

Miyanaga Aiko and Albert Yonathan Setyawan

Radiance at Mizuma Gallery, Singapore

13 DECEMBER 2018, DANIEL GAUSS



Miyanaga Aiko, "*radiance -basket-*", 2018, naphthalene, ceramic, mixed media, 25 x 36 x 30 cm, © Miyanaga Aiko, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Art Gallery

Coal tar is a gummy, black liquid which results when coke and coal gas are derived from coal - it has medicinal uses for skin diseases and can be used for road surfaces. Naphthalene is distilled from coal tar and it is the material that moth balls are made of. This substance begins to disintegrate at room temperature and as it disperses in the air it can serve the function of an insect repellent. For a museum show in Tokyo, Miyanaga Aiko once created a bag made out of naphthalene into which she placed a key. As the days progressed the bag slowly deteriorated, ultimately leaving the key exposed. The fact that naphthalene begins breaking down at room temperature is significant for the meaning of this type of piece in that a process occurs with no human effort, thus becoming a perfect symbol for a natural or unforced process of revelation. It represents a process independent of the force of human planning, will or desire, where something protective but also inhibiting is allowed to wither away at its own pace and of its own devices.

Currently at Mizuma Gallery in Singapore, Miyanaga Aiko teams up with Albert Yonathan Setyawan, originally from Indonesia, for a show called *Radiance*, which features a "collaboration" as well as individual works by both artists. There is a piece, for example, in which one of Setyawan's sculptural works is placed within a naphthalene basket by Miyanaga. As the days go by the evaporating naphthalene begins to collect on the inner surface of the glass case as crystals. So ultimately the piece by Setyawan will be freed of the basket and surrounded by the residue of crystals. The naphthalene crystals thus represent the useless but beautiful remnants of a process of disclosure - sort of proof that such a process happened, kind of the way art is proof that a process of humane development can happen. The crystals present a type of *via negativa*, a way of pointing to or describing something by indicating what it is not.

So you start with coal, get coal tar, then get naphthalene and, finally, all the effort and planning ultimately results in ineffectual but pretty crystals as leftovers of change, change being represented by the creation of liberating space and the disappearance of a man-made object. Thus there is also a Duchampian element here as Duchamp's pawky definition of art was, essentially, that art is something useless into which meaning can be imputed. So perhaps we get a wry twist on Duchamp in Miyanaga's pieces as she begins her process with representations of ordinary everyday objects and allows them to transform to attain to the meaningfully useless in crystalline form.

Yet, in regard to the shoes that Miyanaga presents casts of, each is based on a real shoe that has been worn. She seems to feel that each shoe takes on the experience of the wearer through a type of contagious magic. Time itself becomes embedded into each shoe, the wear and tear becomes the stories of aging and maturity and the challenges of life involved in human survival. The disintegration might represent the liberation of the accumulation and effects of the experiences the shoe has absorbed - like a shedding of that which can harm, tarnish or corrupt (like the old ritual of placing a community's sins in a goat and releasing it into a forest). In the *waiting for awakening* series Miyanaga presents a naphthalene shoe immersed in layers of resin, the layers demarked by air bubbles. The air bubbles represent periods of time as they have been inserted into the resin at differing periods. The shoe lies dormant or latent between these layers of the work until someone pulls a seal so that the process of disintegration will begin and the shoe will transform and disappear.

In another of Miyanaga's works from the past she created a book of transparent resin with a key of naphthalene embedded in it. Piggy-backing on this, Setyawan, in the current show, created a book of pottery clay with grass seeds in it which will sprout and destroy the book. Miyanaga's piece might be about transformation of the material to the immaterial within something that represents the confines of memory and the visceral effects of experience as our memories and our bodies work together to create a palpable sense of the possession of schemes and patterns of thought and action. Setyawan's piece might be about the same process in different form, as what the book represents is subsumed by a process lying embedded and inherent within the book, rendering the book inconsequential due to a more compelling development.

In regard to some of his independent work, Setyawan likes the idea of being a type of artist/worker, which reminded me of the work of Cambodian artist Sopheap Pich, who tries to create art that feels good to make and which is therapeutically calming in the construction. The difference is that Pich wishes to create works free of meaning while Setyawan creates works based on concepts of deep religious/spiritual significance first before submitting himself to the pure joy of recreating multiple versions. For *Helios* he first draws upon a passage in the *Book of Revelations* in which four animals - in the forms of a lion, calf, human and eagle - proclaim "Holy holy holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come." He thus creates the human-like creature with its six wings covering all but one of the multiple eyes. The alternating image is flower-like but based on the concept of light and the sun. We thus get a type of active/receptive theme (like yin/yang or the Star of David), the active element providing the element of passionate expression, the receptive the element of fulfillment. The extreme repetition perhaps causes a loss of meaning within the giant design or creates a super-charged meaning to the huge pattern. To me the pattern becomes like a self-referential binomial sequence where you question the means of communication itself instead of trying to determine the meaning.

