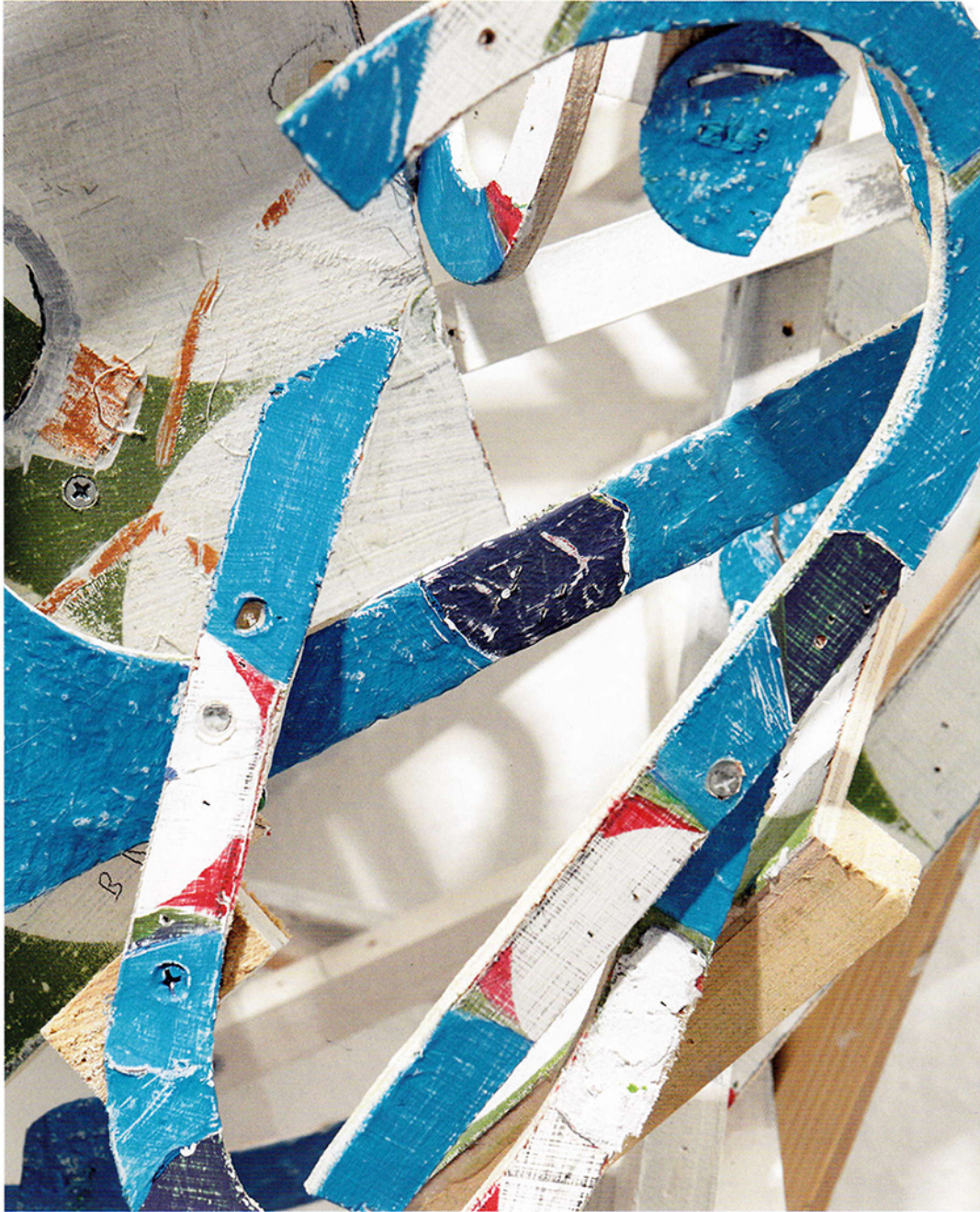


KENJI FUJITA





Kenji Fujita, Accumulation (2018), 56 cm x 54 cm x 48 cm, Acryl, Sprühfarbe, Calciumcarbonat, Papier, Holz



Kenji Fujita, Debris of Life and Mind (2018), 33 cm x 14 cm x 42 cm, Vinyl Farbe, Latex Farbe, Filz, Schwamm, Papier, Calciumcarbonat, Atelier-Detritus, Plastik, Harz



