



かばにゆをへる

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山口 藍

kaba ni yu wo heru
ai yamaguchi

14.04 — 28.05.2023



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Written by Ai Yamaguchi

For several years now, I have continued to create paintings based on Japanese *tanka* poetry. There exist countless Japanese poems that express human emotions in an intimate, almost palpable manner, defined by the rhythm of 31 characters (syllables), and with a lyrical quality that still appeals to us today. To me, reading through these 31 syllables really feels as if watching 31 leaves flutter down one after another. These words, as they fly by one by one, are keen enough to salvage us, but they are also sharp enough to slash us. This applies to any situation in any age, and nowadays, according to the number of means of communication, a single word may either bring peace or start a war. The experience of randomly catching a word in passing that instantly makes us feel happy or sad, is one that every human has probably made at least once. In such situations, the letters that we read or hear seem to linger around us while flexibly changing their appearance.

I became fascinated with the way such “letters” form words, which are then communicated in the form and rhythm of poems. Tracing back the history of letters and their original meanings inspired me to create paintings that illustrate how we humans are unconsciously guided by the power of letters.

The assembled works shown at this exhibition are based on the idea to illustrate how poems function as continuous chains of words, and how words are aggregations of letters that only make sense together.

About “kaba ni yu wo heru” (2023)

This work is based on the “Iroha,” the first three letters of the versified Japanese alphabet. The Iroha is a poem in which each of the 47 syllables in the Japanese alphabet appears one time only, and that has been recited throughout Japanese history without ever clarifying the mystery of its originator, purpose and time of creation. Vaguely defined until around the Edo period, its seven-five-syllable meter was later applied in Buddhist poems expressing the joy of entering Nirvana, before the Iroha was formally established as a recitable poem for calligraphy use.

While being of practical use, the Iroha’s content is still a riddle that has been interpreted in different ways, and it is today recited in various rather playful renditions. Aware of this fact, I attempted to write my own Iroha, whereas the challenge and the trickiness of having to convey one’s message in the seven-five-syllable meter, and without using the same syllable twice, struck me as one entertaining point. So I decided to write a poem that suggests the most unintelligible of sceneries.

Na-ku-shi-ta ko-i ka (A lost love)
 A-me fu-ra-se-re-ba (If I could make it rain)
 Ke-mu-ri no yo-u ni (Like smoke)
 Ho-so-i su-mi-tsu-yu (The thin dew of ink)
 Ya-ma ne-ro to e wo (A vision of the mountains asleep)
 O-mo-wa-sa-nu hi he (Over days unimagined)
 Ki-e-te chi-ru (And fading away)

The meter here is not the basic seven-five-syllable meter of *tanka* poetry, but I deliberately chose a composition of seven-syllable lines. There exists an expression, “toganakute shisu,” that resulted from cutting up the Iroha into blocks of seven syllables each, and then lining up the last syllables of these blocks. It has been interpreted as referring to “a man dying after being falsely accused,” which further stresses the Iroha’s inscrutability. So I tried the same with my poem, and got the phrase “kabaniyuwoheru.” This does of course make no

sense at all, but while looking for (Chinese) *kanji* characters that I could apply, for “kaba” I found the character 栂, which is also read “momiji” (“autumn leaves”) in Japanese. The character is a Japanese variant of the Chinese 樺, and both combine the characters for tree (木) and “flower” (華/花). From this I gathered that the idea behind the word “momiji” was to express how, in autumn, the leaves of trees change their colors to look like flowers.

In other words, through my unintentionally composed poem, I learned about how the word “momiji” came into being.

[In the painting, I chose to depict cherry blossoms in honor of the original Iroha as a poem dedicated to the lifetime of a blossoming flower.]

About the meaning of the poem

The feeling of lost love is perhaps making it rain ink-colored dew, like smoke. Even when thinking of villages and mountains saturated with the joyful mood of spring, I cannot imagine those sceneries, however I guess such feelings will disappear along with today’s rain.

(The vision of “mountains asleep” refers to things like the voices of the invisible, or things that are said by habit. In such cases, if the mountains are silent, there can only be darkness, and with no way of struggling, all that one can do is wait for time to pass, without imagining anything.)

