

MIYA ANDO:
SKY WRITING

LOWE

MIYA ANDO: SKY WRITING

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Foreword

Jill Deupi

Art is a house of many mansions. It presents creators and viewers alike with boundless opportunities for expression, discernment, and introspection. It fosters personal growth while connecting us to individuals and communities from distant periods and places. Art reminds us of the reassuring, life-affirming power of beauty. It allows us to be our full selves. *Miya Ando: Sky Writing* embodies all these potentialities and more. Through her unique artistic voice, Ando invites us on a journey deep within ourselves. She transports us to the far shores of Southwestern Japan. She takes us high into the stratosphere and back in time to a moment when Zen Buddhism was fresh and new. Through her work, we learn of the splendor of Bizen swords, whose elegance belies their fatal strength, and are reminded of the importance of words, remembered and forgotten. As an artist, Ando dwells in the spaces in between, bridging realms and cocooning us in works that are simultaneously transient and enduring--just like nature itself, just like our mortal existence.

This exhibition also reminds us that there is no more enduring and impactful way to learn than by doing. The capstone of ArtLab@the Lowe 2024, *Miya Ando: Sky Writing* is the physical manifestation of new masteries gained by the budding curators in this year's cohort: Isabelle Gomez, Jackson Harris, Xavier Lane, Milla Nicolas-Nader, Benjamin Rosen-Cappellazzo, Ximena Salazar, and Divya Srinivasan. Through seminar-style conversations as well as independent research and writing, these students have not only deepened their knowledge of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art and culture, they have also immersed themselves in the history and traditions of Japan. Their ready access to the ever gracious, always generous Miya Ando further enhanced the group's curatorial practices, teaching them how to collaborate with a contemporary artist and clarifying the critical importance of preserving the creator's voice. These same lessons were reinforced for them through their collaborative work with Rose Jenny, Allen Means, Sankara Olama-Yai, and Evan Wambeke, MFA candidates in UM's Creative Writing Program who gamely lent their own creative

voices to this volume. Weaving together these experiences, both practical and theoretical, was the ArtLab '24 participants' week-long immersion in Japan, where they engaged in invaluable cultural exchanges and experienced, with all five senses, that about which they were learning in the classroom.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to our ArtLab '24 participants; nothing gives me greater pleasure than to see our curators-in-training grow and develop into independent researchers, thinkers, and writers. I am also grateful to our Creative Writers for accepting the invitation to contribute ekphrastic pieces to *Sky Writing* (a first for ArtLab!). Thanks are equally due to Dr. Nathan Timpano, my intrepid ArtLab '24 co-lead and faculty lead for this project, for his unwavering commitment to the success of this program. The Consulate-General of Japan in Miami and above all, Consul General Kazuhiro Nakai, were instrumental in bringing this year's trip to Japan to fruition, as was the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who facilitated our cultural exchange through their Kakehashi Program. JICE staffer Yuki Someya and her colleagues in Tokyo provided essential logistical support, while Kyoko Sunaga, whose warm intelligence made us all feel welcome, bravely accompanied our group for a week as we toured Kyoto, Hino-cho, and Tokyo. The Lowe's remarkable staff also contributed in ways big and small to this project: thank you, Karina Alvarez, Brianna Campbell, Angeles Cardenas, Martin Casuso, Yatil Etherly, Monica Gonzalez, Chris Hixon, Faviola Hurtado, Evelyn Infante, Marie Milhomme, Megan Orlanski, Dr. Mark Osterman, Dr. Tola Porter, and Natasha Zabala, for all that you do for ArtLab and for our museum!

The Lowe relies on its supporters to make our exhibition and engagement programs possible; ArtLab is no exception. I therefore wish to recognize the Berkowitz Contemporary Foundation; the Frank Family Charitable Foundation; Jane Hurt; Perri Lee Roberts; Cardinal Four Foundation; Marie and Harley Lippman; Tracy Berkowitz; Gustavo and Lori Calleja; Lorraine Stassun; and Michael Troner for

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I reserve my final words for Miya Ando. Miya—We are all incredibly grateful for what you and your beautiful works have brought to our campus, to our city, and to our lives. *Nanikarananimade, hontōni-arigatōgozaimashita!*

Jill Deupi, J.D., Ph.D.

Beaux Arts Director and Chief Curator
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To access the online version of *Miya Ando: Sky Writing*, please scan the following QR code:



Introduction: Miya Ando's "Sky Writing"

Nathan J. Timpano

Miya Ando: Sky Writing is an exhibition curated by undergraduate students who enrolled in the ARH 511: ArtLab@the Lowe course at the University of Miami during the Spring 2024 semester. This annual seminar provides studio art and art history majors with the opportunity to organize an exhibition and create an accompanying catalogue on a theme related to the annual programming of the University's Lowe Art Museum.

The theme of this year's ArtLab exhibition centers on Miya Ando's *Cloud Series*, and as such, is the first ArtLab in the program's sixteen-year history to focus on works by a contemporary artist. Born to a Japanese mother and an American-Russian father, Miya Ando (b. 1973) spent her early life between a Buddhist temple (where her maternal grandfather was an *oshō*, or priest) and California's remote Redwood Forest. She currently lives and works in New York City, where her bicultural background informs her multivalent, multimedial approach to artmaking.

Miya Ando: Sky Writing provides viewers with an opportunity to explore the artist's devotion to contemplation and reflection. To subtle changes in the moon, tides, and weather. To the languages of life, the poetry of nature, and the impermanence of light. To achieve these visions, Ando brings age-old materials (such as silver and Japanese indigo) into literal dialogue with modern media (including aluminum and urethane). The resulting works are timeless and haunting, encouraging us to think about the precarity of the world we inhabit.

Images in Ando's *Cloud Series* can be read as visual meditations on the ephemerality of atmospheric conditions, human existence, and the cyclical rhythms of nature. As the subtitle suggests, one might even be tempted to "read" the poetry of nature in her painted clouds—objects that, quite interestingly, originate as photographs captured by the artist's camera.

