



Keiko Hara 慶子

S E A S O N S

Topophilia – Imbuing

Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture  
August 20, 2004 – January 16, 2005





Tophophilla – Imbuig/Seasons 2004, mixed media installation. Photos courtesy of Hans Matschukat.







Keiko Hara

慶子

S E A S O N S

It isn't unusual to find people who recently have come from other lands to live in America and who experience a sense of limbo, of being neither of the old country nor of the new. It is unusual to find someone who can translate such feelings into visible form.

Keiko Hara is one of that select few. Born in North Korea of Japanese parents, growing up in Japan and coming to the United States as an adult, she uses the universal language of art to describe feelings that accompany radical life transitions caused by separation, loss, and psychological isolation. Through her personal experience she has become acutely aware not only of the trauma for individuals, but also of the cultural boundaries that separate the world's peoples. Her beautiful abstract artworks are poetic manifestations of her wish to bridge the gap between the physical world and the inner world of meditation where the physical becomes the spiritual.

Some years ago the British poet Sir John Benjamin coined the word "topophilia" to signify a sense of attachment and yearning each of us has for special places. Keiko Hara notes that the word is close to the Japanese term for "aware," which describes a nostalgia caused by a love for a person or thing as well as a place and made special in memory because of its beauty, or more likely, by something else that has given it exceptional power. She has adopted the term topophilia as her overall theme, and she explores its various aspects in large multi-media installations as well as in paintings, prints, and collages. Her singular command of processes, materials, and techniques gives her the ability to bring her ideas into visual and tactile fulfillment. With a can-do approach that belies her small size, she takes on ambitious projects, often in several

mediums at the same time, and is undaunted by any construction, equipment, or technical requirements.

With *Seasons*, the multi-media "house" in this exhibition, Hara is interested in certain conditions of the actual physical world that are so basic they are essential to survival. Although every person on the planet knows the effects, both good and bad, of hot, dry, cold, and wet climates, our responses to them differ. Because we feel weather conditions rather than seeing them, the artist's challenge was to give material form to fleeting sensations. To do so she constructed a separate environment in a space resembling a room for each element. Doors lead visitors from the entrance through each room and ultimately, to the exit door. Panels filled with colors, patterns, and tactile surfaces cover the walls and floors. Strangely, the viewers become part of the artwork as they glimpse themselves in mirrors that are inserted in some of the panels and notice that the images on the panels are being projected onto their bodies. While the content of the rooms differs, a disorienting sensation is present in all.

The exterior of the installation is covered with collaged and painted words or fragments of words on paper panels. Some are legible; some are not. Some are written on the back side of the paper, others are pasted on the front, sometimes overlapping, with all but a few purposely obscured. They are taken from the myriad languages of the world to define the weather element treated in each of the rooms. European, Asian, African, North and South American languages, including those of indigenous peoples; all were searched for translations of "hot," "cold," "wet," and "dry."

Keiko Hara holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees in art from institutions in the United States thereby achieving a thorough grounding in European art as well as exposure to trends in international contemporary art. With her students at Whitman College where she heads the art department, she follows current American and European styles and the issues they deal with. Nevertheless, traces of her upbringing and education in Japan where she sometimes works with printers in Tokyo and Kyoto, are evident in her art. Her use of paper, her interest in calligraphic markings, the flat shapes and application of color, all associated with the art



of Japan, remain integral in her work and can be seen here in *Seasons*, in the large paintings on canvas, and in the many square sheets of paper comprising *Topophilia – Imbuing – Maru*.

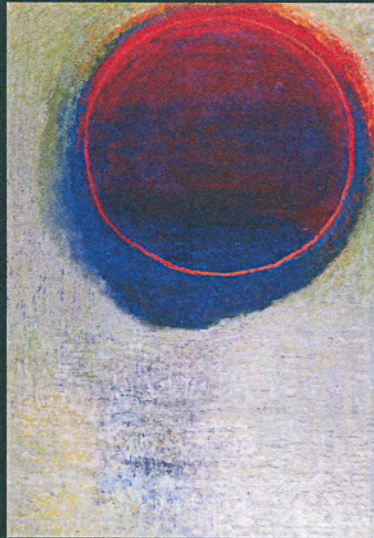
"Maru" means a circle in Japanese. As a symbol it has many significations, most having to do with wholeness, especially as in all that exists, all time, and all possibilities. In each of the squares of handmade paper in Hara's impressively large grid, a circle, sometimes faint but always there, encloses a fragment of fabric. These come from many countries and cultures and are not preserved antiques but, rather, are the remnants of items worn by people. They are important to Hara because of their identity with the life histories of ordinary people. As an example, she relates a little known but touching story: "...Japanese orphans in China from World War II have been seeking their parents and families for more than fifty years after the war ended. Their parents gave all the money they had to the Chinese families who were willing to take them. The babies were wrapped in fabric or distinctive clothing which belonged to their parents, but they had no documentation to identify them. They are now seeking their families with nothing but fragments of those pieces of fabric left behind." While viewers may appreciate the artwork simply for its formal beauty of design, texture, and color, Hara's content, as in so many of her pieces, addresses currents that underlie human life everywhere and are timeless.

