

TECHNIQUE AND TEXTURE : Yumiko Irei-Gokce's Collagraph Printworks

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Form versus content. Meaning and method. At times artists can trip themselves up attempting to convey something---a certain feeling , sensation or idea---by the way they try to express it. Abstract art, for example, not always as easy as it may seem, often falls victim to its own ambition. Some artists tend to over reach in order to dazzle with technique and end up falling flat with works that may be skillfully, even impressively assembled, but which have little or nothing to say.

More interesting, more communicative and indeed more mature is the artist who can deliver the goods---medium *and* message---with just the right internal balance or harmony of creative elements in his or her work so that no one ingredient completely overwhelms another. Granted, there are times when, for experimental purposes, if not for specific effect, an artist may intentionally exaggerate something. But it is a risky business, and not everyone can pull it off without the finished product somehow appearing heavy-handed.

Yumiko Irei-Gokce's own singular style boasts a well-defined and attention-grabbing technique. But fortunately for the viewer, her multi-layered, richly textured collagraph prints call attention to this technique without conceit and without overwhelming the equally important impact of her skillfully handled materials. Paper, ink, color - these Yumiko generally allows to speak for themselves.

This has been an important feature of her work as it has evolved over the years, one that has enabled her to develop and advance her art-making procedures without, to put it plainly, getting stuck in a rut. For an artist who is a capable technician must know when to leave her creations well enough alone. For Irei-Gokce, there is a point at which the meticulously registered printing, pasting together and cutting up of her sandwiched-together sheets of hand made Japanese *Washi* ends and the independent existence of her sumptuous surfaces begins. It is a moment as exciting as it is unpredictable in the on-going tug of war between artistic expression and technique.

But in her recent work, Yumiko succeeds in extending her collagraph methods confidently to some new formats---hanging scrolls and *Washi* on wire constructions, for instance---while continuing to develop the vocabulary of form already explored in her multi-layered prints. These paper works appear in large, hinged, multi-paneled versions immediately highlight their Japaneseness. It is an appropriate reference, for at the same time this framing device, clearly reminiscent of traditional Japanese screens, act as a container for and helps call attention to the process by which these pieces were made. After all, so much of Japanese art, old and new, is *about* process, about gesture and a certain mastery of technique, not always with imposing flourishes but often with a sober matter-of-factness instead.

Preparing a textured cardboard printing plate, pressing color onto delicate sheets of varying thickness, pasting the printed *Washi* together, and “drawing” by cutting the paper with surgical precision: surprisingly, considering all that goes into the making of Yumiko’s collagraphs, they never seem to end up as the kind of artworks which, one by one, make a quick, bold statement and then quietly recede into the walls.

Instead, like abstract art that achieves some measure of resonance---a mark of technically proficient work that still gives content some room to breathe--- their meaning or expression simply *unfolds* for each viewer. There is a feeling of time passing here, a sense of something gradually unwinding, whatever references may be suggested by the plant-inspired, organic growth of Irei-Gokce’s leafy forms and sweeping incisions. In part it is the reflection of the energy of an artist committed to her craft, to exploration in her work and to the excitement of moving on.