Miya Ando: Sky Writing pares down images from her *Cloud Series* by focusing on five works only: three tondos, one rectangular painting, and one polytych consisting of 24 small, square paintings. Do not be fooled, however, by the paucity of works in the exhibition, for Ando's "minimalist" works invites introspection, rather than fleeting glances.

Under my guidance, ArtLab students researched these five *Cloud* paintings in order to provide visitors and readers with deeper insights into Ando's work, especially within the broader field of contemporary art. The student curators and I additionally invited graduate MFA students enrolled in the Creative Writing program (Department of English, University of Miami) to contribute ekphrastic or calligraphic poems related to Ando's images in the exhibition.

As you read their essays and poems (the latter of which are interspersed amongst Ando's work in the Catalogue to this volume), please consider the manner in which her "sky writings" contribute to a greater understanding of culture, intermediality, nature, practice, and technique. To this end, Xavier Lane, Divya Srinivasan, and Ximena Salazar each respectively consider the ephemeral, spiritual, and contemplative nature of Ando's work alongside Buddhism and the expansive field of Postmodern and Contemporary painting. Milla Nicolas-Nader and Jackson Harris somewhat contrastingly provide essays on Ando's relationship to Minimalism, the Light and Space art movement, Kinetic Art, and Op Art. Finally, Isabelle Gomez delves into the history of traditional Japanese metalwork (especially swords) to reveal their connection to Ando's iconographies.

Following these essays, readers will find Benjamin Rosen-Cappellazzo's interview with Miya Ando, which provides a candid glimpses into the artist's background, practice, and philosophical ideas concerning art. Similarly, poems by Rose Jenny, Allen Means, Sankara Olama-Yai, and Evan Wambeke offer new and creative ways of "seeing" Ando's *Clouds* through artistic eyes.

As the old adage goes, it takes a village to make an exhibition (and catalogue) come to fruition and, as such, I am truly thankful for the benefactors and institutions whose generosity allowed our ArtLab group (including my co-lead, Dr. Jill Deupi) to curate this exhibition, publish this catalogue, and travel to Hino-cho, Kyoto, and Tokyo, Japan in March 2024 to gain a richer understanding of Japanese customs, history, and Contemporary Art. In terms of curatorial studies, the cultural exchanges in Japan were an invaluable opportunity for undergraduate students to codify their newfound art historical knowledge in (and beyond) the pages of this book.

I am likewise grateful to the entire staff of the Lowe Art Museum, especially Dr. Jill Deupi (Beaux Arts Director & Chief Curator), Faviola Hurtado (Office Manager), Dr. Mark Osterman (Assistant Director for Technology and Engagement), Dr. Tola Porter (Museum Educator), Natasha Zabala (Museum Registrar), Megan Orlanski (Curatorial Assistant), Monica Gonzalez (Senior Events Planner), and Brianna Monique Campbell (Communications Specialist), all of whom assisted ArtLab students with aspects of the exhibition.

Last but certainly not least, *Miya Ando: Sky Writing* would not exist if not for the time and talents of Miya Ando, as well as the creativity and curiosity of the 2024 ArtLab students: Isabelle Gomez, Jackson Harris Xavier Lane, Milla Nicolas-Nader, Benjamin Rosen-Cappellazzo, Ximena Salazar, and Divya Srinivasan. To all: arigato gozaimasu!

Nathan J. Timpano, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Art History

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Clouds, Contemplation, & Clarity

Xavier Lane

In her *Cloud Series*, Miya Ando (b. 1973) creates metallic skylscapes that convey a sense of ephemeral beauty through serene depictions of the natural world. The paintings featured in this exhibition are of cloud formations set against shifting and shimmering skies. Having spent a considerable amount of her childhood in a Buddhist temple, Ando draws inspiration from both Japanese spiritual beliefs and her own experiences as a Japanese and American artist. Zen Buddhist practices and philosophy have been particularly influential in Ando's work and are discernibly present in the *Cloud Series*. This essay seeks to explore the origins and effects of these key influences on Japanese artwork and Miya Ando's practice.

The Zen sect of Buddhism was formalized in China before being brought in the thirteenth century CE to Japan, where it flourished between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. This period is known as the Muromachi Period (1336-1573), during which Zen Buddhism became the dominant form of Buddhism in Japan. Zen was well-received, especially by the elite and powerful samurai class that fostered this new sect through commissions ranging from temple buildings to religious art. The first Japanese artists to adopt Zen in their works were monks who embraced the simple aesthetics of the natural world promoted by its ideology. At the height of the Muromachi Period, the artistic freedom of these Zen monks was, however, often limited by their wealthy patrons. Following a series of civil wars that mark the end of the Muromachi Period, Zen Buddhism fell out of favor among the political elite. It thrived, by contrast, among the monk class, which began to cultivate the idea of pure, individualistic expression in art.

This "renaissance" was the origin of *zenga*, a term that encompasses both painting and calligraphy from the seventeenth century to the present. *Zenga* is not a reflection of individual tastes or knowledge, but rather, the product of an elevated state of consciousness. *Zenga* art is therefore meant to be contemplated by both artist and viewer alike. These artworks are not necessarily uniform in style, nor do they

require any formal, artistic training of the creator. The only requirements are a familiarity with the practice of meditation and the ability to clear one's mind before, and during, the artistic process.

Miya Ando's art harkens back to this tradition. Her work, especially the *Cloud Series*, conveys a similar sense of temporal beauty and serene reflection that is found in Zen, or *zenga*, artwork. During a conversation with the artist, she acknowledged that she did not pursue any formal artistic training, nor did she envision herself working as an artist. These realities, one might argue, have allowed her to express herself free of the constraints imposed by classical, artistic conventions, and have likewise imbued her with the ability to express an enlightened state during her creative process.

