



23 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10065  
tel (646) 912 9300  
web [www.takaishiigalleryny.com](http://www.takaishiigalleryny.com)  
email [info@takaishiigalleryny.com](mailto:info@takaishiigalleryny.com)

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Kumi Sugai “Paintings and Multiples from the 1950s”

**December 5, 2015 – January 30, 2016**

**Reception: Thursday, December 10, 6-8pm**

Taka Ishii Gallery New York is pleased to present “Paintings and Multiples from the 1950s”, a solo exhibition of works by Kumi Sugai (1919-1996). A painter, sculptor and print maker born in Kobe in 1919, Sugai was one of the first generation of the post-war Japanese artists to join the international avant-garde art scene. He was a pioneer who acquired Western style of painting and combined its essence with classical Japanese painting (Nihon-ga) and calligraphy abroad. Featuring paintings, multiples and works on paper from 1955 to 1994, this exhibition represents his interests and philosophy as well as the evolution of his style.

Since 1952, Sugai had lived and worked in Paris. “KURO” (translated “Black”) (1957) is an oil painting which represents Sugai’s intension to create paintings with essences of Surrealism and abstract painting with his experience and knowledge of Japanese technics. Characteristically Sugai’s brushstroke is reminiscent of Japanese calligraphy yet is fueled by the influence of Art Informel movement. Dynamism of the work comes from combination and reinvention of his traditional aesthetics and technics that garnered him international acclaim. Sugai was immediately noticed in Paris for his delicate matière and use of abstract gestures resembling primitive forms. At the same time, he experimented with silk screen printing and lithograph. On view, “DIABLE ROUGE” (1955), “LE TONNERRE” (1960) and “LE VENT VIOLET” (1962) develops upon pictographic figures and show Sugai’s transition to composing with color and graphic structure.

“ROUGE, VERT” (1968) is an oil painting which shows Sugai’s dramatic change of style from the abstraction and introduced hard-edge geometric forms painted with clear colors. This painting is an early example of his direction toward his later works, signified by his continuous pursuit of simple form and composition of intelligential beauty. In this period, he introduced design aesthetics with a functional reality. In the 1960s and 1970s, Sugai made large capitals letters in his works. “S” is its representative motif and well-known series that has the first letter of Sugai. “S” also resembled the curves of freeways on which Sugai enjoyed driving in his beloved Porsche. He was possessed with speed which became a motif for his works. “S.ROUGE” (1992) is an acrylic painting and one of this “S” series which Sugai drew repeatedly. He found an originality in the act itself of repeatedly drawing the same motif. However, Sugai dedicated himself to another series, Cadmium, which acquires more and more clear texture on behalf of his acknowledged matière. “ROUGE DE CADMIUM 6-SEP” (1994) and “ROUGE DE CADMIUM 27-28” (1994), both of them are acrylic paintings, are the result of his eternal pursuit of a style. Thus the two paintings visualize his two extreme sides of lucid and strong graphical aesthetics.

A Kobe native, Kumi Sugai acquired formal training in Western style painting starting at the age of 14 at the Osaka School of Fine Arts. His artistic career began in 1937 with commercial work for the Hankyu Railway Company where he designed advertising posters. His meeting with the Gutai Art Association founder and artist, Jiro Yoshihara (1905-1972) was influential to his experimentalism. While refining his technique in Western style paintings under the instructions of Yoshihara, he took interest in calligraphy and traditional Japanese painting. These formative years of practicing Western and traditional Japanese mediums gave a dual foundation to his future work reaching its full maturity in Paris where he relocated in 1952. His artworks were shown in numerous exhibitions around the world including “Japon Des Avant Gardes 1910-1970”, Le Centre Pompidou, Paris (1986); “Contemporary Art/Postwar” (1979), The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura; “Development of Postwar Japanese Art: Abstract and Non-figurative” (1973) and “Contemporary Art: Dialogue between the East and the West” (1969), The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; “Contemporary Japanese Painting and Sculpture”, circulated by American Federation of Arts. (1963-1964); the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Documenta, Kassel (1959 and 1964); the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Sao Paulo Biennale (1959 and 1965); Carnegie International Exhibitions, Pittsburgh (1955, 1958, 1961 and 1964). Sugai awarded Zagreb Prize, Third International Print Biennale, Ljubljana (1959); first prize, Tokyo Print Biennale (1962); first prize, Forth International Print Biennale, Ljubljana (1961); David E. Bright Foundation Prize for artists under 45, the 11<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (1962).

His solo exhibition includes “Kumi Sugai”, Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art and The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (2000); “Retrospective Exhibition 1952-1983”; Seibu Museum, Tokyo (1983) and The Ohara Museum of Art, Okayama

(1984). Also he received midcareer retrospectives at Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo (1967) and the Städtisches Museum, Leverkusen, West Germany (1960). One-man shows at The Kootz Gallery, New York (1959, 1960, 1961, 1962 and 1964), Galerie Creuzevault, Paris (1958 and 1963), Galerie H. Le Gendre, Paris (1957), Galerie Craven, Paris (1954) and Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (1954). He received and completed the commissions for a mural for the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (1968–69), and a public mural in the sport center in Hannover, West Germany, for the 1972 Olympics. His work has been included in institutional collections such as Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Modern art, New York; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Brooklyn Museum; Los Angeles Country Museum of Art; National Museum, Oslo; Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Le Centre Pompidou, Paris; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; The Museum of Modern Art, Kamakura & Hayama; Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art; The National Museum of Art, Osaka; The National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, amongst others. Sugai died in Kobe 1996.

For further information please contact: Exhibition & Press: Takayuki Fujii  
23 East 67<sup>th</sup> Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, New York, NY 10065 tel: 1-646-912-9300  
email: [info@takaishiiigalleryny.com](mailto:info@takaishiiigalleryny.com) Tue-Sat 11:00-18:00 Closed on Sun, Mon and National Holidays  
Winter Holidays: December 24, 2015 - January 4, 2016



Kumi Sugai  
"KURO", 1957  
Oil on canvas  
31 1/2 x 22 53/64 inches  
© Kumi Sugai



Kumi Sugai  
"ROUGE, VERT", 1968  
Oil on canvas  
11 13/16 x 11 13/16 inches  
© Kumi Sugai