

# *Veranda: Contemplating Spaces In Between*

On view at the  
Japanese American Cultural & Community Center  
August 21, 2014 through September 9, 2014

On view at  
Wilshire Blvd Temple  
for the Voices of LA Culminating Festival  
Sunday, September 14, 2014

## Participating Artists:

Joshua Abarbanel

Melinda Smith Altshuler

Noriko Furunishi

Andrea Hodos

Hiroko Ikuta

Yokou Kitajima

Wakana Kimura

Jessica Shokrian

Cathy Weiss



The Krupnick Festival of the Arts  
An Initiative of the  
Jewish Community Foundation of Los Angeles



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## Veranda: Contemplating Spaces In Between

One might not expect to find a scholar of Japanese history in Jerusalem. Yet, Professor Ben-Ami Shillony, of Hebrew University, is exactly that. In 1995, Professor Shillony was the keynote speaker for the first Jewish & Japanese-American Conference, held at Stephen S. Wise Temple in Los Angeles. His remarks focused on both the distinctions and commonalities between our peoples' stories and cultures.

Shillony began by highlighting the differences between Jewish-American and Japanese-American immigration narratives. Japan has been an independent nation since the 3rd century, and traditionally had very little immigration or emigration. Only in the mid-20th century did a labor surplus force many Japanese citizens to leave their homeland for the first time. Jews, on the other hand, had been perennial wanderers—displaced by a historic diaspora that began two-thousand years ago. Jews arrived in America with a long history of engaging with host societies and adapting their culture to new surroundings.

However, Shillony points out that despite these very different origins—Japanese and Jewish immigrants to America shared common values and commitments. Both cultures place deep value on education as a pathway to success and on family cohesiveness. As a result, both Japanese and Jewish Americans have achieved significant success in this country, consistently ranking as among the most educated and successful of immigrant cultures.

We gather together on the veranda, a place where inside meets outside, and a fitting metaphor for this exploration of immigrant cultures. The word veranda originates in Sanskrit, from the word meaning to meet. In Japanese, the word is *engawa* [縁側 which is written with two Chinese characters, *en* (relation, fate) and *gawa* (side, edge).

Our immigrant ancestors were people who stood at the edge of American society. From this unique vantage point, they both learned from America, but also retained their distinctive cultural, historical, and spiritual traditions. In this way, our fates are bound together. We remain both within and outside of mainstream America. Our community leaders, artists, teachers, guides and spiritual practitioners dance between the interior and exterior spaces of tradition and modernity.

This dynamic tension shapes us as we engage with arts, commerce, and America's diversity—and allows Jewish and Japanese American artists to find commonality while embracing multiple disciplines. The visions of the Japanese American artists displayed in this exhibition form a seamless continuity, blurring the intersection between tradition and modernity. Flower arranger **Yokou Kitajima** plays with the space between shadows within the defined area of the ceremonial tearoom. Photographer **Noriko Furunishi** and painter **Wakana Kimura** invite us to a macro/micro cosmic world of contemporary Japan. Their works are inspired by the traditional Japanese sensitivity of approach and observation.

The idea of liminality, captured by the physical setting of the veranda, is also a theme in traditional Japanese arts. Masters of Japanese ink painting understood that that which is left out of the canvas is equally, if not more, important than that which is included. Furthermore, the ink that is used for these paintings is made from charcoal—the remains of fire—which is mixed with water to create the medium. The balance of inside and outside, of seen and not-seen, of fire and water, all speak to an aesthetic which celebrates in-betweenness. This can be seen in the work of **Hiroko Ikuta**, who blends carbon soot with a traditional calligraphy style. Thousands of strands of hair are submerged into liquid ink becoming a type of oneness with the medium and a representation of the self.

Similarly, there is an ancient Jewish esoteric teaching, which holds that the Torah, the most sacred scroll containing God's words, is written in black fire (ink) on white fire (parchment). Rabbi Avi Weiss, of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, expounds on this teaching:

"The black letters are limited, limiting and fixed. The white spaces catapult us into the realm of the limitless and the ever-changing, ever-growing. They are the story, the song, the silence. Sometimes I wonder which speaks more powerfully, the black, rationalistic letters or the white, mystical spaces between them."

The Jewish artists represented here reflect this tension between what is visible and the deeper truths that lie below the surface. Their works move beyond mundane interpretations of the world around them and explore new ways of challenging and celebrating contemporary Jewish practice.

**Joshua Abarbanel** and **Melinda Smith Altshuler** examine the fragility of our ecosystem using found and natural materials. Abarbanel's abstracted wooden coral reef wall sculpture and Altshuler's suspended cloud forms point to the primordial and mystical spaces of beginnings. Choreographer **Andrea Hodos**, uses her body to literally move between written words. Her performances grapple with and expand upon traditional Jewish teachings. **Jessica Shokrian**, an Iranian-Jewish artist, illuminates the afternoon prayer service, *mincha*, in her diptych *Midday Prayer I & II*. The out-of-focus female subject, who is deep in meditation, suggests reverence for this sacred act. **Cathy Weiss** in her multi-media woodblock print entitled *Holding On Letting Go* explores the fragility of the human experience. Both the scale of this work and blue ink background reference the Eastern tradition of painting one's door blue in order to protect against evil. Thus, Weiss offers us a meditative passageway for moving between worlds.

Los Angeles is a destination along the contemporary Silk Road-- a road that has never ended, from Marco Polo's day to ours. It is fitting that Japanese-American and Jewish-American voices should commingle in this City, which holds the largest Japanese and second largest Jewish diaspora communities in the world. Situated at the edge of the Pacific Rim, and at a meeting place of immigrants from around the globe, we occupy fertile ground for exchanging stories and exploring common values. Standing on the veranda, we pause to reflect on our ongoing status as insider/outside, and as inheritors of cultures that know the value of in-between.

Co-curated by Anne Hromadka and Hirokazu Kosaka

**Anne Hromadka**, representing the Jewish Artists Initiative (JAI), is an independent curator and art consultant. JAI is an artist-run organization committed to fostering visual art by Jewish artists and promoting dialogue about Jewish identity and related issues among members of the arts community. Learn more at: <http://www.jaisocal.org/>

**Hirokazu Kosaka** is the Artist Director at the JACCC, an artist and Buddhist priest. Founded in 1971 and sited in Little Tokyo, the mission of the JACCC is to present, perpetuate, transmit and promote Japanese and Japanese American arts and culture to diverse audiences, and to provide a center to enhance community programs. Learn more at: <http://www.jaccc.org/>