

Culver City

**Takako Yamaguchi**

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For over 30 years, Takako Yamaguchi has synthesized the overtly decorative with the representational, borrowing heavily from the screens, textiles and woodcuts of her native Japan as well as the rich tradition of Western landscape painting. Without losing the exquisite rendering, brilliant coloration, perspectival playfulness and mystical sense of light for which she became known, this group of recent midsize paintings refines the earlier complex compositions to depict abstract patterned "skies" above spare but canvas-filling scenes of mountains, desert or ocean.

America has long treasured its wide-open spaces and sublime vistas, with historical painters like Albert Bierstadt and photographers such as Ansel Adams stoking our prideful gaze and escapist nature fantasies. Even modernist painters, inflecting their canvases with biomorphic and organic abstraction, sought to reconcile a clean universal bond with nature. O'Keeffe, Hartley and Dove, in paintings that conveyed lurking sexualities, brooding foreboding, rhythmical energies and spiritual yearnings, and Burchfield, with his quivering, highly animated fields and forests, all seem to charge their work with the unique conflicts, romance and magic of America's great landscapes.

Yamaguchi plays to these American antecedents while invoking the highly stylized graphics of Japanese woodblock prints. *Post-Romantic* (2006), with its crisp chain of pyramidal snowy mountains beneath a sky of bluish gray and yellow stripes topped by scallops of ocher clouds, distills the atmospheric conditions of the spectacular Western mountains into a luminous almost hallucinogenic vision. Compositionally similar,



**TAKAKO YAMAGUCHI: "Post-Romantic" 2006**  
Oil and Bronze Leaf on Canvas 36"x 48"

*The Landscape, the Weather and That* (2007) is an O'Keeffe-like arrangement of earth-toned dunes receding into elongated bands at the glittery bronze-leaved horizon, above which stream churning braids of white clouds. All the paintings convey a near-ecstatic experience of being engulfed by nature's grandeur.

The contemporary landscapist's challenge is to celebrate the natural environment without seeming to diminish the current eco crisis. Yamaguchi suggests that an esthetic and spiritual reverence for the land might play a part in the drive for its preservation, reminding us that, to paraphrase Thomas Mann, excluding problems of beauty from the political in our sphere of vision borders on the barbaric.