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YOSHIO IKEZAKI: ELEMENTS

"A wonderful painting is the result of the feeling in your fingers. If you have the feeling of the thickness of the ink in your brush, the painting is already there before you paint." — shunryu suzuki

Yoshio Ikezaki's art is first and foremost grounded in the fundamental principles and philosophical concepts of Japanese aesthetics, interpreted and expressed materially in a contemporary context. In the Japanese tradition the mastery of craft demands each generation add something new to the art form, regardless of how subtle. In contemporary Western terms the artist is expected to invent new forms. Ikezaki's work exists in a dialogue between the two in which prescribed materials take on forms that are unpredictable departures from the standard, and traditional imagery such as landscape is imbued with an ambiguity of readings. His materials — handmade washi paper and sumi ink — may be quintessentially Japanese, but the transformation of his uniquely layered paper sculptures into metal castings are the result of his response to environmental conditions and events. Likewise the sumi ink and watercolor paintings express the profound power and vulnerability of nature in its relationship to humanity, thus illuminating the deeper meaning of the contemporary global environmental crises in poetic rather than didactic terms.

In Japanese culture and thought for more than a thousand years there is no intrinsic difference or separation between humans and their environment. Rather, they seek to blend in with the natural world that surrounds them, believing that this can provide them with a better understanding of themselves and others. Without this sensitivity to the subtle moods of nature it would be impossible to enter into the "emotional quality of things," which is the foundation of aesthetic awareness.[1] This is expressed in poetry and painting as a deeply felt response to the beauty of changing seasons. In sharp contrast is the Western world's ideal of conquering nature, of pitting ourselves against its forces and subduing them for our own use and benefit. Ironically the success of this enterprise is now endangering our world, both the natural and artificial one, as well as our survival as a species. A recognition of these conflicting views, along with a deep regard for the value and meaning of the Japanese relationship to the natural world, has informed every aspect of Yoshio Ikezaki's spiritual, intellectual, and creative life as an artist, teacher and thinker.

"Ki is the essential element for my artwork. I use water as an active force to control the ink on wet paper. Ki serves to transform my will and intention to control the ink movement over the entire and local space of paper, for both even distribution and/or intended accidental collisions of ink and water." — yoshio ikezaki

Inspired by nature, Ikezaki's creative practice is simultaneously performtive and meditative. It unifies "the life of the mind" with a deeply intuitive physical engagement with material processes that manifest the “beauty” (meaning true nature) inherent in each encounter. In that sense Ikezaki’s works are the embodiment of *Y¯ugen* (幽玄) a Japanese word pertaining to a profound awareness of the universe that evokes feelings that are inexplicably deep and too mysterious for words. The aesthetic and spiritual precept of *Y¯ugen* is in the power to evoke, rather than the ability to state directly. In principle, the true nature and meaning of reality is revealed in what is suggested in only a few words, as in haiku, or a few brush strokes. It is in what has not been said or shown that awakens inner states of consciousness. In Ikezaki’s case, the artist’s identification with and knowledge of his material is in itself a state of consciousness, an intuitive space in which a transformative process unfolds. This encompasses the complete life cycle of being and nonbeing, energy into matter and matter into energy as exemplified by nature in process, and expressed in the principle of “emptiness” in which absence and presence exist at the same time.

Both Ikezaki’s paintings and sculpture represent this state of possibility, of limitless potential. The space between silence and sound, the moment between the whiteness of the paper and the black ink on the brush contain both here and there, before and after. This interval in space and time is an essential concept in Japanese esthetics called *Ma* (間), the void between, through, around, and within all things. This includes between objects, people and their environment, as well as spatial and temporal states. *Ma is the emptiness full of possibilities, like a promise yet to be fulfilled*. As described by Taoist philosopher and poet Lao Tse, “Pots are formed from clay,   though the space inside them is the essence of the pot.” In quite
a different context, Miles Davis has referred to the space between the notes as the source of his music. The difficulty in depicting such an abstract concept is what imbues it with an indefinable beauty, and an ambiguity that is able to transcend cultural boundaries. The feeling of boundlessness is relative to the environment in which it takes place. At the same time, in the acute observation of something in its arrival, passage, and departure, beyond and out of sight — a single flower petal falling, or a bird in flight —“value” shifts from the object itself to the process of recognition in the viewer. An appreciation for the brevity of the moment intensifies the emotional experience. This awareness of impermanence (*muj ¯o*), the transience of all things, and the ephemerality of experience is called *Mono no aware* (の哀れ), or the “pathos of things.”

