

# Portrait of an Artist

## Venture into the mystic with Sharon Yamamoto

BY DAVID PINES

"Art is about participation," said artist Sharon Yamamoto. "Everyone sees a work of art through their own window. You have to be willing to look and to be looking truthfully."

"Great art stands the test of time. You can know the social context when a piece was created and its significance, but the real question is whether it means anything to you personally. It matters if you are looking in the first of 21st century."

Yamamoto has been in South Florida for seven years and resides in Belle Meade. She first established herself in England as an exhibitor at the East London Open Studios in 1986 and recently presented Mystical Images at the Gallery Vincent in the Streets of Mayfair.

What brilliantly colors Yamamoto's palette is her interest in the evolution of man's consciousness.

"I believe in order in the universe," she said. "Why do we think the way we think and why we are here and exploring the reasons for the miraculous phenomena known as mankind and how it relates to the universe."

Yamamoto's process of painting begins from ground zero with a brief meditation to clear her mind from any thoughts and sometimes she even removes her contact lenses to really create from a pure, fresh place.

"I scrape all the paint off my palette and pour white spirit over it," Yamamoto said. "I then take a rag, dip it into the blended paint and wipe it onto the canvas as if it were a chalkboard and discover what comes to me. I build from these origins and I find my work hinges on the position of the canvas and the areas necessitated by my arm movement."

Yamamoto's allegorical creations contain Renaissance figures, animals and images of the Golden Child that recall early Inca sketches evocative of Leger, Chagall, Botero and Gauguin.

"Everyone teaches me a little more about my work," she said. "The Pink Shell depicts an archetypal 'blue' male embracing a 'pink' female, reflecting aspects of ourselves and how we get through life."

Another favorite is her sphinx-like charcoal drawing entitled Knowledge. Here, there is fortress and lighthouse imagery with owls in the eyes and a man in a boat who has just embarked or is about to climb stairs that resemble an open book of a month.

"Knowledge is a blessed gift only given to humans and one has to be intentional about obtaining it," said Yamamoto. "It doesn't just happen. You have to look for it, discover and work at it."

This concept is visualized with one owl in flight, symbolizing its active imagination, while the other owl sits reflecting, passively looking and depicting the intellect.

"Changing perspective and looking at things in a new and different fashion is what art is all about," she said. "For something to change the way you think, you need to digest it before you believe it. Thus, staying still is important, also. Being reserved, you can internalize facts and theory, investigate and proceed to utilize in practical life."

Born April 1, 1948 in Chicago, Yamamoto is a third generation Japanese-American. She attended the Art Institute of Chicago junior school from 12 years old

and graduated summa cum laude from Illinois Wesleyan University in 1969. She opened the Vera and Yamamoto Fine Art Gallery in Miami Beach last year.

Her desire for April 1st to be an international holiday can be seen in perhaps her most illuminating painting, *The Divine Spark*, inspired by the artist, Cecil Collins who did a series of drawings using the fool as his prototypical figure and Jesus as the ultimate fool.

"The ultimate fool is the pure self, he is not naive because he can see through things," said Yamamoto. "Throughout history, the court jester made people laugh because he spoke the truth without tilting people up. But the fool is also a sad figure, as he could see what the world could not."

Yamamoto also amazes little gallery notes near her paintings to help guide the art aficionado into the mysterious world that is creation.

"She's an excellent writer as well as a genuine artist," said fellow artist Rafael Andres. "She expresses truly what we are all feeling when we look at her art."

"I was inspired to do this when I saw it done at the Tate Gallery in London," said Yamamoto. "It allows the average person on the street to participate and overall helps make art more accessible. My intent is to simply promote the healing of the human soul through visual means."



Artist Sharon Yamamoto with one of her works entitled "Inevitable Journey" (top)

