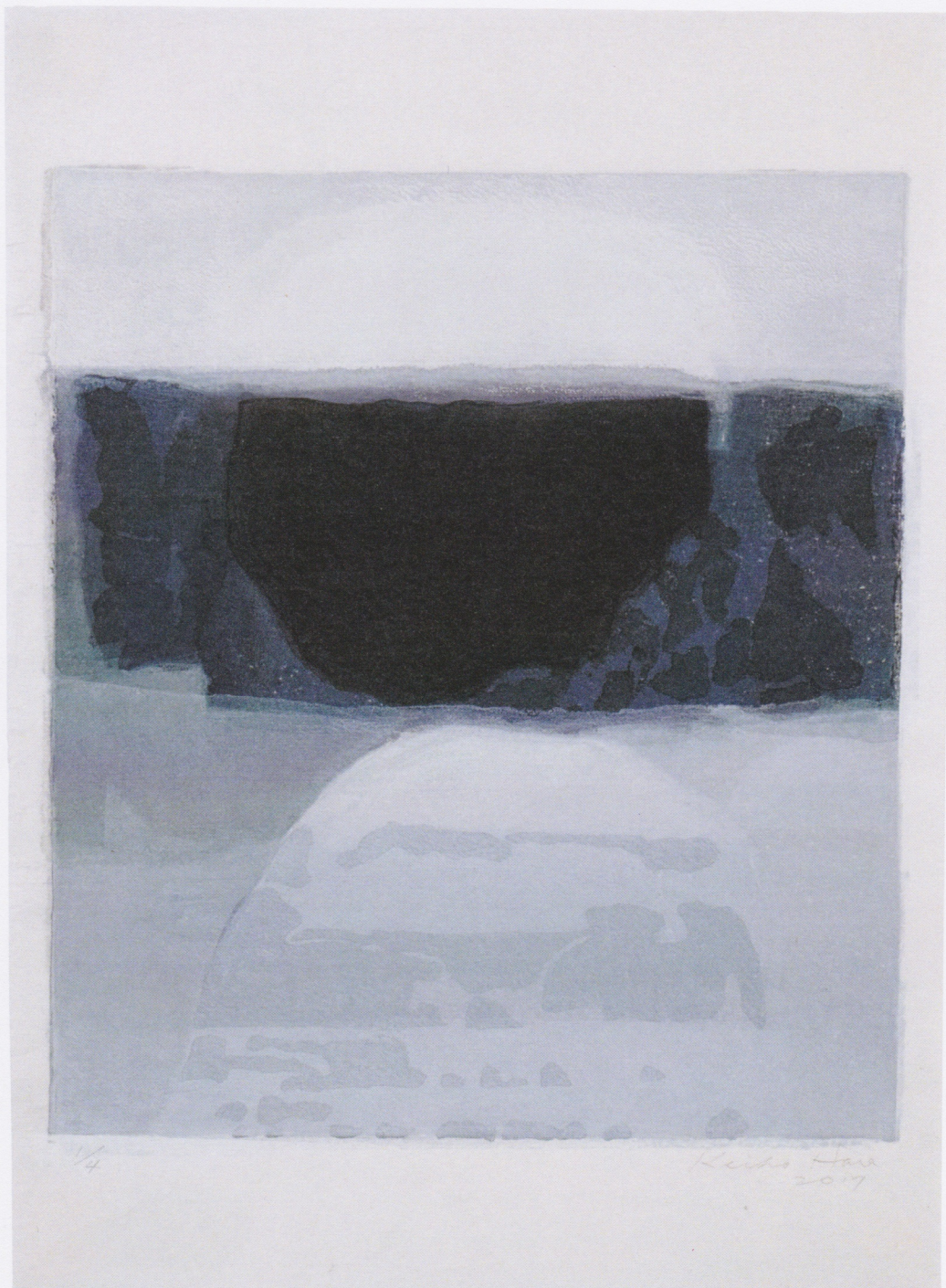


Keiko Hara

Mokuhanga / A Selection of Woodblock Prints



Keiko Hara and Her Journey into *Mokuhanga*

At school in Japan, Keiko Hara learned to make woodblock prints—*Mokuhanga*. It was something every pupil did. So, like all Japanese, she grew up familiar with her country's tradition of printmaking. Then, as a young artist in Japan and later in the USA, she chose to focus her studies on painting and other printing methods—lithography, screenprinting, and intaglio. She used these media in innovative combinations, eventually adding elements such as collage, papermaking, sewing, glass, and installation: Hara has never been an artist for whom a single medium is adequate to express her poetic vision.

