

Derosia

Harry Tafoya, Paper, March 29, 2024

# PAPER®

## Naoki Sutter-Shudo Sculpts What Can't Be Said



Naoki Sutter-Shudo is fluent several times over. The Paris-born, Tokyo-bred, Los Angeles-based artist has a grasp of sculpture, painting and photography that's as easy and sophisticated as his command of English, French and Japanese. But in acquiring these wildly diverse tongues and toolsets, he's also developed a deep sensitivity to the subtle shades and distinct forms that an idea can take on, knowing just how easily they can get bent out of shape or lost in translation. But rather than spiraling over the basic inability of humans to ever *fully* understand one another, Sutter-Shudo has taken on the challenge of actually building

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out and coloring in the spaces where communication fails. In his wide-ranging creative practice, the artist has created a rich visual vocabulary to spell out concepts that are too elusive to put into words, circling over gaps in meaning and even giving structure to the void itself through woodwork, metal and paint.

In his recent shows at Gaga/Reena Spaulings in Los Angeles and Derosia in New York, Sutter-Shudo mixes wildly different styles of artwork from kinetic sculptures with molded-over doll heads to spiky crown of thorns sculptures to blown-up paintings of Bic lighters and the Hawaiian flag. Sutter-Shudo has a magpie's eye for shiny rubbish and a relaxed intelligence that's both sharply critical and responsive to the more abstract pull of material, color and form. He is a prolific collector of everything from rare books to cigarette packs to pictures of Paris Hilton; in a similar way, the conceptual thread that unites his portrait of far-right Playboy model Pierrette Le Pen with his riffs on Zen Buddhist calligraphy is more intuitive than rigorous or academic. There *is* a logic to how he assembles this series of work, but it's open-ended, elliptical and at peace with not fully making sense.



Among Sutter-Shudo's greatest gifts as an artist is a tolerance for contradiction and paradox, which lets him sit back and channel the absurdity of his work rather than bending over backwards trying to map a sense of reasoning onto it. The fabric-painted mantras that kicked off his show at Derosia — “form/void,” “nothing nothing nothing,” “the enigma of the universe” — are meditations that are clearly taken to heart. The architecture of his sculptures is structurally sound, but also builds out onto weird vistas and bizarre easter eggs. If you were to light the fake candle wick attached to “Untitled” (2024) you would probably end up burning

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the whole gallery down. A free-floating flame pops up attached to another work a couple of paces over, although the craggy aluminum bears more of a resemblance to a butt plug than a spark. All manner of surrealist knobs are attached to Sutter-Shudo's work, both graphically striking (some of his art is a dead ringer for Memphis design) and freakily suggestive.



In a piece like “Pay Here (197 Grand St. 2W NY NY 10013)” (2024), Sutter-Shudo turns the audience into a kinetic sculpture, instructing them to pay into a coin slot without getting anything in return. It’s the kind of object-as-prank that Marcel Duchamp would approve of, setting the viewer up for a deadpan anti-climax. This works as a comment on the many fake and pointless transactions that define the art world (you might consider Maurizio Cattelan’s banana to be a cousin), but is even better as an illustration of how Sutter-Shudo cultivates meaning: by staging silly and stylish encounters with the ineffable.

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PAPER caught up with Sutter-Shudo to discuss paying your way in the art world, the meaning of the shape of words and why Paris Hilton is so hot.



**Could you talk a bit about your approach to language and how it becomes the jump start for the ideas you want to work with?**

I grew up in Japan, with a Japanese mother and a French father, who spoke to each other in their own language. My mom would say something in Japanese, and my dad would answer in French, and I was in the middle of that, which was great because I naturally picked up both languages. Usually the kids of binational couples have one dominant language, but I didn't really have one. On some level, being between languages, which is kind of being between identities, you're forced to translate. I would pick up nuances of something that my dad would say that my mom wouldn't get or vice versa. But sometimes you are confronted with things that are untranslatable or very hard to translate. And I like thinking about these sorts of conundrums, almost like little intellectual puzzles, which in a way is similar to looking at art or thinking about art. The way you structure something physical, like a sculpture, or even a painting, can be similar to grammar or syntax. I'm into puns also, like that sort of slippage of language, when language becomes inadequate to describe something.

