

ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

MARCH 3, 2020 BY ETTY YANIV

Yasue Maetake – Intersubjective Narratives



Urethane Flower on Steel Stem Clad with Foam (2013-2019), H91 x 110 x 67 inches (H233 x 284 x 177 cm), steel, polyurethane resin, epoxy clay, burnt and varnished Styrofoam, photo by Mark Waldhauser

The Japanese born Brooklyn based sculptor Yasue Maetake largely draws on laws of nature like gravity, as well as on her Japanese cultural heritage like Butoh dance/theater. The artist describes for Art Spiel her artistic impetus, layered ideas, and elaborate process.

AS: Tell me a bit about yourself and what brought you to sculpture.

Yasue Maetake: I was originally trained in glass engraving. Prior to moving to New York, I attended vocational training in Japan and the Czech Republic, and I also apprenticed with a private glass foundry in southern Germany. When I worked with traditional masters in Japan, I was particularly inspired by their claims that materials guide, or even speak, to them in a quasi-spiritual fashion. I spent time researching glass casting technology in

Prague under the influence of East European Modernism. There, I also made tabletop sized objects in bronze, steel, and cement, exhibiting in local town hall galleries, premises that are often, surprisingly, either in Gothic or Baroque castles. These edifices provided a subtle, optical influence on much of my later work.

AS: Your sculptures are abstract but for me they also evoke a futuristic biomorphic essence, not in an illustrative sense, but rather as strong presence with multiple possibilities for interpretations. How do you see the relationship between the potential narrative / figurative and abstract / materiality in your work?

Yasue Maetake: My work appears to be non-specific. I do not employ an inductive process to abstract images, nor do I attempt to materially create objects. The non-specificity is often yielded by blurred reproductive memories of figurative objects or events combined with figments of my imagination. The recurring biomorphic images in my work are examples of this occurrence. I usually use an engineering process, which creates a distance from signifying my intention in exchange for what can feel like a transmigration of images.

For instance, I suspend materials before affixing them to the ground as free-standing, allowing gravity to directly influence their eventual composition. The method involves working in a commonly thought of as trial-and-error process that will eventually cause me to submit to an encounter with “figures imposed upon” the entire work. I am, therefore, directed towards a powerful intersubjectivity. To me, the term *biomorphic* means “longing to become” something else altogether that opens potential, ever-evolving narratives.

AS: In your interview with Corinne Beardsley in Frontrunner you say that you aim to “convey an impression of every material’s physical transitional state as it changes from one expression to another.” How is this reflected in your process?

Yasue Maetake: The truth is that the materials do not need my assistance to demonstrate their physical, transitional state. But I use this phrase as a metaphor to describe my relationship to them. When I make use of the raw materials available around us, I do not change their very nature from which they are spun, rather merely their external qualities. I do fabricate an impression of material’s transitional state rather than my sincere involvement in experimenting with the materials. This is more an reenactment of my veneration of the artist’s process by hand as a motif.



Amorphous Terrain (2018) , Collaboration with Andrew Erdos, H126 x 87 x 96 inches (H321 x 221 x 244 cm), copper corrosion stain on pulp (kozo, abaca and cotton), silicon glued safety-glass sheet, steel, cane and jute rope, photo by Hirofumi Kariya

AS: You seem to have a voracious appetite for playing with variety of forms. Tell me about your process. How do you choose these forms for a project and can you share a typical approach or reference points?

Yasue Maetake: When it comes to large-scale, free-standing forms, I exhaust all possibilities I can think of as I visually suspend forms in seemingly impossible positions using my understanding of gravity's effect on each object. This is neither a gesture of defiance of gravity, nor is it an attempt to succumb to it. I consider it to be a reconciliation with gravity for the time being, or, shall I say, a truce with being enslaved by gravity. I sometimes recall my practice with dance in Japan. Butoh was an idea and dance form conceived by Tatsumi Hijikata as a response to Western concepts of the human physique in dance.

Hijikata's Butoh is based on the movements derived from farming in Akita-prefecture, his home. For example, presenting as a bow-legged stance which involves movements that resemble the act of plowing the earth. No matter how much the ballet dancer tries to conscript her body to become a statuesque material, she still expresses her human will as she moves. In contrast, Butoh made the conscious decision to give up on the challenges posed by ballet, and instead embraced gravity's relationship with the earth. However, one might argue that they perceive something to the contrary – that my work relates more resemblance to ballet.



