

Of Asian Nature, Spirit And the Garden State

By BENJAMIN GENOCCHIO

JERSEY CITY

"RESONANCE: Five Asian Women Artists in New Jersey" is a slick, accessible exhibition at the Harold B. Lemmerman Gallery at New Jersey City University. It's a pity that the space isn't as accessible, for it's located up winding stairs, down a corridor and on the third floor of the main administrative building here.

"Resonance" is the university's nod to Transcultural New Jersey, the statewide project developed by Rutgers University to boost the profile of New Jersey's multicultural artists. Midori Yoshimoto is the curator, and it's her first exhibition since taking over this modest little gallery space about 18 months ago. Before then, it mainly offered up faculty exhibitions and the occasional dreary show by a visiting professor.

Ms. Yoshimoto has plans to start showing more Jersey City artists in an effort to give the gallery greater local currency. Good idea. The present exhibition makes a worthy start, presenting the work of five East Asian female artists who have either lived or worked in New Jersey at one time or another. (Three are still here, two have since moved.)

As the title indicates, the exhibition is about tracing stylistic and spiritual affinities among the works of the artists. These affinities are roughly characterized, as Ms. Yoshimoto's catalog essay advises, "by unique blends of Eastern and Western aesthetic cultures and spirituality." Nature is also a collective reference point.

Tomomi Ono uses subtle modeling and coloring to create blurry, seemingly stain-like lithographs of organic motifs. Some images remind you of micro-organisms viewed under a microscope, while others resemble sprouting plum seeds or bursting flower buds. Somehow all of her imagery appears to float atop the paper, giving the prints a rare, almost ethereal lightness. They are beautiful.

Mayumi Sarai moved to New York from her native Japan in 1991, although since 1994 she has lived and worked in Jersey City. Her works are also loosely inspired by nature, the artist constructing chunky, rough-hewn wood sculptures that look like Tiffany baubles crossed with Flintstones finery. I particularly like how each piece is covered with Band-Aid-like wooden patches: oddly, it makes them seem precious.

Two artists here (Wei Jane Chir and Soonnam Kim Singer) are accomplished painters. Each one has a refined aesthetic

sensibility, and each is fully in command of her chosen materials, style and medium. What their works have to say beyond this is another issue, but at least they make for un-complicated, thoroughly satisfying viewing.

The final artist, Heejung Kim, makes wrapped sculptures that seem to take formal inspiration from Korean pojagi — square, patterned and occasionally embroidered cloths made and used by women to cover, store or carry things. Ms. Kim's works are probably the most intriguing of all those here, for the contents of her wrapped sculptures are so unexpected.

Ms. Kim fills her pojagi-like cloths with oddball items, like tree branches, pink plastic babies, faux eggs and umbrellas wrapped in shiny fabric. Although Tibetan Buddhist scriptures and ceremonial mandalas are cited in the catalog as influences, these kooky wrap-ups remind you of surrealist tableaux, or early Christo. But they also have a nutty flair, as if the artist's imagination has run a little too wild.

"Resonance: Five Asian Women Artists in New Jersey," Harold B. Lemmerman Gallery, third floor, Hepburn Hall, New Jersey City University, 2039 Kennedy Boulevard, Jersey City, through April 6. Information: (201) 200-3246 or www.njcu.edu.



Work by Heejung Kim, above, Mayumi Sarai, left and Soonnam Kim Singer, below, is on display at the Lemmerman Gallery at New Jersey City University.



Ron Steelman

Shannon Koob plays 24 characters in Two River Theater's production of "The Syringa Tree."

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