colours, quarried in different areas, interspersed with minimal but visible empty spaces. "In that small space", wrote the artist, "the distance between their journeys and their story is enclosed". Precisely in relation to the theme of travel, which is pivotal in Nagasawa's poetics and biographical story - it is enough to mention that the artist arrived in our country from Japan by bicycle -, in BUILDING the work *Barca* [Boat] (1980-1981, marble, soil, tree) is proposed, which consists of a monolithic white marble base that contains a plant inside. The work is rooted in the Shinto tradition according to which every natural element, from stones to plants, possesses a sacred dimension and is a means of prayer to the gods.

Furthermore, the exhibition also includes **a selection from among the artist's numerous works on paper and two never-before-seen marble sculptures, exhibited to the public for the first time ever: *Cubo* [Cube] and *Nastro* [Band], both dated 2012.**

Through this selection of works, the **exhibition intends to emphasise two of Nagasawa's distinguishing features:** his **attention to the relationships between the work of art and architecture** and his almost **utopian vision of an apparently weightless sculpture** that would exist suspended in space and appear to be light even when reaching monumental dimensions.

Lastly, **Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, from April 4th to May 25th, 2024**, is hosting the work *Barca* [Boat] (1983-1985, brass and paper), consisting of a thin brass tube covered with Japanese paper that, in agreement with the place that from time to time contains it, employs new spatial dimensions, climbing up walls, ceilings or lying on the ground. The outline of the vessel, with a thin white line reveals an ethereal and open structure, that navigates lightly in space. Thus, the boat becomes a metaphor for the journey, that is: experienced and dreamed of, mythical and spiritual. Just as in the textile world, for ancient cultures and in the common thought, the carpet becomes quintessentially a vehicle capable of accompanying into a sacred atmosphere that expresses elevation, purity, and oneness. The work thus finds its natural placement in the **Brexa Room on the ground floor** of Gallery Moshe Tabibnia, which is dedicated to the extraordinary display of **five 16th Century Small Medallion Ushak rugs**, so-called "**Tintoretto**", which laid on the ground to accommodate the worshipper in prayer, serve as a figurative link between the sensible and supersensible worlds.



Elisabetta Catalano, *Hidetoshi Nagasawa*, Roma, 2003, silver salts print on glossy Baryta paper, 50,5 × 40,5 cm (67 × 52 × 3,5 cm with frame)

Biographical Notes

Hidetoshi Nagasawa was born in 1940 in Manchuria. In 1945, following the invasion by the Soviet Union, his family undertook a difficult year-and-a-half journey to Japan. In Tokyo, he attended Tama Art University, graduating in 1963 with a degree in Architecture and Interior Design; during his university years, he became aware of various avant-garde trends such as Neo-Dada, and he came across the Gutaj Group art movement. In 1966, he left Japan by bicycle heading west toward Europe. In August 1967, he arrived in Milan, where his journey ended. He found a studio in the working-class neighborhood of Sesto San Giovanni, and came in touch with a group of artists, including: Enrico Castellani, Luciano Fabro, Mario Nigro, Antonio Trotta, and Athos Ongaro. In 1972, he participated for the first time in the Venice Biennale. In 1979, he co-founded, together with Jole de Sanna and sculptor Luciano Fabro, the Casa degli Artisti, a space for exhibitions, events, and artist residencies that played a key role in the Milanese art scene. In the 1980s, Nagasawa's work underwent an enlargement in scale, which led him to create environments on the edge between sculpture and architecture. Sensitivity to nature, respect for the quality of materials (from paper to wood, stone to metal), consideration on the complex relationship between East and West, the present and the past, on the contrast between being and appearing, and on the idea of the fragment as part of a whole constitute the recurring elements of Nagasawa's entire artistic career, which ended with his death in 2018.

