FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Mingei: Are You Here?

508 West 25th Street, New York
March 7 – April 5, 2014
Opening reception: Thursday, March 6, 6 - 8 PM

New York—Pace Gallery presents the group exhibition, Mingei: Are You Here? from March 7 through April 5, 2014 at 508 West 25th Street, New York. The exhibition explores the legacy of Mingei, a Japanese folk craft movement led by philosopher and critic Soetsu Yanagi and questions the presence of craftsmanship in contemporary art. Originally conceived for Pace London in fall 2013, Mingei: Are You Here? presents a new and expanded iteration of the UK exhibition featuring additional artists and new work at Pace Gallery in New York.

Curated by Nicolas Trembley, Mingei: Are You Here? features more than 80 works by 30 artists, including paintings, sculptures, works on paper, ceramics and textile shown in a vitrine inspired by ethnographic exhibitions. Systems of display and practical aspects of museum work are two of the central themes of the exhibition Mingei: Are You Here?.

This museum-quality exhibition juxtaposes for the first time historical works by Japanese artists belonging to the original Mingei movement—whose techniques derive from traditional methods of craftsmanship, as seen in many of the Japanese artifacts on display—with the works of modern and
contemporary artists, designers and architects, who keep alive the philosophy of Mingei today. Pace’s artists featured in the exhibition include: Josef Albers, Isamu Noguchi, Robert Ryman, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Lee Ufan. Guest artists specific to this exhibition include: Anni Albers, Ruth Asawa, Mark Barrow & Sarah Parke, James Lee Byars, Valentin Carron, Trisha Donnelly, N. Dash, Simon Fujiwara, Naoto Fukasawa, Shoji Hamada, Kanjiro Kawai, Bernard Leach, Sgraffo Modern, Jasper Morrison, Mai-Thu Perret, Charlotte Perriand, Stephen Prina, Willem de Rooij, Keisuke Serizawa, Kenzo Tange, Kenkichi Tomimoto, Danh Vo, Brent Wadden and Sori Yanagi.

Inspired by the 19th century Arts and Crafts movement in Europe, the Mingei movement was established in 1926 during a period of rapid growth in Japan that included military imperialism, nationalism, westernization and urbanization. It sought to maintain the cultural identities and traditions of the rich and varied histories across Japan. The title of the exhibition refers to the philosophical ethos of Mingei which champions the everyday, ordinary and utilitarian objects created by nameless and unknown craftsmen.

According to Sōetsu Yanagi,Founder of the Mingeikan – Japan Folk Crafts Museum, “Dishonesty, depravity, and luxury - this is what Mingei objects must avoid at all costs; all that is natural, sincere, safe and simple – these are the characteristics of Mingei art.”

Highlights include works by Mark Barrow who collaborated with textile designer Sarah Parke to produce a hand-loomed linen work onto which Barrow has painted a geometrical composition of delicate and interweaving colors. While the interlacing composition might allude to Barrow’s obsession with pixels as well as pertaining to wider evocations of technology, the sciences and phenomenology, the process by which the piece has been made adheres to an artisanal tradition based in natural materials. Here we see a palpable link between tradition and modernity that is integral to the exhibition and, not least, the development of the Mingei movement.

An addition to the New York presentation is two paintings by N. Dash who is largely interested in materials and the craft of indigo making. Also featured are two works by Swiss artist Mai-Thu Perret, known for reanimating historical issues in a contemporary style. Mai-Thu Perret’s work stems from the fictional narrative, The Crystal Frontier, which the artist has evolved since 1999. This unresolved story follows a group of young women who flee to the remote desert of New Mexico to form a utopian commune free from capitalism and patriarchy. Diary entries, letters, song lyrics and written materials create a nonlinear narrative that serves as the point of inspiration for the artist’s work. On view will be the artist’s When I look I do not see, When I listen there is no sound (2011) and Banner for Zvezdochka (2007).

Valentin Carron looks to his native Swiss valley, where he collaborates with local artisans to produce works like these vases made of unrefined concrete, and finds inspiration in the vernacular shapes one finds in public spaces. For one of the sculptures in this exhibition, he used a particular marble, Cipolin, from a local Italian quarry that is now closed (also used by the architect Adolf Loos in his Villa Müller, Prague). Similarly, the American artist Trisha Donnelly sourced a rare slab of Brazilian marble, which she cut and engraved for one of her pieces on show in Mingei: Are You Here?. For her second sculpture in this exhibition, Donnelly worked with both a locksmith and blacksmith to create a blade that encapsulates the “warrior spirit” of a sabre.
Returning to his homeland, Vietnam, Danh Vo gilds mundane cardboard boxes with gold leaf offering a critique on the oft-tainted contemporary notion of the artisan. Perhaps simultaneously his piece evokes the heritage of Mingei visual culture that refashioned daily utilitarian objects into objects considered “beautiful.” The re-use of everyday materials is further found in Stephen Prina’s piece as the artist has painted on simple roller blinds in reference to Japanese scroll painting, kakemono; this work was recently featured at the Pavilion for Japanese Art of LACMA, Los Angeles.

