

# SUBVERSIVE ROMANTICISM IN THE WORK ON MIZUHO KOYAMA

By John Austin

What is remarkable in the work of Mizuho Koyama is the evident realization that her work has deep commitment as it asserts a serious element of romantic subversiveness. Her expanded agenda ranges from work that is intensely personal, even privately joyful in nature, to the poetic, to the phantasmagoric. Her pictorial imagery, clearly, traces a long arc.

On the one hand, we can trace elements that are modern in content but traditional in execution, such as explorations of the divided and shattered psyche, responses to interior states responding to exterior stress. These images, as in the sumi-ink on board work "Guest House #2" which are rendered with remarkable finesse and, seemingly, at a delicate remove from the sturm und drang of the roiling soul in distress and spiritual estrangement. Koyama's work however is rooted in a romantic inquiry in the role of cosmic forces as they direct man's inner and outer life away from the known and the representable.

The impetus to this way of thinking is a result of the artist's seeming response to the Japanese traditional painting, Abstract Expressionism and the interest in the symbolic language of poetry. What we see is not an overtly anti-empirical art or an overtly rationalist one. It has acquired the necessary component of inner resistance and contradiction that fuels art. Great art emerges out of the need to present first and foremost, the breathing visual incarnation of aesthetic intuition. This involves an intense concentration on the part of the artist to balance conscious and unconscious activity, drawing upon a power-not-itself, and combining the real and the ideal.

Koyama throughout her career seems to have been in a pursuit of individuation. This goal has been attained as a direct consequence of this artist's deriving her strength from reflecting, reducing and concentrating her attention to the most pressing and urgent needs. Towards that end she has unearthed (or invented) texts and narratives to fuel the intentions of her work.

These intentions are clear: to exemplify integration, a celebration in visual form, of the combined worlds of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. Koyama's ink shapes inhabit spaces and places that are in the world of the not-known. Through them she has explored the realms that are shadowy and subterranean. The artist's works reflect the chemistry of imagination, the volatile and fluid alchemy of the reverie, that is of the waking dream. It mirrors an internal rhythm of life, answering escapist tendencies that are nevertheless vital for the creative aspects of her imaginative consciousness to flourish.

Were we to permit ourselves the challenge of characterizing the complex and often contradictory quality of Mizuho Koyama's art we might say that its facets arise out of a struggle to make manifest an 'inner romanticism' only available to the artist. It arises out of a world that only the artist is capable of identifying and tracing. Koyama is engaged in seeking in art a satisfaction for man's rage for order; he finds spiritual order, not divine revelation, in a secular imagination. In outlining that world's contours to the observer (who is destined to forever be a mere onlooker of the imagining consciousness) Koyama's 'logic of passion' gives moral authority and remarkable importance to the artist's task of unveiling the marvelous.

John Austin is an art writer working and living in Manhattan