

**Shades of White, Shades of Seeing:  
Yoshihiro Suda: In Focus at Asia Society, New York, October 6, 2009-February 7, 2010**

**YAYOI SHIONOIRI**

Before Isaac Newton, most scientists believed that white was the fundamental color of light and that all other colors were formed by making additions. With a simple piece of glass and Newton's ingenuity, suddenly the eye could see what had been present all along: white was revealed as the perfectly balanced spectrum of colors in equal proportions.

As seen in the contemplative new work by Suda Yoshihiro—exhibited at the Asia Society alongside seven artworks he selected from their Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller 3rd Collection—white possesses the ability to represent varied, compound meanings depending upon context. Far from being neutral, white can be imbued with potent messages, if the viewer chooses to interpret such messages in, and attribute such meanings to, white.

The complex multiplicity of messages embodied by white is silently but acutely communicated through Suda's depiction of a white magnolia blossom, created from intricately carved and painted magnolia wood. Encased in transparent plexiglass, the viewer sees the magnolia in a perfect, singular moment in time—complete with vestiges of bugs having feasted on its petals. As an almost too perfect encapsulation of a moment in nature, the magnolia is both a representation of, and a stand-in for, life.



Image courtesy of Asia Society.

Suda's artistic practice combines an evocation of Japan's sculptural tradition with unique exhibition strategies. Claiming that he "personally like[s] small corners or marginal spaces,"<sup>1</sup> Suda usually exhibits his work in unassuming places, so much so that viewers sometimes have been unable to locate his works. However, for Asia Society's installation, Suda's magnolia is placed on an encased pedestal, simultaneously enticing the viewer to touch its petals while repelling her by its preciousness.

As a result, this project appears to represent a unique collaborative vein in Suda's exhibition practice. Instead of using the space as the "starting point for the development of an installation idea,"<sup>2</sup> Suda has started with a concept and picked visual referents to match his formal



Suda Yoshihiro (b. 1969, Japan), *Magnolia*, 2009, painted wood,  
Courtesy of the artist, D'Amelio Terras, New York, and Gallery Koy-  
anagi, Tokyo.

choices. Suda's white is one among many, including a Chinese ewer from the Ming period in green-hued alabaster white and a Japanese square serving dish from the Momoyama period in eggshell white. In the exhibition space, Suda's magnolia is both relic and homage. Just as much as the ewer and dish make the viewer think of the culture and period from which they were taken, their past owners, and the ways in which such pieces were used, the viewer cannot help but reflect on the moment in nature from which the magnolia was carved and on the visual inspirations that led Suda to create the magnolia.

By banning color from the visible spectrum, Suda's installation powerfully communicates the underlying shapes and possible usages of the displayed artworks—as the prism splits light or as winter reveals a garden's bones. White is not pure; contingent upon the interpretations of the viewer, it has the ability to appear unsullied and fresh, uniform and unexceptional, contradictory and referential, or clinical and still. Each work in the exhibit challenges the viewer to transfer a direct visual experience into a meditative one. Indeed, the messages interpreted in the works are as different and subtle as the various 'hues' of white appearing throughout the exhibit, with Suda's representation of nature serving as just one possible interpretation.

Yayoi Shionoiri is obtaining her Masters in Modern Art: Critical Studies at Columbia University.

1. Telephone interview between Suda and Asia Society Museum Associate Curator Tezuka Miwako, April 14, 2009.
2. Ibid.