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LOVE, VOLTAIRE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

- AMIT MUKHOPADHYAY

DHRUVA MISTRY IN CONVERSATION WITH SUMATI GANGOPADHYAYA



HAREN DAS (1921-1993): A LEGACY OF GRAPHIC PRINTMAKING

- GAURAV KUMAR

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NATURE AND CRAFTSMANSHIP: FORCES DRIVING CONTEMPORARY ART AT ASIA WEEK NEW YORK

- CLANCI JO CONOVER

Every March, some of the finest examples of Asian art arrive in New York for the annual Asia Week celebration. Dealers, auction houses, and museums come together to present rare offerings that showcase the continent's diverse styles enriched by long cultural histories. While ancient and historic art forms like

^ Ken Matsubara, *Green Dragon*, Pigment on paper, 42.5 x 6.6 x 42.5 x 6.6 cm, Photo Credit: Ippodo Gallery



thangka paintings or Yuan ceramics are a large focus of the event, modern and contemporary artists have also earned considerable popularity and respect. Asia Week, now in its 15th ideation, was founded by a group of art dealers who wanted to share an appreciation for and understanding of Asian art in America's international art capital.

This year, modern and contemporary offerings were dominated by Korean, Japanese, and Chinese artists, with Southeast and Western Asia lacking in representation. A constant, recurring theme across Asia Week exhibitions is the attention to and appreciation for craftsmanship. Whether we are looking at ancient stone carvings from Gandhara or new styles by emerging artists, there is an undeniable reverence for material and technique.

^ (L) Kondō Takahiro (b. 1958), *Cobalt and green-glazed large conical bowl with small flat base and "silver mist" overglaze*, 2020, Glazed porcelain with gintekisai "silver mist" overglaze, 13 x 22 inches, Image Courtesy of Joan B Mirviss LTD, Photo Credit: Richard Goodbody

(R) Kajiwaru Koho (b. 1935), *Peony Basket*, Madake bamboo and rattan, 41.75 x 28.5 x 13.5 cm, Photo Credit: TAI Modern



Joan B. Mirviss' *Eternal Partnership: Japanese Ceramics in Blue/White* focused on the legacy of blue and/or white porcelain that endures in the work of contemporary artists such as Kondō Takahiro (b. 1958), who created a new series of marbled porcelain specifically for the show.ⁱ Blue and white porcelain has a long history wrapped up in export and trade – Chinese porcelain in this style was regularly exported by and for Europeans starting around the mid-16th century, but there was also a particular style of this blue and white porcelain treasured by Japanese consumers.ⁱⁱ This was known as *Ko-sometsuke*, porcelain created with poorly refined clay and was intentionally flawed, appealing to Japanese sensibilities.ⁱⁱⁱ Porcelain (not to be confused with ceramic) was not produced in Japan until the early 17th century when porcelain stone deposits were discovered around the town of Arita, Saga Prefecture^{iv} With increasing unrest in China, the Dutch turned to Japanese makers to export blue and white porcelain, in high demand with European audiences, by the second half of the 17th century.^v The blue and white porcelain produced in Japan was simply known as *sometsuke*, and involves the application of paint onto a fired, unglazed piece of porcelain with a cobalt ore pigment that is glazed and finally fired a second time to enhance the color.^{vi}

Kondō Takahiro draws on the aesthetics of the celebrated blue and white porcelain tradition, combining it with his unique approach to ceramics. A descendant of ceramicist and Living National Treasure Kondō Yūzō (1902-1958), Takahiro has distinguished



himself from his predecessors by inventing his own technique of “silver mist” or *gintekisai* glaze that combines metals and glass to create the droplet-like texture he has become known for.^{vii} The artist’s fascination with water is employed within his new series of blue and white porcelain, which unites aspects of traditional *sometsuke* porcelain with his shimmery *gintekisai* glaze to present a modern take on the honoured practice.

Of course, the elite craftsmanship of Japan extends beyond the realm of ceramics. Bamboo, employed in ancient weaving, is a cherished material that has been used to craft tea scoops, flower holders, charcoal containers, combs, and boxes, among other objects or tools. Bamboo crafts can not be discussed without noting the deep symbolism the plant carries in Japan – it is renowned for its hardness and longevity, often a metaphor incorporated into visual, written, and/or oral narratives.^{viii}

At Asia Week, Japanese bamboo art was presented by TAI Modern, with an assemblage of over 40 stunning works crafted from this seemingly unconventional material.^{ix} Exhibited artists working in bamboo like Kajiwaru Koho (b. 1935) and Shono Tokuzo (b. 1942) have certain similarities in their philosophical approaches to the medium, respecting not just the plant itself but the process by which it becomes a new, useful shape. A layer of lacquer finish called *urushi* is

typically applied to Japanese bamboo and rattan works to protect the surface, increase durability, and retain shine.^x As noted by TAI Modern, a famous Buddhist sutra states that: “form is emptiness, emptiness is form,”^{xi} and this contradiction perfectly encapsulates the sensuous appeal of bamboo work, past or present.

