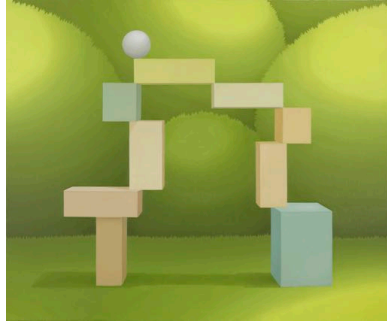


STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Horizon That Appears Out of The Sleepy Woods
Yusuke Asai, Takanobu Kobayashi, Kyoko Murase and Syozo Taniguchi
selected by Yoshitomo Nara

28 April – 1 June 2016

Private view Wednesday 27 April 2016, 6-8pm



'Horizon That Appears Out of The Sleepy Woods' brings together work by four Japanese artists: Yusuke Asai, Takanobu Kobayashi, Kyoko Murase and Syozo Taniguchi. Each artist lives and works in and around Tokyo and has never exhibited in London before. Selected by Yoshitomo Nara, the exhibition runs concurrent with Nara's own show. So often Japanese art is distilled through a Western lens and this provides an opportunity to connect directly with the Japanese avant-garde. As a counterpoint to Nara, who is known worldwide, the under exposure of these artists outside Japan is an important comment in itself. Much like Nara's approach to making art, these four artists reference Japanese and international art and culture in their work. Their critical understanding of contemporary issues in a global world brought these artists to Nara's attention, and this underpins the exhibition.

Yusuke Asai was born in 1981 in Tokyo, Japan. He is a self-taught painter whose work is inspired by folklore. Without formal training Asai honed his distinctive style by drawing from life in urban zoos. His work therefore conjures an imagined dream-like nature. In his paintings, dense forests full of imaginary animals and people are set against lush patterns that crawl across the surface of the work. The work is illustrative, and akin to the historic wall paintings of Ancient Egypt and India. Asai is well known for his large-scale murals that traverse the floor and walls, seen recently as part of his show entitled 'Yamatane' at Rice University Art Gallery in Houston. For these he uses soil as his palette; a surprisingly wide spectrum of rich browns that seem almost too vibrant to have come from the ground. The artist has also used soil in some of the paintings shown here.

Takanobu Kobayashi was born in Nihonbashi, Tokyo in 1960. Kobayashi's realism, which spans an array of subjects, is so finely painted and cleanly executed that some objects appear three-dimensional. *"I want to depict existence. Everything has a characteristic attribute and that's where its meaning comes from. Once you take away the meaning, you get down to the essence. My idea is to paint vessels, people, pillows or trees, all in the same way as 'things'".* Though his work has the feel of a still life, Kobayashi often paints from memory. The phenomenon of 'hikikomori' - young adults escaping from the pressures of modern society by retreating into their bedrooms - is well known. But fewer people know of 'sotokomori', a similar phenomenon where people escape abroad. There, a gentler pace of life and lack of social interaction that comes with linguistic and cultural barriers serves

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the same function as bedroom walls. The precise focus of Kobayashi's gaze and particular choice of still life subjects can be understood in light of this.

Kyoko Murase was born in 1963 in Gifu, Japan. *"It seems as if I am depicting a moment, but the image includes multiple histories including times of doubt and uncertainty, which may indeed be a kind of entry into the work. Even if you enter the work, however, you may find that things are in flux, which can be simultaneously comforting and disturbing."* Her ethereal paintings and drawings have long depicted girls. These dream-like figures, often enjoying the sense of floating or flying are highly emotive. Her technique; the use of feather light strokes of oil paint, soft colour pencil or collage with petals or magazines, underlines the exploration of femininity that pervades her subject matter.

Syozo Taniguchi was born in 1990 in Ehime, Japan. This young artist works in illustration and video, in a style that clearly takes its lead from Nara's legacy. The tales of companionship and adventure played out in his animations are a millennial investigation of ideas about adolescence and identity that Nara also explores. Taniguchi's work, like the others in this exhibition, is seen in London for the first time.

Each of the artists shown here, though diverse in their approach, works in response to an element of contemporary society: femininity, the environment, spirituality and adolescence. In bringing these four artists together, Nara showcases the diversity and relevance of under-represented Japanese contemporary art.

"I studied with Takanobu Kobayashi (born in 1960) and Kyoko Murase (born in 1963) at university, though they were one year below me. While other students were experimenting with different modes of expression, they had decided to stick to painting. After graduation they continued making work and successfully established themselves in the world of painting, having developed a strong style and very personal point of view.

Yusuke Asai (born in 1981) is more than twenty years younger than Murase and Kobayashi. Instead of using paint, he collects mud from around the exhibition space and works directly on the wall, erasing the mural after the exhibition. His paintings are very free and inspired by a 'primitive life force'. For this exhibition he has made two-dimensional paintings, though he also works with installation.

Then there is Syozo Taniguchi. Born in 1990, he is almost 10 years younger than Asai, and thus is still developing. He produces a vast quantity of paintings and drawings, which exude a fresh sensitivity and remind us of something fundamental in an artist's drive to make art. For this exhibition Taniguchi will exhibit an animation that was produced as a promotional video for two Japanese bands." Yoshitomo Nara April 2016.

Gallery Two: 'Yoshitomo Nara: New Works', 28 April - 3 June 2016
Gallery hours are: Tuesday to Friday, 10am - 6pm and Saturday, 11am - 5pm
For further details please contact India Alexander:
+44 (0)20 7494 1434 / india@stephenfriedman.com
For sales enquiries please contact sales@stephenfriedman.com