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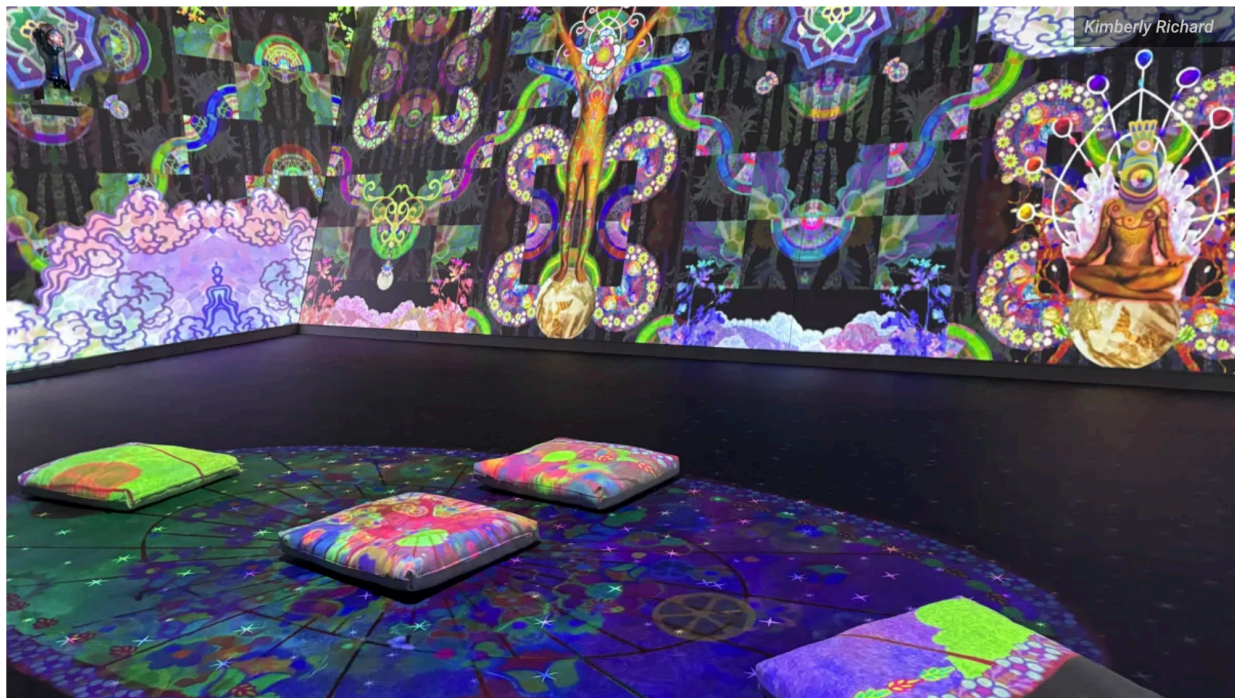


ART AND CULTURE

Enter the dreamy world of Saya Woolfalk at the Crow Museum's UT Dallas location

Woolfalk's immersive world of the Empathic Universe is on view at the Crow Museum of Asian Art's Richardson location through Sept. 7.

By **Kimberly Richard** • Published May 24, 2025 • Updated on May 24, 2025 at 12:23 pm



Enter another world at "Saya Woolfalk: Floating World of the Cloud Quilt."

Step into Multimedia Gallery 5 at the Crow Museum of Asian Art's location on the UT Dallas campus and you will find yourself in a fantastical world of hybridity and empathy created by American artist Saya Woolfalk. *Saya Woolfalk: Floating World of the Cloud Quilt*, a multimedia installation, is on view through Sept. 7.

Born in 1979 to a Japanese mother and a mixed-race African American and Caucasian father, Woolfalk considers herself "binational."

"Japanese was her first language. She remains fluent. Although her family moved to Scarsdale, New York when she was two, she spent every summer in Japan with her maternal family. Growing up, she reflects she always felt more Japanese than American," said Natalia Di Pietrantonio, curator at the Crow Museum of Asian Art.

This fusion of cultures influences Woolfalk's artwork as she investigates hybridity and builds her own world.

"She creates her own ecosystem which she entitles the Empathic Universe," Di Pietrantonio said. "It's a cross of utopic dream, science fiction and reality."

In the Empath world, technology is coeval to the genetic and social interdependence of plant life with humans. Woolfalk populates this universe with hybrid characters.

"When you step into her virtual world," Di Pietrantonio said. "It's inhabited by these Empathics, a fictional race of women who alter their genetic make-up by fusing with plants."

With a three-channel wall video, a single-channel floor video and an infinity loop, Floating World of the Cloud Quilt immerses visitors in the natural world with references to spiritual traditions. This installation builds on this universe by drawing on symbols and imagery from Woolfalk's vast analog and digital archives of past projects. Woolfalk also draws inspiration from the Crow Museum's collection.

"Many of the figures sit in lotus positions, " Di Pietrantonio said. "Others are enrobed in feather-like petals and feathered headdresses dripping down their shoulders."

Although this installation is technology-based, the work is inspired by the craft of quilting or collage.

"Saya spent time sewing with her grandmother, making use of remnants from the family textile business in Japan. Her grandmother encouraged her interest in making things," Di Pietrantonio said. "In another sense, the whole installation is a quilt where each piece or pixel is a square."

Sitting on a pillow in the center of the installation, visitors are wrapped up in the Empathic Universe as if it were a giant blanket.

"A quilt is an object of comfort, warmth, and protection, and it is also a space for dreaming. With this work, I took a number of historical elements from the Empathic Universe that resonate specifically with the Crow Museum's collection, and quilted them together so the audience can experience what being immersed in that world feels like," Woolfalk said in a statement for the museum.

With its infinity loop, the installation's emotional exploration is timely and timeless.

"Visitors engage in this alternative mode of being in which Empathics, as a lived-in community, invite us to center on the emotions of compassion, empathy and love," Di Pietrantonio said.