

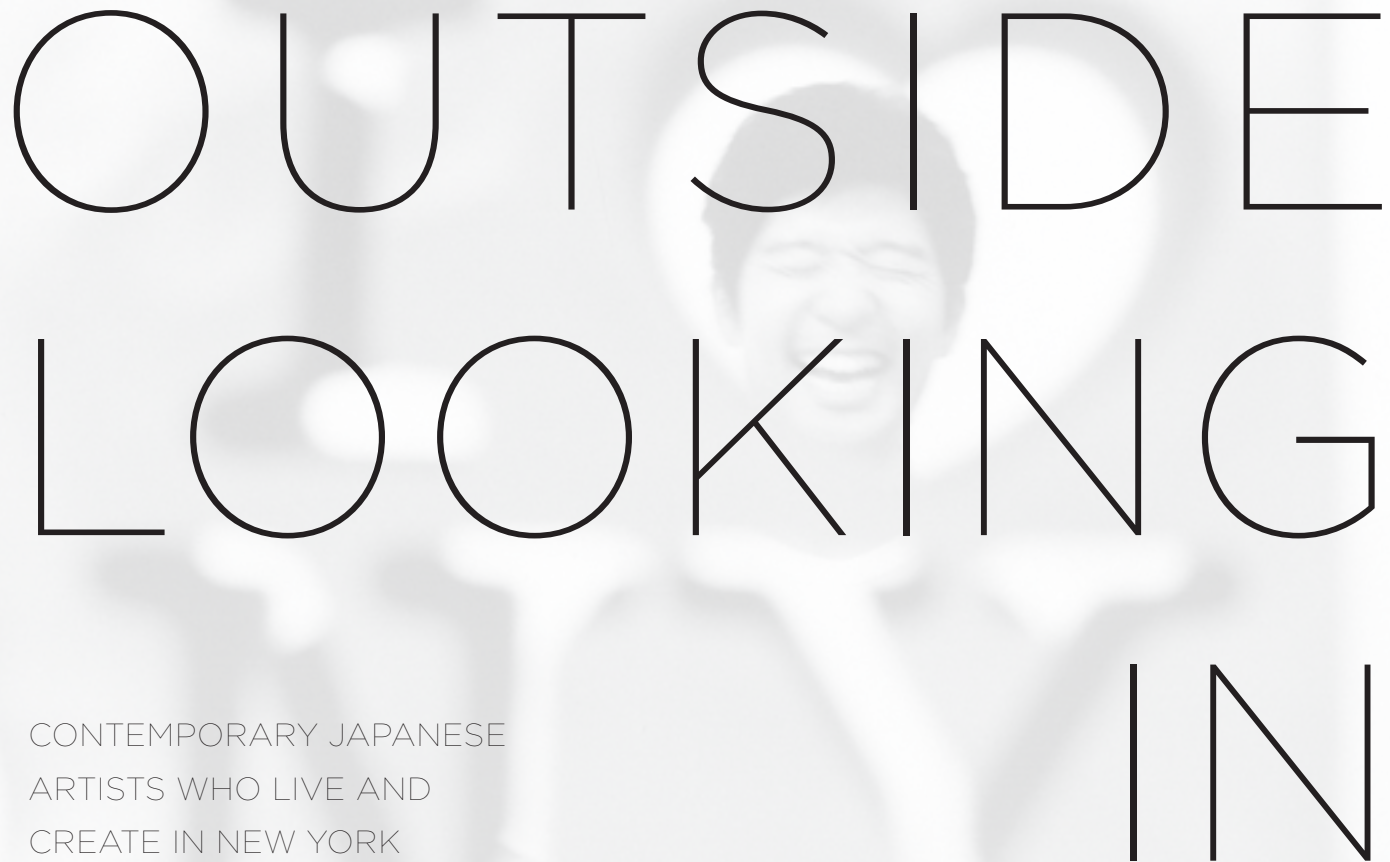
OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE ARTISTS WHO LIVE
AND CREATE IN NEW YORK



LESLEY KEHOE GALLERIES





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GROUND FLOOR 101 COLLINS ST MELBOURNE VICTORIA AUSTRALIA

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SHINICHI MARUYAMA

AUGUST 14 - SEPTEMBER 13

TOMOKAZU MATSUYAMA

SEPTEMBER 25 - OCTOBER 25

MIYA ANDO

NOVEMBER 6 - DECEMBER 20

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN, THE TITLE OF THIS SERIES OF EXHIBITIONS, SUGGESTS IN-GROUPS AND OUT-GROUPS AND THE TINTED PERSPECTIVE OF EACH.