About “ha no ura” (2023)

This work depicts a transformation that occurs in a girl, from the inside out, after hearing a certain poem. I made it based on the idea of something that was originally one picture, which then broke into pieces that eventually got buried and lost, and that were then discovered and unearthed after a long time, and the work was restored based on memories of the original picture. After discovering a shard that had been buried in a nearby park, and seeing ancient ceramic

vessels at museums, which were reconstructed by anticipating their designs from single unearthed fragments, I became interested in the way fragments of things stir our imagination. This inspired me to create works like this one.

A girl exchanges poems with some other person. Upon reading a poem that the other person wrote to her in reply to hers, the words that entered her body through her eyes and ears begin to surround her body as her own feelings. This was the image I had in mind when depicting the girl as she responds with all of her body to the words floating around her.

However, I didn't draw the girl's entire body, but I actually painted the single words that supposedly pour down on her, with a brush, and expressed their meanings by distorting their forms, especially in parts other than her face, such as the waves of her flowing hair. Through that depiction, as an expression of transformation in itself, and through the patterns on her face and hair, I consciously included hints at the fact that it is all fantasy.

The discovery of buried fragments is something that I have experienced in reality. At a nearby park, there is a hill that apparently contains some debris of a house that was once demolished somewhere, and it still happens today that I find pieces of things like rice bowls or other vessels at that park. When picking them up, I think about how they were once used, in what kind of household, and in what age, and the fact that I cannot retrieve their original shapes and daily use, makes me feel the fleetingness of things, and at the same time, the pleasure of imagination. In Arita, Saga Prefecture, one of the most prominent ceramics production towns in Japan that I frequently visit for ceramics making, porcelain exists as a commonplace local product, so there are pieces of porcelain buried quite naturally by the wayside and in people's gardens. As these also include some very precious cultural assets, it is not possible to dig them up without permission, but I had a chance to do some digging when an acquainted pottery

maker took me to the site of his family's house in this town. As a result, we made some surprising discoveries of fragments of dishes and a toothpick holder that the man himself had been using as a child.

Another source of inspiration is so-called “kohitsugire” – poems and letters from the Kokin Wakashu that had been written onto picture scrolls, which were later separated and individually bound as luxury items for wealthy businessmen. This is one theme I applied not only in the ceramic tile work, but that I also frequently refer to in other works. Just like the potsherds, even though the segmentation in this case was done intentionally, these text fragments will never revert to their original shapes, as they have been scattered around Japan, or even around the world, by various collectors. While it also appears to me as an unfortunate development, it is at once great fun to try and imagine the adjoining parts before and after, what kinds of letters they are written in, and what they say.

These are the things that eventually inspired me to base my works around the fascinating idea of how bits and pieces stimulate our imagination regarding the respective whole. For this ceramic tile work, I assumed that only the part from the girl's neck up had been unearthed, and the fact that each of those pieces had been enclosed in the soil for ages, I tried to express by sculpting the individual fragments in different ways.

About “uyotsu” (2023)

For this work, I made a round-shaped work to look like a clock, on which I painted a girl that expresses a certain time through her posture. It is a time of day that has a particular meaning for myself in my daily routine, however rather than indicating the time as information, to me the hands of the clock each seem to be depicting a separate kind of space.

Around seven o'clock in the morning, for example, is a time of day when my task of waking up the kids, and sending them off to school, is a matter of minutes. If this doesn't go smoothly, they will be late. So,

the question of how far I get with the other housework before that, and how much room I have left for these things, is my daily gamble in the morning. This is about the time itself, “6:55” as indicated by the hands of the clock, and at once also about the portion of the clock face that is framed by the hour hand and the minute hand. I filled this space with an illustration of my own scenery, based on my awareness that, during exactly that same time, different things happen in different places inhabited by different people.



kaba ni yu wo heru

2023

persimmon tannin and acrylic on wood (old cedar door)

