

Noriyuki Haraguchi, 1946–2020

It is with great sadness that we announce the death of Noriyuki Haraguchi (1946–2020). The extraordinary Japanese artist of global importance rose to prominence in the late 1960s through the development of painting and sculpture that engaged with cultural and environmental issues through a post-minimalist vocabulary.

A statement from Frances Morris and Sook-Kyung Lee of Tate Modern, London:

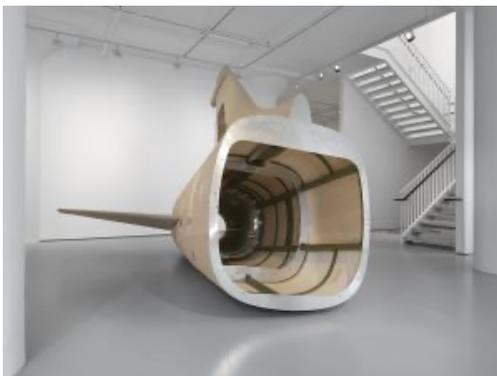
“Noriyuki Haraguchi made history as the first Japanese artist to show in Documenta 6 in 1977. His memorable large scale oil pool work, with its fluid reflective surface, was indicative of the complex conversation his work facilitated between raw and manufactured materials exploring notions of modernity, industrialisation and nature in works with a beguiling formal beauty. Shaped by early memories of fighter jets encountered as a child on the US naval base in Yokosuka where he grew up, Haraguchi’s interest in materials and questions of objectivity and perception made him an important voice within the ‘Mona Ha’ movement. Haraguchi’s Airpipe C from 1969 is on long term display at Tate Modern alongside Japanese, European and American contemporaries who showed together in the 1970 Tokyo Biennial.



Photo by Shigeo Anzai

“Haraguchi was notably generous to Tate and will be remembered at Tate Modern as a quiet and reserved yet warm and thoughtful artist.”

Born in 1946, the artist spent most of his life in the town of Yokosuka, Japan, the home port of the US Navy’s 7th Fleet. The environment of Yokosuka, located south of the massively industrialized city of Kawasaki, indelibly shaped Haraguchi’s aesthetic and instinct for pure construction.



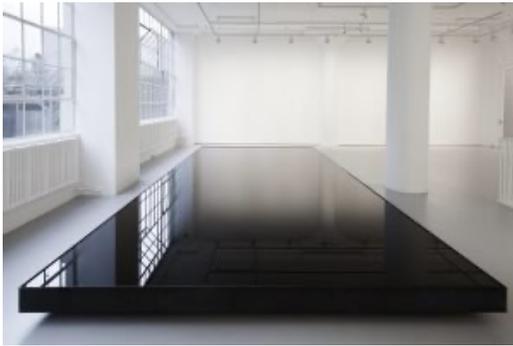
Installation image of ‘A-7E Corsair II’ in Noriyuki Haraguchi at Fergus McCaffrey, New York, 2015

Haraguchi attended Nihon University, Tokyo, in the late 1960s, amidst the protests and campus riots against the war in Vietnam and the presence of US military on Japanese soil. A 1968 encounter with the tail of a US Navy jet fighter aircraft proved decisive in cementing Haraguchi’s politically-infused minimalist aesthetic, inspiring his iconic 1968–69 work, *A-4E Skyhawk*—the first in a series of full-scale replicas of jet tails of Vietnam-era American warplanes. This work, along with the artist’s early paintings and sculptures, such as the *Ships* series (1963–65), *Tsumu 147* (Freight Car) (1966), and *Air Pipes* series (1968–69), evinced an

early and acute awareness of the aesthetics of militarism and heavy industry that Haraguchi would continue to explore throughout his decades-long career.

