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Penn's Blossoms, Samurai Sculptor, Blue Collars: 57th Street

By Michael Killeen

Feb. 9 (Bloomberg) -- In a sad mistake, a large Masayuki Nagare granite-faced sculpture in the World Trade Center plaza survived the 9/11 attack only to be bulldozed and destroyed by clean-up crews working on rescue and recovery.

Now, five pieces in black granite and one in bronze by the Japanese artist are on view in "Masayuki Nagare, Sculpture: New to America," at Jason McCoy.

Born in 1923, Nagare studied martial arts, Shintoism and Buddhism. He apprenticed himself to a samurai sword-maker and was trained as a kamikaze pilot. During years spent wandering a destroyed postwar Japan, he began to fix fallen tombstones, which sparked his interest in stonework.

Nagare has referred to stone as a "stubborn" material, but he has found his way with it. The sculptures at Jason McCoy have highly polished surfaces that contrast with small areas of rough texture: the natural alongside the man-made.

An 8-foot-tall woman's figure in "The Form" is a sensuous, gradual sweep of elongated legs seamlessly blending into torso. The smooth, swordlike lines of "Bachi" break only when the piece twists slightly on its axis, interrupting the taut, upward momentum of the spadelike shape.

Nagare's forms are strong in a gallery, but seeing a work like "Bachi" against the horizon, even in a photo, is to grasp how much nature informs and completes it. The sculpture becomes a conduit between earth and sky. Monumental in their physicality, Nagare's pieces invite intimate touch, and both aspects combine to convey exuberance, endurance and hope.

"Masayuki Nagare, Sculpture: New to America" can be seen through March 3 at 41 E. 57th St.; +1-212-319-1996; <http://www.jasonmccoyinc.com>