1A / 1B / 1C ROTOLO, 1979



Title
Rotolo

Date
1979

Medium
bronze and gold

Dimensions
100 x 161 x 25 cm

Description

"A huge bean (a 1.20-meter seed) found in Brazil. The golden bronze cast emerges from the branches of a tree embossed on a bronze scroll. The story of the bean is wrapped in the scroll". (Hidetoshi Nagasawa in *La conoscenza rovesciata. Testi sull'arte di Hidetoshi Nagasawa*, curated by Jole de Sanna, Segrate, Nike, 2000, p. 91)

Rotolo [Scroll] belongs to, and indeed anticipates, that group of Nagasawa's works that tell of prodigies, manifestations of immaterial and spiritual entities, and prophetic visions taken from the Bible - of which *Visione di Ezechiele* [Vision of Ezekiel] (first made in 1986) is by far the most emblematic work.

The artist is neither a Christian nor a Jew, but simply a non-believing Asian person who, on one hand, reads the ancient scriptures to absorb the spiritual legacies of each culture and transfer them into his own imagery and; on the other, he looks at nature as the primary source of prodigious manifestations.

In this sense, *Rotolo* [Scroll], a long bronze scroll unfolding in the air, crushing against the wall so as to show both sides, is nothing other than the scroll "[...] written inside and out bearing the divine message, that same honey-flavored scroll that the Eternal makes the prophet swallow." (Caterina Niccolini, *Nagasawa. Tra cielo e terra. Catalogo ragionato delle opere dal 1968 al 1996*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1999, p. 42)

The artwork is meticulously described by Bruno Corà: "In *Rotolo* [Scroll], the pod comes out of the branches of the plant embossed in bronze on a roll, which is also made of bronze, as if its tale were pronounced directly by the storytelling roll. What makes this sculpture unique is the abnormal size of the natural element, which reveals that reality is a lot more astonishing than one might think. The 'prodigy' seen when contemplating this work generates those feelings of amazement and wonder that, hopefully, works of art always produce." (Bruno Corà, *La scultura degli anni Settanta: nascita dello spazio di tensione*, in *Hidetoshi Nagasawa. La scultura degli anni Settanta*, curated by Bruno Corà, Florence, Il Ponte, 2019, p. 11)

1D QUATTRO SASSI, 1990

**Title**

Quattro Sassi

Date

1990

Medium

stones

Dimensions

275 × 780 × 470 cm
(variable environmental
dimension)

Description

In the Japanese, 'Ma' is a concept that merges time and space into a unity. It means: in spatial terms, the natural distance between two or more things existing in a continuity; in temporal terms, the natural pause or interval between two or more phenomena'. The Japanese, in the past, did not recognize distinct concepts of time and space; the two dimensions were perceived as inseparable entities, conceived together in terms of intervals. Nothing could be further from the Western dual serial system of time and space. The concept of space-time was expressed in a single ideogram, which in the words "Ma," "Aida" or "Kan" finds its phonetic translation.

"Ma" indicates on the one hand, the empty space in which different phenomena manifest, lose their contours and disappear; on the other, the instant of passage, the fraction of reality that is charged with tension and ambiguity. Its importance is reflected in the treatment of traditional space: in architecture, music, drama, garden arts, all artistic expressions that can be called "Arts of Ma."

The work *Quattro Sassi* [Four Stones] very eloquently exemplifies this concept of "Ma": it consists of four portions of a gray stone, repeatedly split in half. One half of the stone is located in the center of the room while a quarter stone has been leaned against one of the walls. The last two sub-multiples, equal to one-eighth of the stone, mark the corners of the room.

The work thus traces the spatial unity that underlies the Japanese architectural tradition. The artist himself, in this regard, observes, "Each room can be considered a Ma, in fact we go to the mountains to collect logs to build the house, we divide the log into four and this corresponds to the cardinal points. Each part has to keep the same position when building a house, and there is a jutting quarter of the log for each point. The space that is formed is a Ma." (Hidetoshi Nagasawa in *Ma*, curated by Jole de Sanna, in Nagasawa. *Fessura nel Tempo*, Turin, Associazione Zero gravità, 2001, p.14).