In 1987, after living in the USA for sixteen years and now an art professor at Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington, Hara had the chance to rekindle her interest in *Mokuhanga*. A faculty fellowship took her to Kyoto for a semester to teach and to conduct research. Her students were Americans in a specialized program at Doshisha University and her subject was *Ukiyo-e*—that 18th century flowering of woodblock prints produced for Japan's merchant class and featuring famous actors, courtesans, and views of nature. Her Kyoto time provided invaluable lessons. Hara recalls watching for hours as craftsmen made woodblock prints for tourists at a museum. She took note of how they handled the brush applying pigment to the block. That evening she tried to emulate their skill, using up sheet after sheet of paper in the process. She was discovering her artistic heritage together with her American students.

Back in her USA studio, Hara incorporated woodblock—albeit in a contemporary way—into her art. *Topophilia 2*, 1990, a series of three black-and-

white prints, is easily recognizable as a woodcut. There is a strong sense of the artist's hand as she has scratched, cut, and carved into the block, creating powerful graphic images with vibrant, dynamic lines. After carving, she would ink the block, then lay down a sheet of paper, burnishing the back of the sheet with a baren to transfer the inked image to paper. Her experimentations revealed how, in woodcut, the pigment was absorbed deep into the paper. She relished these opportunities for depth and translucency and incorporated the effect in two major three-dimensional installations: *Topophilia 3—Quilt Work*, 1992, and *Topophilia 5—100 Gates*, 1994, each with tall panels containing many prints.

The prints Hara made by herself would, in traditional Japanese work, be made by a team—an artist, a carver, and a printer. Plus the team would “edition” their work for commercial purposes, creating print after print until the block wore out. Hara, unlike most print artists—then or now—has less interest in editioning her work. She prefers to make each individual print a new variation, often changing the registration, placement of imagery, color, and layering. Using printmaking this way gives her the greatest potential for exploring her ideas.

A new turning point in this journey of discovery about *Mokuhanga* came in 1996. Hara saw the work of an extraordinary, fourth-generation *Ukiyo-e* craftsman, Tadashi Toda, who was printing for Western artists such as Francesco Clemente and Helen Frankenthaler. His work was exquisite. Boldly, she invited him to Whitman College. As he left after his time at the college, he invited her to work with him in Kyoto. It was,

she says, “The opportunity of a lifetime.”

Toda printed for her *Topophilia 7–Gray, Blue, Red, Green*, 1996, four prints with 21 woodblocks and 23 colors. Over the rich, intense colors, Hara added stencil, collage, and words. The words refer to a Noh play where a mother searches for her son in the shifting mists of the Sumida River. Hara was interested in what is real or unreal, visible or invisible: the central shape in each print seems like a solid form, until it shifts and all but disappears . . . just as the son’s ghost melts away under the mother’s embrace.

Along with his encouragement of her vision and his acceptance that Hara had added her own elements to his master printing, Toda gave Hara something more precious yet . . . a fuller understanding of the potential of *Mokuhanga*. She learned, for example, that he had used 21 blocks—each several times—to achieve a profound depth of color and that his process enhanced, rather than concealed, the beauty of the paper he printed on. Most important, she saw the sensitive and innovative ways he interpreted contemporary artists’ work.

In the years since then, Hara has continued to investigate *Mokuhanga*. Unlike artists who choose a medium and use it unchangingly all their life, Hara constantly pushes to invent new techniques to achieve her goals. She never lets herself reach a finite place of knowing all there is to know about any medium. Endlessly curious, she continues her *Mokuhanga* exploration, saying, “The process takes me to a place I’ve never been before.”