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**The gesture of language goes a long way to communicate itself. When you have language that you want to focus on, how does that dictate the shape or color of it?**

Sometimes the embellishment of a word, or putting a color onto it, or having it be in a specific shape also does color the meaning of the word or add something to it, which is almost like creating a sentence out of one word. I like it when just the pure formal description of an artwork — like I'm trying to do right now — is also hinting at some meaning, or the meaning comes from the description comes from the physical aspect of the work. What's interesting about Chinese calligraphy is that originally those characters were written in a way in where the gesture created the meaning, meaning if you trace the line upward that means "up" and if you trace a line downward, that means "down." Even if the result looks the same, the brush stroke itself indicates the meaning, so the trace of the bodily gesture is already constructing meaning and, perhaps, symbolism.



**Your approach is very associative. When people hear about these kinds of crossed visual wires, they often think of synesthesia. Could you talk about handling these words? Do you also have a visual sense for what they are?**

I don't really have synesthesia, so not necessarily, but even when I write short stories, for example, I like to write by hand, the first draft. And there is something in the speed of the hand, that sometimes it's faster than your brain, which is, in a way, getting lost in the words themselves. I read in French, English and Japanese, but Japanese is the language in which I read the fastest because you don't have to spell out words in your mind as you're reading, you just kind of scan the page, and you get the meaning immediately. There are obviously

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characters that I like more than others for their shapes, because there's thousands of them, and stylizing them is an interesting thing that's been done for millennia. It's often very difficult to decipher old calligraphy when you read it, but trying to decipher something, even if it's just one character, is not unlike looking at art. Sometimes people who are not familiar with contemporary art or modern art assume that art is like a puzzle to be solved. You have these symbols, and then you have to decode them. But it's not like that. There's a quality to language and art that escapes being just a puzzle.

**What inspired you to make the more abstract sculptures? Are they building off those same ideas you'd been working from, or are they coming from somewhere else altogether?**

Sometimes it originates from pure play in the studio when I'm just assembling shapes and materials, and it's a quite slow process of assembling and collaging things, and then I just know what feels good or what feels true. It's not like meditation because you're active, and you're moving around the thing with sculpture. But there is something like a pursuit of truth, I'm not sure how else to put it, it almost feels religious at times. Almost as if there's something that you can tend towards, a perfect shape or something that is specific and feels good. But other times, it's also informed by more abstract [things], like design elements that you encounter in the world. When a shape starts resembling a potential symbol — that's when maybe it's interesting. It's a sort of interesting thing that's similar to maybe reading or writing.



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**You have other sculptures made for the show, like the coin slot, that initially seem to have a lot less to do with language and a lot more to do with how you're interacting with that space. Where did the inspiration for those sculptures come from?**

The payment one, which is this very simple coin slot that says “pay here” on the side — “pay here” being a phrase that you encounter a lot, especially when you're driving in Los Angeles and you go to park your car or something. And, you know, it's just like, I'm just trying to exist and breathe, but everything is like being monetized and you have to pay for everything. There is a masochistic pleasure in getting rid of money. Like it's probably going to remain there forever until the building gets torn down. And then who does the money go to? Does it go to the landlord? The landlord probably doesn't need any more money. But there's a sort of perverse pleasure in submitting yourself to something that is already extracting money and wealth from you. Also, just taking money out of circulation and having it disappear. Because there's no reward: when you put the money in, it disappears, it doesn't do anything. You don't get anything in exchange. And that's a big trap. It's also rare to pay for nothing.



**It feels very art world-specific, because so many of the transactions that go on in the art world feel like they're paying for nothing and actually what you're buying is just pure abstraction.**

Oh, totally. I mean, like works that are bought and sold without even leaving the storage.

**Or without even being seen.**

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Most sales today are online. And people use these weird euphemisms. Like: “We just placed this work.” But like, was it placed? I’m not sure. Is it in a place? Or is it in Delaware? It was funny, seeing the reaction of artists and dealers in front of that piece. Like Gregor Staiger, who is a dealer from Zurich, kept putting in coin after coin and said, “Metaphor for my life, metaphor of my life.” It’s a weird humor thing.

