



THE SILK ROAD

a proposal for an exhibition
of works
by
Rosalind Robinson
and
Midori Takaki

EXHIBITION PROPOSAL
ROSALIND ROBINSON AND MIDORI TAKAKI

1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT.

Rosalind Robinson and Midori Takaki first encountered each other's work on social media in 2018, and noticed similarities of subject matter and approach, although each working with very different materials, and from very different cultural standpoints.

The seed of an idea was sown that one day they might exhibit their work together.

In 2022 they agreed to make work inspired by the Silk Routes, and spent the following eighteen months busy in their respective studios creating paintings and ceramics for the project.

Please visit the Silk Road pages of our websites.

<https://www.rosalindrobinson.com/styled-5/> <https://www.midoritakaki.co.uk/silk-road>



1
The Muse



2
Jakarta to
S-Hertogenbosch



3
A Silk Route Encounter



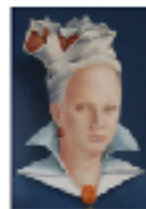
4
The
Significance of
Symbols



5
The Paradox and
the Pearl



6
La Peregrina



7
Souvenir



8
Diamond
Jack



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ROSALIND ROBINSON

ARTIST'S STATEMENT ABOUT THE PROJECT:

I began my work on the project travelling along the Silk Roads via Museum visits and books, gathering as much information as possible to begin formulating ideas for paintings. As I soon discovered, the scale of the subject is vast with the history of the Silk Routes going back thousands of years to 114 BC and the subsequent network of trade routes spanning thousands of miles across Asia, Africa and Europe.

After two or three months of research, realising that I could spend several years delving deeper into this endlessly fascinating history without ever managing to pick up a paintbrush, I decided I must choose to concentrate on just one aspect of the subject that promised to provide the most inspiration for my work.

I decided to focus my attention on the characters that might, in my imagination, be involved in trading along the Silk Routes - trade not just in commodities like silks and spices, but also the trading of ideas and cultures.

Consequently, the eight paintings I have completed for the project so far are all portraits, all of them incorporating symbolism and allegory to tell a small part of the story of trade along the Silk Routes.

Like Midori I am interested in story-telling and inventing characters. My portraits are always based on people I know, but as I work on my paintings the appearance of that person will change as I adapt their personalities to fit the narrative I want to suggest. I'm interested in what costume and facial expression can tell us about time and place and I enjoy the opportunity to invent costumes for the characters in my paintings.

It was pure chance that brought Midori and I together, but the serendipitous joining of our two cultural backgrounds, East to West, is ideally fitting for the Silk Road Project. An interesting juxtaposition of our respective works has resulted.

Please visit my website to read details of my CV.

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MIDORI TAKAKI

ARTIST'S STATEMENT ABOUT THE PROJECT:

For Japanese people, I can safely say the Silk Road starts at Xi'an. In their mind, it goes to natural wonders like the Rainbow mountains, the flaming mountains, the Taklamakan desert and the Tarim basin; arid climate covered with sands and rocks. It is such a contrast to our lush and green country. Beyond that, we vaguely imagine there was the Persian Empire, the place of stories, jewels, wealth, spice and power. There were lots of domed buildings and desert people on camels there.

With the joint project with Rosalind, I realised that there are big differences between our perceptions of the Silk Road/Routes. I exploited the gap, and created the Japanese view of the Silk Road for my first works of the project. In 2023 I went on a research trip to Nara, the capital of Japan in the 6th century when goods, culture and ideas had arrived through the Silk Road. They had a huge influence on then Japanese life, and many artefacts are still in temples and museums in Nara.

There must be so many various views to the Silk Road over the world. The descendants of horse traders, of oases inhabitants, of caravanserai owners, of bandits who attacked traders must see it in different lights. I would like to know how they view the world's most famous trading route. If this exhibition would be a start of converses, I would be very happy.

Having said that, neither British nor Japanese had actively traded on the route, let alone being on the route. Still the significance of the trade route was so great that it gave our ancestors huge influence. In fact, most parts, if not all, of Eurasia, the Indian sub-continent, Arabian Peninsula and Eastern and Northern parts of Africa had been affected by the trading.

With all the current political problems we face, I think this is even more remarkable than before.

I propose that this is not just an art exhibition, but it has the elements of history, anthropology and storytelling. The vast wealth was made on silk, which was used as currency in parts of the route. Silk was very luxurious, and it still is even though it has reduced in value. It can be said that vast wealth came from silk moth cocoons. I think that is the most amazing part of the history.

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1.
THE MUSE

'Muse' was the first work I made in the exploration of ideas for the Silk Road series of paintings.

Silk production was exclusive to China until the Silk Road opened in 114 BC. The white mask of 'Muse' references the Chinese cultural tradition of white face paint, while silk itself is represented by silk worm cocoons nestling atop the silk turban, the embroidery of mulberry leaves on the waistcoat and the silk moth motif in the necklace.



2
's-HERTOGENBOSCH TO JAKARTA

In 1595 the first Dutch ships set sail to the East Indies to access spices directly from Asia, eventually waging war, colonising the Indonesian archipelago and enslaving it's people. It's a cruel history, but in contrast, my painting is a light-hearted fusion of cultures: the paintings of 15th century Dutch artist Hieronymus Bosch, the silks of India and the textile patterns of Indonesia.