In 2002 Hara created a portfolio titled "Verse from the Sea" consisting of twelve prints based on her memories of walks by the seashore in Japan when she was a child. She has continued to employ the title "Verse" in recent works, including the two very large oil paintings in the exhibition, but adding the word "imbuing." The dictionary meaning of imbuing is "to saturate or to impregnate, e.g., applying dye in fabrics." Although both *Verse – Imbuing in Yellow* and *Verse – Imbuing in Red* meet the literal definition, Hara uses it as a metaphor to signify the metaphysical world where (she writes) "the reality that exists between the physical world and a world beyond the physical one" exists. Metaphysical content aside, both paintings can be appreciated for their visual aspects alone. They are virtuosic applications of color in which brushstrokes and color combine to create an emotional, as well as a visual and an intellectual, impact.

Hara observes that the paintings are her personal reflections of multi-cultural issues existing in current global conflicts. While the terrible conflict between two ancient cultures now raging in Palestine and Israel is a dramatic example, each of us, in spending time contemplating these expansive, vivid works, is given entrée into that mysterious, unknown "reality" existing just beyond actuality.

**Lois Allan**

Portland based art critic and author



*Verse – Maru 2002, oil on linen. Collection of the Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture. Photo courtesy of J. Craig Sweat Photography.*

## TOPOPHILIA

Some years ago the British poet Sir John Benjamin coined the word "topophilia" to signify a sense of attachment and yearning each of us has for special places.



## from the curator

My first encounter with Keiko Hara's work was accidental. Shortly after I arrived at Whitman College in August 1999 to teach art history, I took a stroll across campus and came upon Hara's three gates. Constructed out of bronze and glass, the slender gates rise from a small stream up toward a canopy of tree branches. In art historical terms this deliberate interplay between sculpture and a natural space is called environmental art. However, when I sat down near this secluded spot to find rest for contemplation, I was hardly aware of the installation as art. Indeed, even as I passed the spot over and over again during the next two years walking to and from the classroom, I connected with the gates on an immediate level, oblivious of their position in the grand chronology of art history. I saw the gates flickering in sunlight, noticed their reflections in the water and their changing appearance during each season. Here, serendipitously, I was introduced to the theme of Topophilia – translated as awareness – that has preoccupied Keiko Hara in a number of past exhibitions, including those at the Tacoma Art Museum and Marylhurst University. Hara's multi-media installation *Seasons* at the Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture (MAC) is an exploration in awareness, made manifest in the encounter of environment (seasons) and human consciousness (language).

Although Walla Walla is only three hours driving distance from Spokane, it took a considerable number of individuals and organizations to make the exhibition happen. I am grateful to the entire MAC staff, especially Ryan Hardesty and Valerie Wahl, my co-curators, who managed the project with great skill and enthusiasm. We are honored that Lois Allan agreed to write about Hara's work for this publication. Her expertise in contemporary Northwest art is invaluable. Our gratitude to all of those who sponsored the exhibition is



Tophophilia – Imbuung/Maru, detail, 2004, mixed media installation.  
Photo courtesy of Hans Matschukat.

immeasurable. We thank The Spokesman-Review, Klünder I Hosmer, US Bancorp Foundation, Frank Paluch from Perimeter Gallery, Lorinda Knight from Lorinda Knight Gallery and Peak Video Productions. In conversations with Keiko Hara's friends and supporters, the one thing that everybody invariably comments on is her work ethos. Keiko and her student assistants have worked very hard to complete a very complex installation on time. Her dedication to the work has been a source of inspiration to all.

**Jochen Wierich, Ph.D.**  
Curator of Art

## exhibition sponsors



**THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW**



Perimeter Gallery, Inc., Chicago

Lorinda Knight Gallery

Peak Video Productions

Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute

Hiroshi and Michiko Takaoka

Dr. Elizabeth Welty

and many Whitman College Alumni



Keiko Hara 原 恵子



Photo courtesy of Aaron Johansen.