1E / 3 COMPASSO DI ARCHIMEDE, 1991



Title
Compasso di Archimede

Date
1991

Medium
iron

Dimensions
126 x 590 x 450 cm

Description

"Three iron bars arranged in the center of a space rise at one end crossing each other. An iron cage blocks the upward movement. [...] I combined several ideas together: a dark material, the bars weighing three hundred kilos, held up by a cage of which you cannot tell whether it is going up or down. There the concept of time materializes, which makes the weight of the matter disappear. I would like to create the concept of time going alone, to somewhere."

(Hidetoshi Nagasawa in *La conoscenza rovesciata. Testi sull'arte di Hidetoshi Nagasawa*, curated by Jole de Sanna, Segrate, Nike, 2000, pp. 48, 98)

In *Compasso di Archimede* [Compass of Archimedes], the joints and their shifting balances are reminiscent of the stick mechanism in the game Shanghai. The calculation of contrapositions and thrusts gradually translates into an engineering structure based only on the principle of leverage. To Archimedes, the Greek mathematician and physicist who encapsulated the secret of the lever in his treatise on mechanics, is dedicated this work, in which three heavy iron rods flex, weighed down by their own mass, rising from the ground and then locking in mid-air with the help of a joint, created by a suspended iron cage. The artist simply place the elements together, balancing the weights and relying on natural laws, calling them into question and provoking them.

As Caterina Niccolini observes, "Since 1987, Nagasawa seems to want to place multiple elements in space by binding them in a dynamic tension, making use of the principle of leverage. No nails, bolts, or welding intervene in his static inventions, everything holds itself in balance, thanks to physical laws, to natural forces combined in a game of pushes. [...] After levitating bodies in the air, after making opposing forces collide by launching their vectors toward an invisible pole of attraction, Nagasawa starts again from the ground, to make his 'impossible constructions' rise from the ground. [...] With anti-gravitational sculpture, once again, the artist makes visible an invisible force, he calls into question that power hidden in created things, that force with which nature is filled, bringing before everyone's eyes a living and present reality." (Caterina Niccolini, *Nagasawa. Tra cielo e terra. Catalogo ragionato delle opere dal 1968 al 1996*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1999, pp. 47-49)

1F / 1G CASA DEL POETA, 1999



Title

Casa del Poeta

Date

1999

Medium

iron, steel, brass and paper

Dimensions

253,5 × 180 × 90 cm

Description

"There is a drunken but very good Chinese poet, Li-Pai, who has interested me since I was a boy. The dry lyricism of his images, the concision of his accents became a kind of suggestion that I had to give substance to. And so, this very long staircase with a roof over was born: something tiny, that would allow me to get closer to the intangible rhythm of his poetry." (Hidetoshi Nagasawa in Nagasawa. *Tra cielo e terra. Catalogo ragionato delle opere dal 1968 al 1996*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1999, p. 34)

Beginning from the 1980s, Nagasawa's work becomes increasingly charged with poetic connotations, becoming an intermediate stage between a message in the form of sculpture and a message that takes shape in the impressions and imagination of the viewer. Eastern poetry becomes the muse for some of artworks, and the image of the poet's house is embodied in several of the artist's works, such as in *Casa di Li-Pai* [Li-Pai's House] (1982), *Basyo* (1990), and *Casa del Poeta* [Poet's House] (1999), in which few, essential elements give shelter to poetry.

