

Suzuki's lifetime of works

By ANDREA RAYMOND *Special to The Mirror*

The Gendai Gallery exudes a sense of tranquility as viewers sit on a bench and reflect on an innovative installation: copper-painted tree branches immersed in water.

The sculpture is just one of the pieces in the exhibition Aiko Suzuki, Selected Works from 1973 to present, celebrating the accomplishments of the famed artist.

Suzuki, whose best-known piece is *Lyra*, a large-scale fibre sculpture located in the entranceway of the Metro Toronto Reference Library, studied art in the late 1950s and continued to create pieces and travel in the '60s.

She had her first solo exhibition in 1967, and two years later was approached by the Toronto Dance Theatre to create a set using fibre for one of their productions.

Fuelled by the success of the project, Suzuki continued to work with choreographers and to experiment with fibre, continuously pushing the medium.

The Gendai exhibit, that includes paintings, monoprints and mixed media works, also features *Lyra: Refrain*, consisting of hundreds of single strands held together by wooden slats.

In addition to working with fibre and textiles, Suzuki continues to experiment with a variety of media.

She works out of Open Studio, a printmaking facility in Toronto where she has created many of her latest monoprints.

"They are immediate and improvised on the spot. To

me that's really exciting," Suzuki said.

Constantly drawing inspiration from her life, Suzuki said she never knows what she'll be working on next. "The [Reflections from the Garden] installation was inspired by explorations I was doing with the branches. I wanted to realize what I had been percolating in my mind for some time," Suzuki said.

The piece was created this year and brings together tree branches partially immersed in water in a low-lit black room.

"This piece acknowledges nature and our co-existence with it. It enables people to self-reflect."

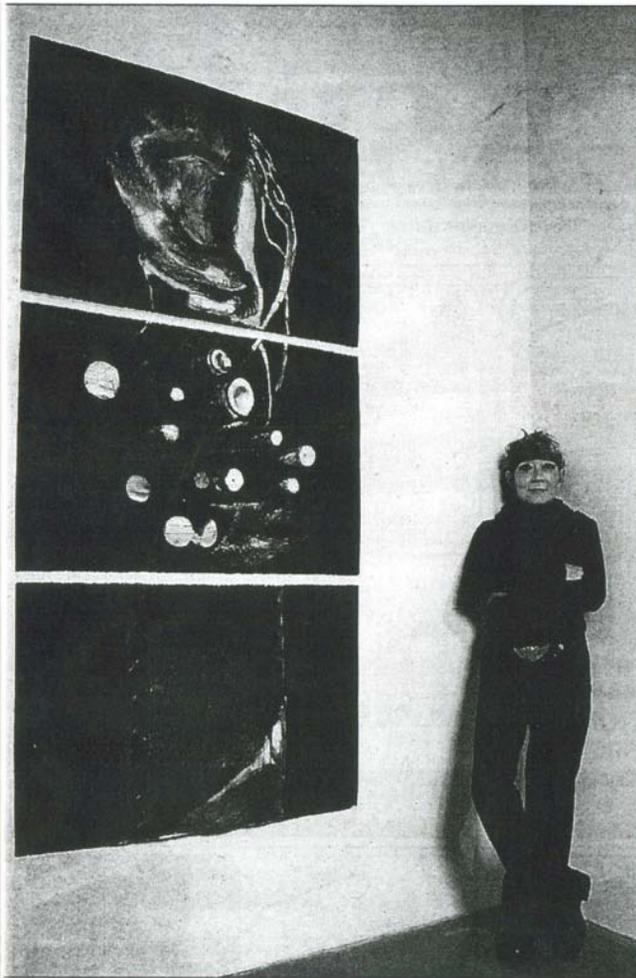
While reflecting on the piece, an observant viewer will notice a drop of water, from an unknown source, falling every so often. This addition to the installation, though subtle, creates a sense of wonder and is the product of an amazing amount of time and mechanics.

In addition to her art making, Suzuki is actively involved in arts education programs such as the Inner City Angels, visiting schools and teaching children to create art in a variety of media.

"Going into schools and working with young people, letting them find the joy in making art - it gives so much back," Suzuki said.

Suzuki was also instrumental in the creation of the Gendai Gallery, lobbying the Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre to include a public contemporary art gallery mandated to show the work of Asian-Canadian artists. The gallery, more than two years old, has been a great success with strong programming, she said.

An innovator, Suzuki's exhibit at Gendai is just a sampling of the work created over a career that has spanned more than five decades.



Aiko Suzuki: Selected Works from 1973 to the Present runs through April 12 at the Gendai Gallery, Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre, 6 Garamond Ct. Call 416-4412345.