180 × 825 cm



morikuru hikari
2012
mixed media
236 × 308 × 263 cm



neru ga uchi

2023

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

31 × 31 × 3.5 cm



uyotsu
2023
acrylic on wood tray
d. 24 × 4.5 cm



tatsu futatsu

2023

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

d. 20 × 3.5 cm



tatsu hitotsu

2023

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

d. 20 × 3.5 cm



tatsu mitsu

2023

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

d. 20 × 3.5 cm



hoto
2022
acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel
47 × 55.5 × 4 cm



kakikurasu hito

2022

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

28 × 28 × 3 cm



tori naku

2022

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

28 × 28 × 2.5 cm



misobitogusa

2020

acrylic on canvas mounted on panel

27 × 60 × 1.5 cm



itoma
2019
acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel
100 × 88 × 3 cm



toto
2019
acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel
62 × 54 × 5.5 cm



koko
2018
acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel
90 × 75 × 6 cm



tsukanoma no ito

2016

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

35 × 28 × 2 cm



yama kamuri

2013

acrylic on cotton, blanket, and panel

31.5 × 31.5 × 4 cm



ha no ura
2023
porcelain
71 × 70 × 1 cm



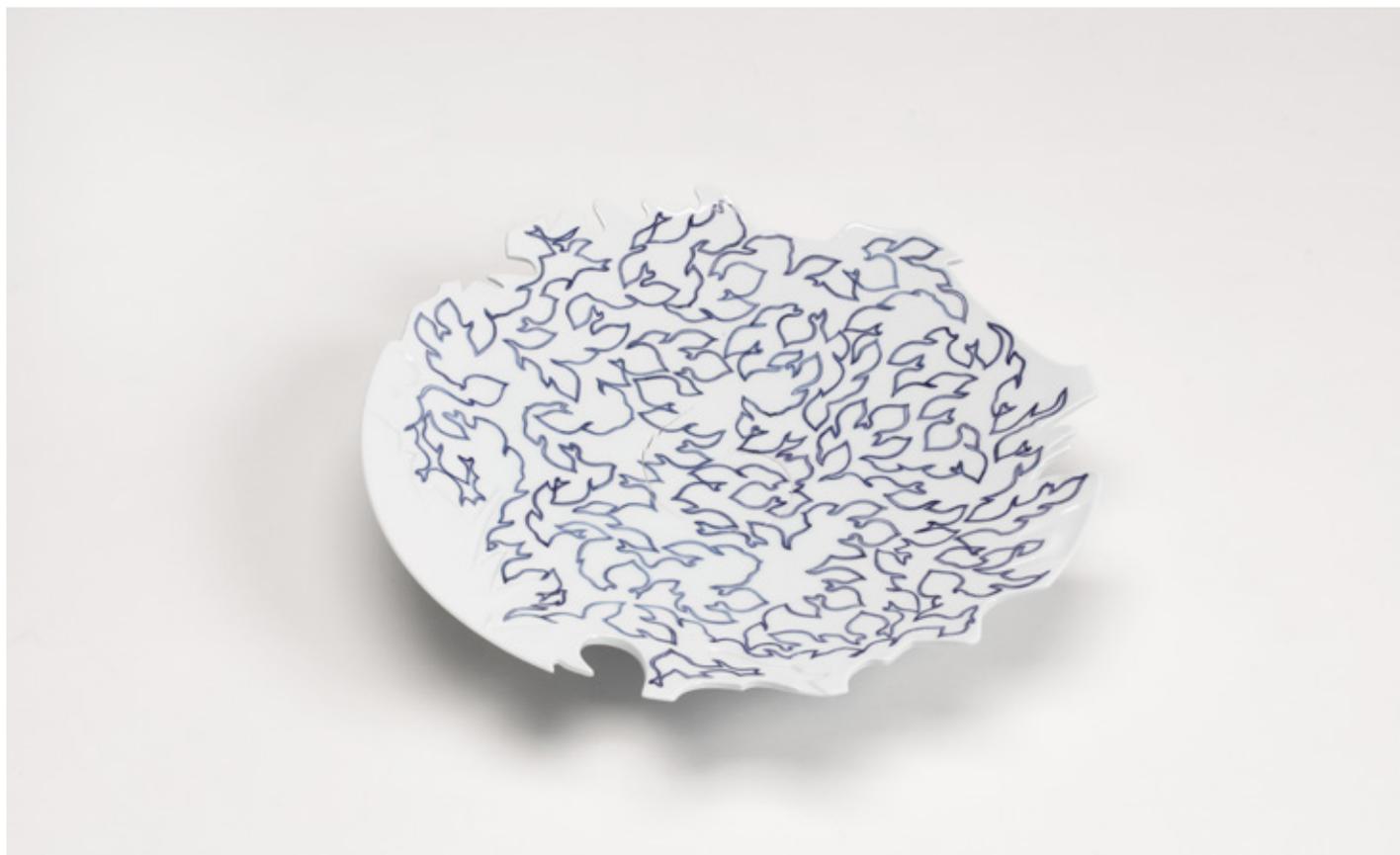
hana no atama
2023
porcelain
20.5 × 16 × 2.5 cm



