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Los Angeles Painting and Sculpture and Important 20th Century Art

MAKING CHANGE

The Art of Hikaru Hayakawa In an Age of Paradox

Hikaru Hayakawa is the other Japanese artist. He does not belong to the order of the "Primal Spirit" artist which has been seen recently in Los Angeles. Rather, Hayakawa belongs to the New World Artist who looked out the window to see the foreign land beyond Japan. He left Osaka to come to L.A. in 1987. He went to graduate school at Otis. Hayakawa belongs now to the growing phenomena of Japanese Artists, like Kuniyoshi and Fujita before him who were fascinated with France and America. To that extent, the host city of choice for Hayakawa is Los Angeles.

Hayakawa lives and works in an improbable studio in the hills of Hollywood above the Sunset Strip. His studio is beyond the main two-story house, beyond the pool populated with Roman plasters. There is a garden, a courtyard and a compliment of household comforts in direct contrast to many Venice and Downtown artists' lofts. Within this unusual studio and setting, the paradox begins.

In this spirited Hollywood location, a chunk of paradoxes, a mixed bag of highpowered agents, swanky restaurants, deal makers, exotic cars, the livestock of the entertainment and film business, Hayakawa collects his consciousness and focuses his fierce energy toward art making. When he is ready and preparations are made, Hayakawa blocks in his concepts and narrative of cultural comparisons of Eastern ideals and values which interface Western personalities and "facts." Hayakawa builds a comparative and constructed visual history.

Hayakawa's painting, "Lost Right Hand" shows Augustus Caesar definitely and helplessly out of touch. An impotent Caesar, a man, a statue, a painting of both with his right hand severed. Caesar's royal leaves are missing as well. Caesar is just another guy identified and remembered as a vanished cultural artifact.

Caesar is placed vertically against a horizontal case of leaves, the eternal Haiku of time and vulnerability. Sealed, all the leaves are brown and grey and protected from any further drift or decay. The artist constructs a case of leaves, a perfect study center for quiet contemplation; the leaves slow down the tension and anxiety of seeing a limbless Caesar. Hayakawa intersects East and West as he sets up his paradox.

Seen another way, "Lost Right Hand" is a classic spaghetti Western set against a Kurosawa blizzard of leaves. The viewer shuffles back and forth between wordless mute and mutilated visual images. The painting is a known experience, a still life of leaves that have no smell, touch, or sound. But the leaves are as real as a science project; yet we are denied knowing anything except art. Hayakawa constructs a fiction of the real and the nonfiction of the artifact. His paintings define a new reality of paradox. He is aligned with Rauchenberg and Johns, recycling themes, motifs, and recalling from medium to medium. Hayakawa makes two cultures into a flip book bound together in one constructed history.

The upper portion of "Lost Right Hand" is a fragmented layered wooden frame. This sample of a frame is separated from the body of the painting; this separation opens even further the distance and perspective in the painting. Hayakawa opens spaces in the entire painted cultures questioning the painting or cultures openness. The West shuts in the edge or boundary; The East opens the edge. Hayakawa pushes the frame away exposing this paradox and polarity. Only the case of leaves is sealed as a fate. The paintings' frame is only a part, a suggestion, a memory with missing parts. Hayakawa uses fragmentation as dichotomy in art.

The bottom 1/3 of the painting is a gaggle of chains suspending blank frames from the Euroasian painting above. In this painting, as in many Hayakawa works, he constructs units of organized visuals. Ejected from the main body of the painting, the chains dangle, enslave the empty "cultures" helplessly. The chains act as a line dropping the bait in the artists cultural bottom fishing. The artist is clearly outside the political and social content of the painting. He waits to fill up the empty frames. "Lost Right Hand" is a conglomeration of loss and recovery, detachment and regeneration. Hayakawa's paintings are dismantled just as Japan was dismantled. But waiting in the wings, the artist is the connector, innovator and inventor.

In contrast to other contemporary narrative/conceptual artists who operate within an absurdist photo language system, Hayakawa's paintings are word free. Yet his work is about translations. Visual translations. Paint sometimes obscures and interrupts a date line chart, or redirects the messages of maps and other manufactured visual aids. Hayakawa uses graphs, maps, charts, the ephemeral information of science and industry in his paintings. His art creates a static forcing a gap between art feeling and information knowing in an opportune and changing time. We are slaves of knowing and to this problem Hayakawa shuttles us from visual to visual. His art distributes and alters what he wants us to feel. His walls or paintings are bulletin boards, his shelves safekeep objects, his drapes conceal a stilllife; Hayakawa constructs an arsenal of cultural slam dunks.

He is a populist artist, an encyclopedia of ologies beginning with anthro and ending with zoo feeding on its own nutrients. His painted and constructed "shelves" may be in fact selves.

The fascination with the origin of art continues through Hayakawa. We are intrigued with Picasso in France, Matisse in Morocco, Gauguin in Tahiti. The Tokyo, Berne and Paris in Sam Francis' painting is always mentioned. Looking at Hikaru Hayakawa we wonder what is Los Angeles or Hollywood in his painting. It is the grandness of de Mille, mixed with pragmatism of Little Tokyo.

Some paintings like "A Day for You" are funny and tragic. A visual equivalent of M Butterfly and all the Mikados. The materials of the painting are oil, paper, plywood, electric fan, frame, mirror, and graphite. This painting is driven by electricity. Old Japan is gone. Bring in the fans.

In the past year Hayakawa's art masterplan grew conspicuously larger. Crossbreeding painting and sculpture; he addressed the theme of NO BOUNDARY with exacting craftsmanship and consummate skills. His tradition of quality is clearly evident. After each painting, Hikaru Hayakawa slips outside his own painted and sculptured questions and problems. His issues are left to us. He gives us an art of global treasure hunting in a colony of paradox.

Joni Gordon, January 1991