Outsiders to their home culture Japan, the three selected artists reside in New York where the freedom of the Western art market liberates them from the stifling conservatism of the 'local': Yet being of Japanese origin, they are 'outsiders' in New York too. This privileged objectivity sees a unique creativity in each genre and portfolio.

They combine their Japanese origins, cultural, artistic and technical, with the contemporary freedom of New York.

'Matzu' was a young 'Orange County Boy' with an American cultural outlook that did not fit with Japan on returning home; Shinichi carries on Japan's 19th century fascination

with Western technology in the stimulating environment of New York; and Miya Ando, with an exotic Japanese and Russian heritage and an upbringing in a Buddhist temple with a swordsmith uncle, uses her enviable metalworking skills to create wondrously romantic landscapes.



14.08.14 – 13.09.14

**SHINICHI
MARUYAMA**

PRESENTED IN CO-OPERATION WITH BRUCE SILVERSTEIN GALLERY NEW YORK

www.kehoe.com.au
www.shinichimaruyama.com

















shinichi maruyama

nude #9

158 x 158 cm

edition of 1 + AP





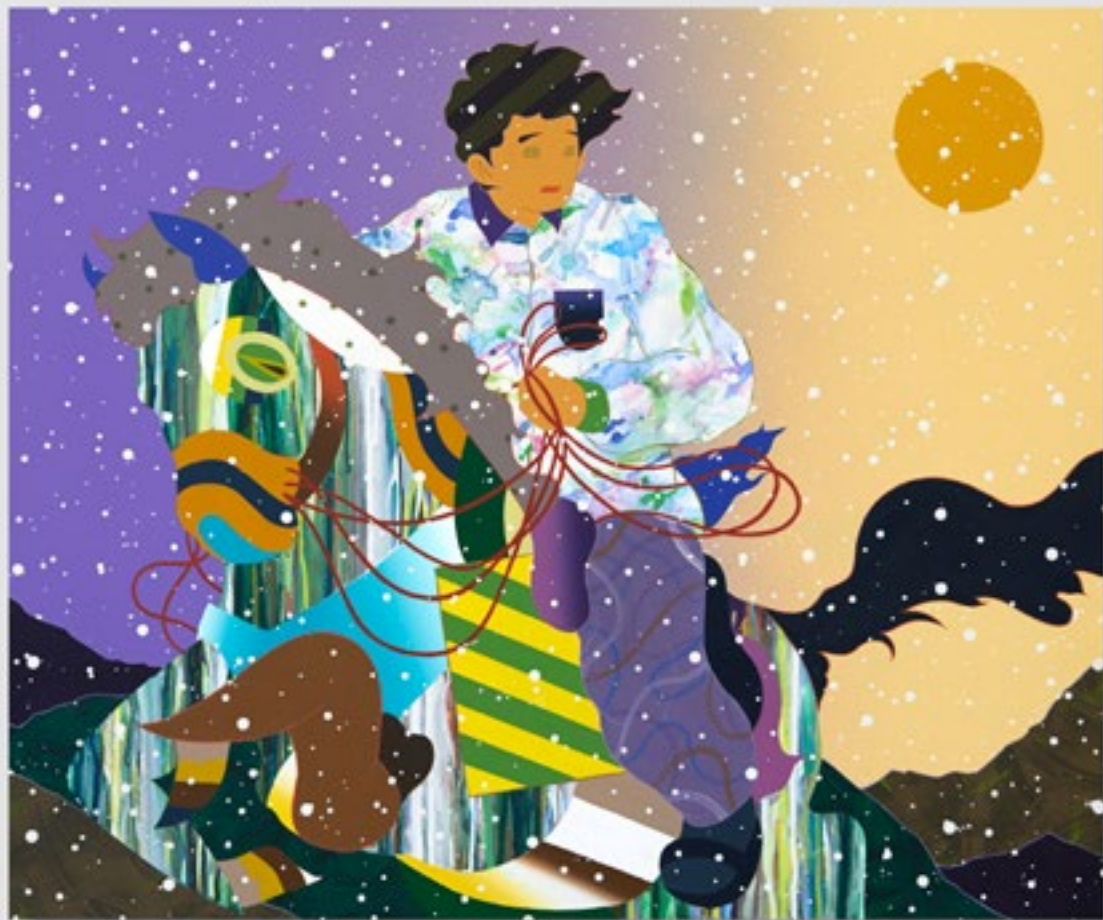


TOMOKAZU MATSUYAMA

25.09.14 – 25.10.14

