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All Things are Impermanent with Satsuki Shibuya

Mike Sonksen · Wednesday, September 16th, 2015

Satsuki Shibuya is a Los Angeles based artist who grew up in a Buddhist household. This graduate from the arts programs at both USC and the Otis College of Art & Design is having a breakout year, with a recent solo exhibit of her paintings in Spain and a forthcoming exhibit in the Los Angeles Arts District. I spoke with her recently about her work, her philosophy and the interconnectedness of it all. Her upcoming show is entitled “FLOW” and will be held at Poketo Headquarters in the Arts District of Downtown Los Angeles. The exhibit features [abstract watercolors addressing nature and energy](#).

She explains the genesis of the exhibit: “FLOW was birthed from the idea of letting go, being comfortable with the unknown and allowing each painting to share with me where the next step is. As with all things that flow, I did not plan for a direction nor a particular aesthetic. The only parameters were to work on a painting at a time and to allow that one painting to take me on the journey to the next. Each painting represents its own cosmos, like the Milky Way being its own existence, but together, forms the Universe.” Some of the pieces may have similar nuances, she says, but they are all painted as individual creations. She had a lot of fun letting go and trusting that each piece would lead her to the next journey.



“I love exploring other perspectives, cross pollinating disciplines, even those that are not related in the field that I am working in,” she says. “As the world becomes more interconnected, I feel that work which transcends time will be that which is able to pass boundaries and enter into the hearts of those regardless of background, race, religion, beliefs or societal rules.”

Satsuki credits her parents for always allowing her to embrace her curiosity. Her Japanese-born parents moved to California shortly before they gave birth to her and they have always supported her wide range of interests. “My parents always wondered why their child was so strange and yet never once denied me of my curiosities, even if it meant that they would have to make sacrifices.”

Prior to her full immersion into painting, Satsuki often worked in graphic design but was finding the medium too stifling for her lucid style. Her fundamental practice employs multiple themes and this was sometimes too creative for the stiff and conservative corporate design world. She recalls an interview for a design company that ended in tears. “Looking back,” she remembers, “the words that hurt me at the time were actually a hint into what would become my core practice. After viewing my work, the interviewer said, ‘Your portfolio is all over the place. It does not have one theme nor the coherence that designers should have.’”

They also told her that a project she had designed for safe sex was inappropriate. “I had designed condom wrappers with an anime-like character to allow for girls to not feel shy about carrying a condom in their purse,” she says. “At the time, their words were harsh and made me feel so belittled, but for myself, it is the way I create and think, pulling ideas from all over the Universe, to fuse them and melt them into something new and unexpected.” She prefers to create work that is boundless and grounded in truth. “My biggest object(ive) with my work is to be a catalyst and share love, peace and harmony. I love simplicity and keeping my mission statement simple, but rich in meaning,” she tells me.



Growing up in a Buddhist family has deeply connected her to Eastern philosophies. One in particular is a word that she loves in Buddhism. “Shugyo Mujo (???) — impermanence. That all of life is a continual flow and that no one thing is permanent in existence. Further, it talks about how by being in the illusion that things are permanent we begin to correlate it with anger, sadness, frustration and other negative emotions,” she reflects.

For this reason, the idea of impermanence and imperfections play a large role in the work that she does. She explains further, “It reminds me of the beauty within imperfections and that the impermanence of pigments and water evaporation brings forth another dimension to the work that I would not have otherwise predicted. A medium which has a life of its own, I constantly find myself falling back in love with each brushstroke.”

The deep faith she expresses in her work is also connected to her lifelong ability to read energy. Even before she understood it, she has always been able to sense other’s energies. She has perpetually been in tune with the world that surrounds her on a deeper level. As time went on, she began to translate this into words and paintings. “Through energy reading for friends, family and even complete strangers when the situation arises,” she adds, “it takes me on a journey to another dimension beyond the senses to see that what we experience in our outside world is just the beginning. Energies, The Universe and the unknown continue to play a large role in how I create.”



The more she began to understand this, the more everything in her life started to fall in place. “To be honest, I’ve never felt that I belonged here until recently. Although I was born and raised here, my heart longed to be in a different location, possibly a different time all together,” she explains. “I’ve always felt odd and never quite fitting into my surroundings, but as I’ve become older and through personal life experiences, I have come to realize that Southern California, particularly Los Angeles, is where I belong at the moment. Especially where my studio is located, Rancho Palos Verdes, it is home to wild peacocks that roam the streets, 10 minutes from the ocean, which I love dearly and quiet that allows for me to truly explore the inner workings of my soul.” All of these elements combined together culminate into her rapidly expanding body of paintings.

Recently she was on a phone conversation with a gallery in Japan discussing a future exhibit and the subject came up about her being a California artist: “The curator was telling me how although I am Japanese, speak Japanese and grew up with parents who were from Japan, my way of thinking, being, down to the colors that I choose to paint with, all have a particular Southern California vibe.” As noted earlier in this essay, Satsuki is now in the South Bay but she lived all across Southern California as a student. However, she has lived her entire life in Los Angeles County.



The last few years have been a whirlwind for Satsuki and she has more exhibits coming up. Besides her parents, she is very thankful for her husband. “I would like to give thanks to my husband, Kevin, for believing in me when no one else would,” she confides. “To support me in a way that allows me to be truly free and express myself completely without holding back.” Her free expression is on full display at Poketo Headquarters in the Arts District. In addition to her paintings, she has also created a collaboration calendar that will be available. The show “[FLOW](#),” opens [Friday night September 18th](#) and runs until October 10th. As Satsuki likes to say, see it while you can, because all things are impermanent.

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