



Sanya Kantarovsky “After birth”

Dates: Apr 14 – May 27, 2023

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery Kyoto

Opening reception: Friday, Apr 14, 16:00 – 18:30

Taka Ishii Gallery is pleased to present Sanya Kantarovsky’s solo exhibition “After birth” from April 14 to May 27, 2023. This marks the new Kyoto gallery’s first exhibition and features a selection of works centered around the location’s rich history and landscape, mixed with darker subject matter.

Once someone knocked on the front door of a confectioner’s shop in the Yasuhara area of the Date district between 3:00 and 3:30 in the morning. The shopkeeper got up, and when he opened the door, a woman came in and stood on the earthen floor of the entryway. She looked still young, but her hair hung down straight over her shoulders. She wore a white kimono and carried an apparently newborn baby in her arms. She kept pushing the hair out of her eyes with an angry look, and said that she would like very much to have some sweet ame [rice candy], and then paid for it with a mon coin [the smallest monetary unit in old Japan]. The shopkeeper sold her the ame; she took it, thanked him, and went away.

Again the next night, about the same time and in the same condition, she bought ame and went away. The shopkeeper started wondering about it, so one day he talked to an artist who was a good friend of his. The artist was just as puzzled as the shopkeeper and said he would come by that evening so he could see for himself.

So that evening the artist got his brush, some paper, some rice wine and snacks, and visited the confectioner. They drank and talked until late into the night. Then they heard someone knocking on the door. The shopkeeper motioned to the artist to get out of sight, stood up, and went to the door. As he opened it, in came this mysterious woman who wanted ame for a mon. The shopkeeper intentionally took a long time stirring the ame around in the barrel, and the artist hid behind something. From there he was able to draw a picture of the woman.¹

This exhibition was conceived specifically for 123 Yada-cho, a 150-year-old *machiya* situated across from the historical landmark of the Sugimoto residence, in the Shimogyo ward of Kyoto. Previously a home and later a café, the house serves as a container for a new group of paintings, watercolors and traditional *Nishijin*-made tapestries.

Representations of several Japanese *yōkai* populate this exhibition’s domestic partitions: among them *Ubume*,

¹ “Obligations of a Dead Mother.” Source: Kondō Kiichi, “Shintatsu Mintan-shū: Yūrei no hanashi, Komochi yūrei,” in Tohoku, vol. 9 of *Nihon Minzokushi Taikei*, edited by Ikeda Yasaburō, et al. (Tokyo: Kadokawa-shoten, 1974), 96.

the dead mother; *Nuppeppō*, a little lump of rotten flesh; and *Rokurokubi*, a woman whose head hovers around, semi-detached, on a snake-like neck. These *yōkai*, conjured throughout Japanese history as a way to deal with everyday discomforts and mortality, share the dim rooms of the *machiya* with subjects borrowed from other sources such as Western mythology, art history, and the artist's own experiences.

The paintings were made through a process of one idea superseding another, a layered gestation of addition and subtraction, rinsing and drying, wiping and evaporating—the interplay of emulsions and spirits. Elsewhere in this old home, handwoven *Nishijin-Ori* (*Nishijin* brocade) present aspirational, parasitic fungi—*Growths*—the culmination of using traditional *Hikihaku* techniques, with an approach to representing a subject by means of its own material: pigments gleaned from the surrounding natural environment—moss, lichen, and fungi.

The forms installed at 123 Yada-cho address very particular kinds of nurturing—a fastidious care and attention that, while indicative of an act of love, does not preclude a reverent air of fear. For the artist who bore witness, he may have wondered about his creative decisions: how do I represent a ghost, how do I work through fear in a way that feels true? But also: why was this ghostly figure buying candy for her newborn child? Perhaps the nurturing actions of the *Ukume* legend's spectral mother were motivated from a concern towards her child's potential—not to nurse its human capabilities, but to contain its primal vitality.

Sanya Kantarovsky was born in Moscow, Russia in 1982 and currently lives and works in New York. He studied painting at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, Rhode Island and received his MFA at the University of California, Los Angeles. Kantarovsky recently presented solo exhibitions at the Aspen Art Museum in Colorado, USA (2022), Kunsthalle Basel in Switzerland (2018) and the Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo in Turin, Italy (2017-2018). Recent group exhibitions include Baltic Triennial 13 "GIVE UP THE GHOST" (2018), "The Arcades: Contemporary Art and Walter Benjamin" at the Jewish Museum, New York (2017); "The Eccentrics", at the Sculpture Center, New York (2016). Other important presentations include "Happy Soul" at LAXART in Los Angeles (2015); "You are Not an Evening" at Gesellschaft für Aktuelle Kunst in Bremen (2013); "What Were You Expecting, Mr. Milquetoast, a Plot?" at Badischer Kunstverein in Karlsruhe (2014). A comprehensive monograph entitled *No Joke* was co-published by Studio Voltaire and Koenig Books in 2016. Kantarovsky's works belong to several prestigious museum collections, including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Tate Modern, London; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

For further information, please contact:

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Thu – Sat 10:00 – 17:30 Closed Sun – Wed and National Holidays



Sanya Kantarovsky
"Ubume (Yoshitoshi)", 2023

Oil on linen
140.3 x 100.2 cm

© Sanya Kantarovsky
Photo: Jeffrey Sturges



Sanya Kantarovsky
"Dacha", 2023

Oil on canvas
80.5 x 60 cm

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Photo: Jeffrey Sturges



Sanya Kantarovsky
"Badgirl", 2023

Oil on canvas
140.2 x 100.4 cm

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Photo: Jeffrey Sturges