

• **Presentation for Thread through Asia**

Guyseika is a French artist who studied art in the beginning of the 90s, at the St-Martin's School, London. He had his first shows in London which is also where, influenced by the Viet-Nam of the period when his grand-mother lived there, he started developing an interest in the Far East, studying its numerous cultures and practicing Tai-Chi.

The show held at Alliance Française is consequently a glimpse into more than twenty years of exploration, a thread originating in traditional Zen and Taoist painting of China and Japan, moving on to Shamanism, mandalas and folk rituals of India and to Tibetan tangkhas.

Not turning his back on the world of abstract-expressionism, street art and punk rock from which he comes, Guyseika's aim is to confront and mix different world views in order to create a mythical universe neighbouring and questioning our ordinary reality.

Starting with calligraphic Zen paintings, the viewer is confronted with the riddle of the place of human beings in the universe. Minstrels, Taoist hermits, sâdhus or everyday people, wander the world. Inspired by the traditional Zen paintings of Japan, often illustrating a short poem, they present a simple but profound teaching on Tao (the path, Dharma). The strokes of ink seem to emerge from the emptiness of the bare sheet of handmade paper, and the colours pulse and flow on the surface like a wild cloud.

Like the paintings of Mountains and Rivers, that we find here framed as Tibetan tangkhas, they are all about energy or chi. In Taoist philosophy, it is the actual emptiness that allows the energy to flow, and to show through. Traditionally, the paintings of Mountains and Rivers aim to create a microcosm truer than nature itself, because it makes the chi, the breath of life, visible. In that way, they are sort of wild, intuitive mandalas...

Guy became fascinated with yantras and mandalas and the ritual use of pigments that we find all over India, on paper, floors, statues, rocks or foreheads. Coming from the roots of humanity, they echo with the physical science of our time, questioning our concepts of time, space, mind, creation and matter.

Guyseika explores Tangkhas and Shamanic visions, sometimes blowing up details of traditional Tibetan paintings, sometimes mixing manga, tattoo, street art, surfing culture, and Tibet to give form to his own inner visions of complementary, ever changing phenomena in a universe that is fundamentally one... His works tell us about a world in which everything is alive, interwoven, interdependent, connected. A vision cherished by animist cultures and Eastern wisdoms. A vision that is particularly relevant in these days of ecological emergency.

• **Biography GUYSEIKA / EKA FAUNE**

Seika, born in Normandy in France, started painting shortly after high school, at the age of 18, and moved to London the following year, hoping to find fertile ground for his artistic research.

There he worked and attended evening art and design classes, made music, painted and took photos, until he joined the Central St Martin's School of Art in 1994. Guyseika held his first exhibitions in London, showing works dealing with London's nightlife, and then expressionist paintings at the Alternative Art Galleries. He participated in a group art project in a squat, painting on the walls using existing textures. It is also in London that, influenced by the Vietnam of his grand-mother, he started developing an interest in the Far East, practicing Tai-Chi and studying its numerous cultures.

Back in Paris, he was noticed by the 3 Suisses Foundation during the Plein Soleil group exhibition and worked for two years for the graphic novel publishing house Glénat, before making his way to Central America in November 1997. He worked in a nature reserve for a month and then travelled through Mexico, Belize and Guatemala for 4 months. He began writing on notebooks, savagely mixing poems, notes and ink drawings, that he will later publish in handmade books.

On his return to France, Seika started practicing Zen with a disciple of the Japanese master Taisen Deshimaru before leaving for several months for India. This interlude allowed him to start on a new footing when he came back to Paris and his works were now dominated by Eastern cultures. He immersed himself in the ancient art of the zen monks and Taoist sages, shamanic visions, Tibetan tangkhas and Hindu mythology and folk art, to express these cultures through words and images of his own, as he didn't turn his back on the world of abstract-expressionism, street art and punk rock from which he came. Hence Guyseika's aim is to confront and mix different cosmogonies in order to create a mythical world neighbouring and questioning our ordinary reality.

