

Moon Rabbit
Jean Isamu Nagai + Ash Wyatt

EXHIBITION ON-VIEW DATES

February 17–May 10, 2024

EXHIBITION OPENING RECEPTION

Saturday, February 17th, 3–5 p.m.

By Morgan Ritter, Curator & Program Manager

The Arts Council of Lake Oswego is pleased to present *Moon Rabbit*, an exhibition of two Washington-born artists, Jean Isamu Nagai and Ash Wyatt.

A moon rabbit is an example of pareidolia. Pareidolia is the cognitive process of perception that imposes a meaningful interpretation onto a nebulous stimulus, usually visual, so that one sees a pattern, face, object, or meaning, where there is seemingly none. Innumerable resemblances of people, animals, and objects may be perceived in clouds, and because clouds are not stagnant, these resemblances are infinite, just as our ability to create meaning.

The moon's lunar lava plains and wrinkled ridges create a combination of light and shadow, contouring what we may see as a moon rabbit or a man in the moon. The moon rabbit is a cross-cultural mythical figure that is believed to be seen on the moon in Chinese, Japanese and Korean folklore as well as in legends of Indigenous peoples of the Americas including Mesoamerican and Cree peoples. Nagai and Wyatt's work feature highly textured, abstracted landscapes where temporal forms may come into and out of view, like the shapeshifting of clouds in the sky, or seeing a rabbit on the moon.

Ash Wyatt's stoic imagery is constituted of soft materials such as horse hair gifted from a friend, wool, cotton, and vintage linens. Her visual work appears spacious and gestural, yet are sharply and methodically hand-punctured through substrates within the painstakingly tedious processes of tufting and embroidery. Wyatt's work inhabits the edges between light and dark, heavy and refined, sharp and soft, earthly and intangible, alive and inanimate. Each line in her work traces her ancestral lineages and has personal significance. As an artist and a poet, the corresponding titles are complex and ripe with possible meaning, highlighting an expansive world of poetic thinking and rigor that underlays her visual work. *La Montaña en La Otro* translates to English as *The Mountain in the Other* and speaks to the deep psychological work she is concurrently enmeshed in as she pursues her Masters Degree in Clinical

Mental Health Counseling at Portland State University. Within Wyatt's seemingly minimalist, nuanced body of new work is her physical and spiritual endurance to make this work.

Repetitive mark making by hand allows for possibly dissociative or trance-like states for both artists. In a recent conversation with Wyatt, she suggested that getting lost while making her work was a sign she was going in the right direction. While Wyatt's work transforms the soft into the heavy, Nagai's ethereal paintings are made gritty by the integration of pumice, as if an inverted set of material explorations.

Each dot cemented within Jean Nagai's paintings is a point in time, amassing into a vibrating and cratered plane of interconnected points in time and space. The dots float upon fluid background gradients, sublimated within the canvas. That background vs. foreground contrast creates depth for the viewer to settle into the visual field, just as the field begins to break down. Time almost slows when absorbed in these paintings. Nagai's work conveys the fragility of our shared landscape. Constellations of forms appear and disappear and subtle references to the natural environment are mysteriously imbued within these non-representational works. Ant colony architectures, mycorrhizal mushroom networks of the Pacific Northwest, glaciers crumbling in Alaska, the cold and wet air in Olympia, omnipresent smog in Los Angeles—these may all be referenced within his work. And these references are not just conceptual, they are materially integrated. Nagai sometimes combines mushroom spores into his paint mediums, and in the past has listed smog alongside acrylic paint and pumice, as media in his work. Nagai shares that his inclusion of pumice “relates to the thin layer of earth of the Pacific Rim and the ‘ring of fire’ which connects Japan and the west coast of the United States.” The ring of fire is a horse-shoe shaped string of 452 volcanoes, mountains, and oceanic trenches that stretches 25,000 miles long. Ninety percent of the world's earthquakes occur within this belt. Nagai's inquiries are at once mystic and scientific. Where does life come from? How do the sky and the earth relate? As otherworldly as his paintings may appear, the work is substantial.

Both artists' work is scalable— their expressions are expandable and contractible. Nagai's pointillistic color fields exist as large-scale immersive murals while simultaneously his small paintings that function like portals into an incomprehensibly vast sky. Wyatt's large tufted tapestries are bold and graphic, while her horse hair embroideries are delicate, if barely decipherable. Despite the range of media and scale in her work, her line work has corporeal integrity.

Ash Wyatt (b.1985 Spokane, WA) is a bi-racial Mexican American Indigenous artist. From Spokane, currently living in Portland, Oregon, she is an

early career artist who has done some exciting collaborations with woman owned ceramic studio and workshop, The Granite, and handcrafted tile manufacturer, Tempest Tile Works. She has multiple pieces within the Regional Art & Culture Council's Public Art Collection in Portland. Ash has recently completed a large-scale commission at a new luxury high-rise building in Portland, and is pursuing her Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling at Portland State University.

Jean Isamu Nagai (b. 1979 in Seattle, WA) is an artist who spent much of his upbringing in Olympia, Washington, and more recently spent the last few years in New Mexico and currently living in Los Angeles. He received a Bachelor's Degree from The Evergreen State College and thus far his work has been shown mostly along the West coast. By engaging in a trance-like process by which the sum of many individual dots accumulate to form a larger synergic whole, Jean's work both creates and explores a spiritual microcosm and macrocosm that shifts between the physical, digital and political landscape.