

## Not knowing is most intimate at Amos Eno



Nishiki Sugawara-Beda, Installation view of *Somewhere Around There*, 2022. Photo courtesy of Maggie Pavao

It is perhaps in this state of “not knowing” that we first encounter the works in artist Nishiki Sugawara-Beda’s current solo exhibition *Somewhere Around There*, on view at the Amos Eno gallery. The exhibition, which presents works from the artist’s *KuroKuroShiro* series (‘black-black-white’ in Japanese), features dynamic shapes in shaded monochrome that seem to alternately emerge and recede from view. Faced with this shifting visual field, the viewer gradually develops a kind of intimacy with these unknown forms, opening up new possibilities for interpretation and engagement.

For Sugawara-Beda, process is as vital and expansive as product. The works are painted with Sumi, and the artist fully embraces the range of tone and temperature offered by the traditional East Asian ink. For her, the dual processes of producing and using Sumi make up one contiguous spiritual act,

which begins with the burning of wood to create soot. Believing that the soot particles in the ink carry the essence of that which was incinerated, she understands each artistic mark made with the Sumi to be infused with this originary spirit.

Born and raised in Japan, Sugawara-Beda was trained in calligraphic techniques and steeped in the imagery of traditional Japanese paintings. These often minimally decorated landscapes prioritized an artistic interpretation over a literal depiction of the land. Informed by this philosophical abstraction of the material, Sugawara-Beda embeds meaning into each layer of applied Sumi to create works that straddle the line between abstract and representational. The pieces in this exhibition, with figures inspired by the natural world—horizons, cloud formations, gulfs and valleys—have a comforting presence and offer the viewer both refuge in their rich, dark corners and joy in their bright expanses.



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Another relevant aspect of traditional Japanese landscape paintings is the significance of overall composition, in which time is communicated by spatial arrangement: the lower section of the canvas depicted the present, while the middle and upper portions revealed the future and the ‘ideal,’ respectively. Japanese landscapes thus depicted a narrative unfolding throughout time in a single scene. In this most recent body of work, Sugawara-Beda knowingly belies this heritage to great effect. Her exaggerated brush marks, patterning, and etchings both acknowledge and transcend their origins, challenging any attempt to ‘read’ a linear narrative in them. The artist collapses time and space, joining here to there, converging past, present, and future.

A step from the known into the unknown, *Somewhere Around There* represents an enchanting reimagination of familiar forms and a revelatory new perspective on artistic conventions. Nishiki Sugawara-Beda lends her distinct vision to the legacy of Japanese landscape painting while intentionally obscuring the works’ specific inspiration in the natural realm. Behind the veil of abstraction, she both creates and withholds so that the spirit of the Sumi might come to the forefront, ushering her viewer into an ever deeper reflective and meditative state. It is here in this place, in this *Somewhere Around There*, that the Sumi facilitates an authentic encounter with the unknown, inviting the viewer to inscribe individual meaning into the landscape and engage beyond time and place.



Nishiki Sugawara-Beda, (from left to right) *KuroKuroShiro The F*, *KuroKuroShiro The W*, *KuroKuroShiro The A*, *KuroKuroShiro The E*. All 2022, Sumi on wood, 40 x 30". Photo courtesy of the artist

– Maggie Pavao