**The Swiss love to do all kinds of weird, metaphysical things with money. You’re a pretty prolific collector. Could you talk about a couple of things that you collect?**

My collecting is not informed by any guidelines. What I’m interested in is just like being in the world and encountering something and appreciating the thing for its thing-ness. I like to go to flea markets, antique stores, and just, you know, anything that catches my eye, regardless of its value. So it could be old ceramics or lacquer-ware, but it can also be just like a screw or something. Trash sometimes, also — I have quite a bit of trash that I’ll just find on the street. I’m also very bad at throwing things away. I keep, for example, all the packs of cigarettes I smoke, I keep them in a box.

**Wow! How big is it?**

I have several boxes of them. I started doing that only a couple years ago. But also, I started keeping cigarette butts in buckets. I collect a lot of books, and, you know, it used to be just books for the content of the book, but now it’s becoming slightly more bibliophilic. Recently, I got some books from George Bataille’s private library. I have a binder full of magazine clippings of Paris Hilton.





**Why is Paris Hilton of interest to you?**

Paris Hilton was so big when I was first exposed to American pop culture — and the fact that she was famous for being famous. You wouldn't have Kim Kardashian without Paris Hilton. At the time, it was so hard to foresee the influence that she would have or how she would pave the way to fame based on nothing. It's like pure fame. And this pure invention was a weird camp character. And had I known that, I would have been critical of it at the time.

**Do you like Paris more as a person or as an object?**

As an image. I would not really care about meeting her. But yeah, just as an image.

**That seems to be a common thread for so much of this work, it seamlessly navigates all of these different dynamics: it's traditional but it's modern, it is reverential but it's also kind of silly, it's appreciative but also kind of critical. But you're also somebody who is coming in at the nexus of these two very distinct cultures, which are both incredibly rich and, to be blunt, quite racist. How do you feel like growing up between these cultures helped form your perspective? Was it a sense of "both and" or "neither nor"?**

It's funny, often people are like, "Oh, it must have been hard growing up in Japan for not looking fully Japanese," or something, but not to me. I never felt any problem with it or felt singled out. There's this Baudelaire poem that starts out something like: "Life is like a hospital, where every patient says that by the window is nice, but it's too cold. But, like, I also want the view by the window." And at the end: "It's anywhere, anywhere out of this world." Like you don't know where you actually want to be. And that's how I feel most times. I don't really know where I want to be or where to be.

Being in Los Angeles is a neutral, weird territory, it has extremely new history. It has its own history also — but it's sort of a neutral zone. But yeah, I mean, it's like how people have different personalities in different languages. And I do feel that a lot when I'm talking to someone in French, or talking to someone in Japanese, it brings out a different way of being, it brings out a different way of thinking, also. And it's a way for me to not fully commit to one thing — but also, not being able to commit to one thing is perhaps why making something ambiguous in the form of an artwork is a good outlet.

*Photos courtesy of Paul Salvesson, Gaga/Reena Spaulings and Derosia*

Gracie Hadland, e-flux, January 31, 2024

Naoki Sutter-Shudo addresses the current critical landscape with a series of seven “Critical Figures” and twelve paintings. Installed in only one half of the gallery, the audience of figurative sculptures faces a wall on which is hung a row of large graphic canvasses. Each is adorned with a formal accessory made of flimsy material: a wire twist-tie shaped into a tie, a fake lettuce hat, a shirt made of bubble wrap or a plastic bag. The figures’ apparent attempts to present as professional are rendered ridiculous by the nature of their clothing. They look as though they’re dressed for a nineteenth-century salon—complete with bonnets, big collars, and ties—rather than a contemporary art gallery. Each figure’s body has an intricately constructed apparatus holding a wind-up metronome with a bell (some in 3/4 time, others in 1/4 time) and has a unique look, height, and facial expression tending towards the bizarre—one has three heads, for example.

