

SATORU KURATA "Ba/u/cker La/u/cker"

February 27 - March 27, 2021 CLOSED: Sun, Mon, National Holidays

【Concurrent Exhibition】 CADAN Yurakucho

"Infinite Jest" Satoru Kurata x Yuto Nemoto

February 23 – March 14, 2021

Tomio Koyama Gallery is pleased to present "Ba/u/cker La/u/cker," an exhibition of works by Satoru Kurata. The exhibition marks the artist's first solo presentation with the gallery, and features a selection of approximately 20 paintings including a large-scale work measuring over 3 meters.

From personified animals to close-ups of humans wearing masks, and scenes of everyday life that are familiar to us all, Satoru Kurata depicts a world of painting that is filled with a unique sense of humor and narrative that draw inspiration from his own memories and intuitive images.

Although figurative motifs such as people, animals, furniture and cars often appear in his works, elements that are associated with the real world and specific eras in time are carefully stripped away. Kurata's attitude towards his artistic practice, which concerns universalizing the self-portrait aspect of the work rather than presenting a closed narrative, is reflected in his approach of deliberately transcribing personal themes into generic forms. The reason behind Kurata's incentive to create paintings and drawings is the fundamental question: "why are people alive?" In this respect, the artist expresses a desire to create "works for human beings" rather than for politics or technology. This attitude is also reflected in the expression of his figures. Masked humans and personified animals act as a kind of avatar that conveys emotions to the viewer in a manner that is in tow with Kurata's ideal, that is, "character representation consisting of minimum elements." Furthermore, expressions that suppress the graphic vividness of the body is also a unique development for the artist who attempts to go against the context of figurative painting that has strived to realistically represent the human body.

Meanwhile, the color fields that captivate the gaze and the contrast of light and shade both stir the viewer's imagination, luring it towards a profound narrative. Light and dark, degrees of saturation, sparseness and density, organic and inorganic, thickness and transparency are depicted through elaborate brushstrokes. These contrasts construct the balance of the entire image plane, and serve to instill the landscape with a "sensation of breathing."

In this exhibition, the three exhibit spaces are divided according to the visual effects of the colors. The first space features monochrome works reminiscent of midnight, then a space for works depicting scenes at dusk, and finally a space for dark yet chromatic works. The exhibition is thus structured so as to enable the scenes illustrated on the canvas to maximize the visual effect that it has on the real life space. It also conveys the loss of visual saturation in par with transitions into realms related to death, as well as in correspondence to one's mental state.

Kurata associates the impression given by the blue shade that appears during the blue hour period of twilight with the sense of what is referred to as "かなしい" (kanashii) in the ancient Japanese language. This word, which harbors various nuances such as lament, sadness, and sorrow, is also a sensation that Kurata seeks in all his works. Kurata further mentions that the humor in his work is an extremely important factor in liberating us from the gravity of the worthlessness and meaninglessness of life.

The title of the work “Ba/u/cker La/u/cker,” which is also the title of this exhibition, was inspired by an image of “an egg with a face in the midst of falling” that had one day come to the artist’s mind together with the phrase “馬鹿落下” (baka lakka, meaning “an idiot falls”).

The artist mentions as follows regarding this title.

“Originally, Ba/u/cker La/u/cker was conceived as an antithesis against excessive consumerism in art, and is made by combining the image of an “egg” (a word often used in Japanese to refer to beginners and aspiring individuals) falling into the city at nighttime, and that of the character Humpty Dumpty.

The “idiot” in the context of Ba/u/cker La/u/cker = an idiot falls refers to myself, and my own personal state of having no choice but to venture into this consumerist world despite expressing an aversion towards it. At the work’s idea stage I had hoped to express this with the intention of it being a witty pun or means of self-deprecation. The phrase, Ba/u/cker La/u/cker, or the four words “Back” (behind / reverse side), “Lack” (missing / deficiency), “Buck” (man / money), and “Luck” (good fortune / destiny) seemed to be a description of myself in this current moment in time, that is, “a backward-thinking (negative) man who is lacking/deficient, but nonetheless fortunate.” In producing work, I place great importance on the fact that such intuition and chance come to take on a certain sense of inevitability within me.”

For Kurata, who often writes texts that complement his work in parallel with the production of paintings, the generation of meanings that appear as repetitions of these images and phrases is indeed an essential element of his artistic practice. The artist’s childhood recollections and fictitious narratives that are woven as the paintings are completed represent the connection between his own view of the world and his work, as is evident from Kurata’s own words, “if you take some time to paint a picture, you come to understand the true meaning of why you are painting it.”

Reality and fiction, color and monochrome, living human beings and forms that act as symbols –we invite viewers to engage with Kurata’s work, which explores new possibilities for figurative painting with a prominently remarkable sense of balance.

【Artist Statement】

“Although we may turn away and forget should we find ourselves desperate to live each day, or have some kind of social role to play, I believe that the basis of our existence is fundamentally ambiguous and is that which is constantly uncertain. With myself as a starting point, I have made works regarding the groundlessness of such existence, that is, the question that life is meaningless and worthless, the beauty that unmistakably exists regardless of this, and the movement of one’s feelings and mind.

I feel that all the works I have made thus far can be understood through this question of “worthlessness and beauty.”

For me, making work concerns more than simply reproducing and expressing my thoughts. It is an act that encourages me to notice far more things through what I have created, and thereby enables me to understand and identify myself again.

In the case of the drawing of the egg that I am currently working on, I had started from the ideas that were born from the circumstances I find myself in, such as my aversion towards consumerism and sense of self-deprecation. As the work was nearing completion however, I felt as if I was being sucked into the darkness or the emptiness of outer space all alone.

The symbolic face that appears to make no claim also represents emptiness, reflecting itself relatively to those who view it, like a mirror of sorts. Again, what is more, my works represent my most significant concern, that is, worthlessness and beauty.”

【Artist Profile】

Satoru Kurata was born in Tokyo, in 1991. He graduated with a BFA in Painting from the College of Art and Design, Musashino Art University, after which he studied abroad at the Universität der Künste Berlin, Germany. In 2017 he completed his MFA in Painting at the Graduate School of Art and Design, Musashino Art University. Kurata currently lives and works in Tokyo. His recent solo exhibitions include, “Weird Void” (Musashino Art University FAL, Tokyo, 2020), and “Memories of Ajewarlae” (Tokyo Wonder Site Shibuya, Tokyo, 2016).