

**HANNA  
YOKOZAWA  
FARQUHARSON:  
WHOLENESS**

## **Wholeness: Healing and Empathy in Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson's Textile Works**

By Amy Gogarty

Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson listens closely to the vibrating universe, noting signs of changing seasons and passages of time. She is present in the moment, cherishing its beauty and accepting it will pass. Her approach to art is shaped by her Japanese heritage and by two aesthetic principles from her homeland: *wabi-sabi*, the beauty of unfinished or imperfect things, and *mono no aware*, awareness of empathy and impermanence.

The exhibition *Wholeness* brings together two bodies of work, *Calling* and *Gaia Symphony*. Individual pieces resemble quilts, a nod to the importance of quilt-making in Saskatchewan, where the chill of winter impressed her when she moved with her family to Saltcoats, Saskatchewan, in 2011. Working in a care home, she noticed how quilts brought comfort and security. Although she had trained and worked in design, she had not considered textiles as an art form until 2016, when she began to make quilts of her own.<sup>1</sup>

Born and raised in Japan, Yokozawa Farquharson traces her deep love of nature to Buddhism and Shintoism, which continue to shape her spiritual life.<sup>2</sup> Titles to her works provide insight into her thinking: *Full Moon*, *The Milky Way*, and *Star Trail* invoke the cosmos. Other titles suggest natural phenomena or geography: *Hoar Frost*, *Moss*, *Prairie Grasslands*, while others still recollect states of being or consciousness. All point to a spiritually engaged understanding of the world.

*Calling*, completed in 2020, focuses on health and healing. For Yokozawa Farquharson, creating art is an act of healing and purifying. Appreciating connections between life and death—accepting change and loss—is an important aspect of *mono no aware*. Works in this series draw on abstract

forms to suggest emotional ties to the community and environment. *Circles*, a closely quilted square of white, grey, and black cotton, charts expanding circles of kinship, which knit communities together. *Wholeness* features vertical rows of closely spaced stitching with a circle of loose threads at the centre. The circle suggests harmony, family, or love, but it could also represent the earth.<sup>3</sup> *Prairie Grasslands* plays on the theme of the horizon. Balancing the pale gold of the grass against a soft white sky, the work celebrates her new home.

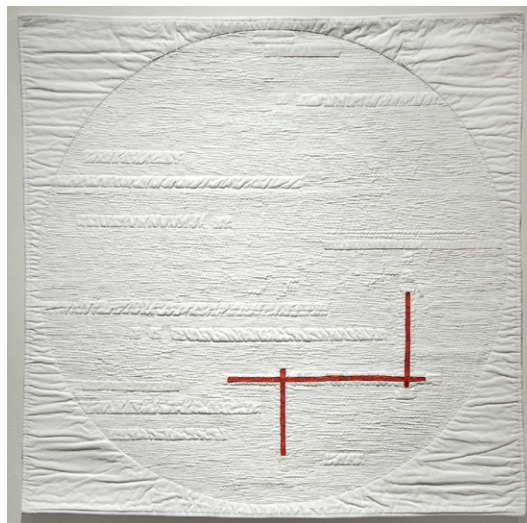
Pieces worked on wool felt accentuate the weight and drape of the textile. Tiny seed stitches pick out concentric circles in *Star Trail*, mark craters in *Full Moon*, and trace energetic pulses in *The Milky Way*. The stitches nestle into the plush surface of the wool, generating a tactile frisson. In *Moss*, a series of three circular works using polyester felt, stitches pucker the fabric into patterns resembling the plant's undulating surface.

Other works are geometric. In *Choices*, small squares are quilted into a tight grid, while in *Vibrations*, a pale grey stripe traverses a series of concentric rectangles. In *Hoar Frost*, the artist captures patterns created by ice crystals, delighting in their transient beauty. In these, as in all of the works, combinations of black, grey, white, or ivory, emanate a sense of calm. The artist works with a neutral palette, which she feels is more effective in conveying her desire for wholeness and healing.<sup>4</sup> The subtlety invites close viewing, which is rewarded by appreciation for the skill and intricacy of these seemingly simple works. Within the reduced range, the artist creates depth and complexity with shifting shadows and compressed textures of fabric, thread, and padding.

