

ULLENS CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART 尤伦斯当代艺术中心

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust

—Acclaimed Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima brings digital installations and sculpture to UCCA

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Tatsuo Miyajima's UCCA solo show *Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust* marks the first time that this leading-edge Japanese artist has held a solo exhibition in China. His elegantly-constructed works of installation and sculpture – featuring digital counters that the artist describes as “LED gadgets” – invoke numerals as a metaphor for human existence. UCCA audiences are sure to enjoy this powerful synthesis of modern technology, Buddhist philosophy and visceral experience.

UCCA Director Jérôme Sans says that for Tatsuo Miyajima, “numbers are both figurative and abstract, symbolizing a vast realm of existential possibilities, the eternal nature of space and time, and the infinite cycle of life, death and rebirth. His core artistic concepts are derived from Buddhist philosophy, while his methods and materiel are informed by the latest technologies.”

3 powerful works, a synthesis of east and west

HOTO, *MEGADEATH* and *Floating Time*, the three works in Miyajima's UCCA solo exhibition, highlight the best artistic and aesthetic traditions of east and west, bringing together eastern mysticism, western rationalism, cutting edge LED technology and ancient philosophy. Each of the works features LED digital counters programmed to cycle through the numbers from 1 to 9

and back again without ever reaching “0,” a value that the artist feels is meaningless. In Buddhist philosophy, there is no absolute zero, no negation or end; human existence is but an infinite cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The closest Miyajima comes to “0” or “death” is when he programs his LED counters to go blank, plunging the room into darkness.

“These counter gadgets symbolize the glitter of human life,” says Miyajima. “The transformation and glitter of the numbers symbolize the ‘life’ of man, and the darkness of ‘zero’ symbolizes ‘death’.” Miyajima does not, however, use numbers merely as a metaphor for people; in all of his work, numbers represent a much greater range of metaphorical possibilities, infinite ways of perceiving and experiencing time and space, and myriad individual lives moving to their own unique rhythms.

HŌTŌ (“the bejeweled tower or pagoda”) measures 5.4 meters high and is constructed of 6 separate discs. The mirrored surface and glittering numbers invite the viewer to become a part of the artwork, a process Miyajima feels is essential for “making art into art.”

Floating Time is another highly visceral work. The artist uses computers and four separate projectors mounted overhead to orchestrate a dynamic space and immerse the viewer in a sea of floating time.

The last work, *MEGA DEATH*, is a glittering array of 2400 blue LED counters representing the 167 million lives lost to war, strife, revolution and genocide during the 20th century, described by the artist as “an era of artificial mega-death.” When the counters all suddenly go dark, we are plunged into a state of anxiety, waiting for the numbers to begin ticking once again, and for the ultimate annihilation to be transformed into the ultimate rebirth.

From street performance to the mystery of numbers

The dynamism and visceral quality of Miyajima’s work may owe itself to his early experiments with performance art. After spending 5 years in the early 1980s doing performance art, he

stopped for 10 years, during which time he was turned on to the idea that objects might be perpetually transforming, not solid in state. From that point on, Miyajima began making art with this in mind. “I started making objects which I wanted to be essentially unstable,” he explains. “I became involved in the potential of light and movement. Eventually I realized that, in a different way from live performance, these new objects involving movement and involving light were performing.”

Of his upcoming UCCA solo exhibition, the artist says: “For many years, I have employed these counting systems to express the nature of human existence or fate, an artistic concept that is rooted in Buddhist philosophy. China, of course, made a vital contribution to the spread of Buddhism, and for this reason, I am very much looking forward to showing this exhibition in China.”

UCCA Director Jérôme Sans notes that “Miyajima's simple digits from 1 to 9 are a potent reminder that each individual life is unique, equally valuable and worthy of respect. Whatever the calculations, however we are added up, we are always more than the weight of our numbers, more than the sum of our parts.”

This exhibition has been made possible with the support of LVMH / Moët Hennessy. Louis Vuitton.

Exhibition in collaboration with SCAI THE BATHHOUSE.

Exhibition catalogue available at UCCASTORE.

Related Events at UCCA

Artists' Talk: Tatsuo Miyajima – A Digital Philosophy of Life

Date: July 16 / 13:00-14:30 / UCCA Auditorium

Guest speaker: Tatsuo Miyajima

Language: Japanese, with Chinese and English translation

About Tatsuo Miyajima

Tatsuo Miyajima (b. 1957, Tokyo) studied painting at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, where he earned a Master of Arts degree in 1986. He began experimenting with performance art and eventually moved on to light-based installations. In addition to participating in numerous international biennales and important group shows, he has held solo exhibitions at Foundation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain (1996), Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth (1996), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (1997), Art Sonje Museum (2002) and Art Tower MITO (2008). In 2006, Miyajima was selected to serve as Vice President of Tohoku University of Art and Design. He currently lives and works in Ibaraki, Japan.

About UCCA

The Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) is a non-profit, comprehensive art center founded by collectors Guy and Myriam Ullens in November 2007. UCCA presents exhibitions of established and emerging artists and develops a trusted platform to share knowledge through education and research.