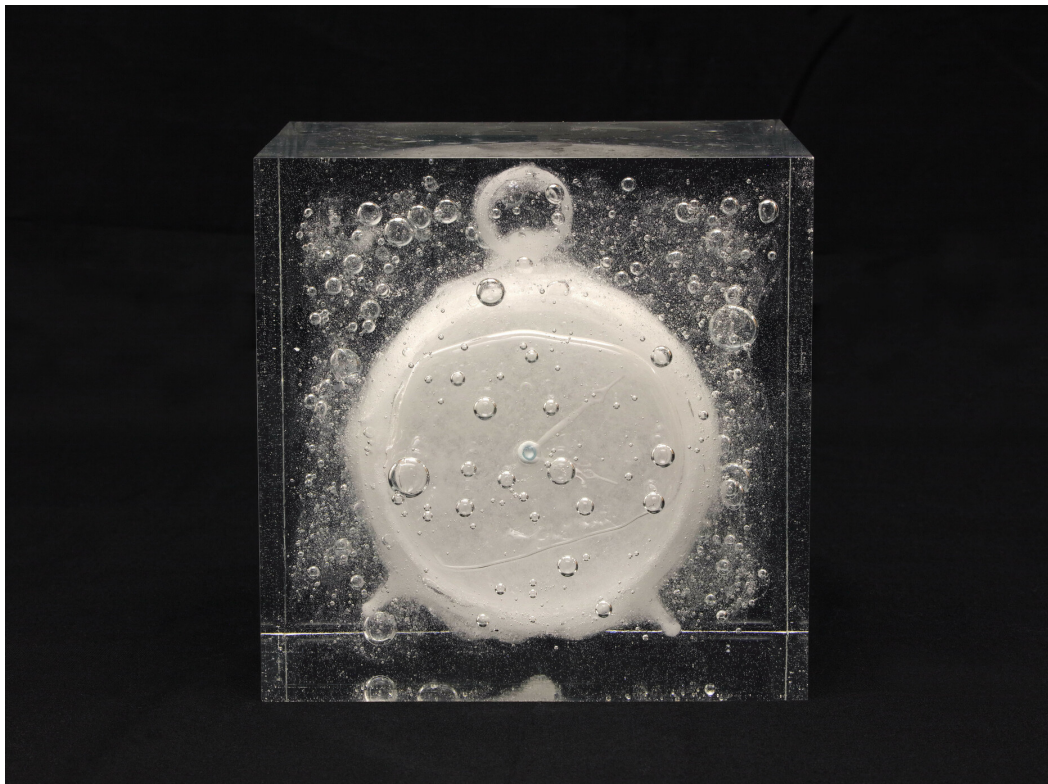
In *Gnosis* mothlike creatures form in an entropy-defying pattern reminiscent of a lattice. In *Chrysopoeia*, a term used by alchemists to mean the transmutation of lead into gold, we see densely packed knots, like a critical mass of problems which cannot be resolved, cannot be endured and cannot be escaped, only allowing for a submission to a belief in some heretofore unknown solution provided by the problems themselves. In *Providentia*, a term referring to the ancient Roman personification of the ability to anticipate and provide sustenance, we see a radiating pattern of feathers with eyes. The essence or building block of each abstract pattern is a moth, a knot or a feather with an eye on it. We can be affected by the overall structures but simultaneously examining the individual elements comprising the structures awakens the sense that there is some type of extraordinary immanence to be experienced, creating the feeling that we should open ourselves to it. It is also the empty spaces among the moths, knots and feathers which contribute to the sense of transcendence, like the air bubbles of Miyanaga's work.

