



Koinobori (eggs in the belly)

Date

2021

Primary Maker

Alexa Kumiko Hatanaka

Medium

Sumi paintings on washi, linocut on washi, rice bags, indigo, kakishibu, and gyotaku on washi, konnyaku, and handmade deckle box gampi paper

Description

Koinobori is a Japanese word that translates to “carp streamer,” and these joyful, funnel-shaped kites are traditionally flown to celebrate Children’s Day on May 5th. Carp, or koi, symbolize courage and tenacity in Japanese culture, thanks to the tale of a carp who spent a thousand years trying to reach the top of a waterfall and was transformed into a golden dragon as a reward for its perseverance. In a drawer on the other side of this wall you can view Ohara Koson’s woodblock print of a leaping carp, which also references this story, and see several embroidered Chinese golden dragons nearby. Many of Hatanaka’s artworks explore humanity’s shared connection through our natural environment and include references to the bodies of water that connect the world, and representations of fish. This koinobori incorporates monoprints made by laying sheets of paper directly onto fish, a traditional method used to record their size and health, partly inspired by Hatanaka’s grandfather and great-grandfather who

were fishers. This koinobori, like many of Hatanaka’s works, includes fragments of papers drawn from her personal archive, such as a traditionally printed woodcut that the artist translated from a screenprint of a cat that she made when she was a child. Food traditions and the artist’s familial ties are also stitched into the koinobori through sections of rice bags collected by Hatanaka’s father and other elements that reference the significance of fishing to her family and Japanese Canadian culture more broadly. While modern koinobori are often made of nylon, Koinobori (eggs in the belly) is made of traditional materials, namely washi (paper) that has been treated with starch and konnyaku (Devil’s Tongue root paste). Inspired by kamiko, or Japanese paper clothing, the material appears delicate but is in fact extremely durable, and can be sewn, shaped, and even worn. Kamiko dates to 910 CE, and contemporary makers are working to preserve the technique. Papermaking is dependent upon water quality and so caretaking the land and water are key to sustaining this historic practice. By using washi to construct her artworks, Hatanaka links the health of the environment to our ability to persevere, like the carp, and experience joy.

Dimensions

Overall (Hanger to tip of tail): 9ft. 5 in. × 21 in. (2m 87 cm × 53.3 cm) Overall (Hanger to tip of streamer): 11ft. 4 in. × 24 in. (3m 45.4 cm × 61 cm)