

Size Isn't All

Solo show reveals little gems

By Dan Tranberg

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It's a small world, but once you're inside the miniature works of Margaret Yuko Kimura, a whole universe opens up. Her show, *Fragments: Works by Margaret Yuko Kimura*, currently on view at the Bockrath Gallery in Little Italy includes 30 works from four different series. Most are collages in which fragments of information are assembled as both literal and metaphorical references to the creative process. Tiny pieces cut from older drawings and prints are resurrected as elements of new works. Sections of handwritten notes from her school days appear as another kind of fragment, including legible traces of her studies in art history. These coupled with newspaper clippings, swatches of fabric and newly drawn or printed images create a patchwork dense with implications as well as imagery, and all within works small enough to fit in a briefcase.

They have a raw quality, reminiscent of sketches but without seeming incomplete. "Whenever I go to art museums," Kimura says, "I am always more inspired by the artists' drawings in sketchbooks or unfinished pieces than by completed works. They reveal the formative moments of the artists' working process." Clearly those moments possess an energy she wants to capture. In many of her works she is successful. Tiny as they are, some only a few inches square, her collages represent the range of her interests and investigations without being tedious or overworked.

Kimura was born in California, but her family moved back to Tokyo soon afterwards. She returned to the U.S. in 1989 and studied at the Cleveland Institute of Art for five years before going on to earn her MFA in printmaking from the University of Michigan. It was during a break, after graduating from CIA in 1994, that she first began cutting up old prints into small pieces to make collages. Without access to printmaking facilities she was driven to invent a new way of working. "I worked with these fragments every day, and new ideas resulted from unexpected accidents," she says.

Experimentation led her down several different paths. The most compelling resulted in a series of enamel pieces that, like the collages, grew out of experiments with leftover remnants of printmaking. Begun as a

series (called Print + Enamel) in 1992, they are made by fusing glass powder directly onto used copper etching plates. Additional marks are added by screen-printing enamel over the surface, a technique common in the commercial ceramics industry. The rich enameled images suggest visions of other worlds, but deliberate, scratchy marks within the pieces recall the process used to create them. The combination of accidental qualities in the enamel and more deliberate marks from the screen-printing strike a precarious balance between thoughtfulness and chaos.

Similar visual qualities are found in some of the collages. A series called Notes From Art History is made using sheets of tracing paper to create dense layers of written words and small sketches. While in graduate school, Kimura took notes on the paper while her art history professor lectured and showed slides in a darkened classroom. Consequently her notes and simple line drawings of slide images have a wonderful haphazard appearance. Her deliberate reconfiguration of the fragmented notes forms a counterpart to the chaotic display of information. In some pieces the results are perhaps accidentally humorous. One includes the words "Vishnu," "Great moment," and "UPS packing" along with a diagram of a figure (possibly the Indian god Shiva) that appears to be juggling.

Another series is called Collage With Templates and incorporates sections of paper-sewing templates used by the artist's grandmother. Inspired by the way her grandmother sews together fragments of seemingly unrelated fabrics, Kimura takes an approach similar to her other collages but draws upon particulars of her grandmother's habits. "She tries not to work hard, taking breaks and reading her favorite newspaper," says Kimura, referring to her grandmother. Within the collages themselves, cuttings from Japanese newspapers form visual breaks in the compositions.

Though possibly a bit too diverse for a show of 30 works, Kimura's Fragments is full of little gems. In contrast to the long-standing trend of contemporary art being huge in scale, Kimura's work successfully asserts that size isn't everything.

