

Toronto

by William Fabrycki

To get to Aiko Suzuki's studio, one heads east on Queen Street in Toronto to the factory district just off the downtown area. Mixed with Second World War vintage brick factories are small shops whose dirty windows advertise a variety of goods from far-off countries. Across the way from her studio, four boys in leather shirts, jeans and tattoos lean against a building, smoking and watching.

A narrow stairway leads up to the second floor door of a closed-down candy factory. Beyond the once perfumed, sticky-sweet smelling hall is another door leading to her studio.

Working with bright nylon threads hanging from painted wood boards she calls "platforms", Suzuki creates striking sculptural tapestries of color, form and texture. The hundreds of threads, hung side by side, snake down from the "platforms" toward the floor like the continuous lines in a waterfall.

Collectively, Suzuki has named her pieces *Suspensions*. Meant to be hung away from the wall and viewed in-the-round, they are created, developed, and changed, with nothing ever finalized, as dictated by the Abstract-Expressionist credo of adding and subtracting elements until the work develops out of the knowledge and creative instincts of the artist. The energy of Suzuki's work is found in her determination to force changes to occur and thus confront choices and in the colors and forms of the threads in the end result.

She first lays out her work on a table or floor, adding thread after thread until she is satisfied the initial image has been achieved. Then she hangs the piece vertically, studies it for hours, adjusts it, studies it again, and finally she changes the threads, twists and lifts whole sections and without any hint of reluctance, takes up scissors and cuts away at the threads, until a new form develops. At other times, however, she slows the work down and one piece may be developed over a period of months.

Much of Suzuki's work, despite its firm roots in the visual-arts, can be traced back to her avant-garde set designs, first executed in 1969, for the Toronto Dance Theatre. Working for David Earl and Patricia Beattie, she designed sets of draped rope and cheesecloth which were used for performances in houses such as Toronto's St. Lawrence Centre and MacMillan Theatre.

Most startling of the seven pieces hanging in her studio is *"Mishima II"*, titled after the Japanese poet who, as an act of political protest, committed suicide by hari-kari. (It is worth mentioning here that some of her titles reflect her Japanese, ethnic heritage, although Suzuki was born a third-generation Canadian in Vancouver). Yet, the piece is decidedly western in concept. Executed in 1974, of black and white vertical threads hanging off a thick, round, black "platform", *Mishima II* is a contemporary sculpture of diverse components. To disrupt the vertical thrusts of the threads, Suzuki has draped, in front, stark white orlon which has been sprayed with silicone and formed to resemble a maze of cobwebs. Near center, she has bunched the threads and webs together to form a central focal point. Off to the right side, as syncopation, she has added a half-dozen red threads to tease the eye, away from the focal point. Again and again the viewer's eye moves between these two elements - the red constantly focusing the mind on the title and the blood let in Mishima's suicidal act. As an interplay of form, Suzuki has hung from the "platform" vertical, black, painted dowel rods at various intervals. The whole effect fuses the expressionistic hand of her early training as a painter under Mashel Teitelman with the distinctly modern attitude of using the methods inherent in many disciplines.

Another composition, *Oh Canadada*, constructed in 1974, is sardonically political, suggesting a sort of Dada joke. She has attached white vinyl stars over red, white and blue threads, fixed a wilted red vinyl maple leaf at the top, and incorporated thin plastic tape with she threads. One can easily read suggestions of social-political commentary about Canada - United States relations, big business, and the commercialism of the art world.

The largest *Suspension* (6 x 7V2 feet) which, with her other work, will be shown at the Sisler Gallery in Toronto from February 24 through March 11, 1976, is tentatively titled *Hokusai Silver*. Of particular interest is the simplicity of this new piece. Unlike anything else in the studio, it has threads in only a grey, colorless scale. Too, this piece is simplified in that it consists of four planes which she has not twisted or interrupted in any way with added forms. Here she has draped the piece in what looks like, from the side, a huge "S", fallen over backwards. The effect is a motif of rectangles, created by the mass of the threads, which are contrasted by the horizontal lines of the "platforms". It's like looking at a huge curtain which has been lifted up and hung over a number of rods.

While Aiko Suzuki says *Hokusai Silver* does not necessarily suggest a new direction in her work, one has to read it as a road for her to travel at some point in the future.