In the process of manifestation, Ikezaki engages the tension between the phenomena of nature and human consciousness with particular attention to the integrity of the materials themselves. Zen master Shunryo Suzuki describes this quality of “being” as follows. [2]

“When you do something, if you fix your mind on the activity with some confidence, the quality of your state of mind is the activity itself. When you are concentrated on the quality of your being, you are prepared for the activity.”

Ikezaki makes his own washi paper and mixes his own sumi ink, and is acutely aware of the latent possibilities that exist prior to the action taken, while simultaneously being completely present in the moment of enactment. The resulting artworks are a synthesis of his relationship to his materials, his immersion
in his process, and the elemental nature of his subject matter — Fire / Earth (*Hi / Taichi*), Water / Air (*Mizu / Kuki*), Mind Essence / Beingness (*Ki*), Matter / Energy / Impermanence (*Ku*) — the four essential elements in nature and their evolving states of mind and matter.

Having established the philosophical foundation for Ikezaki’s art, it is equally important to reframe it within the context of a modern art discourse, and its representation of contemporary issues. Ikezaki, who was born and grew up in post-WWII Japan, received his primary art education in the United States in the 1970s when Japan was enamored with American pop culture. He later went on to teach and exhibit here, in Europe and Japan, and is as well versed in Western modernism as he is in both Japanese traditions and the post-war avant-garde. His sculpture in particular exemplifies the interface between these cultural currents in its material presence as an evocation of nature's inherent "impermanence," while negotiating its status as art object. At the core is the tension between two cultures, two ways of looking at the world, and how meaning is defined within them.

In terms of his sumi ink paintings, while it is tempting to draw parallels with the rhetorical stance of abstract expressionism with its emphasis on the "act" of painting, and the confronting of the empty void of the white canvas with material in hand, it would be a misleading equivalency for Ikezaki's intent is neither self-referential, as in Jackson Pollock's famous quote "*I am* nature," nor is his subject matter the creative act in and of itself. Absent is the existential angst of encountering a godless universe, and the notion of the individual gesture or mark as an autobiographical signature. Nor is there the moral imperative of Barnett Newman's pursuit of the absolute sublime to be achieved through a primal act of creating the world from chaos and darkness, thus equating the art act with Genesis, the artist as progenitor, and the painting as "an ideograph of the idea of original creation."[3]

Instead Ikezaki's conceptual approach is closer to a synthesis of theoretical physics and Zen Buddhism, as expressed in the unifying force of *Ki* that exists in all things and is everywhere in daily life. Ikezaki describes this as an inner energy and power that everyone possesses that "can be enriched and developed by daily practice of concentration and meditation." The artist both controls the medium — in this case ink and water — while at the same time allowing for what is present and active in the material substance itself in determining the outcome.

Despite the differences in media, Ikezaki is more in tune with the thinking of composer John Cage in his incorporation of the element of chance and indeterminacy on the level of composition. But then Cage was a practitioner of Zen Buddhism, which may be understood as a path to clarity and awareness rather than a system of defined beliefs. Cage's approach to silence as sound as demonstrated in his famous *4 minutes 33 seconds* music performance, is echoed in Ikezaki's reflections on "emptiness." In addition, Cage's intention "to let things be themselves" is evident in Ikezaki's process, from the making of the washi paper to its manipulation into sculptural forms, to the relationship of paper to sumi ink. The result is a fusion of performance and composition, of mind and matter, with a deep respect for the life within the materials.

This brings us to the imagery of the paintings — landscapes that are abstract and figurative at the same time in that they do not represent a specific place or locale, but rather the conditions of nature and its primary elements of water, air, earth and fire in a transformative state of process and interaction. Thus abstraction is specific in its representation of the chemistry of the physical world.