3
A SILK ROUTE ENCOUNTER

This painting depicts a meeting of minds. On the left I imagine an architect from Genoa, an important Silk Route port, on the right a philosopher from Bahrain. The buildings in the background combine the architecture found in both places. A closer examination of the painting reveals symbolic references to the occupations of the two men.

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4

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PAPER CRANES

A juxtaposition of symbols from Chinese and Japanese culture illustrate the exchange of ideas and beliefs between the two countries which began as early as 630BC, long before Japan officially became part of the Silk Route.

In the history of both countries the crane was used in the arts as a symbol of longevity. In my painting, paper cranes nest in the young boy's hat while another Chinese symbol representing longevity (Shou) forms the patterns on his shirt.



5

THE PARADOX AND THE PEARL

Pearls, jade and other precious gems were lucrative items of trade on the Silk Road.

La Peregrina was the name given to a pearl found off the coast of Panama by an enslaved African diver in 1513. It is one of the most famous pearls in the world. The pearl was gifted to the Spanish monarchy but in my painting it is worn by an African girl. On her head she carries a type of seaweed found in the waters off the Pearl Islands, and on her body is drawn a map of the Islands.



6

LA PEREGRINA

La Peregrina was the name given to a pearl found off the coast of Panama in 1513. At the time it was the largest perfect pear-shaped pearl ever found anywhere in the world.

It was given as a gift to King Phillip II of Spain in the 1530s and stayed in the Spanish Royal Collection for 200 years. My painting re-imagines a young Spanish princess wearing the famous pearl with a collar of jade and other precious gemstones.

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7

SOUVENIR



Tulips, originally found growing wild in Central Asia, were transported along the Silk Road to Turkey in the 14th century and cultivated as highly prized plants for the palace gardens of the Sultans. In the 16th century the bulbs were introduced into Europe via the Maritime Silk Routes and were traded amongst Europeans, particularly the Dutch, as an extremely valuable commodity.

I imagine the subject of my painting to be a young sailor working on a Dutch ship who secretes a number of tulip bulbs in his headdress to take home as souvenirs.

8

DIAMOND JACK



Diamond Jack is a trader in diamonds, jade and precious gemstones found in Central Asia and other locations along the Silk Routes. On his head he carries a velvet bundle containing gems in their raw state, and proudly displays his resulting wealth in the jewellery that adorns his tunic.

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9
THE SPICE TRADER

The first of a pair of two circular paintings depicting traders travelling along the Silk Roads. Nutmeg, Cumin, black pepper, vanilla and Star Anise all feature in the Spice Trader's costume and can also be found hidden in the Northern Hemisphere constellations that form the background to the painting.



10
THE PEARL TRADER

The second of a pair of two circular paintings depicting traders travelling along the Silk Roads. Pearls, jade, turquoise, rubies and emeralds all feature in the Pearl Trader's costume and can also be found hidden in the Southern Hemisphere constellations that form the background to the painting.

New work continues to be added. Please check the Silk Roads pages of our websites.

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1

EMPRESS LEIZU

In 27 BC, Empress Leizu, the wife of Yellow Emperor, was said to have discovered silk thread while she enjoyed tea under a mulberry tree; a silkworm cocoon has dropped in her tea cup and a thread unfurls in it. As her discovery was the basis of the huge wealth in Silk Road trades, she is worshipped like a goddess in China. Because there was no record I could find for fashion or hairstyle in around that time, I used hairstyle found in the oldest records. This work shows my respect to this legendary empress.

2



DIORAMA - Zhangye Danxi, Dunhuang mogao, Tien shan, Taklamakan desert, Flaming mountains, Turfan, Kucha

For Japanese minds in general, the Silk Road starts from Xi'an, the capital of China during the Silk Road had been the main global trading route, and then the western part of current China, which contains Taklamakan desert, and then 'Beyond'. At the end of the route, there was Persia, a mysterious exotic wealthy country with domed buildings. In this work I have depicted what Japanese people imagine when we hear the word, the Silk Road in diorama. The female has decoration of Turquoise blue, which was used in the Western part of China, as some of the cave paintings in the area show.

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3

ON THE CAMELBACK



Vast wealth was made on and along the Silk Road for centuries. That wouldn't have been possible without camels. They have been bred for travelling specially in the Taklamacan desert, the harshest conditions on the route. I bet they didn't want to be dragged along. I wanted to shed a light on how the animals contributed to the rise and demise of empires and the creation of the vast wealth for centuries.

4

FROM MULBERRY TO BOLTS OF SILK



Sericulture goes back to a long time. Nothing has changed in process from old times. It is extraordinary to think that beautiful fabric was made from threads exuded from cocoons, and pupae inside was boiled alive! In this work I wanted to embrace the life of the silk moth, which unwillingly contributed to human wealth and power.

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5

JAPANESE PRINCESS, NISHIKITENO HIMEMIKO

She witnessed the arrival of exotic artefacts from the world in Nara. The trading and missionaries to China had widened and deepened Japanese culture. China then was what Rome was to Western Europe at that time. From foods, such as fruits, vegetables, noodles, to dance, music instruments, Buddhism, government system, and characters, all aspects of civilization arrived in Japan, and it enriched the culture. She was aspired to learn higher culture. She wears face decoration popular in the Tang dynasty. Later, after her father was assassinated, she will escape to countryside with her mother. She sadly died on the way, but her mother reached north eastern part of Japan where she was said to have spread the knowledge of sericulture in the region. The town still boasts silk production after 1400 years and there is a small shrine for her in the town.



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