

KEN TAKASHI HORII: OF MIND AND MATTER

The Chazan Gallery at Wheeler
228 Angell Street
Providence, Rhode Island

September 18 through October 8

ENTERING THE GALLERY, OBSERVE BEFORE YOU THE TEMPLE-RED BUDDHAPADA, THE DIAMOND REALM MANDALA...AND, BOTH "VISHNU'S SMALL [AND BIG] BIG BANG THEORIES." BEFORE CONSULTING YOUR MANUAL, IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT KEN TAKASHI HORII APPROACHES THESE HEADY SYMBOLS AND DIAGRAMMATIC PROBLEMS FIRST AND FOREMOST AS AN ARTIST, NOT AS A DISCIPLE.

While steeped in esoteric inquiry on the surface, in essence, this show is a chapter in the story of an American artist. After all, Ken Takashi Horii, a third generation Japanese-American, was born and raised in New York City.

Only in adulthood did Horii delve into his lineage to discover an impressive 14 generations of Shinto priests, as well as strong ancestral ties to the sect of Shingōn Buddhism from which he freely borrows iconographic references.



Ken Takashi Horii, *Of Mind and Matter*, 2008, plywood, paper, sumi ink, ink.

These include direct parallels, such as his adaptation of the Diamond Realm mandala as a diagrammatic structure; and, more subtle echoes, like the obscured source images behind the gestural inkblot drawings he nests within.

Originally trained as a painter at Cooper Union, Horii inexorably gravitated towards the physicality of sculpture in the mid-1980s after his visits to India, where he was impressed by the breathtakingly preserved ancient rock-cut Buddhist cave temples at Ajanta and other historic sites.

Since that seed experience, Horii's work exhibits a 20-year transition from painting to sculpture - with glimpses, as in this show, back again. The overlap is apparent in this exhibition of his newest work. Here, the traditional medium of sumi-ink painting finds sculptural intent through the dimensional process of folding that Horii utilizes to achieve the watery symmetry of Rorschach inkblots.

Sculpturally, this series retains a very controlled, flat quality. The focal piece, a stylized, vermilion Buddhapada (footprint of the Buddha), also titled "Of Mind and Matter," acts for all intents and purposes as a frame for the lightly sculptural, folded sumi-ink

drawings adhered to its auspicious 108 openings.

Ironically, it is the small, convex mirror anchoring this Buddhapada form to the wall that conveys the most depth; a fitting conundrum, as the detailed realm packed into its bowed reflection is, after all, an illusion.

These perceptual dualities are what Horii attempts to reconcile, through very deliberate material choices, framing his iconographical references to the Eastern traditions of Vajrayana and Shingōn Buddhism. Steeping that iconography in the highly interpretive Western structure of the Rorschach inkblot, Horii presents a diametrically opposed window into our perceptions of illusion and allusion.

It sounds fairly heavy; yet, it's not too hard to swallow. One does not need a PhD in Eastern philosophy to enjoy the dualities set up by these works. In fact, the metaphysical structures employed by Horii in this series are by nature a hair airtight.

Clearly, Horii follows a very precise and diagrammatic working process, which extends into his careful research on archival raw materials. A one-time cabinet builder and retail fixture designer, Horii relies on real-world experience to resolve structural questions. Even his sumi-ink drawings, which in tradition open the door for nature to interact with accident, still require a certain amount of control for the application of ink and folding of paper to achieve their interpretive blots. When pressed, Horii admitted to a search through his methodic process for the "smallest avenue that opens up to a space where control leaves off."

Of course, relying on this control and measured precision, he first must answer every question he can before finding release in the questions he cannot. In this case, the most satisfying aspect of this body of work is that shining threshold.

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HEIDI WHITMAN, FACULTY, *Wind Brain Terrain (157)* (detail), 2006. Acrylic, flashe, and ink on panel.

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