The viewer is able to wind up the “critics,” letting them spin their wheels while looking around the show. The result is a rhythmic kind of chatter punctuated with the ding of a bell, as if to signal a lightbulb moment. Sitting atop stacks of white archival boxes crudely labeled with the names of various art and culture magazines, from *Frieze* to *Vanity Fair*, the critic figures appear to have emerged from, or will soon return to, a storage space, resigned to a life of stasis contingent on the vitality of their publications. (At the opening, a bouquet of flowers gifted to the artist lay on the boxes labeled *Artforum* like an offering on a grave.)

The twelve paintings invoke a number of styles and subject matter—some taken from other painters, including a scaled-up reproduction of a painting by the artist’s wife Alexandra Noel, of an image from a French cigarette label—and depict among other things a Hawaiian flag turned through ninety degrees, the mother of Marine Le Pen as a slutty French maid in an image taken from a 1987 *Playboy* shoot, and a lighter bearing the name of the exhibition and the acronym that means it is sometimes, falsely, cited as an etymology for the abbreviation of *et cetera*. The works almost exist as stand-ins for the Big Paintings that dominate the art world Sutter-Shudo seems to be responding to, yet these well-executed examples do not feel ironic or cynical so much as whimsical.

The common gripe that there isn’t any “real” criticism is often paired with the complaint that people only want to show/buy/talk about Big Paintings. That an artist’s success is solely determined by market value can seem to push criticism into redundancy. “End of Thinking Capacity” brought to mind conversations with my peers about the state of criticism, especially in Los Angeles, where it can feel that criticism functions as an extension of the PR apparatus. One potential reading of Sutter-Shudo’s ghoulish sculptures is that they lament this state of affairs: all the critic has left, in this vision, is her outdated clothing and an automated wagging finger. In this sense, the show

Gracie Hadland  
Naoki  
Sutter-Shudo’s “End  
of Thinking  
Capacity”

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Gracie Hadland, e-flux, January 31, 2024



View of Naoki Sutter-Shudo's "End of Thinking Capacity" at Gaga & Reena Spaulings, Los Angeles, 2024. Image courtesy of the artist and Gaga & Reena Spaulings. Photo by Paul Salvesson.

might be read less a swipe at the critics themselves than a critique of the flimsy infrastructures that support them.

"End of Thinking Capacity" suggests the industry creates limitations for both artist and writer. Sutter-Shudo embraces the freedoms available to the former, but the title of the show suggests finality, a paradigmatic shift, an End for which the artist offers no solution. While the vitality of the work hedges against bitterness, another reading of this exhibition is possible: that it presents a kind of nostalgic fantasy of the antagonistic relationship between critic and artist. In other words, it's a provocation to writers. Perhaps these figures end up being self-portraits—the "critics" that live in the artist's head.

X

**Gracie Hadland** is a writer living in Los Angeles.

Derosia

Contemporary Art Writing Daily, January 31, 2024

## Contemporary Art Writing Daily

*Wednesday, January 31, 2024*

Naoki Sutter-Shudo at House of Gaga



From the detritus of our semio-catastrophe we re-erect old forms: the wreckage is placed back into the shape of airplane, or of the critic and its painting. (Of a world still generating meaning.) The ability to re-erect it stands in for it, a literal strawman, the wreckage magically invokes its whole. If it can be recreated surely it can be understood. A social ritual to create a collective conscience that this once existed. There used to be people and not just cave paintings from the mall.

## Headiness: Naoki Sutter-Shudo Sabrina Tarasoff

Fragments of moments altered by their motion blur: Naoki in the swimming pool smoking a Camel Wide. Naoki at Le Chiquito drinking a second *demo* of 1664. Naoki pouring delicate glasses of shiso liqueur over ice. Naoki spilling secrets into a martini. Naoki and I sulking in a garden with a bottle of Barolo poured into plastic cups; or drinking Jack Daniel's at a nameless American bar with our phones turned off; or tiny beers in his studio with the AC turned on high; Crémant de Loire at his wedding; chain-smoking Gauloises Blondes with chartreuse in small snifters.