- 1942 Born in Korea to Japanese parents
- 1945 Moves to Japan with family
- 1971 Moves to the United States
- 1983 Granted permanent US resident status

#### EDUCATION

- 1976 M.F.A., Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI
- 1975 M.A., Printmaking, University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee WI
- 1974 B.F.A., Painting, Mississippi State University for Women, Columbus, MS
- Oita-Kenritsu Art College, Oita, Japan
- Gendai Art School, Tokyo, Japan

#### TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 1985 to Present Professor & Rotating Department Chair, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA
- 1980 to 1985 University of Wisconsin, River Falls, WI

#### GRANTS AND AWARDS

- 2001 Invitational King County Public Art Commission Grant, Seattle, WA
- 1997 Purchase Award, Portland Art Museum, Gilkey Center for Graphic Arts, Portland, OR
- 1994 Artist Trust Fellowship, WA
- 1991 Purchase Award, Oita Art College, Oita, Japan
- 1989 Artist-In-Residence Grant, The Washington State Centennial Commission of Washington/Pacific Cultural Connections at Centrum
- 1983 Artist-In-Residence Grant, Artpark, NY

#### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2004 Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, Spokane, WA
- 2003, 2000, 1998, 1995, 1992, 1990, 1987, 1985, Perimeter Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2003 Perimeter Gallery, New York, NY
- 2002, 2000, 1997 Lorinda Knight Gallery, Spokane, WA
- 2001 Autzen Gallery, Portland State University, Portland, OR
- 2000 Foster/White Gallery, Seattle, WA
- 1999 Prichard Art Gallery, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID
- 1999, 1996 Foster/White Gallery, Kirkland, WA
- 1998, 1994 Sheehan Gallery, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA
- 1997 Elizabeth Leach Gallery, Portland, OR
- 1995 University of Oregon Museum of Art, Eugene, OR
- 1994 Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
- 1990 The Gallery 3286, Mississippi University College for Women, Columbus, MS
- 1984 Catherine G. Murphy Gallery, St. Paul, MN
- 1981 Gallerie in den Vierlander, Hamburg, Germany

#### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2004 "Mark My Word: text, code and literary allusion," Museum of Northwest Art, LaConner, WA
- 2004 "Impressions," Jundt Art Museum, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA
- 2003 "New Prints 2003/Autumn," International Print Center New York, New York, NY
- 1999 Graphica Creativa International Print Exhibition at Triennial of Jyväskylä Art Museum, Finland
- 1998 "ColorPrint USA," National Invitational Print Portfolio Exhibition
- 1998 "Japanese/American: The In Between," Art Gym, Marylhurst University, Portland, OR
- 1997 "International Print Art Exhibition," Portland Art Museum, Portland, OR
- 1997 "Abstract Painters," Center on Contemporary Art, Seattle, WA
- 1994 "Graphic Legacy," The National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.
- 1986 "Contemporary Screens," The Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH

#### SELECTED COLLECTIONS

- Jundt Art Museum, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA
- Northwest Museum of Arts & Culture, Spokane, WA
- Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
- Muskegon Museum of Art, Muskegon, MI
- Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee, WI
- Detroit Institute of Art, Detroit, MI
- King County Arts Commission, Seattle, WA
- Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, WA
- Portland Art Museum/Gilkey Center for Graphic Arts, Portland, OR

#### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- 2003 ARTNEWS, "Keiko Hara at the Perimeter Gallery"
- 2003 Critic's Choice/Chicago Reader, Fred Camper
- 2000 "Keiko Hara-Semaru," University of Idaho, Prichard Art Gallery
- 1999 "Print Inside, Graphica Creativa '99," Jyväskylä Art Museum, Finland
- 1998 "Japanese American In Between," Terry Hopkins, Director, Art Gym, Marylhurst University
- 1997 "Contemporary Printmaking in the Northwest," Craftsman House, Lois Allan
- 1994 Artweek, "No Discernable Path: Keiko Hara at Tacoma Art Museum," Loch Adamson
- 1986 "Contemporary Screens," The Art Museum Association of America
- 1983 "Printed by Women U.S.," Philadelphia, PA

2316 W. First Ave., Spokane, WA (509) 456-3931  
www.northwestmuseum.org



NORTHWEST  
MUSEUM  
OF ARTS  
& CULTURE