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New Exhibition Explores the Evocative, Sensual, and Sculptural Power of Contemporary Japanese Bamboo Art

Houston, Texas, November 15, 2016—Asia Society Texas Center is pleased to announce *Modern Twist: Contemporary Japanese Bamboo Art*, an exhibition exploring the innovative shape bamboo art has taken in Japan since the mid-twentieth century. With rare wall-hung installations and sculptures never before seen in Texas, this exhibition both engages and educates audiences about a vibrant cultural art form. *Modern Twist* will be on view in the Center's Louisa Stude Sarofim Gallery from January 28 through July 30, 2017.

Bridget Bray, Asia Society Texas Center's Nancy C. Allen Curator and Director of Exhibitions, states: "These works represent the critical and continuing role that artistic traditions can play in the most cutting-edge contemporary art in Asia. Because of bamboo's importance in Japan, it has never left the forefront as a material of choice for artists there."

Bamboo is a quintessential part of Japanese culture, shaping the country's social, artistic, and spiritual landscape. Although bamboo is an abundant natural resource, it is a challenging artistic medium with less than 100 professional bamboo artists in Japan today. Mastering the art form requires decades of meticulous practice learning how to harvest, split, and plait the bamboo. *Modern Twist* brings 16 of these artists to North American audiences, and their 38 works display a mastery of the supreme technical skills inherent in their innovative and imaginatively crafted sculptures. The exhibition is guest-curated by Dr. Andreas Marks of Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and organized by International Arts and Artists, Washington, D.C.

The emergence of bamboo as a sculptural art form has religious and cultural roots. In Japan, functional objects have been woven from bamboo for hundreds of years. By the 8th century, bamboo baskets were incorporated into Buddhist ceremonies, and held flower petals that were offered to deities in sacred rituals. During the 15th and 16th centuries, bamboo vases, tea scoops, ladles, and whisks became important features of Japanese traditions, such as flower arrangements (*ikebana*) and tea gatherings (*chanoyu* and *senchadō*).

Bamboo is characterized by strength, flexibility, and lightness—bending, not breaking, with strong winds, while enduring harsh winters. It has been featured in a range of disciplines including architecture, construction, cuisine, music, literature, art, and poetry.

Modern Twist examines the rising awareness of this medium as an innovative art form. In the last 100 years, the creativity and talent of bamboo basket makers has elevated their status from artisans working primarily anonymously to sought-after artists. These artists have redefined aesthetic conventions by experimenting with abstract forms, and their creations have evolved from functional vessels to increasingly sculptural objects.

Since 1967, six bamboo artists have been named Living National Treasures. The Japanese government created this award after World War II in an effort to celebrate and preserve the nation's traditions and culture. Individuals considered for the honor are from areas highly valued throughout Japanese history, such as art, drama, and music. Being chosen as a Living National Treasure is a recognition of excellence in one's artistic field. In essence, the award establishes the recipient as a Cultural Ambassador, responsible for the dissemination, perpetuation, and future development of their designated art form. Only two living bamboo artists —*Modern Twist*'s **Katsushiro**

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Sōhō (2005) and **Fujinuma Noboru** (2012)—currently hold this title. Katsushiro is represented in the exhibition by his piece, *Sunset Glow*, which demonstrates his impeccable craftsmanship and renowned execution of diverse techniques. Fujinuma Noboru’s works, *Spring Tide* and *Gentle Heart*, exemplify the array of shapes and techniques that he has mastered, showcasing his level of perfection.

In addition, *Modern Twist* features works by other visionary artists: **Matsumoto Hafū, Honma Hideaki, Ueno Masao, Uematsu Chikuyū, Nagakura Ken’ichi, Tanabe Chikuunsai III, Tanabe Yōta, Tanabe Shōchiku III, Tanioka Shigeo, Tanioka Aiko, Mimura Chikuhō, Nakatomi Hajime, Sugiura Noriyoshi, and Yonezawa Jirō.**

Modern Twist demonstrates that in the hands of master bamboo artists, a simple grass is transformed into a sculptural art. The exhibition celebrates these artists who have helped to redefine a traditional craft as a modern genre, inventing unexpected new forms, and pushing the medium to groundbreaking levels of conceptual, technical, and artistic ingenuity.

Admission to this exhibition is FREE for members and children ages 12 and under, \$5 for nonmembers. Asia Society Texas Center, located at 1370 Southmore Boulevard, is open Tuesday – Friday, 11 am – 6 pm, and Saturday – Sunday, 10 am – 6 pm.

The touring exhibition is generously supported by the E. Rhodes & Leona B. Carpenter Foundation and the Nomura Foundation.

This exhibition at Asia Society Texas Center is made possible through the support of presenting sponsor, Nancy C. Allen. Major support also comes from Chinhui Juhn and Eddie Allen, The Brown Foundation, Inc., Leslie and Brad Bucher, and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance, and Houston Endowment, Inc. Generous funding also provided by The Clayton Fund, Kathy and Glen Gondo, Ann Wales, and through contributions from the Friends of Exhibitions, a premier group of individuals and organizations committed to bringing exceptional visual art to Asia Society Texas Center.

About Asia Society Texas Center

With 12 locations throughout the world, Asia Society is the leading educational organization promoting mutual understanding and strengthening partnerships among the peoples, leaders, and institutions of Asia and the west. Asia Society Texas Center executes the global mission with a local focus, enriching and engaging the vast diversity of Houston through innovative, relevant programs in arts and culture, business and policy, education, and community outreach. Visit us at AsiaSociety.org/Texas.

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