Shortly after graduating in 1970, the artist executed his first *Oil Pool* sculpture in 1971, made from welded steel and containing dark, acrid-smelling, spent machine oil. Underscoring the friction between the contemplative splendor of its reflection and the polluting nature of the materials, a later version of the sculpture was exhibited to great acclaim at Documenta 6 in 1977 and soon after acquired by the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Iran, where it remains installed today. Marking his rise to prominence in the West, Haraguchi emerged on the global stage alongside Richard Serra, Luciano Fabro, Pino Pascali, Brice Marden, Gilberto Zorio, Robert Smithson, and Richard Nonas; sharing a post-minimalist appreciation for the essence of a material and an intuition for how to transform it into art.

Fergus McCaffrey shares: “Writing this, my memory falls back to being in the old apartment in Zushi with domestic comfort abandoned entirely in the mad pursuit of ambitious art. Of cramped space, choking cigarette smoke, crazed neighbors, and toxic polyurethane fumes; all the while Haraguchi-san mused about Hasegawa Tōhaku and Mt. Fuji... Well both are united now in the milky white light and clouds around Mt. Fuji; and I am confident that he too will inspire future generations of creative souls to commit themselves to important art.”



Installation image of 'Oil Pool' in Noriyuki Haraguchi at Fergus McCaffrey, New York, 2015

Haraguchi's work has been exhibited extensively, in Japan and abroad. Recent solo and group exhibitions include Fergus McCaffrey, New York (2015, 2014, 2012); Miyake Fine Arts, Tokyo (2014, 2012, 2010); Kanazawa Art University Gallery, Kanazawa (2013); Art Unlimited 2014, Fergus McCaffrey, New York (2013); MoA, Seoul (2013); Espace Louis Vuitton, Tokyo (2012); Kamakura Gallery, Kanagawa (2012); Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012); Yokosuka Museum of Art (2011); BankART, Yokohama, Japan (2009); Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg (2007); and the Lenbachhaus, Munich (2001).

Haraguchi received the Award of Excellence from the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo and Tokyo Central Museum in 1969 and 1973, respectively.

Commenting upon Noriyuki Haraguchi's life and career:

“Documenta 6 in 1977. —I entered a room that felt heavier than it should have, darker than it actually was; a room thickened and silenced by something I could not identify. I felt myself pushed down by a kind of fog, a self-generated palpable blackness. —I saw a huge steel rectangle filled to the edge with thick rust-brown oil; saw oil pooled almost a foot deep and spread twenty-four feet in one direction and twelve feet in another, almost filling the room. I saw that pool surrounded, held and guarded by a narrow path of naked floor just wide enough to walk on.

—And I felt that room become the world.

“I had never before been overwhelmed by art; emptied by it and almost destroyed by it. —But at that moment I was. I felt my life change.

“How had Haraguchi accomplished that? —*By starting where he started, and by getting where he got.* I had no other answer then, and have none now. —There is no answer but the celebration of art strong enough to devour us, and artists great enough to feed us into it.”

—Richard Nonas

“In 1988 in Hakushu, Yamanashi, Haraguchi began creating a pool with iron in the middle of the rural landscape, which consisted mostly of rice fields and forests. Rice paddies exemplify the fact that horizontality derive from ancient times. Haraguchi masterfully built the pool’s horizontality using iron frames. Not a drip of the material inside the pool would escape from it. In *Mother Nature*, his huge work—a trigger for magic—was set in place.

“At the time, it had been 14 years since I first met Haraguchi, and I had not yet stepped into his world—in a deeper sense. As if ignoring my uncertainty and speculations of the people surrounding it, the piece stood there firmly. Finally, the iron-framed pool was filled with a substance, which kept its long horizontal lines all the way to the full. It was, in fact, filled not with oil, but water. The next day, Nature was gathering at his piece—aquatic insects swimming here and there, and flying insects coming in and out.

“Noriyuki Haraguchi's oil-pool installations are exhibited in different places worldwide. But, he never created the one with water-filled again. I do not know what people think of it, but I love the personality it had with depth and gentleness.

“R.I.P. Noriyuki Haraguchi.”

—Min Tanaka

“We are sorry to hear this sad news. God bless [Noriyuki Haraguchi]. We are sure he will always be within us and his great works remind him.”

—Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Iran