"Love is like liquor," writes Louis-Ferdinand Céline in *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932). "The drunker and more impotent you are, the stronger and smarter you think yourself and the surer you are of your rights."<sup>1</sup> In the word-sculpture *Theorie* (2017), Japanese-French artist Naoki Sutter-Shudo disorients literary systems of meaning to similar end. Woodblock letters in an alpine green are speckled with frail daisies; each letter is a mirror of itself. In this twin aspect, *Theorie* is laden with the vertigo of love with no reason or rationality. Literature's systems of meaning are tipsied and blur under the artist's preference for literary *style*; in the work's baroque misspellings, "theory" is deliriously lost into an image of itself. Sutter-Shudo, like Narcissus in the clarion pool of self-image, indulges in an intellectual life without reducing it to mere contemplation. "Let me keep looking at you always," he asks of his objects of adoration.<sup>2</sup> The disorderly conduct of words lends a presence, a charm, to their very meaning. It is the sense of exaltation that isolates and encloses in the present, and so reveals, in a moment of exceptional, daisy-chained pleasure, that in contrast to the discourse of reason, delirium, be it of love or liquor, elevates mere ideas into art. Our conversations accumulate over time about fiendish literature, prohibited objects, poorly kept secrets, the impermissible in art, interperate friendships, drunkenness, the impermanence of it all. A shared love for the idea of *eau de vie* arises from the spirit's ability to provoke an instability at surface that makes boundaries—formal categories, epistemologies—dissolve into some delirious feeling of being at an edge. Sutter-Shudo's headiness is marked by a commitment to "influence": literary influences, spatial ones, idols, votives, and the sphere of Frenchness, but clearly also the intoxicating atmosphere of drinks, or cigarettes (read: *substance*). Semiotic collapse, the topography of beauty, and the momentousness of inflection aside, I like to imagine the spirit of Sutter-Shudo's work as emanating from some state of emotional (and moral) ataxia, a swindling threat to reason. Put through the Proustian mind, "drunkenness brings about, for the space of a few hours, subjective idealism, pure phenomenalism; all things become mere appearances, and exist only as a function of our sublime selves."<sup>3</sup> *Alors*, call it "the Naoki sublime": a *laissez-faire* romanticism preoccupied with what is concealed, and uncertain, and maybe a little stoned, which is to say in awe of (or *under the influence of*) sights, or subjects, that are entirely about appearances, miens, and impressions. Consider *C'est la guerre!* (2018), an impeccably *confiture*-colored still life of a teapot and ceramics mingled in a cloud of

smoke. In its evocations of rooms laden with hazel-flavored opium smoke, looming danger, desire or sadness or some in-between—some heaviness, which may as well be the heft of art history—disorients in its stillness. I am always moved by its wordless battle as it condenses into one image, on Proustian terms, "the unconcern that others dilute in their whole entire existence [. . .] in which they see their whole lives, still lives only within their fragile brain."<sup>4</sup> We are on the side of aesthetics, here, in a realm where the slightest variations in form have euphoric effect.

In another photo-diorama, *Smoky (freedom always)* (2017), an image of a pack of Gauloises Blondes is distended laterally and framed in impeccably enameled wood. If the cigarettes are his "Mont Blanc" ("lending splendor, where from secret springs," as Percy Bysshe Shelley writes in his 1816 natural ode from *History of a Six Weeks' Tour*), smoking is then a pastime made monumental with posteriority in mind.<sup>5</sup> Under the influence of the image, its surface speckled somewhat masochistically with pins, pricks of desire, one's vision is not only blissfully impaired, but everlasting in the universe of things: cigarettes, like great art, liberate the mind from past and future. "I was trapped in the present"—the Proustian narrator goes on—"as heroes are, or drunkards."<sup>6</sup> The impeccable stillness of the photographic image is unsettled with the nails, branches, and pins that adorn its frame, all violent acts of disturbance, which the artist recognizes as somewhat revolutionary, at least in jest. Hence the prevalence of *La Tricolore*, the red, white, and blue of the French flag, in Sutter-Shudo's extended oeuvre: clearly a parody of the artist's most sublime self, summoned in the drunken buffoonery of patriotism, which both dismantles meaning in exhausted national tropes, such as painted, stale baguettes, while still professing a longing to participate, albeit recklessly, in their symbolic order. To dispense with unnecessary moral or historical precaution, and proceed to drink deeply the Kool-Aid of Frenchness is to embrace the work's delicious abandon: "In the kitchens of love," Céline educates, "vice is like the good pepper in a sauce, it brings out the flavor, it is indispensable."<sup>7</sup> Sutter-Shudo's vices are similarly essential. In their darkness, one is filled with dreams.