hito yama futa yama
2019
acrylic on porcelain
27 × 21 × 3.5 cm



aki ("kun" series)
2022
porcelain
6.5 × 6.5 × 3 cm



natsu no kita yama
2022
porcelain
31.5 × 31.5 × 6.5 cm



omoi no tane
2022
porcelain
31.5 × 31.5 × 7.5 cm



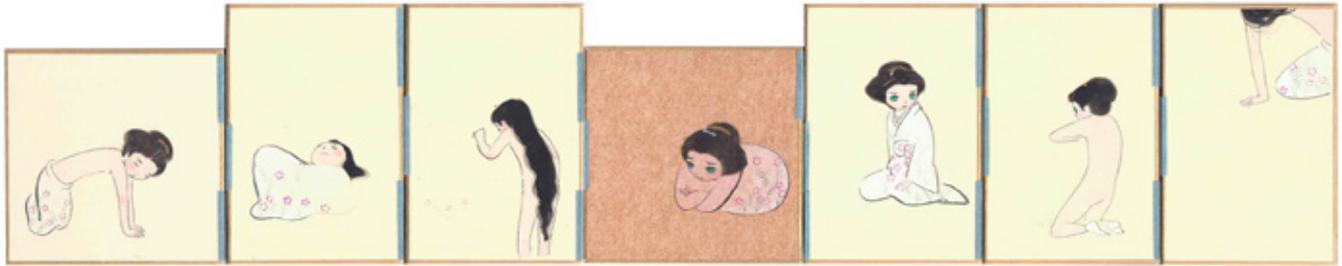
te no sora
2019
porcelain
20 × 20 × 5.5 cm