The Wind (2016), H91 x 110 x 67 inches (H231 x 280 x 176 cm), forged steel, casted polyester resin, resin coated soil on plexi-glass, drawing on found plywood, photo by Riggie Shiobara

This is probably not something I have intended. I think it can be said that some artists are influenced by ideas in their exposure to the study of Western art history as it involves being introduced to the physicality of construction; we are already given examples of what “good form” is, albeit subconsciously. Even my engineering processes could be understood from this point of reference. I think that this all profoundly connects to my sense of longing for and an attachment to Baroque sculptors who sought to convey dynamism, motion, and drama in three-dimensional, static forms that often appear to defy gravity.



*Precarious Windbreak (2019), H114 1/2 x 67 x 71 inches (H292 x 171 x 181 cm)
polyurethanesin concealed iron rust, aluminum powder and copper corrosion on boiled and beaten mulberry bark (kozo)
and cotton pulp, cane, steel, bronze, photo courtesy of Allegheny Art Galleries*



Installation view of solo exhibition Reverse Subterrestrial at The Chimney NYC, Brooklyn (2017), photo by Hirofumi Kariya

AS: Let's take a closer look at your body of work in "Reverse Subterrestrial" at Chimney. What is the genesis of this show and the idea behind your work there?

Yasue Maetake: When I saw Chimney's space for the first time, I was fascinated by the immersive 25' ceilings and their industrial verticality. I linked it to my familiarity with creating two-story loft space in an artist's studio or walking under the scaffolding at a construction site. I am ever aware of our increasingly sedentary culture, and I wanted to illustrate these basic "nuts and bolts" that would provide viewers a motivation to identify their connection or desire to be released from Earth's gravitational pull, yet to find its tranquility. Then I produced the 2-story structure by the construction scaffoldings where viewers ascend the vertical space to experience the exhibition from various angles and altitudes. Then I adorned it with flora and fauna in handmade papers' metaphorical natural growth while as if the industrial elements were being reborn into an organic amalgamation.

AS: It seems like in “Speculative Geographies” at Allegheny Art Galleries, PA, you further explore the figurative component and materials. Can you elaborate on how you engage in your process?

As I described, I usually pursue various connections between the sculpture’s equilibrium and the figurative elements that I experience as a human being in a human body. I enjoy participating directly as a literal engineer, wherein I let my body inform the process based on its own relationship with gravity. Recently, I have been moving past such literal engineered constructs from my human physical experience into one that is being informed by symbolism. The exhibition was a three-artist presentation, and the first show in my life in which “scope of outside of humanity” was seriously embraced as a theme proposed by the gallery director, Ms. Paula Burleigh. In the new series, “Symbolic Atmosphere,” I supplanted the human physique with animal bones, stone and various metals, and tried to remove recognizable figurative elements that still looked like the familiar body.

As I proceeded, I realized again and again that I could not escape from my own human nature and, especially, mirror image. As I went forward, such indeterminate biomorphic forms merged into a series of assemblage pieces. They are like an iconography that indicates variation of postures fluctuating between states of dormant and soaring. I liken this to what I define as a “limbo” between fantasy and structural reality.



Symbolic Atmosphere VI (2019), H45 x 31 x 28 inches (H233 x 284 x 177 cm), Camel bones, steel, epoxy clay, wood, brass, coral, photo courtesy of Allegheny Art Galleries

AS: What are you working on these days and where do you see your work going?

Yasue Maetake: I am working in clay right now and have been exploring the representational elements of feathers. The elements are quite realistic as I embed them into an anatomically fictitious bird wing.

My motives are new to me, but I would continue to create units that have their own structural integrity. When the units are assembled, I want the entire work to convey an impression of a cluster of wind-flexed drapes or, possibly, massive towering thunderclouds acting as though they are emerging from a free-hand-drawing high above. By purposely using these embodied objects, I want to express an objects' physical presence in flux as it metamorphoses from one expression to another in its spatial aspects and that withstands being captured by the viewer's gaze.



Terracotta modelling working in progress (2020), H 48 inch (H 122 cm), photo by artist



Photo by Fumi Sugino

Etty Yaniv works on her art, art writing and curatorial projects in Brooklyn. She holds BA in Psychology and English Literature from Tel Aviv University, BFA from Parsons School of Design, and MFA from SUNY Purchase. She founded Art Spiel as a platform for highlighting the work of contemporary artists, including art reviews, studio visits, interviews with artists, curators, and gallerists. For more details contact by Email: artspielblog@gmail.com

➤ **ARTIST INTERVIEW, ARTIST PROFILE**

#CONTEMPORARYSCULPTURE, #NYCARTIST, #YASUE MAETAKE, ARTSPIEL, ETTY YANIV, FEMALEARTIST, NYCART