

Yuichi Hirako

GIFT



Yuichi Hirako (1982, Okayama) graduated from Wimbledon College of Art, UK, with a Fine Arts degree in painting. The central theme of his artistic practice is about the coexistence of plants, nature, and humans and the ambiguity and questions arising from the relationship. Deriving from a sense of strangeness felt from the concept of humans controlling plants to create "nature", as seen in indoor plants and street trees, he explores the boundaries between nature and humans in modern society through his works. Hirako primarily paints, but his works vary in a wide range of mediums such as drawing, sculpture, installation, sound performance, and more. He has been actively exhibiting in Japan and internationally, including shows in Denmark, the Netherlands, Singapore, Taiwan, and Korea.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITION

- 2019 Memories, WAITINGROOM, Tokyo, Japan
Dandelion, Zerp Galerie, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- 2018 Leftover, Dai-ichi Life Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
BLOOM, YIRI Arts Taipei Space, Taipei, Taiwan
Project N 71, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2017 SPROUT, Galleri Christoffer Egelund, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2016 Our way to the Forest, Fouladi Projects, San Francisco, USA
- 2014 Wooden Works, hpgrp Gallery Tokyo, Tokyo, Japan
- 2013 The Thick Forest, The Drawing Room, Singapore
The Leaf Scar, Waiting Room, Tokyo, Japan
- 2012 Memories of My Garden: Hidden Forest, INAX GALLERY, Tokyo, Japan
- 2011 Memories of My Garden : Song, Tokyo Wonder Site Hongo, Tokyo, Japan
- 2010 Memories of My Garden, GALLERY MoMo Ryogoku, Tokyo, Japan

AWARDS

- 2020 Mr.I Prize, Grand Prize
- 2013 VOCA(Vision of Contemporary Art),
The VOCA Encouragement Prize
- 2011 D Art Biennale, Outstanding Performance Award
Arts Challenge 2011, Finalist Nominated
- 2010 The 10th Gunma Biennale for Young Artists 2010,
Finalist Nominated
Tokyo Wonder Wall 2010, Tokyo Wonder Wall Prize
- 2009 Shell Art Award 2009, Finalist Nominated

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITION

- 2020 TOKYO☆VOCA, Dai-ichi Life Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2019 Look and Talk, Sakura City Museum of Art, Chiba, Japan
CYGNUS LOOP, Gallery BATON, Seoul, Korea
SUMMERTIME 19, Galleri Christoffer Egelund, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2018 MUSUBI, Galerie Da-End, Paris, France
- 2017 New Works, The Drawing Room, Manila, Philippines
Après Toronto, Laroche/Joncas, Montreal, Canada
- 2016 Happily ever after, Zerp Galerie, Rotterdam, The Netherlands
- 2013 Art Now:Memories of Body, Tenjinyama Cultural Plaza,
Takahashi Historial Museum, Nagi Museum Of Contemporary,
Okayama, Japan
GENESIS YIRI ARTS Fujin Space, Taipei, Taiwan
VOCA Prize 2013 Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo, Japan
Tokyo Painting II - Mind-cape between interior and exterior ~ ,
Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2011 Arts Challenge 2011 Aichi Arts Center, Aichi, Japan
- 2010 The 10th Gunma Biennale for Young Artists 2010 The Museum of
Modern Art, Gunma, Japan
Tokyo Wonder Wall 2010 Museum of Contemporary Art,
Tokyo, Japan
- 2009 Amuse Art Jam 09 The Museum of Kyoto, Kyoto, Japan
Shell Art Award 2009 Daikanyama Hill Side Forum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2006 Stepsiblings Temporary Contemporary, London, UK

PUBLIC COLLECTION

- LISSER ART MUSEUM (The VandenBroek Foundation), The Netherlands
- Akzonobel Art Foundation, The Netherlands
- Jean Pigozzi Collection, Switzerland
- Dai-ichi Life Insurance Company, Japan

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Using a wide range of media—mainly painting alongside drawing, sculpture, installation, sound performance and more—Hirako explores the boundaries between mankind and nature in modern society. His work has received accolades in Japan and internationally, particularly from Europe and Asia. In this exhibition he will be showing over 30 new paintings and sculptures.

Hirako was born in Okayama, a prefecture with a rich natural environment. Upon moving to London and finding its citizens' preference for artificial nature to be at odds with his own, the theme of his work shifted to mankind's relationship with nature. Seeking psychological comfort, we line our streets with trees, build parks and decorate our homes with potted plants, yet these are only patches being passed off as nature. What's more, they require our care to survive, a far cry from their original state. According to Hirako, "I treat people, plants, nature and man-made objects as coequal. In human spaces, plants are kept under control and thrown away once they've lost their use. By having everything coexist on a level playing field, however, I'm intentionally blurring the boundaries between plant and human, the internal and the external."

Hirako chose the title GIFT to emphasize the importance of shifting our values to reflect the unceasingly changing environment. For example, when we are gifted with beautiful flowers we display them proudly and give them water everyday to maintain their beauty. Yet once they've begun to wilt they're discarded. Consider how we designate certain ancient trees as divine and enshrine them while selecting others for consumption based on our own experience of time and self-serving values. This concept is personified by the tree/man amalgams often found in his paintings. These characters embody the notion that sometime during development we all, regardless of race or gender, become professional judges, deciding "we need flowers because they make us happy" or "we don't need weeds because they encumber the flowers." These seemingly cute and funny characters represent the human ego itself. It says something when even beautiful flowers, strategically evolved to spread their seeds and flourish, are fated to be cut down in their prime and disposed of when they no longer please us.

At first glance Hirako's paintings appear to depict impossible situations. Trees crawl freely around a living room, people's heads have been replaced with trees, and day is indiscernible from night. What may seem like a dreamscape completely divorced from reality is in fact an extension of our world as Hirako sees it, with fact and fiction bridged by aspects underlying our relationship with nature. Through this use of allegory, we are encouraged to rethink our lopsided values concerning the environment.

GIFT

Our sense of values regarding the natural environment is constantly changing depending on the circumstances. This exhibition focuses on the way in which we modify our principles when dealing with plants and nature.

Imagine, for example, that someone gives you some flowers as a gift. When you first receive them, they look beautiful, so you put them in a vase and decorate your house with them. You change the water regularly, and showering them with affection, you try to keep them in a pristine state. But as time goes by, and they start to die, the once beautiful flowers become useless things that you have to throw out. Although we insist on protecting the natural environment when we are financially and psychologically rich, when we find ourselves in a dire situation, we begin to see nature merely as a resource and a target of destruction.

The works in this exhibition are imbued with elements that can be interpreted from a variety of angles. The beginning and the end, destruction and regeneration, ambiguity and clarity – all of these things are cycles, and we are constantly interpreting them in different ways according to the time and context. Assuming that we see plants and nature as ideal gifts, at what point do they become gifts, and at what point do they stop being gifts? I would like to consider questions such as these through this group of works that deals with the borderline between things.

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