

Nobuo Kubota
Hokusai Revisited

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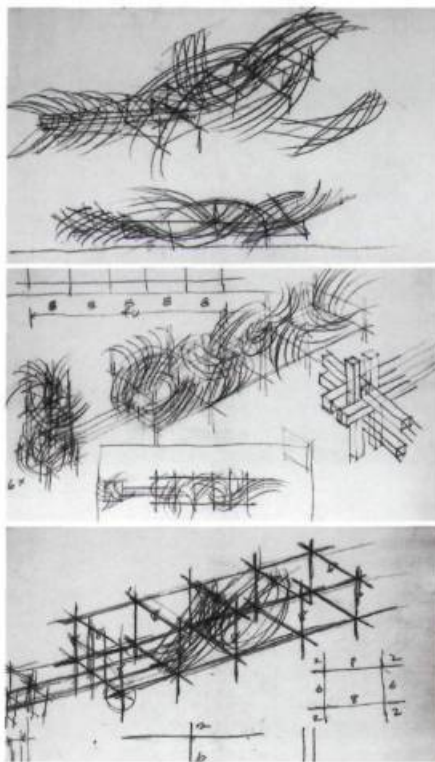
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Nobuo KUBOTA *Hokusai Revisited*

Gil McELROY

We exist in a universe of frequencies and wavelengths. We're constantly bathed in the stuff, from the natural frequencies of the light spectrum that falls on us—a veritable stew of wavelengths ranging from the infrared at one end of the spectrum to ultraviolet at the other—to those human-created sources that incessantly emit on the frequencies used by television, radio, cell phones, sonar and radar (to name but just a few). Our planet has its own natural wavelength, its own frequency, called the Schumann Resonance, a 7.8



Hertz wavelength that, measured from peak to peak, is equal to the circumference of the earth and which tells of constant lightning activity around the planet. Even the most elementary bits of all—those subatomic particles like electrons, protons, and neutrons that make up everything and which may (or may not) be string-like things—have their own incredibly minute, but very real and measurable, frequencies.

Nobuo Kubota, Hokusai Revisited, 2008. Photo: courtesy of the artist.

And then of course there's the aesthetic stuff we humans have always made: music, that art form that is, at its root, built out of wavelengths, frequencies, resonances, and their ratios.

In short, it's all about the waves. It's the stuff (to borrow from Monty Python) of life, the universe, and everything.

Toronto-based artist Nobuo Kubota in some ways is akin to the perfect storm in terms of his "fit" with the wavelengths of things. Arguably he's uniquely situated to contextualize these things owing to his formal background and training as an architect, and because of his involvement in the auditory world of music as a sound performer—not to mention his long involvement with visual art.

His recent gallery installation *Hokusai Revisited*, marries all these aspects of Kubota's life, background, interests and passions into a poetic visual evocation of the wavelengths of the world and even our attempts at taming them.

It's actually not a complex structure he's built here at all. *Hokusai Revisited* comprises a long, almost trellis-like structure entirely made of wood and ample enough to be comfortably walked through. A framework of black painted wood—all clean right angles—forms an elegant kind of post and beam structure of uprights and long horizontal runs of timber that establishes a set of four repeated spaces through its length. And the framework is doubled—each vertical is a pair of posts, each horizontal beam is twined—with a small gap between structural

elements that is of critical importance, for it is within these spaces that the tension of the work is established.

I mean that literally, for Kubota employs these gaps as the spaces within which he weaves long parallel slats of fir so that they all bow—either out or in—to create the wavelengths of the installation. Each of the four spaces within the length of the work is a half-wavelength long, and the wood slats in the sides of each such section all bow in one direction only that is reversed in the next section. And so cumulatively, it means that *Hokusai Revisited* is an installation that is two complete wavelengths long.

The work also articulates tension of another sort: that between the flowing waves of wood slats and the rigid angularity of the framework that holds it all together. While Kubota's trellis-like structure of black wood evokes structural and architectural integrity as we've come to understand it in the West, it simultaneously speaks of the logic and mathematics of Cartesian coordinates—you know, the axes of x and y we all used to plot functions in high school math class—and all the cultural and scientific baggage it has accumulated in its 400 year voyage since philosopher Rene Descartes gave it to the world. This is the realm of determinism, of fixed and knowable positions and relationships—of control of the world.

In Kubota's installation, it's the basis for the graceful curving geometry of wood slats that weave their way in and out of the rigid black superstructure, and which are utterly dependent upon it for the graceful arcs of their wave-

lengths. The superstructure controls, defines, and rationalizes, imposing its own version of order upon things. Cross-illumination in the gallery space casts shadows of *Hokusai Revisited* on the walls, criss-crossing them with strikingly stark black lines that flow and intersect, unconstrained by the physical imperatives of structural symmetry and rational organization.

Such ideational unconstraint is reinforced by another layer of meaning that Kubota adds courtesy of imagery, a video projection of moving water. The waves of its turbulent flow are seemingly chaotic and apparently at odds with the harmony of sinuous waves and the structural order of posts and beams. But, as with the shadows, appearances can be deceiving, for behind the apparent randomness of turbulent water there is the pattern and organization explicated in chaos theory.

It's all, of course, just the tip of the proverbial iceberg, for Kubota's installation shouldn't—and really cannot—be aesthetically constrained by the limits of such contextualizing, for *Hokusai Revisited* (which tours to other venues) proffers a multiplicity of meaning and signification that surmount those having to do with the narrow realms of physics and mathematics. In it, there are many other frequencies to be heard. ←

Nobuo Kubota: Hokusai Revisited

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