One of the most striking characteristics of Ando's *Cloud* paintings is their simultaneous presence and absence of visual elements. This is not for lack of inspiration, but the intentional practice, I believe, of *yohaku*: a Japanese concept defined as "a blank unpainted space in an artwork."¹ In Japanese culture, *yohaku* is intrinsically related to the Zen ideals of simplicity and subtractive aesthetics, often expressed with the terms *wabi* and *sabi*, which refers to beauty as imperfect and impermanent. Some of the most influential examples of *yohaku* in Japanese art are by Hasegawa Tōhaku (1539-1610), who could loosely depict objects, such as pine trees, with minimal brushwork and an ample use of *yohaku*, inviting the viewer to contemplate and meditate on their own interpretation of the landscape. Similarly, the empty space in Ando's cloudscaapes engage the viewer's subconscious interpretation of her works. To this end, Ando seems especially interested in the idea of transience, which she addresses in the names of her works.

For example, *Evening Cloud (Yuugumo) February 4 2023 NYC 6:44 PM* (p. 37) describes a sublime sky at dusk with cool blue, purple and gray tones, while *Morning Cloud (Asagumo) February 7 2023 6:24 AM NYC*

(p. 38) captures the moments just before daybreak in pastel blue. Both pieces illustrate an important, transitional time of day and represent two sides of the same coin. The Zen perspective would view these times of day as one entity, and thus appreciate their complementary relationship. The dark brings uncertainty, the light promises clarity.

In addition to *yohaku*, Zen Buddhism, and *zenga* painting, other Japanese spiritual beliefs permeate Ando's *Cloud Series*. Shinto, the religion indigenous to Japan, is a belief system that emphasizes harmony with nature, which is sacred. Reverence of the natural world is achieved through the worship of *kami*—spirits and deities associated with different elements of the natural world and with rituals and festivals, or *matsuri*. Harmony with the environment is rooted in the Shinto belief that the world is a balance between humans and *kami*.

In the Shinto tradition, clouds can represent dwellings for *kami*, while their constant, shifting nature represents the impermanence of time, nature, and human existence. They are also believed to portend future events or natural disasters, from volcanic eruptions to earthquakes, which are frequent in Japan. Ando's clouds are not imbued with one specific meaning—for they are a reference to multiple beliefs—but like other depictions of clouds in Japanese art, they reflect the evanescent qualities of nature and life. The significance that clouds hold in Japanese culture allows the viewer to better understand why and how Ando employs them.

Ando's *Cloud Series* is intricately interwoven with, and derives meaning from, her Japanese heritage. Zen Buddhism, Shinto, and Japanese philosophy are central to her work. From her strategic use of *yohaku*, to the subject matter of clouds, all aspects of Ando's seemingly minimalistic work are curated and deliberate. Empty spaces may appear devoid of meaning, but are actually visual elements that invite peaceful, thoughtful reflection on nature. As the viewer moves, the shining surface of her paintings move with them, capturing the kinetic quality of clouds in a semi-static state. Ando thus captures a moment of ephemeral beauty and immortalizes it for her viewers.

1. Eugenia Bogdanova-Kummer, *Bokujinkai: Japanese Calligraphy and the Postwar Avant-Garde* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 68.

Meditative Mediums: Spirituality & Ephemerality in Ando's *Cloud Series*

Divya Srinivasan

The movement away from organized religion in the creation of Euro-American visual art has been a focal point of recent scholarship on Modern, Postmodern, and Contemporary artistic practices. Despite this assessment, several scholars have suggested that art of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries alternatively promotes a consideration of spirituality in either an individualistic or universal manner. Here, one might think of Wassily Kandinsky's pivotal book *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, published in 1911.

Rather than serving as propaganda for doctrinaire religion, art of the Anthropocene has been designated by researchers as a medium for viewers and artists to connect in abstracted, yet simultaneously spiritual, ways. The short discussion that follows will address the presence of spirituality and ephemerality in Postmodern and Contemporary Art in order to better conceptualize Miya Ando's art. Works by Mark Rothko (1903-1970) and Helen Frankenthaler (1928-2011) will serve as points of reference in relation to Ando's *Cloud Series*, given that each artist's respective oeuvre offers insights into the possibilities for art to express the fleetingness of nature and life. For Ando specifically, this focus on ephemerality is linked to her familial ties to Japanese Buddhism and Shintoism.

Postmodern Art is known for being unconventional and varied in comparison to traditional (Western) art historical canons accepted prior to the mid-twentieth century. Works produced by artists associated with the New York School of Abstract Expressionism, Rothko and Frankenthaler included, have subsequently been said to operate through the use of a modern, spiritual aesthetic.¹ This spiritual essence, however, has also been discussed as being implied, rather than explicit, in works by such painters. In making this argument, art historians distinguish the narrative and formal aspects of Postmodern and Contemporary Art from religious art that principally functions as a representation of sacred texts.

In terms of historical Christian art, canonical images (prints, paintings, sculptures) were principally commissioned by the Church and thus based on biblical narratives. By contrast, contemporary artists working without such strictures or doctrines have drawn on more personal, spiritual experiences. This over-generalization implies that the meditative aspects of Contemporary Art may be the result of the often intangible intersection between artist, viewer, and artistic transcendence.

The art critic and philosopher Harold Rosenberg (1906-1978), who wrote extensively on the spiritual aspects of Abstract Expressionism, posited that “only if religious art is identified with the depiction of the sacred events of particular cults can modern painting and sculpture be deemed devoid of religious connotations.”² Here, Rosenberg seems to suggest that it is improper to judge art devoid of recognizable narratives drawn from organized religion or designated faiths as purely secular. It is also necessary to distinguish between aesthetics and religious or spiritual art.

