

Yoshio Ikezaki

By Peter Frank 2016

For centuries, Western civilization and Eastern have regarded one another with a mixture of admiration, suspicion, and, most of all, curiosity. Even as mutual misunderstanding persists, the way art manifests in Asia has profoundly influenced art in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, and vice versa. The cross-fertility of Eastern and Western art has proven one of the most dynamic factors in modern cultural history, and shows no sign of abating.

Kylin Gallery has been established to encourage this cross-fertility through education, marketing, and, most especially, presentation of and support for art and artists that consciously “build bridges” between East and West. By opening in Los Angeles, Kylin has targeted the Pacific Ocean as the body of water it will span with its metaphorical bridge. But this spirit of bridge-building will lead the gallery in all appropriate directions. Its program will feature art by Eastern and Western artists alike who look across the geographic and cultural divides in order to marry and merge idea and practice. The results will be not simply hybrid, but fused: in the art at Kylin, it will be hard to tell where one civilization leaves off and the other comes in, but it will be easy to tell that both are present. Fittingly, the

gallery has opened – and dedicated its first year – to the art of Yoshio Ikezaki. Ikezaki is a master painter in Sumi inks, and equally a master papermaker. True to the spirit of East-West fusion, Ikezaki was educated both in Japan and in Florida, and has long split his time between his native country and America, most particularly southern California. Here in Los Angeles his expertise has garnered him many teaching positions, including at the Southern California Institute of Architecture (SCI-ARC) and at Art Center College of Design, which will mount a retrospective of Ikezaki's work this coming spring.

Ikezaki is both painter and sculptor – even though he “paints” with a drawing medium and “sculpts” with a medium designed to be drawn and painted upon. The flow of artistic media and practices into one another, characteristic of so much Pacific Asian art, comes naturally to Ikezaki; but his Western exposure has encouraged him to experiment with such overlapping of media. This is how he can paint and sculpt with materials appropriate in Western practice to drawing: he quite consciously brings forth the painterly quality of Sumi ink, and quite deliberately cultivates the sculptural possibilities of handmade paper.

Ikezaki first came to artistic prominence, certainly on this side of the Pacific, for his paper sculptures. He forges them from washi, an especially fibrous paper derived from the bark of the mulberry bush. Washi is the

traditional support for Sumi painting, but its bulk and malleability inspired Ikezaki early on to experiment with it sculpturally as well as to paint on it.

Although he continues to produce his washi sculptures, Ikezaki has been concentrating more and more on his painting (and relying on traditional Japanese papermakers to produce a special kind of washi under his supervision). The Sumi paintings produced over the past two decades evince Ikezaki's keen awareness of both Asian and Western – and, one can say more specifically, Japanese and American – painting. They flow and bloom promiscuously, as if painted by gesturalists such as those associated with American Abstract Expressionism and Japanese Gutai . But they also often coalesce – suddenly, surprisingly, almost magically – into landscapes, seascapes, and other natural scenes. In this regard, they inherit both from Asian scroll painting and from 19th century American landscapes (notably those of the Luminists and the Tonalists). A spirit of happy accident, valued by Eastern and Western artists alike, presides over Ikezaki's method.

As “modern” as Ikezaki's Sumi paintings appear, they have been produced using the most traditional of tools and techniques. The artist always employs the bamboo brushes used exclusively for Sumi painting, always makes his own Sumi (out of burned vegetable or pine tree ash and seed oil), and always paints on wet paper (western paper as well

as washi) . You might say Ikezaki paints juice on juice. In any case, he certainly maximizes the potential for fluidity, as if allowing his materials to go for one more run in nature before “locking” them into art.

“I try to capture a trace of the enormous energy collisions that occur in nature,” Ikezaki says, musing on the primordial forces that drive the behavior of his materials and continue to drive each completed piece. Helping him to tame the volcanic and entropic power of his materials is his virtuosic engagement of “Ma,” an aesthetic principle that introduces emptiness into fullness, interruption into flow, void into mass. Ma redoubles the energy of an image or object – or poem, or musical work, or movement – by allowing its opposite, its still ghost, into its presence. The unpainted portions of Ikezaki’s Sumi paintings work in exactly that fashion, counterbalancing the areas where the ink has accrued and – to extend the landscape metaphor – describing the water even as the ink describes the trees. Such interplay of positive and negative space is a universal quality, valued equally by painters in Japan and China and by painters in America and Europe; so it serves as an already built bridge between aesthetics. Ikezaki knows this well. It helps him create images and objects that fit equally comfortably into modern Western artistic practice and traditional Asian artistic practice. It is also one of the factors helping Ikezaki work in

both two and three dimensions, with many of the same materials and even techniques.

Especially at a time of great political and social shift, we look to points of commonality in order to communicate with the other humans who occupy the earth with us. Art is, or certainly can be, one of those points of commonality, and artists have striven over the last two centuries, and certainly since the end of World War II, to understand one another and their respective cultures through examination and emulation. This is a central tenet in Yoshio Ikezaki's artistic practice, one he cultivates with urgency and tenacity. And it is the central tenet of Kylin Gallery, which presents Ikezaki as a splendid embodiment of the gallery's purpose. At Kylin, Ikezaki's work is not simply beautiful: it is exemplary.