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Agnes Lew Interviews AAPI Artist Greg Ito
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In this edition of Lew's artist series, she talks with Greg Ito, an AAPI artist from Los Angeles who was featured at Art Basel Hong Kong through the Anat Ebgi Gallery. Ito unveiled new works reflecting the turbulent year we've all experienced, portraying themes around love, loss, hope, tragedy and justice, all the while weaving in his family narratives and deep personal emotions.

Q: How would you describe your oeuvre?

The more I continue my practice, I find that my art is rooted to my life experiences. The moments in my life that define who I am today are my inspiration for the works and exhibitions I create. Navigating the world we live in can be a mysterious and challenging journey, and I investigate the duality of life, both the hopeful and the tragic.

One way that I investigate these emotional tensions is through my family history. During World War II, my family was sent to the Japanese internment camps—but it was during this dark time that my grandparents fell in love. And after leaving the camps, they rebuilt their lives and started their own family. I love how their growth followed tragedy, and it's through my visual language of symbols and imagery that I tell these stories.

Q: Can you tell us about your expansive studio practice?

My practice includes the art forms of painting, sculpture and installation. When I first started making art, I primarily made paintings, but soon I started making objects that were shown alongside, like a companion piece. As my paintings became more cinematic, I started to make sculptures, pulling images and symbols from my paintings into the space as three-dimensional works. Working on sculptures changed how I approached architecture, exploring how objects live in a gallery. I started to transform the space using build-outs, lighting and surface treatments to create an installation folding all the facets of my practice into one presentation. This is when I found the true magic of my art.

Q: What is the most challenging part about being an artist?

The beginning of my career was the most challenging for me. The fear of failing and financial disaster were always on my mind. All the art gossip and do's and don'ts that everyone talked about were killing my relationship with making art. But over time I realized I needed to break the hold that fear had on me and free myself.

After the invisible chains were broken, I noticed a shift in my practice where I followed my heart and made the work that was most important to me. I saw that people connected strongly with this work, and I kept pushing forward. Later on, I got married and this further fueled my momentum forward. And now that my daughter, Spring, was born this February, it's inspiring me even more to continue my journey as an artist.

"Clockwork," 2021. (Photo credit): Courtesy of the artist

Q: Tell us more about your project space in LA showing other artists' work?

When my daughter Spring was born, my wife and I were thinking about what kind of world we want for her to live in. After 2020, we asked this question a lot. We talked about a life full of art and culture, and for her to have the opportunity to see how amazing the art community can be.

This was the main inspiration for starting our project space Sow & Tailor, to bring the art to her. Our space operates to host various projects like group shows, solo exhibitions, performances, and pop-ups by artists and creatives in and outside of LA. It's a special space where individuals can gather and connect, bringing another space for the community to occupy and grow within. We are excited about our inaugural group exhibition "Hot Concrete: L.A. Arrangement," and look forward to all our future projects.

Q: How do you stay connected with the AAPI community?

Being a Japanese American and knowing my family's history, it is important for me to continue my pride of being Asian. My family endured a terrible moment in American history and lived to build a better future for themselves, my parents and me. The government tried to erase our identity by relocating our Japanese American communities to the desert, but they failed and we continue to live on.

One way I stay connected is through my art, where I have been able to contribute to fundraisers that support organizations and Asian community entities. Also being born and raised in Los Angeles, I continue to be a part of my local Japanese American community.

Q: What is on your bucket list?

Besides all my art career goals, I would love to travel the world with my family and meet amazing people and work on cool projects along the way. Living abroad and seeing what it's like to live in Asia, Europe and Latin America is a dream of mine. I also would love to continue growing my family and nurture more cultural endeavors in LA.

"Burn and Bloom," 2021. (Photo credit): Courtesy of the artist