

TOMIO KOYAMA GALLERY

小山登美夫ギャラリー
106-0032
東京都港区六本木6-5-24 complex665 2F
TEL 03-6434-7225
FAX 03-6434-7226
www.tomiokoyamagallery.com
info@tomiokoyamagallery.com

TOMIO KOYAMA GALLERY
complex665 2F, 6-5-24, Roppongi,
Minato-ku, Tokyo, 106-0032 Japan
TEL +81-3-6434-7225
FAX +81-3-6434-7226
www.tomiokoyamagallery.com
info@tomiokoyamagallery.com

Furuhashi Yoshiro

Anne Eastman

I would not describe the landscape around Nikko as gentle. Mount Nantai, the tallest of them, has large swaths of eroded slopes that point straight down to the town below. Lake Chuzenji is unfathomably deep, spilling out in a tall waterfall that falls dizzying heights, The river below carving through giant boulders. Once every few centuries, there is a terrifying storm that threatens to wash the place away entirely. This power gives the mountains a sacred presence—they are seen as living beings, watching over the generations of people and animals who have lived here. Naturally, it became a place of pilgrimage—people come to Nikko looking for something.

Some people are driven far to find where the interesting things are happening. Others recognize that if you stay long enough, something interesting will eventually appear where you are. I realize when I come back again and again to Nikko, I may be doing both of these things at the same time.

My relationship to Nikko is neither as a local or a visitor, but somewhere in between. I came first as a child when my parents bought a house here. I've come to learn its ways over decades, in stretches of time coming back to take care of our house, though I never thought of it as a place to come searching for answers or inspiration.

Furuhashi Yoshiro appeared to me this year, when I saw his watercolors of Nikko at the Kosugi Hoan Museum. His washy, wonky, colorful and abstracted landscapes appealed to me. They brought to mind modernist American landscape painters such as Marsden Hartley and Milton Avery, though I guessed he hadn't looked at them.

I felt the love of a familiar landscape that I feel in Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings. Last year, on my birthday, I was invited to visit Richard Tuttle's home in Abiquiu, NM. He took us on a walk, pointing out across the windy alpine desert to a strangely familiar flat-topped mountain in the distance. As soon as he told us, I saw it—the shape inhabiting so many of O'Keeffe's Abiquiu paintings. Furuhashi, like O'Keeffe, knew Nantai-san, Chuzenjiko, Daiyagawa well enough to abstract them, play with them.

I recalled Robert Smithson's *Monuments of Passaic*, a totally different kind of artist examining his surroundings from birth, re-imagining it as mysterious and ancient. And I imagined projecting *Smithson and Holt's Swamp* video next to Furuhashi's images of reeds by the Inarigawa River. These associations tumbled through my mind.

Mel Bochner passed away last week. I first met him through his nephew when I was working at a less-than-renowned film school in New York. He needed someone to splice together a 16mm film—an austere structural film depicting long panning shots of water on the Hudson River. This was the late '90s; I was new to the city and didn't yet know his work well but I recognized that he was that rare combination of intellect and humor, and he was very kind. It was partially because of him that I ended up going to art school at Yale, though I didn't tell him when I took his seminar. I mention him because some years ago I reached out to him when I learned by chance, that not only had he come to Nikko, but he had used stones from the river by my house for a piece he presented at Gallery 360 Tokyo in the early 90s, right around the time I left for college.

When I contacted him about it, he said he still had them in his studio and those rocks were very special to him. I find his work from that time subtle but mysteriously expansive, challenging but humorous too. Radical limitations that traced the line between concepts of art and a random scattering of river stones. How do we recognize intention from chance, does it even matter, are some of the matters that deeply interested me, perhaps because it's hard to make sense of my movements through the world otherwise.

Aside from the famous Japanese artists, those many prints that Frank Lloyd Wright sold in his down years (some of them bought in Nikko), I wondered how many contemporary artists have passed through Nikko searching for something. I'm always finding that someone I know or admire has been here.

Those who are from Nikko over time witness this steady tide of visitors—though they don't distinguish between them as either artist, tourist, religious pilgrim, school kid, or urban escapee. Many born here leave, looking for something else: a different place, a better job, city life. Where do you go for inspiration when the place you're from is where everyone else comes looking for it? There are some who stay, and some who leave and come back., There's some pride in staying, or perhaps stubbornness that binds a humans to a place. I like to say that people born and raised in New York can be called provincial—limited, in a certain way by their vision that New York is the center of the world.

Furuhashi Yoshiro was limited in those ways. He worked in a small space, not even a proper studio—which is possibly why he painted with watercolors. Without a car to reach distant scenic spots, he had the same view of the mountain and paths along the river from birth until death. It's clear to me that this place produced the peculiar soft intensity, those quirky forms in this works—layers of subtle washes built up to a density

that seems at odds with the nature of watercolor.

Some might call them just another landscape painting, just another tree painting—the world is awash with so many. But they catch me. They hover between the earnest renderings of a Sunday painter and something more unexpected—modernism, abstract expressionism, fauvism—manic yet restrained, internalized. They are both phenomenological and painted from a waking dream, but adamantly specific: These mountains—not some mountains. This tree—not a tree.

Formalism and modernism are arguably escapist in this politicized moment, but these works still speak to me—as a quiet argument that limitations, primary experience, and working within one's circumstances can bring about a kind of freedom.

A visitor in the last weeks of Furuhashi's retrospective at Nikko's Kosugi Hoan Museum this year apparently became belligerent and demanded her ticket refunded. I was told she wrote a scathing review of the show on Google Maps. Curious, I went to read it. She was angry that the art was like that of a child, which further confirmed my sense that he was onto something.

Unlike those that travel far away to expand their world, Furuhashi returned again and again to the same mountain paths. Like a wave lapping at the same shore, exposing different stones. Through the peculiarity of decisions, the limitations of his circumstances—compromises, even—in an effort to express something just beyond his grasp, Furuhashi Yoshiro arrived somewhere altogether better.