

Miya Ando @ Nancy Toomey

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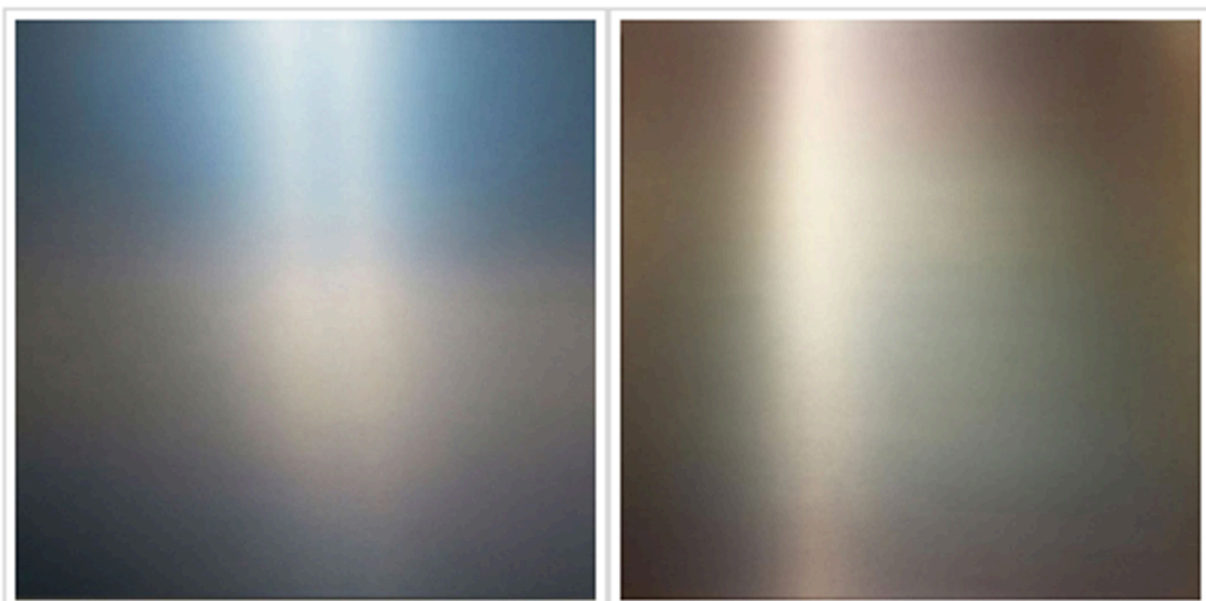


Hanging Tide 6.1, 2016, patina on woven silver, 57 x 107"

by David M. Roth

If past is prologue, then Miya Ando, an artist whose forebears include the Bizen samurai-sword maker, Ando Yoshiko Masakatsu, might well be Exhibit A. Living in a Buddhist temple in Japan for half her childhood, her family didn't expect her to carry on that tradition; but in her own way – through metal-based painting that involves chemicals, sanding, patinas, heat and polishing – Ando has extended sword making's spiritual values to a variety of decidedly non-martial pursuits. These include retina-tingling post-minimalist paintings; a controversial public sculpture made from steel remnants of the World Trade Center (installed in front of Zaha Hadid's **Aquatics Centre**); and a large-scale installation, *Emptiness the Sky*, which appeared at the 2015 Venice Biennial.

While Ando's art has its roots in Eastern thought and in modern metallurgy, it also aligns squarely with Light and Space art, a Southern California movement whose leaders (Larry Bell, Robert Irwin, Mary Corse, James Turrell, Craig Kaufman, DeWain Valentine, Helen Pashgian and others) used industrial materials and processes to pose epistemological questions. Ando's work does that, too; but to a degree that is possibly even greater than that of her SoCal predecessors, her work emphasizes time.

