

# the sisterhood

where jewish women converse

## Searching for Impermanence

By [Lilit Marcus](#)

[Miya Ando](#), an artist whose solo show “Impermanence” recently opened at New York’s Sundaram Tagore Gallery, is a product of two worlds. The daughter of a Russian (via California) Jewish father and Japanese Buddhist mother, she grew up in a temple and didn’t learn English until she was seven years old. Her older sister, Aviva, “got the Jewish name in the family,” while Miya got the traditionally Japanese one. Though she spent years trying to make sense of her layered cultural identity and searching for a place of her own, she has now come to peace with her background and channeled into her art.

Ando is descended from a family who made samurai swords. Now, fittingly, she makes most of her works out of metal. She has developed a custom technique for dyeing aluminum, and the square and rectangular pieces she creates invoke Rothko paintings with their simple yet dramatic use of color and texture. One of the most stunning pieces in the show is a kimono – made to the same exact size and shape specification of a true Japanese kimono – made out of small squares of this dyed metal and hung from the ceiling.

Visiting Ando’s studio, in a loft building in DUMBO, gives you a sense of her complicated background. The studio is of course full of her own work, but there’s also a small Buddhist shrine and a photograph of her paternal grandmother. Though Ando (who grew up between Japan and southern California) doesn’t identify as Jewish, she says that the faith – as well as her relationships with relatives on her dad’s side of the family – has been a big influence. Being in New York, with its thriving and active Jewish community, has also inspired her work. The first piece that got her a lot of publicity was a sculpture made from metal pieces salvaged from the Ground Zero wreckage. The sculpture was commissioned to honor the 67 Brits who died on 9/11 and is displayed in London. She followed that up with another large public work, this time in Tokyo, commemorating the devastating Japanese tsunami and earthquakes in 2011.

“I like to work with metal,” she explained to me in her studio. “I like to make it look like nature, like a cloud, like water.” The pieces in “Impermanence” do just that – though they’re created from man-made metals, they look soft and natural and pick up light from every angle. Her work has been called “post-minimalist,” and after seeing several dozen small multicolored squares of metal on the wall I can see why. But after a longer look, they begin to look like mirrors – they reflect multiple generations, multiple identities, and, eventually, Miya Ando’s smiling eyes.