Lyrical beauty, subtle translucency, glorious color, haunting shapes, patterns echoing nature—these are what she strives for in her abstract

work. But her greatest goal is to create depth on a two-dimensional surface. “My interest is in spatial qualities,” she explains. “I am a sculptor working with finite space.” *Mokuhanga* enables Hara to create that sense of space: sometimes by choosing the finest, transparent *washi* paper, so the viewer may see through to other images; mostly by—as she learned from Toda—printing from the same block again and again. The more she prints, the richer and more nuanced the work becomes as the water-based pigment layers deep into the fibers of the handmade paper. The *Mokuhanga* process, she says, offers a depth and brilliance like no other medium, neither printing nor painting. This richness is evident in a recent 2017 work, *Verse R—Black and White*, although her quest still continues. To further create depth and visually extend her work Hara often adds collage or uses stencils that deposit a raised layer of pigment.

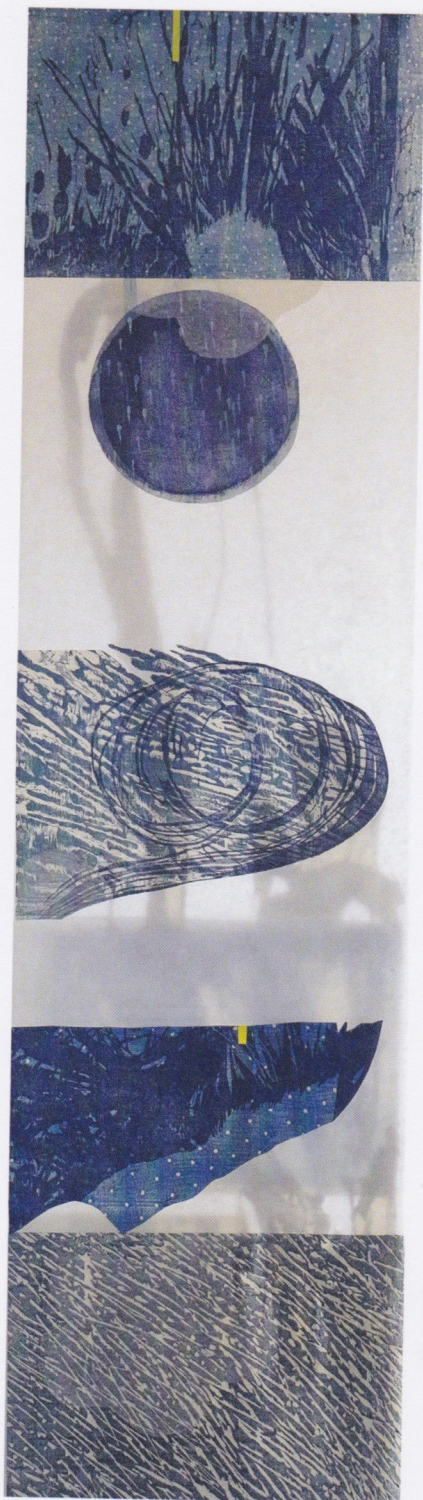
Throughout her long career Hara has been guided by the idea of *Topophilia*, meaning “a strong love of place.” It shapes her thinking, the content of her art, and her titles. She believes each of us holds in our heart feelings about a place of meaning and beauty, be it concrete or imaginary. *Topophilia* is part memory, part longing, but it is not just about looking back. It can provide power from the past to shape the present and influence the future. Her journey with *Mokuhanga* is one such continuum: from an ancient tradition, she has developed the Japanese woodblock to meet her contemporary artistic needs. She continues to explore its as-yet unknown possibilities.

