

Still Moments: Hillu Liebelt

Museum in the Park, Stroud 27 April – 26 May 2013

Aberystwyth Arts Centre, Wales 30 July – 21 September 2013

IT IS NO COINCIDENCE that Hillu Liebelt's touring exhibition at Stroud's Museum in the Park (shown as part of Spring Select 2013 organised by Stroud International Textiles) originally opened in Kyoto.

Like her fellow exhibitor, Japanese textile artist Seiko Kinoshita (who is showing a specially commissioned installation in the foyer next door), Liebelt's work has a quietly Japanese aesthetic. It is characterised by a gentle minimalism, a sense of calm, a restrained colour palette and considerable technical skill.

The main body of this small exhibition (frustratingly some of the works in the excellently illustrated catalogue haven't made it to the gallery) are a series of wall-hang tapestries. Although Liebelt avoids wordy artists' statements wanting the viewer to come to the pieces open-minded, she does tell us that: 'Colour for me is the starting point of a new tapestry', and her pieces are beautifully composed studies in colour with subtle shading achieved through careful dovetailing. Some, such as the glowing, lemony *A New Day* are inspired by specific, often fleeting, atmospheric effects, while others, such as *Long Dream I and II*, a series of delicate smoky grey smudges, are more purely abstract.

As well as colour, Liebelt obviously enjoys playing with optical illusions. The most dramatic tapestry here (and the largest) is *Red Circle*, in which a blue disc seems to float high above a zinging red ring and it is only on closer inspection that you realise the piece is actually flat. The contrast between the intense red and the midnight blue background is so strong that looking at it is almost as dizzy-making as staring at the sun, giving an unexpected note of heat among the otherwise cool colours here. Some of Liebelt's sculptural work is also on show. Unusually for Liebelt, one – *Leaving* – has a specific narrative, referencing the Japanese tsunami of March 2011. Made up of groups of silk cocoons placed on wire stems and arranged in ever-diminishing patterns on a series of clear plinths, Liebelt explains: 'It could be viewed as people fleeing to higher grounds'.

Other sculptures like *Winter Light*, a waist-high circle of gently curved bamboos wrapped in silk and tipped with scarlet,



are inspired by her love of nature. The landscape theme is continued with Seiko Kinoshita's installation, *English Summer Fields*. This large-scale hanging is made up of paper scrolls joined together in vertical rows and suspended from the ceiling by fish wire. The scrolls are made out of hand-woven paper yarns which Kinoshita dyes herself before weaving them on her 80-year-old dobbie loom. She explains: 'Colour is the most important thing for my work, that's why I always buy white yarn and then dye it myself'. Here she has chosen fresh greens and glowing yellows to give the impression of an early English summer landscape, bringing the Gloucestershire fields of oilseed rape into the gallery, an effect heightened by the changing natural light in the foyer (thanks to its large glass wall) and way the panels sway slightly. It makes a neat pairing with Liebelt's works next door, sharing their preoccupation with colour and the natural world, but both realised using distinctly different weaving methods and materials.

