

Six Expressions – Japanese Aesthetics
a commentary by Yuko Nii

Show Curated by Shoko Kanai
Opening Reception Saturday April 3, 4–6 PM
April 3–25, 2004

Artists: Hidenori Izumi, Sachiko Kobayashi, Namiyo Kubo, Teigi Tauchi, Hideo Murakami, Nana Ono, Hidenori Izumi, Sachiko Kobayashi, Namiyo Kubo, Teigi Tauchi, Hideo Murakami, Nana Ono

Since World War II, American Art (New York Art) has dominated the art world, having gone through one new art movement after another, with distinctively characteristic styles and expressions. However, it is getting harder to find a particularly outstanding art “movement” existing today, if there are any “movements” as characterized by a perceived new direction from what has gone before. Usually “movements” are defined by art historians or observers (not necessarily by artists) after seeing that a number of artists are moving or have moved in the same direction at a given time - therefore we call it a “movement.” It does not necessarily mean that the “movement” is in “opposition” to, consciously or unconsciously, what has gone before.

It seems that with the constant and fast changing world, life does not easily allow us to stop and think, contemplate, meditate, examine, sort through and digest our accumulated life experiences to come up with a clear sense of direction. So whether artists are moving in a common direction is unclear. Often, artists cannot see the movement they are creating because they are unconsciously submerged in the ambiguity of its creation. It is only when artists make a clearly defined statement like a “manifesto” that there is a clear conscious recognition of the movement while it is being created.

We are living in the age of constant change, “Nothing is Permanent” - a “ready to move anytime” to the “next new thing” mentality. Additionally, it is an age of “Abundance of Material Goods” in which everything is disposable and replaceable. These notions are reflected especially in today's installation and multimedia art., some of which are made of materials that have been disposed of, are disposable and replaceable, mixing the media in ways which do not allow us to know if their interaction is stable or permanent.

The six artists in this show have expressed in abstract forms, concerns about today's fragility and impermanence of life, by using traditional Japanese media, which are considered as and preserved by society as “more permanent and longer lasting” than the disposable material used by some contemporary artists today. The artists in this show use rice paper (non-acidic), ink, gold leaf, and ceramic powder, etc. This is interesting to compare to some of the contemporary multimedia artists who, whatever ideas they are trying to express in their art, nonetheless exist in a “disposable” society and have decided to use impermanent, fragile, disintegrating, and replaceable materials and media. This has caused alarm and concern among many museum conservators who are not certain what this might mean to their collection. In other words, some of today's multimedia artists do not seem concerned too much with the permanency of the materials and media, as long as

an immediate satisfaction is achieved visually and artistically, and they are not really concerned about the sale of the work or their preservation for the future, except possibly in documentation by photography or video.

It is comforting to know that in this hectic speedy changeable era we can still find some contemporary artists in Japan who appreciate and use the “permanent” (preservable) old traditional Japanese media known for more than 700 years during the Daimyo period (1185-1868), sustaining the characteristic Japanese sensitivity and aesthetics so different from that of the West: qualities like Sabi (rustic – a look of aging), or Shibui (subtle – refined simplicity).