

Tadaaki Kuwayama

1932–2023

November 9, 2023 — January 13, 2024
Floor 1

Press Release

For press inquiries please contact
Vesper Lu at +1 212 541-4900
or vesper@marlboroughgallery.com

Marlborough is honored to host *Tadaaki Kuwayama: 1932–2023*, a memorial exhibition held in celebration of the life and work of the Japanese painter, who passed away earlier this summer. The exhibition will open on Thursday, November 9, 2023, with a reception from 6pm until 8pm and will remain on view through January 13, 2024, in the first-floor galleries of 545 West 25th Street.

Tadaaki Kuwayama was born in 1932 in Nagoya, Japan. In 1958, after graduating from the Tokyo University of the Arts, he relocated to New York City, where he would maintain a studio until his death. The move quickly spurred Kuwayama, who had initially studied the traditional Japanese painting style of *nihonga*, to reject the strict aesthetic principles of his training in favor of creating pure art that achieved “nothingness.” Eschewing both his education and then-dominant Abstract Expressionist trends, Kuwayama developed his own reductive, yet highly-recognizable, style. Free of history, representation, individuality, and the artist’s hand, Kuwayama’s pure art simultaneously evokes “the racket of industry and the enduring calm of eternity.”

Kuwayama once said, “When I started my practice...I felt the age of painting was over, and I wanted to make things that had no trace of painterliness in them, things that existed in a different dimension. I wanted to create things that people who believed in painting wouldn’t understand.” While the artist’s concerns remained constant, his nearly seven-decade long career can be divided into several periods based on his predominant use of varying materials. The present exhibition comprises core examples from different phases of the artist’s oeuvre, including three large-scale installations (one made in 2010, two in 2016) and paintings from the 1960s and 70s.

In the early 1960s, shortly after his arrival in New York, Kuwayama produced paintings that were made by applying Japanese mineral pigments and acrylic solvent on boards wrapped in Japanese paper—perhaps inspired by his prior training. Some were completely monochrome, and others were rendered in contrasting horizontal and vertical compositions. Several works from this period are featured here, including a work from 1960 (one of the two earliest examples in the exhibition) that was featured in his 1961 solo exhibition, *PAINTINGS*, held at the storied Green Gallery in New York. Kuwayama’s earlier canvases are vibrant yet subtle; they are nothing but what the artist intends for them to be—swaths of pure, absolute color. After the seminal 1961 exhibition, Kuwayama continued to refine his practice and use of materials, working in tandem with the American Minimalist movement of the 1960s and 70s. He would continue producing monochrome paintings (some now bisected by thin strips of aluminum), and began using a proprietary metallic paint,



Tadaaki Kuwayama at his studio on 6th Avenue, New York, 1959.

made by mixing acrylic with aluminum powder. Kuwayama also forayed into three-dimensionality, creating floor pieces made from painted wood and paper (in particular, hand-cut Japanese Torinoko paper).

With Kuwayama’s later installations, another central theme of his practice emerges, that of perception—the interaction between his works, their audience, and space. Over time, the artist, still aiming to emphasize pure color and form, adopted hard and shiny substrates, such as Bakelite and titanium. Two installations, *Untitled*, 2016, on view here, are each comprised of thirty blue and blue-green titanium squares arranged into precise grid formations. Upon first look, the squares appear identical; however, the titanium has, in fact, undergone a process of electrolysis until gaining a particular hue and iridescence. As viewers observe the installations, even the slightest movement, or a change in the room’s atmosphere, causes the different elements to change their aspect. As the art critic Aaron Betsky writes, “It is in this manner that Kuwayama has perhaps comes closest to nothing. As he often points out, he sees his art as existing in thin air, as a kind of relational aura between the viewer, the work, and the space in which it occurs. The aim he pursues is to not so much make this aura, as to allow it to appear.”

