

# **Weekend** FINE ARTS LEISURE

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*The New York Times*

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## **Yoshihiro Suda**

*D'Amelio Terras  
525 West 22nd Street  
Chelsea  
Through March 25*

Yoshihiro Suda, a Japanese artist, makes beautiful, extremely realistic, painted wood sculptures of plant forms. This exhibition presents just four, each representing a different stage in the life cycle of the magnolia tree: a short, dried twig; a fallen brown leaf; a new branch bearing bright-red berries; and a branch with luxuriant white blossoms.

Mr. Suda is not content only to create impressive objects; he has also made them the focus of a philosophically suggestive installation art.

For the berry-bearing piece, he set up a room with a low door and green walls; it is dark but for the spotlighting of the sculpture in the corner, where it seems to grow out of the wall. The flowering branch extends horizontally from the wall at the end of a narrow and brightly lighted white corridor. These spaces turn the sculptures into miraculous visions, and they invite one to approach for close scrutiny of this artist's magical transformation of the dead into the living.

With the twig and the leaf Mr. Suda has taken the opposite tack, placing them on the floor near the gallery's front windows, with the leaf near some real leaves from which it is indistinguishable.

Placed so inconspicuously, these seemingly humble objects become, in contrast to the spectacularly presented "living" pieces, haikulike meditations on death and the fragility of life.

KEN JOHNSON

# ARTFORUM

SUMMER 2000

## YOSHIHIRO SUDA

D'AMELIO TERRAS

When art mimics nature, a tension between perfection and impermanence is usually somewhere in the mix. The artist, copying natural forms with all the loyalty and hubris he or she can muster, makes an image—representing, say, a flower—that has neither life nor fragrance but is not subject to death. So is the mimetic artist a god or an obsessive fool? Both, of course, but, ultimately, that's not the point: As the Japanese sculptor Yoshihiro Suda reminded us in his first solo show in the United States, the real point of preternatural illusion is simply the wonder of the achievement, the totality of a deception that we know at all times to be false.

Suda makes life-size, highly realistic botanical specimens using stylishly minimal means and subtle humor. Artists like Roxy Paine and Keith Edmier have recently trod similar territory, but where they cast their flowers in inorganic resins, Suda whittles his from wood and painstakingly paints them. The three works included here traced the life cycle of the magnolia tree, so in effect Suda has exerted himself to make new wood from old. The patent absurdity of the project—combined with its undertones of virtual reality, genetic manipulation, and other human interventions into natural production—make the fragile blossoms and flawless stems feel conceptually smart. At the same time, Suda plays on our most shameless appetites for pretty things, in part by using quietly theatrical architecture to call attention to the sculptures as precious, indoor commodities.

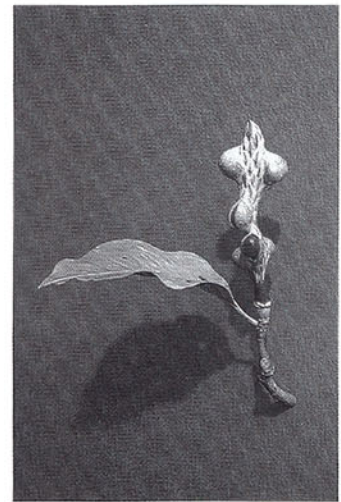
*Magnolia Leaf and Branch* (all works 2000) was an unassuming diptych installed in two screened niches near the gallery windows. The branch—gnarled, about

eight inches long—lay on the floor of one niche, while in the other nestled a small pile of dead leaves—a group of real ones scattered as decoys and one shriveled, lacy leaf hewn out of wood. The careless visitor could easily have missed the piece entirely, a camouflage that highlighted its “naturalness.”

*Magnolia Fruit* and *Magnolia Flower* were concealed in other ways. A half-height doorway led into a small, dark room with spring-green walls. In a spotlight, a single branch with tapering leaf and bud projected from the wall—several bright-red berries peeped through splits in the bud casing. Hovering in its womblike chamber, *Magnolia Fruit* looked like an alien creature, the berries almost disturbingly vital. The cooler, more ethereal *Magnolia Flower* was enshrined in a long, bright corridor, closed at one end with a vellum scrim and only wide enough to accommodate one viewer at a time. A graceful, asymmetrical shadow hovered on the outside of the scrim like a design on silk; inside, fixed to the wall, *Magnolia Flower* proffered a single, arcing branch, one blossom already partially blown, another on the verge of opening.

Suda engineered these aesthetic dramas without bombast. The high artifice of the objects and their enclosures was mediated by the transparent simplicity of each—just wood, flowers, and walls. In this atmosphere, desire and illusion held full sway. Suda's installation enveloped visitors in a delicate context where the essential thing to be observed was our own pleasure at being seduced by appearances.

—Frances Richard



Yoshihiro Suda, *Magnolia Fruit*, 2000, paint and wood, ca. 7 x 5½ x 2".

# Art in America

June 2000

## NEW YORK

### Yoshihiro Suda at D'Amelio Terras

What was most striking about the first American solo of the Tokyo-based sculptor Yoshihiro Suda was its ambiguity or duality. His few pieces seen earlier in New York registered as flabbergasting displays of craftsmanship; in this show, the work was presented in a Japanese context of such exquisite reserve that some viewers may have seen it as Chelsea-style and ironic.

Suda carves astonishingly life-like flowers, branches and leaves. They are so convincing that without the "art clue" of a protective bar prohibiting access, viewers would probably have thought that the brown leaves in a corner of one front window had drifted in from the front door. The leaves were varied in shape, and some were riddled with insect holes. A dead twig in the other window was even easier to miss. Both were products of Suda's hand, and both were a part of the larger theme of the show, which was the cycle of seasons—that schematic emblem of time's passage and of life, death and rebirth.