In all the dwellings poetry imposes itself on sculpture to the point of consuming it, subtracting physicality from it, infusing it with lightness. These houses create an atmosphere of suspension: one enters a metaphysical dimension, as if it were a fragment of a whole existence. There is a growing sense that Nagasawa, while he uncovers the connections between things, reveals them through the principle of overturning of the conditional state of gravity to lightness, assisted by the discovery of natural laws and their reuse for 'constructive' purposes, to contemplate the beauty that lies in the sensitive perception of tamed forces. Zero gravity, lightness, suspension of volumes and forms become evident in *Casa del Poeta* [Poet's House] (1999). As Bruno Corà observes "[...] this creation reviews a spatiality that is as protected as it is tempting. However, the forms are deprived of any functionality; they serve the refinement of the feeling of poetic house as Hölderlin's line 'Dichterlich wohnt der Mensch' (poetically inhabits man) would have invoked. Airy and bright, transparent and wide open, the poet's home is suspended and desirable like a cloud, but like it is unreachable" (Bruno Corà, *Hidetoshi Nagasawa: Fare spazio alle idee, dare forma al tempo*, in *Hidetoshi Nagasawa. Ombra verde*, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2013, p. 58).

Paper and metal convey a light image, ennobled by the glow from within. The catalog raisonné of Nagasawa's work curated by Caterina Niccolini reads, "One breathes the same air as the metaphysical paintings, and it is no coincidence that De Chirico's painting is an object of love and reflection for Nagasawa. Works such as *Odisseus* [Odysseus] or *Le Muse* [The Muses] are directly inspired by De Chirichian painting but, as Minemura notes, metaphysical space, by definition, does not exist; it is hidden. It can be perceived through a feeling similar to longing, a feeling approaching that "nostalgia for perfection" that the artwork silently evokes in us, through an atmospheric, invisible, immeasurable space. Irregularity, absence, imperfection, opacity caused by consumption, and indeterminacy are typical features of Eastern aesthetics, which identifies in the two categories of 'Sabi' and 'Wabi' the melancholy of the passage of time, the beauty of things polished by age, loneliness, calmness, and the feeling of poverty. These two concepts are accompanied by 'Yugen', which designates that which is mysterious and profound. In houses, abandon and the false image of existential perfection are linked to the poetics of the fragment with the same mechanism that characterizes 'Haiku' poetry, where a single word manages to hold exceptional evocative power [...]. The brevity of the verse does not allow for the development of an idea or thought, and its strength lies in the impression of an instant in which sensations are landed and immediately abandoned. The power and charm of 'Haiku' seduced Nagasawa to the point where he wanted to transfer the refined aesthetic sense of this 'wordless poetry' into sculpture." (Caterina Niccolini, *Nagasawa. Tra cielo e terra. Catalogo ragionato delle opere dal 1968 al 1996*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1999, pp. 34-35)

1H / 1I VESPERO, 1999

**Title**

Vespero

Date

1999

Medium

stone, marble, steel, water

Dimensions

50 x 40 x 70 cm

Descrizione

"Vespero [Vesper] consists of a stone pebble smoothed by wind and rain on top of a piece of marble, carved by hand as a twelve-sided geometric solid. They represent two opposites, yet at the same time they are both natural materials. One on top of the other they "float" in a heptagonal pool with eighty liters of the purest water. Again, the title does not explain but adds, with an association of ideas that takes the work further. After finishing the sculpture, the star of Venus, also called Vespero, which can be seen in the evening and at dawn, two different but conjoined moments, came to my mind. In the same way as the star, the two pieces of marble and stone behaved". (Hidetoshi Nagasawa in conversation with Olga Gambari, in Nagasawa, Faenza, I quaderni del Circolo degli Artisti, 2001, p. 42)

1J / 1K LIBELLULA, 1999



Title
Libellula

Date
1999

Medium
iron, brass and wax

Dimensioni
180 x 900 x 400 cm

Description

Is it possible to achieve weightlessness and lightness through the use of heavy, compact materials? The conceptual oxymoron is realized in Nagasawa's work with gigantic sculptures that seem to "float in the air." An action-reaction mechanism is achieved in the sculpture of the 1990s: forces oppose each other in perpetual antagonism, they combine in a relationship of thrusts and counter-thrusts, keeping the mass and weight of matter in the tension of a precarious balance.

