



Untitled, 2020. 53 x 133.5 cm | 20 7/8 x 52 9/16 in. Oil on canvas. Photographer: Kei Okano. ©2020 Izumi Kato. Courtesy the artist & Perrotin.

Izumi Kato

Opening reception Thursday, March 4, 12-8pm
March 4 - April 17, 2021

The multimedia works of the Japanese artist Izumi Kato give image to a far-flung future, but also elicit a mystical past. After a 5 year hiatus, Kato returns to New York with an ambitious exhibition of new mixed-media sculptures, installation, and paintings. Enfolding across two floors of the historic Beckenstein building, the exhibition culminates in a tableaux of connected fabric and soft vinyl sculptures, suspended from the gallery's three-story stairwell.

Viewing the collection of Kato's works is akin to a gust of bracing air. Delivering a jolt, his artworks are matter of fact forms despite (or in spite) of their preternatural proclivity. Many of his sculptures, which are formed from various materials including wood, soft vinyl, and textiles, incorporate disembodied parts – a second head with a missing mouth stacked atop another, for example, or a smaller twin humanoid held in the hand. While his creatures are creations in their own right, there are vaguely familiar associations to be made, such as wide-eyed figures and semi-recognizable bodily shapes. Yet they are both embryonic and alien, seemingly indifferent to their human-likeness as if in apparent defiance of their own sense of corporeality.

Formally, a spindly leg that winnows into the ether or a bulbous head with a perfectly circular, open mouth appear both fundamental – essential even – and at the same time, grotesque, otherworldly, artificial, serendipitous. The fantasy of their form has the surprising effect of creating a pleasingly dissonant space at odds with itself. Kato's paintings and sculptures are bold in every way: their sense of scale, their color palette, and especially in their sophisticated mix of the figurative and folk. Many of the materials the artist chooses to work with, including stones and textiles (which are often sourced from local markets in the place where each project is to be exhibited), have historic precedent in folk art traditions, fusing a backward glance with futuristic overtones. Kato is alert to his medium's seductive powers. The instant back and forth between commonplace and uncanny sharpens the experience if these works.



Untitled, 2020. 31 x 25 x 14 cm | 12 3/16 x 9 13/16 x 5 1/2 in.
 Stone, acrylic, stainless steel
 Photographer: Kei Okano. ©2020 Izumi Kato. Courtesy the artist & Perrotin.



Untitled, 2020. 152 x 32 x 41 cm | 59 13/16 x 12 5/8 x 16 1/8 in.
 Wood, acrylic, plastic model, soft vinyl, leather, stainless steel, wood pedestal
 Photographer: Kei Okano. ©2020 Izumi Kato. Courtesy the artist & Perrotin.

Their power is also in their ambiguity. Some sculptures appear ethereal and buoyant, though they are made of solid materials such as wood and soft vinyl. Other sculptures are fashioned from lightweight textiles and yet are bound with chains that connect the sculptural form to the ceiling and the floor. The forms and postures of these fabric tetrapod works can be altered and installed in myriad ways, lending to a sense of a transmogrifying lifeform that would readily exist on a distant planet or a secret underworld. Although the artist does not think of having created his works within any given series, these sedate beings share a vulnerability, but they also seem comfortable in that state of existence. This idea can be linked to the traditional Japanese Shinto belief in animism, whereby supernatural entities or spirits are believed to inhabit all things, including stones and mountains. Kato does not distinguish between painting and sculpture, often combining both mediums in one work. At the artist's hands, material, form, object, and image are both transformed and transported, exposing the malleability of our reality.

Within a contemporary context, Kato's practice speaks to the unresolved conflict between the infantilization of Japanese culture (evident in Japan's culture of cute) and the continued evolution of Japan's understanding of its postwar condition. Kato's work is all the more prescient when considering the altered experiences of time and space that artists in Japan have been responding to after the devastation of the 2011 nuclear disaster. Born in the coastal prefecture Shimane, the countryside of Japan where Shintoism is widely practiced today, Kato is a self-described "ordinary painter" whose creations are imbued with extraordinary sensibilities. In 2003, the artist first began making carved sculptures from the same wood that is traditionally used to make Buddhist statues. Then a friend introduced him to soft vinyl that is also used to make children's toys, which he has been playfully experimenting with since 2012. Now, Kato utilizes a wide range of materials, including stone, acrylic, pastel, camphor wood, and paint.

In his ambiguous figurative motifs, which conjure abstraction, cartoons, and a persistent celestialism, the suggestions of bodies are fragmented or oddly appended. Kato's latest works are beautiful and bizarre, refined but attuned to an intentional messiness; sumptuous in their molded shaping and materiality yet economical. They are talismans of a certain destiny.

– Tiffany Lambert

More information about the artist >>>

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