Robert Kobayashi: Seeing and Being

Robert Kobayashi’s signature clouage – hammered metal compositions – bring nature alive in dimensional ways. The artist’s childhood became a white antique vessel bursting with flowering branches and eloquently overflowing its frame in My Mother Picking Wildflowers From Her Garden. Kobayashi’s deep appreciation of the paintings of Matisse, Matisse, and Cézanne come into play in this and in other works.

The artist’s early neo-Pointillist paintings evolved into metalworks patterned overall with nail heads. White help painting in all directions sing from their perch in a teapot. Kobayashi’s animated composition is punctuated with tiny nails. Kobayashi’s work, shaped using a carpenter’s tools, may include repeated motifs, diagonal patterns, and incised or inset features. The art is about seeing in all directions and finding and creating beauty in the present tense.

Kobayashi discovers the inner lives of his subjects. Block Print Hanging on a Foreign Wall speaks about the way that an Eastern art work, showing three different boats docked in a harbor with trailing willow branches, is valued in a Western space. This reminds us that becoming part of another culture is an ongoing process between the old culture and its new setting.

Robert Kobayashi studied at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, then, after serving in the army at the end of World War II, he studied in Paris and New York. The artist, now 85, began his clouage around 1976. Robert Kobayashi has spent over sixty years developing compositions filled with shapes in white, chartreuse, and unpainted tin mottled with verdigris signs of age. Each metal piece in the composition is punctuated with tiny nails. Kobayashi’s work, shaped using a carpenter’s tools, may include repeated motifs, diagonal patterns, and incised or inset features. The art is about seeing in all directions and finding and creating beauty in the present tense.

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