

local collectors and Svay Ken's immediate family. Secondly, this critical factor freed the curator from normal art-business concerns and allowed him to create what he called "town squares" for people to personally express their feelings and thoughts about each of the 24 paintings on display. These squares, placed beside each painting, were roughly drawn graphite boxes directly on the gallery's walls, complete with pencils on strings for people to use.

And what of the paintings themselves? There was a strong selection on view that covered a wide array of topics, time periods, and painting styles. What was most uncanny and surprising, for a man like Svay Ken who eschewed any interest in art history, was his ability to "accidentally reference" modern master painters. He has a hotel poolside composition that appears to come directly from David Hockney's *oeuvre*, a stunning sparse painting of a wooden window that reminds one of Agnes Martin, and, finally, an interior that looks like a Richard Diebenkorn. It is certain that he never knew of these painters' artworks because there were no art books of any kind in his home or studio.

Svay Ken, who never titled his paintings, seemed to be absolutely unattached to his own artwork once they were finished, unabashedly made multiple copies of his own compositions, as requested, and wanted to sell everything all the time to anyone (to provide money for his children's education.) He was a pure painter,

who just kept painting all day, everyday. The artwork itself stands as evidence and testament to this man's immense skill and wisdom—with the painter's personal process; it is all rhetoric because, in the end, the proof is always on the wall. And the proof of Svay Ken's talent and vision was shining brightly on the walls of Java Galerie.

Bradford Edwards

Another China at Meta House

The central conceptual basis for *Another China* was a refreshing and unique idea. Simply stated, swing the mono-focus on the dominant urban centers of China (mainly Beijing and Shanghai) toward, arguably, the more intriguing contemporary cultural production of a remote region such as, in this case, Lijiang, Yunnan province. The result was a show in two parts that included some artists that were unable to participate in the first part.

Like any group show there was an unevenness to the work. The standouts of the first show were Joybrata Sarker and Nguyen Quang Huy with their conventional, but strong and concise, image-making. Sarker, a master of arresting compositions, claims that he is a photographer, but I disagree. He is an artist with a camera, with a searing and sharp eye for detail and drama. His piece was a grouping of four large images (each 40 x 60 cm),



Joybrata Sarker, *Untitled*, 2007, photograph, 40 x 60 cm. Image: Courtesy of one 2 one Collection, the United States.

edge to edge without framing, provided the richest narrative of this exhibition. Especially notable was a dynamic scene with water buffalo drawing the plow in a field.

Nguyen Quang Huy, with a 100 x 70 cm oil painting on rough Russian canvas, was singing with elegance with a wry comment on the often confusing melding of tradition and contemporary images. He utilized his signature fuzzy painting technique in his enigmatically titled work *Portrait*—resembling a frozen video frame in different washes of blue. Though it did reference a famous Chinese painter in its "look," still this painting was a simple, poetic, and content-loaded image; the artist using subtlety and beauty in his contribution to this exhibition.

There were several attempts at "conceptual art" that resembled bad gags in their presentation—silly and ironic work that suggested recent art-school graduates. There was a nicely executed audio piece (replete with a turntable and very well designed LP that one could take home) with recordings of ambient sounds and singers by Saskia Janssen. I give high marks to her sensitive attention to the feel, smell, and sounds of the local people living their lives.

Part two of *Another China* yielded one talented and intelligent artist, Sokuntevy Ouer, who traveled from Cambodia to Lijiang to participate in a workshop. She presented two sumptuous images of her own perspective of the grueling and poor rural life of the local Chinese. The one portrait of an elderly couple painted on rough, grassy, chunky handmade paper was a tender and perceptive comment on the passage of time and the high cultural value placed on older members of the local community. Ouer, raised in Battambang, is a rising star in the Cambodian contemporary art scene and, at 26, shows great promise.

*Another China* was a gallant and laudable effort. It was a visionary exhibition and, interestingly, the handsome catalog was, in the end, maybe more valuable than the actual

physical realization of this smart and insightful idea. So it goes. Still, it was a good thing to see, a very good thing indeed.

Bradford Edwards

Monkhor Erdenebayar at Teo + Namfah Gallery and The Chinese House

The image of the horse is a powerful one. It excites the imagination, stirs the blood, and has been an iconic subject in the art canon since the earliest cave paintings. In myriad folk traditions the horse speaks to humankind's dark and ancient history, to strength and nurturing, to work and pleasure, and to the mysteries of life and death.

For the Mongolian people the horse has always been at the very core of life and society, tradition and philosophy, history and religion. The horse carried the great unifier of the Mongolian tribes Genghis Khan (1162–1227) and his descendants' swift-moving armies across Asia and, in the 13th century, into the heart of Europe as far as Poland and Hungary.

Even today the admiration for the horse among Mongolians cannot be underestimated as it still a central creative icon. It is also still vitally important to Mongolian life and commerce across the country, far beyond the cacophony of the capital Ulaanbaatar. It is said that there are more than 10 horses for every Mongolian and that they have more than 230 names and descriptions through which to define the colors of their horses.

