



IN BETWEEN

ARTIST MIYA ANDO CONJURES VISUAL
POETRY IN THE SPACES THAT SEPARATE
CULTURES AND CONTINENTS

BY DREW LIMSKY
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New York artist Miya Ando has to reschedule the interview. She is sweetly, profusely apologetic. She also has a good reason: the Met. “When they say come up, I have to come up,” she says with a humble, musical laugh.

She’s busy planning for her first talk at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, an event more than a year in the making. The subject? “I made several kimonos out of metal,” she says. “I came up with a process of permanently dyeing metals. So for this talk, I’ll be discussing my process and my heritage.”

It’s a heritage that all but dictates her art. Ando is a descendant of Bizen sword makers on her Japanese mother’s side (her father’s side is Russian). Raised in her family’s Buddhist temple in Okayama, Japan—and on a 25-acre redwood forest in Santa Cruz, Calif., that, she recalls, “was so off-the-grid that my parents had to put in a generator and a well”—she merges Eastern and Western aesthetic traditions, epitomizing the global artist, the artist who is permanently crossing borders.



ARTIST MIYA ANDO stands next to *KU*, an installation of charred cedar and aluminum that is included in the “Frontiers Reimagined” exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale.



“I have two very different senses of cultures, languages, ethnicities,” Ando explains, “so I’m drawn to finding the quiet, tranquil, harmonious spaces, and my pieces are an expression of that.” Educated at the University of California at Berkeley and Yale, she references her 16th-generation Japanese sword-smithing and Buddhist lineage by combining tangible and intangible elements—metals and pigment, reflectivity and light—to create transcendent paintings and sculpture.

Represented by the esteemed Sundaram Tagore Gallery in New York’s Chelsea gallery district, Ando produces her contemplative art (called “a must-see” by *The New York Times*) by use of anodized aluminum, dyes, lacquer, and resin—it’s art that conjures an enigmatic world of ghostly, gorgeous color gradients. Her pieces have taken their place on the national stage, in galleries in Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, Paris, Berlin, Australia, and Tokyo, while her public commissions have included projects in South Korea, London, New York, and California. For Art Basel



SHIKI FOUR SEASONS GRID

2014 // PIGMENT, URETHANE, RESIN, AND DYE ON ALUMINUM

“This represents the spectrum of everything that could possibly occur during the year—changes of light, feelings, emotions, memories. It’s 80 pieces and it’s a meditation upon the whole gamut of what one may see or feel during the year. It’s not overly complex in terms of its composition, but it has a lot of variation. I’d like to keep going with that work. Basically, my work from when I started in 2002 and 2003 has been about the same painting, with different iterations, as I look very carefully at color and light, and dissect every facet.”

SUNDARAM TAGORE GALLERY



Miami 2014, Ando and her work were honored at the showroom of the ultra-high-end, Paris-based Ligne Roset furniture brand (Pierre Roset is a collector of Ando’s work) and displayed at Art Miami. Next up: the 2015 Venice Biennale.

The globetrotting Ando has a delicate manner that belies nerves as steely as the materials she uses in her art—and this she attributes to the American part of her upbringing. “In Japan, you’re very constrained,” she says. “There is protocol, there is etiquette, and there is formality. But America is very free, in that nobody really cares if I’m of mixed race. In Japan, that’s a big deal.” With bracing candor, the light-eyed Ando shares the memory of being teased for having “eyes like a cat.”

But when she spent time as a child in Santa Cruz, “it was a place of no rules, wild country,” she says, suddenly authoritative. “So if I want to turn a piece of steel into an ethereal rainbow permanently, I’m going to figure that out, and I don’t care if nobody’s done it before me. I will go there. For me, impossible does not exist. My will is very strong.”

Ando’s recent “Kisetsu (Seasons)” show at Sundaram Tagore was composed of a series of meditative pieces, informed by innovative techniques as well as her continuing exploration of time and transition, ethnicity and identity. In these pages, she shares her intentions behind, and interpretations of, five key works from that exhibition. ●



KOYO

2015 // FICUS RELIGIOSA (BODHI) SKELETON LEAVES, MONOFILAMENT, DYE

“Koyo cannot be directly translated into English, but it’s something like ‘the transformation of autumn leaves.’ The leaves have been placed in bleach and I use a small brush to remove the green part of the leaf, and what you’re left with is the bones, the veins of the leaves. I dye those in a multitude of autumn colors and sewed them in a cascading configuration. Autumn is sort of a somber time, so the piece is a metaphor of the impermanence of all things. Being attuned to nature is something I really love about Japanese culture.”



