

Between the Visible and the Invisible: Awai Yoshiyuki Izuoka Contemporary Textile Painter

Artist Statement

In the summer of 1978, at the age of eight, I stood before the masterpieces of the Impressionists at the Hiroshima Museum of Art. Entranced by their light, I resolved then to spend my life as a painter.

Yet, in my youth, my aspirations were abruptly shattered; due to my color vision deficiency, I was forced to abandon my dream of pursuing a formal education in fine arts. It was my first profound despair. In the years that followed, I attempted to forge a connection with society through various vocations—as a photographer, illustrator, commercial painter, and electrician. Yet, each domain demanded a standardized perception of color, ultimately severing my ties to the social order. I drifted into a deep vortex of self-negation, haunted by the pervasive conviction that I was fundamentally unworthy of societal validation.

It was in the midst of this profound isolation, at the age of twenty-five, that I encountered the art of textile dyeing at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Beholding the vibrant, life-affirming hues breathing within the fabrics, I experienced a searing revelation: for the first time in my existence, I truly saw color. In that singular, luminous moment, a soul previously sequestered from the world reconnected with its transcendent beauty.

In twentieth-century Western painting, artists such as Mark Rothko pioneered a technique known as "staining"—saturating unprimed canvas with diluted pigments to dissolve the material boundaries of the medium. This approach resonates profoundly with the realm of dyeing that I pursue. The phenomenon of dyeing, where color permeates the raw fabric and fuses immutably with the fiber, bypasses the limitations of the human retina, striking at something elemental that stirs the depths of the human psyche. Dyeing has since become my indispensable vessel for expression. Rooted in traditional Japanese techniques and refined through rigorous practice across Southeast Asia, I have confronted fabric and pigment for over three decades, continually unveiling my work in prominent department stores and museums both in Japan and internationally.

In 2022, marking my 27th year as an artist, I fell seriously ill. Through that confinement, I experienced a dissolving of boundaries—between self and

other, between time and space. It was during this period of recovery that I encountered the traditional art of Noh theater. As I touched its profound world, where reality blends with fiction, and life intersects with death, the lingering knot of insecurity I had long held about my color vision deficiency gently began to unwind.

The visible world is not all there is; the breath and presence of humanity exist just as surely in the unseen. I came to embrace my own perception deeply, realizing that my unique vision is simply another beautiful frequency in the vast spectrum of how we experience the world.

In the context of Noh, I am the Waki—the catalyst who bridges the real world of the viewer and the otherworldly realm of the artwork. The created work itself is none other than the Shite, the manifestation of that otherworldly presence.

For over thirty years, I have been captivated by the art of dyeing. The profound impact that initially stained my soul has never faded to this day. Through my work, I hope you will feel that the binaries we often perceive as separate—the visible and the unseen, the self and the other, this world and the afterlife—are all profoundly interconnected, harboring infinite possibilities.

Biography & CV



Selected Chronology

- 2025 *Between the Visible and Invisible: Yoshiyuki Izuoka Solo Exhibition*, Art Ai Kisa, Miyoshi, Hiroshima
- 2017 *Three Artists from Japan and Korea*, K Gallery, Haeundae, Busan, South Korea
- 2017 *Selected Artist-in-Residence (16th Term)*, Yachiyo-no-Oka Museum of Art, Akitakata, Hiroshima
- 2014 *Awarded Special Prize*, Busan Art Biennale, Busan, South Korea
- 2008 *Group Exhibition The World Drawn on Fabric: Textile Dyeing Exhibition*, Hatsukaichi Art Gallery, Hatsukaichi, Hiroshima
- 2007 *Group Exhibition Winds of the East*, SOMArts Cultural Center, San Francisco, USA

- 2001–2002 Awarded Prize, World Picture Book Exhibition, Matsuzakaya Department Store (Ginza, Tokyo) / Toured to Toronto, Canada (2002)
 - 1997 Returned to Japan; Held first solo exhibition in Hiroshima
 - 1995 Apprenticed under Md. Salleh Bin Dawam, Western-style painter whose works are in the permanent collection of the National Museum of Malaysia; Malaysia
 - 1989 Graduated from Hiroshima Prefectural Kannon High School (Forced to abandon aspirations for fine arts university due to color vision deficiency)
 - 1978 Inspired by Impressionist masterpieces at the Hiroshima Museum of Art; Resolved to become a painter
 - 1970 Born in Hiroshima City, Hiroshima Prefecture, Japan
- Solo Exhibitions
- Domestic (Japan)
- Hiroshima Mitsukoshi (Hiroshima)
 - Kokura Izutsuya (Kitakyushu)
 - Nagoya Sakae Mitsukoshi (Nagoya)
 - Daimaru Fukuoka Tenjin (Fukuoka)
 - Hanshin Department Store Umeda Main Store (Osaka)
 - Tokiwa Head Office (Oita)
 - Yonago Takashimaya (Yonago)
 - Yamakataya (Kagoshima)
- International
- SOMArts Cultural Center (San Francisco, USA)
 - K Gallery (Haeundae, Busan, South Korea)
 - Solo Exhibitions in Malaysia, and others
- Public & Private Collections
- Public Collections
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
 - Municipal Museums of Art
 - Public and Private Hospitals
 - Luxury Hotels
 - Premier Department Stores, and numerous others
- Private Collections
- Extensively held in private contemporary art collections both across Japan and internationally.