



TIMELESS TIES

*History meets
modernity in SAM's
simultaneous exhibits.*

BY BARBARA
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At first glance, the two exhibits that recently opened at the Susquehanna Art Museum may seem a world apart, but a closer look reveals connections that break through the surface.

The first exhibit, "Fleeting Pleasures: Japanese Woodblock Prints," introduces museum visitors to the rich history of ukiyo-e prints using some of the beloved images in Japanese art history.

Although female figures appear frequently on the woodblock prints, the art form itself is a masculine one. To some degree, it is an older one, with pieces dating from the 1700s to the mid-20th century.

Among the woodblock prints is Toyohara Kunichika's "Courtesan with Kamuro," dated from 1865. It depicts a geisha putting on a kimono of red, purple and white and wearing combs and pins in her hair. A young apprentice, or kamuro, assists her.

Torii Kiyonaga's 1784 multicolor woodblock print, "Women Enjoying Cool Evening by River at Shijo in Kyoto," demonstrates a style the artist became famous for. The women's slender figures are emphasized by the gentle sway of their ornately decorated kimonos and by the woodblock's plain-white background.

"Kiyonaga's slender, ornately dressed women became associated with an idealized vision of beauty in Edo Japan," said Lauren Nye, director of exhibitions at SAM.

"Fleeting Pleasures"—its works originating from the Georgia Museum of Art—reflects the cultural traditions of the artists' times. The woodblock prints are created through an elaborate and highly technical process, inspired by the bustling metropolis of Edo, which was the former name of Japan's capital, Tokyo.

In contrast, "Deep Roots: Ornamentation and Identity" features five contemporary artists, all female, who are inspired by their personal history, as well as their cultural roots. As opposed to the Japanese artists, they come from diverse places: India, China, Central America, Lebanon and Los Angeles.

But the two exhibits have much in common. The pieces in "Deep Roots" are inspired by traditional patterns and modes of ornamentation, meaning decoration or embellishment.

"The contemporary art complements the shared themes, patterns and aesthetic" of the older art form, Nye said.

"This unique pairing of exhibitions illustrates how ornamentation has been timeless across cultures," she said.

During the past century, Nye pointed out, embellishment and ornamentation fell out of favor, replaced by minimalism in art and architecture.

"But many contemporary artists are now referencing and re-learning traditional techniques of the past to root themselves in their own cultural identity," she said. "The artists in 'Deep Roots' demonstrate this in their mixed-media pieces, using rich patterns and textures and rooting our contemporary lives to the past."

In Patton's "Untitled (Julia)" work from 2020, the floral patterning that appears in many of her paintings acts as personalized ornamentation by the artist.

"In many cultures around the world, flowers denote care and devotion at weddings, funerals and celebrations," Nye said. "The florals in Patton's work serve as a memorial to the lives of the figures portrayed. By enlarging the found photographs and adorning them with colors, symbols and patterns, she celebrates the women pictured."

Zughaib's piece, entitled "Arab Spring," reflects a complex background. Her paternal grandparents were from villages in the mountains of Lebanon. However, before the French colonists separated Lebanon and Syria, her family was considered Syrian.

In the Arab world, she was surrounded by the patterns on carpets, tiles, dishes and mosques and was drawn to their flat blocks of color and the way cultural patterns could tell stories and convey messages using symbols rather than figures.

"These patterns and symbols can reach across borders and communicate among cultures," Nye said.



Alice Anne Schwab, SAM's executive director, encouraged the spontaneity and creative pairing of the two exhibitions. About once a year, Nye is "allowed to go all out" in curating an exhibition "from scratch," Schwab explained.

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"Fleeting Pleasures: Japanese Woodblock Prints" and "Deep Roots: Ornamentation and Identity" run through Jan. 22 at the Susquehanna Art Museum, 1401 N. 3rd St., Harrisburg. For more information, visit www.SusquehannaArtMuseum.org.

The exhibits are accompanied by tours and activities for young people of different ages, coordinated by Bonnie Mae Carrow, education manager of the museum. Featured artist Helen Zughaib will be at the museum Jan. 13 and 14 for an artist's talk and hands-on workshop.

Upper Left: Daisy Patton, *Untitled (Julia)*, 2020, oil on archival print on panel, 30" x 24". On loan courtesy of K Contemporary Gallery, Denver, Colorado.

Lower Left: Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, from the series *Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji*, 1829-32, multicolor woodblock print. On loan courtesy of the Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia; Gift of Alfred H. Holbrook.

Upper Right: Helen Zughaib, *Arab Spring*, 2014, gouache on board, framed 43" x 33".

Lower Right: Cecilia Paredes, *Silk*, 2015, photo performance inkjet print, 41" x 37.5". On loan courtesy of Ruiz-Healy Art, San Antonio, Texas.