

PERROTIN

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ob opens her first U.S exhibition Your, My, Story at Perrotin



Guillaume Zicarelli. ©2021 ob/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy Perrotin.



Exhibition view of ob: *Your, My, Story* at Perrotin New York, 2021. Photographer: Guillaume Zicarelli. ©2021 ob/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy Perrotin.

At Perrotin Gallery in New York, ob opens her first US solo exhibition entitled *Your, My, Story*, where she transports with her the dreamscape paintings of adolescent girls for which she is known in Japan. Born in 1992 in Kagoshima and raised in Kyoto, ob grew up in a generation that regularly embraced social media, technology, and video games. She first gained recognition on Social Networking Services (SNS), where she shared her art and organized virtual exhibitions with an online community of other young artists. A young member of the Kaikai Kiki Studio based in Tokyo, ob draws inspiration from manga, anime, and video games as well as her personal experiences.

In *Your, My, Story*, the adolescent subjects of ob's paintings stand out for their round and curious eyes, which the artist likens to "a tunnel or the moon" that not so much as stare outwardly at the viewer but invite them inwards. The characters remain wide-eyed as they stand before bodies of water, embrace each other in passing gusts of wind, or reach into their reflections in fountains in works such as *Lingering Scent* or *Access*. ob's pastel palette blends the subjects in with their backgrounds through hue, delicately dissolving the distinctions between the inner and the outer. The adolescents, it seems, are wandering through the atmospheric depths of their own emotional or psychological interiority. Alternatively, it might be the intensity of that very interiority which colors their experience of their surrounding environments. In ob's paintings, the characters welcome the viewer into these intimate realms through the portal of their open eyes, inviting them to join in on their moments of quiet wonder in *Your, My, Story*.



Exhibition view of ob: Your, My, Story at Perrotin New York, 2021. Photographer: Guillaume Zicarelli. ©2021 ob/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy Perrotin.



Access, 2021, Oil on canvas, 55 x 33.2 cm ©2021 ob/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.
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Drift, 2021, Oil on canvas 33.3 x 24.2 cm | 13 1/8 x 9 1/2 inch ©2021 ob/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd.
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The title of your show, *Your, My, Story*, suggests an intimate connection between you, the artist, and your audience. What types of relationships do you hope to build with your viewers through the expression of your art?

The title “My” includes myself, but it also refers to many other stories of an unspecified “My”.

How the viewer sees the artwork cannot be derived from a fixed answer, like mathematics. The perspective will change greatly depending on the time and place of its presentation.

I hope my artworks offer a space where viewers can honestly contemplate their personal memories and emotions, and I would like them to imagine that someone else has their own perspective.

There's also an element of collaboration suggested in the title as if both you and your audience are creating some sort of collective story together. What is the role of community to your creative practice?

In social life and relationships, we are expected to make things go smoothly, and in that process, we are often rejected by others or end up rejecting ourselves.

It is painful to feel that you are the only one different from the rest of the society. Community is also where our self-esteem is strengthened and where we are allowed to have conversations about how to live better. Through my practice, I would like to create a place where both the viewers and I can look back at oneself and connect with others.

I admire how you have been able to use SNS as an extension of your art by connecting with online audiences to build both virtual and physical communities. Still, what are some challenges you face as an artist today in our digitally-saturated and media-driven world?

Now that the media has evolved, it has become easier to appreciate artworks in high image quality without physically seeing them. Media such as SNS may even be seen as a competitor because artwork and SNS both convey the honest feelings and desires of human beings.

However, I believe the value of real information will increase relatively as digitalization progresses. That is why I feel it is necessary to further strengthen the aspect of an artwork that can endure to be appreciated for a long term in a society full of information because the nuances of the real thing cannot be conveyed just by looking at images.

How do you deal with those challenges? What are some ways you remain self-guided and intentional in your use of technology and social media?

I would like viewers to interact with the images that come to mind during the appreciation of the artwork, so I am conscious of not talking too much about the meaning behind my works. Since I portray the ambiguous theme of spirituality, I often let people know the background of each painting, but I am afraid meaning will be consumed as fact if I explain in detail on SNS before the exhibition.

Information enjoyed by those who only see artworks on SNS is a different sort from people who actually visit and appreciate them in person, so I still wonder how I should transmit information. I feel that the gap between the online and in person experience is getting bigger year by year.

Are there sources of inspiration — art, music, manga, or video games — that you feel especially connected to?

Music may be the most familiar medium. I put together a playlist of music that creates an image similar to the one I would like to paint, and listen to it a lot during production. It is difficult to verbalize, but I feel it is easier to paint if a sound and an image of a painting are connected. Rhythm is the most primitive sense in any medium and is also present in paintings.

There is a clear atmospheric and dreamscape quality to your works, so I'm curious what kind of physical environment you set up for yourself while you are producing them. Can you describe what your studio looks or feels like?

The studio was originally a car garage. Since the garage door still goes up, it is possible for me to make large-scale paintings.

The production site is a practical place. Movable handmade shelves and walls allow me to change the layout of the studio as needed. Since I work on 3 to 4 paintings simultaneously, while oil paint dries slowly, a drying space is also required. In order to make effective use of the limited space, I try not to put too much furniture. However, it's a little difficult to see the painting objectively in a space that has only paintings and myself, so recently I am thinking of creating a space for small items and photographs. Like ventilation to prevent chemical intoxication, adding non-painting elements in my studio might be a good idea for my process. I am always thinking about the best balance for production in the best condition.

I find that the imaginary landscape of adolescence in your work opens up a space of reflection that is at once both nostalgic for the past and inspiring for the future. How has the theme of adolescence remained important to you while looking ahead and navigating the adult world?

Adolescence is a time when self-awareness wavers greatly between oneself and society. There are a lot of possibilities for transformation because we hold expectations and fears towards the unknown world.

Through many experiences and various decisions, the direction of our lives become set as we grow up, but no matter how old I become, I believe there can be an encounter with the unknown that will have my heart shaken. I think you can gain strength by observing what you do not understand from adolescence.

Finally, what are some lessons from adolescence that you'd like your viewers to walk away with — or remember — through your first show at Perrotin?

Sometimes the discoveries made through the accumulation of losses enrich us. I would be happy if you could rediscover your own story through my exhibition, what kind of person you were, and what kind of things you found beautiful and joyful.



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On Dream's Edge, 2021 Paper, pencil, oil pastel, soft pastel, Unframed: 21 x 13.3 cm ©2021 ob/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Courtesy Perrotin