Libellula [Dragonfly], made in 1999, perfectly embodies this type of anti-gravitational sculpture. As Akira Tatehata explains, "*Libellula's* [Dragonfly] sections mysteriously seem to float, because of their precise arrangement and bold, dynamic equilibrium. A vertical structure that opposes gravity may have been essential to previous sculpture, but much of Nagasawa's work has overcome this earthly fate, projecting images of things that float or fly in the sky. A secret sense of tension is created by skillful arrangement of weights that cannot be nullified, allowing them to cancel each other out in a dynamic fashion. Gravity is a metaphor of earthly things, and at the same time a dynamic mode of cosmic generation in a poetic space." (Akira Tatehata, *Ideas and Poetry*, in Nagasawa. *Dove tende aurora*, Spatial Design Consultants Co., 空間造形コンサルタント, Japan, 2009, pp. 167-168)

2A LAMPO, 2004

**Title**

Lampo

Date

2004

Medium

iron

Dimensions

500 x 500 x 30 cm

Description

Since the end of the 1980s, Nagasawa has tackled with his work the physical laws that govern reality, creating paradoxes, creating miracles of statics, bringing bodies into balance in the void, letting different, opposing forces free to act. The desire to overturn a principle, to invert spatial directions, to overturn an order, has nourished his work since his early beginnings. Listening to his 'subversive' nature, the artist, now in his mature years, manages to provoke the force of gravity by challenging it through the weight of the sculpture. The new works invade the space, self-sustaining themselves. The artist seems to want to demonstrate, paradoxically, that a body in space can acquire lightness by using its own weight. And, the greater the weight, the more the artist does whatever he can do on courageous inventions, creating prodigious events, in which gigantic pieces of wood or iron hover in the void – they move in space – inventing a new force: an anti-gravitational force.

This is the case with *Lampo* [Lightning], a monumental sculpture that the artist has been making in several versions since 1989, where the joint device is translated into a lever mechanism that levitated the structure in the air. Gigantic bars of iron articulate in the airspace thanks to the principle of leverage: everything supports itself, starting from an initial combination and projecting into the void in a zig-zag fashion, with a repeated play of thrusts. The transmission of weight between the beams is a dynamic weight, the structure moves freely in an anti-gravitational sense, and the gigantic weight of the beams is miraculously nullified. Balance and lightness are achieved through effective weight, a body weight that exerting its own force resets to zero.

As Caterina Niccolini observes, "Seeking the balance formula of emptiness, the artist seeks direct contact with things, with their 'inside.' [...] If during the 1970s the artist pushed matter, pushing it beyond the boundaries of its own appearance, now the anti-gravitational sculpture leads the work to the brink of a new 'limit situation.' Subjected to the strain, matter is examined, the artist tests its endurance through the interaction between its own resources and the natural forces governed by physical laws. [...] Whether on the ground or in the air, what emerges from these works is the existence of a fulcrum, a pivot, or a dynamic focus around which objects are distributed in space. From the natural to the geometric world, the sculpture absorbs and evokes that cosmic game of rotation that is observed in the whirlpool of fluids and the motion of galaxies." (Caterina Niccolini, *Nagasawa. Tra cielo e terra. Catalogo ragionato delle opere dal 1968 al 1996*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1999, p. 49)

2B BARCA, 1980–1981



Title

Barca

Date

1980-1981

Medium

marble, soil and tree

Dimensions

175 x 230 x 87,5 cm

Description

"The instant of a form: while wet sand flows through the hands. A moment later it is gone. That instant has become a boat; a real tree grows inside it, a tree that changes with each place in which the boat is exhibited." (Hidetoshi Nagasawa in *La conoscenza rovesciata. Testi sull'arte di Hidetoshi Nagasawa*, curated by Jole de Sanna, Segrate, Nike, 2000, p. 91)

In Nagasawa's life and work, the boat has a long history related to myth and travel, a tale intertwined with his biography, culture, and experience as an artist. Two long journeys marked his life: the tragic escape in 1945 from Manchuria to Japan (1945), and the journey from Japan to the West (1966-1967) with a canoe and a bicycle.

