

Izumi KATO

Making a Scene

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Izumi Kato

Born Shimane Prefecture, 1969; lives and works in Tokyo and Hong Kong

Growing up in a small seaside town in Shimane Prefecture, 800km west of Tokyo on Honshu island, Izumi Kato was fascinated by tales of ghosts and the Shinto gods known as kami. His family lived between 'a lot of ancient burial sites, like little pyramids with gravestones on top' and the ocean, where, he says, 'sometimes kids would drown. So adults would scare us with stories to prevent us from going near it at night. They would say a ghost with the body of a snake and the head of a woman appears. I think this influenced both my personality and my work.'

Kato's paintings and sculptures, his figures with their undeveloped bodies, have an ominous, otherworldly quality – primitive and supernatural, alien and alienating, disturbed and disturbing. (It comes as no surprise that he likes African tribal art.)

At Musashino Art University in greater Tokyo, he studied oil painting – an experience he did not enjoy. 'In order to pass the entrance exam, you have to make paintings that require



This page, Portrait by Guillaume Ziccarelli. Opposite, Izumi Kato, *Untitled*, 2015. Oil on canvas, 162.0 x 162 cm.
© 2015 Izumi Kato. Photo: Kubiro Watanabe. Izumi Kato, *Untitled*, 2017. Oil on canvas, 130.3 x 356.0 cm.
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Above, Izumi Kato.
Left, *Untitled*, 2017.
Opposite, *Untitled*, 2015

a very specialised technical ability. I learned how to copy them in order to get in, which meant I had already lost all interest in art by the time I began.' On graduating, however, he began to paint for himself, renting gallery space and organising his own exhibitions. By the time he was 30, he had realised he was 'really interested in art'. Moreover, he wanted to paint people, or at least 'more human shapes' – prepubescent, childlike and even embryonic torsos, topped by distended heads and hollow eyes – but not with brushes. Instead he uses his hands (protected by tight-fitting latex gloves) and sometimes a spatula, working the oil paint with his fingers and palms, which gives his paintings a visceral quality.

From time to time, he 'reaches a deadlock' with painting and turns to sculpture, carving figures – some doll-like, others totemic – from camphor wood, or moulding them in sofubi, a soft vinyl used in the manufacture of Japanese toys. But the two disciplines are not so different, he says. Sculpture is 'like making a painting three-dimensional', and is by extension a process that helps him paint. ● www.perrotin.com