



Top: Wendy Kawabata, *Stemma*, 2006, kukui nuts, thread, bell jar, 18" x 6" x 6"; bottom: Lisa Solomon, *Wallet size me*, 1980, 2004, embroidery on satin, vintage embroidery hoop, 8" x 8", at Kruglak Gallery, MiraCosta College, Oceanside.

## Wendy Kawabata and Lisa Solomon at Kruglak Gallery, MiraCosta College

**I** dentity and the numerous ways it is formed—the eclectic mixture of gender, culture and personal history—is explored in the diverse two-person exhibition *Wendy Kawabata and Lisa Solomon: The Point of Loose Ends*.

Distinct in their individual approaches to art, these artists nonetheless engage us in their own personal dialogues that, thematically, may not be new, but, with their own artistic insights, end up being fresh, insightful, and, curiously enough, an added commentary on the work of the other artist.

Bay Area-based Lisa Solomon exudes the confidence of a second-generation feminist artist who skillfully and cunningly uses craft, primarily thread and embroidery stitches, as a fine art medium. With a wry sense of humor, she explores American middle-class mores inspired by Victorian England ideals and concepts of masculinity/femininity that

she is continually eliding. She also, on occasion, delves into her own past.

Of her skills, her greatest strength is her use of conscious simplicity coupled with irony that results in a total shift of perception. An example of this technique is found in her series of rifle targets such as *Cozied Rifle Target: pink bonecomb*. Solomon transforms both new and used targets with embroidery or paint. Those with shot holes are mended with stitches, while others are painted with images of flowers used in herbal medicine to stop bleeding. In other words, the targets are subverted and invalidated.

Solomon also turns portraiture on its head. An elevated genre traditionally done in oils becomes, in Solomon's hands, a unique commentary on both artistic mediums and on herself. The series, *Wallet size me: 1975-1985*, are embroidered portraits based on snapshots of the artist and family members. Using embroidery hoops as frames, Solomon's blank backgrounds and red thread are seen on what is actually the wrong side of the fabric that reveals knots and loose ends. Such meshing of fine art and craft is so well done that the craft part of the

piece—the materials and embroidery techniques—are initially overlooked.

More oblique and nebulous in her message, yet no less personal, is the work of Wendy Kawabata. Her fascination with Eurocentrism, orientalism, colonialism and imperialism begun in graduate school, remains integral to Kawabata's life and practice. As a non-Asian woman married to a Japanese man living in Hawaii, and as a fairly new mother, these theoretical concepts are more personal than academic. Kawabata questions both western history and artistic styles, and examines eastern techniques and traditions. She then blends the two revealing new meaning and a unique style that is both complicated and translucent.

A number of works in which she examines eastern and western signifiers are found in her series *Itinerant*. Small and simple, each piece is the outline of one barely visible, yet fairly iconic, image such as Buddha or the figure of English artist Thomas Gainsborough's 1770 painting *The Blue Boy*. Not immediately obvious, these pieces quietly make us think about what is admired in different cultures.

Much more complex are the three pieces *Celebrant*, *Protestant* and *New World*. Made up of tiny pin holes on white paper, each piece is an outline of either an individual—like Christopher Columbus or a woman in colonial dress—which merges with the outline of a land mass. Eschewing western perspective and western mediums, and quietly alluding to European influence on new lands and cultures, these seemingly simple pieces are dense and convoluted.

More complicated still is Kawabata's process piece *Stemma* in which the artist is wrapping red thread around 600 kukui nuts for an upcoming exhibition in Rochester, New York. In the artist's own words *Stemma* "is an attempt to depict the problems of defining identity through bloodlines, and in defining my relationship to Hawaii through marriage and family. The kukui nut inside the thread are not visible but the resulting form is reliant upon it."

As focused as this last statement is, it can also be used to sum up the exhibition at MiraCosta: Solomon and Kawabata inherently and broadly question artistic mediums, traditions and styles that most artists rely upon.

—Victoria Reed

*Wendy Kawabata and Lisa Solomon: The Point of Loose Ends* closed in December at Kruglak Gallery, MiraCosta College, Oceanside.

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