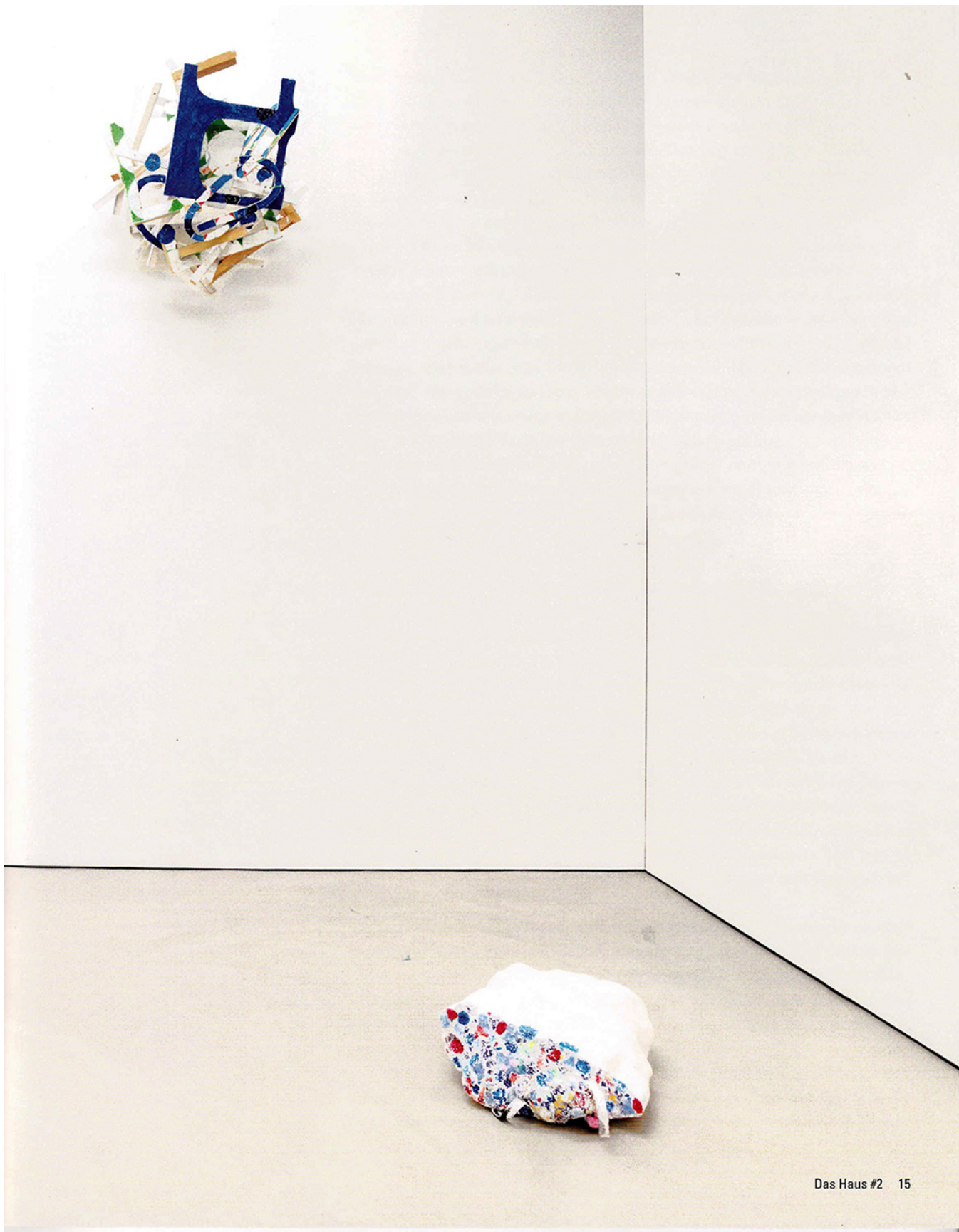
Kenji Fujita, Contact Improvisation (2016), 64 cm x 87 cm x 5 cm, Vinyl Farbe, Graphit Farbe, Gesso, Filz, Stoff, Leinen, Holz, Sperrholz



Links: Robert Hartmann, Mashallah (2018), 26 cm x 33 cm x 17,5 cm, Holz, Keramik, Glas, Metall

Rechts: Kenji Fujita, Accumulation (2018), 56 cm x 54 cm x 48 cm, Acryl, Sprühfarbe, Calciumcarbonat, Papier, Holz

Im Vordergrund: Kenji Fujita, Debris of Life and Mind (2018), 33 cm x 14 cm x 42 cm, Vinyl Farbe, Latex Farbe, Filz, Schwamm, Papier, Calciumcarbonat, Atelier-Detritus, Plastik, Harz



KENJI FUJITA

von Ken Landauer

The Imperfect Is Our Paradise¹

The government of the United States deported Sadamitsu Neil Fujita from Los Angeles as a young man. He was jailed at Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming, not for national security, but for racist reasons². After release, he served in the US Army, got married, had three children and made a home in the United States. And he became part of an avant-garde. He brought abstract painting to a larger public through his graphic design work, especially on some famous jazz album covers. Abstraction and jazz were forging new mental paths. Both defy rationality, thwart prediction, reward familiarity, create discord and resolve it.

He bought furniture from George Nakashima, who had also been locked into a Japanese internment camp as a young man. The furniture could have been preserved for its visual beauty or status, but the Fujita family used it daily. The furniture was passed on to his son's family home.

They are not spectacular pieces of furniture for Nakashima, not displaying wild grain patterns, raw natural edges, butterfly joints, nor the delicate spindles of his comb backed chairs. They show their years of life, mostly gentle and some rough.