For many contemporary viewers, Rothko's Postmodern paintings exemplify the intersection between art and spirituality. Take, for example, author and poet Laura Glen Louis's experience at the Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas. Louis writes:

I had sat in the Rothko Chapel, nearly alone, looking at length, and felt after an hour a deep sense of well-being, of arrival. The more I looked at the Rothkos, the more I saw. I might even have seen images that weren't there.³

Images in Miya Ando's *Cloud Series* function in a manner similar to the Rothko Chapel paintings. Not only do her works make use of a formalist sense of color, they also require a comparable level of introspection. Drawing inspiration from her personal connections to Japan, Ando touches on aspects of Buddhism and Shintoism in these works, and yet they are not about religious narratives. Her pieces instead operate through the viewer's participation in meditation and contemplation, as do Rothko's. To sit at length and look at Ando's *Clouds*, the more one sees. The ekphrastic poems included in this volume (see pp. 40, 41, 43 & 45) are testaments to this declaration.

Ando has stated, moreover, that she greatly admires works by Helen Frankenthaler. Frankenthaler, a second-generation Abstract Expressionist, is known primarily for her stain paintings—works like *Spiritualist* from 1973 (National Museum of Women in the Arts)—which collectively feature colorful, non-objective forms. Described as being “weightless, radiant expanses with the brilliance of watercolor and the authority of large scale,” Frankenthaler's pieces (similar to those by Rothko) represent an ethereality that emphasizes the painter's attempt to (ironically) depict ephemerality in a fixed state.⁴

Like Rothko and Frankenthaler before her, Ando demonstrates that contemplation and the “spiritual self” still have a place in art of the Anthropocene. In her *Cloud Series*, this is achieved through meditating on the permanence of otherwise transitory cloud forms. These paintings ask the viewer to sit, look, and consider higher, more transcendent realms. To do so is to become transfixed by their quiet surfaces and what lies beyond.

1. Mike King, “Concerning the Spiritual in Twentieth-Century Art and Science,” *Leonardo* 31, no. 1 (1998): 21-31.
2. Harold Rosenberg, “Metaphysical Feelings in Modern Art,” *Critical Inquiry* 2, no. 2 (1975): 222.
3. Laura Glen Louis, “Blue Monotone,” *The Hudson Review* 72, no. 3 (2019): 401.
4. Karen Wilkin, “Helen Frankenthaler (1928–2011),” *American Art* 26, no. 3 (2012): 101.

Miya Ando & the Meditative Principles of *Dansaekhwa*

Ximena Salazar

There are many ways in which one might physically achieve a deep, meditative state. A common medium used for this purpose is art. One style in particular that takes the practice of meditation to its very essence is the art of *Dansaekhwa*. Translated from Korean as “monochrome painting,” *Dansaekhwa* is a term used to describe a non-collective art “movement” that emerged in South Korea in the mid-1970s. Although the name implies that artists associated with *Dansaekhwa* uniformly embraced a highly restrictive color palette, several of these painters would actually layer multiple hues on top of one another to create a multivalent, yet visually “singular,” color on the surface of the canvas.

One such painter, the South Korean artist Park Seo-Bo (1931-2023), stated that for him, *Dansaekhwa* “is not so much about the color as it is about the essence of the action itself—the repetitive gestures that empty and cultivate the painter’s mind.”¹ With Seo-Bo’s quote in mind, the present essay seeks to address the following question: How does an examination of the meditative principles of *Dansaekhwa* help us to approach paintings by Miya Ando?

Art historian Simon Morley has argued that one can find echoes of American color field painting or Minimalism in the art of *Dansaekhwa*. The movement is also closely associated with “South Korea’s quest for a modern cultural identity in a period marked by slow economic development and repressive politics.”² He writes:

However we choose to approach *Dansaekhwa*, it is clear that it very markedly displays qualities that set it apart both from the kind of painting styles that dominated East Asian art for millennia, and also from those that were being adopted under the “modernizing” agendas of East Asian Communism. This rupture certainly has much to do with the impact of Western culture.³

Morley contends that *Dansaekhwa*’s uniquely “East-meets-West” aesthetic allowed South Korean artists to embrace abstract painting as a “meditative process.”⁴ These sentiments were repeated more recently by art historian Hamin Kim, who asserts that “behind the seemingly simple and even monotonous surfaces there is an unseen labor-intensiveness, the fruition of a deliberate and meditative undertaking.”⁵

Echoes of the cross-cultural and meditative principles of *Dansaekhwa* can similarly be found in Miya Ando’s *Cloud* paintings. When speaking of her practice, Ando has mentioned how being biracial, bicultural, and bilingual (see p. 35) profoundly affects the “East-meets-West” aspects of her oeuvre. Her *Cloud* Series, for example, is just one of many bodies of work in which the sky becomes her protagonist in an attempt to visually connect with nature’s ephemerality. Clouds also become a source of meditation and contemplation for the artist and her viewers.

To stand in front of one of her *Cloud* paintings, one sees the smoothness of her seamless traces, the transition and movement of colors depending on where one is standing, the stillness and quietness of clouds. Ando’s work, although different from paintings created during the *Dansaekhwa* movement, nevertheless share characteristics with it on a philosophical level.

Like *Dansaekhwa* artists, Ando typically employs few hues or colors in her paintings, but often utilizes Japanese indigo, and likewise highlights the importance of materiality in each of her works, be that painting, installation, or sculpture. In a similar vein, Yun Hyong-Keun (1928-2007), one of the more prominent artists associated with *Dansaekhwa*, stated that his work often attempted to convey the sky

by transposing blues, such as ultramarine or indigo, onto the surface of the canvas. Like Ando, Hyong-Keun also experimented with reflective, visual qualities to enliven his skies. In Ando's *Cloud Series*, this luminosity is achieved by using aluminum as a support for her paintings.

As with *Dansaekhwa* art, Ando's paintings are seemingly minimalist, yet allude to deeper meanings. To this end, Ando has stated: "Art is a question, an investigation, an inquiry; it allows you to find solace in your own thinking."⁶ When gazing upon one of her *Cloud* paintings, one can do just that: meditate and let the mind wander to loftier planes.

