

## Kayne Griffin Corcoran



### Noboru Takayama



NOBORU TAKAYAMA, *Untitled*, 2018, 138 railroad ties, dimensions variable. Installation view of "Noboru Takayama" at Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles. Photo by Flying Studio. Courtesy the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran.

For almost five decades, Noboru Takayama has used the sturdy wooden beams that hold together railway tracks to create large-scale sculptures, invoking in his work the human body and postwar history. Now in his seventies, Takayama is often grouped with the Mono-ha movement alongside artists such as Lee Ufan, Nobuo Sekine, Kishio Suga and others, due to his simple interventions upon unfussy materials. He shares with these artists a wistfulness for the past and a slightly anti-modernist stance, and yet, in a conversation I had with the artist at his first exhibition in Los Angeles, he made clear that he no longer associates himself with the movement, which he feels was relevant to a specific point in history. While his work continues to encapsulate the mental and physical toll that the passage of time and the development of modernity has demanded of certain individuals, Takayama's site-specific sculptures found a new relevancy in Los Angeles, a city that emphasizes the *au courant* and in which the car reigns supreme over a labyrinth of freeways.

S. Li, Jennifer. "Noboru Takayama." Art Asia Pacific. March/April 2018. Print.

A sense of heaviness was immediately palpable in Takayama's show at Kayne Griffin Corcoran. Upon entrance into the expansive, light-filled modern gallery, one was confronted by *Untitled* (2018), one of the exhibition's two enormous sculptures. The work is among the largest in Takayama's oeuvre. More than 100 railroad ties were painted black and assembled in the center of the room, commandeering the entire space. Takayama began working with his signature medium in the late 1960s, after a chaotic but enlightening day spent waiting for the train at Yokohama station. Amid the bustle of people and the roar of advancing technology and modernization, railroad ties crystallized in his mind as symbols of humankind. He came to refer to the material as "human pillars"—each slab of wood is over two meters tall and weighs around 90 kilograms, similar to the mass of a larger-sized person. Though the columns in Los Angeles were received new from a lumber yard, most of the railroad ties that Takayama has worked with in other cities in Europe and Asia are sourced from obsolete components or gathered from abandoned train yards, paralleling the trajectory of an aging person: once young and relevant, finding themselves one day outmoded.

At the center of the piece's structure are about a dozen poles that stand vertically, like a section of a tall fence or an imposing barricade. On one side, another dozen or so posts are laid down vertically against the floor in a staggered but orderly arrangement that recalls bleachers or stadium seating. Opposite this, railroad ties seem to burst forth, spilling over and splaying out from the center, reaching, tumbling, spreading out on the ground. If these pieces of wood are meant to be representative of people, the metaphor was elegant, if a bit obvious. Together we stand strong, but alas, how easily we fall apart.

Unquestionably, a sense of solidarity underlies Takayama's focus on humanity. While in university, he visited the coal mines in Hokkaido and came into contact with the miners. He was struck by the paradoxical juncture at which they lived—mining for a fossil fuel, at the time already considered to be unsustainable, to further power the humming societal machine that was leaving them by the wayside. In this sense, Takayama views the sculptures as a requiem to the people that were marginalized by a changing society.

In the courtyard garden of the gallery, a smaller, lighter work, also untitled and created in 2018, stood almost balletic in comparison to the hefty, behemoth piece in the room. Ten railroad ties stretched across a grassy patch and floated into the air, the loosely trapezoidal form hoisted aloft by two graceful stilts. There is a sense of levity in this work, perhaps carrying with it the prospect that, as with Takayama himself, relevancy and innovation are not always confined to the young and the new. Though working with a familiar material, a refreshing sense of ingenuity and refocus—whether through scale or composition—was apparent in both of Takayama's works.

—Jennifer S. Li