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Art Review
Junior Year Writing

Map of Mystery, Gallery of Emotion

The small doorway stands in front of me, allowing me to see just a sliver of what visual excitement lays ahead. The open door frames a dark room and through the door, on the floor, there is a bright puddle of light, beckoning from the shadows it sits in. I'm lured into the room by what feels like a circle of hope, and I find myself surrounded by intriguing art by five artists from Japan in the show "Foreign Affairs" at Hampden Gallery.

A visit to a gallery is always an exciting experience filled with wonder. Whether the experience is joyful or not is really up to the artist and the installation. This show, greeting me with a puddle of hope, was definitely a great experience. Notice, I did not say joyful. Unless you find piles of broken glass in cramped hallway, somber black and white photos, and a video of glass balls crashing to the ground to symbolize a nuclear meltdown "joyful", then I think you will understand why I refrain in using the word. "Foreign Affairs" has beautiful and interesting work. I did not walk out of the gallery feeling joyful, but I felt inspired and full of thought about the world around me. In my opinion, a better reaction than "joyful".

I walk in the doorway to this circular pool of light on the ground but before I can reach it I'm distracted by the sound of glass smashing to the ground. I look to my left and sure enough, glass was shattering next to me in a video projection. The video, displaying glass balls crashing to the ground in varying numbers, is accompanied by calming yet eerie music. The viewer is lost in the video playing backwards and forwards

in slow motion, following the balls to the ground and then watching each glass piece come back together to form the ball in whole again. This piece by Izuru Mizutani is called *Collapse*, which apart from the intended meaning of the artist can have a personal meaning to each viewer. Even just interpreting it as an emotional collapse, the viewer is given hope in the reassembly of the glass balls breaking. As the balls crashed to the floor I felt emotionally crushed, but seeing the balls reform gave me hope. That emotional aura is emphasized by the soundtrack accompanying the video. However, one key part of this piece was easily overlooked. Apparently, there was a reflecting pool underneath the projection, mirroring the images and therefore doubling the effect of the video. I didn't realize it because I felt like I was standing at the right distance from the screen, but without any obstruction preventing me from moving forward. It was like the reflecting pool took up just enough space in front of the screen that it didn't catch my attention.

As I finish watching that video, I find myself able to return to what lured me into the room in the first place, *Tears of the Sky* also by Izuru Mizutani. However, I find that the music from the first piece heavily influences my interpretation of the second piece. The video installation is presented on the floor on a circular concave structure. This is not a large structure, only about four-feet wide and barely a foot tall, but its visual effect is powerful. The viewer stands over this circle that has blue skies with clouds projected on it. Every so often, the image is disturbed by a ripple effect in the projection, like a droplet of water was dropped onto the sky. The feeling of looking down on an image of the sky is more powerful than it sounds. The bright blue sky held my attention while the soft clouds made me feel calm. The sun in the picture radiates towards you from the ground. Unlike the unattainable sun in the sky that is so far away, this sun is right at your feet. You stand over it, almost in control of it, making you feel as if this hope that the

image represents is right there, staring at you. The music from *Collapse* and the visual representations of *Tears of the Sky* coincide to produce a strong feeling of hope.

This hopeful feeling is subdued in the next room with black and white photos covering the room. Moving from such a bright, capturing projection on the floor to small black and white photos on the wall makes the latter less impressive. An intriguing, but poorly placed video installation is also situated in this room. Despite my feeling of hope being subdued, I still found enjoyment out of these small photos. The long horizontal series of small pictures of a street corner at different times in the day, called *87th and Lexington, Snow* by Masahiro Amano, hung on the far wall. The only differences in the photos are the amount of snow on the ground and the people in the frame. The work focuses on the perspective from a window. It observes the contemporary life through one viewpoint, allowing the viewer to focus on the people and animals in each picture. Some are very active while others simply depict two birds in the snow, giving the viewer a rest from the constant movement of modern life.

The next room is manipulated in a way that leads the viewer as a guest through a maze of rooms, furnished with various tables and cupboards. Turning one corner after the next, the viewer is greeted with different lamps and mirrors and even piles of glass. Feeling cramped and a little overwhelmed, I exit the last room and feel relieved and confused. I'm then greeted by someone who tells me I have dropped something and hands me a crumpled piece of paper. From the look on her face, I know I am supposed to accept this gift regardless of whether it is actually mine. To my enjoyment, there is a map on the paper, with a dark scribble at one point. It took me a few minutes, but I realized where I was being lead to and followed the map, a little scared of what lay ahead.

I think the artist, Yuriko Yamamoto, wants the viewer to feel uneasy. After navigating a cramped maze of wooden bureaus and broken glass, the viewer is supposed to follow an ambiguous map to a place indicated with an angrily scribbled black circle. Inviting? No way. But despite whether you feel welcomed or not, the viewer feels intrigued. There is a mystery in where that map leads you in the gallery. It actually brings you out of the space of hope, both figuratively and literally, to a different emotion. I urge you, my readers, to go to Hampden Gallery and follow this map. Get lost in the emotions that fill the gallery and follow this map of mystery. I hope you'll be as pleased as I was with what you see and perhaps leave the gallery with joy and wonderment for the arts.

“Foreign Affairs”
Hampden Gallery
University of Massachusetts Amherst
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