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'Tales from China' exhibition at Miaja Gallery, Singapore

Nissa Kauppila and Kim Xu explore Chinese visual languages at Miaja Gallery

Sep 22, 2017 | By Ilyda Chua



— Kim Xu, 'November 14'

Miaja Gallery presents a joint exhibition featuring American artist Nissa Kauppila and Chinese artist Kim Xu. Titled 'Tales from China', the exhibition shines the spotlight on the distinctive Chinese art style. It will run from 22 September to 1 December.

At first, Nissa Kauppila's classical Chinese paintings seem an odd choice. Growing up in a small country town in northern Vermont, Kauppila went on to study at the Rhode Island School of Design and the University of Vermont. Considering her all-American background, then, the style she chooses to work in seems, at best, charmingly quirky.

But looking at Kauppila's admiration of the natural world, the classical Chinese style of painting, with its distinctive minimalism and focus on the elements of nature, seems a natural choice after. "Imagine, for a moment, being a young child, observing a small part of nature for the first time," says the artist. "A butterfly lifting in flight from a flower, or a bird descending upon a branch — when one focuses on this moment happening, all other components of nature around it dissolve. You are left observing this small moment in wonderment."



— Nissa Kauppila, 'untitled: 9°49'23.7"N 83°50'07.3"W'

"This has been my experience, and thus I have always painted my subjects in regards to capturing a moment with as little distraction as possible," she adds, explaining that her minimalist approach stems from her desire to keep the compositions as simple as possible around the focal area of movement.

Kauppila's works highlight a variety of different subjects and colour themes. For example, one of her pieces, 'Untitled 32', depicts a number of dried seed pods and two single feathers, suspended just above them. Kauppila explains that the piece was inspired by a very familiar seed pod found in her hometown of Vermont, especially during the autumn.

"It embodies a perfect marriage of delicacy and sturdiness, and in fact is reminiscent of the nature and way of life in the place that I grew up in," says Kauppila. "Vermont is a place where nature is able to withstand the harshness of the environment in a beautiful way. And while I am continuously drawn to the flora and fauna of Southeast Asia, I find myself on occasion needing to revisit the places I also hold dear."

But while her love for nature is her primary inspiration for her artwork, she's also heavily influenced by China, where she currently resides in.



— Nissa Kauppila, 'untitled: 22°16'38.6"N 114°10'14.0"E'

"There is a wonderful balance between the feng shui aesthetic and cluttered chaos in southern China that I find absolutely appealing and invigorating," she says, explaining that having immersed herself in a foreign country and culture, she has found a newfound appreciation for the importance of communication. This theme of change and interaction is one that she increasingly tries to reflect in her work, she adds.

While Kauppila's works are heavily reflective of the classical Chinese style of painting, Kim Xu's pieces are, in contrast, a fusion of styles from the East and West. Blending traditional Chinese watercolour techniques learnt from his grandfather with Western-style oil-based techniques, he uses flowers and the female body as a motif in his works.



— Kim Xu, 'Face of Harmony #1', 2016

It is not just in his technique that his works reflect a surreal mix of both worlds, however. In 'Face of Harmony #1', for example, he depicts a classic natural landscape, complete with traditional curved-roof buildings, but outlines the image in the silhouette of a woman's face and hairstyle, giving it a refreshingly contemporary edge.

More information at miajagallery.com.