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Lee Bul
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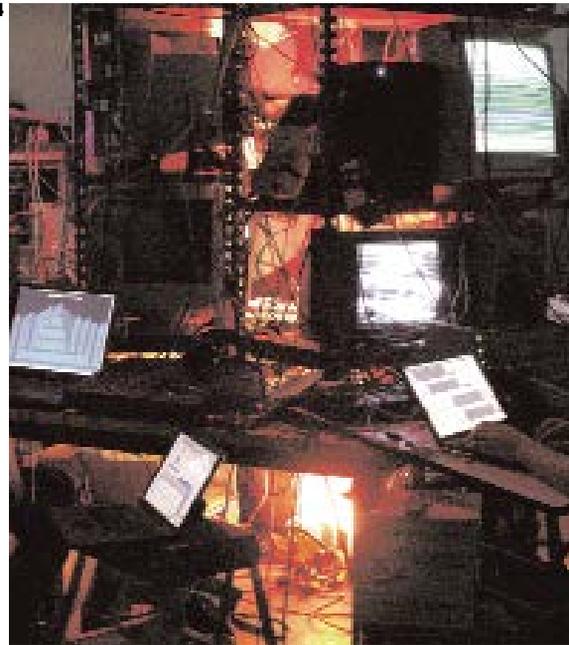
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On the Cover: Lee Bul, *After Bruno Taut (Negative Capability)*, 2008. Crystal, glass and acrylic beads on stainless steel armature, aluminum and copper mesh, PVC, and steel and aluminum chains, 274.3 x 294.6 x 213.4 cm. Photograph: Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin Gallery, NY.



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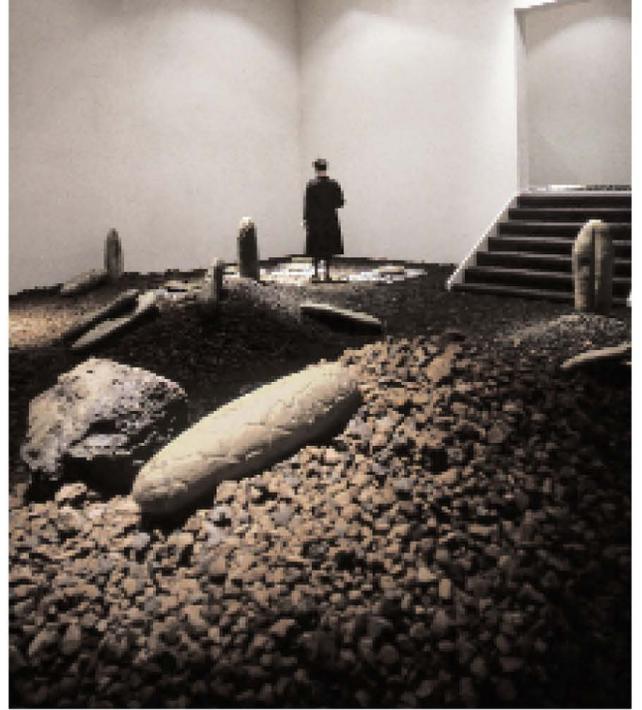
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The Pleasures of Simultaneity

