

Private Sanctuary:

Walsh Gallery, Chicago

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Turning Japanese; Walsh Gallery show a hybrid of Japanese, global influences

By :

Tania Ralli

A journalist and editorial writer

Cultural practice tend to evolve with time, but what happens when particular customs are shifted to the opposite end of the world?

Two artists, native to Osaka, Japan, who reside in Chicago, address this question in “ Private Sanctuary “, an exhibition now on view at Walsh Gallery. Both artists deal with specific Japanese traditions, examining them and rethinking them through their installations.

Yumiko Irei-Gokce’s work, entitled; “ Muryouji , an alter space ” is a large installation of color prints, ink drawings, hanging fabric, and 840 pounds of salt. Most of the works on paper hang against a back wall, and the two open sides of the space are hung with vertical panels of sheer white fabric. The fabrics works to enclose the area, creating an intimate space but also focusing the eye on the hanging prints.

Four collagraph prints bracket four smaller, centered ink drawings. Half of the prints are vibrantly colored and their color leaks into the two other monochromatic prints. In the context of an alter space, the prints are fiery and chaotic, almost too much of contrast to more meditative qualities of the installation. Yet, Irei-Gokce has hung the work in such a way that the eye circles from the saturated color of top right, through the quieter black and white work, and finally to the placid whiteness of salt.

The salt, all 840 pounds, is smoothed into a square on the floor. It is the final resting point of the eye, thus moving the viewer from chaos to metaphorical purity. In Japan, salt is traditionally used to purify and cleanse; for instance, a family returning from a funeral might sprinkle salt at their door to keep away evil spirits. As an artistic medium, the salt works better symbolically than aesthetically. It is very fine grain obliterates texture, and it seems to absorb light rather than adding any luminosity, due to the overall whiteness of the gallery.

Here, Irei-Gokce uses an unconventional print technique known as collagraphy which is a relatively new mean of printmaking medium. Preparing the plates with the materials of silk organza fabric, and medium solution to adhere it to the board before cutting and engraving intended images, in order to create both intaglio and relief surface. For the pieces of “MURYOUJI ” she used single plate with several colors to pull the edition of at least 20 and layered multiple impressions : in sake of constructing one piece of collagraph work, prints were cut some section of images away and curled to reveal different colors and layers—but the same shapes—below.

Alongside her installation, the artist is also exhibiting works of Sumi-ink on paper. Drawing the strokes on her calligraphy trained in Japan who uses traditional materials in a non-traditional manner. The brush she uses is so large that the paper must be placed on the floor and the brush held above. The result is large graceful sweeps of Sumi-ink creating shapes with positive and negative space. The texture of the brush is evident in some strokes, whereas other areas of the work show the diffusion of ink into water.

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Her work has appeared in **the New York Times**,

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She worked as an editor at *ArtNews* magazine as well.