

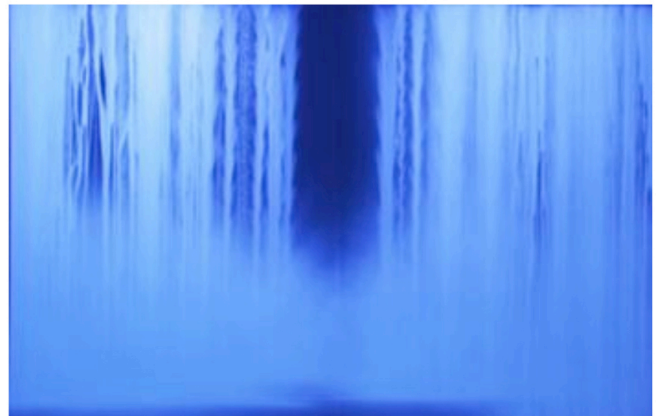


Hiroshi Senju
Haruka Naru Aoi Hikari (New Light from Afar)
[Sundaram Tagore Gallery](#)
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Haruka Naru Aoi Hikari (New Light from Afar)

Humans need to commune with the elements of nature and art at its best can provide such an experience of communion. Artists often reflect on nature and transform it into intensely condensed metaphors, poems, and songs. Hiroshi Senju and Gisela Colón are two such artists inspired by natural forces, if in distinctly different ways. Senju's paintings reflect his relationship with the elements of air and water, while Colón's paintings emerge from earth and fire. The viewer experiences the intensity and vitality of the works through immediate sensation, the body holding the memory of our actual experience with these basic life-giving forces.

Through his sublime paintings, Japanese artist Hiroshi Senju has contemplated multiple facets of water, especially its fundamental power, for almost twenty years. Following the Nihonga style of painting, a thousand-year-old traditional Japanese technique, Senju makes his own paint by grinding mineral pigments from coral, seashells, and stone, binding it with animal-hide glue, and applying it to Japanese mulberry paper mounted on board. In essence, he transforms solid materials from the earth to create images of elusive aquatic torrents. Veils of dripping white paint descend from the top of each painting, forming cascading vertical lines that dissolve into an atmospheric mist glimmering into a pool of infinity. The illusion of flowing movement does not allow for a beginning or an end but sets up a cyclical, continuously shifting rhythmic motion. Viewing these mural-sized paintings activates all of the senses and surrenders the viewer to a place of peaceful repose. In this series of Waterfall paintings, Senju incorporates fluorescence into his white paint, which dramatically transforms the images under black light. This activates the viewer's sensory memory: one becomes aware of the soothing sound of falling water, the majestic beauty of a cascade, the cool air and mist, and the overwhelming force of gravity.



Hiroshi Senju, *Waterfall*, 2009, fluorescent pigment on mulberry paper mounted on board, 89 ½" x 179". Courtesy Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

The dynamic and explosively colorful abstractions of Los Angeles-based, Puerto Rican painter Gisela Colón, by contrast, ignite the element of fire. Colón's pieces read like landscapes but seduce and captivate the eye like the jewel-toned mosaics and mystical stained glass found in the churches of Ravenna. Fiery shades of orange, ruby red, emerald green, turquoise, cobalt blue, and translucent mother of pearl burst forth underneath a gold and silver veil, suggesting a vibrant flower garden or, just as easily, the contents of a treasure chest. Colón creates the illusion of three-dimensional space by applying multiple layers of rich colors, overlapped and underwoven by an irregular silver and gold lattice. She completes each piece with a coat of resin, imparting a luxurious enamel glaze. Overall, Colón's work evokes the opulence of Venetian glass pieced together into the background of a Klimt painting.

Nature is a primal source of inspiration for both Senju and Colón, and both of their oeuvres inhere a pulsating vitality, Senju's derived from his perception of the elements of water and air and Colón's from the elements of fire and earth. As a result, a great contrast maintained between their exhibits (fortuitously displayed a block apart). Their works are powerful enough to trigger personal memories of nature, which in turn inspire sensate responses engrained in the human experience. Senju's gray and white paintings are quiet, soothing, spiritual, and cleansing, while Colón's colorful compositions are exuberant, passionate, dazzling, and joyful. In other words, one screams hallelujah and the other sings a hymn.

by **Anna Meliksetian**