Like many things made with care, they elicited care in return. In the Fujita family home, under books and newspapers, I saw the beautiful furniture, noticing the coffee table first. Two chair armrests had split from stress along long wood-pinned joints. When I saw the broken arms, I offered to fix them. As I worked on them, I saw the spindles were faceted from a spokeshave, not perfectly round from being turned on a lathe. The angles on the seat bottom appear to have been cut by a hand-plane. After designing them, Nakashima made these chairs with his daughter and their assistants around sixty years ago. My repairs were rewarded by an intimacy with their embodiment and long lives.

Care defies consumption. It invites repair rather than disposal of an object. Care also inclines us to share and to find future homes for the objects we no longer need, or which outlast us. It also enriches us, reciprocally.

Attention

Right now our politics are more dramatic than our arts. We are dangerous to ourselves as well as to the rest of the world. At the same time, our technology dazzles us with an endless stream of images, giving us hormonal boosts and depicting a

world of endless fun moments for countless people. We shape and consume the spectacle and it shapes and consumes our time, our thoughts and our emotions. The spectacle sprawls far and wide and it absorbs perimeters voraciously, so new frontiers are scarce. We don't need an avant-garde any more. It's a military term anyway. Instead, art occupies many crucial in-betweens in our culture which arise from our attention and energy being elsewhere. To experience Kenji Fujita's work, one must first turn away from the din to engage with its in-betweens.

In-betweens

Kenji Fujita's work is modest, personal, and asks for quiet contemplation. That's why the word 'you' describes the experience better than the more general 'viewer,' or any plural terms.

He uses three dimensions, not materially like a sculptor, but to make room for color, or to create the voids and shadows of irregular partitions.

Color, on the other hand, he handles sculpturally. Instead of paints, the colors start with patterned fabrics, fragile found materials, or single-colored boards that appear to have a long, troubled history. Tawdry materials like tin foil and cheap sponges, luan and plastic bags are handled with care and respect. After being shaped and placed, their colors are built-up or subdued by sanding or by masking with glues or similar-colored paint.

Further description leads me to lots of duplexes. I am borrowing the term from Leo Steinberg as he described Leonardo's Last Supper. The components of a duplex multiply one another rather than working against each other. They are not contradictions, oxymorons or paradoxes. Duplexes create the dynamic tension that fuels artworks. They span voids in our culture and language. Kenji Fujita's work is thoughtful and wordless, labored and casual, masterful and playful, chaotic and careful, heavily worked and natural, intimate and not-small, absorbing and not-large.

The Tacit

The maturity and mastery of the work lie in tacit knowing⁴ which is not obvious knowledge, but manifests in skills and sharp intuition. The realm of intuition is not easy or innate. It is acquired and strengthened through time and close attention. We rarely recognize tacit knowledge or its results, unable to distinguish between tacit judgement and acts fueled by prejudice, whim or emotion. But tacit knowing is key to the value of Kenji Fujita's work.

Shrouding the tacit smarts even more, the skills are not craftsman-like, but evident in the overall decision-making. The immediate appearance is casual, playful,

diminutive and quick. You may initially react with a reciprocal flipness, by not giving much time. But closer inspection is rewarding. You discover that the seemingly natural gestures are hard won, and exactly constructed. The process is very slow and involved. Effects are visited and revisited until the casual lightness is perfected. The apparent immediacy of each piece is slowly, carefully constructed and balanced like early Motherwell more than through the practiced speed of Sumi-e ink masters. He has refined the act of casual construction for thirty years.

Being Lost and Settling-in

To experience this work you need to allow yourself to get lost in the groundless spaces of the artworks. The colors are bright, but not loud, and they don't refer to flowers or express fun. He uses few fields of color. Instead, gobs and irregular shapes give optical pushes and pulls through off-white spaces. The colors mark, enliven and orient.

Even in chaos, we tend to find patterns. Within the apparent randomness of the paintings, there are underlying patterns, constant feedback loops, repetition, self-similarity, expanding symmetry and self-organization. Besides describing the paintings, that previous sentence is one definition of chaos theory⁴. For Kenji Fujita, unspoken parameters define each series. Each has its own implicit vocabulary which you can acquire through time.

For chaos, the starting conditions are key. Patterns arise. S. Neil Fujita said he "felt fortunate to have worked in that period before the computer when we had to search for solutions with our own hands."⁵ He returned to painting, which his son was doing, at the end of his life.

You can't understand the work from photos. To understand it, you must circle around, like a person lost in the woods. Then, the patches of color begin to operate like orientation points. The more you trace and retrace the paths, the more familiar the work becomes. The strange becomes familiar. With more time it becomes intimate. When you are intimately immersed, you have arrived.

¹ from Wallace Stevens *The Poems of our Climate*

² This is according to President Carter's study, thirty years after the internments.

³ from the writing of Michael Polanyi on what he coined "the tacit dimension"

⁴ from Wikipedia's definition of "chaos theory", with a couple of words moved around.

⁵ Steven Heller, *Waxing Chromatic: an Interview with S. Neil Fujita*, AIGA Voice Journal 2007, excerpted in 2010 to commemorate his passing.