Diana Wolf

Catalogues (£12 including p&p) are available from hilluliebelt@gmail.com



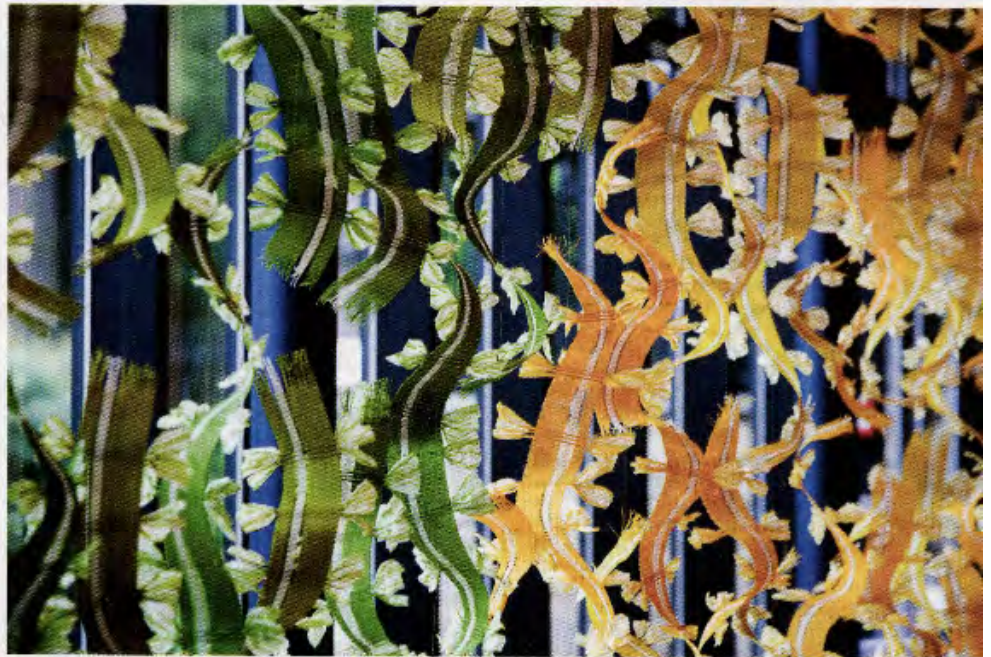
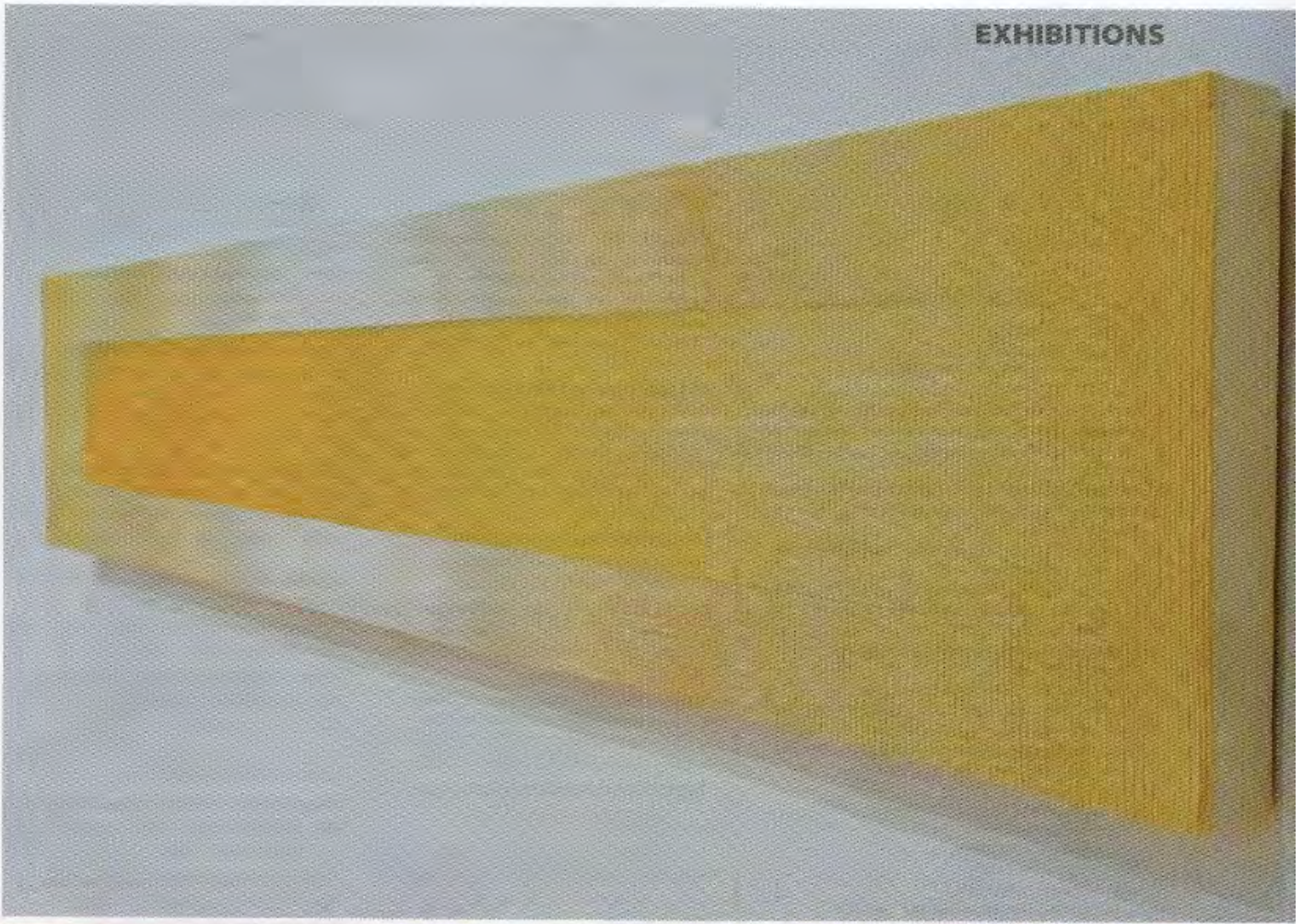


PHOTO: DALEX CAMINADAST

Opposite: Hillu Liebelt, *Leaving*, 2012. (Pictured at Gallery Yuragi, Kyoto, Japan). Silk cocoons, stainless steel wire, travertine stone

Top: Hillu Liebelt, *A New Day*, 2012, Silk, rayon, cotton. 24 x 120 x 4cm

Left & above: Seiko Kinoshita, *Summer Fields* (detail), 2013