

Spinning yarns through fabrics

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Arts Correspondent

Curious yarns unravel in Japanese artist Aiko Tezuka's tapestries.

As you walk up the steps leading to the exhibition space Third Floor Hermes, a sari-like fabric appears suspended with parts of its threads stretched onto the floor.

It has the fluid flow of a light muslin sari – at least in the parts that fall so beautifully to the floor. But the sides where the fabric is pressed against the wall have a more carpet-like feel.

Part of the artist's solo exhibition titled *Certainty/Entropy*, it is one of five works on display in the non-commercial space at the luxury boutique at Liat Towers in Orchard Road.

When you look at the work from a distance, you see birds, flowers and fruit. Closer examination reveals more ominous silhouettes of nuclear disasters and environmental hazards.

The soft-spoken Berlin-based artist tells *Life!* that she has used fabrics with Peranakan, Indian and English motifs to examine aspects of "Singapore's multi-culturalism as well as to make sense of some of the things happening in our world today".

In a soft voice, she speaks of the history of civilisations which can be traced from their textiles as well as the layered meanings of various motifs that find their way into textiles.

"Even our lives," she says, "are a lot like fabrics, with various layers, stories, textures and colours."

Her entry into the world of art-making was planned but the textiles part happened by chance.

The 37-year-old artist, who is single, did her master's in painting from Tokyo's Art University and received her PhD in painting from the University of Arts in Kyoto.

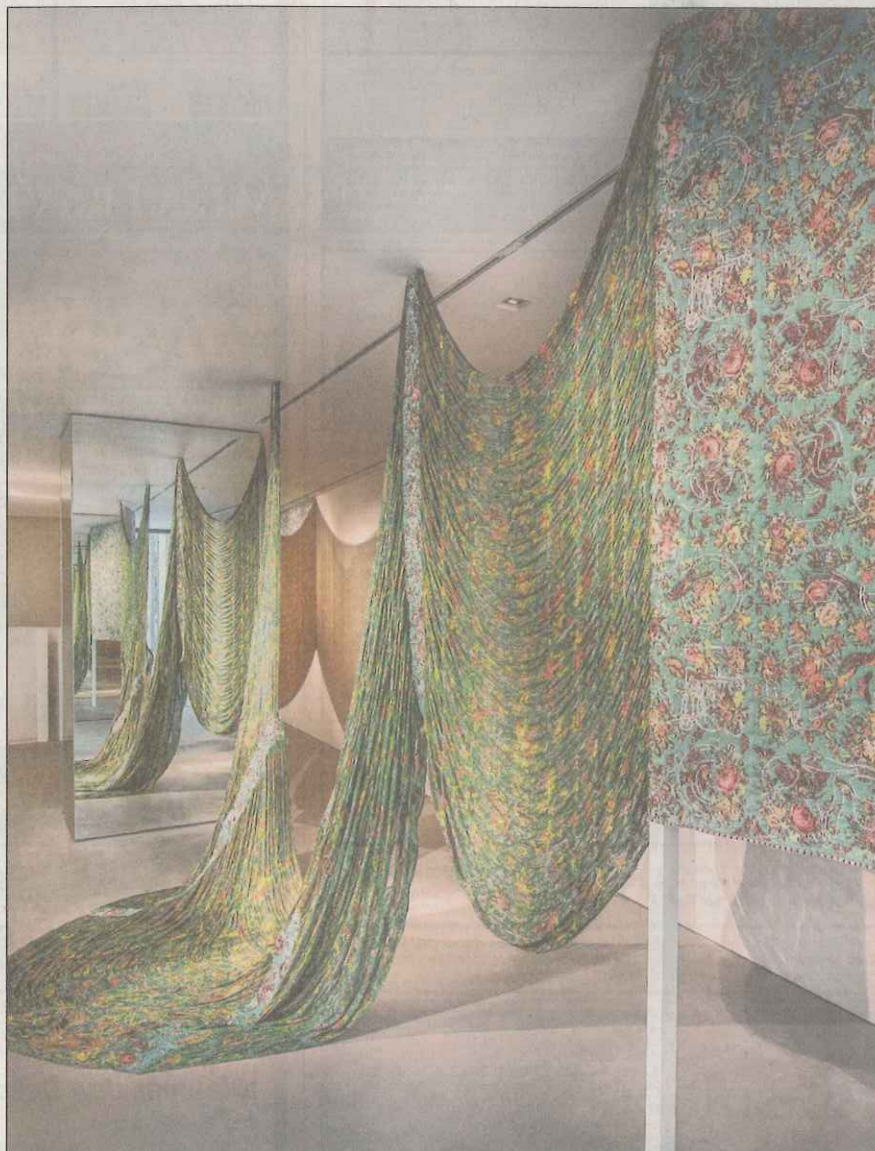
When asked why she moved to textiles, given her background in painting, she says she was drawn to the tactile element of fabrics.

She adds: "Also, I just could not find a new way to work in painting. Lots of painters before me had tried many of the things I wanted to."

She started her early experiments with textiles almost 17 years ago. Since then, her work has grown in scale and become more ambitious, as can be seen in her exhibition here.

In her Berlin studio, she works with four to five assistants. Her creative process, she says, is centred not just on finding fabrics but also sometimes designing and creating them.

Through the process of unravelling a part of the



Fabrics with Peranakan, Indian and English motifs are used in the artwork by Japanese artist Aiko Tezuka (above). PHOTO: EDWARD HENDRICKS

View it

**AIKO TEZUKA:
CERTAINTY/ENTROPY**

Where: Third Floor Hermes, Liat Towers, 541 Orchard Road
When: Till July 27, 10.30am to 7.30pm daily
Admission: Free
Info: www.en.fondationentreprise-hermes.org

fabric, she not only studies the looming process but also creates complex patterns that address everything from environmental concerns to nuclear disasters.

Certainty/Entropy runs till July 27. None of the works featured is for sale. Viewed collectively, they are an investigation into space, structure and the materiality of fabrics. In pulling out threads, she questions how far an artist's canvas can really go. The laborious creative process driving the art involves both creation and destruction as she and her assistants unpick portions of the fabric to reveal the original weaving process.

Tezuka went to Europe from Japan in 2010 – first to London, then to Berlin on a *Kunstlerhaus Bethanien* Residency.

She shows you a folder with loose sheets of papers showing how for the Singapore exhibition, she picked fabrics with ancient Indian, Peranakan as

well as old English designs. The original prints have distinctly Asian symbols, including dragonflies and pineapples which are integrated with contemporary symbols such as signs of peace, credit cards and images of radioactive waste.

The result is impressive. It is a fluid weaving of stories from the past to the present.

An examination of the works also calls for some cracking of codes while looking at the intense process of art-making that clearly extends beyond the canvas.

As the artist says: "History is interwoven in fabric, in symbols. There are stories in those layers. I decided to make this a structure for my work, to mix cultures to get a better understanding of them. Over the years, I have learnt everything is woven by time and us human beings."

It is a sentence that calls for reflection, long after one has stepped out of the exhibition space.