



Taka Ishii

Gallery

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Naoto Kawahara “Hypnos”

Dates: Jul 3 – 31, 2021

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery (complex665)

Taka Ishii Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition with Naoto Kawahara. Featuring four new paintings, it is his seventh solo exhibition with the gallery and the first in six years.

Kawahara has long produced photorealistic paintings that faithfully reproduce photographs of people and landscapes around him and scenes from films. In recent years, he has made references to images from classic paintings by Albrecht Dürer, Balthus, Lucas Cranach, Edgar Degas, Edvard Munch, Pierre Bonnard, and Pieter Claesz, among others, changing the figures through his own models and re-envisioning the original scenes on his canvases. Through this series of “re-envisioned paintings,” the artist has developed and demonstrated to the viewer “an exploration of prototypes of imagery that still strike a deep chord with people today,” while “creating *déjà vu* perceptions through repetitions of the subject matters borrowed from old masters.”

This time, the artist references paintings by Lucian Freud (1922-2011). For Kawahara, who has worked mainly on classic and modern painters, this is the first attempt to refer to works by a painter who, active throughout the 20th century, lived contemporaneously with him. His focus in this show is placed on reconsideration of both the unbalanced nature and harmony generated by two colliding elements in Freud’s oeuvre—namely “the almost violent depictions peculiar to him” and “the delicate and precise depictions” that can be seen in small details—as well as “the beauty inherent in their interrelation.”

The title of this exhibition, “Hypnos,” comes from the name of the god of sleep in Greek mythology. In ancient times, sleep was regarded as a state of suspended animation, thus more approximate to “death,” rather than “life.” It thus makes perfect sense that Hypnos was considered to be a twin brother of Thanatos, the god of death, as well as a sibling of Oneiros, who symbolizes dream, and Moros, doom. However, based on his idea that “sleep” is rather what constitutes the foundation of “life,” Kawahara’s brushstrokes meticulously picture “sleep” as an act of quietly healing one’s mind and body in order to re-animate oneself, a tranquil moment filled with both mysticism and vigor.

As evident in *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*, one of the new paintings shown in this exhibition, the nude is the most recurrent subject of Kawahara’s practice. The artist has stated that the nude is “the simplest motif for painting where I find so interesting that the entire impression of the canvas changes drastically when the shade shifts only faintly or the muscle moves just slightly due to a minor posture adjustment.” Observing human bodies as pure objects, without pathos and emotions, Kawahara continues his pursuit of new forms for artistic expression.

Naoto Kawahara (Tokyo, 1971) is an artist based in Tokyo. After he worked as an industrial designer, Kawahara studied at the Lorenzo de Medici Institute in Florence. He has participated in the group exhibitions,

“Biennial of Painting / Biennale van de schilderkunst,” Museum van Deinze en de Leiestreek, Deinze (2014), “The Figure and Dr. Freud,” Haunch of Venison, New York (2009), “Diana und Aktaion: Der Verbotene Blick auf die Nacktheit,” Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf (2008) and “Attention to Detail,” The FLAG Art Foundation, New York (2008). His solo exhibitions have included Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo (1999, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008) and Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp (2007, 2012).

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Tue-Sat 12:00-18:00 Closed on Sun, Mon, and National Holidays



Naoto Kawahara, “Benefits Supervisor Sleeping”,
2021 at the Artist’s studio © Naoto Kawahara

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Courtesy of Taka Ishii Gallery

Photo: Kenji Takahashi



Naoto Kawahara

“Benefits Supervisor Sleeping” (detail), 2021

Oil on canvas

158.4 x 227.3 cm

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Photo: Kenji Takahashi