

Keiichi Tanaami was born in Tokyo in 1936 and graduated from Musashino Art University. An artist of another breed, he has been active in graphic design, illustration, and fine arts since the 1960s, never heeding the boundaries of mediums or genres but instead aggressively traversing them. Though his spectacular debut as a designer during his student days is well known, few know that during that same time he was tirelessly creating works of fine art as well, exhibiting at the Yomiuri Independent exhibition and holding a solo show at the Tsubaki-Kindai Gallery. Following his graduation in the mid-'60s, he was baptized, so to say, by psychedelic culture and pop art and he broadened his range of work to include animation, silkscreen, cartoon-like illustration, collage, experimental film, painting, and sculpture, which he continues to this day. He was particularly inspired by the experience of meeting Andy Warhol in the '60s, and to this day utilizes the design technique of compilation as he takes on experimental approaches in challenging the dominant problems that exist within the contemporary art world such as art and design, art and product, and the relationship between the everyday and the beautiful. Tanaami's recent major exhibitions include solo exhibitions *No More War* (Schinkel Pavillon, Berlin) and *KILLER JOE'S* (1965-1975) (Fondation Speerstra, Switzerland), and group exhibition *Ausweitung der Kampfzone: Die Sammlung 1968 – 2000* (Berlin State Museums, 2013). His international reputation continues to grow, and his works will be featured in the upcoming pop art macro-exhibition, *International Pop*, that is scheduled to travel to the Walker Art Center, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the US in 2015.

In recent years, Tanaami has channeled much of his efforts onto the canvas. In particular, since 2010, he has been concentrating mainly on large-scale paintings, mandalas, so to speak, of his over 78-year personal history. These works contain many motifs associated with Tanaami's childhood experience of war. Glowing, grotesque creatures personify bombs and the light of their explosions. Beams of emanating light are the searchlights of Japanese troops keeping watch for American bomber planes. The skeletal monsters that appear in his works represent war casualties, and at the same time function as figures of us, ourselves, who know no fear. A recurring character based on a motif that comes from Tanaami's wartime memory of goldfish also frequently appears in his works, and is deeply connected to the sight of the light from the American bombs reflecting off of the scales of the goldfish his grandfather kept. Pine trees, seemingly pregnant with animal-like life forms, are based on hallucinations Tanaami witnessed when he nearly died from a pulmonary edema at age 44.

The upcoming exhibition will include large sculptural works in addition to new paintings, including the title piece, *Cherry Blossoms Falling in the Evening Gloom*, a large painting measuring 3 meters in width. His new sculptures are part of a series of new works that incorporate the motif of his 2012

work *Red Drum Bridge*, and include a powerful piece in which characters riding in a plane sit atop an uncrossable bridge. Tanaami says that, “it is in my personality to take even the dark experiences of the past and transform them into positive expressions,” however, the world depicted here may be a vision of Tanaami’s own ultimate paradise, transcending both good and bad, suffering and fear.

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