

Arai has talked about ideas of construction and deconstruction, the use of the primitive with the modern. These ideas relate to my own use of different materials, although on a simpler level.<sup>7</sup>

I began this piece by reflecting on the effects of globalisation, and I return to those choppy waters for my conclusion. Identifying cultural difference, where our particular cultures diverge and connect, has immense relevance when thinking about current trends toward a global identity, with the concomitant issues of homogeneity and loss of diversity. In his book *Arts Under Pressure*,<sup>5</sup> Joost Smiers quotes Anthony Smith: 'What memories, which myths and symbols, values and identities, can such global culture offer?'<sup>6</sup> As has been noted on many occasions, textiles occupy a wide aesthetic territory, seemingly without a fixed borderline. Yet, as demonstrated by this project, the nature of making, of creativity, is closely related to the evocation of shared experience and memory within specific cultural frameworks. I conclude my essay in the catalogue accompanying the *Through the Surface* exhibition by saying 'The project has no end point, there have been a series of observable outcomes: the exchanges, the website, the exhibition, the catalogue. All this has been possible through our universal engagement with textiles and it is my hope that the journey will continue.'<sup>7</sup>

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- 1 *Through the Surface* catalogue. Ed. Lesley Millar. Pub. The Surrey Institute of Art and Design, 2004. p.95
  - 2 Some scholars claim that diversity is the normal characteristic of the arts, and call it hybridity
  - 3 Joost Smiers: *Arts Under Pressure. Promoting cultural diversity in the age of globalization*. Pub. Zed Books 2003, p.125
  - 4 The first was 'Revelation', an exhibition of mainly UK based textile artists which toured to Japan in 1998, the second was 'Textural Space', an exhibition of Japanese textile artists which toured the UK in 2001
  - 4 Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. Pub. Knopf, 1993 p.37
  - 5 Joost Smiers *Arts Under Pressure. Promoting cultural diversity in the age of globalization*. Pub. Zed Books, 2003 pp.82-3
  - 6 Anthony D. Smith. *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*. Pub Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995
  - 7 *Through the Surface* catalogue. p.13
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Lesley Millar is Project Director of the *Through the Surface* exhibition and is a research fellow at The Surrey Institute of Art and Design, University College

*Through the Surface* continues at the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan during April and May. For further information [www.throughthesurface.surrart.ac.uk](http://www.throughthesurface.surrart.ac.uk)

**Machiko Agano** spins elaborate room-scale webs, often using fishing yarn line. Her wondrous shadow-world works have been highlights of both the 2001's *Textural Space*, and now, mentoring the collaboration with **Anniken Amundsen**, the *Through the Surface* project

If you happened to be in Brighton during the early summer of 2001, you might have happened upon the spectacle of a vast fibre form extending the length of the city's main gallery space, Fabrica. In the underlit ambience of the room, the gentle organic curves and waves of Machiko Agano's unfolding netting were apparent, along with the work's still, calm, sculptural combination of fishing wire, steel wire and handmade paper, an apt echo for its deconsecrated church location.

Agano's site-specific piece stood out as a highlight in the exhibition it was part of – *Textural Space*. In the last year, Agano's work has again been part of a textile exhibition showcasing this Japanese high craft-made art: *Through the Surface*. This time Agano has worked with the Norwegian, though British based, artist Anniken Amundsen, as explained in the accompanying interview (p107). Amundsen's concerns and connections with Agano are referred to, including Amundsen's awakening, while on her mentoring visit, to her Japanese peers receptivity to nature and the natural world. This seemed particularly the case with Agano, who wrote in one of her exhibition catalogues of her attraction to, 'the mysterious shape of nature: patterns made by the wind on desert sands; shapes of eroded rocks on coastal shores, clouds driven across the autumn sun'.\* This sounds like another way of talking about the invisible forces that Agano and Amundsen found as common ground, as discussed in their exhibition's internet diary collaboration. Indeed Agano's spatial textile sculptings seem to make palpably physical these invisible forces, overlapping with her primary relationship with nature.

In a short email correspondence, Agano acknowledges the centrality of nature, while seeing a tangible difference when comparing the central influence of 'natural landforms and reverence for some natural power' in her work to that of certain British land artists – for instance David Nash and Andy Goldsworthy, who have occasionally been related to the Japanese landscape perspective.

'I've never worked from the exact shape of natural landform,' she wrote, 'for I always got the feelings from the places, or feel some invisible power from the land and try to express the natural feelings in an abstract way of thinking for my works. But at the same time, these invisible forces have the primary relationships with my work to nature as you pointed out.' Expanding on this, in response to a question about how central the Shinto spiritual



Machiko Agano: Untitled

reality is to her work, Agano comments that it is 'only a reference, although I have a small altar in my house, in the Shinto way,' and believes 'the god's existences are as they are ... in anything as it is with Shintoism.' To the question of whether the nature she connects with is necessarily Japanese, or can be from any part of the world, Agano states that it is more abstract. Asked if she views her work as a journey for her as a textile artist-sculptor, and whether the works seen in *Textural Space* and *Through the Surface* 'exist as part of her current period of work, which has changed and evolved over the years, she says, 'My ways of expressing art have changed several times in the last twenty years. But the basic idea of my work has been the same, on the expression of natural feelings.'

Both exhibitions have opened up a world where textiles are used for interior design and designing in public spaces. The Japanese contributions focus on the quality of things, which in textiles are embodied in a subtle awareness of the relationship of the textural objects to the space they inhabit. This includes the underlining of spatial harmony, exploring not only space but also light, texture and materials, an aesthetic which has a long tradition in Japan. The Japanese aesthetic relationship of light to shadow is explored in detail in the book *In Praise of Shadows* by Junichero Tanizaki, an aesthetic which

Agano acknowledges is central to her work. 'The praise or effect of shadow is a very important idea for my work. Light could be the true effect by shadow as a self-evident truth. Especially my recent work needs lighting and it needs the shadow effect very much. Perhaps we Japanese have that sense in our DNA, for we've been living in the Japanese-style house for so long. But recently, the style of the housing has changed into something a bit similar to Western style. So, I'm not sure the same thing could be said about the younger generation.'

Such changes are also felt in the contrast between the Japanese reticence to talk about ideas as openly as Western artists. Agano is unsure whether this is changing through joint projects like these exhibitions, and the general increase in cultural traffic between Japan and Europe. 'I think it's based on the long tradition of the way of thinking that we Japanese catch some abstract idea from nature, and that makes it difficult for us to explain our basic idea openly. But on the other hand,' she concludes, 'it depends on each of the artists, so I can't say so definitely.' *OL*

\* Portfolio Collection 28, Telos; found while visiting the Sainsbury Centre, Norwich