The second series, *Gaia Symphony*, 2021, is dedicated to what the artist calls “the symphony played by Gaia, our mother earth.” She likens the life force flowing through all things to music, which she expresses through these works,<sup>5</sup> echoing the ancient Greek concept of *musica universalis*, or



*Circles*, cotton, wool, cotton batting, cotton thread, 111.8 x 111.8 cm, 2018



*Round Window*, cotton, cotton batting, cotton thread, Japanese silk obijime (sashi), 96.5cm x 96.5cm, 2017

“music of the spheres.” The Greeks perceived the movements of celestial bodies as a form of music not audible to human ears, but revelatory of a divine resonance based on mathematical proportions.<sup>6</sup>

The series was inspired by the work of Saskatchewan-born painter Agnes Martin (1912-2004), whose expression of immaterial concepts often took the form of minimalist stripes or grids. Yokozawa Farquharson identifies with Martin’s use of the grid to express spiritual connections between elements of the universe.<sup>7</sup> The grid also references weaving and textiles, the basis of her art.

*Gaia Symphony* repurposes silk kimono and obi fabric from garments once worn by family members or collected from other sources. Traditional kimono fabric is woven in narrow panels bordered by selvages, allowing the kimonos to be taken apart for washing and reassembled. Out of

respect for the beauty and artistry of the original fabric, Yokozawa Farquharson restricted her interventions to the most minimal, yet these small changes transform the raw material into luminous, expressive works.

Kimonos played an important part in the artist’s life. Her mother, who loved kimonos and practiced a number of textile arts, encouraged her daughter’s creativity and supported her desire to become an artist. She also played and performed traditional Japanese instruments and dances. As a young woman, Yokozawa Farquharson studied kimonos, learning how to wear and care for them.<sup>8</sup> Thus the artist’s use of kimono fabric resonates on personal, aesthetic, and conceptual levels.

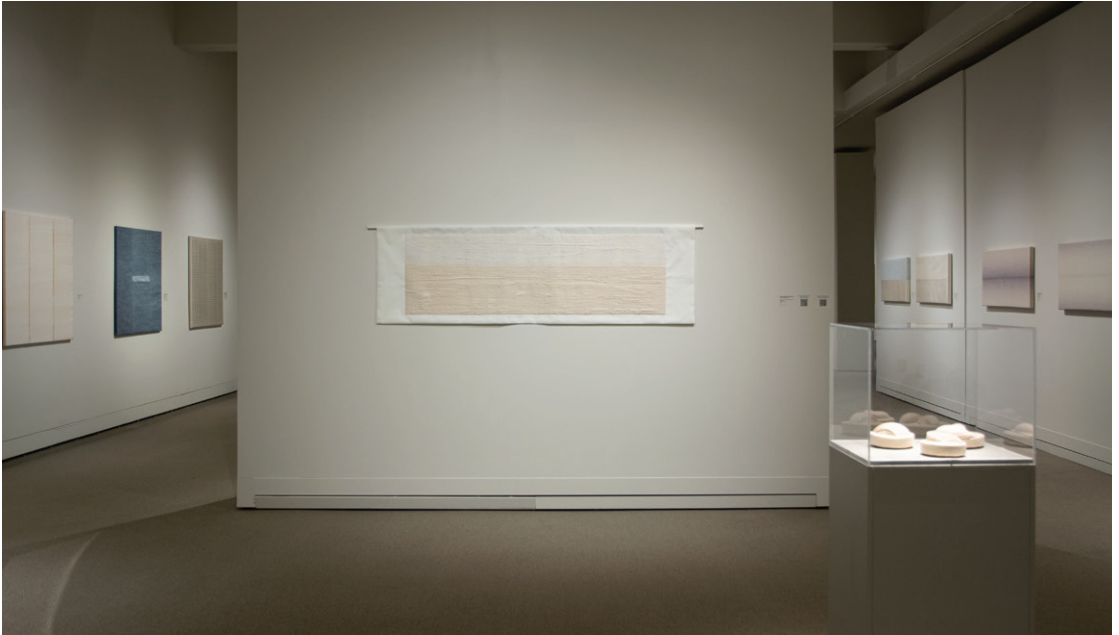
Just as titles to many of Agnes Martin’s works—*Earth, Tree, Leaf*—reference nature, many titles in *Gaia Symphony* similarly refer to the natural world. However, neither Martin, nor Yokozawa Farquharson, depict nature; both use abstract



