

## **Matsumi Kanemitsu: Traction Avenue May 18 – June 29, 2024**

Louis Stern Fine Arts is pleased to present a selection of late works by influential Japanese American artist and educator Matsumi Kanemitsu (1922-1992). The works exhibited were created in the last years of the artist's life, during which he lived and worked in the historic Joannes Brothers Company Building at 800 Traction Avenue, located in what is now known as Los Angeles's Arts District. This body of work represents the culmination of the artist's prolific and diverse career and bears the legacy of his profound impact on cultivating a vibrant and thriving artist community in LA.

Kanemitsu's work, particularly in his later years, was fundamentally concerned with the essence of nature. As Jackson Pollock remarked of his friend and fellow Abstract Expressionist: when Kanemitsu was painting, it was as if he was nature itself. Expressing the complex human experience of natural forces in sumi ink, watercolor, and acrylic, these works embody both the splendor and the perils of a sunset in a scorching desert, the churning waves of a Pacific storm, or rivers of rain in a summer deluge. Even as he battled cancer, which would take his life at the age of 69, Kanemitsu embarked on a final series of paintings featuring fields of radiant, scintillating dots. Paired with energetic dashes and waves of molten color, they illuminate the canvas like the prickle of warm sunlight on skin.

Born in Utah and raised in Hiroshima, Kanemitsu enlisted in the United States Army in 1941 and had his first exhibition in an army detention camp, where he was held after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. After living in Europe, then in New York, where he studied at the Art Students League and became an active member of New York's Abstract Expressionist school, Kanemitsu was brought to Los Angeles in 1961 to work at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop. Kanemitsu became a revered art educator in LA, teaching at Chouinard Art Institute and Otis Art Institute over the next several decades.

The exhibitions and community gatherings that Kanemitsu staged at 800 Traction Avenue were vital to the flourishing of the Arts District, promoting artistic exchange within the LA arts scene and supporting the work of young local artists, particularly those in the Japanese American community. The fight for recognition of Kanemitsu's historical importance to the development of the Arts District is ongoing, supported by forthcoming scholarly research and oral history projects.

Works by Matsumi Kanemitsu are held in numerous public collections worldwide, including the Art Institute of Chicago; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY; Museum of Modern Art, NY; Whitney Museum of American Art, NY; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.; and National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

Louis Stern Fine Arts is the exclusive representative of the estate of Matsumi Kanemitsu.