www.kehoe.com.au

www.matzu.net







Whatever The Playboy Wrote, It Was As Good As The Great Waves

2014

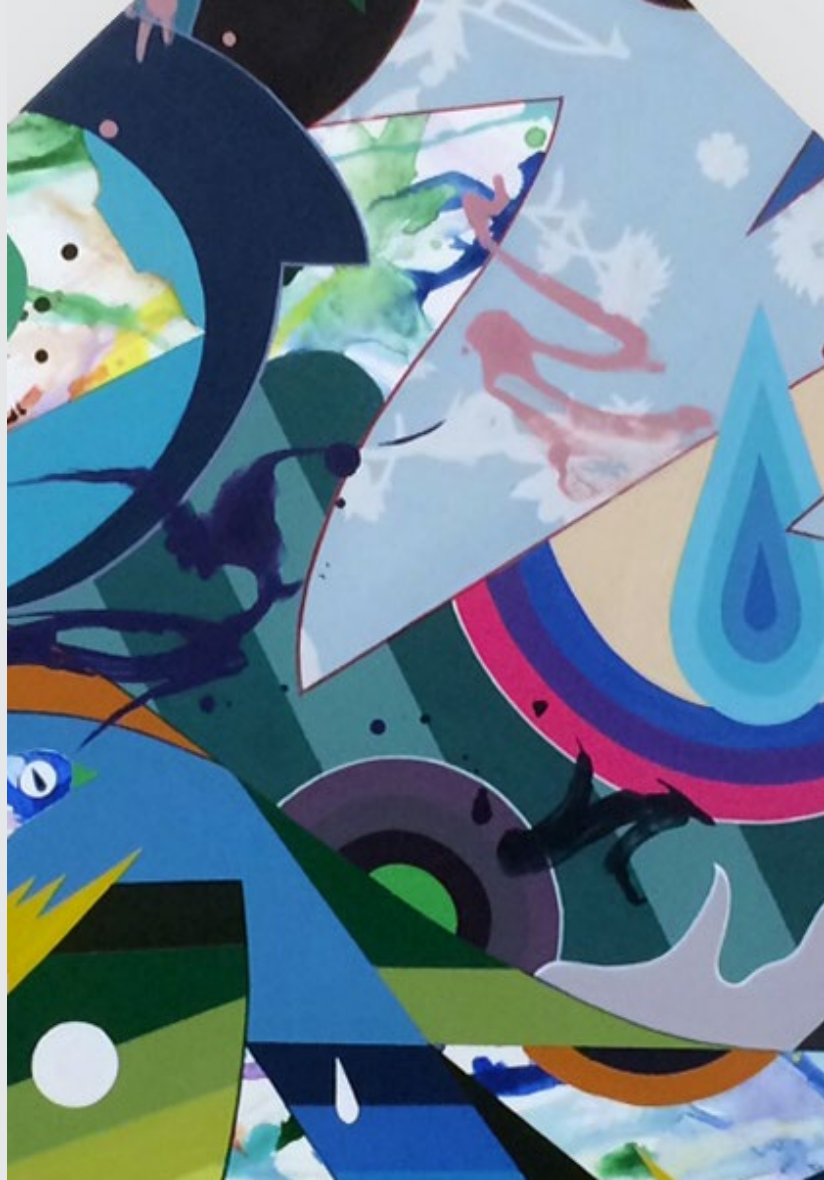
161 x 254 cm













PRESENTED IN CO-OPERATION WITH SUNDARAM TAGORE NEW YORK

MIYA ANDO

06.11.14 – 20.12.14

www.kehoe.com.au
www.miyaando.com







‘Miya Ando’s refined, subtle works of rolled steel, made of sheets of burnished and chemically treated metal, are ...a must-see for anyone interested in post-minimalist contemporary art’

New York Times 2009













“THAT IS HOW
I EXPLAINED
MYSELF
TO THE
STRANGE
IMPRESSION I
HAD OF BEING
ODD MAN OUT,
A KIND OF
INTRUDER.”

ALBERT CAMUS, THE OUTSIDER

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

An Essay : Lesley Kehoe BA MA FRAS

The idea of ‘outside’ conveys feelings of alienation, difference and deviance. In contrast, the idea of ‘inside’ evokes a sense of belonging and safety, of mutual acceptance and understanding. In-group and Out-group designations exist on both a macro level amongst nations and cultures, and on a micro level within nations and smaller groupings. Undoubtedly, most of us have experienced the trials of not being part of one or other in-group during our lifetimes.

