



Three Graces, ca. 2000s, cast bronze, left: 78 x 22 in., middle: 74 x 21 in., right: 76 x 23 in.

48 WALKER ST | MAY 16 – JUL 25, 2025

Toshiko Takaezu

Bronzes

James Cohan is pleased to present an exhibition of monumental sculptures by the late artist Toshiko Takaezu (b. 1922, Pepeekeo, Hawaii - d. 2011, Honolulu, Hawaii) on view from May 16 through July 25, 2025, at the gallery's 48 Walker Street location. Takaezu was celebrated for her experimental approach to abstraction and form over a lengthy career, which spanned the 1950s into the 2000s. While she is widely known for her painterly ceramics, Takaezu spent three decades mastering the possibilities of bronze. *Toshiko Takaezu: Bronzes* foregrounds her series of outdoor sculptures in the medium.

Takaezu's initial foray into bronze was tied to her strong interest in the natural world. Starting in the 1980s, she worked closely with a team of artists and apprentices at the Johnson Atelier in New Jersey to render her creations using the lost-wax casting process. Takaezu's soaring *Stack Forms*, ca. 1982-4, were directly inspired by her series of ceramic River Stones: convex circular forms glazed in tones akin to a riverbed of pebbles, such as earthy ochres and soft whites. In the main gallery, tall tree trunks in rich blue and green patinas are cradled by white pebbles and flanked by otherworldly globes. *Tree-Man Forest*, 1989, is a reverential meditation on both the precarity and resilience

of natural life. Takaazu was deeply moved by a trip she took in 1973 to “Devastation Trail” on the Big Island of Hawaii, where she encountered a forest laid bare by the volcanic eruption of Kilauea Iki in 1959. Takaazu paid homage to this transformational event first in clay, and then in bronze, giving permanence to these majestic forms and embedding them into the land.

The epic *Three Graces*, ca. 2000s, emits a powerful anthropomorphic presence; one that visitors can engage with as they circumnavigate each form. Takaazu’s first iteration of *Three Graces* was cast in 1994 and is installed at Grounds For Sculpture in New Jersey. These sculptures echo Takaazu’s classical tall ‘closed forms’ and showcase the artist’s mastery of gesture, visible in her application of dripping chemical patinas in deep blues, blacks and greens. In Greek mythology, the Three Graces were the daughters of Zeus—goddesses of beauty, charm and grace, often depicted together, interlaced in mid-dance. The martyred saints Faith, Hope, and Charity, represent three similar theological virtues in Christian theology. These overlapping concepts are embodied in these monumental and undulating bronzes, forever linked as a trio.

The singular resonant *Untitled (Bell)*, 2004, perfectly concretizes Takaazu’s interest in sound and materiality. It is one of several forms that were inspired by the ceremonial bells of Japanese temples, and is similarly reliant on the strike of a mallet to produce a deep vibrational ring. This imposing bronze bell hangs from a custom interlocking wooden frame designed by the artist. Its dimensional surface resulted from Takaazu pouring hot wax in linear motions over the domed mold prior to its casting; an action that harkens back to her dynamic glazing process.

Toshiko Takaazu’s achievements in bronze are a testament to her boundless exploration across mediums. Takaazu’s sculptures are monuments that reflect the natural world; fusing gesture and form through material permanence. *Toshiko Takaazu: Bronzes* unites carefully considered groupings which serve as sites for contemplation that engage the senses.

Born in Pepeekeo, Hawaii in 1922 to Japanese immigrant parents, Toshiko Takaazu first studied at the University of Hawaii, and later at Cranbrook Academy of Art. Takaazu was a devoted maker and art educator, having taught at the Cleveland Institute of Art and Princeton University, until her retirement in 1992. She lived and worked in rural New Jersey through the 2000s. Takaazu passed away in Honolulu on March 9, 2011.

Throughout the artist’s lifetime, her work was exhibited widely in the United States and Japan, including a solo exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art (2004) and a retrospective at the National Museum of Modern Art in Kyoto, Japan (1995). Takaazu was the recipient of the Tiffany Foundation Grant (1964) and the National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship (1980), among others. Her work is represented in many notable collections including the DeYoung/Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, Honolulu Museum of Art, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Recent exhibitions include the 2022 edition of the Venice Biennale, *The Milk of Dreams* curated by Cecilia Alemani and presentations at the MFA Boston (2023) and Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art (2024). In March 2024, The Isamu Noguchi Foundation and Garden Museum hosted *Toshiko Takaazu: Worlds Within*, the first touring retrospective in twenty years. It has traveled to the Cranbrook Art Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston and will open at the Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin-Madison (September 8–December 23, 2025) and the Honolulu Museum of Art (February 13–July 26, 2026).

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