

Three Artists, One Family/ Japan, New York

Smitten by the grandeur of movie palaces emblematic of the golden age of Hollywood, Yoichiro Yoda devotes his considerable painterly talent recreating the magic of that era. The movie theaters exuded luxurious opulence and their programming offered an escape from the ordinary everyday travails into a dreamland of happy endings and often a hilarious fun. It is no surprise that Charlie Chaplin is featured in so many of Yoichiro's paintings.

And it is not only in paintings that Yoichiro conjure so ably atmosphere of those, once so immensely popular, places. The artists decided to conjure the full ambiance of the movie house at the Setouchi Triennale in Kagawa in 2016 where he transformed an old warehouse into a replica of a movie theater complete with murals and other decorative elements. There the audience could relax in the 1950's vintage theater seats-imported from United States for the occasion – and watch the video *Last Days of 42nd Street* also produced by the artist. This documentary is significant not only within the scope of Yoichiro's work – it bespeaks the times when entertainment was shared as a social event - imbued with varied aesthetics but always aiming to distract from often grim personal or societal circumstances. Going to the 42nd Street theaters, now largely defunct was an event when everyone wore their Sunday best and men would not venture out without a fedora hat. But there was also sadness and melancholy as brilliantly captured by Edward Hopper in his 1939 work *New York Movie*. However, it is not only nostalgia for the lost splendor of the movie land that is a fundamental source of Yoichiro's inspiration. Certain autobiographical events, friends past and present, domestic situations and the late beloved cat constitute a substantial part of Yoichiro's vocabulary. It is especially in

the 1990th that fellow students and acquaintances populated his paintings. In stylized portraits such as *Suzanne* 1990, or *Dearest Friends*, 1994 the artist conveys the knowledge of art history and his interest in the preeminent expressionistic masters James Ensor among them.

Yoichiro is also an accomplished musician and a number of portraits, mainly after 2010, are dedicated to fellow musicians and their instruments.

Travels and the associated anguish of departure and longing inspires many memorable movie scenes thus it is reflected in a number of Yoichiro large scale work such as *Fairy Tale (Mursashi)* 2017.

Great movie buff Yoichiro's overall style bears traces of the cinematic, it is however fully developed and independent painterly expression. That he is this accomplished should not come as any surprise since Yichiro grew up in the family of two serious artists. This gave him an early knowledge what constitute a discipline of painting and also brought a continuous encouragement.

Although all three artists share a working space in a large New York City loft, there are no emulations of each other's style. Within this closely knit family the respect and understanding for the singular disposition and preferences of each member is assured thus guaranteeing an independent development for everyone.

Yoichiro's father, Toshihisa Yoda, moved from Japan to New York City in 1966, together with a number of other Japanese artists who gravitated to the strong New York art scene. The second generation abstracts expressionism, Minimalism as well as Pop art were all part of the artistic discourse that made New York City the place to be. Toshihisa came not only to participate in the discussion and to produce his own art but also to further his formal education at the number of special institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum art School and the

Art Students League – these allowed enough freedom to let the individual talent grow while offering an invaluable tutoring by some of the most influential artists of the time.

Success of Toshihisa's 1975 exhibition at the Lotus gallery proved his decision to permanently relocate was a right one and he became an inherent part of the New York City art world. Through his entire career Toshihisa's style remained unabashedly abstract, both in painting, relief and small-scale sculpture he frequently works on simultaneously.

While in the early works such as the #70-11, 1970, we get to see loosely defined geometric shapes; these are later reduced to linear elements that command the pictorial space as #76-11, 1976. It is in 1980, that the work begins to expand in size and the complex web of mostly vertical elements applied in layers and spatters of colors, grows into seemingly borderless compositions such as *Untitled #A -10*, 1981.

At close examination the suggestion of loosely defined shapes imbedded in the painted layers was never truly eliminated and after 2000 we can detect them in numerous Toshihisa's compositions. Whether these are allusions to atmospheric conditions, organic world or any other form of the observed reality or are pure figments of the artist's vision will be left to our imagination. Mostly triangular shapes they became integral parts of the composition in number of paintings over the period on last two decades.

Clearly delineated in pieces such as *Umbrella Plant*, 2009, the triangular shape was liberated from the confines of the canvas after 2012 and stepped into the three-dimensional world, at first through the use of the low relief in *Triangle Series-Relief*, 2012-13, and later in the fully asserted three-dimensionality *Triangle –Series Solid*, 2014.,

It is time to turn our attention to the third member of this artistic triumvirate, Toshihisa's wife and Yoichiro's mother,

Junko Yoda. For many years part of the legendary Zabriskie Gallery, Junko seems to garner most critical attention. Born in Japan, where she trained as an artist, she moved to United States in 1969 soon to fully integrate into the busy New York artistic scene

Over the years Junko incorporated varied materials and techniques, which allowed her to experiment widely and to maintain rich studio practice.

However, through all the experimentation Junko always followed one subject matter - all her work is based on the observation of the landscape and the diverse phenomena of the organic world.

The artist states: " The subject matter has always come from landscape, looking down from high above on to the earth". Not only long international flights from Japan, but also shorter ones over Finger Lakes and Upstate New York inspired this long lasting romance with observing and mapping of the landscape. Seen "from high above" through the prisms of atmospheric layers, the reality on the ground is already abstracted only to be made more so by the artist's unbridled imagination. Highly textured and colorful *Ocean #12*, 1986, suggests not only real character and inner composition of this ever changing and majestic element but heightens our awareness of the drama taking place in the depth within the countless layers of currents and marine life. It is large bodies of water that attract Junko's attention - she aims to lead us to the recognition of beauty and struggles within this unpredictable element.

The richly textured surfaces of Junko's works are truly labor intensive. They are formed by the application of countless fragments of colored rice paper attached to the panels or canvas and over painted with acrylic. Subsequent layers of rice paper fragments are applied and again over painted. This

layering of three-dimensional elements and layers of paint results in the colorful low relief characteristic of Junko's work. Recently she added another technique to her repertory – that of photo collage. Devoted admirer of New York's Central Park, she made it her subject in countless works, most recently in the series of smaller pieces based on views of Untermeyer Fountain. Junko photographs the fountain and print the images on Japanese rice paper using inkjet printer. Selected elements are cut out and applied to rice paper previously patterned by dripping acrylic paint that itself is already attached to wooden panel or canvas. This layering gives the work feeling of depth, interesting foreground background interplay and abundant array of colors.

An eminent art critic, Grace Gluck, stated in a New York Times review of Junko's exhibition at Zabriskie Gallery in 2004: "Her low-key but eloquent ways with materials and her exquisite craftsmanship make her work a delight to behold."

Each member of this artistic family has personal approach to every aspect of creation. It with delight that we contemplate each piece - while discovering multiple aspects of the world through these artists' unique vision.

Charlotta Kotik,
Independent Curator, Curator Emerita
Contemporary Art, Brooklyn Museum

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1. Grace Gluck, *Junko Yoda*/ Zabriskie Gallery, The New York Times, Friday, July 2, 2004.