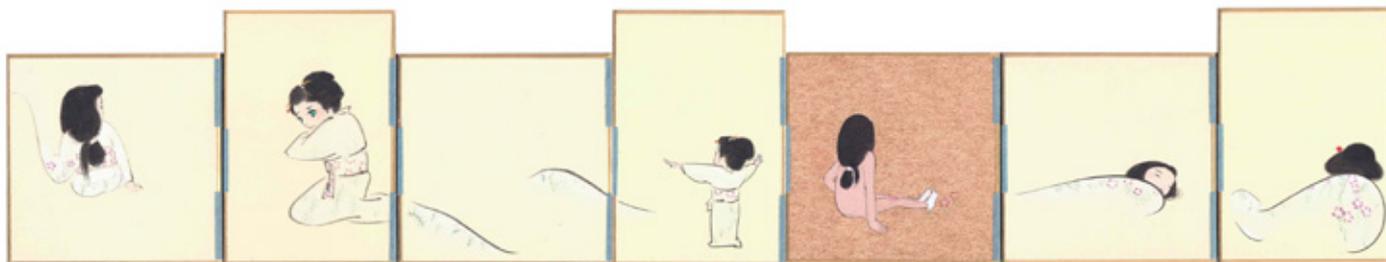


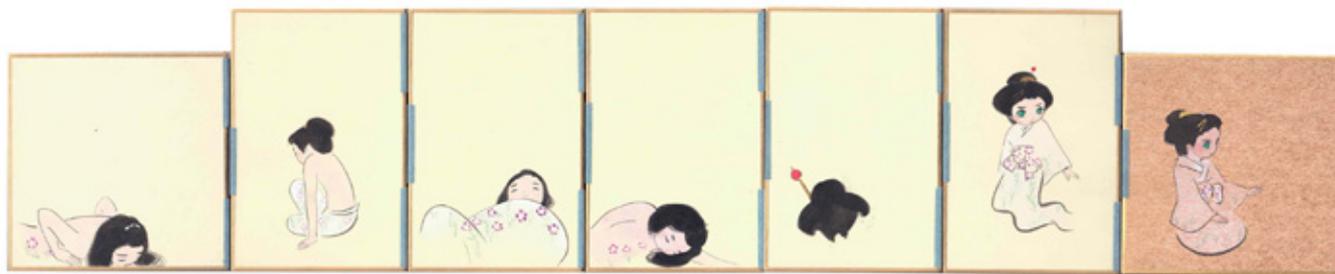
Installation view



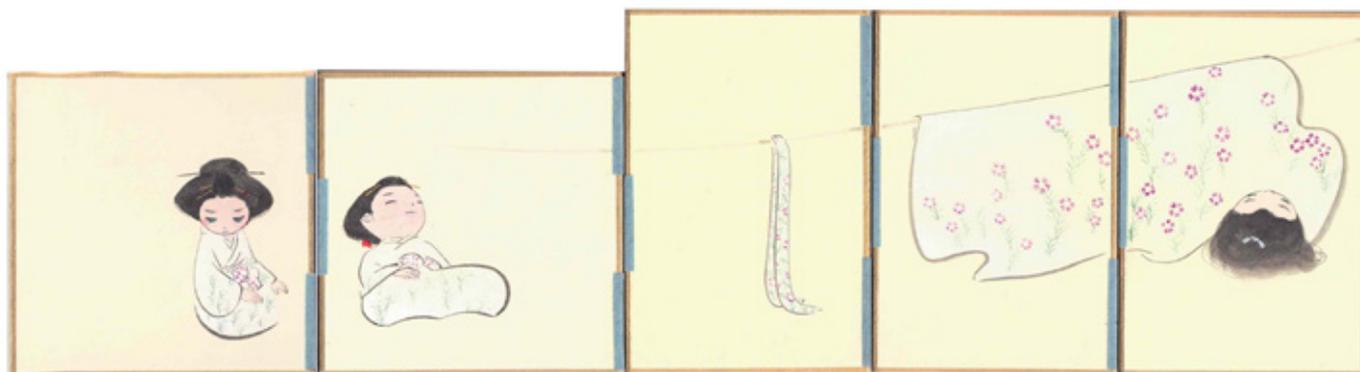














Ai Yamaguchi (b. 1977 in Tokyo, Japan) established the group “ninyu works” in 1995 after entering Joshibi University of Art and Design, Department of Design and Crafts in 1995. Her works feature a unique support material below the picture surface, and are expressed with supple and delicately-drawn lines, often depicting women who live as ladies of the night in a teahouse on a mountain ridge, known as the *touge no ochaya*. Taking as her model the culture and customs of the Edo period, she accedes to the legacy of various forms of Japanese beauty from *rinpa* art to classical *waka* poetry. In doing so, she continually searches after a unique kind of ideal beauty: a renewed iteration of the classical Japanese form of paintings of beautiful women or *bijinga*. Her works have gained widespread acclaim both within Japan and internationally. Significant exhibitions in recent years include “*Kamisaka Sekka: Dawn of Modern Japanese Design*” (Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia, 2012), “*The Grand Kojiki Exhibition - Feelings and words handed down from past generations to the future*” (Nara Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan, 2014), Meiji Jingu Forest Festival Art “*Shikansuiyo - Beautiful Forest and Nature*” (Meiji Jingu Museum, Tokyo, Japan, 2020) and solo show “*yamaai no uta*” (Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan, 2022). Ai Yamaguchi lives and works in Tokyo, Japan.

