
A PRECISE LIFE

WE TAKE A THOUGHTFUL WALK THROUGH THE WORLD OF KANA HARADA. URBAN DWELLER.

ART MONK. MYSTIC.



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The mist that often lingers above Turtle Creek on a crisp spring morning is as close as we might get to finding Zen in our city's urban sprawl. The concept of mist – tiny droplets of water suspended in the air,

soon to transform into a translucent cloud – is rather analogous to the work of Japan-born, Dallas-based artist Kana Harada. Some of her works, such as Cotton Candy Tree, Duet, and Trio, have a decorative-arts quality.

Collectively, they resemble highly stylized chandeliers gliding in the air – much like mist hanging above water. An intimate experience with Harada's mobiles is both

poignant and compelling. The shadows these works cast on a stark-white gallery wall leave the viewer transfixed.

Harada lives and works in a quaint loft on Main Street in Downtown Dallas, an artful respite in the middle of the Bermuda Triangle of fashion made up of Neiman Marcus, Forty Five Ten, and Traffic LA. Her dwelling calls to mind the romanticized notion of the artist as an urban dweller – a creative soul who feeds on the rapid pulse generated by the chaos of a big city. Yet Harada’s work is different. It doesn’t reflect urban chaos; instead, it embodies an otherworldly element that is fanciful and fantastical.

Harada shares her monastic space – she enjoys referring to herself as an art monk – with her husband of more than 20 years, Makoto (Mak) Takemura. “Mak says it was 100 percent my decision to live downtown,” she says. “My commute is my walk from our bedroom in the morning to the former living room, which now functions as my studio – and in contrast he must brave traffic to make it up to his offices at Texas Instruments.” For the couple, living in a historic building was of utmost importance, as they relish the flavor and charm that comes with a patina of age. Harada dreams of the building’s past tenants, and she prefers the minor quirks and flaws that come with living in a historic space. “The floor isn’t even level – but I appreciate that about our loft,” she says. “A lot of the windows don’t work. They keep us cold during the winter and hot during the summer, but I still love it.”

It’s impossible to separate Harada’s sculpture from the physical space in which she creates. Her studio is obsessively organized. This is not the scene of clutter surrounding many artists, but rather a laboratory with an assortment of precise instruments. Harada works in a variety of mediums, but for her hanging sculpture and freestanding works, she

often employs delicate paper or foam sheets, which she painstakingly cut by hand with small scissors she desires. For her “White” series, the marshmallow-like texture of the foam creates an ethereal effect. In the case of her black 3-D suspended pieces, the mobiles’ pliable nature is an interesting contrast to their hard, wrought-iron appearance.



The artist often wakes around 5:30 am, pours herself tea, has a light breakfast, and does yoga. Her mantra is “May peace prevail on earth,” and she begins her practice with gratitude: “I thank my spiritual

guides, Mother nature, all my ancestors, and my late parent for waking me up, for giving me a new day, for my life.”

By 8 am, she is working. Numerous windows allow an inordinate amount of natural light. But at this early hour, she begins cutting under the soft glow of her table lamps. She skips lunch (the couple only eats two meals per day), but she will occasionally indulge in a midday spoonful of organic peanut butter with honey.

After 5 pm, Harada goes for a therapeutic walk to clear the clutter from her mind. Until then, she avoids the distractions of the outside world and prefers not to break the flow of her studio time. During those urban hikes – she never wears headphones, instead absorbing the sounds of the world around her – she may continually recite her personal mantras. This, she says, is her way of “thanking the earth, concrete, trees, air, people, dogs, the sun, the moon, the clouds, the sky, and

perhaps the awesome breads at Commissary.” Harada has even been known to offer a moment of meditation to the panhandlers in her neighborhood. Many years ago, she instinctively felt for those in need and, like a reflex, began bowing – a Japanese custom of showing respect – before homeless people as her way of saying she was sorry for their plight. Many of those people she encountered now bow to her in return.

Harada was born in Tokyo. Her family moved to the U.S. for a short period in the 1970s, when Harada was in middle school. “I never experienced bullying,” she says. “I was the first Japanese girl many of my classmates had ever met, and they wanted to teach me.” By this point, she knew she wanted to be an artist. When she was just one year old, she began drawing – and by four, she told her mother she was born to draw. Harada returned to Japan to study graphic design, Japanese fine art, and drawing at the Ochanomizu

School of Fine Arts. Her fascination with flowers and nature – likely due to trips to the lush foothills at the base of Mount Fuji – is apparent, as she employs them in many of her motifs. Harada’s hanging sculptures could be described as celestial gardens. The exquisite white structure, often dancing through the air, are painted with delicate flowers and patterns in vibrant pastels.

Harada was once asked whether she would like to be considered a Japanese artist. “No.” was her response. “As proud as I am to be a Japanese woman, I have never really tried to incorporate anything Japanese into my work. However, there is a very old-school part of me, which I owe to my mother. Japanese-ness is perhaps too ingrained in me for me to be fully aware of it.” ***Kana Harada is represented by Talley Dunn Gallery in Dallas and will have a solo exhibition at the Art Museum of Southeast Texas in Beaumont in 2020.***