PRESSBOOK

Izumi KATO

Artforum

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HONG KONG

Izumi Kato

GALERIE PERROTIN

Most of the sculptural characters that Izumi Kato crafted for this exhibition (all works *Untitled*, 2017) have heads made of granite that the artist collected from the reclaimed landfill close to his coastal studio. He selected these pieces of rock for their shape and texture, which recall those of *suiseki* (decorative stones) or scholar's rocks, and treated them minimally, attaching them to bodies made mostly from wood, painting them a variety of colors, and standing the results on simple wooden pedestals. (The artist made other figures from pieces of leather and soft vinyl, their "limbs" splayed out over small wooden tables.) Kato arranged a dozen of these stone-and-wood sculptures, in varying sizes, in a line against a deep-Prussian-blue wall, where they stood like guardians of a tomb or temple, or even of another dimension; they were the first thing a visitor saw on walking into the gallery. The most monumental of these figures was one made entirely of wood, a larger-than-life-size, freestanding woman with brown hair, a deep-blue face, a light-blue body, and red legs. She holds a tray on which a group of small figures crafted of soft vinyl—with white bodies, yellow faces, and black dots for eyes—stand in a line. She seems to be a high priestess for whom the forms she holds and the ones that surround her are at once charges and offerings.

Izumi Kato, ***Untitled***, **2017**, wood, soft vinyl, acrylic, 74¼ × 17¼ × 19⅝".

Here, the influence of the temples and shrines of the Shimane Prefecture, where Kato is from, felt tangible. His ambiguous figures recalled the silent presence of the sculptural deities that populate these sites. Similar to the *suiseki* evoked by Kato's granite heads, they serve to create a formal link between the natural world, human existence, and the unfathomable totality that encompasses them. These are ambiguous bodies that straddle an indistinct line: They are at once natural and artificial, familiar and alien, contemporary and archaic. Kato uses color to play up this ambiguity, as is also the case in his paintings of similar figures, which the artist creates directly with his hands. One standing wooden figure is painted a deep turquoise, with the lines delineating the shape of the body—arms, breasts, legs—rendered a bright corn yellow, while her hair, painted onto her granite head, is a vivid volcanic red. In the sculptures, the grain of the wood and the texture of the granite remain visible beneath the painted color, whose vibrancy offsets the vacant, frozen, impassive facial expression each sculpture exhibits.

But these figures, in their somewhat cartoonish rendering as childlike avatars, also connect with another tradition—that of Japanese popular culture, and the plethora of anime and manga humanoids that have come to reflect the nation's complex postwar psyche. This alternate reading, or inverse reflection, in which the classic and the spiritual are countered by an equal sense of the contemporary and deviant, creates a totality of sorts; the metaphorical swamp out of which Kato's characters seem to have emerged could well represent the deepest recesses of an expansive personal and collective mind, both conscious and unconscious, at once particular and universal. Indeed, what separates Kato's representations from the naughty girls of Yoshitomo Nara's imagination or Takashi Murakami's bombastic neo-Pop characters is the indistinctness of his bodies' near-abstract crafting. These spectral projections, rendered in solid form, straddle many worlds. Their function is to elicit a sense of uncertain recognition and to serve as a point of unfixed contemplation.

—Stephanie Bailey

TOKYO

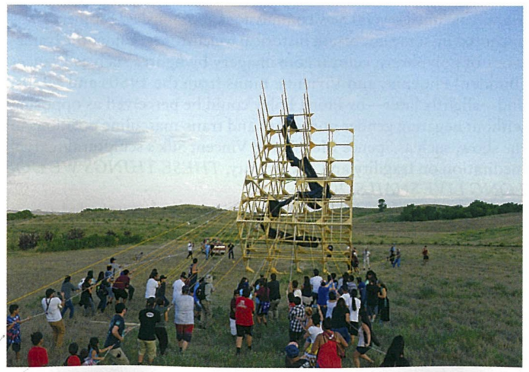
Tsubasa Kato

MUJIN-TO PRODUCTION

Tsubasa Kato's work is typically described in the terms of socially engaged and community arts. This framing befits his iconic "Pull and Raise" series, 2007–, for which the artist recruited people to erect or topple symbolic architectural structures, including apartment rooms and a tsunami-destroyed lighthouse, with ropes and festive cheers. To some extent, it also applies to "(Drawing) Fractions of the Longest Distance," his recent exhibition in two successive parts, which featured video documentation and performance artifacts from nine projects conducted between 2015 and 2017. *Black Snake*, 2017, for example—the most recent of several projects carried out at the Standing Rock Indian Reservation in North Dakota since 2013—documents locals overturning a giant three-dimensional wooden grid. Plastic sheeting had been woven through the structure so that it resembled a black serpent, an animal that features centrally in Sioux legend and that has become a metaphor for the notorious oil pipeline.

But "(Drawing) Fractions" also highlighted how Kato has branched out beyond such affirmative and simplistic images of community toward more complex social figures. Proximity, for one, no longer guarantees unity. *Listen to the Same Wall*, 2015, shows three folk musicians in Mexico City struggling to play together despite each being sequestered in adjacent patios separated by ten-foot-high walls. *Woodstock 2017* pays homage to Jimi Hendrix's legendary performance of "The Star Spangled Banner" by showing a rock band in Seattle trying to play the national anthem while their limbs are tugged at by ropes attached to their bandmates. "In a time when it's less clear who to unite with or what to accomplish, when social media provides the main forum for our debates, we look back to the physicality of Woodstock with a kind of longing," writes Kato in the exhibition notes.

Do we really, though? After all, Kato himself clearly enjoys dissonance. Like a thesis statement, *Can You Hear Me?*, 2015, was the sole work exhibited in both parts of the show. Four smartphones, their casings removed and their insides showing, stood upright in a plastic vitrine. On



Tsubasa Kato, ***Black Snake***, **2017**, digital C-print, 17¾ × 24⅝".