

IN THE GALLERIES

'70s Japanese art reflects zones of austerity

BY MARK JENKINS

After World War II, Japan began to rebuild its incinerated cities with steel and concrete. These stark materials are among the subjects — assuming they can be said to have subjects at all — of minimalist artworks in “Photographic Images and Matter: Japanese Prints of the 1970s.” Several exceptionally austere pictures are featured in this survey, which was organized by the Japan Society and is currently at the Japan Information and Culture Center.

The show, which overflows the 1970s at both ends, is divided into two chapters. “An Age of Photographic Expression” reveals what happened when the camera supplanted the carving tools used to make the woodblock prints for which Japan is so well-known. The works in this section can be straightforward, but often call attention to the mechanics of image-making.

Akira Matsumoto and Katsuro Yoshida enlarge halftone dots to make their presence obvious. Satoshi Saito photographs a set of mirrors placed in a streetscape to reflect part of the off-camera scene into the picture. Kosuke Kimura's photo-collages incorporate lenticular printing to produce a 3D effect, and employ Day-Glo inks to yield the brightest hues in a show dominated by gray and brown.

The most recent piece is a 1991 lithograph by Lee Ufan, a Korean artist who has spent most of his life in Japan. Lee, who in 2019 transformed the Hirshhorn's grounds with stone and metal installations, is associated with “mono-ha,” Japanese for the “school of things.” The emphasis of this movement is on the innate qualities of objects, both natural and manufactured. This approach is illustrated by the show's second part, “Images of Autonomous Matter.”

Aside from Lee's prints, which abstractly echo his sculptural installations, the sparest pictures include three meditations on the nature of metal: Arinori Ichihara's all-over close-up of a corroded surface, Mitsuo Kano's study of a jagged scrap of a blue industrial substance and Tatsuo Kawaguchi's rough but elegant impression of what appears to be a rusted handle. Anyone seeking historical precedent can see

these prints as a continuation of Japanese art's traditional embrace of transience and imperfection. But they also express a will to rebuild Japan with new outlooks as well as new materials.

Photographic Images and Matter: Japanese Prints of the 1970s
Through June 28 at Japan Information and Culture Center, 1150 18th St. NW. us.emb-japan.go.jp/jicc/exhibits. 202-238-6900.

Edgar Reyes

The tailgate of a Chevrolet truck greets visitors to Edgar Reyes's “It Was Only a Dream,” which includes what Hamiltonian Artists' statement calls “found Chicano relics.” But these simple artifacts don't dominate the show, which was

partly inspired by the Mexican-born artist's childhood experiences as an undocumented resident of the D.C. area.

Many of his personal talismans are rendered more complex, and distanced, through computer alteration. Details of pre-Columbian sculpture are pixelated and printed on obviously synthetic fabric. Wooden lightboxes hold three photos that might seem to document Reyes' boyhood but are actually AI-generated. And a short video of men standing by a pickup truck is animated not by their action but by abstract moving patterns.

If the artist's approach is more mythological than anthropological, it also reflects the alienation that can result from technology. Ancient objects and images of religious rituals,

including a Roman Catholic procession, are digitally modified so they appear unrooted. The geographic border Reyes crossed seems less important than the porous boundary between reality and simulation.

Edgar Reyes: It Was Only a Dream
Through June 22 at Hamiltonian Artists, 1353 U St. NW. hamiltonianartists.org. 202-332-1116.

Chapman & Yates

Like sullen rejects from an animated Disney fairy tale, gnomes and goblins prowl Von Ammon Co.'s “Too Little Too Late,” warning of corrupted American fantasies. The show pairs sculptures and drawings by two Los Angeles artists, Jason Yates and Dinos Chapman. The

bulk of the work is by the latter, who began his career in his native Britain, where he long collaborated with his brother, Jake.

Yates's contributions include a free-standing troll, plated in chrome except for its bushy hair and tail. The rest are sets of found kitsch objects, arranged on shelves with the entirety spray-painted black. The tarry color mocks such single-word 3D edicts as “learn,” “love,” “dream” and, of course, “believe.” (The latter is perhaps Hollywood's most often delivered message.) It's up to the viewer to determine whether Yates personally rejects these wannabe-uplifting directives or if he thinks it's his home city that has subverted them.

Chapman offers a wall-mounted array of toy guns

covered with gloppy resin in fluorescent colors; they appear as soft as cotton candy, yet their shapes remain ominous. Three severed heads, bewigged and made of fiberglass skillfully painted with realistic skin tones, bobble on spikes. The heads all sport bulbous noses, as does a childlike figure that stares into a mirror. Gazing at itself rather than the chaotic burlesque around it, the black-clad tot is a totem of a narcissistic age.

Dinos Chapman and Jason Yates: Too Little Too Late Through June 16 at Von Ammon Co., 3330 Cady's Alley NW. vonammon.co 202-893-9797.

Cindy Press

While Von Ammon Co. regularly hosts artists who present American popular culture as diabolical, a new gallery a few blocks away is offering a more sanguine view. Cindy Press's paintings at Cabada Contemporary celebrate stylish women with photorealistic renderings of such things as a lipstick nestled against a woman's mouth or a wrist draped with bracelets. The show's title, “Wish List,” does not seem to be ironic.

A few characteristics separate Press's pictures from commercial fashion illustrations. The New York artist usually frames her subjects in extreme close-up, and often excludes faces. She also paints entirely in shades of gray, accentuating her link to photography. The effect is to give the paintings a detached vibe, suggesting that Press is interested in the form of her art as much as its content.

Thematically similar but more colorful are paintings by Sabrina Cabada, one of the gallery's two namesakes. (The other is her father, abstractionist Javier Cabada.) She portrays young women, often in or near water, in summery hues. In one picture, the subject lights a cigarette while reclining in a bath. It's a moment of bygone glamour, seemingly retrieved from a time capsule.

Wish List: Paintings by Cindy Press Through June 18 at Cabada Contemporary, 1054 31st NW, #009. cabadacontemporary.com. 703-629-5751.



VIVIAN MARIE DOERING/VON AMMON CO.

An installation view of Dinos Chapman's work in the show “Too Little Too Late,” which also features works by Jason Yates.

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