

FAMILY STYLE

Standing on Top of the Universe

By Ann Binlot | Photo: Courtesy of The Peninsula Hotels

Japan-born Saya Woolfalk constructs a thought-provoking moment of respite amongst the chaos of Hong Kong.



Saya Woolfalk, *Visionary Reality Portal*, 2024.

Full of luxury shops, scenic views, and inviting restaurants, Tsim Sha Tsui is one of Hong Kong’s tourist hubs, with the Star Ferry pier, Avenue of the Stars, Chungking Mansions, and the Victoria Harbour among the many sites to see in bustling Kowloon. It’s understandable that one would need a moment of respite to calm themselves amidst the crowded streets and sidewalks.

That’s what Brooklyn-based artist [Saya Woolfalk](#) had in mind when she concocted *Visionary Reality Portal*—what she calls “an immersive and multisensory digital-meditation chamber,”—located on the ground floor of The Peninsula Arcade, the shopping center situated in [The Peninsula Hong Kong](#) hotel through May 17.

Part of Art in Resonance, the hotel’s art program co-curated by Bettina Prentice and Isolde Brielmaier that launched in conjunction with Art Basel Hong Kong during [Hong Kong Art Week](#), Woolfalk’s installation is among four public artworks situated within the hotel, including Kingsley Ng’s *Esmeralda* hanging in front of the hotel’s facade, Elise Morin’s *Soli* in the hotel lobby, and Lachlan Turczan’s *Harmonic Resonance*, at the entrance to Verandah, the first floor restaurant. “The artists in the program invite accidental audiences to tune in to something deeper than a casual glance may allow,” says Prentice.



Saya Woolfalk, Visionary Reality Portal.

For her part, Woolfalk, who was commissioned by the curators in 2019, created a mesmerizing otherworldly installation that transports viewers into another dimension. “The multisensorial digital meditation chamber includes a myriad of cultural references from mandalas to stained glass windows to nkisi,” adds Prentice. “She offers viewers a window into the contemplation of the divine through the lens of centuries of spiritual practice from around the world.”

Born in Japan to a Japanese mother and Black and white American father, the artist’s work is also an amalgam of her multicultural identity. She wants visitors to not only meditate, but to also think. “I actually think of my work as a response to the diffusion, collision, and conflicts of cultures with one another, and the cultures that they create,” Woolfalk says. “So it’s not intended to be just work that is straightforward and calm. It’s supposed to be a little bit disorienting, a little bit unnerving. But hopefully it opens up a new space.”

Guests who wander in will see colorful, dancing flowers as a spiritual being stands before them. A dreamy soundscape composed by Dim Gurevich immediately eases visitors into a tranquil state. “What I hope is, maybe they’ll sit down inside of this pool of light, maybe they’ll sit on one of these Ottomans that are outside of the space, and look and hear and feel,” says Woolfalk. “It feels like you’re standing on top of the universe. That’s what I wanted.”