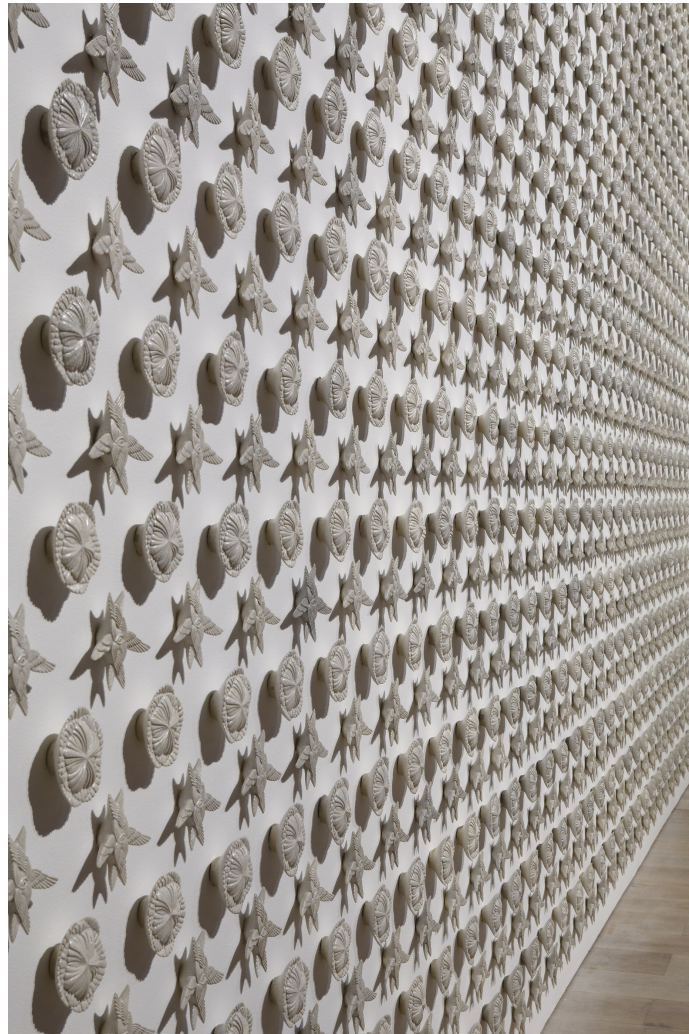
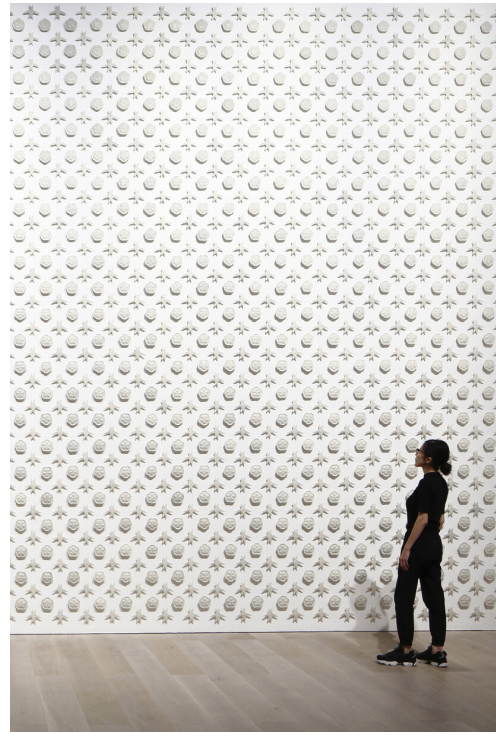


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Daniel Gauss is a native Chicagoan who attended the University of Wisconsin (BA) and then Columbia University (MA). He has worked in the field of education and the social services his entire adult life, forswearing the profit-driven world for a life of service..

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1. Miyanaga Aiko, "*waiting for awakening -clock-*", 2018, naphthalene, resin, mixed media, 16.5 x 16.5 x 13.9 cm, © Miyanaga Aiko, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Art Gallery
2. Albert Yonathan Setyawan, "*Helios*" (detail), 2017, ceramic dimensions variable, © Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Photo by Kioku Keizo, courtesy of Mori Art Museum, Tokyo
3. Miyanaga Aiko, "*waiting for awakening -high-heeled shoes-*", 2018, naphthalene, resin 20 x 30 x 19.5 cm, © Miyanaga Aiko, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Art Gallery
4. Albert Yonathan Setyawan, "*Helios*" (detail), 2017, ceramic dimensions variable, © Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Photo by Kioku Keizo, courtesy of Mori Art Museum, Tokyo
5. Miyanaga Aiko, "*waiting for awakening -shoes-*", 2018, naphthalene, resin 15 x 22 x 15 cm, © Miyanaga Aiko, courtesy of the artist and Mizuma Art Gallery
6. Albert Yonathan Setyawan, "*Helios*" (detail), 2017, ceramic dimensions variable, © Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Photo by Kioku Keizo, courtesy of Mori Art Museum, Tokyo