

**Worcester Art Museum Exhibition of Contemporary  
Japanese Art Blends Elements of East and West**

***Exhibition Features Works Drawn from Collection of Joanne and Douglas Wise***

Worcester, MA – June 6, 2014 – This summer, the Worcester Art Museum (WAM) will present an intimate exhibition of abstract works by contemporary artists whose practice merges Western trends with Japanese traditions. *Abstractions in Blue: Works from The Wise Collection* will examine the evolution of Japanese contemporary art, an underexplored topic in American art museums, through ten works made between 1973 and 1996. Linked through their incorporation of blue hues, which signifies a break from the standard Japanese palette, these artists experimented with a variety of media to represent the natural world, incorporating references to the cycle of life and passage of time. On view June 18 through January 11, 2015, *Abstractions in Blue* features works donated to the Museum by Joanne and Douglas Wise in 2011.

Representing a range of media from ceramics to silkscreen prints, the ten works on view were created by nine Japanese artists whose levels of professional training reflect a variety of cultural experiences. From formal art school in Japan to training in the United States and Europe, these artists were exposed to Western trends that changed their approach to making art. Pushing the boundaries of Japanese artistic techniques such as printmaking and calligraphy, these artists used new media to portray traditional Japanese subjects, including the beauty of the natural world and the progression and cyclical nature of time. The artists represented established a new artistic language by projecting their Eastern perspective onto Western concepts. Displayed alongside one another, the works encourage visitors to find visual connections through their use of blue across varied media and contemplate the holistic balance that emerges when viewed together.

“*Abstractions in Blue* invites active learning about the works’ art historical context, but also provides the chance for a meditative, reflective viewing experience in which one can consider the aesthetic harmony of these powerful works. Presented together, the works offer a sense of calm and reassurance through their color palette and aesthetic sensibilities,” said WAM’s Curator of Asian Art, Louise Virgin. “We are so grateful for the Wise’s generosity, as the Wise Collection has been an invaluable resource for our Museum and has allowed us to introduce audiences to these important figures in establishing a new mode for contemporary expression within Japanese society.”

The artists represented incorporate characteristic Japanese artistic elements in their work, including quirky humor, explorations of space, and subtle gradations, but they also reveal an interest in contemporary Western trends. Highlights from the exhibition include:

- Kimiyo Mishima, ***French Newspaper***, about 1981 – Mishima uses discarded clay and scrap from tile factories to create her ceramic newspapers. Flattening the clay, she silkscreens the material with American newsprint and often “crumples” it before firing so it resembles a discarded newspaper. She thus transforms the temporary nature of news into the permanence of ceramics. Blending a Japanese tradition with Western media, Mishima comments on the wastefulness of consumerist societies.
- Shoichi Ida, ***Flag-Black and Blue, No. 2***, 1986 – An internationally known artist, Ida (d. 2006) specialized in collage and print-making, but also created works in a variety of other media. This work made of cotton fabric, ink, and cords is part of a series called *Surface is Between* in which he explored “spaces between objects that, seemingly, have no space” and how to make spaces with invisible communication visible by showing the point of contact.

- Hiroki Morinoue, **Night Sky No. XI**, 1988 – This work exemplifies Morinoue’s international formal training. An American artist of Japanese descent, he studied painting and printmaking in California and Japan. His works incorporate elements of Western Impressionism with modern Japanese design to show the serene beauty of nature through watercolors.
- Atsuhiko Musashi, **Marks 88-9-16**, 1988 – Incorporating Eastern philosophy in a Western collage-like technique, Musashi creates freeform, intuitive drawings based on the images of human cells. Hoping to communicate a sense of inner space, he layers drawings to construct his paintings, thinking of shape as bones, color as related to flesh, and texture as skin.

Joanne and Douglas Wise lived in Tokyo, Japan from 1978 to 1982. During this time, they befriended Japanese painters, printmakers, and ceramic artists, and began to collect their works. Upon returning to the United States, first living in Houston and then New York, Joanne dedicated herself to promoting Japanese contemporary artists through newsletters and exhibitions, helping to stimulate interest among American collectors and artists. Having assembled what became The Wise Collection, Joanne and Douglas generously donated works from this collection to WAM in 2011. It is their hope that these works will help inspire even greater knowledge and appreciation of modern Japanese art. *Abstractions in Blue* presents a selection of ten works from among the forty works donated to WAM by the Wises.

#### ABOUT THE WORCESTER ART MUSEUM:

Founded in 1898, the Worcester Art Museum serves Worcester and the broader region. The Museum houses an encyclopedic collection of paintings, sculpture, decorative arts, photography, prints, drawings, and new media. WAM’s collection has historically been strongest in European Renaissance paintings, but with recent acquisitions and donations, like Veronese’s *Venus Disarming Cupid* and the integration of the collection from the Higgins Armory Museum, it continues to diversify and expand its curatorial and programmatic offerings. Symbolized by the opening of the Salisbury Street doors in 2012, the Museum continues toward its goal of accessibility for all visitors.

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