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Taka Ishii

Gallery

Silke Otto-Knapp

Dates: Aug 1 – Sep 19, 2026

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery Kyobashi

Taka Ishii Gallery Kyobashi is pleased to present a solo exhibition of the work of Silke Otto-Knapp from Saturday, August 1 to Saturday, September 19. This is her fourth exhibition with Taka Ishii Gallery, the first in eight years and the first since her passing, and features approximately eight works made between 2006 and 2019.

I am not interested in painting actual props or theatrical backdrops but instead apply their ethos to my paintings as a kind of distancing device. The painting still acts as a moonlit landscape but with a subtle shift in perspective, if that makes sense.

Silke Otto-Knapp

Interviewed by Pernille Albrethsen, "Ten Questions: Silke Otto-Knapp," *Kunstkritikk*
September 13, 2013.

Standing before Otto-Knapp's paintings, one first becomes aware of what is absent rather than what is depicted. The figures in her pictures remain faceless contours, holding their breath in stillness, as though time had stopped midway through a choreographed movement.

Erasure was as central to Otto-Knapp's practice as paint application. Rejecting paper, the conventional support for watercolor, as "too illustrational," she instead developed a distinctive technique of repeatedly applying and removing layers of watercolor and gouache on canvas. As the pigment rose to the surface of the canvas, she transferred the separated pigment to other areas or removed it with water, a dry cloth, or a sponge, building up a dense succession of washes and layers. These accumulated traces resolved into countless gradations, producing dark negative spaces against which the contours of figures and landscapes slowly emerged. Here the act of painting was inseparably bound to the act of erasing, and this process generated a highly charged tension between the subject and the picture plane, giving rise to surface and depth, transparency and opacity. This ambiguity within the pictorial space lay at the core of the artist's approach.

Performance and the body were recurring subjects in Otto-Knapp's work. She repeatedly referenced the choreography of the Bauhaus dancer Xanti Schawinsky and pioneers of postmodern dance such as Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown, as well as scenes from theatrical adaptations of films by Rainer Werner Fassbinder. The title of "Moontrail (Trio A)" (2010), a large painting on view in this exhibition, is drawn from "Trio A," the landmark work Yvonne Rainer first performed in 1966. Bringing together the trail left by moonlight and the bodily movements of choreography within a single painting, Otto-Knapp's work has a curious quality: its subjects seem motionless yet somehow wavering, and it is as if the granularity and fading of photographs had

been translated into paint.

A group of paintings of dancers produced in 2006 employs restrained gradations of silver, white, gray, and pale brown, giving the surfaces a delicate radiance reminiscent of a theatrical stage formed by light. "Lilac Garden (2)" (2011) is from the 76-print series "Lilac Garden (Rehearsal)" (2011), the title of which references Antony Tudor's ballet "Jardin aux Lilas (Lilac Garden)" (1936). This groundbreaking work of 20th-century ballet conveyed psychological states not through narrative but through body language such as posture, gaze, and subtle gesture. Otto-Knapp's work of this period reveals her interest in deconstructing and reconstructing the visual vocabulary of that stage production.

Otto-Knapp took a strong interest in the work of the choreographer Michael Clark. In an interview, she spoke of her fascination with the way Clark's choreography employs classical ballet as a formal language while overturning and modifying its discipline during the creative process. The resulting contradictions coexist in a complex state of tension, which could be said to resonate with her own approach to painting.

Otto-Knapp approached landscape with the same gaze she brought to the body and the stage. Even in the serene, unpeopled landscapes of her later years, including "Rainbow" (2019) and "Birds and Waves" (2019), both on view in this exhibition, there is a pervasive sense that figure (positive) and ground (negative) are constantly on the verge of changing places.

Since the artist's death, a series of solo exhibitions and a growing body of critical writing have kept her work in view. Her influence has continued growing steadily, offering new creative perspectives to artists of her own and younger generations.

Silke Otto-Knapp (1970 – 2022) was born in Osnabrück in 1970. She majored in cultural studies at the University of Hildesheim and received her MFA from Chelsea College of Art and Design in London. Otto-Knapp has held solo exhibitions at Heidelberger Kunstverein (2026); The Kunstverein in Hamburg (2024); the Renaissance Society, Chicago (2020); the Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (2017); the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (2015); the Kunsthalle Wien and the Camden Arts Centre, London (2014); the Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2013); the Kunstverein Munich (2010); and the Tate Britain, London (2005). She has also participated in many group exhibitions, including "Fictions of Display," The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2025); "Performance on Paper," Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2025); Michael Clark "Cosmic Dancer," Barbican Centre Art Gallery, London (2020); "Performer and Participant," Tate Modern, London (2019); the Liverpool Biennial 2018, *Beautiful world where are you?*; "Made in L.A. 2016: a, the, though, only," the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2016); "Sacré 101 – An Exhibition Based on The Rite of Spring," the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich (2014); "Dance/Draw," the ICA, Boston, MA (2011); and the 9th International Istanbul Biennial (2005).

This exhibition is held in collaboration with the Estate of Silke Otto-Knapp.

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Tue – Sat 11:00 – 19:00 Closed on Sun, Mon and National Holidays



Silke Otto-Knapp

“Moontrail (Trio A)”, 2010

Watercolor and gouache on canvas

140.5 x 160.5 cm

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Photo: Kenji Takahashi