

Sarah Waites

The Power of the Ephemeral: My Response to Yusuke Asai's Installation

Walking into Yusuke Asai's installation is walking into a holy space. I am overcome with the same sense of awe and wonder as when I entered Westminster Cathedral. Looking at Yusuke Asai's mural, I am awed. The swirling space and curves reveal something new each time I see them, offering up unexpected surprises.

In addition to the intricacy, I think so much of the power of the space comes from its ephemerality. In a matter of weeks, it will be gone forever. Yes, there will be photos and digital records, but none of those things can hope to capture the essence or awe of the space. In the gallery, I find myself looking desperately at each figure, each marvelous detail, each swirl of earth, trying to commit them to my brain for eternity. It's like looking at the face of someone you love who's dying - you're trying so hard to capture every last moment with them, to imprint every detail of their face into your mind, but at the same time, you know the entire venture is hopeless. Your mind will betray you, and eventually, you will have only the vaguest impression of their smile or the light in their eye. Yusuke Asai's installation reminds us of our own mortality.

The space would not have had nearly the power if made with the usual artistic materials. So often in art, we are obsessed with preservation. Our materials advertise their archival qualities, and our cultural masterpieces are tended to by a fleet of trained archivists. When I look at a painting in a museum, it may passionately affect me, but it has never had the power of Yusuke Asai's work, because I know that in all likelihood it will outlive me. It will be there, for whenever I want to return to it. But Yusuke Asai's space reminds me that all things must pass.