

Art review: Exhibit by Albuquerque artist Emi Ozawa playful, superb

By Wesley Pulkka / For The Journal
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ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — The “Follow the Line” wood sculpture and works on paper installation by Albuquerque artist Emi Ozawa at the Richard Levy Gallery is a wonderful incorporation of impeccably executed technique with dynamically correct lighting in a superb architecturally compatible gallery space.

“Follow the Line” is a 20-piece exhibition that gorgeously combines art history, playfulness, constructivism, minimalism and museum-quality craftsmanship. Ozawa designed this combination of elements to challenge the eye and mind of the viewer.

Her wall sculptures rely on cast shadows from a fixed light source to animate the constructions, which transform from two-dimensional to three-dimensional form as the viewer moves by while witnessing their dissolution and recomposition.

These furniture-quality shadow-dependent built forms are reminiscent of painted steel sculpture by Argentine artist and Rhinehart School of Sculpture Fellow Robert Janz, who painted his abstract compositions to match the outdoor wall color on which they were mounted.

As the sun moved across the sky, the structured and ever-changing shadows became the only noticeable elements on the apparently blank wall. Janz worked

at Rhinehart from 1963 to 1965.

Ozawa’s painted wood and paper constructions were created during her 2016-2017 Roswell Artist-in-Residency. Her zigzag wall designs also share a conceptual kinship with Pablo Picasso’s early cubist studies. To depict a water glass, Picasso drew a circle bracketed by two vertical lines with a straight line across the bottom. In Ozawa’s wall pieces and cast shadows she offers the stationary viewer three views at once. The straight-on two-D view with the shadows revealing the three-D form as well as the actual structure, one step beyond Picasso.

Ozawa built two low relief geometric wall pieces titled “Amidakuji” and “Kaki to Yuzu” that look like Piet Mondrian’s late paintings. Ozawa based her linear compositions on a Japanese children’s lottery game in which participants follow the chosen line of color through the abstract maze-like composition.

In his early life, Mondrian taught elementary education in the Netherlands. To learn plane and solid geometry, each child received a kit consisting of a gridded desktop and a set of colored geometric shapes. Each year, the child would be given a more complex kit. In works such as Mondrian’s 1942 “Broadway Boogie Woogie” painting, he revealed his advanced understanding of geometric design a la Dutch elementary education.

Also at work in Mondrian’s imagination are the geometric tulip beds and greenhouse structures occupying the flatlands behind the Netherlands dikes.

In 2015, I noticed a dimensional corrugated painting titled “Peach” by Ozawa in a 10-artist group show at the Richard Levy Gallery. I was impressed by the stunning, painstaking execution, as well as the beautiful palette. I compared her piece to corrugated works by Israeli artist Yaacov Agam.



"Rain on Rain" by Emi Ozawa creates the illusion of sky borne falling water while adhering to strictly geometric shapes and a three-color palette.



"Yabane Daidai" by Emi Ozawa plays off of constructivist, minimalist and cubist concepts in her "Follow the Line" solo exhibition at the Richard Levy Gallery.

Ozawa conceptually revisits "Peach" in several, fruit-colored and weather-related works in this show. In "Rain" and "Rain on Rain," Ozawa corrugates the surfaces while limiting her palette to blue, warm gray and white. Both paintings communicate the exciting visual experience of falling sky water while sticking with crisp no-nonsense geometric shapes.

One aggressive wall piece titled "Yabane Daidai" by Ozawa translates to "Arrow Feather Orange" consists of three zigzag elements made of poplar and painted with orange acrylic. The excellent craft in all of her work stems at least in part from her studies of furniture design and construction at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia and the Rhode Island School of Design, where she earned a Master of Fine Arts degree.

Her perfectly made paper constructions are even more impressive due to her complete control over tiny elements that are unforgiving of any ham-handed behavior. This is an intelligent exhibition brilliantly executed by a talented artist. Don't miss it.

If you go

WHAT: "Follow the Line" a 20-piece solo exhibition of wall sculpture and works on paper by Emi Ozawa.

WHEN: Through March 2. Hours are: 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Call 766-9888.

WHERE: Richard Levy Gallery, 514 Central SW

HOW MUCH: Free