"Silence does not have the same meaning as nothingness. Emptiness and nothingness leads me to think about 'silence.' A silence is an expression, the most effective method of depicting inner dimensions of thoughts. Silence related matters designate simplicity, condensation, and articulation of essence matters in non-living and living things. Those things must have energy and spirit. These concerns relate to my way of sumi ink painting."

Mizu / Kuki

WATER / AIR

Water is the mother of everything, the essential ingredient without which there would be no life as we understand it. Water is the life force of the planet, the fuel and nourishment of existence. Air, like water, is substantive. It is the body of breath, wind, and spirit, the carrier of light and shadow. These inseparable and interdependent elements and forces inform several decades of Ikezaki's paintings. His landscapes are in their natural state untouched by humans. They contain only the elements of sky, water, land, sun and moon. The horizon line is the essence of the cycle of transformation from water to air to water. Water and air are represented as an active force as in tsunami, flood, storm, waterfall, wind and clouds. The process of creating sumi ink and watercolor paintings allows for "accident" in the encounter of ink, water and paper. Floating on top of the paper, water becomes part of the painting process just as water flows over the earth. The process repeats over and over — wet /dry /wet /dry, as in the daily life of nature.

Almost all of the paintings before 2015 are black and white, covering a wide range of grays from cold to warm tones, invoking the temperature of air and water, the density and space of light and dark, the changing states of deceptively calm surfaces to turbulent currents. The scale is intimate. The visual language filled with nuance. Meaning is implied, alluded to, subjective, ambiguous, open to interpretation. As in a poem, take what you will. These are meditative works. Depending on the viewer's experience they can invite a heightened sense of awareness, and a wide range of emotions. You must look and look again and what you experience will change like reflections on the surface of water.

In recent years, Ikezaki has introduced color, combining sumi ink with watercolor. Muted tonalities of water and sky, dusky aquamarine, blues, smoky violet and teal undertones bring a vibrant beauty to the images along with a shift in emotional intensity, opening up another level of sensual and spiritual responses.

There is an almost dreamlike quality to these paintings, an undercurrent of longing and loss in this time of environmental crisis. Summoning both the power and vulnerability of nature, the rapturous beauty of the images paradoxically reminds us of our human hubris and careless abuse of that which sustains us. We cannot stop a raging flood, or tidal wave that can wipe us away in a deluge. Likewise, water can abandon us, leave us high and dry and dehydrated. It is easy to represent the aftermath, but difficult to truly capture the nature of what we endanger.

FIRE / EARTH

Fire and earth are the forces of Creation and Destruction. The Earth was born of pure energy evolving into matter. Heat and fire gave form to earth. Fire also consumes the earth, nature and culture devoured in its path, dematerializing into energy to be reborn. Ikezaki's layered washi paper sculptures and metal castings of paper sculptures, as well as sumi ink paintings are representations of this volcanic power and its aftermath. In the black and white paintings in particular the ink seems to have erupted across the paper like the flow of lava. Ikezaki's imagery reflects on a living earth in process, alluding to both geologic time and the disruptions of the immediate present. Having lived in both Japan and California, earthquakes are part of Ikezaki's direct experience, as is his familiarity with the landscape of fault lines, canyons, ruptures, chasms and crevices as evidence. The earth moves, opens, swallows, regurgitates. The sculptural works from the past twenty-five years are engaged with a contemporary discourse around art and environmental concerns, the handmade versus mechanized fabrication, the integrity of materials and the power of the object as evidence of its life cycle.

Ikezaki's handmade washi paper, kozo fiber and sumi ink wall sculptures made in the 1990s are like archeological artifacts retrieved from the aftermath of such catastrophic and geologic events in the recognizable form of face-down open books whose pages have been molded together. While the implied texts and/or images they might have contained are no longer accessible, they remain records of nature's processes, be they cataclysmic or evolutionary, along with their interface with human culture. The volcanic lava Ikezaki witnessed in Hawaii in his youth was what motivated him to make paper sculpture with black sumi ink. A book is a uniquely human object. No other species records its own history, thoughts, experiences, knowledge and perceptions in this form, and preserves the evidence for future generations. As an artwork it contains as many layers of meaning. In Ikezaki's book-like sculptures this includes the products of the earth out of which they were born — from tree to wood pulp, plant fiber and water, to paper and ink— and the journey they have taken. They are like fossils of consciousness, fused in fire, earth and ash, excavated to be read anew. Ironically, the whereabouts of many of these works is currently unknown.