YAMAGUCHI Ai

1977

Born in Tokyo, Japan
Lives and works in Tokyo, Japan

Education

1995

Entered Joshibi University of Art and Design, Department of Design and Crafts (Textile Weaving)

1999

Established the group “ninyu works”

Selected Solo and Two-Person Exhibitions

2023

“kaba ni yu wo heru”, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore
“niwa no kocha”, CUBE3 (Matsuzakaya Shizuoka), Shizuoka

2022

“Noe Aoki + Ai Yamaguchi: Mountain and Sky”, GINZA ATRIUM (GINZA TSUTAYA BOOKS), Tokyo
“yamaai no uta”, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo

2018

“ima to koko ni”, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo

2017

“Resident Artist Project vol.1 Ai Yamaguchi”, Yuki Hayama Studio, Saga
“Curator’s Selection #2 AI YAMAGUCHI”, Joshibi Galleria nike, Tokyo

2014

“shinchishirin”, Joshua Liner Gallery, New York, U.S.A.

2012

“hoshi”, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo
“ai yamaguchi×PIP&POP: UTAKATA TAYUTAU -the blinking of an eye-”, Spiral Garden, Tokyo
“ashita mata”, 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong
“yorokobi”, NADiff modern, Tokyo

2011

“kumogakure”, Aki Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan

2010

“hogara hogara”, NADiff Gallery, Tokyo
“kiyu”, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo

2008

“hana wa no ni aruyouni / Flowers as they are in the field”, Robert & Tilton, Los Angeles, U.S.A.

2007

“yama, haruru”, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo

2006

“E no e : Pictures of Pictures”, GR2, Los Angeles, U.S.A.

2004

“Oyasumi”, Shaheen Modern & Contemporary Art, Cleveland, U.S.A.
“Haru no yukue”, Mizuho Oshiro Gallery, Kagoshima
“Hana mite kurasu haru”, NADiff, Tokyo (traveled to NADiff bis, Miyagi)

2003

“Sukutoko”, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
“Hanabukuro”, Viewing Room yoyogi/garage, Tokyo

2002

“Kinuginu”, Gallery Eve, Tokyo
“Ai Yamaguchi”, Giant Robot Store, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
“Ai Yamaguchi”, Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, U.S.A.

2001

“Ominaeshi”, NADiff bis, Miyagi
“Shoumonraifuku”, SHIBUYA SEIBU ART GALLERY, Tokyo

2000

“Haru ni shirarenu hana”, NADiff, Tokyo
“Mokomoko no tsuki”, NADiff, Tokyo
“Kamuro”, Salon Sui, Ishikawa

Public Collections

Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney, Australia

Selected Group Exhibitions

2023

“Another Landscape: Contemporary Urban Genre Painting” (Metaverse Exhibition)

2021

“BOUNDLESS”, Hwas Gallery, Shanghai, China

2020

“Uninterrupted Wander”, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo
Meiji Jingu Forest Festival of Art
“Shikansuiyo – Beautiful Forest and Nature”, Meiji Jingu Museum, Tokyo

2018

“Yuki Hayama, takeshibuya, Ai Yamaguchi”, Yuki Hayama Studio, Saga

2017

“Cool Japan - worldwide fascination in focus”, Museum Volkenkunde, Leiden, Holland (travelled to MAS: Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerp, Belgium)
“IMFACTS! II”, Gallery Ohrin, Ibaraki

2016

“IMFACTS!”, Gallery Ohrin, Ibaraki

2015

“Giant Robot Biennale 4”, Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
“Prints & Originals”, Gallery SPEAK FOR, Tokyo

2014

“IMFACTS!”, ZANE BENNETT Contemporary Art, Santa Fe, U.S.A.
“The Grand Kojiki Exhibition – Feelings and words handed down from past generations to the future”, Nara Prefectural Museum of Art
“Conversations through the Asian collections”, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

