

## **Interview with Mieko Anekawa**

I had the chance to visit Mieko Anekawa's studio in Astoria, New York, on a cold, rainy winter morning. The sky was gray and dreary, and the wind was heavy. The lack of color I was subject to that morning made the moment I stepped into Anekawa's studio even more impressive: I was struck with a variety of vibrant colors from every direction, the fluorescent neon highlighter colors being the most prominent. As I pleasantly immersed myself into a sea of multicolor hair, beautiful women, flowers and sea animals, Anekawa politely asked me my opinion of her works. It was surprising to me, at first, for I expected her to enlighten me about her works, rather than me tell her what her works mean.

Anekawa said she genuinely is interested in the response of her audience. Even if the audience utters a mere "I like it," she is fine with it. Although she also admitted her dilemma of wanting to convey her artistic intentions by talking to her audience, she thinks first impressions form a great part of how a person views a work of art. Thus she wishes for her audience to look at her work from their point of view, without any preconceived notions of the artist or the works themselves. Personally, her works elicited a strong response from me. I was subconsciously empathizing with the artist: my eyes were tracing the splatters and drips on her canvas, imagining what techniques the artist used to create those effects. Yet, there was a clear visual tension between the experimental splatters of paint, with the meticulously organized composition and the naturalistic rendering of the female figure. There were moments when I was completely immersed in her work, trying to imagine her process, or was viewing the work from a distance, appreciating the compositional elements. Anekawa's works demonstrate a curious combination of the ability to immerse the viewer into her wonder-world, but also render them as mere

objective perceivers at the same time. The visual tension within her works lends her images a distinctive power.

This curious visual tension most likely comes from her background. Anekawa originally studied graphic design in college, and pursued that path, until she realized sitting in front of the computer and mechanically producing layouts was not really for her. She wanted to draw with her own hands— that is when Anekawa started to paint with acrylics, as if she was releasing all of the repressed creativity that was previously bubbling up inside of her. Anekawa is almost a completely self-taught painter, which may explain her fascination with medium as a means of expression. Anekawa explores the technical potential of paint and canvas throughout her works: the drips, the splashes and the blurry edges of paint on an unprimed canvas all attest to her want to exploit her medium in every way possible.

Yet, Anekawa's focus is not entirely the medium: she invests arguably more attention to the compositional aspects of her work. Whenever she works on a painting, she always plans out the composition first. Only then does she layer wet paint on top of another, or splatter paint and let them drip. Anekawa competently combines these spontaneous aspects with her design sensibility distinct of a person well-voiced in graphic design. The combination of restrained compositional perfection and abstract spontaneity in Anekawa's works might be read a modern update of the meticulous *Nihon-ga* of artists like Ito Jakuchu. Her compositional perfection shows she is working in the *Nihon-ga* tradition, yet her attempt at abstraction also show her attempt of violently breaking away from preconceived notions of art. Anekawa wishes to explore the combination of tradition and the rejection of tradition in her future works as well.

—Erin K.