



My Dahlia – My Sister, 2012, 20" x26",
oil-stained wood mosaics, acrylic and oil
paint, sumi ink, Japanese paper on board

Naoko Morisawa's mosaic artwork is hand-made of thousands of very small slices of natural and oil-dyed (wood) chips on board. She incorporates the patterns in the wood and enhances them with oil-stain to explore imagery that comes from common items: a cupcake, shoes, a wave, and waterfalls etc. Her work has been exhibited internationally and locally at Seattle Art Museum Gallery; Whatcom Museum; Wing Luke Museum; FCA Gallery in Vancouver-BC Canada; contemporary art museums and galleries in Ginza, Aoyama, Kobe, Kawasaki, Yokohama, and Tokyo (Japan); Dublin Biennial International 2014 (Ireland); Roma Art International Biennale, 2015 and Florence Biennale International 2015 (Italy).

<http://www.naokomorisawa.com>

With each artwork requiring 45 to 50 days to complete, there's a temporal aspect to Naoko Morisawa's artwork that might not be apparent at first. Mosaic – the art of assembling small pieces into a whole – requires great patience and skill. In work that is at once abstract and representational, Morisawa takes the art form to new heights with her exacting attention to the tiniest detail. In *My Dahlia – My Sister*, for example, the different shades of red in the foliage and the sparing use of blue and white in the flower itself are almost uncanny in the way they convey the flower. It's as if Morisawa uses stained wood panel to take a realistic photograph – the elements of the flower which are unique are captured in the work of art. The flower has one larger blue petal on the left and one smaller blue petal on the right; the recognition of uniqueness in nature or in the model is part of Morisawa's gift. The colors seem to leap off the wall or hypnotize viewers by luring them across the room. The closer you look at one of her pieces, the more you see: the subtle placement of a line that from a distance seems unified but up close is revealed as a painstaking arrangement of individual components. The color in a single piece of wood is enhanced by its underlying grain; the direction of the very cells has been taken into account, incorporated, and made to contribute to the overall masterly effect.

Morisawa's artwork also wonderfully straddles the border between craft and fine art, which the Northwest as a region is widely recognized for. In Japan, traditional mosaic using wood (parquetry and/or marquetry) is called *yosegi*, and dates from the Edo period (1603-1868), when an explosion of functional objects incorporated the craft, including puzzle boxes and screens. With a little background research, it becomes impossible to look at Morisawa's work, for instance, and not think of a screen such as the fireplace screen by Nakajima Mokudō (Kikutarō) 1889-1968 in *The Art of Japanese Craft: 1875 to Present* (Felice Fischer, Philadelphia Museum of Art in association with Yale UP, 2008, 29), with its still

life and painterly effect. As Fischer emphasizes, Japanese craft really accelerates in the early 20th century, with poet and sculptor Takamura Kōtarō famously observing that art was about more than just technical mastery. (This is echoed wonderfully by glass pioneer Harvey Littleton of the American Studio Glass movement who said that “technique is cheap.”). Locally, it’s also a short step from Morisawa back to woodworker and architect George Nakashima, whose interest in the grain pattern of wood helped shape the growth of the American Craft movement.

As much as Morisawa has perfected her technique over many years, her choice of subject matter and aesthetic for fashion (especially shoes) and flower arrangements (ikebana in Japanese tradition), as well as the new interest in geometric abstraction, belies a deeper project than what we normally associate with a utilitarian or craft-based object. As the art of craft in general overlaps more and more with contemporary art (for example, *By Hand: The Use of Craft in Contemporary Art*, Shu Hung and Joseph Magliaro, eds. Princeton Architectural Press, NY, 2007; *Crafting a Continuum: Rethinking Contemporary Craft*, ed. Peter Held and Heather Sealy Lineberry, ASU Art Museum, 2013 [the latter came to Bellevue Arts Museum in 2014]), Morisawa’s work is increasingly resonating with the contemporary focus on materials and process, sharing the characteristic of lengthy production time with a lot of other wood, metal, and ceramic-based art forms. In essence, her work provides a fascinating 21st century update to the traditional parquetry craft of the Edo period.