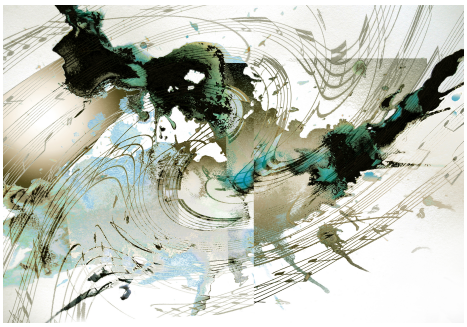
Saugy's Exquisitely Refined Aesthetic Sensibility

An artist's work on paper are almost always the armature, the foundation, on which her or his aesthetic rests. Certainly this seems true of the Swiss-French artist Catherine de Saugy, even though she employs a complex process, involving multiple layers of Plexiglas and blocks of Perspex, to create many of the works for which she is most widely celebrated.

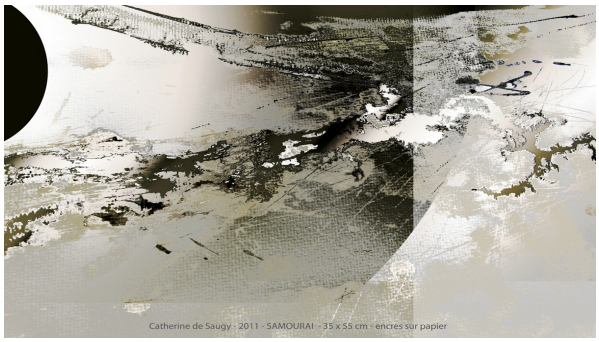


It is in her works on paper, however, that we see Saugy's forms stripped down to their bare essence and are able to marvel at her superb draftsperson-ship.

Indeed, her spare graceful forms and the mostly monochromatic palette she employs to realize them remind one of the masters of Asian ink painting. For while, unlike those great scroll painters of ancient China and Japan, Saugy's compositions are adamantly abstract, in contrast to the flattening of form on the "picture plane" that we see in much nonobjective contemporary art, Saugy's forms inhabit a spatially complex realm that suggests "rivers and mountains without end," to borrow a felicitous phrase from Gary Snyder's epic poem about the grandeur of Chinese landscape painting, particularly.

L'ANGE on Arches paper

Certainly, the artist herself hints that she is well aware of the Asian inspiration in her work, judging from the title "Samourai," that she has given to one of her most ethereal monochromatic compositions on paper,



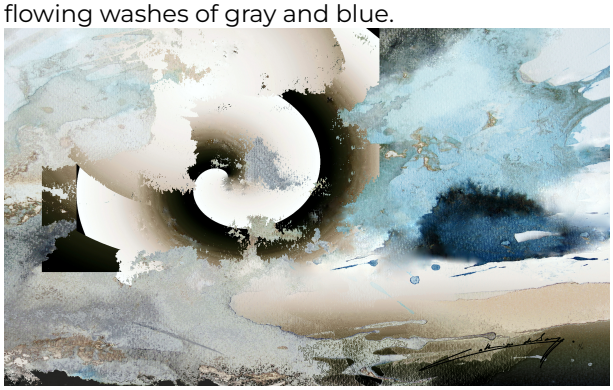
with its flowing, cloud-like forms - albeit floating amid shapes more astringently geometrical than even the sharpest mountain peaks.

SAMOURAIon Arches paper

The suggestion of literal landscape space is more overt in "Tempest," where the pull of a low-lying full moon appears to be influencing the flow of the aqueous forms below.

Yet here again, the artist reveals her faithfulness to the language of modern abstraction, as well as her metaphysical imagination, by setting the pale blue cloud at the right of the composition, directly opposite the lunar orb, against a sharply defined gray rectangle unlike anything to be found in an actual landscape.

Abstraction, after all, enables Saugy to convey inner states, as well as outer reality. In the sinuously linear composition that she calls "Sand and Dreams," for example, the somewhat distorted forms of musical notation suggest the pleasure of listening to a classical composition by Ravel and daydreaming about an exotic caravan making its way through a desert sandstorm. And in "L' Ange," another work in which the forms of musical notation figure prominently, a more tumultuous composition evokes the excitement of Beethoven, with staff lines filled with notes swirling in graceful arcs interspersed with freely flowing washes of gray and blue.



TEMPEST on Arches paper

It is in these compositions particularly that one sees the influence that music has had on the life of the artist, who as a young woman, studied piano at the Conservatoire de Musique and design at the École des Arts Appliqués in Geneva. Indeed, it was her first art form, before beginning her career as a visual artist in 1992. And one can see its influence, not only in her musically based compositions, but in the rhythmical flow of all of her works on paper, which are among the most spontaneous and direct expressions of the exquisitely refined aesthetic sensibility underlying all of the works of Catherine de Saugy.

— Maureen Flynn
art critic
NEW YORK February 2012