2013

“Ukiyo-e POP – Pop Culture from Edo to Today”, Shizuoka City Tokaido Hiroshige Museum of Art
“Wonderful My Art – The Artist of the Takahashi Collection”, Kawaguchiko Museum of Art, Yamanashi
“Crossover”, AKI Gallery, Taipei, Taiwan
“LOOK EAST! 2 – Asian Perspectives”, Mizuma Gallery, Singapore

2012

“ZIPANGU : The Surge of Japanese Contemporary Art”, The Niigata Bandaijima Art Museum, (traveled to Takasaki Museum of Art, Gunma / Hachinohe City Museum of Art, Aomori / Akita Museum of Modern Art, 2013)
“Kamisaka Sekka - dawn of modern Japanese design”, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

2011

“ZIPANGU - 31 spirited artists cutting through new territories of Japanese contemporary art”, Takashimaya Nihonbashi, Tokyo (traveled to Takashimaya Osaka, Takashimaya Kyoto)

2009

“November Steps -Susan Phillipsz & Gallery Artists-”, Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo

2008

“Macrocism”, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
“Off the Rails”, Mizuma and One Gallery, Beijing, China

2006

“DO NOT STACK”, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
“2006 Group show”, Mizuho Oshiro Gallery, Kagoshima
“Fiction@Love”, Museum of Contemporary Art Shanghai, China (traveled to Singapore Art Museum, Singapore)

2005

“take art collection 2005”, Spiral Garden, Tokyo
“Untitled”, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
“A -lunch”, AXIS Gallery ANNEX, Tokyo

2004

“EYE OF THE NEEDLE”, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, U.S.A.
“Fiction. Love-Ultra New Vision in Contemporary Art”, Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, Taiwan
“OFFICINA ASIA”, Galleria d’Arte Moderna, Bologna, Italy

2003

“Still Waters”, Roberts & Tilton, Los Angeles, U.S.A.

2002

“Kageki Metonymics”, Stefan Stux Gallery, New York, U.S.A.



Executive Director Suelo Mizuma established Mizuma Art Gallery in Tokyo in 1994. Since its opening in Gillman Barracks, Singapore in 2012, the gallery aims for the promotion of East Asian artists in the region as well as the introduction of Southeast Asian artists to the international art scene. From 2014 to 2019, the artist residency space “Rumah Kijang Mizuma” operated in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, providing a new platform for dialogue by supporting exchanges between East Asia and Southeast Asia. In 2018, a new gallery space, “Mizuma & Kips” in New York, USA, as a shared collaboration between Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo and Singapore, and Kips Gallery from New York.

Mizuma Gallery features the works of Japanese artists including Aida Makoto, Aiko Miyonaga, Amano Yoshitaka, Ikeda Manabu, Tenmyouya Hisashi, and Yamaguchi Akira. Moreover, it showcases the works of renowned East Asian artists such as Ai Weiwei, Du Kun, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Ken + Julia Yonetani, and Zhao Zhao. The gallery also features the creations of prominent and emerging artists from the region including Agan Harahap, Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Angki Purbandono, Ari Bayuaji, Ashley Yeo, Ben Loong, Budi Agung Kuswara, Entang Wiharso, Gilang Fradika, Heri Dono, I Made Djirna, indieguerillas, Iwan Effendi, Kemalezedine, Made Wianta, Mark Justiniani, Nasirun, and Robert Zhao Renhui.

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Tue-Sat: 11am - 7pm
Sun: 11am - 6pm
Closed on Mondays and Public Holidays

Facebook.com/mizumagallery
Instagram @mizumaartgallery

GILLMAN BARRACKS

Set in a former military barracks dating back to 1936 and surrounded by lush tropical greenery, the Gillman Barracks visual arts cluster was launched in September 2012. Gillman Barracks' vision is to be Asia's destination for the presentation and discussion of international and Southeast Asian art. Today, Gillman Barracks is a place for art lovers, art collectors, and those curious about art. The cluster is a focal point of Singapore's arts landscape, and anchors the development of visual art in the region and beyond.

Executive Director
Mizuma Suelo

Director
Fredy Chandra

Gallery Manager
Theresia Irma

Project Executive
Marsha Tan

Design
Raissa Ali

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