

Thursday, September 27th, 2018

Sliding Away Into Space: Barbara Takenaga at DC Moore

by Mary Jones

Barbara Takenaga: Outset at DC Moore Gallery

September 6 to October 6, 2018

535 West 22nd Street, between 10th and 11th avenues

New York City, dcmooregallery.com



Installation shot, Barbara Takenaga: Outset, at DC Moore Gallery, 2018, showing, left to right, Aeaea (2018) and Manifold 5 (2018)

In a 2013 interview with Robert Kushner, Barbara Takenaga relayed her process in nautical terms: “I feel like I am on this really giant ocean liner, and I’ve got this little tiny steering wheel, and I’m turning and turning and turning it.” In this analogy, she describes the shifting directions and momentum through both individual paintings and her entire body of work. She’s also talking about navigating between control and the changes she courts to explore new territory.

This image was on my mind viewing Takenaga’s new show, “Outset,” at DC Moore, her fifth with the gallery. The ship seems straightened now, leaner, and many familiar motifs appear to be thrown overboard. The tarmacs of Nebraska are long behind her, horizon lines have all but disappeared, and with them allusions to her home state skies, suburban hallucinatory wonder, and a certain kind of intentional goofiness. Ahead is somewhere unknown, and acceleration is palpable.

As with earlier work, we are flying, floating, or dreaming through hyperconsciousness, or maybe all of these at once. References to explosions, ecstasy, space travel, aerial views of drifting land masses, and microbiology are well established elements of Takenaga's vocabulary, as is her ability to deliver this iconography with masterful, exquisite clarity. The surface of the painting is a statement in itself— her signature palette of steel blue-gray delivered in taut flawless satin, a sheet touched and frosted everywhere with iridescence, sometimes in fuschia.

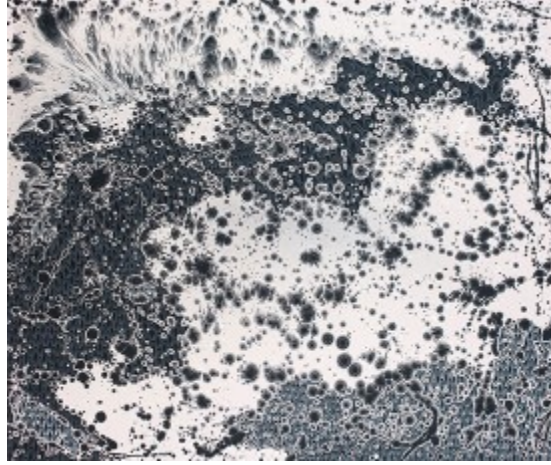


Babara Takenaga, Hello, 2018. Acrylic on linen, 42 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery

Takenaga plays through octaves of weight. Tiny brushstrokes, hairlines, and rendered dots of white are made with the lightest touch, skittering across a heavy lava flow of poured and puddled acrylic. She knows her chemistry. Untold hours of attention, focus and devotion to her craft are haptically present, the paintings suggest strenuous concentration and, like meditation, allow the viewer to escape the pressures of time and distraction. Takenaga has practiced and honed these qualities through decades, and now she thoroughly owns them.

As Takenaga has recently been categorized as a “mature” artist, like the battered ship and stormy skies of Thomas Cole's allegorical “The Voyage of Life: Manhood,” she seems to be veering into deep and confrontational turbulence, ready to relinquish some control, take more chances and partner with chaos. The “black holes” of *Aeaea* (all works, 2018) and *Hello* rip into the center of her compositions and in this body of work she not only allows them to stay, she cultivates them into the strongest figure-ground relationships in her work to date. Black centered pours cover a third of these two canvases, and the backgrounds have the least amount of pattern. Takenaga embellishes the pour in *Hello* outlining the shape with thin white and yellow lines, a kind of halo. While working on *Aeaea* she noticed a long accidental drip along the right side—an outlier of iridescent insect-leaf green—which she incorporated it into the composition. The black shape stretches from left to right, and pulls to all four directions, vaguely figurative and certainly muscular. Delicate Japanese patterns spring forth to inhabit its wildness with waves of fish scales or mountains, a net of pattern that gently tames and lands the form into the blue-gray

ground. Her boldness is confirmed in *Manifold 5*, a sprawling five-paneled painting suggestive of rupture and emotional separation. An immense phallic ellipse divides a pitch black void. Takenaga is unabashedly poetic here and invites, or rather incites, the viewer's imagination to follow hers. She riffs wonderfully on associations between Japanese screens and patterns, candles floating on the Ganges, submarines, and Whistler's nocturnes.



Babara Takenaga, *Serrulata*, 2018. Acrylic on linen, 45 x 54 inches. Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery

As a young artist Takenaga found inspiration in Japanese prints, patterns, Indian painting and mandalas, as well as the work of Sol Lewitt, Eva Hesse, and Yayoi Kusama. It's interesting to note that while Takenaga was a student at the University of Colorado, Boulder during the mid 1970s, the pattern focused Criss-Cross artists' collective was still very active. In an interview with Leslie Wayne for "Two Coats of Paint," Takenaga lets us in on a personal dimension embedded in her use of patterns: "References to my grandmother were coded into mountain shapes ... Lots of hiding and coding. The whole series of dot mandalas from 2001-2009 were about my mother, sliding away into space." In her new show, paintings like *Serrulata* spell it out for us in rhythmic, ebullient language. Sumi ink-like splotches on a shell pink ground make a koan of cherry blossoms and time, and like the work of another great student of Japanese art, Roland Flexner, the painting coalesces before our eyes. Taking a cue from the vision of time revealed to Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, Takenaga has seen her universe blow open, and she's taking action.



Babara Takenaga, *Outset*, 2018. Acrylic on linen, 45 x 54 inches. Courtesy of the artist and DC Moore Gallery