

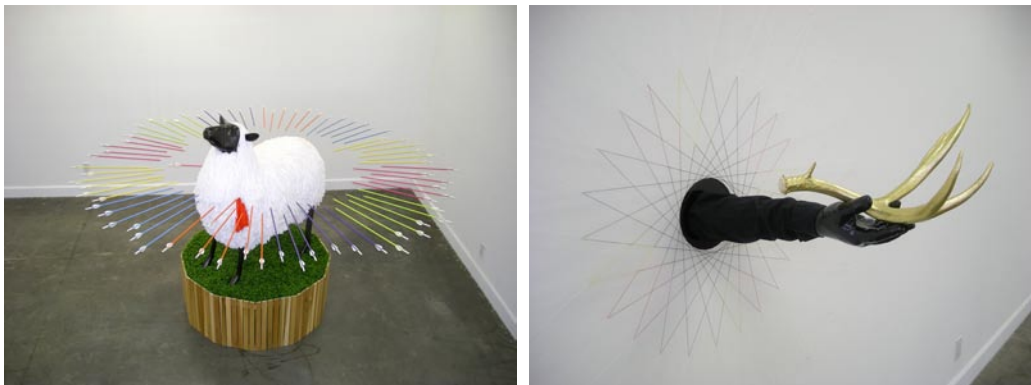
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Fresh Perspective

Tokyo-Born Artist Macha Suzuki's Unique Twist on the Language of Modern Art

Written By Steven Krcmar



One of the standout pieces in Macha Suzuki's excellent first solo show, entitled "Walk," features a sculpture of a sheep under attack. Life-sized and far from the watchful gaze of Lil' Bo Peep, the animal is surrounded by different colored arrows, some of which have already hit their target.

But the animal doesn't bleed red. Instead, the bleating beast's coat matches the color of the offending arrow, be it orange or pink. Push the story a little further and it's easy to imagine the multi-hued arrows hitting their target and turning the sheep's wool into an explosive rainbow of colors. Which beats the hell out of being off-white, bloody and dead.

It also gives us some perspective on how Suzuki, a dyed-in-the-wool fatalist, sees the world. "We can't always control the things that happen to us, but we can control how they affect our lives," explains Suzuki, talking about the sculpture dubbed, "Minor Threat."

That's as deep as he'll go into it, though. He won't even talk about the title much, except to say it doesn't have anything to do with the band Minor Threat and their sheep-happy *Out of Step* album cover. Regardless, it still begs the question: Is the minor threat the external world (i.e. those who shot the arrows) or the sheep itself?

Art that leads to an open-ended question marks a serious change for the 29-year-old artist, who readily admits that his earlier work (which means the art from his *undergraduate* days) was didactic. But the look has been similar. Even from a young age he was drawn to Japanese animation and its design sensibility complete with clean, crisp images, hard lines and saturated colors.

Suzuki was born in Tokyo in 1979, and lived outside the city for a little more than nine years before his family uprooted and moved to La Crescenta, an affluent town north of Downtown Los Angeles.

Aesthetically, he was first attracted to a Japanese equivalent of *Sesame Street* before discovering Ultraman, a larger than life superhero from outer space, as well as the films of Hayao Miyazaki at a very young age. But Suzuki didn't have to turn on the TV or venture to the cinema to find inspiration—he just had to go to the market to peep out the hyper-designed packaging found on everything from pocky to packaged sweets.

"It's [the packaging] not necessary," Suzuki says. "It's not going to charge the flavor of the candy. But it's that extra generosity or extra gift to the consumer."

By middle school he knew he wanted to be an artist or a baseball player. And, his aesthetic became Americanized when he started watching a lot of MTV and listening to heavy metal (his favorite band was Metallica). In high school he discovered the gearheads known as "tuners" that would rebuild Hondas.

"I never got into that culture, but I always loved the idea of taking a car like a [Honda] Civic, an economy car, and by adding and modifying it and dressing it up, you turn it into a racing car," he says. "I love that: taking something that's so ordinary and changing it into something it wasn't meant to be."

With smooth finish and glossy colors he even liked the look of the vehicles. But, more importantly, the tuner's approach to working on four wheels informs his view of storytelling. One of his favorite films is Tim Burton's *Big Fish*, a movie about an angry son who challenges the veracity of his father's stories, as the

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dad is dying. By the end of the film, we find out that the stories included many exaggerations, but the essence was dead-on, something Suzuki aspires to.

“Good storytellers take a true story and recreate it to make it better,” he says. “That’s sort of what I’m doing in my work except that I try to take it extremely far, to the point where you can’t recognize the story anymore. The story becomes the vehicle to get to the object.”

The stories he uses are from his own life. He often uses these tales as the seeds for a piece and as the seed of the story grows it morphs, evolving into a beast that’s unrecognizable when comparing it to the original thought.

“I love looking at art and talking about art,” says Suzuki, who is an adjunct professor at Azusa Pacific University. “But inspiration comes from living my life and seeing what I see. I feel like I’m never going to run out of ideas, because as long as I’m living and experiencing, there’s always going to be stories to tell.”

In the end, he creates a world that is electric, fantastical and filled with his own creations—*Alice in Wonderland* for the next generation. And in these times of political infighting, where the elephants and the donkeys fight and distort truths, it’s prime time for hedonistic, visual tales that beg questions rather than bark out the answers.