

Art in the Garden

Threads of Hope: Art as Social Practice
in the Textile Work of Hiroshi Saito

Summer 2012



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For the past 25 years Kyoto textile artist Hiroshi Saito has been using his art to bring hope to those suffering from HIV-AIDS, the developmentally disabled, and most recently those who have suffered the loss of home and family in the devastating earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan in 2011.

Hiroshi Saito was born in 1947 in Yokohama. As a young man, dismayed with the prospect of a career in the business world, he decided to pursue a career in the traditional arts and took an apprenticeship with a kimono dyer in the ancient capital of Kyoto. At the age of 35, however, he decided that there was more to life than dyeing up to 10 bolts of silk a day, all exactly the same color. He struck out on his own, experimenting with handmade cotton from Thailand, Peru, Mali, India and China because of the warm, handmade quality they possess.

Saito's extensive knowledge of traditional dyeing techniques and his interest in avant garde dance theater led him to the production of backdrops and costuming for contemporary dance and music companies. In the early 1980s, he was invited to produce a monumental installation for dance and musical performances at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City, which raised funds to benefit the Gay Mens' Health Crisis in the early stages of their struggle to raise awareness of HIV-AIDS. He returned to Japan to organize the creation of the first Japanese panel for the AIDS Memorial Quilt that was shown on Capital Mall in Washington, D.C. Saito was among the first to raise awareness of the disease in Japan.

This exhibition features Saito's *tezome* (hand-dyed) fabrics in the form of wall hangings, shawls, scarves, Kazafu shirts, and Awase Matofu coats designed and tailored by Asayo Takeda and Junko Furukawa. His hanging scrolls feature stunning calligraphy by Taiga Sakamoto. He works primarily in beautifully woven garabo cotton and wool muslin to create one-of-a-kind wearable art. He has been partly responsible for restoring the failing wool muslin industry in



Japan by re-introducing this soft, delicate fabric to a modern audience around the world.

Saito is also well known internationally for "Nozome," a self-supported, community-building project in which he supervises groups of up to 100 people dyeing 20-meter lengths of cloth. Through these events he brings people together to forget their troubles and celebrate nature in one carefree day of working outdoors to create a thing of beauty wielding dye brushes and pots of colorful fabric dyes. Over the past year, his Nozome projects in the Tohoku district of Japan have brought a moment of peace, productivity and enjoyment into the lives of earthquake and tsunami victims who are still living in temporary shelters.

The Garden is honored to be able to show the work of such a fine artist and generous human being. Your kind donations during the exhibition will help to support his continuing good work in Tohoku.



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