

## Earth's Patterns Are Seen

### AROUND THE GALLERIES

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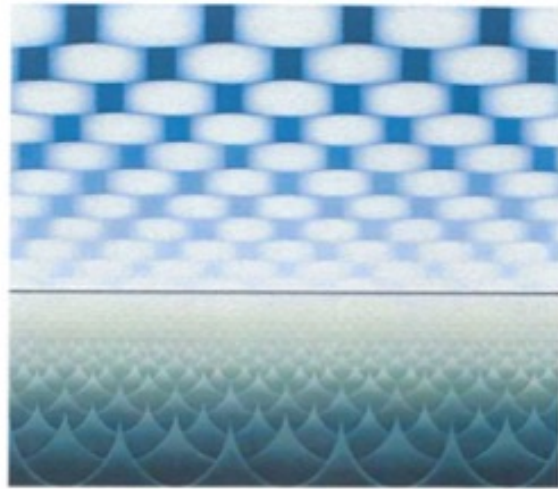
About three years ago, Takako Yamaguchi started to strip down to basics. Her compositions became simpler, more reductive. The ornately layered and interlocked motifs of her paintings began to separate and stand freely. It is as if she dialed down from orchestral extravagance to the refined purity of a chamber quartet.

Eight recent paintings at Cardwell Jimmerson exemplify the change. They are among the L.A. painter's best work – as richly referential as ever, exquisitely precise, stunningly beautiful.

The two newest paintings, from 2008, are also the largest, at more than 5 feet by 6 feet, and the most absorbing. Like all the work on view, they are straight-on landscapes with clearly articulated horizons. Above the line, extraordinary skies of stylized clouds and below, receding patterns of waves or hills.

In "Add This to Rhetoric," the sky reads as a magnified weave of blue and white, and the sea as tightly aligned rows of pointed peaks. As the waves recede, they flatten out, diminishing from exclamations to murmurs and lightening from dark teal to soft, pale greenish-gold. Three crisp stripes of slate, Prussian blue and bronze leaf divide upper from lower realms. Self-conscious, smart and unabashedly gorgeous, the painting could be a poster child for the decades-old campaign to give pattern and decoration a good name.

Yamaguchi's swirling seas and curtained clouds have been likened to the abstracted patterns that invigorate Japanese textile design and screen painting. The affinity is striking, but the artist's imagery and approach are at least as deeply informed by early 20th century American Modernist painting, from Georgia O'Keeffe through Henrietta Shore, Helen Lundeberg and Agnes Pelton. All painted the landscape with equal parts clarity and wonder, giving hard edges to elusive, sometimes spiritual conditions.



**TAKAKO YAMAGUCHI: "Add This to Rhetoric"**  
2008 Oil and Bronze Leaf on Canvas 68"x 78"

Yamaguchi's other 2008 painting, "Reunion With Reality," pays direct homage to the late Chicago painter Roger Brown, particularly his 1974 canvas "Buttermilk Sky." Yamaguchi's orderly, hilly brown mounds rest on the ground like candy buttons. Football-sized clouds, in gleaming bronze leaf, shrink down to abbreviated blips at the horizon, then seem to rise again and grow, like the Earth's own radiant thought bubbles.

Here and elsewhere, Yamaguchi borrows a good deal from Brown in terms of form. Her scalloped clouds echo his quilted skies. Her chain-link clouds go even further, as do her twining strands and serpentine bands of white in the sky.

Her work doesn't, however, share Brown's dark sociopolitical undertow. Yamaguchi's newest paintings celebrate art's magnificently syncretic history and the ecstatic beauty of the natural world. Expansive as well as reductive, they have a distant kinship with the pulsating visions of Charles Burchfield and his contemporary L.A. offspring, Sharon Ellis.

Yamaguchi is still layering her work, but the complexity is as much temporal as spatial. The images themselves ring with clarity. They distill her earlier work to its luminous essence and embrace, with familial respect and a lifelong learner's awe, what came before in the work of others.