

Brevity and Light



01 Miya Ando; **02** *Depth Cube*, 2012, Hand Dyed, Anodized Aluminum, 17" x 17" x 17"; **03** *Meditation Blue 2*, 2013, Steel, patina, pigment, resin, 12" x 12"; **04** *Obon Puerto Rico : Night image*, 2012, skeleton leaves, resin, phosphorescence (Image by L Young); **05** *Obon Puerto Rico : Day image*, 2012, skeleton leaves, resin, phosphorescence (Image by L Young); **06** *8 Women/8 Stories* installation at Sundaram Tagore Gallery (Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery); **07** *Furisode Kimono* (details), 2011, Stainless Steel, Sterling Silver, patina, pigment, lacquer, 70" x 56" (Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery); **08** *Geta*, 2010, Steel, Steel Cable (Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery) **09** *Sentient 2*, Hand Dyed, Anodized Aluminium, 40" x 30" (Image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery).

Japanese-American artist Miya Ando creates simple, thought-provoking works that transcend ordinary means of expression.

Opening on International Women's Day, the *8 Women/8 Stories* exhibit at Hong Kong's Sundaram Tagore Gallery was conceived as an accolade to the eight female artists who contribute to the show's interwoven narrative. Provocative in their own right, works by prolific practitioners such as Golnaz Fathi, Susan Weil and Miya Ando are heavily informed by the artists' cultural, aesthetic and spiritual sensitivities, each seemingly linked to one another through unique exploratory processes and a profound sense of experimentation. Expressed through divergent approaches in materiality and technique, the pieces find common ground in their shared ability to straddle conventional artistic categories, blurring the lines between painting, sculpture, metalsmithing, collage and calligraphy.

New York-based artist Miya Ando's highly tactile work, *Furisode Kimono* emerges as one of the show's highlights. Composed of stainless steel squares intricately soldered together with sterling silver rings, the piece was inspired by an actual kimono handmade and given to Ando by her Japanese grandmother. Formally worn by unmarried women, donning a *furisode* signifies the wearer's "availability" as a young single female who has come of age. Conventionally crafted out of expensive, brightly coloured silk and sewn with elongated sleeves, Ando's version strikingly reinterprets the original garment; the draping presence of steel assigns the typically dainty kimono a newfound toughness while deep-red gradations on the sleeves sustain its indelibly delicate associations, lending it a new resonance. "My idea was to make a hybrid of armour and jewelry, but in a feminine form," says the artist.

Perusing her impressive portfolio, Ando's long-term preoccupation with paradoxes is evident. Her multifaceted practice has given rise to often pared-down mixed media works conceived through the dynamic pairing of contrasting elements, forms and concepts. Notable works include a recent public commission for a 30-foot tall sculpture in London, erected on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of 9/11 in memory of those who perished. Wrought using steel salvaged from the wreckage, the piece features a graceful amalgamation of mangled and refined forms, aptly embodying vulnerability and strength.

There is also *Obon*, a site-specific series that pays homage to the ancient Japanese ceremony of the same name. A annual ritual of remembrance, descendants of visiting spirits guide their deceased ancestors back to the netherworld by floating small paper boats containing lit candles. Ando initiated the latest edition last year, in collaboration with the Fist Art Foundation in Puerto Rico. Consisting of a thousand Bodhi leaf skeletons, each fragile entity was painstakingly hand-painted with phosphorescence and resin, and cast afloat on a pond. The leaves absorbed sunlight during the day, emitting an otherworldly glow later that evening when the showcase opened, allowing the haunting work to achieve a temporal synergy with its physical environment. "I wanted to connect this notion of memory together with the naturally occurring bioluminescence which Puerto Rico is known for," says Ando.

Ando's pieces are understatedly autobiographical, each a fleeting clue that guides us deeper into the artist's layered background; understanding the actual depth of the art stems from comprehending just who the artist is and where she comes from. As quietly compelling as her work, Ando's personal story reads like something out of a Haruki Murakami novel. Born of mixed parentage into a family of renowned Japanese swordsmiths, she was raised by Buddhist priests in a temple in Okayama where she lived until she was spirited away to the mountainous environs of Santa Cruz, California as a young girl. The part-Russian Ando was later educated at Berkeley and Yale, majoring in Buddhist iconography and imagery before returning to Japan to undergo an apprenticeship with a master metalsmith. As an artist, she regularly contemplates possibilities inherent in "emptiness or nothingness," an idea deeply rooted in Buddhist philosophy.

"I had a truly East and West upbringing, living between two cultures and speaking both Japanese and English," says Ando. "I feel these two places have integrated within myself and both have influenced my philosophy and artistic practice. The heart of my artwork is expressing harmony between contradictory things, interconnectivity and transformation."