Earth also embodies the feminine principle as the source of nurture and nourishment. In Greek mythology, Gaia was the great mother of all. Later referred to as Mother Nature, our primordial ancestor can be both giving and fearsome. She lets us enter her body and partake of her riches. When she heaves and quakes she moves mountains, opens gorges, and spews fire and water. We have used and abused her generosity, as if we are not part of her.

In the 2007– 2008 series called *The Earth Breathes*, Ikezaki responds to Mother Earth with a body of handmade paper and kozo fiber sculptures that take a surprising turn in their narrative implications and erotic analogies. Whether you read them as enfolding landforms of earth with a deep blood red vertical gash, opening to the explosive force of liquid fire, a crack in the melting Artic ice revealing an entrance to a cavernous hidden interior, or the crevice left in the aftermath of shifting land masses along a fault line, there is no avoiding the suggestion of female physiology and sexuality. As organic vulvar forms they traverse the space between the terrain of the body and the land, at once fecund, vulnerable, and unyielding. Layers of paper crushed, crinkled, and folded range from white to gradually deepening shades of ashen gray. The absence of color denies the malleability of flesh, while the rippling forms suggest the fragility of petals frozen in the moment of unfolding, preserved like the bodies of

Pompei. But then there is that blood red incision at the center like an open wound, both seductive and accusatory, a paradigm of propagation and violence. Despite the outward similarities of imagery, Ikezaki's works do not fit within a feminist art discourse. Rather, embedded within them is an intentional ambiguity inclusive of birth and death, the micro and the macro, *Ma*, the emptiness full of possibilities, of which there are many.

Which brings us to the artist's more recent sculptural work from 2011 to the present that are metal castings of paper sculptures. Here we enter a territory directly shaped by environmental disaster on a massive scale — the Tohoku 9.0 magnitude earthquake on Friday March 11, 2011 and subsequent tsunami whose waves reached heights of up to one hundred and thirty-three feet. It traveled six miles inland to the Sendai area of Iwate Prefecture, two hundred and thirty-two miles northeast of Tokyo. It was followed by three more aftershocks greater than 7.0. Japan moved more than seven feet closer to North America and the Earth shifted on its axis between four and ten inches, causing a number of planetary changes. Three days later the Shinmoedake volcano in Kyushu erupted. Kyushu is where Yoshio Ikezaki is from. Deeply affected by these events, Ikezaki's decision to make the metal castings was the result of the earthquakes and everything that followed. This includes the disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant and subsequent radioactive leakage. As a witness to human helplessness in the face of nature's overwhelming power, he decided to make what he called "memorial pieces."

Ikezaki recognizes the paradox and the irony in the fact that water and fire, our most basic life sources without which we would perish, can also destroy us. His works attempt to encompass and balance those positive and negative polarities. Paper and metal come from opposite elements. One is biological, the other geological. However the earth is their common source, and in both cases the end product is the result of human intervention. Thus the process of transforming one material into the other, while retaining the object's essential form, is both a physical and a spiritual journey. Although the original paper sculpture is destroyed in the process, the new metal piece contains its DNA, signifying the resilience of the human spirit and the impetus to survive, as well as the fundamental relationship between energy and matter. They are simultaneously an act of reproduction and preservation.

On another level, Ikezaki pays homage to nature's transmutability and endurance, as well as its destructive power. Two of the sculptures from 2011 are cast in iron, one of which seems to have caught the great wave momentarily stopping it in time. The contrast between the fluidity of the form and the solidity of the metal, with its cold bluish undertones, captures the esthetic principles of *Y¯ugen* and *Mono no aware*. The unexpected quality of lightness and transience underscores the idea of impermanence. Yet its metallic presence is that of a fossilized artifact of the event and the residue of memory. The other piece of cast iron has quite a different character — heavy, dark and dense as solidified earth and debris. In this piece one witnesses the weight and force of the earth as it breaks apart, taking everything in its path with it. It pays tribute to the life and death that has been compacted and compressed into layers of experience, memory and matter preserved. The object sits on a bed of stones as evidence to be contemplated.