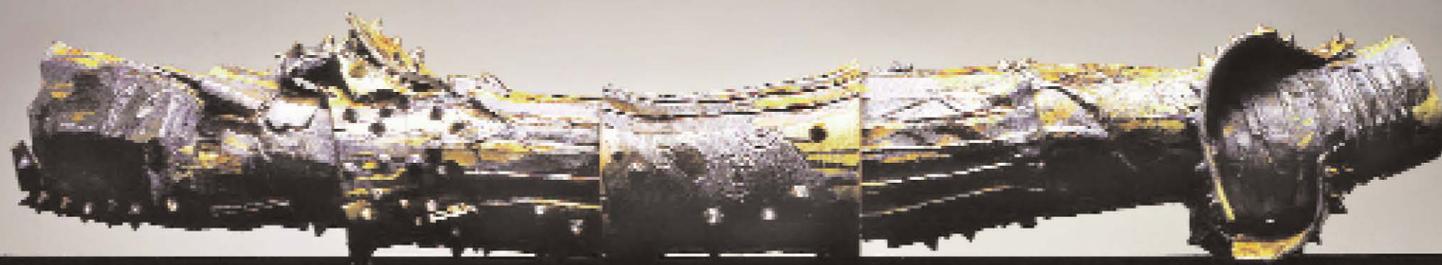
Carlos Runcie Tanaka

BY RICARDO PAU-LLOSA

Initial approaches to the sculptures and installations of Carlos Runcie Tanaka, a Peruvian artist of British and Japanese descent who lives and works in Lima, disclose an aesthetic mission based on intuiting ideas through a complex theater of abstract and referential images in which light and color play a significant role. The more subtle the stagecraft, the more enveloping and provocative the theme—relationships between symbolic language and nature, inner ripples of internal time consciousness, ambiguities that emerge when apprehending a ritual while enacting it—the more the works clarify into a central, abiding preoccupation: how approaching the infinite within the context of visual art entails the coalescing of two or more systems of representation and reflection. This layering of expressive systems is what awakens the reverberative nature of aesthetic experience targeted on a philosophical idea, and the same layering occurs in our participation in and theatrical experience of ritual.

OPPOSITE: MICHEL ZABÉ

Above and opposite: *Paisaje de Tezontle (Tezontle landscape)*, 1991. Ceramic, tezontle, river stones, and water, dimensions variable.



Above: *Progresión Orgánica (Organic Progression)*, 1988–89. Thrown and altered stoneware, 165 x 37 x 33 cm. Below: *Desierto al Sur de Lima (Desert South of Lima)*, 1987. Ceramic and sand dune, view of work installed along Panamerican Highway Km45, Peru.

Runcie Tanaka's imagination draws on the gift of confluence. Japanese traditions in philosophy and ceramics merge with the Andean legacy of patterned clay works, masonry, metallurgy, and weaving to denote the worldly residence of myth and divinity—archaic expressions of the infinite. The impact of this legacy is pervasive (from the textile art of Colombia's Olga de Amaral to the paintings of Peru's Fernando de Szyszlo). The power of Catholic iconography—Peru is home to innumerable Spanish colonial Baroque buildings, churches, and artifacts—provides Runcie Tanaka with a reservoir of liturgical contexts and images. He is also a prominent heir to a wider Latin American preoccupation with the infinite in painting and sculpture that originates with Joaquín Torres-García's highly original fusions of Constructivist grids and letters, numbers, and pictographs. Runcie Tanaka has founded the core of his style and themes on this Modernist current, drawing on his complex



TOP: CARLOS VELÁSQUEZ / BOTTOM: JAVIER SILVA

heritage to provide the semantics and the theater of his unique work. He has represented Peru in many international biennials—in Lima, Havana, São Paulo, Venice, and Cuenca, among others, and has exhibited widely throughout the Western hemisphere, Europe, and Japan.

It is a hallmark of Runcie Tanaka's approach to the infinite that the intimate and the ritualistic find simultaneous expression, as evidenced in the theme of gesture. Whether represented indexically as the impact of the hand on molded clay, symbolically through painted brushstroke or writing, or iconically as oversized hands in figures or in videos in which the artist's hands appear at work, gesture is the link between flesh and thought, the often ignored protagonist of all rituals. The seat of gesture is the hand, and hands dominate the bulbous humanoid clay figures that appear in variant abundance in Runcie Tanaka's installations beginning in the late '90s. The cocoon-like, generalized figures function like words in a three-dimensional text whose page is the room. They evoke seeds—a leitmotif in Runcie Tanaka's work—and resonate as origins of discourse rather than icons of subjectivity. Their blossom is the sign, the letter, the meaningful gesture that nonetheless resists tranquil interpretation.

The figures have their origin in Runcie Tanaka's works from the previous decade, textured ceramics with openings that unite the organic repetition of seed and husk with the forms of utilitarian objects (urns, vases) and musical instruments (shell horns, ocarinas). They also resemble eggs and shelled sea creatures, evolving with time into more complex sculptural forms that shadow urchin, coral, and crab. Here, the botanical, the biological, and the musical guide the artist's exploration of form and hollowness, enclosure and anticipation; and their placement in desert settings enhances the contrast between the severities of a horizon paced by infinite grains and the insubordination against landscape declared by a sculptural ark at rest.

