



re:view



Robin Rice on Visual Art

Good Neighbors

Something there is that doesn't love a wall/ That wants it down! In Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall," his neighbor is unshakable in the opposite belief — that "good fences make good neighbors."

By re-envisioning what a wall can be, Keiko Miyamori reconciles these opposing ideas; her Wall of Connection (Tsunagu-Kabu) is, like the skin of a plant, a permeable fabric for literal and symbolic exchange. It represents one way to be a good neighbor.

Tsunagu-Kabu is one of the works in "Transplants," a two-part show organized by Sean Stoops celebrating the Asian Arts Initiative's brand-new gallery. There you can see Miyamori's installation and the work of other artists (Jiny Ung's The Daily Staple is pictured);

TRANSPLANTS

Through Jan. 16, 2009, Asian Arts Initiative, 1219 Vine St.; International House, 3701 Chestnut St.; 215-557-0455; asianartsinitiative.org

the exploration of life-changing journeys continues with a concurrent group of videos in the Video Lounge at West Philly's International House.

The path to Tsunagu-Kabu has been a long one, and Miyamori is not done yet. She first became involved with trees — the central thread of the project — in Japan, where she did bark rubbings in a forest slated for demolition. Years later in Philadelphia, she happened across an enormous, partially uprooted oak, sacrificed to the Cambridge Plaza Housing Project. Almost 7 feet in diameter, the tree at the corner of Girard and 11th was still alive, though most of its root system was exposed.

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Miyamori likens her response to this particular tree — its energy and its tenacity in surviving for many years under concrete sidewalks — to "falling in love."

She got help from the construction company in removing the roots after they were severed from the trunk. Then, like an archaeologist, she gently cleaned, removing and categorizing objects and countless fragments of glass and brick, artifacts of the tree's long history. In 2002 she organized an installation at the Project Room and has incorporated these elements in subsequent installations. In 2006, Miyamori encased the enormous City Root in a cube of clear plastic and returned it to the outdoors at 12th and Callowhill's Shelly Electric Co. Cracks in the plastic cause light to refract through it in ways Miyamori finds intriguing.

She continues to use elements salvaged from the root mass in interactive projects. At the 2002 show, she gave visitors tiny plastic boxes containing brick fragments from the tree. Since then she's developed the idea as a cultural and personal exchange, inviting others to swap small items for boxed fragments once in the

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grip of the City Root. Some of these exchanges are documented in a video by Aby Rao, a first cut of which is in the "Transplants" show. Beside the video is a small translucent wall — more like a set of shelves filled with tiny boxes — that Miyamori hopes is the prototype of a huge wall packed with boxes and boxes of exchanged items. At a table beside the wall, visitors to the show can swap items (anything of the right size that won't rot) for numbered bits of brick.

Recently, on a goodwill trip to Iraq, Miyamori met with people and listened to their perspectives on the current political landscape. "We have to learn — not just say one side is good and one is bad," she says.

"If we connect, we are less likely to have war. It's really nonsense to have a war. I can't change [the political situation], but maybe I can facilitate people developing and sharing a connection."

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To see more of Miyamori's work or swap something for a fragment of brick from City Root, visit keikomiyamori.com.