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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Takeo Yamaguchi

Dates: Feb 2 – Mar 18, 2017

In conjunction with Asia Week, Taka Ishii Gallery New York will be open on Sunday, March 12 through Saturday, March 18.

Taka Ishii Gallery New York is pleased to present a solo exhibition of works by Takeo Yamaguchi from February 2 to March 18. Within the Japanese modern art world, which followed new Western European art forms, Yamaguchi independently searched for non-representational expression. Using simple compositions and concise forms, he created works characterized by imposing surfaces, strong presence, and expanding space. This exhibition will feature six works in total—two paintings from the 1960s that highlight the expansion of rectangular planes and overlap of color fields, and four works of the 1970s that represent a productive period in which he concerned himself with the materiality of painting.

Yamaguchi was born into a wealthy family who owned a large farm in Keijo (present day Seoul). He developed an interest in painting in junior high school and entered the Tokyo School of Fine Arts. Recognizing his own lack of skill, he practiced the basics of art education and developed early on the basics of his artistic approach, which remained constant throughout his oeuvre, of apprehending the shape and tonal quality of the object as a whole rather than rendering external forms in detail or refining the application of oil paints.

Impressed by the works produced in Europe by Yuzo Saeki, which were on special display in the 13th Nika Exhibition (1926), Yamaguchi traveled to France soon after Saeki returned to Paris. Yamaguchi ventured on a sketching trip with Takanori Ogisu, Sadami Yokote, and Ryosuke Ohashi, who had all similarly been moved by Saeki's astonishingly serious production. In contrast, however, to the other three artists, whose pictures displayed Saeki's influence, Yamaguchi alone learned from Saeki's attitude of expressing the "personality" intuitively assessed from the object. In 1928, Yamaguchi rented with the other artists a vacation house in Vétheuil, a suburb of Paris. While the others painted in their studios and outside to capture Parisian scenes, Yamaguchi remained drawn to the reality of the natural environment, which he found simultaneously simple and infinitely deep. He grew very conscious of returning to nature. With Minoru Nishimura's introduction, Yamaguchi frequently visited Ossip Zadkine's studio and developed a desire to apprehend the "framework" of objects. Yamaguchi has explained, "Arriving in Europe, I felt suspicious of what I had been doing up to that point. I started to consider throwing away the past and restarting from scratch." Accordingly, he eliminated the sketchy ambivalence which he found in himself to capture the true form of objects through a "systemic understanding" based on tactile perception. After returning to Japan in 1931, Yamaguchi submitted work to the Nika Exhibition on Ikuma Arishima's recommendation. He soon became a regular in the "Modern Room No.9," established by Seiji Togo and others for avant-garde artists on the occasion of the Nika Association's 20th anniversary. As the establishment of the Dokuritsu Bijutsu Kyokai [Independent Art Association] in 1930 and the Jiyu Bijutsuka Kyokai [Free Artists Association] in 1937 shows, the decade saw the influx of two major trends—abstraction and surrealism—into Japan. That Yamaguchi developed an independent mode of expression at the dawn of Japanese avant-garde painting despite only being able to paint in his time spared from his family agricultural business, is remarkable.

After the outbreak of the Pacific War, it became difficult for Yamaguchi to send works from Keijo. In 1945, he was also drafted. In 1946, after the end of the War, Yamaguchi repatriated from Keijo. He had lost nearly all of his works in the war, but called the prewar works "studies" and "sketches." He stated, "The end of the war brought me into a new phase, and I could finally start over," suggesting that his desire to produce works was uninterrupted. Immediately after the war, he began making works again when he was called upon to re-establish the Nika Association. While his previous work had been spatial pictures comprising concise forms and lines, his

postwar works featured forms in colors reflecting his own personality such as reddish browns and ochre, on a dark color background. Rather than a shift from figuration to abstraction, the change reflected his aim to clearly apprehend and compose forms themselves. Because Yamaguchi was using a painting knife like a trowel for painting walls, he began using plywood as supports in 1952 and the impasto paints began exerting a materiality of their own.

What I do is not so much abstract, but wanting to get at the root of primitive. (...) The boards I paint, I sometimes think, are not pictures or works. I don't want them to be paintings. I'm simply making movements to make sure I can do something. The multicolored paint becomes simplified and colorless, then the color of one's body.

-Excerpted from Takeo Yamaguchi, 'Ashiato [Footprints]', *Geijutsu Shincho*, Shinchosha, Feb 1969, No. 230.

Just as abstraction was becoming popular in the Japanese art world, and the works of avant-garde artists who had worked since the prewar period were becoming mature, Yamaguchi was pushed to the forefront of contemporary Japanese art as the pioneer of abstract painting despite his intentions. He exhibited works in major international exhibitions in the latter half of the 1950s and his primitive, yet fast and dynamic forms, which differed from the intellectual compositions then popular in Western Europe, were applauded internationally. In terms of picture-making, Yamaguchi first combined circular forms with simple color fields bound by straight or curved lines, then made grid-like forms, and finally arrived at layering thickly applied color forms based on rectangular shapes. The compositions of clear forms were eventually mostly covered by colored surfaces that expanded to fill the picture plane, and the materiality of the layers of paint, the gestural trace inscribed with painting knives, and the textures of torn and uneven surfaces were emphasized. In other words, the substantiation of materiality allowed the works to achieve a rich vitality and form a coherent and whole entity.

Takeo Yamaguchi was born in Keijo (present day Seoul) in 1902 (and passed in 1983). He graduated from the Tokyo School of Fine Arts in 1927. He traveled to France that same year and stayed for three years. Through his exchanges with Yuzo Saeki and Ossip Zadkine, Yamaguchi began making works with the aim of apprehending the framework and substance of objects. After returning to Japan in 1931, Yamaguchi submitted work to the Nika Exhibition on Ikuma Arishima's recommendation. Yamaguchi continued to submit works to the Nika Exhibitions until 1962, excluding the wartime and postwar years in which the exhibition was canceled. In 1933, he exhibited in the "Modern Room No.9," established by Seiji Togo and others for avant-garde artists for the 20th anniversary of the Nika Association. In 1938, the "Room No. 9 Association" was formed by Yamaguchi, Giichi Minegishi, Jiro Yoshihara, Yukiko Katsura and others, all of whose works had been exhibited in "Modern Room No. 9." The Association became central to the promotion of avant-garde painting in Japan. In 1946, Yamaguchi left Keijo and returned to Japan. In 1953, he participated in the establishment of the "Japan Abstract Art Club." He also taught younger artists, becoming professor at Musashino Art University in 1954 and dean at Musashino Art School in 1982. His solo exhibitions include "TAKEO YAMAGUCHI Exhibition", Minami Gallery (Tokyo, 1961); "Yamaguchi Takeo Exhibition", Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art (Fukuoka, 1980); "Takeo Yamaguchi Exhibition" Kagoshima City Museum of Art and traveled to other locations (1993-1994). His international exhibitions include the 18th American Abstract Art Exhibition (1954); the 3rd Sao Paulo Biennial (1955); the 28th Venice Biennial (1956); Guggenheim International Award exhibition (1958). His awards include the 1st Contemporary Art Exhibition of Japan, Prize of Excellence (1954); The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture's Art Encouragement Prize (1961).

For further information, please contact:

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Tue-Sat 11:00-18:00

Closed on Sun, Mon and National Holidays



Takeo Yamaguchi
"Combination of Forms", 1962
Oil on plywood
61.5 x 91.7 cm



Takeo Yamaguchi
"Kei", 1970
Oil on plywood
52 x 44 cm