While many cultures have words to describe the ‘outsider’, and appropriate political strategies to incite patriotism, (the most recent ‘Team Australia’ perhaps!), it is in Japan that both the concept and its associated isolating behaviours have reached their apogee: the relatively polite ‘gaikoku-jin 外国人’ and the more ostracizing ‘gai-jin 外人’.⁽¹⁾

The ideas of the outsider/foreigner are of particular relevance to Japan given its historical policy of isolation from the rest of the world. 250 years of a closed door hierarchical and status-bound political and economic policy has left a residual sense of in-group parochialism that lingers today in restrictive immigration and citizenship policies; a censored education system; a status-identifying, gender-distinct linguistic system; a continuing popular fascination, both positive and negative, with 'gaijin', and an intrinsically contradictory sense of cultural superiority/inferiority: This latter subtly camouflaged by politeness routines that insist that one word of Japanese spoken by a foreigner elicit high praise for fluency, and a request for sushi or sashimi is interpreted as a desire for steak.

An hierarchical classification system extends to the art world where rigidly bureaucratic traditional organizations control not only the selection of works for exhibition and complementary awards and prizes, but also the characteristics of works to be submitted. Artists are generally not recognized until after they turn 60, and there is little opportunity for younger artists to establish careers and gain recognition. Subject to corruption and nepotism, this system is under scrutiny and showing signs of change and possible obsolescence. ⁽²⁾

When Lesley Kehoe Galleries started in Japanese art some decades ago, it was career suicide for an artist to be recognized first in the West. A subsequent career or representation in Japan was impossible. As artists have increasingly rejected the incestuous national art organizations, many have sought exposure in the West, and many have given up residence in Japan to seek more creative and less restrictive environments outside.

Outside Looking In takes three contemporary Japanese artists who have left Japan and are based in New York and looks at how they synthesize their innate Japanese consciousness with their personal and artistic experiences in New York and its art environments. That they are 'outside' Japan is obvious, that they may be regarded as 'outsiders/foreigners' in New York may not be so obvious to either themselves, or in this international and globalized environment, to those observing their work. That they felt like 'outsiders' in their own country, Japan, may have been a catalyst to their Western odyssey.

'Looking in' refers to their perspectives on the home culture and the undeniably Japanese influences manifest in their work and conceptual approaches. However, in discussions with the artists, these influences are often discovered to be unconscious. The apparently 'undeniable' Japanese aspects of the work are labelled as such by Western observers, applying their own 'outside' interpretations and perceptions of the 'Oriental', or 'not-Western'. Thus we have the intriguing subjectivity and fluidity of the concepts 'outside' and 'inside'.

It is my contention, more fully explored in the essay, 'Tomokazu Matsuyama: Privileged Outsider' ⁽³⁾, that the status of 'outsider' bestows an enviable freedom and objectivity; an objectivity that permits, rather stimulates, an enlightened perspective akin to that of Plato's prisoners released from The Cave and exposed to an alternate 'reality'. Returning to Japan's history and the opening of the country to trade and outside cultural influences after two and a half decades of self-imposed isolation, we see in the Meiji Period (1868-1912) the enthusiastic reception in Europe and America of Japanese art forms. Japanese woodblock prints, ukiyoe 浮世絵, for example, often no more than pin-ups of famous actors and guides to the courtesan world and associated with the officially denigrated nouveau-riche merchant classes, were embraced as fine art in the West, exerting significant influence on the Impressionists and other Western designers and artists. ⁽⁴⁾ In what is termed 'reverse export' (gyaku yunyu 逆輸入), it was this objective re-evaluation of these works by 'outsiders' that eventually led to their recognition as worthy art works in Japan. The 'outsider' non-Japanese observer was able to assess their art value objectively, that is, free of the social value judgments tied to them in Japan. This applies also to the miniature sculpture form, netsuke.

The three artists selected for Outside Looking In are singularly different in genre, approach and concept.

Shinichi Maruyama is enamoured of technology, turning a highly successful career in commercial photography into that of a uniquely inspired contemporary artist. In a departure from accepted practice as radical as that of Jackson Pollock, he has taken paint off the canvas. He creates movement and captures the impossibility of multiple fleeting moments. He has gone beyond the usual categories of photography, transcended the staged photograph to create something that ceases to exist the minute it has been photographed. Technology is his tool, mastery and a unique conceptual approach his genius.

