



FRAMED by one of her fibre creations, painter-sculptor Aiko Suzuki talked with Star art critic Gary Michael Dault this week about her decision to change from painting to making fibre hangings. They're really - constructions rather than woven works, Gary Michael Dault says.

Sculptor's determined to prove artistic worth of fibre hangings

By GARY MICHAEL DAULT

There's no reason why fibre hangings ought not to count as important art. And 41-year-old painter-sculptor Aiko Suzuki is determined to prove it.

Suzuki began her career in 1967 as a painter of rather severe, hard-edged paintings. She painted for five years, feeling all the while that somehow the medium was just not for her.

In 1969, she began to free herself from the tyrannies she felt painting imposed upon her by designing sets for the Toronto Dance Theatre. One piece, a set for a work called *Study For A Song In The Distance* (Dec. 1969) can be looked upon as a precursor to the fibre hangings she makes today. For this particular set, Suzuki hung three ropes over the stage. Three ropes arranged in subtle, spatially modifying ways. It was an idea to which she would return again and again after she had finally ceased to paint.

Suzuki has been making fibre art now for six years. Her apotheosis within the genre will occur when she completes a \$36,000 commission for the new

Metro central reference library. The big public 'work, Suzuki's most ambitious undertaking to date, will be called *Lyra* and will be suspended over a pool of water where it will ripple its white nylon cords to the accompaniment of any current of air passing through the lobby.

It should be a soft {vaguely meditative, and perhaps even serene experience for library-users. It ought to look, if Aiko Suzuki maintains her esthetic control of the piece, like mist rising from the water's surface. What better place than a library, after all, for a little three-dimensional poetry?

But the success of fibre-art depends upon inordinate amounts of concentrated esthetic control by the artist. Otherwise - for reasons that are subtle and not always easy to discuss - fibre art tends to go all cute and sentimental and craftsy.

Aiko Suzuki wages a constant and continuing war to keep her work free of this kind of problem. Most of the time she succeeds. "I hate the craftsy, purist approach to hangings," she says. "All that boring stuff about dying your own wool..."

No wool

She has committed herself, for example, to a cheerful acceptance in her work of contemporary materials and effects. There is nothing about it that smacks of a whole-earth-catalogue, back-to-nature celebration of pioneer moral rectitude: No sweet, Arcadian honesties of method. No laboriousness for its own sake. She never uses wool for example. She uses something called Polypropylene. It has a desirable gleam. It picks up and conveys light. And you can dry clean it.

And, of course, she never weaves. Her hangings, which generically she refers to (rather gracefully, I think) as "suspensions" - are really constructions.

For while she does, indeed use fibre as the basis of all of her work, Aiko Suzuki uses it in a way that is quite removed from the way textiles behave. For one thing, she manipulates individual strands of fibre - arranging and rearranging them (by addition or subtraction) into a configuration that will become one of her sculptures. Because she uses one strand at a time, the whole

process is more akin to drawing (albeit in three-dimensions) than it is to weaving, knotting, and whatever it is you do to produce hanging, tapestries, and other textile or fibre works.

"I feel like a dancer when I make these pieces," she says. "The trouble with paintings is that they limit you in the ways you can move through space. For me, these suspensions don't even assume their final shapes until I'm up on a ladder poking at them and twisting them into the special form I want for them."

Her suspensions are probably the most severely sculptural, and the least arbitrarily decorative fibre works in existence. Her new pieces are even less adorned than her pieces of a couple of years ago. Those pieces have strategically placed fringes, for instance. Fringes are, however, as Aiko Suzuki began to realize, needlessly pretty and seductive. So the fringes are gone. So is every other bit of incidental business. Now all that is left is color - and the great smooth self-confident thrust of the body of the work itself.

"For me, a sculpture must be

light and quick," says Suzuki. "You can see right through these pieces. They trap light and modulate it. They move in the breeze. And you can pack them into a suitcase." Fluid sculptures for a transient time. "

Enormous studio

Of the four or five new

suspensions now set up in her enormous, cathedral-like Mowat Street studio, perhaps the best is a graceful suspension in cream and white – 12 feet high - called Lyra's Mum. Lyra's Mum is a study for the big forthcoming library piece. It seems to consist of two or three curvaceous turns in space of hundreds of parallel

Polypropylene cords, all arranged simply enough, apparently; except that it is almost impossible to follow (or remember) the exact shapes that they make - or the big dramatic cuts they leave in the spatial volumes left around the piece. This effect is the essence, of Alko Suzuki's work, It is the

basis of the "poetry" of her work. Her pieces look so easy to deal with. Almost. too easy, And then you find that the work itself has slipped through your fingers and left you nothing but an atmosphere.