

**Kishio Suga** was born in Morioka, Japan, in 1944. He currently lives and works in northern Japan. Suga graduated from Tama Art University in Tokyo with a BFA in oil painting in 1968. His first one-person show took place at Tsubaki Kindai Gallery, Tokyo, in 1968. Since that time, he has been producing sculptural installations that explore questions of formal, material, and conceptual equilibrium. Suga has had numerous solo exhibitions in Japan, most recently at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (2015). In 2016–17 his work is featured in *Karla Black and Kishio Suga: A New Order* at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, and *Kishio Suga: Situations* at the Pirelli HangarBicocca, Milan. Suga's presentation at Dia:Chelsea is his first solo museum show in the United States.

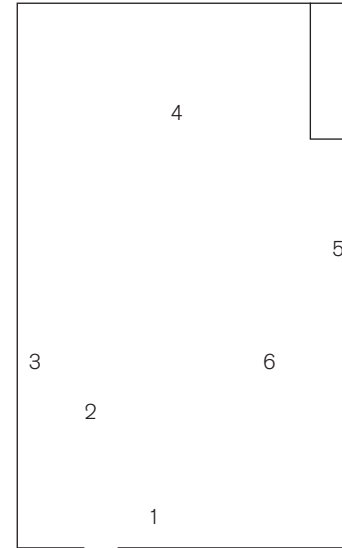
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#### site map and checklist

All works courtesy the artist and Blum & Poe

1. **Space Transformation**, 1968  
Wood and paint
2. **Diagonal Phase**, 1969/2012  
Wood and stone
3. **Accumulated Phases**, 1979/2016  
Paper, stone, and earth
4. **Law of Halted Space**, 2016  
Wood and metal
5. **Accumulated Effects**, 1979/2016  
Stone and vinyl
6. **Placement of Condition**, 1973/2016  
Stone and wire



**Kishio Suga**  
November 5, 2016–July 29, 2017



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Cover: Kishio Suga, *Law of Halted Space*, 2016. Dia:Chelsea, 541 West 22nd Street, New York City.  
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**Dia:Chelsea**  
**541 West 22nd Street New York City**  
**[www.diaart.org](http://www.diaart.org)**

## Kishio Suga

Kishio Suga, 1968

We fall in love not with artists or works, but with the essence of a thing [*mono*], its state of being.<sup>1</sup> —Kishio Suga

Kishio Suga, 1968

For almost five decades, Japanese artist Kishio Suga has produced site-responsive installations that combine common, raw materials into uncanny visual and physical encounters. Suga is one of the founding members of *Mono-ha* (School of Things), which emerged in Japan in the late 1960s and developed in parallel with Postminimal and Land art in the United States and Arte Povera in Europe. Informed by, and inflecting, international debates about the sculpted form, Mono-ha rejected the implied subjectivity of fabricated objects in favor of arranging resonant juxtapositions between found or preexisting *mono* (things). As Suga explained in 1970: “We [artists] should serve as a third party to materials, processes, and *mono* themselves.”<sup>2</sup> Drawing on perceptual theory and Buddhist philosophy, the Mono-ha artists pursued a distinctly Japanese antiformalism, which they believed could effectively address questions about the very nature of existence. Within this context, Suga developed a sustaining interest in the causality between different materials and phenomena in the world. He combines unrelated natural and industrial materials into unexpected, at times absurd, situations with an economy of means that belies the visual and conceptual complexities of the works at hand. This exhibition takes Suga’s contingent concerns as its point of departure. It brings together six works, spanning the range of his artistic career, that variously explore the relationship between matter and perception. Each installation consists of a network of elements that rely on each other for stability.