Two later pieces from 2014 and 2015, both cast in bronze, can be seen as either fossilized living organisms or shifting land formations. Either way they are records of impermanence and evolution. As transformation of one thing into another carrying its genetic code with it, the metal castings — one highly polished, the other less so — are offspring of the paper parent. Likewise, the metal pieces are not clones of the paper ones, but mutations or adaptations to environmental conditions. Thus referencing the unknown effects of leaked radiation from the Fukashima nuclear energy plant. Because Ikezaki's works remain continually open to multiple readings and meanings, they allows us to also see a contemporary analogy in the vulnerability of all carbon-based life forms in an increasingly robotic, silicon-based landscape.

"At the time I thought about Zen philosophy and how all things on the Earth evolve, change and perish. The spirits remain and are reborn to brand new lives that have visible and physical forms. To be reborn my paper sculptures must go through the process of perishing with fire. The melted metal retraces the form of paper and becomes solid metal, replacing the paper."

Ki

MIND ESSENCE / BEING

Ki is at the heart of all of Ikezaki's art and life practice. A Japanese dictionary defines *Ki* as (1) Spirit; soul; (2) Feeling; (3) Intention; inclination. He describes it as mind essence, a unified state of "beingness", or intensely focused consciousness.

"I practice 'Ki' power to paint. Ki is also my concentration of muscle power, my will, and my intuition which I depend on to form my sculpture."

What Ikezaki is referring to is a oneness of body, mind and spirit in which intention and intuition act in concert with each other. The derivation of this philosophy is in the ancient Chinese concept of *Qi* or *Ch'I*, the "life force" or energy that permeates everything. This flow of energy around and through the body forms a cohesive totality, and is a central principle in traditional Chinese medicine and martial arts.

In terms of Ikezaki's fifty sculptural works entitled *The Earth Breathes —Mind Landscape* (2008), a parallel approach in Western philosophy might be found in phenomenology, "the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view. These include perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, bodily awareness and embodied action. The structure of these forms of experience typically involves 'intentionality', that is, the directedness of experience toward things in the world, the property of consciousness." [4] These ideas are equally reflected in Ikezaki's description of his intentions in relation to *The Earth Breathes — Mind Landscape*.

Thus this body of work represents an East / West synthesis of perception, experience and intention as expressed in the principles and philosophy of *Ki* and Phenomenology. In addition it includes the idea of the artwork as a transcendent object along with the state of consciousness in the act of creating it. On one level
this includes Newman's notion of the American sublime, expressed in such statements as, "We want to hold on to the exalted and our absolute emotions" and, "The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history." [5] Hence the object must contain a spiritual and /or emotional quality that the viewer can directly experience.

The big difference, however, lies in Ikezaki's relationship to and perception of his materials and what they represent culturally and personally. The sources of the materials used in making washi paper, as well as the physical and spiritual process of making it have profound cultural and environment significance. Ikezaki
describes this in terms that equate the resulting sculpture to a transcendent state of consciousness in material form, with the immersion of self with nature and its life cycles as the key to the full utilization of *Ki* energy.

"The relationship of the world between macro and micro produces its own environment seen as a projection of itself from each individual's viewpoint. I believe washi is the most suitable material for me to express the world mentioned above. From the conflict and practice I go through I finally reach the comprehension I seek. I strive for making new paper sculpture that exceeds beyond the boundaries of representation, abstraction, time, and space." [6]

Ikezaki's washi paper is made from kozo bark derived from the mulberry family, a deciduous tree whose trunk is harvested annually, with the stump left for the following year. Japanese washi paper is the product of a coexistence with nature coupled with a lack of natural resources, along with the effort and desire to maintain a sustainable environment. Using the kozo fibers to make his own paper, his intimate relationship to the paper's life cycle directly influences the forms that emerge from it. Hundreds of sheets, layered one on top of the other, grow into three-dimensional objects.

