

Exhibition title : Emerging from the Void

Artist : Ryo Hirano

Dates : Jan. 19 – Feb. 23, 2019

Location : Sakurado Fine Arts Tokyo



Sakurado Fine Arts is pleased to announce a solo presentation of works by Ryo Hirano, ‘Emerging from the Void’, which brings together for the first time since 2000, an intimate selection of twenty works on canvas and paper, executed between the 1970s and 1990. A self-taught artist, Hirano entered the art scene in the late 1950s and continued to produce work until his death in 1992. Little known outside his home country, his body of work consists of drawings and paintings on the themes of the human figure and landscape, depicted in an expressive, abstract style.

Born in 1927 in Oita, Hirano spent his youth amidst the turmoil of the Second World War and made a living by drawing portraits and posters in the early years of his career. It was in the late 1950s that he gained recognition as an artist in the avant-garde art scene, with his style developing from realism to abstraction around 1955. Responding to a solo exhibition of works on paper using ink, watercolor and wax which was held at Minami Gallery in Tokyo in 1959, Shuzo Takiguchi, a leading art critic at the time, pointed out that the subjects of Hirano’s works were not predetermined and were instead constructed gradually through repeated painting and scraping of the work’s surface. Differentiating himself from contemporary art movements such as Art Informel and action painting, rather than embracing spontaneity and physical energy in his creative process, Hirano focused on visualizing his inner thoughts through the careful manipulation of media.



After briefly experimenting with minimalistic abstraction in the early 1960s, he returned to human figures in the 1970s. In these works, subjects were boldly reduced to intertwining lines, with the influence of Alberto Giacometti becoming evident. Often presenting images from nature such as insects and plants, self-portraits and scenes of destruction rendered in an organic and at

times grotesque style,, Hirano used the accumulation of lines and tactility of the paint to build ambiguous and suggestive forms which float in the pictorial space. In the drawing ‘People in Weeds’ (1981), the contours of human figures are formed by and merge with the mass of lines, eliminating any clear spatial distinction between the figures, and creating a sense of temporality and the residue of movement in the image.. In ‘Agony’ (1990), a vacant white space floats in the center against a dark background, with an ambiguous human hand and hazy lines stretching, organic and vein-like, around it. Dreamy and ghostly in appearance, the painting evokes a feeling of unrest and tension in the viewer.. ‘Self-portrait’ (1989) depicts the upper body of a man, the contours of his figure are rough and blurry, as if they’re being erased or disappearing, giving expression to the sense of violence associated with the act of continued self-scrutiny and a gaze which reaches deeper and deeper into one’s inner self.



In the 1980s, motifs from the natural world became relevant to Hirano’s work, and his style became comparatively calm and poetic. This preoccupation with nature led him to create a series of hanging scrolls in 1989. By venturing into ink and restricting the color palette to black and white, these scrolls became a playground for him to merge human figures and negative space within the picture plane, creating a mystical atmosphere, rich with symbolism in the graphic depiction of his subjects. In his later years, Hirano traveled to Europe and Central Asia several times and made sketches of anonymous people in the streets. Rejecting any ties to a specific time or place, Hirano’s semi-abstract depictions of the real world highlight the maturity of his approach in attempting to capture the universality, rather than the individuality of humankind.



During his lifetime, Hirano distanced himself from the capital, working in the suburbs of Kitakyushu in the western part of Japan. As if responding to the chaos of the postwar era, void and darkness lie at the inception of Hirano's work. The resulting images portray distorted human figures reduced to pure metaphysical being, capturing the fleeting space between light and darkness, known and unknown, life and death. While deeply rooted in the psychological landscape of postwar Japanese society, Hirano's work evolved in ebb and flow with the wider context of twentieth century figurative art, Somewhat reminiscent of Francis Bacon and George Condo, Hirano's expressive brushstrokes reflect the artist's persistent fascination with humanity, its anxieties and alienation, revealing the often overlooked diversity of painterly expression within Japanese postwar art history.

Hirano's museum retrospectives include The Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art (1986), Kitakyushu Municipal Museum of Art (1987, 1997), and Central Museum, Tokyo (1990). His work is also in several public collections including those of the Fukuoka Prefectural Museum of Art and Oita Prefectural Art Museum.

Images:

1. Ryo Hirano, *Two Women*, watercolor and pencil on paper, 40.0x32.0cm
2. Ryo Hirano, *People in Weeds*, 1981, ink on paper, 21.0x35.0cm
3. Ryo Hirano, *Agony*, 1990, oil on canvas, 162.1x130.3cm
4. Ryo Hirano, *Self-portrait*, 1989, oil on canvas, 72.7x53.1cm

For further inquiries please contact:

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