Thus, Nagasawa's art is closely linked to the theme of travel, understood as a continuous wandering from a place to another, and it is repeatedly embodied in the image of the boat. From 1973 to 1993, the artist's studio is transformed into a shipyard, from which seventeen boats emerged, transformed and moved through space. Consequently, the boat becomes a metaphor for the current and lived, mythical and dreamed journey, taking on the connotations of a journey in space and time, in a real and unreal dimension, between East and West.

In particular, *Barca* [Boat], presented in 1981 at the Sperone Gallery in Turin, consists of a monolithic marble base with an organic form, which houses a real plant inside. As Caterina Niccolini observes, "The mast of the boat, which supports the sail and let itself be carried by the wind, becomes a real tree, so as to transform the boat into a vessel filled with life. The ancient iconographic motif of the vessel in which the mast flourishes is renewed [...]. If the boat, according to its function, carries a cargo, this *Barca* [Boat] ferries nature, the plant-related life. Its strange features as well remind us back to the sea, to water, to birth, to the 'fertile' element par excellence, since the gesture of drawing water inspired its form." (Caterina Niccolini, *Nagasawa. Tra cielo e terra. Catalogo ragionato delle opere dal 1968 al 1996*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1999, p. 35)

The artist himself narrates the genesis of the work in a conversation with Jole de Sanna: "When you close two hands in prayer - all over the world religious people make this gesture - at the point where the two hands touch create a space, a space that cannot be seen. *Oro di Ofir* [Ofir's Gold], made in '71, was born from this image, an imprint of two hands. The same thing I wanted to do with the marble boat. From '83 on, I only made boat silhouettes: I became lighter, more transparent, more fragile. The boat almost disappeared, the idea, the concept, the suggestion remained. I grew up in a countryside on the outskirts of Tokyo near a large rice field. My village was located by four big rivers, and every year the countryside was flooded and became like a big lake, so the farmers had to pull their boats down from the ceiling of the houses and it was a great tragedy because the year's rice rotted. It was obviously a very sad event; however, as an image it was beautiful, because all those tiny boats ended up in a big lake [...]. This affected me deeply, and the beauty of the image always comes back to my mind.

Hence, I can say that the boat in my work is related to the sense of waiting, but also to the idea of having to leave a country. Then, for me there was a first escape trip with my mother, from Manchuria where I was born, to Japan. We were supposed to leave on a boat, but this boat never arrived, we were always waiting on the dock. Our escape lasted more than a year, there was no food, and my mother tried to reassure me by repeating that a boat would soon arrive to take us safely to Japan. With my imagination as a child, I constructed many stories waiting for this boat. In reality, when we arrived in Japan, nothing existed, we only witnessed a great tragedy. We arrived in the south of the country and to reach Tokyo we passed by Hiroshima, which was destroyed by the atomic bomb. The boat is not a simple story for me, it's always connected to many things, not just travel. Also, Japan is an island and to get out or in it was always needed a boat, now there are planes, but before..." (Hidetoshi Nagasawa in *La conoscenza rovesciata. Testi sull'arte di Hidetoshi Nagasawa*, curated by Jole de Sanna, Segrate, Nike, 2000, pp. 71-72)

4A / B ALBERO, 1983

**Title**

Albero

Date

1983

Medium

bronze, granite and gold leaf

Dimensions

550 x 600 x 600 cm

Description

A bronze tree, with a golden veil wrapped around it, at the center of Tsukuba, the university town designed by Isozaki Arata

