

THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR - 1989

MITSU IKEMURA

Landscapes for the mind

'My main interest is not to show what you can see, but rather, what you cannot see'

MITSU IKEMURA seems at first the perfect modern artist. Dressed in a black shirt, black bolero jacket and sleek black pants, he is the picture of BoHo cool, the '80s version of the beatnik.

But a few moments with the Japanese-Canadian artist and a look at his work and the image of the sullen, brooding painter disappears. Like his vibrant, colorful work, Ikemura is cheerful and friendly.

This latest show of his work at the Beckett Gallery in Hamilton comes out of Ikemura's stay at the Banff School of Fine Arts artists' retreat this past summer.

Set in the mountains of Alberta, the school invites artists, who are encouraged to write, paint or play without outside distraction. The effect, said Ikemura, is that productivity soars. "One month there is equivalent to three months at home," he laughed.

The camaraderie of the artists promotes work, but the landscape plays a large role as well. "You cannot escape being influenced by the mountains," said the 46-year-old artist who has lived with his family in St. Albert for the past 10 years.

The mountains may be there somewhere, but Ikemura's landscapes are not realistic depictions of nature. "I paint what I have in my mind," he said, looking at the large multi-colored works. "They can be called semi-abstract landscapes...but my main interest is not to show what you can see, but rather, what you cannot see."

The result of Ikemura's internal musings are impressive mixed media works, in which the artist uses Japanese rice paper, watercolor, acrylic, pencil crayons and oil sticks to create elaborate, gentle compositions loaded with bright color and

texture. There are hints of pink and purple mountain ranges, sweeping blue skies, and green water, but only hints; the overwhelming impression is of movement and energy.

That is explained partially by Ikemura's habit of using music to fuel his painting. He routinely listens to Bach and Mozart and lately the work Carmina Burana by Carl Orff has been particularly inspiring. As well, the simplicity and depth of Japanese haiku have also played a role in his paintings.

All this is a long way from his chosen career as an architect and urban planner. Ikemura studied at the University of Kyoto and graduated with his degree in architecture, later specializing in urban planning. He practised architecture in Japan for 14

years, moving to Canada in 1974. He worked for a large firm in Toronto for several years and then moved to Edmonton, eventually settling in St. Albert.

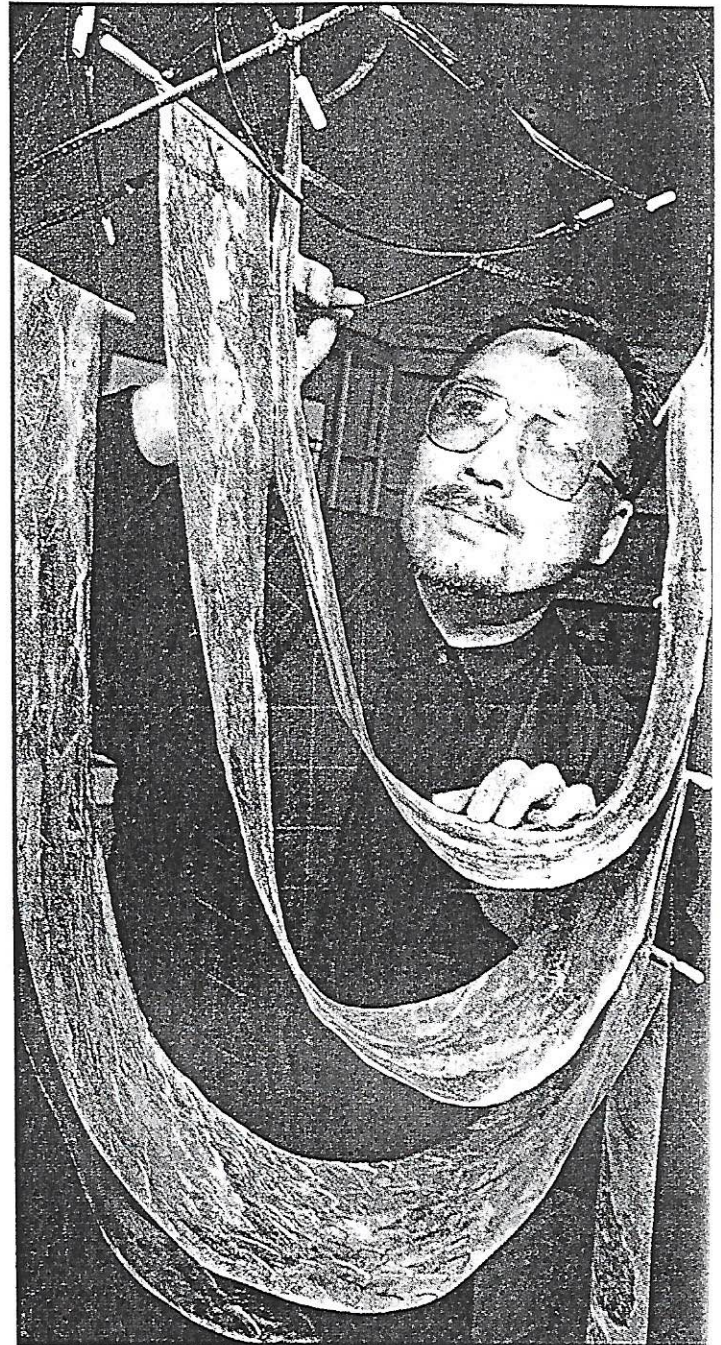
In 1983 he set up a studio to paint. "I had had enough of fulfilling other people's needs. I needed to seek something hidden inside of me," he said. By 1985 he had given up a prosperous career in urban planning for a full-time career in art. "I had to sacrifice in monetary terms but you gain in spiritual terms."

From his first show, his work has received popular and critical acceptance. Several paintings have been purchased by the Alberta Art Foundation, and Ikemura's work has been chosen for the permanent collections of the University of Alberta, the Provincial Museum of Alberta, the Canada Council Art Bank, and dozens of corporate collections. His largest work to date, a 16-panel mural, hangs in the pediatric section of the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre in Edmonton.



ARTSCAPE

Paul Benedetti



□ Artist Mitsu Ikemura at the Beckett Gallery. Paul Hourigan, The Spectator

But for Ikemura, success is having people relate and find their own meaning in his vibrant designs. He rejects art that cuts out the viewer, or is only understood by a few crit-

ics. Ikemura says his work is open to infinite interpretations by the viewer. "That's what I'm trying to express. I'm trying to capture something of the universal."