Particularly concerned with craft, Onishi Gallery’s exhibition *KOGEI and Art* celebrated the Japanese notion of *Kogei*, which translates to “craft,” but has a deeper meaning.^{xii} A 1937 paper by the president of Tokyo Higher School of Arts and Technology, Rokuzo Yasuda (1874-1942), classified *Kogei* as “artistic industry” or “applied art.”^{xiii} The term evolved within postwar Japan, moving away from craft and transitioning to signify industrial design.^{xiv} At Onishi, ceramics, metal, and lacquer arts were represented to interpret the enigmatic concept of *Kogei*, with Living National Treasures like Ōsumi Yukie (b. 1945) showing alongside emerging artists like Konno Tomoko (b. 1967) and Rusu Aki (b. 1976).^{xv}

A special showcase featuring the work of Chung Sanghwa (b. 1932), Shin Sung Hy (1948-2009), Nam

[^] Nakagawa Mamoru (b. 1947), *Living National Treasure, Yubae (Sunset’s Glow)*, 2013, Vase; cast alloy of copper, silver, and tin with inlays of copper, silver, and gold, 19 x 32 x 14 cm, Credit: Onishi Gallery



Kwan (1911-1990) and Kim Sang-lan (b. 1952), *Korean Artists in Paris*, was exhibited at HK Art and Antiques.^{xvi} Each of these artists lived and worked in Paris, and the exhibition illustrated the cross-cultural exchange of Korean and French influence that appears within their work. Each artist deals with colour and form in their own abstract styles, from the monochromatic *tansaekhwa* style that categorized modern Korean art seen in Chung Sanghwa’s paintings to the tactile mixed media works of Kim Sang-lan. Both Korean postwar and contemporary art have gained increasing critical attention in both the international market and in the United States, with the first major exhibition devoted to Korean art in the U.S. since 1897 taking place at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art from 2022-2023.

In addition to the common thread of craftsmanship and historical tradition, a popular topic for Asia Week artists this year was the environment. Traditional Asian arts are known for their thoughtful connections to and portrayals of the natural world - consider brush paintings or Shinto shrines, for example. The new generation of Asian artists has a tendency to look to their predecessors for inspiration, studying their own national artistic treasures to inform their 21st-century practice. This link to the past, honouring

heritage, provides a sense of grounding that ties us to a lost world where countless hours could be spent creating a single textile and communication was entirely offline.

“Cosmic Sound: Master Paintings by Ken Matsubara” was shown at Ippodo Gallery, and included 20 paintings by the master artist. Matsubara (b. 1948) has long been inspired by folk interpretations of the dragon and draws on the verdant Japanese landscape in approaching his work.^{xvii} Interestingly, the artist was raised in a Buddhist temple established in the 1200s, where he grew up in constant contact with the temple’s interior paintings.^{xviii} In his own painting practice, he seeks to transcend individual identity and connect with viewers through a sense of commonality and shared experience. While most of the paintings exhibited at Asia Week were created in the last 10 years, Matsubara transports the viewer back in time, evoking moonlight poetry sessions or a mountain pilgrimage.

At Alisan Fine Arts, a selection of work by young Chinese artists Bouie Choi (b. 1987), Chu Chu (b. 1975), Lam Tung Pang (b. 1978), Kelly Wang (b. 1992) and Yang Yongliang (b. 1980) showed in tandem with groundbreaking ink artist Lui Shou-Kwan (1919-1975).^{xix} Lui was trained traditionally to copy masters of calligraphy or landscape painting, but when he moved to British-occupied Hong Kong in 1948, he was exposed to modern movements like Abstract Expressionism.^{xx} Over time, he created an aggregate style that blended the calligraphic brushwork he

[^] Kelly Wang, *Brush Rest*, 2023, *Newspaper and Mixed Media*, 191.8 x 63.5 x 99 cm, Credit: INKStudio



trained in with playful painted forms that would become more abstract, informing the New Ink movement. Each of the artists exhibited alongside Lui interprets the natural landscape through their own distinctive lens, serving as successors to this pioneer.

Kelly Wang's work was also featured at INK Studio alongside Ren Light Pan (b. 1990) in an exhibition that looked to redefine the material practices of ink art^{xxi} – a concept that Lui Shou-Kwan would likely approve of. In one of her pieces, Wang takes the traditional ink brush scene and brings it into the three-dimensional world by sculpting twisted newspapers into mountainous landscapes reaching for the heavens, effectively breaking the 2D barrier.^{xxii} The celebration around traditional ink styles and how they have been reinvented in the last 100 years, like many traditional practices in Asian art, has opened the door for artists to continue pushing these boundaries, uniting technique with creativity, and nature with technology.

Contemporary photography found a place in this edition of Asia Week, with Miyako Yoshinaga presenting *Joo Myung Duck: Sensory Space in Photography*, which highlighted the artist's work from 1988-2011.^{xxiii} Joo (b. 1940) turned his attention to landscapes in the late '80s, capturing dark, monochromatic images metaphorically named *Lost Landscapes* that are influenced by Korea's modernist *tansaekhwa* movement while indicating a sensitivity to nature found in philosophies like Daoism. The

show placed these sombre images in conversation with newer works from 2011, where the artist has shifted his focus towards vibrant, close-up details and textures of urban surfaces. This juxtaposition illustrates the duality of modern Asian art – and in a more abstract way, Asian society – by combining the ancient, organic worlds, full of rich history, with current, man-made cities bursting with innovation.

On top of gallery exhibitions, a number of museums hosted dedicated shows that coincided with Asia Week (such as the Howard Hodgkin Collection of Indian Miniatures at the Metropolitan Museum), and top auction houses held some of their most important Asian art sales of the year. Asia Week continues to serve as a wealth of knowledge for its visitors, connecting East and West through visual dialogues that span over a thousand years of artistic creation.

[^] Joo Myung Duck, *Seoul, 2011, Archival Pigment Print, 20 x 30 inches*, © Joo Myung Duck / Datz Museum of Art & Miyako Yoshinaga Gallery

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- xxiii. Miyako Yoshinaga (2024). *Joo Myung Duck: Sensory Space in Photography and its Conversation with Korean Abstract Painting*. <https://asiaweekny.com/dealers/miyako-yoshinaga/>

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