Confident in his new approach, he exhibited amongst other places, at the gallery « Impressions » together with the calligrapher Jacques Foussadier in 2003, at the Procé Mansion with the support of the city of Nantes in 2007 and 2015, as well as at many cultural centers throughout France. He was part of the exhibition and workshop concept Art Pro of the town of Orsay in 2014. In 2018 he organised, with the support of the town of Nantes, an exhibition about woolcraft in the Himalayas. He was also one of the permanent artists of the Gallery « L'Ouroboros » in Nantes. He has illustrated many books, like the Biographie Ryokan, moine du Ciel by D.Blain in 2017. Seika also created Sauvagerie Production, an organisation that publish handmade books of poetry.

Seika does not own a studio and he simply uses the materials that directly surround him. We could therefore speak of nomadic art...

• **Monks, Mountains and Many Cultures: A Note on Thread through Asia**

Artist Guyseika's exhibition Thread through Asia offers a compelling synthesis of styles inspired by traditional Buddhist art from China, Japan and Tibet, with a punk aesthetic informed by abstract expressionism. A French Zen Buddhist who has been practicing meditation with a Zen master for 22 years, Guyseika's practice spawned an interest in Zen culture that led him to study Tibetan and Zen Buddhist art while at the same time immersing himself in Japanese poetry.

Indeed, the artist has said that most of his more Japanese-influenced works have been inspired by the work of poets like Han Shan, Ryokan and Ikkyu, as well as Basho and many other Taoist and Zen poets. Guyseika's Buddhist inspirations are amply evident in his work, though they are also illuminated by a penchant for quirky captions in French and English that is as much reminiscent of Magritte as it is of Hokusai. At the same time, this merging of the graphic and the textual is directly inspired by street art and graffiti, and aims to convey the manner in which the information conveyed by our senses can sometimes differ from the feelings that are aroused within us when perception occurs.

The influence of street art is more obviously visible in Guyseika's work using repurposed scraps of banana paper and cardboard. These works can also be put together in a multitude of combinations to create puzzle-like installations with an element of mixed media collage. Works like "Kat" and "Dragon posture" combine images and colours to make layered psychedelic icons redolent of punk and comic book art with their simplicity and fantastic imagery as well as the do-it-yourself attitude with which the artist has transformed whatever is at hand into works of art. At the same time, the swirling vortexes, ascetic figures and tigers that fill these works allow us to trace a thread through Guyseika's work, the thread being the Asian influences that lend the exhibition its title.

With broad, colourful strokes, Guyseika's work in acrylic on canvas represent fluid, dreamlike forms that may be viewed as abstract expressionist experimentation with form and colour. Yet the artist has combined this tendency with his fascination for Chinese paintings, such that works like "Falaise et flou", "Empty rocks" and "Roc doré" bring to mind Japanese and Chinese landscape painting with their calligraphic brushwork conveying the flow of energy and the titles often identifying the forms as representations of the artist's fascination with mountains.

The more traditional series of Zen inks continues this walk through the mountains, with the artist capturing the fleeting present moment in muted hues of blue, red, purple and black on white handmade paper which, through his use of blank space, exerts its own influence and presence.

The artist's use of stamps resembling Japanese hankos, with the artist's Buddhist name, meaning "river of stars" in Japanese kanji lend a sense of authenticity to the series. Often, the stamps, some of which were designed by the artist himself, continue the mountain and water motif.

Mountains reappear in Guyseika's series of mandala drawings made on handmade paper in natural pigments and crayons from the Avani-Kumaon cooperative whose vegetable dyes and pigments Guyseika has a fondness for. In the mandalas, the mountain motif is distilled into the geometric shapes of circles and triangles which can also be interpreted to represent the lingam. Beautifully textured like much of his work, with an aura of radiating light, these works are contemplative and meditative, with concentric circles and sharp lines reminiscent of the work of S.H. Raza. Regardless of the way one might interpret them, the mandalas showcase a fascination with the construction and opposition of forms and the story they tell.

As with the mandala, Guyseika offers his own spin on tangkha art, with large canvas paintings as well as smaller ones on paper in watercolour, that are clearly inspired by Tibetan art with their whiskered tigers and abstracted mudras. Works like "Vajra" and "Lotus 2" are imbued with a deep respect for the culture from which they are drawn while also attempting something that bears the mark of the individual artist. In many ways, they gesture at the central journey through Asian culture that Thread through Asia represents. Tibet – with its Buddhist culture; its location, through which Buddhism had to flow to reach China from India; its history of wandering, displacement and exile; and, of course, its mountains! What better ethos to draw from for an artist inspired by his study of tangkhas, and Chinese and Japanese poetry and paintings? It is more

significant still that this exhibition is taking place in India whose influence in terms of colours, pigments, sculpture and, of course, Buddhism, has made such an impact on Guyseika. Thread through Asia is a show that stands testament to the value of cultural exchange and synthesis, in a country that has, for centuries, been known for the same.