Essentially, Suda turned the gallery into a tea garden, recognizable even though its parts were out of sequence. If the gallery's concrete floor stood for swept earth, the leaves might

recall the legend of 16th-century tea master Sen no Rikyu shaking down a few leaves so that his garden would not be too perfect.

Viewers who overlooked the works in the windows would have supposed that *Magnolia Fruit* was the first work in the show. It was a softly spotlighted branch supporting the fruiting body left after a bloom withers, with several glistening red berries. It projected from the wall in the far corner of a bright moss green room that viewers entered by ducking through a doorway less than 4 feet tall. In a traditional teahouse, visitors must submissively crawl through a considerably smaller entry; Suda only made his New York viewers bow deeply. Except for the branch high on the wall, the room was empty.

The other major installation was a narrow, freestanding corridor in the middle of the gallery's second room, in which one person at a time could approach another magnolia branch. This one bore three closed buds, one that was beginning to open and, at the tip, a gloriously full bloom. The tender textures and colors of the carved-wood simulacrum were washed by a recessed floodlight suggesting spring sun. The controlled movement and controlled view equated with similar constraints in a tea garden even as they recalled corridor works by Bruce Nauman and others of which Suda is undoubt-

edly aware.

Those visitors who departed the gallery past the closed end of the *Magnolia Flower* installation discovered that the end wall was translucent; through it, the cast shadow of the blossoming branch could be seen. This monochrome image, recalling an ink painting, underscored the gratuitous beauty of Suda's work.

—Janet Koplos

Yoshihiro Suda: *Magnolia Flower*, 2000, paint, wood, approx. 31 by 8 by 9 inches; at D'Amelio Terras.



### Yoshihiro Suda

D'Amelio Terras, New York

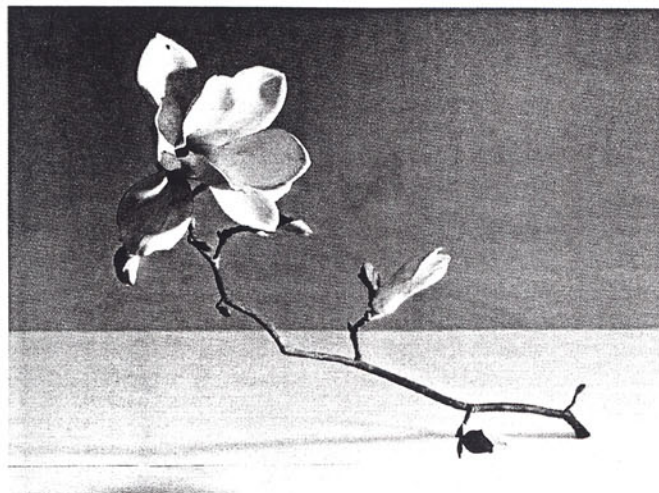
To simply look at Yoshihiro Suda's wooden sculptures of plants will not do – they demand scrutiny. Approaching each object, one should get as close as possible. These sculptures can induce a trance-like state, as if you were a future astronaut lifting a wrinkly, reddish Martian rock right up to your mirrored visor, or a botanist eyeballing a species that only a moment before was totally unknown. Suda's style prescribes the path towards discovery.

Shifting gears from perception to the history of art, his sculptures of plants invite obvious comparisons: a flowering Magnolia blossom, for example, summons a memory of the 13th-century Chinese artist Ch'ien Hsuan – with whom Suda shares a devotion to meticulous realism and tantalisingly delicate flower paintings. In a more contemporary sense, realism functions for him as it does for Duane Hanson's sculpture of a working-class hero, or Christopher Williams' portraits of Harvard's glass flowers, Tony Matelli's tiny weeds, or even John Peto's tacked ribbons and postcards. However, although it is Suda's realism which inspires a certain curiosity, it's a style which only ushers us to the threshold of meaning in his work.

In Suda's art theatricality swiftly undercuts realism, and the

meaning of his work nests in that foreclosure. It is in the presentation of these lifelike sculptures – which transform modest twigs, commonplace leaves and commendable blossoms into artificial episodes – that stirs up a deep significance. Take, for instance, his three wooden carvings of the Magnolia plants coming to life, blossoming, and finally dying. The changing of the seasons portrayed here may recall Ch'ien Hsuan or Casper David Friedrich, but to read them as straightforward meditations on the delicate cycle of life underestimates the artist's aspiration. Perhaps to Western eyes, Suda's Japanese pedigree automatically registers his subject as 'contemplative', but it's a perception that would reduce the artist to a caricature and undervalue his ambition. Introspection is hardly Suda's subject – it's more about the dramatic moment.

You had to crawl through a low doorway in order to enter an alarmingly green room to see the spotlighted sculpture of a magnolia branch sporting red hot buds *Magnolia Flower* (2000). Here, life was interrupted so you could study the beauty arrested by art. In a second 'event' (and event is the right word), a long, narrow hallway led you to another flowering magnolia branch. Having a look was a solo affair; two people could fit in the



Yoshihiro Suda  
*Magnolia Flower*  
2000  
Paint, wood  
68 x 18 x 20 cm

hall but not comfortably. The blossom was presented before a translucent backdrop that covered the far end of the hall. You could see its exotic reflection through the wall, and if you were lucky, the shadow of a gallery visitor who has dropped by to inspect the wooden flower.

A third sculpture of the magnolia was placed behind a wall near the door of the gallery. Hurrying in and out, you could easily have missed this carving of a dead leaf and twig. For Suda, the beauty of life is a spectacle and a reverie, and often obscured by death, which appears out of nowhere as it always does.

Ronald Jones