*Fossils and Seashells*, (top left) #4, (top right) #3, (bottom centre) #5, cotton, pins, polyester batting, various dimensions, 2020



*Prairie Grasslands*, cotton, cotton batting, wool batting, cotton thread, 59.7 x 184.2 cm, 2020



Installation view of the *Wholeness* exhibition at the Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery.



Installation view; left to right: *Light, Joyful, Love*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm (each), 2021

imagery to interpret nature not as it is seen, but as it is felt or experienced. Agnes Martin stated emphatically:

**My paintings have neither object nor space nor line nor anything—no forms. They are light, lightness, about merging, about formlessness, breaking down form... A world without objects, without interruption, making a work without interruption or obstacle... as you would cross an empty beach to look at the ocean.<sup>9</sup>**

A number of works in *Gaia Symphony* invoke light. *Light of Jōmon* references one of Japan's earliest cultures, which flourished between 14,000 and 300 BCE. The Jōmon period<sup>10</sup> was characterized by cultural complexity and beautifully decorated utilitarian objects. This work consists of pale silk fabric divided into squares by sets of black warp and weft threads; the whole is stitched with tiny pleats into an all-over grid. The black threads appear as delicate marks where they lie on the surface, and as grey shadows where they are folded behind. This simple arrangement is mesmerizing in its repetition, variation and asymmetry. *Light*, a square panel consisting of three nearly identical horizontal stripes of white and pale grey, appears to emanate light from within, while *Sun*, a horizontal oblong, consists of two slightly different shades of pale silk sewn together. The beauty of the fabric and subtlety of the contrast draw viewers close to bask in what feels like a wintery sun.

Several works suggest states of being. *Joyful* features three horizontal stripes traversed by rows of closely spaced lines of machine stitching, which create secondary stripes. The artist thought of these lines as a musical score, in particular, the

fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, "Ode to Joy." She noted Martin's love of Beethoven, and saw the music as echoing the song of the universe, "exploding with happiness."<sup>11</sup>

Others recall living things—*Bird*, *Children*, *Forest*—and natural phenomena—*Air*, *Water*, *Wind*. These works reflect the Shinto belief that all natural entities have spirits and are alive. *Bird*, constructed from three strips of pale pink silk, is crossed with textured bands made from a summer obi sash. Four sets of five nearly invisible lines sewn across the pink fabric represent the bird singing, while the sash, which is created from a breathable fabric, suggests the bird flying free. *Air* is also constructed from a breathable fabric, suggesting it is alive with breath.<sup>12</sup>

With these works, Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson aspires to reach out to viewers, encouraging them to feel the healing power of love and to experience peace and tranquility. The beauty, simplicity, and clarity of these works support her contention that art can heal not only our individual selves but, also, through empathy and compassion, the planet.

<sup>1</sup>"Turning Down the Volume: A conversation with textile artist Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson," *Canadian Quilter* (Winter 2020), 30.

<sup>2</sup>Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson, email "Re: a few questions," received by Amy Gogarty, July 4, 2021.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>"Turning Down the Volume," 33.

<sup>5</sup>Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson, unpublished artist proposal to the Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, "Gaia Symphony", March 26, 2020.

<sup>6</sup>Aurora Orchestra, "Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres," May 28, 2019, <https://www.auroraorchestra.com/2019/05/28/pythagoras-the-music-of-the-spheres/> (Accessed July 4, 2021).

<sup>7</sup>Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson, interview by Amy Gogarty, June 26, 2021.

