

# Tableaux of Newly Imagined Landscapes: Hori Kosai

By Iseki Masaaki

In its embrace of subcultures, modern art in all parts of the world has opened up to all possible forms of expression. From events and performances to high-tech images, artists are using a range of material to create artwork the likes of which have never before been imagined.

Still, painting on a flat surface, in which expression is confined to the traditional tableaux, has by no means gone out of style. There is no lack, in fact, of artists who undertake modern projects within those very limits. Here, "modern" refers to the capturing of the persistent insecurities and desires of modern city and nature dwellers through images and illusions.

One such artist, whose flat-surface paintings give magnificent expression to modern Japan, is Hori Kosai.

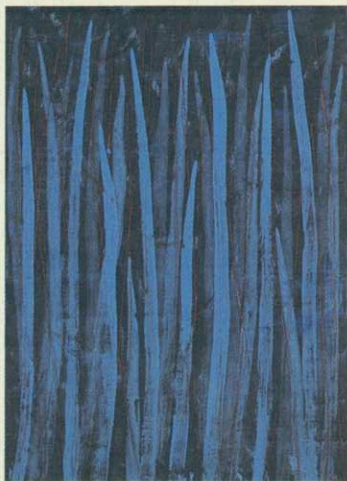
Hori began to forge his own style in the crucible of his simultaneous sympathy with and rejection of the "anti-art" movements of 1960s Japan (neo-dadaist and other movements in which

street events were staged outside of the formal "art" world). One example of the new direction he took at this time was a spatial "work" consisting of a piece of cloth mounted on a thick rectangular timber frame. Through experimentation, however, he came back to his struggle, driven by an internal passion for flat-surface tableaux, to explore the possibilities of a completely new kind of painting. This struggle was first apparent in a 1975 silk screen work called *Three Primary Colors—Practice*, in which the layered printing of primary colors was used in an attempt to create a new painting space by accumulating lines of color. The lines of color were embedded mechanically on the silk surface by repeated flicks of a carpenter's inking line. In this technique Hori was setting a new trend in an age in which art was mostly created by hand.

This kind of experiment with lines of color presages Hori Kosai's later unique use of strokes and lines, which in turn has fed directly into his current obsessive and incessant exploration of

illusions in the composition of his paintings.

In any event, Hori returned to the basic insight that painting is drawing. In 1979 and 1980, he created *Portrait of Elise*, a beautiful space in which broad wide strokes resonate subtly with thin lines. He followed this with two series entitled *To the Water's Skin* (1982) and *To the Sound of the Wind* (1983), in which the augmented movement of strokes imbued the flat surface with a stronger sense of depth. It is in these works that the "image" which Hori is aiming for first becomes apparent. By "image," of course, not a material image, but rather a psychological image, a mental picture of a landscape given form through a perspective of color. Hori's works can be viewed from above or below or from either side—in other words, they can be viewed from any direction—and yet they still conjure up the same image. This flexibility is all the more proof of the image's psychological depth. The textured variety of his paintings also brings out the



*Glitter on the Waves—10*, 1994; 91x65.2cm.



*Untitled VI*, 1977; 240x320cm. Photo courtesy of Takamatsu City Museum of Art.





*Force Changing the Wind—6, 1992; 259.1x728cm. Photo courtesy of The Museum of Art, Kochi.*



*I Saw Birds in ROME—19, 1991; 259x162cm.*

sense of depth within the confines of the tableau. In addition to acrylic, Hori uses oil sticks, Japanese-style mineral powder paints, ink and more, using each on a distinct visual level and changing the character of the strokes and lines used with each material. This technique also creates a further sense of depth.

From the *Jungle* series (1986) in this genre, he moved to a series in the early 1990s called *I Saw Birds in ROME* in which he used a technique of affixing Japanese paper to his basic canvas. With this series, Hori's imagined landscapes reached the pinnacle of painting as illusion.

In the 1990s, Hori uses the same materials but gives free rein to the form of his strokes. In *Force Changing the Wind* series (1992) and his *The Day that Reads the Wind* series (1996), he uses the independent single stroke to trace lines that move all over the canvas, while his aesthetic of color for his imagined landscapes remains unchanging.

Looking at how Hori Kosai has composed his paintings throughout his career, one thing stands out. Each of the various psychological landscapes that emerge from the act of drawing—be they a woven forest, wind, or a bird—have, once drawn, a mysterious power to incite the artist into drawing the next landscape. This mysteriousness is probably external to Hori's consciousness, but somehow has a tremendous power that will keep Hori in the act of drawing as long as he lives.

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