- 1 Louis-Ferdinand Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night* (1932; repr., New York: New Directions, 1960), 186.
- 2 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 72.
- 3 Marcel Proust, "Within a Budding Grove," in *In Search of Lost Time* (1913–27; repr., New York: Modern Library, 2003), 539.
- 4 Proust, "Within a Budding Grove," 540.
- 5 Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni" (1816), in Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley, *History of a Six Weeks' Tour through a Part of France, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland, with Letters Descriptive of a Sail Round the Lake of Geneva and of the Glaciers of Chamouni* (1817), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45130/mont-blanc-lines-written-in-the-vale-of-chamouni>.
- 6 Proust, "Within a Budding Grove," 539.
- 7 Céline, *Journey to the End of the Night*, 51.

239 Naoki Sutter-Shudo, *Theorie*, 2017.

© Naoki Sutter-Shudo. Courtesy: the artist and Bodega, New York

240 Naoki Sutter-Shudo, *Disagreeable flower with upside down T(theorie) base*, 2017.

© Naoki Sutter-Shudo. Courtesy: the artist and Bodega, New York

241 Naoki Sutter-Shudo, *Smoky (freedom always)*, 2017.

© Naoki Sutter-Shudo. Courtesy: the artist and Bodega, New York

242 Naoki Sutter-Shudo, *C'est la guerre!*, 2018.

© Eric Veit. Courtesy: the artist and Bodega, New York

243 Naoki Sutter-Shudo, *Dispenser (brains)*, 2020.

© Naoki Sutter-Shudo. Courtesy: the artist and Crèveceur, Paris













# CULTURED

30 UNDER 35 2020

## NAOKI SUTTER-SHUDO UNCOVERS BEAUTY IN TRAGEDY



“Subject matter,” Roberta Smith recently said, “is the new form.” That’s the dominant mode right now; the artist is defined by their subject matter. For Naoki Sutter-Shudo however, “Ultimately, style is more important than content.”

He makes all kinds of things—casual photographs of friends, still lifes, collages, paintings, assemblages of found objects, original woodwork—but a refined sense of style runs through all of them: not a narrow or repetitive aesthetic but rather a certain way of balancing forms, of making them look greater than the sum of their parts, that some artists are just able to pull off. Consider his sculptures made from words: take *Truth Trolley* (2017), in which the letters spelling “TRUTH” are separated out, carefully crafted in wood and made into a little wagon filled with dog toys shaped like animals. In his hands, words become something else. Their meanings now derive from their visual style rather than from the dictionary, and so they feel like the opposite of a more literal, subject-orientated mode of artmaking.

Born in Paris, Sutter-Shudo grew up in Tokyo. After high school he returned to Paris for art school and became involved in running the legendary Belleville artist-run space *Shanaynay*. He also went on a six-month exchange at ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena, drawn by a love for the Los Angeles art scene and a dream of meeting Mike Kelley, but Kelley committed suicide before he arrived. The middle of the decade was spent between Paris, Tokyo and California, during which time Naoki fell in love with his now wife, the painter Alexandra Noel, with whom he lives in LA. These days he co-directs the Chinatown gallery *Bel Ami* and the small art press *Holoholo Books*, and shows beautiful, fragile things of his own with *Bodega* in New York and *Galerie Crèvecoeur* in France—“things that are about to crumble but also to come undone.” For him, art is about doomed romance and all that can come from it. “I’m a pretty pessimistic person,” he says. “I really have a view of things that is tragic. But beauty can happen through tragedy. Depressing things can still be beautiful.”

