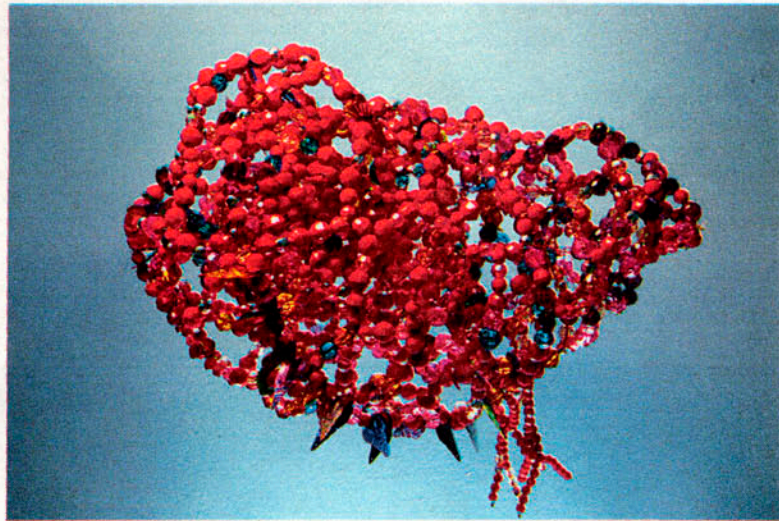


The New York Times

Copyright © 2004 The New York Times

NEW YORK, SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2004

\$4.50 beyond the greater New York metro



Photographs by Chris Maynard for The New York Times

"Spiral Shell Unicorn Horn 003," top, by Natsu

ART REVIEW

Japanese Inspired And Nature Infused

By WILLIAM ZIMMER

NORTH SALEM

THE galleries of the Hammond Museum are also the gateway to its main attraction, a Japanese stroll garden. The garden provides authentic contemplative experiences, like the pleasant shock of the terrace of red maple trees amid all the greenery, or the attraction of being drawn into scanning the pond's lily pads for well-camouflaged frogs.

Shows of contemporary art inside the museum often echo the sensations of the garden, and the art many times has Asian overtones. The current three-person exhibition where there is a striking cross-referencing among the artists features strongly Japanese-inspired work.

Like many artists who see a need to pigeonhole themselves, an artist known only as Natsu who studied both in Japan and New York City calls herself a "chandelier artist." The anteroom of the former mansion here features a niche at each corner. Natsu has painted them an ethereal blue or lavender like a romantic sky; in each she has hung a sculpture shaped roughly like the human heart, perhaps twice life-size. Suspended, they resemble chandeliers somewhat, but because they are made of intertwined strings of colorful plastic beads they resonate strongly with the current Japanese proclivity for inexpensive, popular and often gaudy materials.

The show, "Tsuki No Miyako: Bead Sculptures," is alluring, the pieces transcending their commonplace material, but Natsu also infuses them, perhaps to a degree they cannot fully sustain, with nature and mythology. Each piece is named "Spiral Shell Unicorn Horn" followed by a number, 001 through 004. The aggregate of strung beads creates the impression of a conch shell, an impression that for me alternated with the image of the heart. But the mix also includes the unicorn; on a purely physical level a unicorn horn is a skinny relative of a spiral shell because it spirals before tapering to a point. But Natsu has metaphysical intentions. She introduces an accompanying poem, "Metropole of the Moon," with:

*"Unicorn Horn gems in the heaven,
or Spiral Shell fossils under the sea?"*

The artist's aim is to encapsulate the universe in plastic beads.