



COPE コープ

curated by Sven Loven.

Narrative strategies in contemporary Japanese figurative painting

Motoko Ishibashi, KAITO Itsuki, Ewao Kagoshima Taichi Machida, Ahmed Mannan, Emi Mizukami & Shogo Shimizu

February 4th - March 20, 2022

Opening Reception: February 4th, 2022, 4 to 8 pm

No Gallery - 105 Henry Street #4
New York City, NY 10002

"I've been visiting Japan off and on since 2002. In a culture that so values aesthetics, "contemporary art" occupies a strange position, perhaps because in its most compelling manifestations it can elicit completely contradictory responses. This contentious quality has possibly limited the value placed on it by the larger society. In Japan, there are a number of art scenes, but the one with the most honesty always seems to be simmering below the surface, never being extinguished but never gaining a sure foothold. When I visited friends in Tokyo in 2018 I found a compelling hub of heterogeneous creativity. I ran across a number of distinctive oddities such as a group of studios built in a defunct sumo school; an artist-run gallery in a nondescript basement with a stairway entrance overflowing with an engrossing collection of rare avant-garde books; an aspiring gallerist I befriended who slept in his exhibition space with no windows or bathroom.

The artist Taichi Machida was working for Konami and living in a company dormitory, making art in his free time. On his day off he showed me his studio in the aforementioned former sumo school, complete with derelict tatami mats and sliding paper doors. Each studio was less than eighty square feet; in his was an odd sculpture resembling anthropomorphic snot and a painting of a man urinating on trees, giving them life. After looking at his art we retired to the communal kitchen and grated katsuobushi (fermented tuna) with an antique tool, sustaining a conversation among those assembled in Japanese, English and French.

Shogo Shimizu, the occasional collaborator of my friend Kaito Itsuki, had a job doing the overnight shift in AMPM – a

popular convenience store. I was beguiled by stories of his Ainu coworker – a member of a technocentric cult who wore a necklace containing a code of an MP3 used as a charm against evil spirits. Motoko Ishibashi and I bonded over our shared love of E'wao Kagoshima's art. She had made the pilgrimage to his home in Cypress Hills New York, before me and showed me her photos of his eccentric apartment, decorated with tons of unique tchotchkes and found curios. In one photo E'wao stood before his window, a field of flowers behind him. This impression turned out to be a play of my imagination, as when I later visited I found only nondescript buildings. Kaito Itsuki and I made it to his house the next year but found no one home- we walked to the park nearby and came across him asleep outside on a bench, taking an afternoon nap. Recently E'wao and I met up in a failed attempt to secure a landline telephone at his new apartment – a labyrinthian task in the 21st century. He noticed me observing the unique nature of his black jeans, which were quite thoroughly uniformly coloured. "Just one pair, but I paint them black so I don't have to worry about getting them dirty."



QR code for online viewing room & checklist.

A quixotic attempt to cope with modern life through lived aesthetics! E'wao Kagoshima has been developing his own unique brand of post-modern surrealism for a few decades now, continually an outsider observing contemporary culture and life from an idiosyncratic vantage point. In a similar fashion, a number of the young Japanese artists I met utilize their aesthetic output as a means to grapple with the constraints and pressures of contemporary ideologies. Kaito Itsuki often produces talismanic works exploring the poetic symbolism of faceless male protagonists at battle with the impulses of creation. Motoko Ishibashi, usually living between London and Kyushu, has created translucent pieces which submerge her perspective in the narratives of commodified eroticism. Emi Mizukami has contributed three paintings on haphazard panels which show conflicting traces of stories involving both past and future states of being. Taichi Machida, who works as a video game coder by day while also making paintings and digital art, is represented by one painting of an amorphous man who can only fully satisfy his self-destructive desires by relaxing in a tub of magma. The youngest artist, Ahmed Mannan, is showing three paintings on various constructions of cloth and rice sacks. Brusque and shamanistic in their execution, these works relate the fluctuations of changing identity through a vocabulary of chimeric motifs. Shimizu Shogo presents two drawings that depict hallucinatory revelations concerning interior states of being.

Throughout this work, an outsider's perspective on the foibles of modernity are contrasted with an embrace of naturalistic symbolism; our convoluted world is made more comprehensible through intense observation of its origins in nature. A subtle distrust of contemporary life is accompanied by an indulgence in instinctive impulses. Quixotic loyalty to personal vision is upheld and the results display a fascinating example of the output of multiple generations of artists. The unifying principle is an embrace of the inventiveness explicit in naiveté, of abrasive expression, without the polished nature of much of Japan's famous cultural imports."

~ Text by Sven Loven

Sven Loven was born in 1979 in Stockholm, Sweden and grew up in NYC. Loven has been featured in and represented by numerous galleries such as Magenta Plains, Jan Kapps, Christian Andersen and No Gallery. An article he wrote on the subject of E'wao Kagoshima can be found here: <https://www.spikeartmagazine.com/?q=articles/portrait-ewao-kagoshima>

Motoko Ishibashi was born in 1987, in Nagasaki, Japan and graduated with an MFA in painting from the Royal College of Art, London, UK.

KAITO Itsuki was born in 1993 in Sapporo, Hokkaido, Japan and graduated in 2019 with an MFA from Kyoto City University of Arts (KCUA), Painting Department, Kyoto, Japan. Itshuki has exhibited internationally in New York, Germany, China and South Korea and recently had a solo show in Tokyo at Leesaya gallery.

E'wao "ROCKY" Kagoshima was born in 1945 in Japan and is a Japanese artist whose varying media includes painting, sculpture and collage. Kagoshima's work is known through the canon of Japanese Pop Art and has been featured in a solo exhibition at The New Museum, New York in 1983. Kagoshima is currently part of the 2021 Greater New York exhibition at MoMA PS1, New York.

Taichi Machida was born in 1992, Gunma, Japan and is based in Tokyo, Japan. Machida graduated in 2017 with a BFA from Tōhoku University of Art & Design (TUAD), Yamagata, Japan.

Ahmed Mannan was born in Japan, in 2000, and grew up in Osaka. He is currently earning his bachelor's degree in painting at Tokyo University of the Arts.

Emi Mizukami was born in Tokyo, Japan in 1992. She graduated from Tama Art University and lives in Tokyo. She currently has a solo show at 4649 gallery in Tokyo until February 13th, 2022.

Shogo Shimizu was Born in 1993 in Hokkaido, Japan and lives and works in Tokyo, Japan. Shimizu graduated in 2016 with a BFA from Tama Art University.

Founded in 2019 and located in the lowest of the Lower East Side, Manhattan – **No Gallery** is an exhibition space focused on emerging and mid-career artists.

For questions or inquiries please contact info@nononogallery.com