—Patricia Grieve Watkinson
Seattle, Washington 2017





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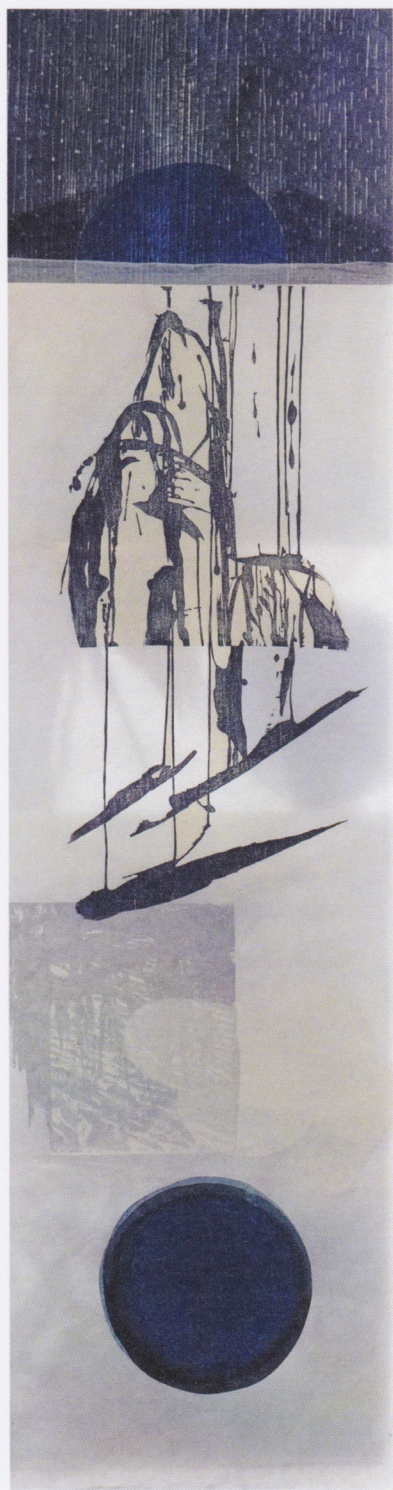


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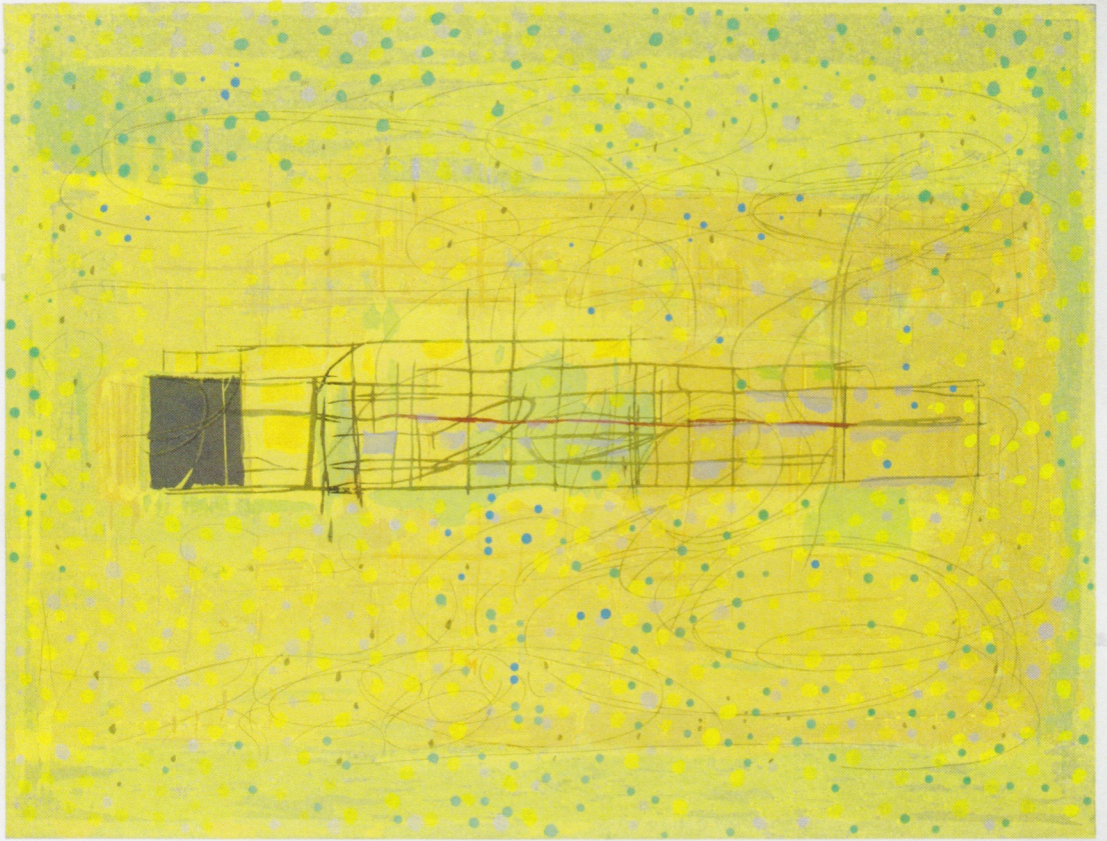




