



MICHIKO KON'S "Chicken, Bonito and Ring" is one of more than 60 photos that will go on display this weekend at the Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge St., in Omaha.

Kon enlivens still-life photos

By Jason Hardy

Staff writer

Traditionally, the subject matter of most still-life photographs is fairly simplistic.

Images of fruit baskets and bottles of wine immediately come to mind. But when it comes to the art of Japanese photographer Michiko Kon, the images look more like something out of a Dr. Seuss book than an art history text.

They're almost impossible to describe in artistic terms, but "collage" probably comes closest to conveying what one can see in Kon's photos. In simpler terms, one can see a fish with legs, a vacuum cleaner turned into an animal, a fish body with a rooster's head and a severed fish head with a rose in its mouth, all made from actual animals and objects.

A collection spanning 10 years of Kon's still-life works will be on display at the Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge St., Omaha, this weekend. It is the first time her work will have been shown in Nebraska.

"They really are rather surprising," said Claudia Einecke, assistant curator for European Art at the Joslyn. "It is quite different from traditional still life, but I think what will also be surprising is the beauty of the pictures. You see the fish heads, and you say 'eww, that's gross,' and yes, it's true, but on the whole, they are beautiful."

While the objects in Kon's photos are all dead, the combination of elements seems to make a connection between life and lifelessness. The animals, or rather the pieces of animals, look as though they've been frozen in time, rather than dismembered and put back together like mismatched Legos.

"You could make a case saying that her work is related or reminds you of 1930s surrealism," Einecke said. "Of course fish or fish heads or chicken feet are real, but she puts them together to

PREVIEW Michiko Kon: Still lifes

WHERE: Joslyn Art Museum, 2200 Dodge St., Omaha

WHEN: Jan. 22 - March 19
COST: \$2.50 for students through Feb. 11

THE SKINNY: Bizarre still-life photographs on display for first time in Nebraska.

create things that are not so real — a dress out of crabs or something like that. In that sense, it's reminiscent of surrealism."

Terry Pitts, director of the Tuscon Center for Creative Photography in Tuscon, Ariz., said Kon's approach to still-life photography was like no other.

"They're wonderful," he said. "They're so exciting, there is not one other person like her; it's unbelievable. It's exciting to be as daring as she is."

While at first glance the images may seem a bit grotesque, Pitts maintains the effect is one celebrating life.

"It's obvious that all of it is dead, but there is no sense of this being about death and decay," Pitts said. "Everything is wet and shiny, the fish seem to be leaping, and to me it has always been wonderfully zany."

"Once you see the whole show, once you see more than four or five photos, you can't help but understand that attitude of life-affirming construction and humor."

The collection on display at the Joslyn will have more than 60 of Kon's photos, giving Western audiences the first significant introduction to her work.

"They are so very bold, very striking," she said. "I don't think you'd go through there and not be arrested by them."

Senior editor Sarah Baker contributed to this report.

Ryder and Jolie shine in 'Girl, Interrupted'

By Samuel McKewon

Senior editor

"Do not drop anchor here," head nurse (Whoopi Goldberg) scolds 17-year-old Susanna Kaysen (Winona Ryder) about her stay in Claymore, a 1960s-style five-star mental institution in upstate New England where Susanna has been placed for "a rest" in the film "Girl, Interrupted."

It comes at a strange moment in the movie, much later than one would think it ought to occur. By the time Goldberg says it, Kaysen's already been institutionalized for much longer than she should have; she's also finally realizing she doesn't belong inside.

By then, we know it, too, though Claymore is not all that bad a place to be — which seems to be director James Mangold's point. Unlike the institution in similarly themed "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," Claymore mutes the pain rather than magnifying it. As one character says, it allows Susanna to "embrace her flaws."

Everyone else at Claymore does the same, especially Lisa (Angelina Jolie), the wild child of the ward who escapes from time to time and manages to win Susanna over to her side.

Jolie is one of those actresses, by benefit of her looks and sheer energy, who commands every inch of the screen when she's on it — the patients and the camera revolve around her.

Jolie's performance is balanced by Ryder, who's comfortable sinking into the scenery.

Playing a girl who ultimately wrote of her experiences inside the hospital, Ryder observes her terrain and its main inhabitants — there's burn victim Polly (Elisabeth Moss), pathological liar Georgina (Clea DuVall), anorexic Janet

REVIEW Girl, Interrupted

STARS: Winona Ryder, Angelina Jolie

DIRECTOR: James Mangold

RATING: R (Jolie cusses and cusses; yucky roast-chicken carcasses abound)

GRADE: B

FIVE WORDS: Jolie, Ryder win you over.

(Angela Bettis) and Daisy (Brittney Murphy), a deeply disturbed girl who fattens up on her father's chickens, then stores the carcasses under her bed.

And, after first battling these surroundings, Susanna is slowly drawn into their world, assuming it as her own.

We know it's not. Claymore takes her in after a half-hearted suicide attempt — she chases a bottle of aspirin with vodka — and her parents' assertion is that she sleeps around, most prominently with one of her teachers. Nothing smelling of insanity.

But really, as Goldberg's nurse contends, Susanna's just too spoiled and all too willing to retreat from the real world. Her friends in Claymore don't judge her. She sleeps all day, or watches TV.

Director Mangold (the so-so "Copland") makes not-so-veiled attempts to compare the girl's situation to that of Dorothy in the land of Oz, a place she can leave whenever she wants to.



ANGELINA JOLIE and Wynona Ryder star in "Girl, Interrupted," a film that questions the boundaries of freedom and confinement.

And though we never get the real story behind Lisa, we sense the same thing has happened to her over time. Her attempted escapes never afford her the power and freedom she has to captivate an audience in Claymore.

With these somewhat quieter themes, "Girl, Interrupted," outside of Jolie's wilder scenes, doesn't jump off the screen. Some critics of the

film argued this was a flaw — that Ryder's character had little to do.

It's true, because "Girl, Interrupted" doesn't present the hospital as an enemy to her well-being. Claymore's nurses are actually quite

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