The works in *The Earth Breathes — Mind Landscape* are extraordinary in the ways in which they seem to emanate a living presence. They radiate energy in their stillness, and capture the meaning and beauty of sentient "beingness" in a way that elicits intense and inexplicable emotion. The complexity and variance of layers, ridges and folds, along with the nuances of feeling expressed in lightness, darkness and subtlety of color and tone, communicate the essence of a conscious organism, be it human or other. As such they are the embodiment of *Ki*, and in that sense they change the way an inanimate object can be perceived.

"My wish is to capture a trace of the enormous energy collision that happens in nature, the miracle of lives being born, the changing of the environment, and a mysterious living thing that settles deep within me, as well as on the paper, with the memories of the fiber." [7]

"Through the years I have come to know washi as a medium for expression rather than just a material to be used as a foundation. The fibers react in front of me as if they were living things with their own wills. It is seen in practicing the process of soaking and removing gums, cooking, rinsing, picking impurities, pounding, sloshing, pressing, forming, drying, coloring, polishing, and finishing. Each fiber of kozo, which has grown as a living thing in the ground once, must remember the graceful memories and the hardship experienced through nature." [8]

Ku

MATTER / ENERGY: IMPERMANENCE

Ku represents the interchangeability of all things in continuous process, never to be completed or perfected. When Ikezaki speaks of *Ku* in relation to his painting and sculpture he is referencing the philosophy of Zen Buddhism at the core of which is the doctrine of impermanence in which all things are subject to change and alteration. Thus only *impermanence* is permanent, the ongoing process of living and dying. The very nature of existence is one of transience, the passage in and through time.

In the 12th century, Japanese Zen master Dogen wrote, "Impermanence isn't a problem to be overcome with diligent effort on the path. Impermanence is the path. Practice isn't the way to cope with or overcome impermanence. It is the way to fully appreciate and live it." He offers us this paradox of existence to contemplate. "Time is impermanence and impermanence is time! Time is change, development, and loss. Present time is ungraspable. As soon as it occurs, it immediately falls into the past. As soon as I am here, I am gone. If this were not so, how could the *me* of this moment ever give way to the *me* of the following moment? Unless the first me disappears, clearing the way, the second me cannot appear. So my being here is thanks to my not being here. If I were not, not here, I couldn't be here!"

This might be compared to early 20th-century French philosopher Henri Bergson's approach to the question of time and the perception of existence: "... duration as the ultimate reality does not merely encompass individual selves, it also envelops or runs through all things. When people turn their attention to 'outward things' which initially appear to be stable entities in themselves, they can discover that like themselves, they exist in a kind of transience or flux, never standing still but always 'caught up' in this passage of time. For this reason everything changes; everything is in movement." In addition, Bergson's theory of duration posits that human comprehension of reality understandably rests on the accumulation of memory. "One moment is added onto the old ones, and thus, when the next moment occurs, it is added onto all other ones plus the one that came immediately before. In comparison to the past collection of moments, it cannot be the same as the one immediately before, because the past is 'larger' for the current moment than it was for the previous moment."[9]

The latter statement presumes the importance of the separate self, central to Western philosophy, as the vehicle for the cumulative progression of individual perceptions in defining a subjective reality. Whereas, within the framework of Zen Buddhism the idea of the separate self (i.e., ego) does not exist as such, and is balanced by an appreciation for and understanding of the concept of selflessness. At the same time it recognizes each of us as an independent being, existing in an independent moment, as well as all things being a part of each being. Such Zen paradoxes are an inherent part of the complexity of Ikezaki's art and central to his practice.

In 2004 Ikezaki had been studying Hannyashingyo sutra (Heart of Sutra) and was creating sumi ink paintings and sculptures incorporating his own handwritten sutra, with the intention of making works that expressed the meaning of the sutra within a contemporary framework. Heart Sutra from the Sanskrit *Prajñ¯ap¯aramit¯ahrdaya* means "The Heart of the Perfection of Understanding." How does one transform such an abstract concept that even eludes a definitive linguistic description into a tangible image or object? Ikezaki took on this chal-lenge by referring back again to *Ku*, which also means "sky" "

空", (i.e., air), as equated with "emptiness" or formlessness. Both air and water as interchangeable elements epitomize impermance as they are visibly always in a state of flux. In addition they embody the paradox of existence / non-existence in the state of transition. The making of the sumi ink painting involves water flowing on paper, substance without form becoming image of its passage in time. Thus the image of its impermance is its form.