ART FAIRS

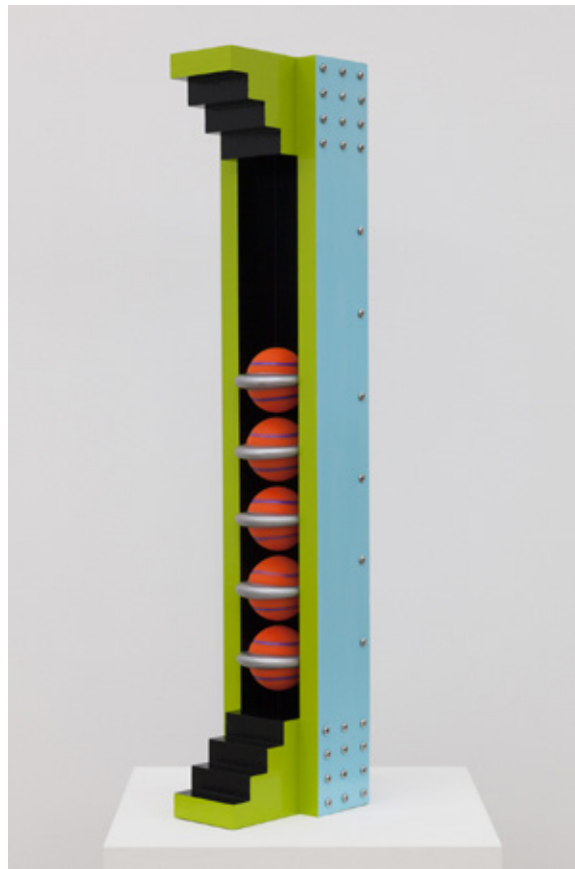
Advisor Bill Cournoyer Shares His Favorites From LISTE 2019

By Artspace

**NAOKI SUTTER-SHUDO**

*Dispenser (saturns)*, 2019

Bodega, New York, New York



Naoki Sutter-Shudo's sculptures at Bodega are a delightful mixture of surrealism, design, and architectural influence. Inside the seemingly PEZ dispenser-looking sculptures are stress balls representing an existing object in the world like the earth, a human heart, or the planet Saturn like in *Dispenser (saturns)*, 2019. It seems apparent that Sutter-Shudo makes a strong reference to The Memphis Group, an Italian design and architecture group founded by Ettore Sottsass from 1980 to 1988. I've seen their work in museum collections recently and recognize the excitement and fun they brought to design at that time. Sutter-Shudo's use of nostalgia and the familiar, combined with a sense of humor, makes his work a joy to experience and a reminder to chill out!

# ARTFORUM

## Naoki Sutter-Shudo

GALERIE CRÈVECOEUR

English is Naoki Sutter-Shudo's third language, following French and Japanese, which may help explain why the Los Angeles-based artist's practice in painting and sculpture evinces such sensitivity for the interstices between one language and another, for those words that do not have precise correspondences in another idiom. This appreciation of nuance also informs the title of his recent exhibition, "*Mœurs*," which refers, in French, to both customs and morals. And within the etymology of *mœurs* a sense of measurement and rule, of moderation and modesty, reverberates.

In one of the works in the show, Sutter-Shudo evoked a morally controversial episode from French history, dating back to October 1941, when the Vichy regime decreed that statues and monuments made of copper alloys be removed from public spaces and melted down in order for the metals to be extracted. Though the selection was supposed to pertain solely to works lacking artistic or historical interest, Marshal Philippe Pétain adopted an exquisitely political criterion: Statues of radicals such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Jean-Paul Marat, Jean-Sylvain Bailly, Denis Diderot, and Charles Fourier would be taken down. In *Quelques sculptures parisiennes enlevées en 1942-43* (Some Parisian Sculptures Removed in 1942-43; all works 2018), Sutter-Shudo paints this pantheon within a nebulous black, with neither perspective nor spatial coordinates, stripping these monuments of any gravity and embedding them in a historical purgatory.

Language returned as a protagonist in the sculpture *Human*. Formed of that word's five letters, the work expresses a stereotyped notion rendered tangible by typography: a highly simplified rectilinear grapheme. Arranged in a circle, or rather a pentagon, the letters lean against one another in a precarious equilibrium that perhaps conveys the fragility of the human condition. At the same time, they form an enclosure that remains empty on the inside—a habitable space or a roofless shelter that can nevertheless be pitched anywhere, like a tent.

