

Nanami Saito “*Good bye!*”

March 14 (Sat.) – May 9 (Sat), 2026

Nanami Saito was born in Osaka in 1996, and currently lives and works in Tokyo. Employing techniques such as entwining wire netting used for pest control around clay before firing, she has produced ceramic works that explore the sense of traversing between nature, manmade objects, and her own body, using that sensation as a starting point to address the distance and relationships between them. Saito's artistic practice is underpinned by extensive field work that is carried out not only within Japan but also overseas. Inspired by her cultural anthropological interest in sacred sites such as the vast forests of Yakushima, the stone circles of the British Isles, and Balinese religious rituals, in recent years she has expanded the scope of her artistic expression, with the glaze effects and forms of the works taking on organic characteristics. This exhibition presents new works rooted in the artist's more personal experiences, centering on the motif of a “lemon tree,” which she spent around two years living with after relocating from the Kansai to Kanto region, as well as the results of her fieldwork at Mount Osore in Aomori Prefecture.

Countless ceramic lemons are arranged throughout the exhibition space. At the center stands a lemon tree set in a bronze pot. For the artist, the lemon is a motif layered with multiple meanings. It starts with the concrete experience of loss—living with a lemon tree day by day until it eventually withered—and encompasses the emotional fluctuations depicted in Motojirō Kajii's novel *Lemon*, as well as the physical sensations evoked by the fruit's sourness when tasted. The lemons placed on the floor, sometimes stacked vertically, sometimes forming a haphazard pile, bring to mind the legend of “Sai no Kawara” (a riverbed in the netherworld where the souls of children who die prematurely are sent to as punishment for causing great sorrow to their parents, and are made to pray for salvation by building small stone towers), and the practice of stacking stones in Mount Osore as a memorial prayer for children who died before birth. Saito views beliefs as an accumulation of repeated actions and believes that sacredness may reside within the very structure of human behavior itself. Watering a tree, eating the fruit that it bears, after which it bears more fruit—this daily cycle can be seen as having ties to a form of belief that arises through repeated gestures. This sensation resonates with the creative process of repeatedly producing the same shape from the same plaster mold of a lemon, and here it is also possible to observe a link to the keyword of “corporeality,” which has been an important perspective within her practice.

Saito's inspiration for creating works based on parts of her own body came from observing the ancient forests of Yakushima. Her experience in Yakushima, which catalyzed her thoughts on the “threshold” between trees and her own body, as well as the time she spent living with a lemon tree, watering it and being nourished by its fruit, enabled her to deepen her insight into her own existence within the cycle of life. In this exhibition, she presents several ceramic works that trace her various body parts, such as the abdomen and buttocks. For this exhibition, Saito intertwined more personal territory with the results of her fieldwork, undertaking a new endeavor of working with bronze and creating multiple ceramic lemon works using a plaster mold. Her practice, which has been grounded in the concept of traversing the boundary between human artifice and nature, is progressing to a new stage of inquiry while reexamining important themes such as rituals and beliefs. We welcome visitors to witness Nanami Saito's efforts—supported by a philosophy exploring sacred sites where nature and human activity intersect, beliefs and corporeality, and the coexistence of humans and non-humans—as well as the outcomes of her practice.

A couple of years ago, when I moved into my new home in Tokyo, I welcomed a lemon sapling into my life and spent about two years living with it. I spent time enjoying the little things, like eating the fruit and nurturing a ladybug pupae I found in a nearby park, protecting it from aphids. However, last year, as my stays overseas and in the countryside continued, the lemon tree withered away.

That loss was much greater than I had anticipated, and coupled with physical and mental exhaustion and other tragic incidents, I found myself unable to accomplish anything for days on end.

Interweaving these personal experiences with fieldwork conducted in Mount Osore in Aomori prefecture and my research on beliefs and sacred sites, in this exhibition I attempt to reconsider the questions of how we mourn the dead as well as the nature and significance of beliefs and sacred sites.

The process of making a mold of a lemon and creating lemons out of clay one by one, felt like tracing the time I once spent watering the lemon tree every day. The lemon is both a symbol of this exhibition and is a tangible presence for me. The physical sensation reminiscent of the refreshing aftertaste brought about by the sourness of a lemon, is also one of the elements shaping this work.

Goodbye to all the unpleasant things!

—Nanami Saito

Artist Profile

Born in Osaka in 1996, and currently lives and works in Tokyo. Employing techniques such as entwining wire netting used for pest control around clay before firing, Saito produces ceramic works that explore the interplay between “nature/manmade objects/her own body,” examining their distances and relationships. Saito’s artistic practice is inspired by extensive fieldwork both in Japan and overseas, focusing on rituals, beliefs, and sacred sites, and covers a wide range of locations, including Mount Osore in Aomori Prefecture, Yakushima in Kagoshima Prefecture, the stone circles of the British Isles, and the religious rituals of Bali. In recent years, she has taken up the new theme of “corporeality,” expanding her practice into a series of works that use her own body parts as motifs. Her major exhibitions include *MA* (kokyu kyoto, 2022), *Whispers in the Wholeness* (Yutaka Kikutake Gallery, 2024), *PNEUMA* (Kuma Gallery, Tokyo, 2023).