Sameer Abraham Thomas is a Faculty Associate with the Centre for Writing and Pedagogy at Krea University. He is also a freelance editor and content writer with an interest in the arts.

• **Interview for the magazine SoCulture, january 2020...**

1. You started painting early at the age of eighteen and later moved to London. What are your early memories?

Being a teenager is not always easy and art was a mean for me to express my inner feelings. At this time my art was very much linked to the music I was listening to (From punk music, Velvet Underground and Pixies to industrial and early electronic music) Music and art is the reason why I moved to London, spending much of my time in underground clubs. This scene was very powerfull visually and musicaly. That's at that time that I had my first shows.

2. Your first exhibition! What were the main elements and topics of your canvasses?

My first exhibition was very much about this underground scene I was part of. Very colorfull and sort of tribal paintings influenced by the art of Keith Haring and Tony Cragg. Some of these paintings were renderings of musical tracks. I would translate sounds into forms, signs, volumes, colors. And I would paint an imbrication of symbols, animals, humans in the background that would depict the nightlife of the time...

3. You started studying Orient and learning Tai chi. Do you think Tai Chi and such master arts help enhance creativity?

It certainly helps to see the world from a different point a view. Through the practice of Tai Chi you'll start perceiving reality more in term of energy, energy flow. You'll also be more in your body, in your movements, and so in the present moment. Body and mind unified... Your art becomes naturally influenced by this new vision of the world and by this new connection with your body... I feel the Conscience opens up with these kind of practices, like with Yoga and Zen meditation.

4. Your fascination with words happened and you started to maintain notebooks and writing poems, scribbling texts and drawings watercolors. You started later Sauvagerie production.

We always had a lot of books at home, my parents and my sister were great readers. My sister was excellent with words, which was not my case, but she certainly influenced me. I read a lot, got into reading poetry, and finally writing poems. My first notebooks were more about drawings, mixed with poems from other people I liked. But I got into writing more and more... But these

notebooks lead me to publishing some fanzines and illustrated poetry. I first published my own things and started publishing other poets and artists later on. Sauvagerie Production is about mixing powerfull texts and images...

5. You have studied Chinese and Japanese Buddhism, and you have spent several months in Indian Himalayas. How this interlude allowed you to set out on new bases?

I got into Zen Buddhism when I left London. Practicing meditation and reading books. Then I met a master of Zen in Paris, a disciple of Japanese master Taisen Deshimaru. In India the encounter with the Himalayas and its cultures was a very strong blow. The snow peaked mountains always in the background, the small stone temples with idols smeared with gee and adorned with pigments and flowers, the colorfull weaving of wool in the villages. In my mind it got mixed with the traditional chinese paintings of Mountains and Rivers that embodied a zen and taoist view of the world. And that is something I wanted to render in my own more colorfull and abstract style... I started my Zen drawings around the same time, but this was more through the influence of zen poetry.

India is also the place where I really started to get interested by Handycrafts and the use of natural ressources to create beautiful things that resonate with a particular environment. It is after my first journey in India that I started to use handmade paper and natural pigments. I really hope India will be able to save her folk knowledges about handcraft and the use of natural ressources. We have lost most of it in Europe...

6. Cultural amalgamation...diverse studies...Zen, Orient, Western influences, how all the travels and learnings impacted your original expressions?

As some would say, we are conditioned... It is difficult to say "this is the reason why I do this", because there are so many hidden reasons that lead us where we are, doing what we do. What is evident is that because of our past experiences and upbringing, some things resonate more or less with our innerself in the present moment. Asia just happened to be a part of my life from an early age, from the tales of my grand-mother about Vietnam and all the objects that surrounded her, to manga or Bruce lee and the early practice of martial arts. But there was also the music of my youth, the street art that surrounded me, the shows in museums, the comic books I was reading, the movies I was seeing, the surfing and skateboarding culture. It was all bound to mix for better or for worst...

