

## Steeling the show

Apple Lam

Friday, March 14, 2014

A misty landscape has water reflecting the warm gold rays of the setting sun against a blood-red sky.

This is no painting, but an aluminum plate anodized with sapphire crystal, repeatedly washed and dyed by Brooklyn-based artist Miya Ando.

The half-Russian, half-Japanese artist first discovered her affinity for metal in a university welding class. She attributes it to the fact that her Japanese ancestors were Bizen swordmakers over a century ago.

"When you are welding, you have to wear a helmet. I was inside this very dark space and it became so clear to me. Looking back, I think: 'Of course! How can you be so unaware of your own being?' We are often in darkness and we are not really aware," Ando said.

The philosophical ideas that inspire her artwork also come from her childhood, when she lived in a Buddhist temple in Japan where her grandfather was head priest.

One example is the idea of how the shared impermanence of time, people and materials connects them together. To Ando, even metal, which seems hard, durable and industrial, is no exception.

"It's an ancient idea that will always be relevant. But the technique, execution and materials could not be more contemporary," she said. "My work is a bridge between them."

At the age of six, Ando moved to a redwood forest in Santa Cruz, California. She visited Japan during summer vacations and lived there as a teenager and in her 20s, including one year where she worked as an apprentice at a metalware workshop where few women worked.

"They taught me to respect the material," Ando said.

But she is not afraid to reshape it - such as into a kimono constructed out of gold- and silver-colored anodized steel squares.

"Once you get married, the sleeves of your kimono are made shorter because you're washing dishes and carrying babies. Those connotations of how your identity shifts show up even in your appearance. We speak to each other via our attire."

The artist's Light Metal exhibition will run until March 22 at Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

