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THE ART ISSUE
NIHONGA RISING

WATERFALL, HIROSHI SENJU, 2012

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NIHONGA RISING

Harnessing the elements that occur naturally in Nature has allowed Japanese artist Hiroshi Senju to create a stunning body of work that captivates audiences the world over

They may look simple, but Japanese artist Hiroshi Senju's sublime waterfall and cliff paintings have an enthralling quality about them that transports the viewer right to the actual scene of the waterfall.

Describing the first time he viewed on Senju's work during the Venice Biennale in 1995, Sundaram Tagore, the founding director of Sundaram Tagore Gallery, had been awe-struck by the installation which consisted of a series of cascading waterfalls in a dark room surrounding by water.

"You were immediately transported to another realm—where you could hear the gushing sound of the water and feel the coolness of the mist on your skin," said Mr Tagore. "Hiroshi Senju is not only an artist but a philosopher and an educator, and his paintings transcend any one culture or label. His genius for combining elements from the East and West has yielded a wholly original art form that has the ability to inspire awe in viewers," he added.

Created using the traditional Japanese Nihon-ga style of painting, which makes use of mulberry paper and mineral pigments, Senju's ability to capture the imagination through his installation saw him rise up to become the first Asian to be given the Merit prize by the Biennale committee.

EMBRACING NATURE

"It is my mission to remind people that we are all living on the top of this precious stone called Earth. In respect to her natural phenomenon, I use water and gravity and I paint waterfalls," shared the artist, who is regarded as a contemporary master of the style. Revealing his method, Senju said: "I begin by listening carefully. I am

trying to discover which way the waterfall wants to flow, what form it is trying to take. I spend time engaged in this silent dialogue, looking at the washi paper before me without painting at all. As I paint, the image in my mind gives way to the real waterfall I am painting, which is now so much stronger."

"The flow of water falling from top to bottom, the wrinkled mulberry paper, and the powdered natural rocks dug up from the earth, this is beauty."

Through the use of mineral pigments sourced worldwide, the artist believes that the mineral paint in his artwork contains elements from all over the world.

"It is for this reason that these pictures can still speak to our fellow human beings on this Earth, transcending the divisions of countries and regions. In this way, you could say that the whole world can contain Nihon-ga, and conversely, that Nihon-ga can contain the whole world. The natural mineral pigments of Nihon-ga are really the universe itself," he said, explaining the universality in his work.

As for the emotional responses he hopes audiences will get from his work, he said: "Beauty gives order to chaotic situations. I believe this is a very important message to convey to human beings. Beauty replaces the phrase 'I am' with 'We are'." **D**

Hiroshi Senju's work is available at Sundaram Tagore Gallery. For more information, visit Sundaramtagore.com.

Sundaram Tagore Gallery is located at Gillman Barracks, 5 Lock Road, Singapore 108933



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