Suga’s early work was shaped by his formative experience at Tama Art University in Tokyo, where he trained as a painter between 1964 and 1968.<sup>3</sup> Along with many of his Mono-ha peers, he studied with pioneering figures of the Japanese avant-garde while at art school. Among those figures were Jirō Takamatsu—who contested the limits of representational space by distorting one-point perspective in sculpture, painting, and performance—and Yoshishige Saitō—who introduced young artists to the field of phenomenology and the reductive tendencies of advanced European and American abstraction, from Constructivism to Minimalism. Suga’s first sculptures are particularly marked by Takamatsu’s perspectival subversions. *Space Transformation* (1968), for example, consists of three stacked cubes, each of which appears more compact and distorted than the next, succumbing to the pressure of weight from above and pull of gravity from below. The work’s open-latticed forms evoke the rigid geometry of Minimalism, while its warped lines recall Takamatsu’s visual tricks.<sup>4</sup>

Creating the illusion of a towering structure on the brink of collapse, the jutting red beams of *Space Transformation* elicit a feeling of suspense, a sensation that became

a crucial device for the artist. Though Suga ultimately rejected the visual artifice at work in *Space Transformation*, he remained committed to exposing the latent forces that shape our experience of matter. In his mature work, Suga dismantles our expectations of common preexisting objects—such as paper, stones, and wood—by wresting them from their natural states of repose and arranging them in precarious configurations.<sup>5</sup>

*Diagonal Phase* (1969/2012) is perhaps Suga’s most paradigmatically Mono-ha sculpture. The work’s title implies a kind of material transience and recalls the work of fellow Mono-ha artist Nobuo Sekine, who similarly deployed the liminal term “phase” in each of his titles. Within *Diagonal Phase*, two wooden elements push against each other to remain upright; their external thrust is stopped by the heavy inertia of stones at their bases. The position of each component relies on that of the others. This contingency is echoed in the structure’s adaptability: the angle at which the two wooden components buttress each other is determined by the height of the gallery’s ceiling and the structure’s proximity to other works on view. To this end, the work seems to illustrate Suga’s notion that: “As all things exist interconnectedly within any given space, one can become aware of such space together with its inherent things; by observing the points of connection.”<sup>6</sup>

In his “situations”—a term Suga adopted to describe his installations for its implied mutability—the artist highlights both the internal qualities of a given substance (such as mass, structure, and weight) and the external forces acting on it (such as gravity, humidity, and time). As he further explains, “extracting the reality of a physical object is about making tangible its invisible aspects.”<sup>7</sup> In *Placement of Condition* (1973/2016) he binds blocks of stone with steel wire into a mutually dependent and stable network. While the canted blocks of granite make gravity palpable, the stability of the configuration bears witness to the tensile strength of the steel wire and Suga’s finely calibrated “release” (as he describes the process) of each element to operate according to their own properties.<sup>8</sup> The work seems to illustrate his notion that “[e]verything is interdependent without definition, until we become aware of one aspect; then ‘form’ emerges for the first time.”<sup>9</sup> At Dia:Chelsea, the precisely cut stones also function as a deliberate nod to the gallery’s history as a marble-cutting facility, activating the historical as well as physical forces informing each viewer’s understanding of the work.

Throughout his career, Suga has repeatedly explored the intersection between the vertical axis of man-made architecture and the horizontal plane of the natural world. In a notebook from the 1970s, he writes of wanting to make “walls and floors apparent,” giving “intent to the man-made spatial construct” in opposition to nature.<sup>10</sup> Installations such as *Accumulated Phases* and *Accumulated Effects* (both 1979/2016), in which objects are shored up against a vertical plane, accentuate the supporting yet contrived architecture of the gallery.

Kishio Suga, 1968

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The interweaving x’s of Suga’s most recent installation, *Law of Halted Space* (2016), similarly address the artist’s interest in planar dimensions. Here the Cartesian axes are presented as a series of crisscrossing vertical and horizontal beams. Slivers of spare wood are caught between the steel rods at eye level. Woven together, these forms simultaneously recall and distort the gridded spatial conventions of visual perception.

Drawing on the teachings of the Madhyamaka school of Buddhism, Suga noted in 1974: “No thing can be segregated from others; everything possesses its own position through mutual interdependence.”<sup>11</sup> The installations presented at Dia:Chelsea are carefully conditioned by their environments, responding to factors such as scale, light, and architecture. While Suga’s individual sculptures can be realized in multiple locations, each iteration is uniquely reconfigured to the given space in “an attempt to find the most frank expression” of existence that is possible.<sup>12</sup>

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