

VAN DOREN WAXTER

Katsura Funakoshi: A Tower in the Night Forest, Recent Work 2011-2019
November 14, 2019 to January 17, 2020
23 East 73rd Street | 2nd Floor



Sound of Tree Water, 2019, painted camphor wood and marble, 36.61 x 18.31 x 12.2 inches (93 x 46.5 x 31 cm)

“I have always longed to take the strangeness, the depths, the fascinating aspects of people...and reveal them in new or unique forms.”

—KATSURA FUNAKOSHI

“He has created a new species of humans.”

—PHYLLIS TUCHMAN

Van Doren Waxter is pleased to announce *Katsura Funakoshi: A Tower in the Night Forest, Recent Work 2011-2019*, an exhibition of five hand carved, half-length sculptures and related drawings made by the renown Japanese sculptor on view at 23 East 73rd Street from November 14, 2019 to January 17, 2020. Funakoshi is admired for his fantastical, distorted, and contemplative figures, particularly in Japan where the artist is foremost among sculptors. He began exhibiting in Tokyo in the 1980s and in 1998 represented Japan at the Venice Biennale. This exhibition of works dating from 2011 to 2019 is the artist’s first in the U.S. in more than a decade and follows a solo exhibition at Mie Prefectural Art Museum in Tsu, Japan (2016).

The son of highly regarded sculptor Yasutake Funakoshi (d. 2002) who himself worked in bronze and stone, Funakoshi was born in Japan in 1951 and grew up in the medieval town of Morioka City. He earned degrees at Tokyo University of Art and Design and Tokyo National University of Art and Music and today lives and works in Tokyo. The artist is noted for his forms that utilize camphor wood harvested from laurel trees, traditionally used to make religious objects. He cites as his early influences the restrained modernist Romanian-French sculptor Constantin Brancusi (d. 1957) and the legendary Japanese sculptor Unkei (c. 1150-1223), active during the Kamakura *shōgun*, an era recognized for the emergence of the samurai.

Funakoshi’s futuristic, visually striking figures, which the American art critic Phyllis Tuchman asserts “feel like hybrids and mutants” and “time travelers” operate, according to the artist, “in a world of joy and suffering, of

passion and anger, of resignation.” His poetic, mysterious forms are made slowly over the course of many months by the hand with a chisel and hammer and incorporate steel rods in their centers. The sculptures are influenced by the nude in Western art but are markedly unique give their lengthened necks, missing hands, eyes made of painted marble that gaze straight ahead, and painted, polished skin that a reviewer in *The New Yorker*, commenting on Funakoshi’s “exquisite sensitivity” remarked, is “fine-grained, and uncannily fleshlike.”

The wonderfully strange half-length *Sphinx, with Whose Eyes?* (2011), measuring nearly four feet tall, is a male figure gazing into the distance whose ears appear as wings or horns and whose face is fitted with small pieces of glass. A similarly scaled female, *Sound of Tree Water* (2019), is meticulously made of wood and marble coated in washes of diaphanous blue from the neck down. These mysterious, intelligent souls are grounded by history and yet at the same time are forging an imaginary future, that as the artist, says, “murmur audibly in solitude.”

About the artist

Katsura Funakoshi was born in 1951 in Morioka City, Japan and today lives and works in Tokyo. He earned a B.A. in sculpture at the Tokyo Zokei University, University of Art and Design in 1975 and an M.A. at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music in 1977. His work has been the subject of numerous solo and included in group exhibitions in the United States, England, Germany, and his native Japan. His work was most recently on view in *The Sphinx in Myself* (2016) at Mie Prefectural Art Museum, Tsu, Japan, and he was the subject of a traveling museum exhibition, *Katsura Funakoshi Works: 1980-2003* (2003-2004) at Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. He has been honored with prestigious awards, such as the Nakahara Teijiro Prize for Excellence (1995) and the Hirakushi Denchu Prize (1997). His work is held in permanent collections such as The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo. Funakoshi’s work has been reviewed and featured in publications such as *ARTnews*, *Art in America*, *The Asahi Shimbun*, *Asian Art*, *Financial Times*, *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, and *Nikkei Art*.

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