

Tomoharu Murakami, an exhibition of the Taka Ishii Gallery Collection**Dates: Jul 6 – Aug 15, 2021****Location: SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery, Hong Kong****By appointment only****Please email tighk@takaishiigallery.com**

SHOP Taka Ishii Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition of Tomoharu Murakami from July 6 – August 15, 2021. Devoting himself to the making of “black paintings” since the 1960s, Murakami’s oeuvre evolved from practices of Nihonga (Japanese painting) and Art Informel, and has become independent from the Japanese contemporary art world with a profound sense of existence and serenity. This exhibition will feature a selection of 6 works from the gallery’s collection.

Morning, noon, night, nature, and a person’s mind:

These things that definitely exist cannot be captured with one’s perceptions.

Is it possible to fix such existences on a two-dimensional canvas?

It might be that when I dispose of unnecessary intentions,

And can just simply be “natural,”

Then it is possible for me to manifest “the profound” that encompasses everything.

I hope to touch that “profundity” over a long passage of time,

And through my daily act of applying paint to my paintings.

Tomoharu Murakami, *Bijutsu Techo*, February issue, Tokyo: Bijutsu Shuppan-sha Co., Ltd., 1982

He abandoned the idea of his self-expression,

And does not adhere to any standards of beauty.

He no longer questions whether his works are “paintings,”

Nor is he bound by any sense of time in “creating” his works.

Considering himself a human being before he is a painter,

He has abandoned the Self,

Solely looks to God,

And prays to be one with God.

Satoshi Yamada, “On Murakami Tomoharu’s Art”, *OUT OF SILENCE: Murakami Tomoharu*,
Nagoya City Art Museum, 2010

Murakami was attracted to the world of Suibokuga (black ink painting) and entered the Japanese Painting Course at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts. His early pursuit of monochromatic expressions featured innovative forms that mixed Japanese pigments with black oil paint; and was well received at the Guggenheim International Award Exhibition in 1964. It was after this trip to New York, Murakami shifted to Abstract Expressionist experimentations. He developed the iconic “black paintings” practice that applies layers of black paint with a palette knife on canvas and accomplishes works based on personal visions. It was an attempt to capture the essence of the flow of time through his labor in painting. Later, his conversion to Catholicism in 1979 has brought a strict routine like monastic services to this prolonged progress of painting, where Murakami rises before dawn to paint for 10 hours with a mind filled with intimate “prayers to God”. His works, each can take up more than a year to complete, are also contemplated as darkness itself, challenging our common understanding of the visual nature of painting.

Derived from his practice of “black paintings”, Murakami’s signature series also features “black and red paintings”. “Transfiguration” (1995) intermingles the contrasting colors with black oil paint and red acrylic paint, as a manifestation of the painter’s internal struggles between his sacred “prayers to God” and his “own impurities”. While in the latest works on paper “Untitled” (2020), Murakami directly scratches the paper with graphite to create a new form, similar to the “white paintings” appeared in 1990s in which he scraped off white acrylic paint with a sharpened pencil.

Tomoharu Murakami (b.1938) was born in Fukushima Prefecture. He is currently based in Tokyo. After graduating from the Japanese Painting Course at the Tokyo National University of Fine Arts, he enrolled in the graduate program in the same department, but quit after three months and started working as a Nihonga artist. Shocked by American abstract expressionist works he saw in 1964, when he was invited to participate in the Guggenheim International Award Exhibition, he began making paintings using a unique method of mixing and layering oils, charcoal, and acrylics and applying them over long periods of time. He converted to Catholicism after visiting a Trappist monastery in Hokkaido and continues to make paintings as prayers to God. His works have been included in numerous group exhibitions including the "Guggenheim International Award Exhibition," Guggenheim Museum (New York, 1964), "Tomoharu Murakami / Satoru Shoji," Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art (1981), "16th Sao Paulo Biennial" (1981), "Cadences: Icon and Abstraction in Context," The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (1991), "Painting-Singular Object: A Perspective on Contemporary Art," National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (1995) and National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto (1996), "Attraction of the Monochrome Paintings: Tadaaki Kuwayama, Tomoharu Murakami and the others," Chiba City Art Museum (2004), and "OUT OF SILENCE: Tadaaki Kuwayama / Tomoharu Murakami," Nagoya City Art Museum (2010).



Tomoharu Murakami
"Untitled", 1983-1984
Oil on canvas
45.9 x 37.9 cm
© Tomoharu Murakami
Courtesy of Shigeru Yokota Gallery
Photo: Kenji Takahashi



Tomoharu Murakami
"Transfiguration", 1995
Oil and acrylic on paper
37.5 x 29.0 cm
© Tomoharu Murakami
Courtesy of Shigeru Yokota Gallery
Photo: Kenji Takahashi

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