1. Park Seo-Bo, quoted in HG Masters, "Park Seo-Bo: Disciple of Nature," *Art Asia Pacific*, November 1, 2021. Available: <https://artasiapacific.com/issue/park-seo-bo-disciple-of-nature?locale=en>.
2. Simon Morley, "Dansaekhwa: Korean Monochrome Painting," *Third Text* 27, no. 2 (2013): 189.
3. *Ibid.*, 190.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Hamin Kim, "What You Don't See: Meditating on Korean Monochrome Painting," Art Institute of Chicago, August 15, 2023. Available: <https://www.artic.edu/articles/1048/what-you-don-t-see-meditating-on-korean-monochrome-painting>.
6. Miya Ando, in conversation over Zoom with ArtLab students, February 2, 2024.

AN EXPLORATION OF MOVEMENT & PERSPECTIVE

Milla Nicolas-Nader

Miya Ando's art emerges as a reflection on her unique cultural heritage and philosophical beliefs. Born of Japanese and Russian-American ancestry, Ando was exposed to a blend of cultural influences, marked by her time spent living in a Buddhist temple in Okayama, Japan, as well as Northern California. As a result, Ando's diverse cultural tapestry and upbringing inevitably shaped her aesthetic vision in profound ways.

Characterized by a minimalist approach, Ando's work explores themes of deep transformation, altered perspectives, and the interplay between nature and human perception. Her artistry is marked by an eclectic use of materials—metals, wood, fabric, and natural pigments—each chosen to embody the philosophical underpinnings of her multicultural background. The interplay of these materials results in visually arresting artworks that are rich in symbolism and meaning. The choice and manipulation of these materials is deliberate and, as such, Ando's work not only seeks to be observed, but experienced, inviting the viewer to reflect upon and immerse themselves in her artistic worlds.

In this regard, Ando's art is similar to works by the Venezuelan artist Jesús Rafael Soto (1923-2005), who endeavored to surpass mere observation, inviting an immersive experience between audience and artwork. Renowned for his innovative Kinetic and Op Art, Soto was interested in exploring movement across changing perspectives. Each artwork is constructed of geometric patterns and multidimensional planes that are meticulously designed to evoke illusions of motion.¹ As spectators move around (and in front of) his works, what previously appeared to be stagnant lines or shapes, now seem to pulse and shift before their eyes.

These illusions transform the act of viewing into an interactive experience, turning passive onlookers into active participants. As a

result, this experience challenges traditional notions of art viewing as a static process. Soto's art is thus an invitation to examine the infinite possibilities of interaction, inviting the viewer to see the world through a lens of engagement.

Ando's art connects with Soto's ideals of engaging the observer by "manipulating" perspective. Ando's exploration of optical movement invites viewers to become an integral part of her art through physical interaction. The illusion of depth in her *Cloud Series* subsequently encourages her audience to examine these painted clouds more closely, to see them transform as they "move" across their metallic surfaces, creating an experience similar to observing real clouds forming and reforming in the sky.

Through her *Cloud* paintings, Ando also explores her Japanese heritage, particularly the Buddhist concept of impermanence and mindfulness. Clouds, with their ever-changing forms and fleeting presence, serve as a metaphor for this concept. The emphasis on impermanence encourages an appreciation of the transient beauty in nature, while mindfulness encourages awareness of the world we inhabit. The result is a body of work that encourages the spectator to perceive beyond the surface and interact with her art in a way that is both personal and resonant. Her works thus offer an invitation to embark on a journey of self-discovery and self-reflection, creating a process in which the viewer becomes an integral part of the work's "narrative."

Ando's pieces are often characterized, moreover, by their tranquil appearance and subtle manipulations of light and color. Her use of layered materials (such as silver and inks) on metallic surfaces (including steel and aluminum) creates a sense of fluidity, similar to Soto's work. In turn, the reflective qualities of her treated surfaces create delicate, gradient colorations that change with the surrounding light in a manner similar to Op Art or Kinetic Art.

Through their respective mediums, Ando and Soto both emphasize the importance of the observer's active engagement when generating meaning in a work of art. This shared quality underlines a deeper understanding of perspective, optics, and the relationship between

form and viewer. As such, Ando's works inspire a contemplative response, inviting reflection that reveals layers of depth and thought. The *Cloud* paintings in *Miya Ando: Sky Writing* are therefore not meant to be viewed straight-on, but as objects in-the-round that seemingly come to life before the viewer's eyes.

1. Bello Milagros, *Jesús Soto: The Destruction of Sight* (Los Angeles: Museum of Latin American Art, 2005), 115-116.

MIYA ANDO & MINIMALISM

Jackson Harris

When paired with Japanese cultural ideas and concepts, Miya Ando's ethereal imagery separates her from other artists working in the Anthropocene. This point notwithstanding, her *Cloud* paintings share affinities with art movements of the past.

During the 1960s, Minimalism, with its abstract ideas and pared-down aesthetics dominated the U.S. art scene. Artists such as Frank Stella (b. 1936) and Donald Judd (1928-1994) distanced themselves from the New York School of Abstract Expressionism to make colorful, geometric pieces that were both eye-catching and stimulating to the viewer. In tandem with Minimalism was the Light and Space movement, which relied on brightly colored light, or lights, to enhance the viewing experience. James Turrell (b. 1943), arguably one of the most well-known artists within this movement, turned to installation to provide immersive, viewing experiences. Minimalist artists prioritized materiality over narrative and recognizable iconographies. Judd, in particular, believed that pieces that did not necessarily need to convey emotion, at least outwardly. He used geometric shapes and varying materials to accomplish this goal. In an interview with Bruce Hooton for Archives of American Art, Judd explained, "One of the reasons, I guess, that my stuff is geometric is that I want it to be simple; also I want it to be non-naturalistic, non-imagistic, and non-expressionistic."¹

In some of his most famous pieces, Judd utilized aluminum to fashion a series of large boxes, or box forms. Their materiality, in turn, created mirror-like surfaces in which viewers could literally see themselves. In this way, Judd's sculptures visually "moved" as viewers walked around the forms and encountered them from different angles. The reflective properties of aluminum also aided Judd in creating art that emphasized movement over the painterly surface of Abstract Expressionist painting.

