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ART PREVIEW RICHARD JAMES HAVIS | 48hours@scmp.com

Glowing, glowing, gone

Hiroshi Senju - Day Falls/Night Falls
Sundaram Tagore

Japanese artist Hiroshi Senju is a celebrated master of the 1,000-year-old Nihonga style of painting, which uses natural ingredients, such as ground rocks, shells and coral as materials.

Senju's pictures of waterfalls – created by simply allowing gravity to pull the paints down Japanese mulberry paper – normally reflect the natural, unpredictable beauty of these features.

But for “Day Falls/Night Falls”, his show at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery, he has opted to use something entirely man-made: fluorescent paint. They change colour under ultraviolet lights, morphing from black and white to beautiful hues of electric blue.

“As a practitioner of Nihonga, I have used natural materials all my life,” Senju says, in his studio in Pleasantville, upstate New York. “Fluorescent paint used to make me think of neon – bars and beer – so I never really thought about using it. I didn’t think it was an important pigment.

“But then I began thinking about how modern humans spend half of their time awake at night, unlike the ancients who slept through it. The night holds their stories. That is today’s

reality. I realised that by using fluorescent pigments, I could capture night scenes.”

The fluorescent waterfalls, like much of the artist’s work, are large; *Falling Water* is 1.63 metres by 2.26 metres.

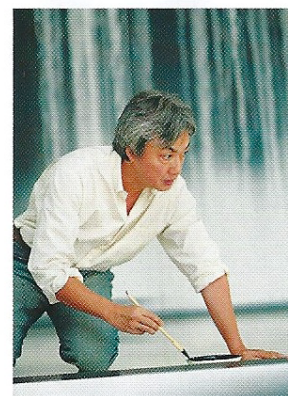
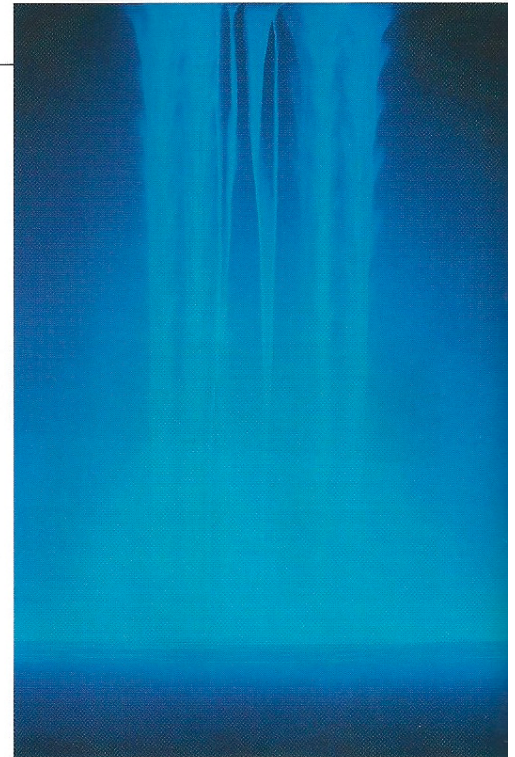
For Senju his waterfalls are metaphors for the earth itself.

“Waterfalls are very interesting, as they are continuously moving. That makes them difficult to paint, and hard to sketch. One day, I felt moved to paint one because of their extreme beauty.

“When you think about what we have on earth, there is gravity, water and temperature,” Senju continues. “You can say that the world is like a waterfall, as it has those three things. So when I am painting a waterfall, I feel I am painting the earth itself.”

And while his works may be reminiscent of Abstract Expressionists, such as Mark Rothko, he says they have a different genesis. While Rothko and others tried to express their inner world, Senju wants only to capture the outside world. “My art is not self-expression, it is an expression of the world.”

At Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 57-59 Hollywood Rd, Central, until June 9. Opening hours: Mon-Sat, 10am-7pm, Sun 11am-7pm. Tel: 2581 9678



Hiroshi Senju (left) paints one of his signature waterfalls using fluorescent pigments on Japanese mulberry paper (above). Photo: Hiroshi Senju