Orbs appear at varying intervals throughout the development of Runcie Tanaka's work, evolving from clusters of textured spheres to encrusted structures, their lay-



ers peeling and rooting, spiked and resolute, like portable labyrinths. Taken as a sequence, the orbs develop into irascible geometries, rebellious monstrosities, icons of our visual organs and the unity of mind and world, the promised perfection of that opaque mirror that is an egg. Perhaps because of the simplicity and universality of their essential formal

Above and below: *Manto (Textile)*, 2006. Ceramic shards from objects made by the artist between 1978 and 2006, 47 x 378 x 204 cm.





Above: *Tiempo Detenido (Standstill)*, 1997. Ceramic, glass, iron, steel cable, text, and light, installation view. Left: *La Misma Plegaria (Rezoes Iguales/Same Prayers)*, 2001. Ceramic, light, and audio, installation view. Bottom left: *Transferencia/DOS (Transference/TWO)*, 2006. Paper crabs, glass, and light, installation view.

premise, the orbs demonstrate Runcie Tanaka's poetics of simultaneity with particular clarity. It is a poetics of juxtapositions that aims at the clarification of its fusing elements, the opposite effect of baroque tropologies whose knotted lace proves elegance can attribute the capturing net.

In many of Runcie Tanaka's installations, the floor of the exhibition space is pathed by designs formed with rocks and ceramic pieces, or both. Ancient stones polished by time function like the insoluble ink of an ephemeral calligraphy inside an architectural space, turning it into internalized theater. Codes of permanence and flux court and mate in the sovereign confusion of pleasure. The inversion of previous installations where ceramic sculptures inhabited natural settings, these enclosures welcome the things of nature into the syntax of edifice. These juxtapositions of the natural and human matrices of images offer a clue to Runcie Tanaka's intense interest in

TOP: JUAN PABLO MURRUGARRA



Above: *Into white/Hacia el blanco*, 2010. Paper, crystal crabs, glass, ceramics, video, and white light, installation view. Right: *La Espera (The Wait)*, 1997. Ceramics, glass, iron, steel cable, and xerographic copies, 80 x 200 x 250 cm.

the dialogue between utilitarian objects and purely sculptural ones, with the lines between them often growing provocatively thin. The layering sensibility of the ritual mind steps forward to reveal that for the infinite to become tangible in forms and signifying spaces (*temenos*) it must resist the Modernist mythology of simplification and reduction, venturing, instead, into a metaphysical and modern baroque mythology of simultaneity and reverberation. Only then can form be itself and a signifier at the same time, itself and a habitat, itself and a word.

The iconic citizen of Runcie Tanaka's aesthetic adventure is the crab, images of which emerge directly or obliquely throughout his work. Whether crafted in ceramic or paper, inscribed with texts or appearing as the familiar armored jewel, the crab is one of those creatures whose archaic tenure enables it to be at home on land and sea. A polyglot of forms, the crab's abundant strangeness and diversity has fascinated artists for centuries. Despite a profile that harkens to fantasy, the crab is our unex-



pected shadow in the natural world, with its ocular intensity and hostile, yet delicate claws. Symmetrical, elegant, grotesque, a floating residence, dressed in a delicacy that appears inedible, the crab resumes in living, sculptural, and mythological form the resonances of Runcie Tanaka's imagination and craft—where selection, journey, form, shell, and perception facet the rigors of the mind and train the river of ideas.

Runcie Tanaka's crab embodies the flatness that retains the orb's soul, wields the claw that ancestors the hand, is the husk that hunts and hides. The crab also haunts many of his most elegant installations, where light greatens and dims as if veiled by crevice, where lanes of paint or light tempt us with boundary and guidance while recording the slow lightning of a crab's ambulations. The crab as page, origami, blossom, and gesturer holds the world of a single thought, of all thoughts, in the palm that is its being.

Ricardo Pau-Llosa is a poet and an authority on modern Latin American art.