

The contrasts of four Japanese artists

CONTRASTS FOUR. Paintings by four Japanese artists at the Port Washington Public Library through May 31. 245 Main St., Port Washington. Monday-Friday, 9 a.m.-9 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

By Malcolm Preston

When most westerners think about Japanese art, they conjure up visions of handsome calligraphy, usually done in black and white, or recall the timeless images of the Japanese wood-block prints of Ukiyo-E.

But the four Japanese painters whose work is now on display at the Port Washington Library gallery feel, "It is of little importance to us whether this effort . . . the creation of a purely contemporary art . . . follows Oriental or Occidental forms." And they also agree in their combined statement that if the Japanese tradition lives within their blood, "its conscious expression seems unnecessary to us. It will somehow appear in the work."

To this viewer, however, much of what is on view appears to be dominated by the esthetics of the last half-century of western art, although here and there one does see the cultural heritage of Japan.

It is impossible to say which of the four is the most Oriental, or the most dependent on Occidental notions. E. Sumiye Okoshi does work with Japanese rice paper. But her "Plenan Series" is essentially a textural color field. Using a grid form, Okoshi manipulates space through color and textural variations. The works are quite subtle, and if they have any distinctively Oriental flavor, it is in their delicacy of tone.



'82-J,' oil on canvas by Yo Yoshitome

The large canvases by Yukimura S. Konishi make use of certain cubist ideas and generally fit into the broad tradition of western abstraction, both geometric and expressionistic. One sees hints of Kandinsky, Braque even Motherwell; yet here, too, particularly in "The Anxious Emotion," there are similarities in design to the patterning, value contrasts and expression that we remember from the Kabuki-based, early 19th-Century prints by Kuni-sada.

To be sure, what we see in Konishi's work is a far cry from the detailed characters seen in the Kabuki

actors. And there is absolutely no illustrative narrative in the Konishi canvas. But the spirit of the wood-block print remains.

Yo Yoshitome's paintings fall rather broadly into the surrealist camp. These are elaborately-ornamented works. Scrolls, filligrees and jewel-like shapes embedded in decorative swirls cascade through "82-J." But that freedom, that richness of decoration is offset in these paintings by the inclusion of a hard, finite interior space. There are walls and doors and windows, all firmly shut, secure.

It is as though Yoshitome wishes to contrast the freedom of imagination with the harsh confines of the real world. The notion of these opposites — as much as the superb calligraphy of the illuminated designs — may well be the unconscious expression of his Japanese heritage.

The fourth painter in this group is Eiji Serita. His themes are architectural. Again and again he gives us the rounded arches of the Romanesque style. Blind arcades, clerestory openings, the vaults of naves and aisles and choirs all come to mind. Are these updated diagrams of Burgundian cathedrals? Are they facades or cross-sections of two- and three-story bays? And why do they sit on an endless plain?

Serita, himself, says these arches are a metaphor for the contemporary moment. His hopes and anxieties about the future are expressed through the arches and beyond.

"Contrasts Four" is a fine title for this show. The four express themselves in very individual ways, contrasting their work with the others. Yet in each there does appear to be some element, some quality that reflects their birthright. /III