Since my twenties Zen and Tai-Chi practices are central to my way of life. As a Zen buddhist I study Zen teachings and poetry, but also philosophies and cultures which are related to it, from Taoism to Advaita Vedanta, from tibetan tangkhas to Tantric art... This interest seems logic to me.

Most of the techniques I use in my art haven't changed much since my time in London. But the content has surely evolved. Travelling in India for a westerner is a very strong experience, and my first encounter with the Himalayas and its cultures just blew me away... The art of Tibetan tangkhas and tantra produce images that express very profound and powerfull teachings (but it is also the case with zen and taoist pantings). As a painter this use of images is very appealing. All of this (Manga, poetry, sumi-e, tangkhas, Mandalas, mantras, temples etc), and all that I

experienced through my travels profoundly inspire me because it also resonates with my spiritual practice, and I express this naturally and automatically in my art. Hard to explain, but it just comes out naturally like that...

7. You write blogs, poems. In one of your blog posts, you wrote about energy exchange...then there is another lovely poem called, "Barefoot in the snow".

Words and music are for me different means to express my pictorial universe: a mix of Asian mystics and western street culture...

8. Recently you had held an exhibition titled in Delhi, India, "Threads through Asia" influenced by monks, mountains, and many cultures.

It was a great show. The alliance Française of New Delhi is a beautiful space where I've been able to show most of the different aspects of the art I've been doing this last 20 years. I was delighted by the response I had from the Indian public. People seemed to intuitively understand what it was all about. I thank the people who came to see the show and particularly the french ambassador Emmanuel Lenain, Jaya Jaitly president of Dastkari Haat Samiti and painter Arpana Caur whom I admire very much.

I just wish I had been able to perform a musical concert at some point... maybe next time...

9. Your ink drawings which at times are accompanied by calligraphy are so beautiful and inspiring. Tell us your vision.

With these drawings, the viewer is confronted with the riddle of the place of human beings in the universe. Minstrels, Taoist hermits, sadhus or everyday people, wander the world. Inspired by the traditional Zen paintings of Japan, often illustrating a short poem, they present a profound teaching on Tao (The Path, Dharma). The strokes of ink seem to emerge from the emptiness on the bare sheet of handmade paper, and the colours pulse and flow on the surface like a wild cloud. It's in a way similar to the zen gardens of Japan.

Some of these drawings depict the wandering of a Japanese monk in his traditional garments (a long black robe with enormous sleeves). He seems lost in the countryside, at the feet of the mountains. This monk was inspired by a manga called Ikkyu. In fact those drawings were often direct illustrations of poems by Chinese and Japanese poets like Han Shan, Ryokan or Ikkyu. Sometimes it's a baul of Bengal, a mythical Native American figure, a surfer or Milarepa who pops up on the paper.

10. What kind of real-life situations, scenes inspire you?

Everything can inspire me, an animal, someone sipping tea, a puddle reflecting the sky, the street light of a derelict city. Or natural elements, like a tree, the colors of a mountain at dusk or a moonlit landscape.

11. Do you think art should be used to influence society? Should it portray religion, politics, ugly sides too?

I don't judge what other artists do. As far as art is concerned, artist should really feel free to express whatever they want. Anyway, art is only a mirror of society.

Whether you want it or not, your art influence society. In fact one can say that every action you make, every word you say influence the whole universe, but even more a creation that will be seen by many other people... Some abstract painting can move you to tears and change your life for ever. Everything is political, or religious. It's all about Life. Where is the separation ? Some paintings by Otto Dix, with defigured soldiers from the first world war are beyond the ideas of beautiful and ugly... Rothko's abstract paintings are beyond ideas, that's why they are political... This is art...

12. What are your future projects?

I would like to find a way to present another show like Thread Through Asia in another Indian city, like Mumbai or Kolkata.

A tour around asian cities of an installation of imbricated drawings (more the psychedelic, punky style) accompanied by a concert of underground electronic music reflecting those drawings.

• **Interview for Asian Age, january 2020**

+ How are your works a summary for your love for Asia?