In recognition of his efforts, Ikezaki was invited to create an installation at the Shoukoku-ji (相国寺) Temple complex, the head temple of the Rinzai sect of Zen Buddhism in Kyoto, Japan. Founded in 1382 during the late Heian period, over the centuries the Temple complex was repeatedly destroyed by fire and reconstructed, making it a somewhat ironic example of the doctrine of impermanence. Ikezaki's exhibition took place in six rooms of the Daihojo Hall, or monk's quarters, built in the early 19th century late Edo period.

The large rooms were open to the outside, from which vantage point Ikezaki's paintings could be viewed. One such room contained three large paintings (6' x 2.5') standing on wooden easels several inches above the tatami mat floor. In the foreground on one side, three paintings framed as one (3' x 7') fit on a sliding rail at the front edge, like a shoji sliding door. Another room revealed two more three-part vertical screen-sized paintings, and three large standing horizontal ones. Also displayed were four black densely layered book sculptures with sutra inscribed in Ikezaki's own hand. A fifth white one accompanied one of the vertical screen paintings.

Ikezaki's black and white atmospheric, elemental abstractions seem starkly modern, in contrast to the rich color and landscape detail of the dozens of screen paintings that line the walls of the Temple rooms. They are uncompromising and unsentimental in their homage to the beauty, power, fragility and sanctity of nature, without relinquishing their adherence to the spiritual and aesthetic pre-cepts behind them as represented by the Temple. As contemporary statements within that context these artworks ask us to think deeply about what they stand for, and thus reconsider our own relationship to the natural environment as a living, breathing part of each of us.

"Emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness. This is Heart Sutra. Ku (emptiness) is the state of selflessness separated from persistence. My idea is to find what emptiness means as it relates to my artwork. There is a difference between one who tries to explain Zen and does not understand it and one who knows it, practices it and remains silent."

"I feel I am a traveler in a very short time in the 20th and 21st centuries. Zen does not give me any definite answers to my questions. It only gives me an example of how to think and handle matters without any suggestions. With the Heart of Sutra, I put myself in the mirror and question myself. I use these ideas to practice and create my artworks because I can stay free. Even if I never understand true meaning of emptiness or nothingness, I try to clarify it little by little by making my artwork as a true mark of myself."

CONCLUSION / PARADOXES ABOUND

Yoshio Ikezaki's art is not easily categorized in traditional terms, nor does it accommodate the superficiality of art market trends. Instead it inhabits "the void between things" as it straddles contradictory cultural values. This leads us to consider the dichotomy between the identity of the art object as a transient experience both in terms of maker and viewer, and the definition of the art object as commodity in the contemporary art marketplace. How does the work maintain the integrity of the former in the context of the latter? Under such circumstances how is "value" measured? And how does an artist negotiate that fault line between these two different realities without being lured into a Faustian bargain? For almost three decades Ikezaki has sought to bridge that divide with a surprising degree of idealism, humility and perseverance.

Although his artworks may be appreciated for their visual beauty and elegance alone, in order to fully grasp the subtleties, nuances and complexities of their more profound content and meaning, they need to be approached with a certain reverence and understanding of the meditative process required for conscious viewing, in much the same way as a Rothko painting, or the ephemeral beauty and mystery of a James Turrell installation. This presents challenges in this era of short attention spans when the culture's appetite for instant gratification and spectacle has replaced contemplation, reflection and the demands of deep thinking, and supplanted connoisseurship with entertainment. And yet his works reverberate with a deeply felt inexplicable energy and presence for all those who encounter them.

Sustained by his spiritual practice in his pursuit of the meaning and purpose of art in our time, he reaffirms the power of art to illuminate and transform our perceptions and experiences, and open our minds to possibilities we have not previously considered.