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Japanese Style: Sustaining Design, Reiko Sudo

RCC's Gallery 1 is a cathedral of colour, light, texture and detail. Occupied by 37 hovering swathes of Nuno fabrics spanning a chronology of 1990 to 2012, tall figure-like forms gently twist and turn with the movement of slowly shifting visitors. As part of a special season *Japanese Style: Sustaining Design*, Ruthin is playing host to a mass of interesting and engaging work. At the centre of this is a collection of fabrics by Japanese textile designer Reiko Sudo, Artistic Director of Nuno Corporation.

Nuno (布) means fabric, or cloth and was the brainchild of Reiko Sudo and co-founder Jun-ichi Arai who together shared an ambition to pioneer and champion the creative potentiality of functional textile design. Since those very beginnings (1984), Sudo has indeed pushed the discipline to its limits and beyond, in journeys through textile traditions both old and new whilst exercising the most fantastic, fluid command of materials and techniques.

As a portfolio collection there are inevitable echoes of *21:21*, the seminal touring-exhibition of Reiko Sudo and Nuno curated by Lesley Millar, which for the first time brought a major collection of Nuno textiles together under one roof. In that show the audience encountered an extraordinary forest of fabric columns, presenting a wide range of Nuno innovations. It was striking, educational and utterly engaging. Like *21:21*, this show brings poetry and science, vision and play, yet there is a new lightness of touch and breathy welcome into Nuno's fabric world. One feels a great sensitivity to the character and potential of these cloths, which are allowed to speak of applications both architectural, and of the body.

Most striking is the remarkable degree of generosity this exposition brings revealing some of the roots and origins of ideas, clearly and beautifully presented in a series of wall panels and handling samples. Together with the large pieces, these quietly articulate Reiko Sudo's thinking, the sparks of ideas and the eye for detail. It is certainly a rare privilege to be able to study examples of complex weave notations, twists of yarn material, momentary sketches and carefully executed paper designs, and lunch receipts folded into fundamentally inspiring origami pleats (see *Polygami*, 2010).

Accompanying the exhibition is a beautifully produced, typically Nuno-styled catalogue entitled *ZokuZoku*, the Japanese onomatopoeic expression suggesting expectation, thrill and potentiality. Clever curation has made further use of this employing the singular term *Zoku* (group, genus, or gang) in assigning nine collective narratives to the exhibited work. These reveal focus yet interconnectivity, and draw on materiality, technique and application. There are hints of early era Nuno, with bouncy, voluminous and wonderfully textured fabrics, together with ultra-fine sheers, liquid shining polyester, and large scale complex embroidery and needle-punch work (*Kasane*, 2005; *Tataki*, 2011). There are numerous examples of innovation of both simple and extraordinary ideas, and the reappearance of key elements like the weaving, cutting and trapping of surface floats, through alternative yarns and weights (*Slipstream*, 1994; *Patched paper*, 1997; *Tiggy*, 2003). New or performance materials are also plentiful, but there is no sense of gimmick, with instead careful and thoughtful application, for example *Baby hairs* (2007), where photo-reactive fibre gracefully billows across the surface of the cloth, and softly glows in darkness.

Much of the work speaks of hybridity and this term perhaps begins to epitomise Sudo and Nuno's capacity. There is no clumsy or heavy-handed interdisciplinarity, but instead sensitive, thoughtful merging and blending of extremely well understood traditions and practices. At the same time there is an increasingly important consideration of broad sustainability with highly evolved appreciation of recycled or organic material, re-thought and re-configured technical applications, and pragmatic use and re-interpretation of 'dying' textile skills and knowledge.

Here is highly sustained vision, perspective, patience, and 'can-do' extraordinaire. It emerges from the most useful kind of obsession, the kind that ensures Reiko Sudo and Nuno will continue to inform, fascinate, intrigue and excite us for years to come.

As I sat taking-in the exhibition, another visitor standing nearby expressed her simple reaction, "Absolutely glorious". I couldn't agree more.