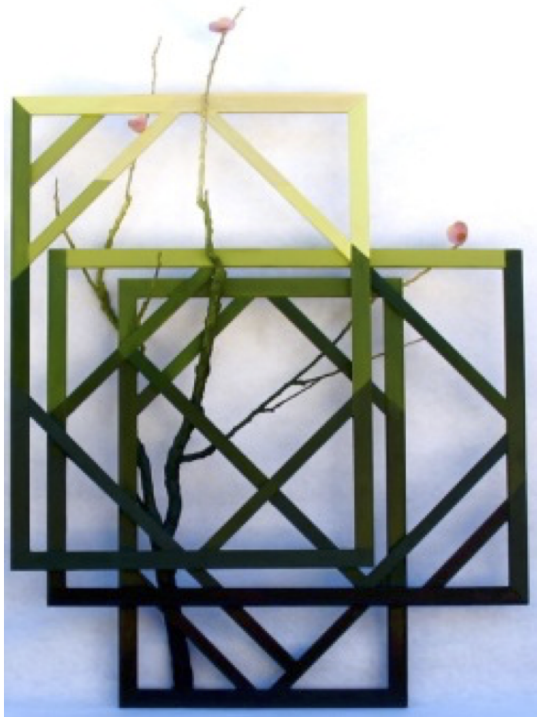


Shizuko Greenblatt: A Tree Grows in Modernism

By [Shana Nys Dambrot](#) *Mon, Jun 24, 2013*

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New Jersey poet Joyce Kilmer lived 100 years ago, but her spirit hovers around Shizuko Greenblatt's Los Angeles art studio. "I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree," Kilmer wrote; and what she meant was that no matter how magical and even beautiful a work of art might be, and no matter how advanced an artist's skill and pictorial grace, that there's something about that which Nature has wrought which is always more perfect still. Throughout her mixed media installations, sculptural constructions, and roughly lyrical paintings, Greenblatt splits the difference.

Her Fusion Ikebana works take form both as increasingly elegant and elaborate wall-mounted assemblies, and as architecturally engaged installations featuring the same elements in pulled-apart arrangements. In the wall-mounted and sometimes tabletop constructions, Greenblatt uses acrylic on stretched canvas to build grid-like frames both rigid and asymmetrical, whose linearity recalls the jazzy grids of painters like Mondrian, Klee, Albers, and Stella. She then deploys across these armatures painted tree branches, as well as the occasional element of glass, cylinders, rods, and other recycled organic and industrial materials. The art of Ikebana flower arrangement originated in Japan 450 years ago as a religious ceremonial art, and its modern secular practice still operates according to rules for aesthetic balance that are as strict in their organic formalism as ptolemaic geometry -- but also contain within that structure enduring narrative symbolism such as how a pine tree represents perseverance, a fan infinite growth, or a plum blossom hope. Beyond her specific references within this meme, the hybrid balance of formal structure and spiritual expressivity it represents is central to Greenblatt's approach to all of her work.



For example, her related painting series based on Japanese characters (Kanji) addresses an ancient calligraphic tradition which like Ikebana operated with both strict formalism and spiritual flourish. Her paintings often invert the writing/gesture dynamic function, with multihued painterly characters taking the place of "writing" while assuming and replicating its shapes. Greenblatt remarks how language itself is a series of micro-narratives, with individual alphabetic characters carrying such associations as "Passion for Life", "Go Forward" and "Infinite Growth" within their shapes that simultaneously function as elements of language -- and as elements of pattern and composition. Her treatment of those crosscurrents balances the demands of modernist-minded abstraction, and as such, in these paintings the calligraphy does the same compositional work that the branches do in the constructions. The Kanji disrupt the flat surfaces and stringent geometrical language of western modernism in the paintings with organic gesture in the same way that the actual elements of nature disrupt the engineered dimensional structures in which they reside.



Greenblatt's stylistic evolution is increasingly moving toward the compacted singular object and demonstrates a new smoothness of technique, a deployment of more complex color schemes -- especially the appearance of a deft *hombre* effect showing both emotional expressivity and design control. With her craftsmanship becoming more elaborated within both sculptures and paintings, the balance tips away from pure conceptual exercises and toward the meaningful object -- in which not only the strains of modernism but also the poetics of personal expression can flourish.



Shizuko Greenblatt: Japanese Characters and Fusion Ikebana III

LA Artcore Union Center For The Arts

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<http://www.shizukogreenblatt.com/>