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KIMONO

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Artist's Statement-- Kimono

We are all citizens of the world. I want my art to contribute to cross-cultural understanding. One of my greatest fears is that we, as a people, will fail to understand each other because we are ignorant of each other's cultures, and therefore we will become isolationist, or worse, we will go to war. I would like my art to act as a means of soft diplomacy between nations; where cultural differences are exchanged for better understanding. Art exhibitions are central to an understanding of contemporary art through their capacity to open small, temporary, but often virulent public spheres where an intellectual and artistic vanguard can incrementally broaden the scope of artistic freedom as well as political speech. An exhibition of art can have an effect on the loosening of governmental and societal restrictions. Artistic expression and political speech are covered under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Freedom of opinion and expression are not rights that are granted in many countries today, but many in the international community are working towards greater freedom. My artwork aims to embody and call for freedom of expression.

Globalization opens up opportunities for the international community to push for freedom of expression. It is precisely because the history of kimonos is a multi-cultural one, invented by the Chinese, then adapted and adopted by the Japanese, then altered by Western colonialists and changed as it permutated from the aristocracy to the middle class and to laborers, that I felt that it was relevant to today and the cross-cultural influences of globalization. This summer, I purchased two authentic Japanese kimonos, (one an everyday cotton one to use as a model for my drawings, and the second, an elaborate silk one with hand stitched brocade –originally used as a wedding kimono.). When first entering the gallery, the viewer sees the authentic Japanese objects representing kimono culture. On the other side of the wall, my exhibition represents the Japanese culture of my imagination –i.e. things influenced by Japanese culture, but transformed by my Western imagination and created into something completely new.

When I draw, I think of Jim Dine. I am especially taken by his bathrobe series. I am attracted to the idea of drawing a garment that looks like there is a figure in it, but in fact, there is not a body in it. Like Jim Dine's bathrobe drawings, my kimono drawings are drawn, then erased, then drawn again. My drawings are palimpsests. Viewers can see the layers beneath the final drawing. Lines from the previous drawings are ghostly presences. I do most of my drawings with either charcoal or Conte crayons on charcoal/pastel paper. I use a fixative before erasing the drawing with a chamois and tortillons. I enjoy working with charcoal. Not only do I like getting my hands dirty like I am working in the garden, but I like the way charcoal drawings look. My kimono drawings are a reflection of the fact that I suffer from dysmorphia –i.e. body image distortion is a brain condition where the person is unable to see himself or herself accurately in the mirror and perceives features and body size as distorted. Although the drawings were made

about the same kimono on the same mannequin, each drawing shifts in size and proportion, reflecting my brain's body image distortion.

Kimonos are the national garb of Japan. Today, businessmen and women will come home from work and change from their Western style suits into more comfortable kimonos. Some people claim that kimonos are not feminist because they are too restrictive. However, Lisa Darby, an American anthropologist who was the first Westerner to go to Japan and learn to be a geisha, contends that kimono are not restrictive if you know how to wear them properly and if you live in traditional Japanese architecture with tatami mats and furniture which is low to the ground. In fact, Japanese laborers adapted aristocratic kimono, by shortening it and adding pants, to work comfortably in the fields and factories. These fabric panel objects are humorous commentary on Minimalism and cultural sharing through globalization, just as some Japanese Manga artists use American animation for their models and ideas.

I've been reading about the art of Japanese screen making –many of which illustrate the different seasons. I designed four 3' x 6' Masonite panels. Each of which is backed by a 1" x 2" plywood frame. Each panel's colors go with each season, starting with the cherry blossoms of spring, or Sakura. The panels are not paintings; they are a Westernized version of a screen or a wall.

My small paintings are influenced by Abstract Expressionism, the Russian avant-garde, and a Japanese Zen philosophy called Wabi Sabi. Leonard Koren defines Wabi Sabi as "the quintessential Japanese aesthetic. It is a beauty of things imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete. It is a beauty of things modest and humble. It is a beauty of things unconventional…. The metaphysical basis of Wabi Sabi [is] beauty at the edge of nothingness." My small paintings are made with watercolors and Indian and Chinese inks on calligraphic. They are made with vibrant pigments. The calligraphic paper they are made on is fragile and impermanent. When I display them, I screw two screws to the wall, place the paper over the screws, and then attach the painting with micro-magnets. Because they are displayed in this way, when the air conditioner comes on, the paintings move in the breeze. They are an expression of my own liberation in that I paint them not only in a free style, so that the colors bleed into one another across geometric boundaries. I paint them as if I were free to paint without any concern for anything except color and form, or for what I am doing in the moment. They are painted mindfully. Each is unique and a form of intimate meditation. Taro Gold explains in his book, Living Wabi Sabi, the connection between Wabi Sabi mindfulness and freedom: "Appreciate this and every moment, no matter how imperfect, for this moment is your life. When you reject this moment, you reject your life. You don't have to settle for this moment, you are free to steer a different course, but for now, this moment is yours, so be mindful to make the most of it." Is this kind of abstraction compatible with my political concerns? Yes. I believe that my small abstract paintings embody the spirit of pure form and free expression. Also, because the geometric forms bleed into one another, they reflect on the diplomatic tensions which exist between countries who fight about borders, and they recall John Lennon's hopeful words, "Imagine there's no countries".