

CRITIC'S PICK JACOB HASHIMOTO



Jacob Hashimoto's *Face Ache at the Ice Cream Social*, 2005, made from handcrafted bamboo-and-paper kites.

When Jacob Hashimoto was at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in the mid-1990s and became frustrated with painting landscape-based abstractions, his father suggested that he find a hobby. "Build kites," he said. So Hashimoto taught himself how to construct a traditional bamboo-and-paper kite and quickly accumulated several dozen in his studio. "I looked at this cluster hanging from the ceiling, and I thought I could do something far better than what I was doing in my painting," recalls the 34-year-old artist. He began playing with the kites to build room-size sculptural environments.

After graduating with his B.F.A. in 1996, Hashimoto—raised by his Japanese father and Irish mother in Walla Walla, Washington—spent the next year building 1,000 small, elliptical kites to form a diaphanous canopy that undulated throughout his house. Ann Nathan, at whose gallery he worked, helped arrange a 1998 show in the project room at Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art. There he multiplied his kites tenfold, creating a 100-by-30-foot installation called *Infinite Expanse of Sky*. "Evoking the sky using objects that can fly in the sky had this sense of Icarus," he recalls, sitting in his Brooklyn studio, where he and three assistants churn out handmade kites in multiple shapes and sizes. "So much effort went into putting them up. And then, with a pair of scissors, you cut them down and it's gone."

Hashimoto, who still makes monumental works—including *Cloud Deck*, a vast permanent installation to be completed at the University of Houston's business school in December—now uses the kites primarily as little canvases in large wall pieces. He strings layers of the kites, which are made of different papers; arranged in layers collaged in an explosive array of colors and textures, from pegs on rectangular wooden armatures. The dense fields of kaleidoscopic patterns are softened by the fuzzy translucency of kites made with natural-tone rice and silk papers dipped in acrylic polymer. Although the effect is abstract, "you can pull a figure-ground relationship out of all my work," says Hashimoto. He is strongly influenced by Agnes Martin and Brice Marden, and freely admits to lifting motifs from other artists, such as the pop patterns of Takashi Murakami, the graphic stripes of Sean Scully, and the simple arcing shapes of Ellsworth Kelly. He is also inspired by fabric designs and Japanese ink paintings.

Hashimoto had his first New York show last January at Mary Boone Gallery. Through the 13th of this month, his solo exhibition "Plumes and the Landscape Omnibus" is on view in Chicago at Rhona Hoffman Gallery, where his wall pieces sell for up to \$35,000.

The kites' deceptive simplicity is key to their impact. "There's no magic in the technique, but the whole thing becomes magical," says Hashimoto.

—Hilarie M. Sheets



Hilarie M. Sheets is a contributing editor of ARTnews.

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