



Otani Workshop. *Buddha lying on the road*, 2020. Acrylic on board. 230 x 364.7 x 4 cm | 90 9/16 x 143 9/16 x 1 9/16 in.  
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## Otani Workshop

### ***Narubekunaranare Narazarumonarubekenya Narareccho*** ***(Be if you can, even if you don't have to be, let it be)***

**Opening celebration Thursday, October 29, 4 - 8 pm**

**On view through Thursday, December 23**

*This is my first solo exhibition in New York. I see it as the culmination of what I've done so far and what I'm doing now. My practice is about transforming a bare material into something that has an appearance of life. I spent a lot of time daydreaming as a child and enjoyed finding human faces or animals in non-animated objects, such as stones. It might have been just an optical illusion, but for me it was a profound experience filled with curiosity. Such a way of perceiving the world has something to do with the idea of animism in Japan, which is the belief that all things have a spirit. I want to create a work that has a spirit of its own.*

*In the past year I've focused only on creating paintings. I think my sculptures evolve as I paint more. I paint on driftwood found near factories in Awaji Island and on old boards used at ceramic factories in Shigaraki. Humans have a limited life span so I like to cherish every object that I encounter in every location. What is important is not only the site itself but also the fact that I exist in that place at that moment and the opportunities that come along.*

*I want my work to be not only experimental but also to present elements of traditions in a new light. I look toward Haniwa from the Tumulus period in Japan (3rd to 7th centuries). Among contemporary ceramicists, I resonate with Yuji Ueda. He is a good friend of mine and we built kilns together when I started making ceramics. Collaborative works are included in this show, which use Yuji Ueda's glaze on my work.*



Left: Otani Workshop. *Daughter*, 2020. Ceramic. 20 x 36.5 x 26.5 cm | 7 7/8 x 14 3/8 x 10 7/16 in ©2020 Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

Right: Otani Workshop. *At the beach*, 2020. Acrylic on board. 80.8 x 64.6 cm | 31 13/16 x 25 7/16 in ©2020 Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

*I remain moved by man-made objects regardless of their categorization as fine art or crafts. I want to work for ordinary people, not for the experts in fine art and for that approach I felt the title 'workshop' was appropriate for my adopted name. In the Japanese educational system, we have 'workshops' in elementary school and 'art classes' in middle school. I feel that the word 'workshop' is associated with a sense of less-than-art and childhood. When I created a boy who is lost in thought with his arms crossed, I paid attention to the sense of being lost in thought. In that process I started to imagine what the figure's background was, and that's how my narratives are born."*

– Otani Workshop

Perrotin New York is pleased to present *Narubekunaranare Narazarumonarubekenya Narareccho* (*Be if you can, even if you don't have to be, let it be*), a presentation of new works by Japanese artist Otani Workshop on view from October 29th through December 23rd. Marking the artist's first exhibition in New York, this body of work serves as a potent introduction to Otani Workshop, and includes a new body of distinctive paintings and bronze sculptures, as well as nearly 150 new ceramics. The works oscillate between figuration and abstraction in order to reimagine the most traditional of art forms.

Japan's culture of ceramic-making, among the oldest on the globe, dates back nearly 15,000 years. Working from his remote rural home and studio in Shigaraki—an epicenter of Japanese ceramic-making for over 800 years—until 2017 and now operating out of a former ceramic roof tile factory on the island of Awaji, Otani Workshop draws upon ancient techniques while simultaneously managing to improvise and experiment with inventive ways of shaping, firing, and glazing. This respect for historical methods from which he deftly borrows and selectively deviates from defines a world unto its own. His is a universe teeming with associations to history but one that also conjures aspects of contemporary pop culture, personal memories, and lived experiences. His wide-ranging objects span clay jars to large-scale bronze sculptures, and often combine found materials, such as iron and wooden pallets. He incorporates discarded materials and objects—abandoned doors, boxes—into his scenographic installations. These customized displays, especially conceived for each presentation of his work, are a pillar of his practice.

