

The Takao Tanabe Show

by FRANCES COHEN

LANDSCAPE painting doesn't have to be an objective representation. An artist can look at a scene, or a number of scenes, and paint an abstract landscape which is the result of his life's experiences. Each picture after that incorporates each new experience and a progression in style and thought becomes evident.

One case in point is Takao Tanabe whose works are on display in the Yellow Door Gallery. Mr. Tanabe was born in Prince Rupert, British Columbia. He studied at the University of Manitoba school of art, the Brooklyn Museum Art School in New York, the Banff School of Fine Arts, the Central School of Arts and Crafts



TAKAO TANABE

in London, and was under the private tutorship of Isao Hirayama at the Tokyo University School of fine arts.

Said Mr. Tanabe, "I make up my own landscapes from bits and pieces. I take forms from all types of landscapes I've seen." According to him they are "abstract paintings" because they are made up of scenes abstracted from the different parts of the world he has seen.

For example, the juxtaposition of a hill to a valley in a painting may have started from an idea of a remembered landscape of a mountain and a valley. "I don't consciously say to myself that the mountain is from the Rockies or Japan," Mr. Tanabe said.

The last 10 years have been the most significant in Mr. Tanabe's development of the landscape idea. His earlier works could be classified in a series which he calls "a portrait of interior land." These paintings are done in oil or acrylic.

"I didn't want to get involved in figures," Mr. Tanabe said. He found that his paintings changed and progressed in a series as new ideas occurred while he was painting. Some lines represented parts of the human anatomy. According to Mr. Tanabe this was a matter of chance. It interested him, and he followed it up with a series.

Since that landscape series Mr. Tanabe began moving into a non-objective means of expression. In Japan he studied the eastern style of painting. This style, as exhibited at the Yellow Door Gallery, evolved from his study of the brush technique of calligraphy. These include the black and white water colors done at that time.

This type of painting taught him a rigid kind of control, and being a copying method it restricted his freedom of expression. "I got involved in this type of painting because I was curious . . . and I wanted to paint on my own using this technique." Many of the paintings he did after studying in Japan were a continuation of the calligraphic paintings he did there.

With this Japanese influence he began to work on a soft absorbent paper which allowed a spontaneous approach to the painting. Each painting could only be done once. They are done in soft watercolors and are delicate in appearance. The Three Foot Bean wall hangings are good examples of this one-stroke technique.

This high-tension, spontaneous style of painting led into a more geometric, stronger "hard edge" painting which Mr. Tanabe continued on his return to Canada. Although his forms change, Mr. Tanabe sees their connection. "I want to try out different series — the ideas are connective and new ideas come from each series," he said.

The technique works itself out through his development and in the end has a considerable influence on what the painting means. The most difficult part of his work is to develop and utilize the form. Mr. Tanabe develops new ideas or plans them out in his mind for future experimentation.

As an artist he is constantly trying to formalize his ideas. Mr. Tanabe looks at his work from a technical rather than a philosophical point of view. He feels that he is now working out some logic in approaching the meaning of his figures. The idea of what a painting means is one of the most complicated and difficult aspects of an artist's work, he said.

Mr. Tanabe has travelled and painted in Europe and Japan on scholarships, and has exhibited widely across Canada, the United States and abroad in both one-man shows and group exhibitions.

His works are in private and public collections such as the National Gallery of Canada, the Toronto Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, the Geigy Ltd. Collection, the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, and in several Canadian university collections.

On leave of absence from the Vancouver school of art, Mr. Tanabe is working on a 13 by eight-foot mural commissioned for the department of agriculture at Ottawa.