

## New wave of art

**MICHELLE YAMAMOTO EXHIBITS NEW YINSPIRATION COLLECTION AT SACHI SUSHI AS PART OF ARTWALK**

by **Nicole Fitzgerald**

Six months ago, Michelle Yamamoto was content with her illustration pursuits: 18 covers for Pique Newsmagazine, commissioned works for various businesses and organizations, and her own line of Whistler-themed, humorous gift cards.

The faces of a few remaining paintings from Yamamoto's first art exhibit, which opened to rave reviews in three national newspapers and Asia People Magazine nearly seven years ago in the Philippines, spoke of more. But the silent call of paint to canvas was lost in the hurried everyday routine of a working single mother living in Whistler.

Amongst surf, ski and bike trips with girlfriends; amongst school carpools and contract jobs, like her paintings looking on, the inspiration was always there. The inspiration, like the cast iron Buddha who has watched over her creative life for more than a decade, was just lost behind a bag being packed for a kite trip.

But the laundry cleared this winter with the turning pages of what she calls the "illustrators bible" and daily visits to the week-long BraveArt exhibition at the World Ski and Snowboard Festival. Inspiration hit — rather Yinpiration struck, the title of her new exhibit showing at Sachi Sushi for July and August as part of Artwalk, a two-month artist showcase taking place throughout Whistler Village.

Yinpiration is defined on her website as the partnering of "yin", the Chinese representation of female energy, with "inspiration" a word derived from the phrase "in spirit". If the definition had a footnote, however, it would read: take the winter off and completely devote your energies to creating.



**GOING WITH THE FLOW** Artist Michelle Yamamoto painted live at the opening reception of her new exhibit Yinpiration showing at Sachi Sushi as part of ArtWalk celebrations. The local painter uses images of surfers to inspire many of her sunset-coloured works.

**What:** ArtWalk  
**Who:** Michelle Yamamoto  
**Registration:** July/August  
**Where:** Whistler Village

I say creating because Yamamoto had no idea how her yinpiration would manifest itself. She began with the yin, the female, her outdoor adventures with girlfriends over land, air and sea. She was in awe of her comrades' passion for both the elements and the extreme. She began seeking out images with the same commanding presence.

"In my world, it's the women that rock," she said. "It's a tribute to the women who inspire me."

The university-credited illustrator, who enjoys the challenge of working within a framework rather than in the infinity of a blank canvas, combed through portfolios of local action-sports photographers' works. Climber and surfer magazines began to stack up and female figures began to emerge, first scaling a rock face then sliding down a water face.

Oceans' real time blues began to give way to sunset's blushing pinks, oranges and rusts, the signature colours of her new collection. Portraiture and anatomy classes at the Vancouver Academy of Art sketched itself into female shapes fading in and out of their watery landscapes: hands reaching into currents where whitewater took on a life of its own.

To the surprise of Yamamoto, the saltwater foam shapeshifted into a dragon. Then her Japanese calligraphy brushes

schooled in boku jazz, a form of Zen Japanese calligraphy, were lifted from the shelf to build even more metaphorical layers into her works.

"I was painting the wave and I noticed a dragon figure within it so I filled in the face, feet," said the master calligrapher. "(The surfer) has harmony with the dragon; the ocean and the power of the surf. You need to be in harmony with the surf. (The painting) tells a story about where he is."

Harmony and balance is a recurring theme in Michelle's works: powerful and soothing, strong and soft, male and female.

So where is the yang in all of this career yin? Right next to her paintings boasting a red dot denoting a sold artwork hung on the wall at Sachi Sushi.

During the ArtWalk opening celebrations earlier this month, Yamamoto was commissioned to produce a customized work. She also sold two of her largest originals and three reproductions on opening night.

"It was a big night for me," she said. "My face hurt from smiling so much... ArtWalk is an awesome concept. A huge thank you to the Whistler Arts Council and Doti for creating this opportunity for me. It gives artists the chance to realize their creative dreams of exhibiting and having our artwork recognized and appreciated."

For participating galleries and ArtWalk brochure locations, visit [whistlerartscouncil.com](http://whistlerartscouncil.com) or drop by Whistler information centres and/or MY Millennium Place. ■