For the outstanding contemporary Mongolian artist Monkhor Erdenebayar, 41, known as Bayar, the horse speaks not only to the Mongolian nomadic spirit, but also to the numerous Buddhist concepts that permeate Mongolian thinking and culture. This is clearly evident in the works that made up Bayar's most recent exhibition entitled *Travels of Red Horses*.

Bayar's horses are far removed from the sleek, shiny historical horses by the great English painter George Stubbs



Monkhor Erdenebayar, *Keeper of the Blue Secret*, 2008, oil on canvas, 150 x 120 cm. Private collection. Image: Courtesy of Teo & Namfah Gallery.

(1724–1806). What one is immediately aware of in Bayar's work is the sheer power of his animals. They have a tough reality about them that reaches far beyond their immediate presence on his large and small canvases. He has achieved this through remarkable geometry that not only represents their power and form but also their spirit. This is reinforced and informed by his range of colors, his astute use of space, and his sense of knowing the animal. One immediately believes that Bayar the artist is also Bayar the natural horseman for whom the horse represents an extension of his spirit.

Since Bayar possesses a profound knowledge of the anatomy of the horse, he is able to combine both the representational and the abstract within a single work with great skill. Although some people may feel that he is often repeating himself, close observation of his paintings, however, shows just how skillfully he lends an infinite range of potent personalities to his subjects.

A work such as *Keeper of the Blue Secret* (2008), which is divided into two parts, is an excellent example of his painting, not only because of his geometry but also in his use of color and form to capture the spirit of the animal. The dominant color is red, a color that suggests a pure energy, the fire of the earth and

of life's forces. The horses in the top half of the picture are quite relaxed in their surroundings, one never senses that Bayar's horses are penned in. They are free and appear always to be ready to move quickly. The bottom part of the picture could suggest grass for feeding or it could be a metaphor for the wide-open grasslands to which the horses are accustomed by right and tradition.

Although Bayar has developed a broader palette over the past few years, the dominant color in this painting is red, a color that Bayar uses often. Red is energy, vigor, dynamism,



Reika Iwami (b.1927), *Sea in the Autumn*, 1978, woodcut. The Tolman Collection.

and the independent spirit. The outer edge of the painting is red but the two parts of the painting are framed within thick blue borders, but these do not confine, rather they momentarily contain the power of the animals. Bayar's horses are also potent metaphors for the spirit and strength of the Mongolian people, and one could not ask for more in this age of creeping conformity.

Ian Findlay

FINLAND

Helsinki

Daughters of Sun Goddess - Japanese Femininity at Sinebrychoff Art Museum

There seem to be a boom for Asian art in Finland. All three museums forming the Finnish National Gallery have had Asian exhibitions during the past months. The third to open was *Daughters of Sun Goddess - Japanese femininity*, which described the life of Japanese women, covering the period from the Edo (1600–1867) until today. Intimate artifacts, pictures, and works of art found a perfect setting in the Sinebrychoff Art Museum that used to be the

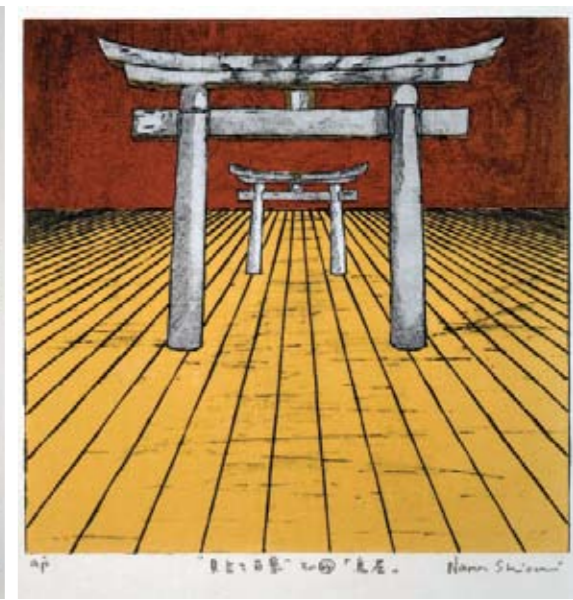
home of the brewery family with the same name. Entertainment life in Edo (today's Tokyo) was depicted through beautiful geishas and courtesans.

The curator Ulla Huhtamaki, director of the Museum, selected a series of old woodcuts from the national collection to present Japanese beauty in Edo. The absolute finesse in the execution of these works of art reveals the colorful clothes and elaborate hairstyles of ladies at that time. The fragile engravings were made by, among others, great stars such as Hokusai (1760–1849) and Hiroshige (1797–1858).

As an addition to the art there was a rare collection of objects relating to female life, such as kimonos and beauty-care materials, from the 18th century. These objects were borrowed from Tokyo. The unveiling of the sophisticated secret life of women at that time was very interesting. The aesthetics and mentality of that time are worth viewing on a larger scale.

As a counterbalance to Edo's visual culture there were works by contemporary female artists. Five of these, Reika Iwami (b.1927), Naoko Matsubara (b.1937), Mayumi Oda (b.1941), Toko Shinoda (b.1913), and Nana Shiomi (b.1956) came from *The Tolman Collection* in Tokyo.

The art of calligraphy was featured through the presence of



Nana Shiomi (b.1956), *Sacred Gateways*, 2001, woodcut. The Tolman Collection, Tokyo.