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## Jacob Hashimoto interview

Madeline Barnabee

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**Interviewer: Madeline Barnabee**  
**Artist: Jacob Hashimoto**  
**Phone Interview Chicago/New York**  
**May 10, 2012**

*Note: The following interview was conducted by a DePaul University undergraduate student enrolled in AAS 203: Art and Artists in Contemporary Culture during the 2012 Spring Quarter as part of the Asian American Art Oral History Research Project conducted by Laura Kina, Associate Professor Art, Media, & Design.*

**Bio:** Jacob Hashimoto was born in Greeley Colorado 1973 and grew up in Walla Walla, Washington. He Currently lives in New York City. He received his Bachelors degree in fine arts from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Hashimoto “redefines Japanese screen painting with his assemblages of paper “kites” in undulating, interactive compositions.” Jacob is represented by Studio La Citta, Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Galerie Forsblom and Mary Boone Gallery. – Bio from <http://jacobhashimoto.com/bio-cv/>



Photo from  
<http://www.studiolacitta.it/English/Artists/JacobHashimoto.php>

### **Interview Transcript:**

**Madeline:** How would you define or categorize your art or yourself?

**Jacob Hashimoto:** [I would categorize my art as] basically landscape based abstraction. It comes out of a few things but I would say that [my art] gravitates to American abstraction dissolved through voice of eighties instillations.

**Madeline Barnabee:** When, how and why did you first get involved with different galleries around the world (Mary Boone in New York, Rhona Hoffman Gallery in Chicago, Studio la Citta in Verona, Italy, and Martha Otero Gallery in Los Angeles.)

**JH:** I started working with Martha Otero in 2007 or so. I think we met through my dealer at the time, Patricia Faure in LA and she introduced me to the director and owner of Studio la Citta from Verona. I met [her] years before. My dealer introduced me to her and we started working together about five years later and then Mary Boone just called me because she had seen my work around and got my phone number and gave me a call around 2006 maybe. Martha Hero in LA I met when we were both in college and when she opened a gallery. She asked me if I wanted to do some projects with her.

**MB:** Could you please tell me about the meaning of kite instillations? Is there a cultural connection to you as a Japanese American? If so, what is it?

**JH:** I don't know if I feel that they have a lot to do with me being Japanese American. The thing about kites is that they are found across the world. And in fact, the original kites pieces were made from European kite patterns, not Asian patterns. My Japanese grandfather used to make kites when my father was a a kid, my father made kites, so there is something attached to my family in building kites, but I don't think that means that it reflects on me being Japanese. You could argue that there is cultural influence attached to that that naturally [the tradition of kite making] because of how it was transmitted. There are other influences however, one of which would be the relationship with my immediate family.

There is an argument to be made that it comes from the Asian side of my family. The mistake I think people often make about my work is they talk about it in terms of being being so Japanese or so Asian, but for the most part the patterns I use for my kites are traditional Chinese patterns, and I am not Chinese obviously. We also use Thai patterns, and ship patterns, which are typically European patterns. We even used Indian style kite patterns... So I guess that there is a Pan-Asian aspect to them at times. The other issue with [the kites] is that I build them up using rice paper or washi, and people associate the aesthetic of the paper as a very Asian medium and there may be truth to that.

**MB:** The Saatchi gallery categorizes your kites as “ephemeral” and also as being “neither sculpture nor painting. Do you think that this is an accurate description of your work? How would you categorize it?

**JH:** Well I would say some of the pieces [could be described as] ephemeral. But, there's a pretty broad range of pieces [that I have made]. Some are very heavy and some are very light. I think that piece-by-piece the visual language changes, so if you want to communicate a mood or a story you can shape them as an artist to capture what you want to portray. Sometimes my pieces are heavy and oppressive, and sometimes they are light and sometimes they are rhythmic and sometimes they are architectonic. It really depends on what I am trying to capture at the time. The Saatchi gallery pieces were lighter and more design based and a little more atmospheric, but I think that my goal is to create the broadest vocabulary of my work as possible.

**MB:** Do you ever address Asian or Asian American identity, themes or histories in your artwork? If so, please give a specific example. If so, was identifying as Asian/Asian American something that was also important to you personally? Please explain.

**JH:** I am sure that I do [address Asian or Asian American identity, themes or histories in my artwork]. There are certain things that are very Asian American about my work. If we talked about [my art] with the idea of landscape and the way the marks are made, they are not necessarily Japanese, but they are reminiscent of Chinese ink painting and some of those traditions, especially the idea of a single mark creating the earth and sky. That is something evident in Chinese paintings. These sensibilities are evident in my work I would say.

For a long time I was very interested in religion and a lot of things like numerical issues. For a while I was interested in making things in thousands and ten-thousands and hundred-thousands. Those are auspicious numbers and emblematic in obscurity to tradition. The things manifest themselves in the work as very negative of the attitude that American artists have in Asian ancestry have of those traditions.

As Americans we look towards to mother country and we fetishize it. For example, my father doesn't speak Japanese because he was born in World War Two and his family was interned. There is this whole cultural backlash against Japanese culture during his time, but my sister came back and reclaimed that Japanese heritage in a lot of ways. She ended up getting her PHD in Japanese language and literature, she learned the language and lived in Japan. This is a pretty typical voyage for a Japanese American if you are several generations removed. So my craft does tend to gravitate towards Japan or Asia in some similar ways but it is in a way that is very typical of American immigrant families. However, you don't see Japanese artists or Chinese artists working in the way that I work. It's kind of a fetishization of the traditional culture and methods of what we kind of perceive as the "homeland".

**MB:** What types of exhibition opportunities have changed or stayed the same for you over the years?

**JH:** I did a big project at the MCA in Chicago, which was a huge opportunity for me. At the time I was only around twenty-four years old I think. Getting such a big show early in my career made a big difference. It made it much easier for coming in contact with galleries and it really opened a lot of doors for me. With one big show beneath my belt that made a big difference. The goal of doing a show is always to create interest for a new show, even if you don't sell any work. The idea is to generate more and more activity.

**End**