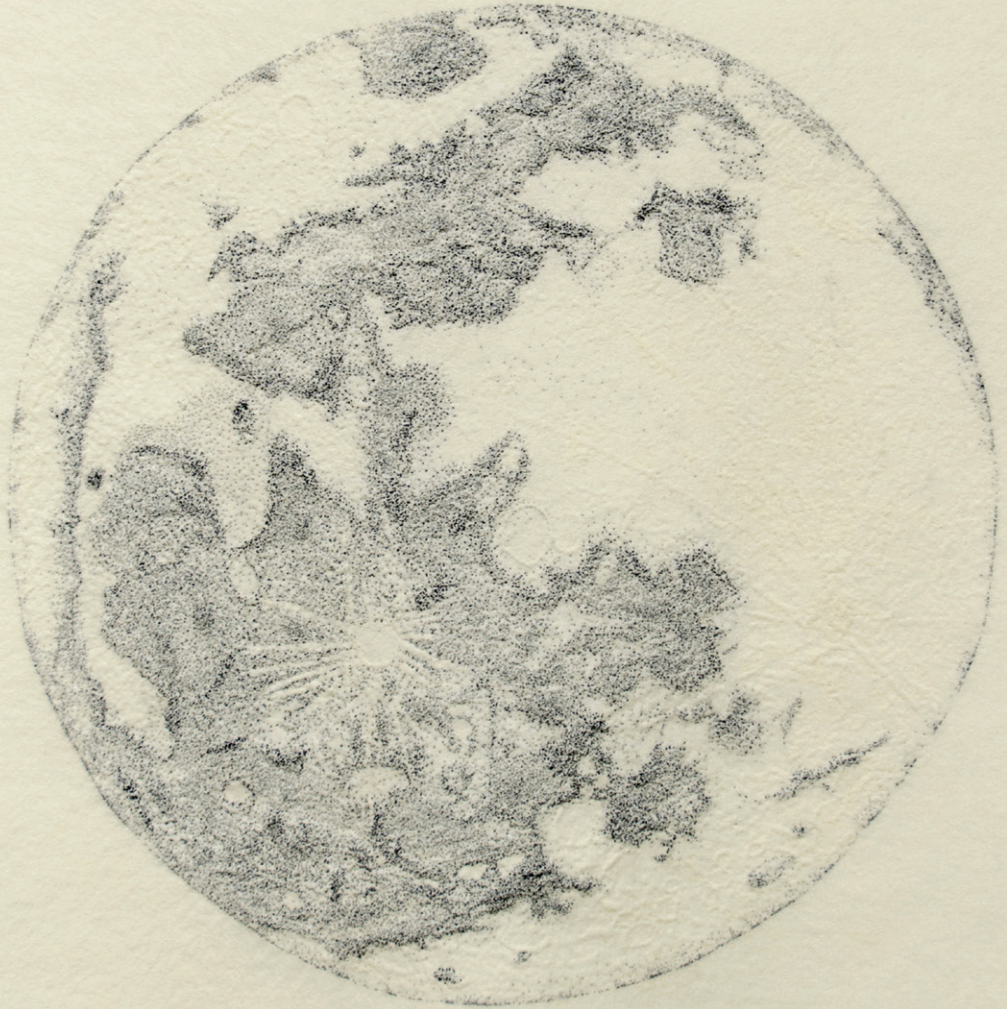
<sup>8</sup>"Turning Down the Volume," 30.

<sup>9</sup>Lily Wei, "The Eternal Joy of an Attentive Mind," *Art in America* (March 2005), 105.

<sup>10</sup>For more information, please see: Secretariat Office for the Promotion of the World Heritage Inscription of Jomon Prehistoric Sites, "Jomon Prehistoric Sites in Northern Japan," <https://jomon-japan.jp/en/> (Accessed July 29, 2021).

<sup>11</sup>Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson, email "Re: a few questions," received by Amy Gogarty, July 2, 2021.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.



