

Pink Fruits, Green Plates by **Yuko Kurihara**

In Conversation with Yuko Kurihara

Yuko Kurihara is a visual artist from Japan. Her art, which is characterized by a unique perspective and an ingenious use of flamboyant colors, draws inspiration from Japanese Nihonga-style painting. **Amaranth Journal** caught up with the artist recently in an interview over email. In this interview, **Yuko Kurihara** talks about her love for natural forms, her journey as a visual artist, and how the brilliantly hued motifs of edible items—so compellingly real yet admittedly magical—have been foundational to the development of her distinctive visual idiom. The artist was interviewed by **Amaranth**'s managing & art editor, Satarupa Sinha Roy.

AMARANTH: We are very curious about your beginning and the progress of your interest toward everyday edibles. What inspired you to focus on the subject of food/ edibles in your art?

YUKO KURIHARA: I have been drawing since I was so young that I can't remember. I think I owe my interest in art partly to my mother, who graduated from an art university.

I spent my elementary school years in Singapore due to my father's work, and I think that my interest in the motifs of edible items in my artwork today is the result of my natural exposure to a wide variety of plants, nationalities, languages, food, and cultures. I think I naturally became interested in such things, especially because of Singapore's climate that encouraged a great diversity of tropical fruits, vegetables, and greens and the fact that everything around me was so colorful and vibrant. Foodstuffs and plants, in particular, show diverse changes in color and pattern over time and are never boring to observe. I paint pictures as I observe.

And just as I mentioned before, I believe that my art has also been influenced by the fact that my mother, who died two years ago, was a quilter. I think seeing her work on a daily basis—not to mention being privy to her fabulous collection of fabrics—has had an indirect influence on me.

A: What is the most important element in your art and why?

YK: One of the main reasons for painting is to convey to the viewer through my work that there are so many interesting and beautiful things in the world—right beside you and me. So I place the greatest importance on how to bring out the charm of the motifs that feature in my artworks. Color plays a key role here—especially in creating and enhancing the overall visual impact of those motifs. For this reason, I consider the color scheme to be a very important factor in my art. I have to be the biggest fan of the motif I choose to paint.

A: Is there a place, real or imagined, that influences (or have influenced) your art?

YK: I can say that Singapore, which I mentioned earlier, is a significant one. But I also believe that nature is the best teacher, no matter what country or place. Libraries are also wonderful places to learn. In particular, I often learn a lot from collections of ethnic and folk art cultures, archaeological sites, and furniture pieces from around the world. Quite often, collections and exhibits of paintings themselves turn out to be highly impressionable.

A: Through the ages, food has featured as a common motif in art. What artist(s)/ artistic works have influenced the way you paint now?

YK: I was influenced by a Japanese painter named Heihachiro Fukuda. He lived in the Meiji era and was very gentle and sincere in his view of nature.
When I was in high school, I saw a collection of his work and began to seriously consider becoming an artist. His paintings—the final versions—are wonderfully good, but the very many sketches leading up to those paintings are also excellent.



Solo exhibition at Bunkamura Box Gallery in Tokyo (2023)



Live drawing at the exhibition

A: What is the most challenging piece (a single painting/series/project) you have ever created/worked on?

YK: There were many, but I would like to mention a particular project—one that involved a lot of other people: I worked for several years on the main visuals for the summer and winter gift season announcements for Mitsukoshi, a long-established department store in Japan. Normally, I work alone. But this project was a rare opportunity for me to communicate a lot with the graphic design company and the department store. Although there was a lot of pressure on me, the process of creating something together with someone else was very interesting and I learned a lot.

A: If you could work in any other art form what would it be?

