

NISHIKI SUGAWARA-BEDA

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As a child, I learned Japanese calligraphy at school. When I was growing up, I watched my father, a calligrapher, practicing and saw how he approached his work. We talked about the meaning behind each proverb he was writing or about his practice itself. We still do. Together with Sumi-e (Japanese ink painting), Japanese calligraphy has become an activity that immediately connects me to my foundation as an individual and artist.

In my current series of work, I use this foundation as a basis for exploring the relationship between written language and visual. I start by searching for characters that embody a phrase or word expressing a particular theme. I draw the phrase in one layer and add another layer that explores possible nuances of the phrase, which creates a sense of space. I prefer paper as my surface, for the immediacy and finality with which it actively drinks up the ink. Finally, I add other

elements that travel through the space, introducing more nuance, supporting the ideas, and making the space more complex or contradictory.

One of my goals is to connect emotionally to the meaning conveyed by the character or phrase, so that everything I do is a physical expression of that meaning. "Decision", for example, represents the progressive feelings of decision-making through Japanese written language. The initial layer expresses uncertainty to form the painting's base, followed by layers in which I add nuance and complexity using language and brush strokes. The final layer declares decisiveness.

For more information please visit www.nishikibeda.com



FP: What is your background as an artist?

NS: I was born into a family in Japan that cherishes "do-it-yourself". We always built things together from scratch. I remember sanding a raw wood board for a table as a child.

After travelling around the world as a young adult, I immigrated to the U.S. where I began reflecting where and who I was, where and who I would be, and ultimately expressing my vision and thoughts through art.

FP: How would you describe the subject matter of your work?

NS: I am in-between, navigating the tension between my native culture and the ones I have encountered and assimilated through my experiences as a traveler and immigrant. The expression of this state of tension and my ongoing process of navigation are the subjects of my work. Juxtaposing the aesthetics of disparate cultures on the canvas, I cast light on their similarities and dissimilarities. My cultural identity is shaped in the spaces where they converge.

FP: Describe your process.



NS: As a child, I learned Japanese calligraphy at school. When I was growing up, I watched my father, a calligrapher, practicing and saw how he approached his work. We talked about the meaning behind each proverb he was writing or about his practice itself. We still do. Together with Sumi-e (Japanese ink painting), Japanese calligraphy has become an activity that immediately connects me to my foundation as an individual and artist.



In my current series of work, I use this foundation as a basis for exploring the relationship between written language and visual images in both virtual and physical spaces. For painting, I start by searching for characters that embody a phrase or word expressing a particular theme. I draw the phrase in one layer and add another layer that explores possible nuances of the phrase, which creates a sense of space. Finally, I add other elements that travel through the space, introducing more nuance, supporting the ideas, and making the space more complex or contradictory.

One of my goals is to connect emotionally to the meaning conveyed by the character or phrase, so that everything I do is a physical expression of that meaning. In Gratitude, for example, every mark and movement is a physical manifestation of gratitude. My mark-making is sincere and direct, a physical response to the emotion that is transferred into the work.

FP: How do you overcome artistic challenges?

NS: I am the biggest cheerleader for my work and the most unforgiving critic at the same time. Sometimes in my studio, I impersonate both characters and make conversations to let them debate.

I also talk to my “muse” often.

FP: Do you have a day job? How do you balance your time?

NS: I am an assistant professor of art at a university. During an academic year, it is hard to make your own time, but I try to be in my studio as much as I can even just for a few minutes everyday. My main creative period is summer, spending time in my studio and travelling to be connected to the world.



FP: What is the best advice you received?

NS: “Make a bunch of bad art.” I received this when I was getting ready for an artist residency. This comment liberated me and enabled me to create whatever comes to my mind without any hesitation. We create art and sometimes the work needs to ripen in a cellar, like good wine. Ideas can be hidden in unexpected places.



FP: Where can we see your work, are you in any upcoming exhibitions?

NS: I am having a solo exhibition at the Artspace Gallery at the College of Southern Nevada, NV (October 10 – November 21, 2014). The work that I am creating for this show is all about decision-making. It is in Las Vegas, and I hope to connect with people in Las Vegas!

Next year, a solo exhibition is scheduled at the Cultural Arts Gallery at Montgomery College, MD (March 30 – May 29, 2015). I am very honored to show there as one of the four exhibitions that address the theme, “Mark, Trace, Impact” during 2014-2015 exhibition seasons.

Some of my works are available at RiverHouseArt Gallery in Perrysburg, OH. If you are in Ohio area, I hope you can visit the gallery.

All images courtesy of the artist.