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Chu Enoki's Weapons of Art at White Rainbow Gallery, London

BY NICHOLAS FORREST | FEBRUARY 18, 2015

Avant-garde artist **Chu Enoki** is a seminal figure in contemporary Japanese art whose practice has influenced the likes of **Takashi Murakami** and **Keiji Uematsu**; yet although he has been active since the 1960s he is relatively unknown outside of his native Japan. London's **White Rainbow Gallery** is hosting Enoki's first solo show in Europe through April 11, 2015. The exhibition showcases the breadth and depth of his practice which spans drawing, sculpture, installation, and performance.

Titled "Chu Enoki :Enoki Chu," the show features some of the artist's most important works from his early performance pieces of the 1970s to his more recent sculptural works made with deactivated guns and cannons. Drawing inspiration from his "Life Self Defence Force" (LSDF) ethos which suggests that we should be responsible for our own lives, without reliance to the state, Enoki creates works that raise awareness about the contradictions of everyday life.

One of the highlights is a photographic record of Enoki's pioneering performance work "Going to Hungary with HANGARI" (1977) in which the artist shaved all hair from the right side of his body for a trip to Hungary where he attracted attention from the police because of his unusual appearance. Other highlights include previously unseen drawings as well as a series of poignant sculptures made from a combination of deactivated American Colts and Russian Kalashnikovs.



Chu Enoki
(Haruko Tomioka, Courtesy White Rainbow)

To find out more about Enoki's intriguing practice, **BLOUIN ARTINFO** got in touch with the artist and asked him a few questions.

Your exhibition at White Rainbow is your first solo show in Europe. What does the exhibition reveal about your work and what do you hope to convey/evoke with the exhibition?

On show at the exhibition is an installation of my metal sculptures; Kalashnikov and Colt guns, as well as a cannon, which is based on my ethos, Life Self Defence Force (LSDF), and Hangari, or "half-shaved head" which are my self-portraits from a performance piece from the 70's. A series of documentary photographs of my travels to Europe with Hangari is also exhibited. It has not yet been shown widely in public, even in Japan.

My ethos, Life Self Defence Force, suggests that we should be responsible for our own lives, without reliance to the state.

Through my work, I would like the audience to see me, someone who pursues art very seriously, and my way of life. I hope they will realise the importance of thinking continuously about what it is to live.

The exhibition title, "Chu Enoki: Enoki Chu," hints at your iconic diptych portraits from 1977 and 1979. What is the significance of these works in the history of your practice?

It is the only performance piece which continued over a period of 4 years. It was a way to physically express that my life and art are inseparable and I wanted to show every string of my hair as proof of my life. I wouldn't be satisfied just to show art in a conventional manner but rather wanted to make physical, performance art. It took courage and strong determination.

What are the key works in the exhibition and how do they represent your artistic philosophies and ideologies?

It's hard to say which ones are more important. All of them are. I do have my own philosophy and ideology, but before I talk about it, I would like people to come and see the exhibition.

You have said that "Art has been my weapon in life." What do you mean by this?

It means, in short, to remain resolute with art. The reason why I use the word "weapon" instead of, say, "truth", which is more likely to be used, is that the seriousness of my practice is indeed relevant to everyone and it should not be taken casually. I try to include what is considered outside of the boundary of art into my practice, and the whole process is very serious.

Your life ethos is Life Self Defence Force (LSDF). Could you explain the basis of this ethos and how it relates to your art practice?

LSDF means that we have to support and protect ourselves within our own resources. I made up this word by replacing the first word of "Japan Self Defence Force." It is my mission to raise awareness about the contradiction we are surrounded by in everyday life.

Your work has influenced the likes of Takashi Murakami and Keiji Uematsu. What do you think of the work of these artists and its place in the history of contemporary art?

We are friends and each of them is fighting relentlessly in their own lives as artists but we are not heading in the same direction. I am going my own way.