

Keiichi Tanaami's second solo exhibition at Karma International, entitled *The Laughing Spider*, presents a new body of work in the form of paintings, sculpture, and animation, in addition to historical collages.

The animated video *The Laughing Spider* represents a recurring character throughout the show: the anthropomorphic Arachnid inspired by the smiling spiders created by Odilon Redon. Tanaami's continued use of appropriation is evident in visions of Katsushika Hokusai's Great Wave and Lichtenstein's iconic, onomatopoeic "CRASH!" and "BRATATATATATAT!" throughout the video. The emphasis on sound in *The Laughing Spider* is imperative in the eerie and unnerving voices of laughing, squealing and crying. Both characters and objects somehow become entangled in the spider's web.

Since 2010, Tanaami has channeled much of his efforts into large-scale paintings. 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 representative of the searchlights that Japanese troops used to keep watch American jet fighters. The skeletal monsters that appear in his works represent war casualties. These profoundly idiosyncratic fantasy worlds that Tanaami has created are exemplified in *Universe in a Fishbowl*, a dream-like triptych depicting a potpourri of cherry blossoms, birds, skeletons and tigers. The symbolism of a goldfish, deeply connected to his childhood memory of light from American bombs reflecting off the scales of his grandfather's pet, allows the fishbowl to become the perfect vessel for his characters.

The vinyl stickers on the gallery windows, portraying the main characters in *The Laughing Spider*, confront the spectator with their macabre. The spider appears with scales and rippled facial muscles, wholly a hybrid of Tanaami's characters. He says, "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 paradoxical paradise, transcending both good and bad, suffering and pleasure.

Keiichi Tanaami was born in Tokyo in 1936 and graduated from Musashino Art University. 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 intrigued by psychedelic culture and pop art which broadened his range of work to include animation, silkscreen, cartoon-like illustration, collage, experimental film, painting, and sculpture, all of 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 mundane 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 were featured in the pop art macroexhibition, *International Pop*, that traveled to the Walker Art Center, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art in the US in 2015. More recently, his work was part of *Passion. Fan Behaviour and Art* at the Ludwig Museum – Museum of Contemporary Art in Budapest and *MYSTIFIERS* at the National Centre for Contemporary Arts in Moscow.

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