

ARTCHIVES

EASTERN INFLUENCES, GOOD VIBRATIONS

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A review of textiles and textile reverberations at the Dolphin Gallery

Ke-Sook Lee, "Little House (apron 1, 2, 6 & 10)" hand embroidered thread, tarlatan, installation of various dimensions, 2009. This is one of several works by Lee at the Dolphin Gallery through the month of June, along with textiles from Asiatica and new work from Debra Smith and Anne Lindberg. All images and photos: courtesy of Dolphin Gallery

Dolphin Gallery

Kansas City, Missouri

May 28 — July 3, 2009

by Blair Schulman

In conjunction with the 2009 International Surface Design Conference (Off the Grid), the work of three Kansas City artists who have a like-minded focus on texture and execution is on display at the Dolphin Gallery. Book-ending this symmetrically ideal collaboration are displays of textiles from Asiatica, the Asian-inspired boutique in Westwood, Kansas.

Installation view of Asiatica Vintage Japanese textiles.

Carelessly — but decidedly intentionally — strewn across floor-level palettes are vintage Japanese kimonos by anonymous craftsmen representing the textural and unending color wheel, lovingly collected by Asiatica owners Elizabeth Wilson and Fifi White. Each piece is unique, and they chose them primarily for their visual qualities.

One particularly striking view is an entire wall displaying a fully opened, piano-roll-like dyer's sample of colors and patterns. Dating from the mid-20th century, rolls like these were used by salesmen in Japan: the idea was that when summoned by a customer requesting a specific color or pattern, the seller had only to flip, or roll, to that specific choice. Thus, 50 ideas or more are easily carried around.

The Dolphin Gallery's clean, airy space allows the entire "sample" to be displayed in one unending rainbow, boggling the mind with the similarity that contemporary design has in connection with ancient pattern, technique and color.

Installation artist Ke-Sook Lee creates a cloud-like fantasy of gauzy fabric, whose four "walls" surrounded you. Contrasting the cold concrete floor below, the *Little House* gives the effect of the viewer's existing in, rather than on, a cloud. One felt isolated, protected and comforted all at once in the filmy womb-like environment. Surrounding walls display varying ideas using vintage fabric dating to the Victorian era that have a whimsical feeling of aprons. The burns and ruffles meandering throughout these fabrics are befitting a sensuous domestic goddess — a Venus whose work is never done; these are the scars

she bears.

Lee's use of thread as a mark-making device is representational of her life experience. Seeing what exists in the world of mother, wife, homemaker and artist, Lee explores ideas and textures with a capable and nurturing hand. The surface relays an embodiment that takes the artist beyond her own experiences of life in both the United States and her native Korea. A gallery corner holds an installation of wire and linen "bubbles" floating upwards, projecting a fairly lightheaded feeling, as if you were at the bottom of a champagne glass.

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The drawings of Anne Lindberg vibrate towards deeper, more subliminal responses. The open field of varied grays in the sole painting exhibited here has a very high spirit. Initially somber, the painting is actually not moody at all. In fact, its vibrations are a source of intense energy. The more you look at it — and one cannot help but see the enormous canvas the second you walk through the gallery door — these shades of gray sizzle. (So big is this canvas that el dorado architects had to build the artist a special table so she was able to stand upright to continue working on the piece.)

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Debra Smith, "Transition to Blue," antique silk/sewn , 15" x 12", 2009

Debra Smith's fabric collages, called *Transition to Blue*, 1-6, imbibe important snippets of Abstraction Expressionist feeling. The vintage kimono silks recall a specific importance to their Asian history and in turn, relate in full to the Asiatica displays in the next room. Smith picked up these specific pieces at a small, private kimono sale in Las Vegas soon after meeting with a potential patron in Berkeley, California, who, after going through Smith's entire portfolio, Web site and samples — mostly of her signature red — simply asked, "Do you ever work in blue?" The deep indigo colors in these pieces continue her thematic use of a single color. This current exhibition marks a new turn for Smith's career as she enters the year-long Roswell Artist-in-Residence Program in New Mexico this fall, an experience known by artists as the "Gift of Time."

The construct of all these artists plays with a certain idea about weave and texture and vibrations. The ideas are just a jumping-off point as to how each relates to the past and our present.

About Review's contributors.

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