

ART PAPERS

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EMILY HANAKO MOMOHARA CINCINNATI

Memory transmutes experience, photographer Emily Hanako Momohara discovered upon searching out her family's stories. She herself transmutes this discovery into the stunning photographs seen in the exhibition *Islands* [PAC Gallery; August 12–September 17, 2011]. They stem from a recent visit to Okinawa, her family's remembered home, which informed her childhood in Seattle.

If these works initially seem more like paintings than photographs, their indisputably photographic qualities soon become clear. Archival pigment prints on Somerset Velvet paper, they are crisp when necessary but always open to subtle contrasts. In *Island 1*, 2011, and a few other prints, the sea has been abstracted into close-knit dark shades. In *Island 6*, 2011, mist turns to smoke when we realize that the landscape, which initially seemed bathed in morning mist, is actually Hawaii's Kilauea volcano.

Island 10, 2011, is a study in geometrics. It represents the right-angled architecture of a replica of a traditional home in an Okinawan national park. As a replica, the house itself is a memory. *Island 2*, 2011, on the other hand, is a sharply focused, window-framed view of a stained wall and old red roof tiles in Okinawa's former Royal Hotel, whose disintegration the green vibrancy of volunteer plants points out.

Island 11, 2011, shows yet another habitation: the Kina home in Tobaru, Okinawa, where a conventional Japanese print of a garden landscape is photographed to make the print look like an open doorway to the represented view.

Texture is so strongly suggested in *Island 13*, 2011, that only a close look, from the side, convinces us that the drop of water on the weathered wood is not real. *Island 12*, 2011, hangs nearby, with its tiny bubbles, more or less related to the drop of water, providing a tangible clue that the elegantly colored fish we see are swimming in water as clear as air. *Island 14*, 2011, is the most enigmatic of the works on view. A china figure of a kitten, lightly encased in plastic bubble wrap, is at right in the composition, against a dark background,

casting a shadow against the surface on which it sits. Are we to take this as childish imaginings that leave long memories?

Four related works make up her *Sagebrush Seasons*, 2011. They are the largest and perhaps the most striking elements of the exhibition. The airy rotundity of a sagebrush in its tumbleweed stage is seen at the bottom of each panel, from a different angle. Darkness stretches up in all four works, highlighted by another rotundity: a glowing moon in *Sagebrush Autumn*; a bird, perhaps about to light, in *Sagebrush Spring*; snow speckles across *Sagebrush Winter*. The upper reaches of *Sagebrush Summer* hold nothing at all. The individual pieces are haunting and together invite contemplation.

Momohara's superb craftsmanship is a pleasure and her leaps of invention in interpretation give the viewer puzzles to solve. As always in art, the artist's meaning is one thing, while the viewer's understanding may be quite another. Both are valid. *Island 4* is perhaps the exhibition's signature work. A hand—the artist's?—holds a fan-like object that could be an island in its verdant complexity. These works, with their elegiac qualities, are distillations of visual experience.

—Jane Durrell

TONY CRAGG DALLAS

The wriggling totemic nature of Tony Cragg's work makes it seem all too modern. Though not literal, his sculptures refer to everyday things in the space of empirical matter and heroic singular form rather than lived reality. By contrast, the space of lived reality would describe performative art: happenings, actual performance, video, new media art, and installation—in short, art that is dirtier, harrier, and more loose-ended. Tight, polished, and resolved, Cragg's work has none of the extemporaneous temporality of art of the now-time. Materially durable, it signifies permanence.

This staunch and particular sense of materiality puts the sixty-two-year-old British sculptor at odds with dematerialization, the much broader and more powerful juggernaut of art making and discourse. Well known to most by now, the origins of the “dematerialization of art” may be traced back to Zurich Dada during World War I. The paradigm has held reliable sway in contemporary art since 1968, when Lucy Lippard and John Chandler published a pivotal article of the same title. In short, while dematerialization means many things, its most prominent contribution is the idea that art has given way to language, discourse, theory, and activism.

While Cragg is an avid reader, he does not rely on theory to make objects. His current exhibition *Tony Cragg: Seeing Things* reasserts that he is an object-man, a sculptor's sculptor who sees the potential for cohesive form in everything from molten bronze and wood grain to dice and broken glass [Nasher Sculpture Center; September 10, 2011–January 8, 2012]. With its yellow pudendal orifice, the bronze *Outspan*, 2008, plays otherworldly femme fatale to the stacked dice of *Secretions*, 2001, which looks something like a dancing mushroom from Disney's *Fantasia*. Though made from different materials—sturdy bronze and gaming dice—they are both figural. *Outspan* looks like a clam or vagina and the *kawaii*-infused *Secretions* resembles a Japanese anime character. Yet Cragg's figuration goes beyond the play of fantastic form. Delving into the realm of classical humanism, some of his sculptures look like humans. Painted black, the eight-foot-tall undulating steel form *It is, It*

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Emily Hanako Momohara, detail of *Island 4*, 2011, archival pigment print on Somerset velvet, 42 x 20 inches (courtesy of the artist and PAC Gallery); Tony Cragg, exhibition view of *Tony Cragg: Seeing Things* (courtesy of the artist and the Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas; photo: Kevin Todora)