BRONZE DIPTYCH

2014 // URETHANE AND PIGMENT ON ALUMINUM

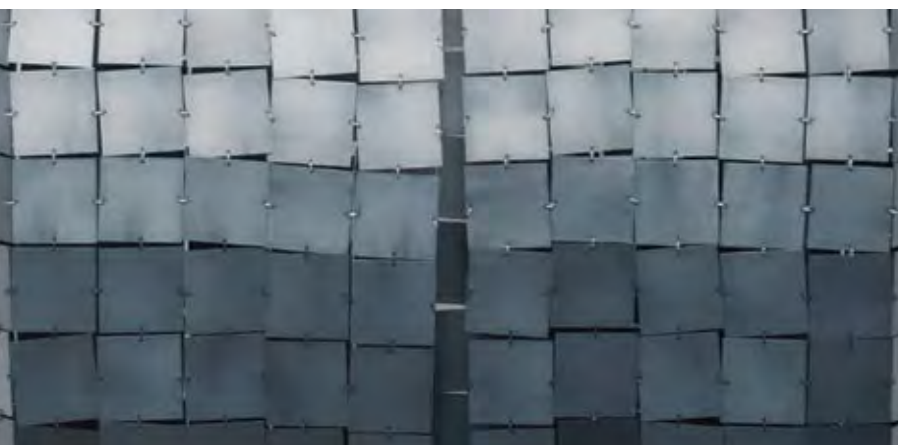
“This time I thought it would be interesting to do a transformation of a material into another material. So I thought I would take a piece of aluminum and turn it into something that looked like bronze. It’s fascinating to me—I love alchemy, I’m a chemist at heart, and I have a very scientific approach. I have this curiosity, and then it becomes an equation to solve. This diptych has the warmth of bronze. I’m a lover of bronze. The piece reflects light as bronze does, a warm light and a soft light, while aluminum is very cool; it’s almost blue. The piece is between representation and abstraction. I was raised in a tradition of Buddhism called the middle path: not too austere, yet not without any rules—the middle path. That appeals to me very much, because I’m not Asian and I’m not a Caucasian—I’m right in the middle.”



FORMAL BLACK KIMONO

2014 // HAND-DYED ANODIZED ALUMINUM

“The black kimono is worn during the most formal occasions—weddings, funerals—and it has your family crest on it. It’s almost anachronistic—in war, the crest is on your horse, on your banner, on your sword, on your helmet. It’s your clan, your identity. Still, to this day, there is meaning and identity from that. Now, the kimono that I constructed is actually made from hand-dyed aluminum plates that are tied together with blackened steel string. I came up with a very unusual technique of permanently hand-dyeing the metal. I applied the dye with a brush, like a painting, onto anodized aluminum. It’s very pioneering; I’m probably one of the first people to use it. I dyed the aluminum to look like fabric so it has that fade, that transition, and that’s my way of suggesting a continuum—it transforms but also maintains. So I like the language of a gradient that reverts back to itself. And I wanted to make something inspired by Japanese armor, but I used aluminum, which is a very contemporary material, because I wanted to look both backward and forward.”



KU (EMPTYNESS/THE SKY SHOU SUGI BAN)

2014 // CHARRED CEDAR SIDING AND URETHANE AND PIGMENT ON ALUMINUM

“*Ku* is an installation with an interior and an exterior. The interior has one contiguous painting going all the way around the room, made from aluminum. The idea was to create a quiet space, as if one could go inside the painting. You have a small space—a room—and the exterior is clad in charred, black cedar. The material is architectural cladding—fireproofing—and these panels were on the sides of the temple I grew up in. Another material connection I have to this piece is that my home in Santa Cruz had a giant redwood, more than 300 feet tall and more than 15 feet across. It was struck by lightning and died, so my dad made a treehouse for my sister and me in this hollow tree. I have some of my happiest memories from playing there. And I thought the only thing that connects my childhood in Japan and Santa Cruz was this charred wood. So I constructed a space of memory.”



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