I'm not sure "love" is the right term... It has just happened to be a part of my life from an early age, from the tales of my grand-mother about Vietnam, all the objects that surrounded her, to Bruce Lee and the early practice of martial art like Judo . Also, my zen buddhist and Tai-Chi practices are central to my way of life. As a buddhist I study philosophies and cultures which are related to it, from Taoism to Advaita Vedanta, and the countries from which these originate... Also travelling in India for a westerner is a very strong experience, and my first encounter with the Himalayas and its cultures just blew me away... All of this, I express it naturally and automatically in my art. All I read, see (subi-e, tangkhas, Mandalas, mantras temples etc), and all that I experience through my travels profoundly inspire me because it also resonates with my spiritual practice. Hard to explain, but it just comes out naturally like that...

+ Can you explain the use of handmade paper and avani crayons?

Even before my first trip to India, I was open to the use of more natural and organic products and I would use handmade paper from time to time, but India really introduced me to the world of handcraft and to the importance of saving the knowledge they represented. Right now, the place where I live is not adequate for the production of handmade paper and natural pigments, but it is certainly one of my goal to produce my own paper and pigments from the surrounding natural environment where I will settle someday... it just seems natural to me to go in that direction, especially with the ecological crisis we are now facing.

Also I got interested artistically by handmade paper because of the textures they have. Each sheet of paper is different and I compose my paintings to harmonise with what each one has to offer. It's particularly important in my work because of the use I make of empty space and transparencies...

+ You see a side of Asia that others don't. Can you explain how that is the case with respect to your works?

My work is an encounter of European and Asian cultures. Also there's the zen, punk and "pop/street art" background. I guess it's an unusual perspective. And I don't intend to limit myself to one aspect, "style" or whatever. I feel completely free in my expression...

+ In your works, it was noticed that fascinated with the spiritual and geometric forms of yantras and mandalas, and the ritual use of pigments, that one finds in abundance in India.

As a painter, the use of diagrams and images to convey ideas or world views particularly speaks to me. I find this very powerful. There's a magical aspect to this. For example I see some of my works, like the "zen drawings", as some kind of talisman. It seems pigments in India, can turn anything, a tree, stone, whatever, into something sacred, imbued with power. From my travels in India, the work of some Indian artists like Raza, the study of tantric art, as well as my spiritual practice, I felt compelled to explore this diagrams... Especially when I'm in India... I feel it strongly...

+ You have used space as one of the key components in your works. In one of your works titled Reflection, it tends to depict loneliness. Can you explain the use of space in your paintings?

Reflection is a direct illustration of the poem written on it : « The reflection is me but I'm not the reflection... » Empty space in Chinese and Japanese art is essential... It's just like in those stone "zen gardens" with rocks emerging from a flat "wavy" sand soil. It express the Mind with phenomenon appearing and disappearing in it : "emptiness is form and form is emptiness" as stated in the Heart Sutra... In taoist painting it is the empty space that allows the energy to show and to flow in the picture, and I have worked on that basis.

Like for the rocks in the zen garden, in calligraphy or painting it is the brushstroke that emerge from the empty space of the paper sheet... And it does give a particular feel to the figure that appears. and anyway that's what my "zen drawings" are about : The place of human beings in the universe/life.

+ the Japanese stamp (in red) is used in some of your works can you explain why?

I use the stamp as my signature (Seika, which means "river of stars"). Also it punctuates, balance, finishes the painting... And sometimes, when the stamp has a particular meaning, like "Beyond thinking and non-thinking", it add to the meaning to the painting.

+ How do you confront and mix different cosmogonies in order to create a mythical world neighbouring and questioning our ordinary reality.

Whatever comes in my mind and under my hand at a given moment. I will use an image from a tattoo magazine and stick it next to Krishna, or draw a Vajrayogini from a Tibetan tangkha with a surfboard in her hand, Sarasvati with a bass guitar, or write a strange caption next to a zen figure,

or by using graffiti or a derelict piece of cardboard. But the message that will give the picture has to be valid in my point of view... it's not just for the fun of putting incongruous things together. In Europe we are not used to see this kind of encounters, and it is also the case in Asia. These encounters force the viewer to reconsider the ideas he has about certain aspects of his/her culture, or of a foreign culture...

+ What is the secret of calmness in your paintings? Is it because of your meditation?

I don't do it on purpose, it just comes out naturally like that. Maybe it is meditation. Meditation is a central part of my life, so maybe yes...