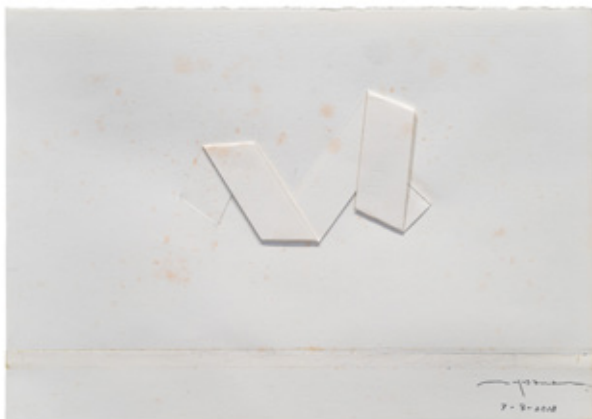
"I had been working on a tree project for seven years, but I had never had the opportunity to create it. In '75-'76, while making the Mano [Hand] with fabric, the idea of the tree with fabric came to me. When I was invited for the new city, I had to think of a sculpture for a square. They asked me for a monument. I absolutely did not want to make a monument. I searched and searched within myself, until I thought the tree was fine. It is a sculpture that stands outside, not a monument. It is also made of bronze for the sake of durability on the outside. The idea of the tree is related to a tale that we tell in Japan. We have a polytheistic religion, Shintoism, like the ancient Greeks. Usually, the gods live in the sky, but once in a while they come down to earth to rest, play, many things. But every time they come to Earth, they look for a favorite tree, and they descend there, they leave their veil on the tree and then maybe they go swimming, walking, I don't know. The veil hanging from the tree has this sense and it would also like to give the atmosphere of the air flowing around this rather strange tree, so that it continues underneath. The veil, if it is in the air, behaves like air, if it is resting on something it behaves like fabric. It is not known what the veil is made of, but in my opinion the gods fly with a "veil-sail", otherwise they cannot return. This tree is not an oak, apple tree, or any particular kind of tree. The big problem was deciding what meaning to give it, not what kind of tree. It may be that it is not a tree, it is and it is not. Before I did this, I made many models one to ten big to look for a tree that was not a specific tree, but yet had to be a tree. After four months I was able to make a piece that looked like a tree but did not resemble any tree. I realized that it was very important not to eliminate the sense of tree, the rule of nature. If I made a mistake or eliminated it, it couldn't become a tree. When I found what that was, I said 'okay'.

Van Gogh says, 'I see the Japanese artist as a man who draws the same blade of grass all his life. What does this man study? He studies the whole world and himself.'

For us, the thought of nature is a need; it has to be there. In Japan, every year the typhoon comes ten, twenty times. Earthquakes and floods destroy cities. We have created so many gods in the form of trees and whatever for this, because at some point they are afraid and get angry. For us to know nature is a task, an obligation to live. We have an incredible fear. In every leaf, in every drop of water the world is stored: not only artists, everyone, each person has to discover the rules of reality. We still have, for example, a very poor dam made about two centuries ago with bricks and stone; however, it is full of holes. It is not built like a wall; when the big wave comes it enters the holes and becomes a small wave, it isn't blocked, it is melted. The dam does not oppose the wave, it is necessary to be friends. Nature is not erased, it is accepted; we know very well that its power is too great, that we have to accept it. Even the Japanese house is like that: if the wind comes it may take everything away, the earthquake moves it but does not destroy it. On the contrary, so many dams built later with reinforced concrete have to be rebuilt."

(Hidetoshi Nagasawa in La conoscenza rovesciata. Testi sull'arte di Hidetoshi Nagasawa, curated by Jole de Sanna, Segrate, Nike, 2000, pp. 27-28)

5 / 6 DISEGNI, 2018



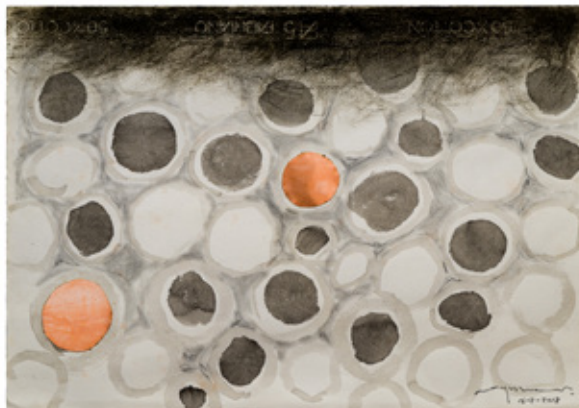
Titolo
Disegno

Date
07/03/2018, 10/03/2018

Medium
paper

Dimensions
35 x 50 cm
(43,5 x 58,5 x 4 cm with frame)