*Human* is distinguished by its craftsmanship, which lies at the heart of Sutter-Shudo's practice. The work has been made out of eleven types of wood, each with a different grain and color. In this way, the artist reinvents the art of intarsia, a technique of fitting together pieces of wood that was traditionally used to create virtuoso trompe l'oeil effects that compete with perspectival painting as well as to decorate marriage chests and jewelry boxes.

In nine mixed-media boxes exhibited on a table, the artist pursued, in his own fashion, the cult of packaging in Japanese culture. Created from wood, Plexiglas, or cardboard, the most intriguing pieces were tied up with twine, sealed, adorned with bows, knotted, bolted, or wrapped in netting, rendering the question of how to open them a veritable brainteaser. Like the sound of an unknown language, the packaging remains impenetrable. The boxes' sibylline titles (*Justib*, *Jingolb*, *Blinb*, *Toler recil*, *Tama teb*, *Anul mab*, and so on) further reinforced their opacity, providing no clue for identifying the contents. Once again, Sutter-Shudo raises questions of access to a foreign linguistic code in which a secret or novel way of seeing reality is encrypted and safeguarded.

—Riccardo Venturi

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

View of "Naoki Sutter-Shudo," 2018. Photo: Aurélien Mole.



bodega

# SPIKE

## THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL: CONDO NEW YORK

Column  
by Dean Kissick



Naoki Sutter-Shudo, *C'est la guerre!*, 2018

**Bodega hosting Galerie Crève-cœur, Paris**  
2:39pm, 167 Rivington Street

A fantastic collaborative effort from both galleries. I particularly like Naoki Sutter Shudo's *C'est la guerre!* (2018), a dark, smoky, enameled C-print that brings to mind 17th-century Dutch still lives while also suggesting a much larger landscape through the play of light across its teapots and ceramics; Than Hussein Clark's *Julian Dreams of the Hudson* (Tissot: I do do don't want to be a doll) (2016), which is a folding transparent Perspex screen printed with patterns and slogans and smeared with a scene of naked figures in the river; and Jason Benson's *Noontide Demon* (2018), a painted mosaic of medieval spectres and dragons, one of whom blows the words "Cold Drynks" from a horn. Some say that Paris is flowering into a new European capital of art. Going by this show; let's move to Belleville.



Jason Benson, *Noontide Demon*, 2018

# Art in America



## Naoki Sutter-Shudo at Bodega, through Jun. 11 167 Rivington Street

Childlike delights clash with grown-up forms in “Parade,” Naoki Sutter-Shudo’s first solo show at Bodega. A squat square plinth in the center of the gallery supports a handful of toylike sculptures (all works 2017). *Theorie*, *Truth Trolley*, and *Theft* distort the words of their titles into three-dimensional forms, like concrete poems brought to life, and present sober ideas as a sort of game. The red wood letters of *Truth*, for example, serve as supports for a small yellow cart transporting four well-loved stuffed animals. In the works hanging on the walls, the Paris-born, Los Angeles-based artist experiments with the ornamentation of the everyday, applying tassels, dead bees, fake flowers, and plastic bread bags to shadowboxes reminiscent of Joseph Cornell. The C-prints set as the backdrops of these pieces present innocuous still lifes of Sutter-Shudo’s stovetop (*Eat well or rest easy or*) or dresser decked with neat stacks of coins (*Cheers from now and a thousand years*). In *Bonbons Rivington*, perched on the ledge of the gallery’s front desk, jellybeans fill streamlined brass and silver-plated containers shaped like pears, apples, and pomegranates. The unassuming luxury of these vessels recalls the “de-functionalizing” tendency pervasive in the 1930s and ’40s—the urge to make functional objects aerodynamic when they didn’t need to be. Sutter-Shudo’s embellished sculptures illuminate the problem anew with puerile glee.

—*Julia Wolkoff*

Pictured: Naoki Sutter-Shudo: *Truth Trolley*, 2017, wood, enamel, dog toys, hardware, plastic, and rubber, 11½ by 13 by 15½ inches. Courtesy Bodega, New York.