Teruko Nimura

Mimesis
Stereotypes are notoriously slippery. As images, they flatten reality and serve as vehicles for prejudice and discrimination. To mimic such exploitative images critically—or diabolically, as Luce Irigaray suggests—is to undermine their power by reintroducing the living voice into the heart of the stereotype.

At the Courtyard, Teruko Nimura explores relationships between Japanese stereotypes and traditional imagery from Japanese art. In one body of work, a series of ink drawings feature images of Japanese women taken from historical woodblock prints. Refracted into mirrored, kaleidoscopic compositions, beautiful patterns of elaborately decorated kimonos and costumes fracture and fill the page, as delicate faces peer out from behind screens and manicured hands pet white, fluffy cats. On top of the drawings, Nimura has overlaid hand-cut paper in mirrored patterns of chrysanthemums and foliage.

By appropriating and multiplying the figures, Nimura confronts the authority of such traditional depictions of Japanese femininity, revealing their constructed nature. The delicate veil of cut paper simultaneously reveals and conceals them, calling on viewers to look closely and experience the push-pull between the power of such traditional representations and their continued proliferation through contemporary stereotypes.

Facing the drawings, Nimura has installed another series of images behind silk curtains in the gallery’s window alcoves. While her drawings reference historical feminine imagery, Nimura’s curtained figures pull from the aggressive, anti-Japanese propaganda that proliferated during World War II. This type of racially charged imagery was commonly used to rally support for the war effort and justify the US decision to send hundreds of thousands of Japanese-American citizens to internment camps along the West coast. Veiled behind translucent silk that, like the cut paper, both conceals and augments their presence, the images ripple with life as viewers’ movements activate the hanging fabric. The effect of these ghosts from our country’s troubling past is both theatrical and haunting.

Mirroring each other across the gallery’s corridor, the works transform the space into a passageway through the complex politics of cultural representation. Though the images speak to Nimura’s experience as a Japanese-American woman, her work asks questions beyond the personal. Made in America, these images haunt our collective memory.

Allison Myers is a PhD candidate in art history at The University of Texas at Austin, specializing in contemporary art and critical theory. In 2016–17 she served as the Visual Art Center’s Curatorial Fellow and is currently a Mellon Fellow at the Blanton Museum. Her dissertation examines how modernist cultural stereotypes influence the ways viewers see and engage with contemporary works of art, particularly in the reception of French art in the US during the 1970s.

Herein lies the diabolical—in mimesis. The appropriation, the very constitution of the same, in which the living person is caught and deadened.

Shadow Screen  
2018 / hand-cut foam core, silk, light / 16 ft x 80 in

Women Shielded by Umbrellas  
2016 / hand-cut drafting film over ink / 26.5 x 42.5 in

Women Curled and Tangled with Cats (detail)  
2016 / hand-cut drafting film over ink / 25.5 x 21 in

Shadow Screen (detail)  
2018 / hand-cut foam core, silk, light / 15 ft x 82 in

Women Gazing at Mirror and Reflection  
2015 / hand-cut drafting film over ink / 26.5 x 42.5 in

Women Shielded by Umbrellas (detail)  
2015 / hand-cut drafting film over ink / 26.5 x 42.5 in
Teruko Nimura

Mimesis

May 3 – September 15 2018

RECEPTION
Thursday / May 3 / 5–7pm

Teruko Nimura is a multi-disciplinary artist with a diverse practice that includes installation, drawing, painting, sculpture, performance, participatory, and public art. She has exhibited nationally and in Mexico, and was recently included in the 2017 TX Biennial. She received her BFA from San Francisco Art Institute and her MFA from UT Austin in 2009. She is currently based in Austin, TX.

Women Hidden Behind Screen
2016 / hand-cut drafting film over ink / 28 x 42.5 in

The Courtyard Gallery is located in the AT&T Hotel and Conference Center at The University of Texas at Austin and features artwork from alumni of the Department of Art and Art History in the College of Fine Arts.