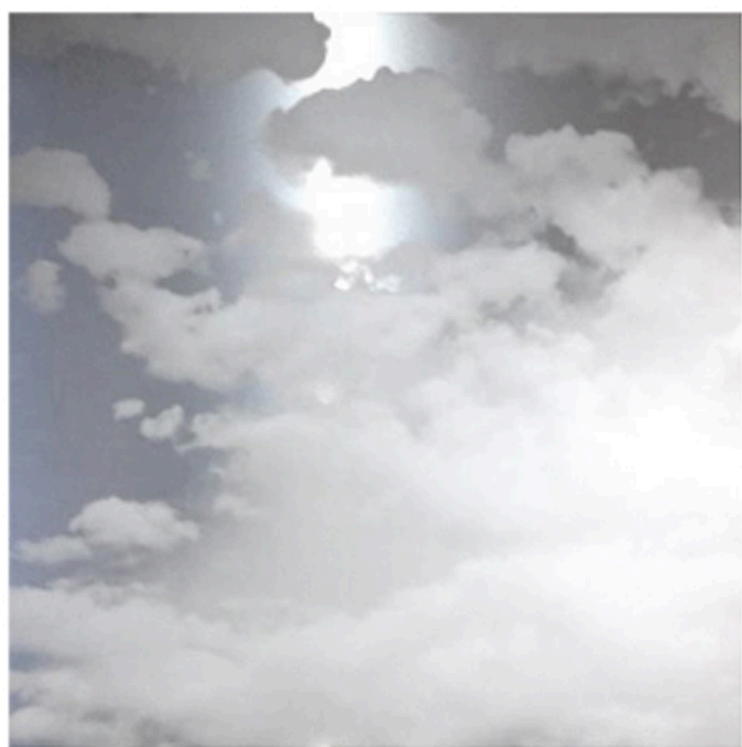


Evening San Francisco and Rainbow, both 2014, dye on aluminum, 48 x 48" each

In *Atmosphere*, an exhibition curated by Michelle Bello, Ando presents paintings on steel whose radiant fields of light behave anamorphically, changing color according to where you stand. The two most powerful, *Evening San Francisco* and *Evening Encinitas*, suggest dusky sunsets and/or shimmering moonrises, subjects that in painting typically show up as static events. Ando turns them into animate fields whose reflective and refractive surfaces issue an unending montage of grey-tinged pinks, aquas, golds and silvers. Unfolding almost kaleidoscopically, these shifting colors mimic the way the sun changes the "temperature" of light to obscure the "true" color of everything it strikes. By synthesizing that phenomenon, Ando enables us to enact it at our own pace, transforming what begins as a visual sensation into something approximating a philosophical quest. One that brings to mind John McCracken's assertion "that all things are essentially mental – that matter, while quite real on the one hand, is on the other hand composed of energy, and in turn, of pure thought."

Mokume Gane (Silver Wood), a gleaming minimalist grid of eight 1 x 1-foot wood panels coated with silver nitrate and dye, plays similar tricks with the eye, but the more interesting aspect is how the metals, having seeped into the wood, accentuate the shape of the grain, giving it the look of wind-swept tide pools. It's typical of the alchemical reactions Ando stirs up between media and substrate, using fire, abrasion and polishing and chemicals to conjure illusions whose inner workings are opaque. *Hanging Tide 6.1*, a wall-hung sheet of woven silver stained red and blue, calls to mind other associations: aerial views of the ocean (owing to deep shadows

cast by the folds of the "fabric") and burial shrouds (from dripping patinas that suggest cauterized wounds). In *Cloud*, an ink-on-steel panel painting, Ando creates billowy cumulous formations. They appear to leap from the surface, as if made of raw cotton. Only the extreme glare coming off the panel stops the illusion from becoming palpable. In this regard, Ando invites comparisons to **Jimi Gleason**, an LA artist who also paints with molten metals. But



Cloud 4, 2015, ink on stainless steel, 48 x 48"

where Ando induces meditative states through works in which color seems to have materialized through some sort of vaporous exhalation, Gleason etches molten metal with acid, yielding highly tactile visions of topographic upheaval.

Where the show falters are in two tondos, each resembling caramel-dipped wafers flecked with droplets of metalflake paint. Both would look at home in the décor of *Mad Men*. Such is the danger of working with things that shine. Ando mostly avoids such missteps. By creating art that makes us question our senses, she highlights, in the best possible way, a central teaching of Buddhism, which is that reality is a construct meant to be questioned, pierced and deflated. Concretizing the ineffable in paintings that are essentially inscrutable, Ando affirms the validity of the tenet that lies at the core of her personal belief system and her art.

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Miya Ando: "Atmosphere" @ Nancy Toomey Fine Art through June 25, 2016.