

Aiko Suzuki

Metropolitan Toronto Library

CORINNE MANDEL

On March 7, 1981, Aiko Suzuki's large-scale, commissioned sculpture was unveiled at Raymond Moriyama's Metropolitan Toronto Library. [See *artscanada's* feature on the Library in Light and Space in the Urban Landscape, Feb/Mar 1978.] Since the artist had to wait for over four and a half years from the submission of her winning maquette to the final installation of the completed work - while the Library Board raised funds for the piece - Suzuki's conception of the piece had understandably assumed a radical change. Originally intended as a series of swagged groupings, suspended over a pool at varying heights, the work as it stands consists of groups of fibre hanging vertically from ceiling beams to just above water level interspersed with swags, so that the apparent orderliness of the maquette, although still an integral part of the revised work, is somewhat more relaxed, less formal.

Situated beyond the double-doored entrance, the buffer to the hubbub of Yonge Street, in the foyer of the library, is Suzuki's hanging sculpture known as *Lyra*. Seeming almost to emanate from the pool and amidst a few strategically placed plants, the piece exudes tranquility, an atmosphere befitting its location. In its Stillness, *Lyra* becomes a sanctuary of sorts, refusing entrance by means of the pond below, yet harboring browser and bibliophile alike.

Lyra is primarily monochromatic: composed of white nylon strands tacitly laced with earth tones, chosen to enhance the architectural surroundings and to amplify a sense of reflection. While such seeming neutrality of tone might seem a departure for Suzuki, an artist accustomed to working with a variety of colors, hindsight would suggest *Lyra* to be a natural progression. Having fashioned stage sets for the Toronto Dance Theatre since 1969, large spaces are not unfamiliar to Suzuki, and her current work was in fact foreshadowed just a year before her initial proposal in an all grey sculpture entitled *Hokusai Silver* (1976). *Lyra* has a mood decidedly at variance with Suzuki's previous works, a mood resulting from a fusion of East and West.

Negative spaces, formed by the cuffing away of fibres, the swagging of strands and the deliberate intervals of suspended fibre not only provide visual rhythm and variety, but also urge a contemplative

attitude in the viewer. While certainly an entity in itself with each group of strands relating to the next, the sculpture prompts the eye to wander slowly over and through each strand, often resting in one place so that sections become separate fascinations, each acting as receiver of thoughts, rather than emitter of ideas. In the simplicity of form, the quietness of hue, *Lyra* becomes not only one object, but many: it may be viewed on all sides, as reproduced through the mirror at one end, or viewed in the water's reflection. The sculpture's only demand is that we do not enter, but view it from afar. And though movement of parts is unfortunately limited by the muffling effect of double doors at the entrance. *Lyra*, like the water below, is mutable, affecting divers moods depending on natural light which streams through the foyer to join artificial lighting inside.

Thus, while employing Western materials in a Western surrounding, the philosophy underlying *Lyra* is indisputably Eastern. In its attention to negative space, its seemingly simple means of construction, and its neutral coloring, the sculpture is deceptively manifold in nature. And by altering the means of achieving its conception by cutting the strands of fibre, *Lyra* has become a most elegant and euphonious interpretation of *sashai*, the concept of less becoming more.



AIKO SUZUKI

Lyra, 1977-81

sculpture at the Metropolitan Toronto Library

Photo: courtesy Metropolitan Toronto Library