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## Artists push artistic boundaries in new Moraga Art Gallery show

By *Sophie Braccini*



Ancestral Mountain by Linda Yoshizawa. Photo provided

Moraga Art Gallery visitors are invited to embark on an exploratory visual journey as part of this summer's Experiments and Explorations exhibit, which features Patrick Hayashi's inventive, beautifully innovative and evocative imagery, and Linda Yoshizawa's weaves of textures, layers and threads that memorialize her Japanese ancestry. These artists' work, along with the ceramics of Lauri-Moffet Fehlberg and Kurt Fehlberg, will be on display through Aug. 12 at the gallery in the Rheem Valley Shopping Center.

Hayashi, a former UC Berkeley vice-president, decided in retirement that it was time to do all the things that he always wanted to do: namely, explore his artistic side, or, as he says, use the other side of his brain. He started taking voice lessons, and, more to the point of this article, painting.

Describing his artistic journey as a spiritual pursuit, Hayashi says the process of creation takes him to a different mental and spiritual place where the world stands still. He immerses himself in the processes, but he is not pinned to any specific media or technique. Art is an exploration for Hayashi.

One technique Hayashi uses is encaustic painting, which involves melting pigmented beeswax and painting it with a brush on a rigid panel where it hardens immediately. The artist then uses a torch to melt and move the wax around, literally painting with the torch. A series of florals against a black backdrop are featured at the gallery. Hayashi pushed the technique by adding Japanese Sumi ink that he hits with the torch. But the ink can catch fire. He moves the fire around, which he says is impossible to control. Thus he calls the process "Zencaustic," because the process of experimentation is pushed until something emerges, but if one tries to control it, nothing happens - just like in life.

The artist invented another process called smoke painting, which is something so unique and interesting that a friend at the State Department invited Hayashi to go to Kyrgyzstan to teach a master class on how to paint with smoke. Hayashi discovered the process by chance while trying to burn a disappointing creation in his kitchen. He now uses fire and smoke to create portraits, landscapes and abstract work. In the gallery, visitors can view folders that explain how the artist works.

Hayashi knows fellow artist Yoshizawa well, describing her as a perfectionist as well as an exploratory artist, pushing the boundary of her art.

Art has always been part of Yoshizawa's life. She graduated in fine arts, and got a job as a technical illustrator, while at night she continued to develop her artistic expression through serigraphy, or silkscreen printing work. After an interruption to raise her children and work as an art instructor in their San Ramon school, she went back to her printing practice at Sherry Smith Bell's Lafayette studio. Yoshizawa was one of the founding artists of the Lafayette gallery that operated for 15 years on Lafayette Circle. She now works in her own studio with her own press. She explains that her latest work, now on view at the Moraga gallery, is the visual rendition of the exploration of her Japanese ancestry.

Her mother grew up in Japan and lived in Hiroshima. She was a teenager during World War II and was lucky to survive the atomic bombing. Her father, a third-generation American of Japanese descent, was studying in Japan when the war broke out and could not come back until after the war. Yoshizawa says it is difficult for her parents to talk about their past. She gets pieces of information from them, peeling layer after layer to get to the truth of their experience. To transcribe this on canvas she uses collographs, a technique involving a collage of layers of different materials glued onto a printing plate made of cardboard. The artist varnishes the surface before painting it with acrylic. Yoshizawa then prints her creation on the surface of her choice.

The gallery is featuring one of her triptychs, called "Ancestral Mountain." It represents the strata of Yoshizawa's ancestral history. Using strings to tie elements together like veins and currents that come from the deepest layers to the surface, Yoshizawa says it represents our ties to our past. These powerful ideas guiding the artist's creation form a visually appealing work, abstract but also timeless.

The Moraga Art Gallery, located at 522 Center St. in Moraga, is open from noon to 5 p.m. from Wednesday

to Sunday.

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