

Drawing On Tradition, In Search Of Oneself

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IU's MFA Students Exhibit Their Work



Twenty-two emerging artists are showing their work in thesis exhibitions this spring on the Bloomington campus, both at the **IU Art Museum** and the **School of Fine Arts Gallery**. Among this year's crop of graduating MFAs, at least two artists have biographical parallels and conceptual affinities.

Although their work looks nothing alike, photographer **June Yong Lee** and painter **Nishiki Tayui** are both expatriates from the Far East who have lived in the US for about a decade. Both have spent their time in Bloomington making art that grapples with cultural and ethnic identity.

The Body As A Landscape

Winner of the Jeannie Pearce Award at the 2010 Society for Photographic Education National Conference, **June Yong Lee's** photographs of nudes might be best described as skin landscapes. In the black and white albumen and ink-jet

prints, we see a few landmarks –breasts, navel, scars, hair, tattoos—but no outer contours of the body; the skin extends to all four edges of the print.

The photographer uses digital technology to stitch together multiple views of a model's torso in a single image, creating a 360-degree rendering of the torso, in the same way that a map of the world represents the globe.

The effect can be unsettling if the images are interpreted literally, as flayed bodies. Lee sidesteps the grisly associations, however, maintaining that “there's an interplay between fiction and non-fiction. Even though when you see this kind of image, it looks like I did flay the skin; it is a constructed image. In this project I'm trying to present the body, not as we know it, but some kind of unfamiliar view of it; to think about what's it means to have these kinds of marks or scars, and what's recorded through the skin; to show their narrative and their personal history.”

For the torso series Lee used models he didn't know who responded to his ads on Craig's List, but he didn't need strangers to embark on this dissection of identity. His first subject was his own torso. In his BFA work, Lee was similarly self-sufficient, rolling his face on a digital scanner to obtain the same kind of 180-degree image derived for a fingerprint. He then printed the scanned images of his face on mulberry paper, which he made in the ancient Korean tradition. The painstaking process offered him ample time to consider his cultural legacy and his relationship to it.

Pop And Tradition Collide

It so happens that another artist completing her MFA this year is examining personal identity in a trans-cultural context. Although she's become an American citizen, Japanese-born painter **Nishiki Tayui** describes herself as “in-between.”

“In-between” is also the name of Tayui's exhibition at the School of Fine Arts Gallery. Her paintings are large abstract compositions, where pop culture imagery collides with the conventions of Japanese landscape painting. In her painting “Hokusai Likes Chocolates Too,” over an ethereal wash of blues and earth-tones straight out of a Hokusai print floats a grid pattern that represents the distribution of colors used to coat M&M candies. There's a persistent playfulness in Tayui's paintings, which have been featured in the 2010 MFA annual edition of the juried art publication ***New American Paintings***.