

GALERIE FONSWELTERS

Ryo Kinoshita – Our whisper is thinner than yours
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Ryo Kinoshita in conversation with Miriam Bettin.

Miriam Bettin [MB]: Your figurative motifs become abstract patterns and create a certain rhythm in your paintings. What image references do you draw on?

Ryo Kinoshita [RK]: I draw on references to nature, memory, movies, ancient objects... anything could work as an image reference. I'm especially interested in shape—I draw almost only shapes without light and shadow. When I find interesting color contrasts I take pictures. Those drawings and pictures function as sketches and sources but are not intended for a certain painting. In painting there are other rules or restrictions, so I need to transform these images in order to use them in my paintings. At that point it's quite important to know what kind of image the painting's support needs or can handle.

MB: You play with illusion and deception: At first the viewers perceive only ornamentation, but on looking more closely they discern the figures and objects that repeat and make up the overall picture. Among them are bodies, fishing hooks, planets, soldiers, toys, cats and mice. The depictions often alternate between playfulness and violence. If one tries very hard one can even decipher hidden text messages in some of your paintings.

RK: Artworks are like life without a mouth. They cannot speak, like someone who isn't good at communication. But their attitude or perspective does tell you something. So please try to look at the artworks a bit longer than you want, then they can whisper something to you. But it's also a pleasure when you find the key to another message, since everyone looks at art on the basis of their own background.

MB: Your materials include oil paint, beads, rubber, PVC, velvet, nicki textile, polyester, and just recently devore paste. To what extent do they determine the image or is the image rather defining the choice of material?

RK: I start to paint almost without envisaging an image. The choice of fabric, size, as well as the vertical/horizontal ratio come first. Each fabric has good aspects, so I imagine what kind of possibility the fabric has. Then I quilt or sew different fabrics together, or just recently work with devore on velvet. Even then I still don't envisage an image on the stretched fabric, but instead I get a more tactile sense of it. So, depending on what the painting support needs, I keep on adding or subtracting oil paint and material, and then eventually I get the bigger picture. I think I'm not able to envisage an image without material accidents.

MB: This sounds like a long and open-ended process in which you take on the role of a carer.

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RK: I usually say my painting process is similar to the work of a farmer. For example, let's say the potato is the painting and the soil is the image support. Without good soil you will never get good potatoes. But I don't want to know which vegetables can be harvested, so I don't plow the soil for certain vegetables. To discover something new in my paintings, I 'plow' the image support with different materials.

MB: I like your metaphor of the farmer and the potato. And I have to smile since you chose the most German of all vegetables. Your practice is inspired by fashion design and textile, especially from Japanese fabric technique and batik. Where did your interest in this craft come from?

RK: When I was child I liked to play outside by the sea, in the mountains and rivers. To be honest, in those days I didn't like to draw or paint because I couldn't keep my focus. I preferred to build a small base in the forest where I explored nature with a wooden stick and a small knife. Those childhood experiences made the haptic and tactile sense quite important in my work. With this knowledge it is probably quite easy to imagine why I'm interested in those crafts. My main inspirations – fashion, design, and textile produced by Japanese fabric techniques – comes from my daytime jobs in this sector; and the technique of weaving baskets I learned from the Italian artist Enrico David.

MB: Enrico is one of the professors you studied with at the art academy in Düsseldorf. In our very first conversation you mentioned him and his sense of humor that you picked up, as well as your common approach to not being afraid of emptiness. Your process also includes subtraction brought about by pulling threads from jute fabric, for example. Could you talk a bit about the meaning of gaps?

RK: Those gaps or empty spaces, the aesthetics of emptiness, evoke a theme that particularly interests Asian people. My example is the comparison of European churches to Asian temples. The church is a closed space with solid walls and only a door and windows. By comparison the Japanese shrine is an open space. The entrance to it cannot be closed like a church, and it is not distinctly separate or confined as a divine place. This difference is also reflected in the language: the German language is good for talking about content, whereas Japanese doesn't always require content. Let's say it works for dealing with anything related to content. It's not as direct and concrete. What these two comparisons have in common is a certain kind of ambiguity—that's where the aesthetics of emptiness originates, I guess. I think the aesthetics of uncertainty influenced the development of onomatopoeia and Haiku, the world's shortest form of poem. In a gap or empty space there is nothing to see but the presence of Asian aesthetics.

MB: When talking about the gaps in your paintings, one also has to mention their extensions: The decorative and ornamental borders are sooner references to an outside rather than limiting frames, this being similar to what you have just described in terms of Japanese temples and language. Also you work on the back of your canvases. In the Rauschenbergian sense your paintings are expanding, in every direction, toward three-dimensional space. What is their relationship to your sculptures?

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RK: I think my paintings aren't that different from my sculptures, since I actually treat both as three-dimensional work. The sole difference lies in aiming for either centripetal force (sculpture) or flat centripetal force (painting). Flat centripetal sounds a bit strange, but how I can explain... in a woven structure you see small gaps between the yarns. I feel each gap has a centripetal force; also the fabric as image support is a flat complex of centripetal force. As the dimensions of those two categories converge, sculpture could be a part of painting and vice versa.

MB: That's most probably why you also treat the sides of the stretcher frames. They become essential parts of your paintings.

RK: Let me add that fabric as an image support is flat, but when it is stretched on a frame it's already functioning three-dimensionally. Then I have to consider what the sides of the canvas mean. Most recent painters keep the fabric's color and do nothing special with it. But in painting you see so much movement, power and energy. So I feel the sides of the canvas have to be consistent with this.

MB: Your work conveys a certain immediacy and—despite the traditional material—an almost digital or at least artificial aesthetic. What value does time have in your work?

RK: In painting you can feel a certain time. For example in the paintings of Pierre Bonnard, I feel a slow time, similar to the rhythm of human breathing. I think the time in his paintings is related to the experience of time in general in those days. Development after the industrial revolution affected or changed our experience of time. Those who grew up with the internet or digital technology are living with another sense of time. If you compare the painting of Vincent van Gogh and David Hockney you see that kind of change.

I would like to create a certain sense of time when I paint by eliminating the brush, because I have the feeling that the movement or the trace of the brush brings a certain time with it.

MB: Thanks for your time, Ryo.

Miriam Bettin is a curator and writer based in Cologne where she works as an Assistant Curator at the Kölnischer Kunstverein.