Light and Space artists similarly sought a new aesthetic. In an interview with Richard Whittaker, Turrell spoke about why he fell in

love with creating art involving light. Turrell said, "the idea that it's possible to actually work in a way, on the outside, to remind one of how we see on the inside, is something that became more interesting to me as an artist."² For Turrell, it is important that his viewers are aware of their consciousness as they move through these installations.

Art critic David Roth has likewise compared Ando's work to Light and Space art, especially to underwater scenes created by Peter Alexander (1939-2020).³ Like Ando, Alexander used a multitude of materials in his work, including aluminum, glitter, rhinestones, sequins, and pearlescent buttons. These reflective materials allow light to "jump" from the surface of a piece, creating an experience that is unique to each viewer's relation to the painting. Similarly reflective properties can be found in Ando's *Cloud* paintings, some of which include silver dust mixed into her pigments.

Works in *Miya Ando: Sky Writing* express, moreover, the ethereality and fleetingness of time in a manner not unlike Turrell's light-filled installations. Colors in Ando's aluminum paintings change as the viewer moves around these works. But unlike Turrell, Ando explores the Japanese concept of *mono no aware* in her works – a principle that seeks to understand the pathos of ephemera. Her *Cloud Series* thus connects with viewers on a deeper level, allowing them to experience the pathos of ephemeral clouds. In this way, her uniquely Japanese conceptualization of contemporary art sets her apart from Minimalist and Light and Space artists.

1. Bruce Hooton, "Oral History Interview with Donald Judd, 1965 February 3," Archives of American Art. Available: www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-donald-judd-11621.

2. Richard Whittaker, "Greeting the Light: An Interview with James Turrell," *Do Good* (2017). Available: <https://www.dailygood.org/story/1553/greeting-the-light-an-interview-with-james-turrell-richard-whittaker/>.

3. David Roth, "Miya Ando's 'Moon Almanac,'" *Square Cylinder* (2023). Available: <https://www.squarecylinder.com/2023/05/51585/>.

MIYA ANDO'S CLOUDS & TRADITIONAL JAPANESE METALWORK

Isabelle Gomez

Miya Ando is a fifteenth-generation descendent of Japanese sword-makers. As such, the current essays aims to conceptualize works in *Miya Ando: Sky Writing* alongside the art and aesthetics of Japanese metalwork and sword-making.

Forging a traditional Japanese sword is a unique art form. Developed over several centuries, it is a process that Ando describes as a "religious pursuit." Japanese metalsmiths typically utilize *tamahagane* (a type of steel made from iron-rich sand) heated in a *tatara* (a Japanese furnace) to produce their swords. In order to eliminate impurities and correct the dispersal of carbon content throughout the metal, the *kitae* technique was developed.

Kitae involves selecting and forge-welding suitable *tamahagane* pieces into a singular block, then hammering and folding the block back onto itself several times. Through this process, intricate *jihada* (or patterns created through layering) are produced. Most importantly, the direction of the folds determines the ultimate designs that form on the sword's blade. In some instances, this repetitive folding creates the illusion of waves, or clouds, on the surface of the metal. While this process is extremely laborious, it is required to ensure that the sword is neither too brittle nor too soft.

After the blade is forged, the edge is treated with heat to create the *yakiba* (the hardened edge of the sword); the extent of this hardening and color change is entirely controlled by the smith. Additionally, *yasurime* (file marks on the tang that prevent the blade from slipping from the handle) are created when the *nakago* (the part of the blade that fits into the handle) is completed.

Ando's knowledge of Japanese sword-making is apparent in her *Cloud Series* in three important ways. First, her use of metals, such as aluminum and silver, are a nod to smithing and metalwork. Second,

the painted clouds on the surface of her aluminum backgrounds are visual allusions to the *jihada* "cloudscapes" that sometimes appear on Japanese blades. Finally, the microstriations that appear on the surface of the aluminum sheets create a parallel to the *yasurime* on a sword's tang.

Ando collectively draws upon generations of craftsmanship and tradition with her *Cloud* paintings. These works are consequently the conceptual melding (or *kitae* technique) of Japanese metalwork being folded into contemporary art. Her cultural background is therefore implicit and explicit in her exploration of clouds and cloudscapes on metallic surfaces: iconographies that are likewise present on the blades of her family's Japanese swords.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MIYA ANDO

Miya Ando & Benjamin Rosen-Cappellazzo

The following conversation took place over Zoom between ArtLab student/senior Benjamin Rosen-Cappellazzo and artist Miya Ando on March 21, 2024.

BRC: If art is a silent form of communication, what conversations or emotions are you trying to facilitate or invoke in the *Cloud Series*?

MA: I really think of art as being the most elegant form of communication. In my methodology and my philosophy, art is thinking, and what you're seeing is the residue of thought. An artist is thinking about things, and then you're seeing this manifest, in my case, in visual art, in this visible, tangible object. That is not a soliloquy or a monologue; it's actually an invitation for a dialogue that occurs between the artwork and the viewer.

So, the viewer brings their entire history, knowledge, background, experiences, and memories, and they regard an artwork, and there is a silent dialogue that occurs. The works are a mirror, both for the viewer and myself, because they are on a surface that reflects light. There is a mutable and mercurial aspect to the material, aluminum, where the works look different based on location, time of day, and type of light.

There is not one emotion that I hope to invoke. When I hone in on these moments, which I consider seconds from my life, I want to look at something tranquil. I may not start tranquil, but I hope to get there. There is this great word in Japanese, *heijyoshin*, which means calm under duress. I would say that is what I am trying to achieve for myself in engaging with these works. If art is thinking and this artwork is residue of thought what are those thoughts that are in my mind when I create these works.

I am thinking about time, temporality and vernacular that expresses particularly fleeting moments of time. The ideas behind the work stem from looking at these frozen moments of time and examining them,

considering impermanence and how this pertains to the human condition which is shared by all of us.