*Full Moon (detail)*, wool felt, cotton, thread,  
129.5 x 90.2 cm, 2020

## LIST OF WORKS

1. *Circles*, cotton, wool, cotton batting, cotton thread, 111.8 x 111.8 cm, 2018
2. *Round Window*, cotton, cotton batting, cotton thread, Japanese silk obijime (sashi), 96.5 x 96.5 cm, 2017
3. *Hoar Frost*, cotton, cotton batting, cotton thread, 102.9 x 77.5 cm, 2019
4. *The Light Shines*, cotton, cotton batting, cotton thread, 67.3 x 158.8 cm, 2021
5. *Prairie Grasslands*, cotton, cotton batting, wool batting, cotton thread, 59.7 x 184.2 cm, 2020
6. *Star Trail*, wool felt, cotton thread, 132.1 x 91.4 cm, 2020
7. *The Milky Way*, wool felt, cotton thread, 129.5 x 92.7 cm, 2020
8. *Crescent Moon*, wool felt, cotton thread, 128.5 x 89.0 cm, 2021
9. *Full Moon*, wool felt, cotton thread, 129.5 x 90.2 cm, 2020
10. *Fossils and Seashells #3, 4 & 5*, cotton, pins, polyester batting, (#3) 6.5 x 17.8 cm diameter, (#4) 6.5 x 13.4 cm diameter, (#5) 8.0 x 13.7 cm diameter, 2020
11. *Tree Rings* (2 works), cotton, cotton thread, 38.1 x 43.2 cm, 2020
12. *Moss* (3 works), polyester felt, wool batting, cotton thread, 35.6 cm diameter, 2020
13. *Ha-Na-Bi / Sparkler*, wool felt, cotton thread, 50.2 x 50.2 cm, 2020
14. *Wholeness*, cotton, wool, cotton batting, cotton thread, 50.2 x 50.2 cm, 2020
15. *Vibrations*, cotton, cotton batting, cotton thread, Japanese silk obijime (sashi), 99.1 x 69.9 cm, 2020
16. *Synchronicities*, polyester felt, 50.2 x 50.2 cm, 2020
17. *Breakthrough*, wool felt, cotton thread, 50.2 x 50.2 cm, 2020
18. *Choices*, cotton, cotton batting, cotton thread, 64.8 x 52.1 cm, 2020
19. *Air*, vintage silk kimono, 50.8 x 101.6 cm, 2021
20. *Harmony*, vintage silk kimono, 61.0 x 61.0 cm, 2021
21. *Prairie Summer*, vintage silk kimono, 50.8 x 101.6 cm, 2021
22. *Prairie Winter*, vintage silk kimono, 50.8 x 101.6 cm, 2021
23. *Bird*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
24. *Children*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
25. *Flower*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
26. *Innocence*, vintage silk kimono, 61.0 x 61.0 cm, 2021
27. *Rainbow*, vintage silk kimono, 61.0 x 61.0 cm, 2021
28. *Water*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
29. *Joyful*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
30. *Light*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
31. *Living Things*, vintage silk kimono, 101.6 x 101.6 cm, 2021
32. *繩文の光 Jōmon no Hikari (Light of Jōmon)*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
33. *Forest*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
34. *Happiness II*, vintage silk kimono, 101.6 x 101.6 cm, 2021
35. *Stone*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
36. *Sun*, vintage silk kimono, 50.8 x 101.6 cm, 2021
37. *Love*, vintage silk kimono, 76.2 x 76.2 cm, 2021
38. *Wind*, vintage silk kimono, 101.6 x 101.6 cm, 2021

## BIOGRAPHY

Originally from Japan, **Hanna Yokozawa Farquharson** is a textile artist now based in Saltcoats, SK. Establishing her practice in 2016, her work has been exhibited internationally, receiving international awards, and is represented in the SK Arts Permanent Collection. Recent solo exhibitions include presentations at the Godfrey Dean Art Gallery (Yorkton, SK) and the Mann Art Gallery (Prince Albert, SK). In 2021, she was nominated for an Emerging Artist SK Arts Award.

**Amy Gogarty** is an independent artist and writer based in Vancouver, BC. She has authored over one hundred critical essays, reviews or presentations relating to visual art and craft practice.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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