Shinichi is not conscious of being Japanese in approach, nor of being an outsider in New York. In the globalized technological world of photography, he is but one of many. However, in conversation with him, we hear of Zen gardens and the aggregate of multiple moments and focused energy required to create one; of the particular sense of space in these gardens and of the equally particular Zen concept of evanescence. He states quite clearly, as a result of recent travels in Asia, that his creativity is dependent on four distinct seasons of the year. To this outsider, and seasoned observer of Japanese art, historical and contemporary, his conceptual approach is permeated with the Japanese sense of the evanescent, an appreciation of the transient. In the language of the Japanese formal practice of tea, 'one life, one moment 一期一会', he is challenged to capture the 'one moment'.

Tomokazu Matsuyama, 'Matzu', is a painter and sculptor. Born in Japan and educated for a significant part of his youth in the United States, he is acutely conscious of being labeled an outsider, of feeling like an intruder, on his return to Japan. A desire to make sense of the disparate elements of his two home cultures is both a verbally and artistically articulated goal of his output. He places himself securely as a member of the internet-savvy, globally connected social media generation. Cultural icons are no longer sacred and the ensuing melee is a universal characteristic of his generation.

Described as a 'hyper-kinetic tableau with a dream-like mood' ⁽⁵⁾, Matzu's work is familiar and accessible. He wants it to be popular and easily understood. It is these traits that he takes from the world of the popular Japanese woodblock print, the aim to communicate with a broad audience without the need for an intellectual or cultural filter. He openly references traditional Japanese painting and woodblock prints in his work, adapts the traditional Japanese studio system to his needs and is savvy to the demands of the Western contemporary art world in being able to articulate a clear conceptual approach. His ultimate aim is to achieve sufficient recognition in the West such that he will be acknowledged in Japan... a contemporary incarnation of 'reverse importing'.

Miya Ando is a rarity in the art world. She creates paintings in metal: 'Miya Ando's refined, subtle works of rolled steel, made of sheets of burnished and chemically treated metal, are ...a must-see for anyone interested in post-minimalist contemporary art' ⁽⁶⁾ Born in California of Russian-American and Japanese parents, Miya has spent much of her life in the grounds of a Buddhist temple with her grandfather. Her ancestors were swordsmiths in the esteemed Bizen tradition and the allure of transforming metal is strong in her work. She too is conscious of her mutable cultural identity, 'As a person who's of mixed heritage, it was always a way for me to connect with that part of my family'. ⁽⁷⁾

Traditional Japanese metalwork is almost alchemical in the hands of master workers. Miya is apprenticed to a master metalsmith in Japan and no stranger to the discipline of the traditional art form. She transforms the rigidity and solidity of steel into works of ethereal light and spirituality. She too speaks of evanescence, of respect for, and an innate understanding of, the transience and impermanence that underlies much of Japanese thinking and daily life. It is this sense of impermanence that is manifested through her mastery of demanding technical skills.

As each of these 'outside looking in' artists strives for creative freedom and recognition in the centre of the contemporary art world, New York, they nevertheless express, consciously and unconsciously, vestiges of their unique home culture. Shared by each is a purity of commitment to technical perfection.

Only through mastery of their respective media and tools are they able to manifest so beautifully their aesthetic and creative genius.

There are benefits and costs in the trend to globalization. One of the greatest costs is the loss of identity in a sea of mundane homogeneity. It is in the stimulating melting pot of the Western art world that these three artists are liberated from the systemic conservatism of Japan. However, it is their roots in the venerable philosophical and artistic traditions of Japan that they discover their uniqueness. They may be 'outside', but they have not ceased 'looking in'. We would argue for the benefits of outsider status.

Vive la Différence. Vive L'étranger.

Lesley Kehoe BA MA FRAS

FOOTNOTES

1. I do not include caste systems such as exist in India in this general discussion.
2. Nitten apologizes, ministry demands answers as Japan Fine Arts Exhibition opens: http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/social_affairs/AJ201311010062
3. Kehoe, L.J. Tomokazu Matsuyama Privileged Outsider Private publication 2013
4. See Irvine, G. Japonisme and the Rise of the Modern Art Movement Thames & Hudson 2013
Wichmann, S. The Japanese Influence on Western Art since 1858 Thames & Hudson 1981
Spate, V & Hickey, G. Monet and Japan National Gallery of Australia 2001
5. Shiner, E. Tomokazu Matsuyama A Floating World Redux gallerywendinorris.com
6. Genocchio, B. New York Times March 5 2009
7. Newsweek June 20 2013

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