

Reviewed by Suzanne Smith Arney

**Global Threads**  
KANEKO



In many ways, *Global Threads* was the heart of the larger multivalent exhibition *Fiber*, on display at KANEKO in Omaha, Nebraska (February 6–April 25, 2015). It encapsulated the expo’s stated purpose to provide “a diverse and engaging sampling of the ways in which textiles and fiber art serve as a canvas for various expressions of culture and the creative process.” Scholars **Jessica Hemmings** and **Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada** showcased textiles’ role as a reflection of societies in flux, with mini-exhibitions within the larger *Global Threads*. Artists **Susan Knight** and **Mary Zicafoose** create contemporary, seemingly abstract work, using ancient textile techniques.

Hemmings illustrated her theory of textiles as an ideal carrier for culture with her exhibition *Migrations*, which included London-based French-born **Françoise Dupré’s** embellished plastic “carrier bags.” The playful khangas of design team **Mr Somebody & Mr Nobody** (both South African expats), and Norwegian artist **Toril Johannessen’s** digitally printed interpretations of optical illusions found in wax-

resist trade cotton patterns, exemplified the portable and mutable nature of cloth.

One reason I am a fan of fiber is its capacity to stretch definitions and expectations of art. This event was no exception. Migrations included a recording of **Pamela Johnson** reading her poem “100% Cotton,” and visitors were invited to touch and refold the arrangement of Johannessen’s fabrics.

Wada’s kimono exhibition was titled ***Kitsch to Art Moderne: Meisen Kimono***. “Meisen” refers to functional textiles made from brightly patterned affordable silk. These kimonos were popular in the first half of the 20th century, worn by middle class women and men freed from sumptuary laws of shogunate Japan. The kimonos represent a shift from a traditional, feudal society to a Western-influenced market system. A related display featured “boro” (Japanese for “rag”) from the collection of **Jay Rich**. A worn indigo-dyed jacket and bed cover were patched with scraps in an array of sizes and patterns.

Zicafoose and Knight both live in

ABOVE: Installation view of **JESSICA HEMMINGS’** exhibition *Migrations* at KANEKO, 2015. LEFT to RIGHT: **PAMELA JOHNSON’S** audio recording of her poem “100% Cotton” (2011); **FRANÇOISE DUPRÉ’S** *Arabesques, Stars with Dragons* (2014) embellished plastic “carrier bags”; **TORIL JOHANNESSEN’S** *Optical Illusions* (2014) digitally printed textiles; and playful khangas (*The Stubborn Chicken, The Piggybacking Goat, and The Whirl a Snake*) by design team **MR SOMEBODY & MR NOBODY**. Photo: Aaron Zavitz.

TOP INSET: Japanese boro pieces from the collection of Jay Rich at KANEKO, 2015. Photo: Aaron Zavitz.

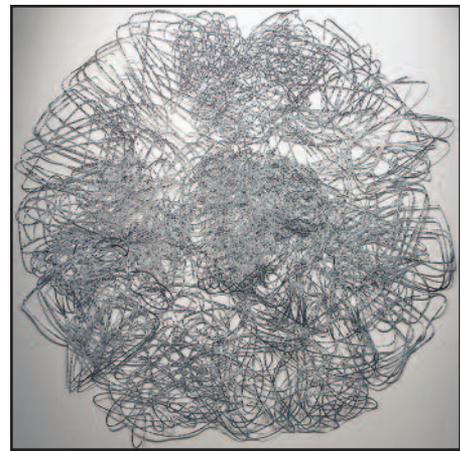
All images shown courtesy of the artists and KANEKO, Omaha, Nebraska.



ABOVE: Installation view of **YOSHIKO IWAMOTO WADA's** exhibition *Kitsch to Art Moderne: Meisen Kimono* at KANEKO, 2015. Photo: Aaron Zavitz.

LEFT: **MARY ZICAFOOSE** *Fields of Desire* Weft-faced ikat, wool on linen warp, 66" x 62", 2013. Photo: Kirby Zicafoose.

RIGHT: **SUSAN KNIGHT** *Collider* Hand-cut Tyvek on paper, Mylar dots, 96" in diameter, 2012. Photo: Aaron Zavitz.



Nebraska, and often find it a source and subject for their attention. Zicafoose is a master of weft-face ikat tapestries. *Fields of Desire* combines bold color and contemporary style, labor-intensive hand-dyeing process, and personally significant references. From a distance, the zig-zag appears as wind-whipped prairie grasslands—three dimensional, accordion-pleated. Close-up, one can appreciate the delineated shapes of saturated color, the gradations of black, the band across the bottom as blue as a summer sky.

For Knight, place is the subject of her attention, affection, research, and concern. *Global Threads* included two of her hand-cut paper constructions—enticingly beautiful and intriguingly challenging. Delicate swirls belie the strength of their material, their feathery weight, and invitingly playful sparkling dots. However, warnings of environmental disaster lurk just below the surface. Even Knight's materials, Tyvek and Mylar, defy stereotypes of paper. The work inspired *Sound Ecology*, a performance by **Quince Contemporary Vocal Ensemble**, using water as an instrument.

Omaha earned its star on the fiber map as a destination for an international assemblage of scholars, instructors, artists, collectors, devotés, and the simply curious. The overwhelming response

was astonished admiration. Hemmings commented that it would be rare to find so many fiber art exhibitions in one city, let alone in a single space. The free multi-faceted collective exhibition filled 40,000 sq. ft. of gallery space, and was supplemented with lectures, workshops, and tours. The host site, KANEKO, bills itself as "a cultural organization exploring and encouraging the process of creativity and how it impacts our lives." [www.thekaneko.org](http://www.thekaneko.org)

To learn more about the other exhibitions included in *Fiber*, visit SDA NewsBlog to read "Focus on Fiber at Kaneko in Omaha, NE" by Jay Rich. [surfacedesign.org/newsblog](http://surfacedesign.org/newsblog)

Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada and Mary Zicafoose will be featured speakers at the 2015 SDA Made/Aware Intensive at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts in Gatlinburg, Tennessee (October 8-11, 2015). To register, visit: [surfacedesign.org/conference-2015](http://surfacedesign.org/conference-2015)

To read the feature article about Yoshiko Iwamoto Wada, turn to page 50.

—*Suzanne Smith Arney is a freelance writer living in Omaha, Nebraska, who enjoys writing about artists and their work, and the role of art in our everyday lives.*