This exhibition’s strongest thread, however, is Isamu Noguchi, who personifies a dialogue between the East and the West, equally addressing design, sculpture, and architecture as well as acknowledging both tradition and modernity. Flanking Noguchi are his friends including the architect Kenzo Tange who designed hand-woven seats, as well as artists represented by Pace who continue to perpetuate an East-West exchange. Indeed, Yanagi’s thinking guided Korean artist Lee Ufan during his days as a philosophy student, and it is Yanagi’s son, Sori Yanagi, who introduced Charlotte Perriand to Japan and Mingei in the 1940s.

Mingei: Are You Here? also presents two untitled works by James Lee Byars from 1959 to 1960 featuring ink on Japanese paper in four parts. In 1958 the artist travelled to Japan where he met Yanagi at the Mingei Museum in Tokyo and was introduced to Mingei artisans and their approach to ceramics and papermaking. The experience profoundly influenced aspects of his work. Sori Yanagi, who is also featured in Mingei: Are You Here?, was greatly impressed by the exhibition Super Normal: Sensations of the Ordinary which was conceived by the Japanese designer Naoto Fukasawa and the English product designer Jasper Morrison on the occasion of the 2007 Milan triennial. He stopped before a sieve to ask who had produced it. So commonplace had this object become since it was first designed, he had forgotten that he himself had actually created it. This anecdote is significant. The Yanagi sieve appears in this exhibition, together with its woven bamboo ancestor, which dates back to the 19th century Meiji period. The latter belongs to the largest private collection of Mingei artifacts outside Japan. Its owner, the collector Jeffrey Montgomery, admits how entranced he is by the way in which such objects emanate “vibrations” acquired through “years of handling and stories beyond words.”

Hiroshi Sugimoto presents two site-specific sculptures in Mingei: Are You Here?. During the 1980s in New York, Sugimoto owned an antique shop which he simply named Mingei.

A catalogue for the exhibition features introductions by Hiroshi Sugimoto, Nicolas Trembley, and Yuko Kikuchi. A video walkthrough of the exhibition with curator Nicolas Trembley and Pace London Director Tamara Corn in the UK is on view at pacegallery.com.
LIST OF ARTISTS

Anni Albers
Josef Albers
Ruth Asawa
Mark Barrow & Sarah Parke
James Lee Byars
Valentin Carron
N. Dash
Trisha Donnelly
Simon Fujiwara
Naoto Fukasawa
Shoji Hamada
Kanjiro Kawai
Bernard Leach
Sgraffo Modern
Jasper Morrison
Isamu Noguchi
Mai-Thu Perret
Charlotte Perriand
Stephen Prina
Willem de Rooij
Robert Ryman
Keisuke Serizawa
Hiroshi Sugimoto
Kenzo Tange
Kenkichi Tomimoto
Lee Ufan
Danh Vo
Brent Wadden
Sori Yanagi

NOTES TO EDITORS

Nicolas Trembley

Swiss curator Nicolas Trembley (b. 1965, Geneva) started his career at the Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou as an assistant, curator and member of the acquisition committee for video works in the New Media Department until 1996.

He is the co-founder and was the director of the bdv (bureau des vidéos) until 2009, publishing house, broadcasting, production, and distribution of contemporary films and videos. He was also in charge of the video programming in 2000 of the MK2 cinemas in Paris. He curated several independent exhibitions in festivals and museums such as the Rooseum Center, Malmö; Moph, Parco, Tokyo; Sketch, London;
l’Institut Français of Istanbul; le Printemps de Septembre, Toulouse; Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia; the Berlin Biennale; Saint Gervais, Geneva; Fondation Cartier, Paris, Capc Bordeaux. Among the creative projects he collaborated with, he curated exhibitions as a freelancer for the Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris in 1999; au Magasin, Centre National d’Art Contemporain de Grenoble or at the Centre Pompidou, Paris.

From 2004 to 2008, he was curator at the Swiss Cultural Centre in Paris. Exhibitions include: Armeleder/Garcia, Swiss Swiss Democracy de Thomas Hirschhorn, Max Bill / Wade Guyton etc. Since 2009, he’s been curator of the Syz collection in Geneva. Thesyzcollection.com

Last year, Nicolas Trembley curated Telephone Paintings, an exhibition and a catalogue presented at Art Basel.

He is a member of the editorial board of Frog, a contemporary art magazine, Art editor for Self Service and Numero magazines, and a regular contributor to arforum.com, Art Collectors, Art Press, Beaux Arts Magazine, Flash Art, Numéro, Vogue as well as many other contemporary art books. He has been invited to lecture at the School of Art and Design of Lausanne (ECAL) since 2007, and is the winner of two awards of the Prix de Médiateur d’art de l’Office Fédéral de la Culture, Berne (2004 and 2005).

He recently presented a touring ceramic exhibition Sgraffo vs Fat Lava including a catalogue in French and English. The exhibition was presented at the Centre d’Edition Contemporaine, Geneva; Frac Champagne-Ardenne, Reims; Kreo Gallery, Paris; EXD11 design Biennial, Lisbon; Galerie Gisela Capitain, Cologne; and Zachary Currie Gallery, New York. A selection of works from this exhibition is featured in Mingei: Are You Here?.

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