7 / 8 DISEGNI CON RAME, 2018



Title
Disegno con rame

Date
22/02/2018, 16/02/2018

Medium
copper, pencil, charcoal and acid
on paper
copper, Indian ink, charcoal and acid on paper

Dimensions
35 x 50 cm
(43,5 x 58,5 x 4 cm with frame)

Description

"Cooking paper?"

To use paper in the sense of cooking a food. I say cooking because I do not mean to find a new way in the interpretation of a material, but to prepare it to take on many different flavors while remaining itself. For example, you who are familiar with the taste of fish know how to cook it by varying and enriching its taste each time. Do not taste new foods, but deepen the flavors. Try to imagine the letter T of the alphabet: I think the avant-garde is constantly looking for new materials and spaces, but always at the height of the horizontal line. It extends, takes on new elements, but never deepens. I would like to be on the other line, the one that goes downward, to try to go deeper.

[...] They look like fabric, not paper.

In fact, it happened to me even with other materials that I wanted to go beyond the material itself: it's clear that I didn't want to imprison the paper, or the marble; I'm fine with it shifting into other things, I don't want to suffocate it, or kill it, I want to make it live. Even fish, if it is well cooked, tastes so good that you wouldn't expect it, however, it is never meat.

Do you like paper?

On the contrary, for me paper is the same as any other material. I know my limit and I am careful not to force it. [...] It is not true that I have more experience of paper than marble or wood. The choice of one or the other may also depend on availability. I also happen to want to tackle materials that I don't know at all. It is a struggle, that I can win or lose; if I win it means that the work is successful. With every material I don't know I am afraid, I want to face it, I want to win, however, it takes time, because first you have to study it [...]." (Hidetoshi Nagasawa in *La conoscenza rovesciata. Testi sull'arte di Hidetoshi Nagasawa*, curated by Jole de Sanna, Segrate, Nike, 2000, pp. 24-25)

Around the mid-1970s, along with the whiteness of marble comes the whiteness of paper: on the paper and in the paper, through the intervention of the artist's hands in the white and empty place of absence, sculpture takes shape.

From this moment on, until a few days before his death in March 2018, the artist produces a large number of paper works investigating and experimenting with the intimate potential of the material, denying it as a two-dimensional support, transforming it into a "medium", as a ductile and manipulable material, capable to transform into sculpture.

About this, Caterina Niccolini notes, "In paper and with paper the artist practices her own ritual of manual iterations and continuous transformation of the image. Textures, dense feathers, woven nets, meshes, lace, dense drapes of threads, ropes, bows and ribbons show themselves as in a sampler of trimmings, curtains and wall hangings. Paper, the quintessentially poor and cheap material, is transformed into a 'rich' material, an active, soft, and light material, and strong as a fabric, which is subjected to continuous tests of resistance. [...] Nagasawa turns paper into fabric, and as an intimate connoisseur of cellulose, fiber, and wood paste he makes sure that the material also becomes a protagonist in the creative process of the work. [...] Two great merits should be credited to this assiduous, intense and fruitful frequentation of paper: having successfully put into practice the transformation of a material into something else, discovering the potential of 'metamorphosis' and having awakened in the artist the pleasure and taste for manual dexterity and the physical 'courtship' of the material through the direct involvement of the artist in the making of the work." (Caterina Niccolini, *Nagasawa. Tra cielo e terra – Catalogo ragionato delle opere dal 1968 al 1996*, Rome, Edizioni De Luca, 1999, pp. 25-26)



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