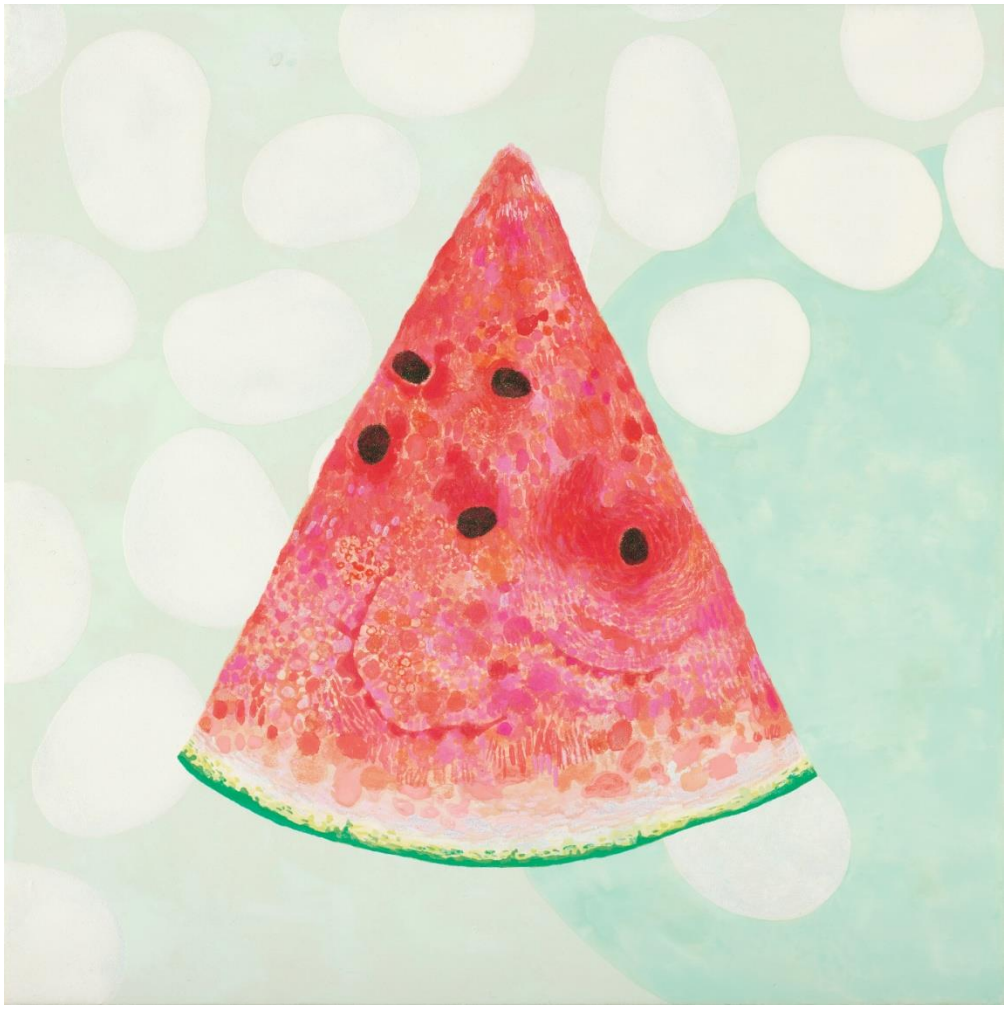
YK: This is a difficult question! But if I had to choose something other than painting, it would be ceramics or Japanese confectionery "Wagashi" design. I have a little longing for the world of confectionery, which expresses the Japanese cultural background and the seasons in a very simple, delicate, and beautiful way. I think it would be very nice if I could design the packaging as well. However, both require making the same thing in the same size and I am not very good at it because I am so clumsy!

A: What kind of legacy do you want to leave through your art?

YK: I have never exhibited overseas but I would like to create such an opportunity someday. Also, I will be 50 years old next year, and I would like to leave something behind for the younger generations. There are some difficulties in choosing a location and actually running the (art) business, but I dream of creating an open atelier where children can come and go as they please, draw pictures, read books, and make things that each of them wants to make while I am working. I love dogs, so if the dog (I hope to have one someday) is also comfortable and relaxed in my atelier, I will be very happy.

A: What words of wisdom would you like to share with Amaranth Journal?

YK: "The snow that falls silently accumulates."
These are the words that my professor taught me when I was a university student. It means that the most important thing is not to be influenced by the words of others, the latest fads, etc., but to continue steadily on the path you believe in, and the results will accumulate like the snow that quietly falls. Snow that falls noisily like sleet will soon melt away. However, snow that falls quietly may be light, but it will accumulate over time.
I think it is actually quite difficult to keep going without losing sight of *who* or *what* we are. But I believe that this will be an unchangeable strength, even if it takes time.



Mizu Mizu by **Yuko Kurihara**



Born in 1976, **Yuko Kurihara** spent her elementary school years in Singapore, junior high school years in Chiba, Japan, and high school years in Atlanta, Georgia and in Rye, New York in the United States. In the third year of high school, she decided to pursue a career in Japanese-style painting, Nihonga, being impressed and inspired by the works of Heihachiro Fukuda, a 20th-century Japanese Nihonga painter.

The collected artworks of Yuko Kurihara were published in 2025 in a volume titled *Nature—As it is*.