



Taka Ishii

Gallery

6-5-24 3F Roppongi Minato-ku Tokyo #106-0032, Japan

tel +81 (0)3 6434 7010

fax +81 (0)3 6434 7011

web www.takaishiigallery.com

email tig@takaishiigallery.com

Makoto Saito “After Watching the Tove Jansson Documentary. - Song of the Forest -”

Dates: November 16 – December 14, 2024

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery (complex665)

Opening Reception: Saturday, November 16, 17:00 - 19:00

Taka Ishii Gallery is pleased to present “After Watching the Tove Jansson Documentary. - Song of the Forest -,” an exhibition of the work of Makoto Saito, from Saturday, November 16 to Saturday, December 14. Saito’s second solo show at the gallery will feature approximately six new paintings.

Saito is known for portraits of artists such as Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, and Antonin Artaud in which their faces appear haunted by insanity, made by transferring computer images onto canvas with a brush as if breathing life into digital data. This process involves dissecting and reconstructing faces on the computer to create intricate dot-matrix blueprints.

With their vivid colors and organic shapes, the new canvases featured in this exhibition mark a radical departure from his previous style and a shift toward abstraction. Inspired by a late-night viewing of a documentary about Finnish artist and writer Tove Jansson, and nostalgic memories of reading Nordic folk tales of trolls and goblins to his daughter, Saito conceived images of forest spirits coming to life, which led to this new body of work.

The various trolls and goblins in these paintings, rendered in highly abstracted colors and shapes against backgrounds that resemble a dim, mysterious Scandinavian forest, appear to coalesce through a process of recurring division and fusion. They are analogous to coacervates (small amoeba-like spheres of proto-cellular organic material) believed to have been the first life forms in the ancient oceans. The folds and cracks of the paint recall the metabolic functions propelling life forms’ growth, which developed over the course of evolution, while also evoking the rugged, uninhabited surface of a desolate planet, juxtaposing microscopic and macroscopic scales. Saito speaks of his great excitement at witnessing phenomena akin to the emergence of life unfolding on his canvases.

In Saito’s previous works, meticulously created from blueprints over great lengths of time, each stage of production was governed by the artist’s precise intent. In contrast, his latest works appear

to celebrate the spontaneity of placing embryonic forms on the canvas and observing their natural development. The paint responds to its surrounding environment, such as the underlying layers or neighboring colors, undergoing unexpected changes and weaving myriad visual narratives both large and small. We invite you to wonder at the emergence of spirits in these pulsating, dynamic works.

Makoto Saito was born in 1952 in the Fukuoka Prefecture, and currently lives and works in Tokyo. His major solo exhibitions include “Makoto Saito –Criticality–,” Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art, Fukuoka, (2019), and “MAKOTO SAITO: SCENE [0],” 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa (2008). His works are housed in the collections of numerous museums in Japan and overseas including San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, Kanazawa; and the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo.

For further information, please contact:

Exhibition: Takayuki Mashiyama / Press: Masayo Suzuki (press@takaishigallery.com)

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e-mail: tig@takaishigallery.com website: www.takaishigallery.com

Tue-Sat 12:00 – 19:00 Closed on Sun, Mon, and National Holidays



Makoto Saito
“Song of the Forest”, 2024
Oil on canvas
163 x 215 cm
© Makoto Saito



Makoto Saito
“Floating Troll”, 2024
Oil on canvas
163 x 215 cm
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