BRC: One of my favorite aspects of your work is that each person has a unique viewing experience; the works are mutable, and what you see changes based on your height or the angle at which you are standing to look at each piece. Can you elaborate on your methodology, process, and the choices you make in terms of materiality and color?

MA: There are a lot of ugly ducklings in my studio, works that were not kissed by the frog (or is the frog that was kissed and became a prince?!). I have made so many material attempts trying to get at the most articulate visceral execution of the work. For me, materiality can viscerally reiterate the concept of your work. If the cloud paintings were on linen, for example, they would not speak as eloquently; the metal substrate of the cloud paintings reflect transitory light, and this reiterates the meaning of the work, which is about temporality and time.

I employ colorization to evoke a moment of transition. Color is a clock, especially in these moments of dusk and dawn, where color changes every millisecond. I have also gone into painting with urethane or lacquer, things that are friends with metal so there's that consideration as well.

BRC: Can you talk about how your work explores language and vernacular?

MA: I am really interested in the concept of lacunae. Lacunae are lexical gaps—they are words that exist in one language system and not in the other, so perhaps you could say they're untranslatable words. My main interest in words is not only in terms of vocabulary and linguistics; words are entire concepts. Now we're talking about missing concepts. When something is valued in society, it's given a

name. I just wrote this 2,000-word dictionary of rain-related term—types of rain—and so this is just an example; it's really metaphoric; it could be rain, wind, snow, it could be anything.

I also did another dictionary of 1,300 words used to describe the moon that I found in Japanese, and translated into English, and made a drawing for each. Why a drawing? It connects back to language because it is speechless. Why rain and the moon? Because they're both ephemeral, the moon is actually really interesting because it's transitory and also permanent, but rain is incredibly ephemeral. I have compiled an entire encyclopedia of words and concepts that pertain to *mono no aware*, this noticing and sensitivity to fleeting things.

Lacunae to me is a place that, being of mixed race and being bilingual and living in Japan and America, is just a vantage point. I realized I can see things that exist here and they don't exist there, and so it becomes almost like the path of least resistance for me. I am able to compare and contrast two cultures in terms of ethnolinguistics.

BRC: Can you talk about your family's history in Japan. How does this legacy impact your work?

My surname is Ando, so my grandfather was a Buddhist priest in a small Buddhist temple in Okayama, Japan. Both my grandmother and my grandfather are from very old families, so I'm the fifteenth generation of both of those families, about 350 years. On my grandfather's side, prior to becoming Buddhist priests, they were swordsmiths. Eventually, samurai culture and, ultimately, the swordsmithing that went along with it ended.

So, you found all of these swordsmiths and craftspeople who had to shift their professions. So, my family became Buddhist priests at that time. As part of my background, I went to Yale for graduate school. I was looking at Buddhist iconography, but I moved back to Japan to become an apprentice for this master metalsmith. So it's part of my family lineage; metal resides in our lineage, and that was part of the draw for me as a young woman.

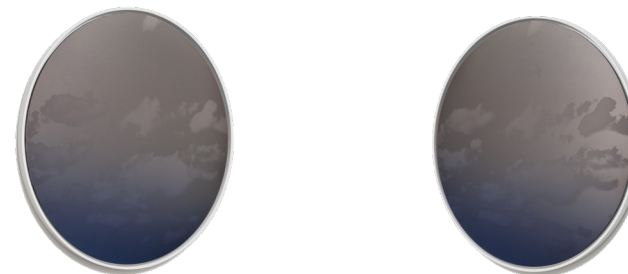
BRC: How has your cultural duality shaped your perspective? Do you feel a pressure to represent either your Japanese or American identity? And, is there a hierarchy to how you present your identities in your work?

MA: I'm from Okayama, which is a smaller city; it's not Tokyo or Kyoto. Imagine that 40 years ago, there were no white people, no one of any other ethnicity, just Japanese people. Then I show up as a half-white baby in a Buddhist temple, so that is really different – I was the first white person in the town. Japanese people will never really consider me fully Japanese just because of my skin and how I look, but I don't blame them; it's just a super ethnically homogeneous place where everyone's Japanese.

So, I developed, a long time ago, ways of coping with my mixed race when I was in Japan. I just accepted that I have this perspective; this is who I am—I am really, truly deep in my heart of hearts, half American and half Japanese. I am Japanese, and I'm American. I love both places, I really do.



Miya Ando, *Evening Cloud (Yuugumo)* February 4 2023 NYC 6:44 PM,
2023, resin, dye, pure micronized silver, ink, urethane on aluminum composite,
41.5 x 1.5 inches (105.41 x 3.81 cm)



Evening Cloud, as viewed from the left and right.



Miya Ando, *Morning Cloud (Asagumo)* February 7 2023 6:24 AM NYC, 2023, resin, dye, pure micronized silver, ink, urethane on aluminum composite, 41.5 x 1.5 inches (105.41 x 3.81 cm)



Morning Cloud, as viewed from the left and right.



Miya Ando, *Evening Cloud (Yuugumo)* March 9 2023 7:02 PM NYC, 2023, resin, dye, pure micronized silver, ink, urethane on aluminum composite, 41.5 x 1.5 inches (105.41 x 3.81 cm)



Evening Cloud, as viewed from the left and right.

