



Proof of age

Hiroshi Hayakawa unites beauty and rust at Gallery V

by Melissa Starker

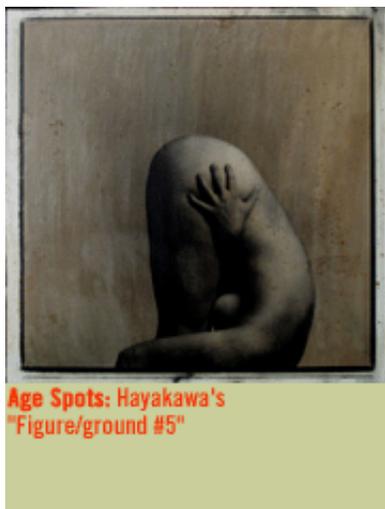
Beauty fades, but often not without a fight from its possessor. Regenerative creams, toxic injections and surgery are a few of the weapons used to stave off the natural, unavoidable process of aging, and ultimately to maintain good standing in a society that worships the young and the hot.

As an artist who photographs the nude female form, Hiroshi Hayakawa shows at least as much of an appreciation for these qualities as the average guy, but he's more accepting of their transience. Aging is an ever-present part of life, and a central element in Hayakawa's memorable work. It's represented by the rust that forms on the squares of sheet metal he uses as his canvas. The artist currently has 10 of his pieces on display at Gallery V, in a joint show that also features drawings by Paul-Henri Bourguignon and haunting X-ray nature photography by Judith McMillan.

Through an e-mail exchange, Hayakawa explained that his process can take up to 11 hours and involves painting liquid photo emulsion onto sheet metal that's been oxidized by a few months of sitting in his back yard. He then prints his images using traditional methods for black and white photography. "In this process the rust on the metal penetrates the image from underneath and surfaces to become part of the image," he wrote in his artist's statement.

Hayakawa's figure studies react to the process in striking, unusual ways. Smooth skin becomes pitted, spotted and cracked. Rust generates an unorthodox sepia tone, and the emulsion application adds a soothing painterly effect.

In the past, he has framed his pictures with ornate, handcrafted woodwork, but for the Gallery V works, the *Figure/Ground* series, he chose a simple presentation, bolting the photographs to flat, painted wood.



Age Spots: Hayakawa's "Figure/ground #5"

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Hayakawa feels that “elaborate framing might take something away from the pieces and add something unessential to them.” The photographer also reinforces his chosen medium by leaving the border images visible.

“The senses of permanence and timelessness conventionally associated with photographic prints are re-examined by the impermanence implicit in the material,” the artist wrote. “In a literal and symbolic sense, my main subject matter—female nudes—provides the ground where these two points in time meet, and the figures work as a catalyst to accelerate this transformation of the medium due to the transient nature of beauty with which female nudes are viewed.”

Hayakawa has been substituting metal for photo paper for 10 years. “I was working on combining a figurative image and an image of rusty metal by exposing the two negatives on a single print paper,” he wrote. “Then just out of curiosity, I tried printing a figurative image directly onto the surface of metal using the liquid photo emulsion. It worked great, and I have been doing this ever since.”

At the time, he was a student at Columbus College of Art and Design. Hayakawa moved here in 1991 after obtaining a degree in French literature at a Tokyo university and spending a few years as a system engineer for a software company until, as he put it, “I couldn’t take it any more.” He now teaches photography at CCAD, and at Ohio Dominican.

While his methods have remained consistent, Hayakawa explained that his compositions have been evolving toward the abstract. “My main interest [for this show] was fragmentation of the body. By depicting only a part of the body, I thought I could make it lose its integrity a little bit, so that the image would become more about the essence or presence of the body, and less about whom I photographed.”

“I still wanted them to be recognizable as human bodies,” he continued, “but I wanted the poses of my models, my compositions and the texture of the pieces to remove their familiarity.” The works commonly question the standard concept of positive and negative space, and in almost all, the figures are positioned at the bottom of the frames because, Hayakawa wrote, “There is a strong sense of gravity-bound orientation throughout the show.”

“In the past, I did a few mixed-media pieces in which I tried to explore the idea of metaphorical transformation by using other materials, such as needle, thread, magnet, et cetera,” he explained. “My idea for those pieces was to suggest the existence of alternative forces that transform our familiar notions of the images, materials and time. This *Figure/Ground* series is an attempt to revisit the same theme from a different direction, without using a mixed media approach.”

Despite the prominent signs of age in his work, the art itself is in a state of suspended animation, protected by a product that works better on metal than skin: layers of polyurethane,

both under and over the printed image. "Some people think the rust of the metal would constantly progress, eat up the image and eventually destroy it," Hayakawa wrote. "Actually, it is pretty stable. What I am trying to do in my pieces is to talk about the suggested decay, but not to make them literally decay."

Photography by Hiroshi Hayakawa and Judith McMillan and drawings by Paul-Henri Bourguignon are on view at Gallery V through August 28. Dial 228-8955 for more information.

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