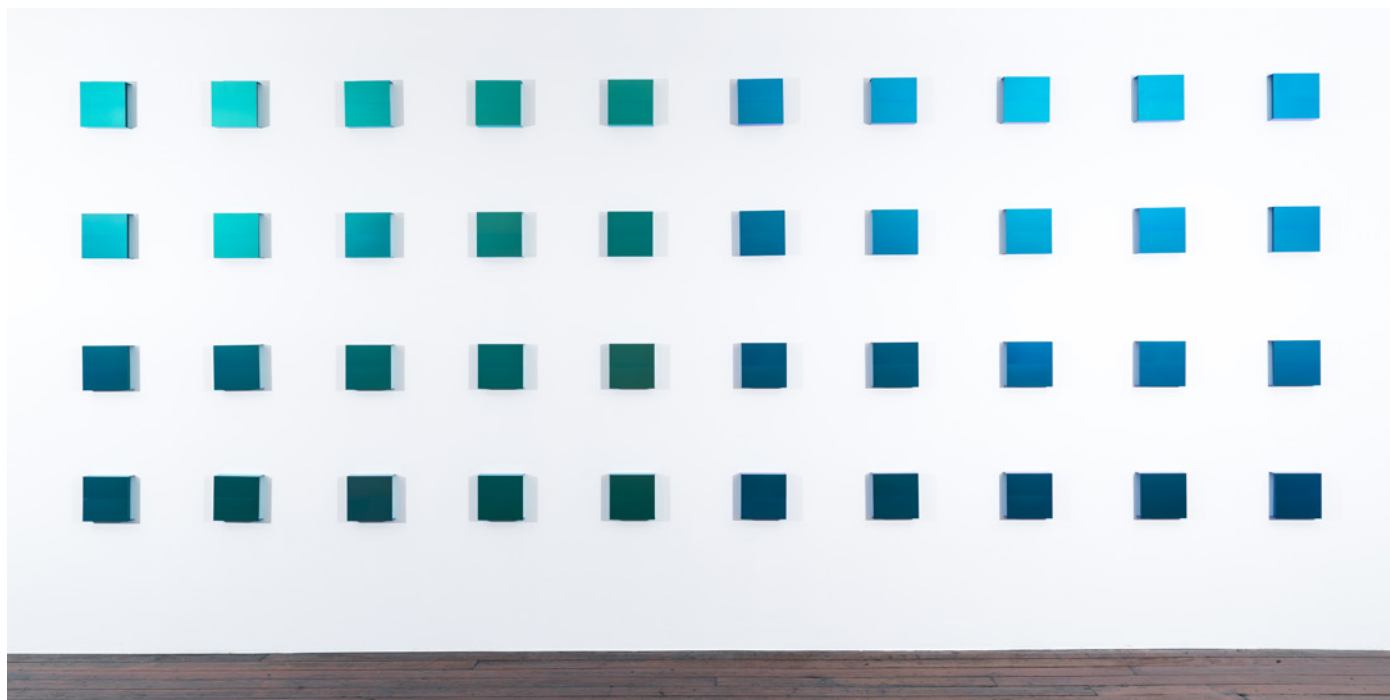
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545 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10001
+1 212 541 4900
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Comprising eighteen square canvases, the 2010 "White: Osaka Project" (originally created for a 2011 exhibition at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan) forms the cornerstone of the exhibition. Beyond Kuwayama's uses of a single color and familiar materials, including paper and wood, the work marks a significant departure from the others on view. Installed in a horizontal line at equally spaced intervals, the installation spans over 130 feet (40 meters). Unable to fully perceive the work in its entirety, viewers are compelled to consume each individual element as they walk along the wall in a slow procession. The installation becomes seemingly infinite, returning viewers to a state of pure white, simultaneously embodying everything and nothing.

Tadaaki Kuwayama has been featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions. Among them are those held at The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan; Nagoya City Art Museum, Aichi, Japan; Rupertinum Museum, Salzburg, Austria; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York (including the renowned 1966 exhibition, *Systemic Painting*); San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco, California; and Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His work may be found in museum collections worldwide, including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York, New York; Buffalo AKG Art Museum, Buffalo, New York; Nationalgalerie, Berlin, Germany; The Foundation for Constructivist, Concrete, and Conceptual Art, Zurich, Switzerland; The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, Japan; The National Museum of Art, Osaka, Japan; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humblebaek, Denmark; Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, Washington; The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, Ridgefield, Connecticut; The Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, Virginia; and Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut; among many others.

The Directors of Marlborough New York would like to express their sincere and heartfelt gratitude to the Kuwayama family for their support in mounting *1932-2023*. During the exhibition's planning, Tadaaki sadly passed away on August 18, 2023, at the age of ninety-one. This exhibition would have never been possible if not for his family's trust and virtuosity following his death.



Untitled, 2016, titanium, 60 elements, each 7% × 7% in. / 20 × 20 cm

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