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Line Work



Commons Gallery,
Sammamish City Hall

801 228th Ave SE,
Sammamish, WA 98075

Opening Reception
November 9, 2017, 6-8pm

Exhibition Dates:
October 13, 2017 - January 19, 2018

On behalf of the Sammamish Arts Commission, I invite the reader and the visitor to spend time with these assembled prints created by Keiko Hara. This exhibition, *Keiko Hara Mokuhanga / A Selection of Woodblock Prints*, offers insight into the richly colored, visually dynamic woodblock technique perfected in Japan during the 17th through 19th centuries, known internationally by the Japanese term *Ukiyo-e*. Using this traditional technique and adapting it to suit her vision, Keiko has produced stunning contemporary work.

The Commons Gallery in Sammamish City Hall provides the community, through the hand of an artist, the opportunity to experience the language of the arts and use that language as a component in building community.

It is an honor to showcase Hara's extraordinary work. This multidimensional artist from Eastern Washington has a distinguished career as an educator, printmaker, painter, and installation artist. Her ability to investigate different disciplines with a willing risk-taking in that exploration is an inspiration. Her work has been exhibited nationally and internationally and we are grateful she has chosen to share her work here.

Appreciation is offered to the City staff for their efforts in support of this exhibit and to Patricia Watkinson who has made the connection with Keiko Hara a reality.

—Barbara Jirsa, Sammamish Arts Commission

Front Cover: Verse R · Black and White, 2017, Mokuhanga Print, 13 x 11". **1.** Topophilia 2 - Series 3, 1990, Mokuhanga Monoprint, 29 x 22". **2.** Verse Ma and Ki - Memory 7-2 (A side view), 2016, Mokuhanga Monoprint with collage, 84 x 24". **3.** Verse Ma and Ki - Memory 7-2 (B side view), 2016, Mokuhanga Monoprint with collage, 84 x 24". **4.** Topophilia 7 -Red, 1996, Mokuhanga Print, 32 x 24", Collaboration with Tadashi Toda, Ukiyo-e master printer in Kyoto, Japan. **5.** Verse Ma and Ki-Memory 7-1 (A side view), 2016, Monoprint with collage, 84 x 24". **6.** Verse Ma and Ki-Memory 7-1 (B side view), 2016, Monoprint with collage, 84 x 24". **7.** Verse -Wind, 1999, Mokuhanga Print with stencil, 20 x 15", collaboration with Tadashi Toda, Ukiyo-e master printer in Kyoto, Japan. **8.** Topophilia Imbuing seasons, 2004, Multi-media installation with printed images, projection and sounds, 89 x 92 x 89" each, four structures. **Back Cover:** Topophilia 7 -Blue, 1996, Mokuhanga Print, 32 x 24", collaboration with Tadashi Toda, Ukiyo-e master printer in Kyoto, Japan.

KEIKO HARA moved to the USA from Japan to pursue her career as an artist and earned an MFA at Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1976. In 1983 she was granted United States permanent resident status as an artist. Hara lives and works in Walla Walla, Washington, where she is Professor of Art Emeritus at Whitman College.

With over fifty solo exhibitions nation-wide since 1976, Hara has also been included in numerous invitational group exhibitions throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. Among museums that include Hara's work in their permanent collections are the National Gallery of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Detroit Institute of Arts, Portland Art Museum, Library of Congress, Jundt Art Museum, and many others.

Hara has been awarded grants from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation and Artist Trust of Washington State. She won the Philadelphia Print Award and first prize in the Michigan Print & Drawing Exhibition.

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