



7384

Kumi Sugai (1919-1996)

Untitled

Oil on canvas

Signed Kumi SUGAI and dated 1954 to the lower right; stamp of Galerie LA ROUE on the reverse

H. 58cm x W. 45cm (23" x 17¾")

Provenance: Galerie La Roue, Paris, France

Private Collection, Paris, France

Kumi Sugai was born in Kobe to a family of talented Malay musicians. He studied at the Osaka Bijutsu

Gakkō (Osaka School of Fine Arts) from 1933 and at the same time he practiced calligraphy and was fascinated by typography, both of which were to play an important part of his later work. In 1937 however, he had to drop his studies due to a health problem and begun working at Hankyū Railway PLC as a poster designer in the advertising department. At the same time from 1947 until 1949 he studied nihonga (Japanese style painting) under Nakamura Teii (1900-1982).

Sugai moved to live and work in Paris in 1952, studied at the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere under Edouard Goerg (1893-1969) and quickly entered the artistic circles of the École de Paris and the Nouveau Réalisme, befriending artists such as Alberto Giacometti (1901-1966), Hisao Domoto (1928-2013) and Yasukazu Tabuchi (1921-2009) amongst others. His early abstract expressionistic oil paintings were popular and Sugai's early solo shows in Paris and Brussels managed to propel his career further. In 1955 he started making lithographs and in 1956 published a collection of pictures and poems created together with the surrealist poet and art critic Jean-Clarence Lambert (b. 1930) who also wrote extensively about Sugai. By 1960, Sugai had enough work for an impressive retrospective at the Municipal Art Museum, Leverkusen, Germany which further established his reputation as a rising star. At around this time and ever keen to expand his repertoire of artistic expression Sugai began to experiment with bronze casting and transformed some of his usual subjects and forms into sculpture. In 1963, following his success Sugai moved to the affluent Left Bank of Paris and bought a much loved Porsche car. This love of cars, speed, topography and the graphic qualities of road signs took Sugai's work in a different direction making his later work geometric, hard-edge and stylised. Some of these works focus solely on large capital letters from the Latin alphabet, appropriating their powerful curves and lines while others feature directional shapes such as arrows painted in bold colours evoking the imagery of road signs.

During this successful period of the late 50's and 60's Sugai participated in all the major Art Exhibitions of the time; Sao Paulo Biennale (1959, 1965), Kassel Documenta (1959, 1964) and Venice Biennale in 1962 amongst others.

In 1967 however Sugai was involved in a car accident when he was seriously injured. Two years later he returned to Japan and lived in both countries for nearly three decades. Like many of his contemporaries,

Sugai also wrote essays and published a book in French, *La Quete sans Fin* (The Endless Quest, 1970).

Kumi Sugai finally returning to Kobe, Japan in 1995 just one year before his death.

Works by the artist can be found in the collections of many museums worldwide including: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Landesmuseum, Hannover; Atheneum Art Collection, Helsinki; Kaiser-Wilhelm Museum, Krefeld; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; National Museum, Oslo; Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh; Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro; Galleria Nazionale D'Arte Moderna, Rome; National Library of France, Paris; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum, New York; Harvard Art Museums / Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Cambridge, MA; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN; The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; The National Museum of Art, Osaka; Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art; The Museum of Modern Art, Shiga; Sezon Museum of Modern Art, Nagano; Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art; Pola Museum of Art, Kanagawa.

Selected Solo Exhibitions:

1954 Galerie Craveu, Paris

Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

1957 Galerie H. Le Gendre, Paris

1958 Galerie Creuzevault, Paris

1959 Kootz Gallery, New York; regular participation until 1962

1960 Retrospective 1952-1960, Municipal Art Museum, Leverkusen, Germany

1963 Galerie Creuzevault, Paris

Kestner- Gesellschaft, Hannover

1964 Retrospective 1952-1963, Die Insel, Hamburg

1965 American Art Gallery, Copenhagen

Konsthallen, Gothenburg

1969 National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

1977 Umeda Museum of Modern Art, Osaka

1983 Seibu Museum, Tokyo

1988 Galerie Brusberg, Berlin

1991-92 Nantenshi Gallery SOKO, Tokyo

Ashiya Municipal Art Museum, Ōhara

Museum and Memorial Museum of Kojiki Torajirō

1997-98 Sugai Kumi, Prints 1955-1995, Takamatsu Municipal Art Museum,

Hamamatsu Municipal Art Museum

Tendō Municipal Art Museum

Kaga Art Gallery

Ashiya Municipal Art Museum, Ōhara

Selected Group Exhibitions and Awards:

1931 Nika-ten, Tokyo; regular participation until 1963

1939 Kyushitsu-kai

1941 Exhibition for Aviation and Art – Asahi Shimbun prize

1947 Bijutsudantai rengo ten (Union of Art Associations Exhibition); regular

1953 Salon d'Octobre, Paris

1955 Carnegie International Exhibition, Pittsburg

1956 Salon de la Nouvelle Réalité, Paris

1957-89 Salon de Mai, Paris

1958 Carnegie International Exhibition, Pittsburg

1959 V Bienal, Sao Paulo

II Documenta, Kassel

3rd Ljubljana International Graphic Art Biennial, Ljubljana – Prize of the Museum of Modern Art of
the City of Zagreb

1960 2nd International Graphic Art Biennial, National Museum of Art, Tokyo

1961 Carnegie International Exhibition, Pittsburg

4th Ljubljana International Graphic Art Biennial, Ljubljana

Tokyo International Art Exhibition Prize

1962 31st Venice Biennale, Venice

1964 Carnegie International Exhibition, Pittsburg

III Documenta, Kassel

1965 8th São Paulo Biennial, São Paulo – First prize for foreign artists

1966 1st International Graphic Art Biennial, Krakow – First prize

1968 French Painting 1900-1967 in America, Krakow

1972 1st Norwegian International Graphic Art Biennial – Honorary Prize

1985 Localising Contemporary Graphic Art, Prefectural Art Museum, Fukushima Prefecture

Cultural Awards:

1966 Annual Prize of the Agency for Cultural Affairs: *Geijutsu Senshō*