Expressions of materiality dominate the discourse of postwar avant-garde Japanese art. The 1956 manifesto by Yoshihara Jiro, leader of the Gutai movement, advocated for art that "imparts life to matter." Extending this lineage into the present day, Otani Workshop brings life to his art, true to his creed that "all things have a spirit." The characters he enlivens in his sculptures, fashioned from clay and sculpted from the earth, seem to produce an enigmatic representation between real and pictorial space. A series of new paintings presented here, which the artist created over the past year, employs similar methods. In his paintings and sculptures alike, narratives emerge from a single, haunting image.

Following free associations and stream of consciousness, the artist creates works that commingle fact and fantasy, establishing semi-fictionalized scenarios that rearticulate the gallery into an imaginary yet strangely familiar space inhabited by these other presences. To experience art by Otani Workshop is akin to finding oneself in a hypnagogic state where you are caught somewhere between daydream and reality.

For the title of his presentation at Perrotin New York, Otani Workshop chose *なるべくならなれ ならざるもなるべけんや なられっちょ* ('Narubekunaranare Narazarumonarubekeny Narareccho'). The phrase, which is a magic spell borrowed from a picture book the artist read as a child, translates to "Be if you can, even if you don't have to be, let it be." In the story, the child protagonist uses the spell to metamorphose into a raccoon. The title's selection for this exhibition reinforces the transformative quality of banal materials into artworks in a manner that both admits their humble nature and respects it as the artist's aesthetic pursuit.

Otani Workshop's creations originate from overcoming personal struggles for self-expression. The faces and figures in his paintings and sculptures embody a naiveté born from unfiltered emotions and actions. They are depictions of the artist's internal realm, involving intuition as much as refined technical skill. Observing the art, one senses that each work demands absorption. After full contemplation, it becomes apparent the artist has invested his seemingly objective characters with nuanced subjectivity. His approach is also reminiscent of the directness of children's art, a quality emphasized by the simplistic formal language and childish features of his subjects, which are themselves imbued with a brazen vulnerability. Their softened, amorphous silhouettes and crude features—the enlarged heads of his bronze pieces in particular—almost demand empathy, underscoring the emotionality in this art.

Tiffany Lambert

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Otani was born in Shiga Prefecture in 1980 and graduated from Okinawa Prefectural University of Arts in 2004, where he realized the vast uncertainty facing young artists. As a result, the young student undertook a year-long journey across the Japanese archipelago, a way of familiarizing himself with museums, temples and cemeteries, a way of resisting the gloominess of sedentary life and, with it, the sadness of precarity. In 2008, Shigeru Otani aka Otani Workshop, was the subject of a solo exhibition at Shiga. Soon after, he was introduced to Takashi Murakami, who became his unfailing champion and advocate.

In 2017, Otani left the city of Shigaraki, the epicenter of Japanese ceramics, and moved his studio to a refurbished, abandoned ceramic tiler on the island of Awaji, in the Seto Inland Sea. In this fascinating space, which includes a monumental kiln, the artist continues to conceive sculptures that marry Japanese pop sensibility with highly traditional ceramic techniques. His works are populated by immemorial figures in which subtlety wrestles with strangeness.

This exhibition marks the artist's first solo presentation in the United States, as well as his third solo exhibition at Perrotin gallery, following exhibitions in Seoul in the summer of 2018 and Paris in the spring of 2019.

#### More information about the artist >>>



Left: Otani Workshop. *Sleeping Pooh*, 2020. Acrylic on board. 92 x 91.5 cm | 36 1/4 x 36 1/16 in ©2020 Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.

Right: Otani Workshop. *Quadruple sleeping child*, 2020. Ceramic. 74 x 32 x 31 cm | 29 1/8 x 12 5/8 x 12 3/16 in ©2020 Otani Workshop/Kaikai Kiki Co., Ltd. All Rights Reserved.



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#### PRESS CONTACTS

**Katherine Wisniewski**, Perrotin New York  
katherinewisniewski@perrotin.com

**Caitlin Merrell**, Perrotin New York  
caitlinmerrell@perrotin.com