& When we're lonlied, still the clouds hold our eyes

Sankara Olama-Yai

Surface Features

Allen Means

&
 cotton when
 plucked
 like we're
 look No labor of love, while i sell what little i
 have left of my youth & body in the fields
 of a drunk city filled with mounds of scrap metal piled high
 into skyscraper's. The sky is full
 of bloated cotton, plump with rainstorm,
 sleet & snow, the clouds look like heaven waiting
 for an answer
 they to a simple question i forget
 to ask myself when the cruelty of the day's
 obligations submerge me into
 an amnesiac state, the forgetting a cocoon
 oak trees and when i look to you i find the question again
 perched on my lips ready to swan dive into the hollow
 shell of your ear in smuggled whispers;
 How does beauty push us to survive forward into tomorrow ?
 Black and silenced in a world of white worry, near the rivers of the city
 black bodies bloated
 with music, whistling the tired working day away, having survived
 beneath Survival for a poet looks like hunt, how i pillage language from our broken moments
 in this lonely city to come lay them at the cave of your ears, a soothing music of muses
 just like the filial sun that rises every morning carrying a bucket's
 worth of light to pour into our eyes from the well of dawn, i wake with
 a cloud of lyric and song longing to lay
 it all gently into the crevices of your body that absorb sound and ache less from that medicine
 bodies hold
 or black and when words cannot assuage that infinite thirst that makes us bleed
 poetry out of the thick, severed artery of our leaking misery,
 sit with me
 dandelions in silence, in an empty field, staring at the clouds eyes
 like
 floating they're

a gap in the sky widens to welcome the eyes of a billion lights. Here, the sky is not a sky but a country we've never been to. Here, the clouds are elaborate instruments for carrying and silver strings. Here, an individual human distilled until connected, dissolved — aluminum. Here, a vessel that against all odds, can float on water; face itself like a mirror in a dream. Here, a world wonder. Here, a new name for heaven, no different from heaven. Here, a million names for the same body, the same vast thing: a paradise opening above the earth, a volume flung, spread wings. Here,

Marriage Midair

(After Miya Ando: *Sky Writing*)
Rose Jenny



Silver blush accents, contours condensation, sticking
to a metallic surface. I wish I could catch a handful
of undisturbed cirrus, lash myself, its streaks wrapping around my wrists
until I am trapped just below the stratosphere, holding on to plumes that slip
from my outstretched arms, clinging to my fingernails. Meet me here. Let's collide
againandagainandagainandagainandagainandagainandagainandagainandagain
and again. I'll carve out a corner for us to rot in, let the mildew and mold
climb across our legs, reach up inside us and take over.

I'm done dwellers dictate letting s urface

our lives.
Why let these riches go

to waste?

Sepia shimmers

in the middle
distance,

a filter flooding

our waterlines

until,

all
of
a
sudden,

we fall.

Miya Ando, *Unkai (A Sea Of Clouds)* October 3 2023 6:52:08 AM NYC,
2023, ink on aluminum composite,
37.5 x 37.5 x 2.25 inches (95.25 x 95.25 x 5.72 cm)



Morning Cloud, as viewed from the left and right.

**Movin' Out—A Pictograph Poem after
Miya Ando's *May Cloud Grid*
Evan Wambeke**



Miya Ando, *May Cloud Grid* 2023,
2023, ink on aluminum composite,
54 x 94.5.5 x 2 inches (137.16 x 240.03 x 5.08 cm) overall

Each metal painting is 12 x 12 inches

The last thing we packed were the clouds
we waited for hours until above our home
they arrived it was 6:44 my mother
with her mind out of space with fogged eyes

she saw herself for the first time she cried hard
golden golden tearing at edges shaking silver sky
finding her face in her hands her home beneath her
flying away boxes erupted for the first time

becoming clouds becoming clouds a memory
we would try to frame we would try to
and find in the new place
our family in- formation our history in-

visible but golden golden side by side
they glowed all of them our bones
in our blood thick like blood ought to be
like streams running home

MIYA ANDO'S RECENT SOLO EXHIBITIONS

MIYA ANDO: SKY WRITING

February 2–June 1, 2024
Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables

VESPERTINE CLOUDS (YŪGUMO)

January 13–March 2, 2024
Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Singapore

SKY ATLAS

September 2–October 21, 2023
Wilding Cran Gallery, Los Angeles

WAITING FOR THE MOON

February 4–April 2, 2023
Bolinas Museum, Bolinas

KUMOJI (CLOUD PATH / A ROAD TRAVERSED BY BIRDS & THE MOON)

September 3–November 5, 2022
Kavi Gupta Gallery, Chicago

AKI WA YUUGURE (IN AUTUMN, THE EVENING)

October 13–November 12, 2022
Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York

MUGETSU (INVISIBLE MOON)

September 15–October 13, 2021
Maki Gallery, Tokyo

KUU / 空

October 31–December 26, 2020
Maki Gallery, Tokyo

CALENDAR OF MOONS (TSUKI KOYOMI)

September 24–October 31, 2020
Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Miya Ando is a Japanese and American artist based in New York. Her art is rooted in the dialectic coexistence of Eastern and Western cultures through the lens of natural phenomena. Her work is part of many public collections such as: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA; Nassau County Museum of Art, Roslyn Harbor, NY; Corning Museum of Glass, Corning, NY; Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit, MI; Luftmuseum, Amberg, Germany; Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Scottsdale, AZ; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA; The Museum of Art and History, Lancaster, CA, as well as in numerous private collections.

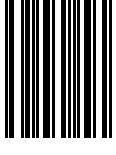
Solo exhibitions of her work have been presented at the Lowe Art Museum, Coral Gables, FL; Bolinas Museum, Bolinas, CA; the Asia Society Museum, Houston, TX; the Noguchi Museum, New York, NY; Savannah College Of Art and Design Museum, Savannah, GA; the Nassau County Museum, Roslyn Harbor, NY; and The American University Museum, Washington DC. Her work has been included in recent group exhibitions at Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, LA; Haus Der Kunst, Munich, Germany; Bronx Museum, Bronx, NY; The Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; and Queens Museum of Art, Queens, NY.

Ando has been the recipient of several grants and awards including the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant Award, and has produced several public commissions, most notably a thirty-foot-tall sculpture built from World Trade Center steel for Olympic Park in London to mark the ten-year anniversary of 9/11, for which she was nominated for a DARC Award in Best Light Art Installation. Ando was also commissioned to create artwork for the historic Philip Johnson Glass House, New Canaan, CT. Most recently, Ando received the 2023 Brookfield Place New York Annual Arts Commission. The artist holds a bachelor's degree in East Asian Studies from the University of California, Berkeley, studied East Asian Studies at Yale University, and apprenticed with a Master Metalsmith in Japan.

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