

Herald St

Green Door

Naotaka Hiro

9th October - 20th November 2021

(Clockwise from left)

Untitled (Mining)

2021

Acrylic, graphite, grease pencil, and crayon on wood

147.3 x 106.7 x 5 cm / 58 x 42 x 2 in

HS17-NH7676P

Untitled (Caller)

2021

Acrylic, graphite, grease pencil, and crayon on wood

147.3 x 106.7 x 5 cm / 58 x 42 x 2 in

HS17-NH7674P

Untitled (Frequency)

2021

Acrylic, graphite, grease pencil, and crayon on wood

147.3 x 106.7 x 5 cm / 58 x 42 x 2 in

HS17-NH7677P

Untitled (N for Nothingness)

2021

Acrylic, graphite, grease pencil, and crayon on wood

147.3 x 106.7 x 5 cm / 58 x 42 x 2 in

HS17-NH7672P

Untitled (Vector)

2021

Oil pastel and fabric dye on canvas

256.5 x 210.8 cm / 101 x 83 in

HS17-NH7671P

Lonesome Tree b

2018

Bronze, stainless steel rod, steel and black patina

152.4 x 71.1 x 30.5 cm / 60 x 28 x 12 in

HS17-NH7678S

Untitled (Green Door)

2021

Oil pastel and fabric dye on canvas

256.5 x 210.8 cm / 101 x 83 in

HS17-NH7670P

Herald St

Herald St is pleased to present the first European solo exhibition of the Japan-born, California-based artist Naotaka Hiro. Titled *Green Door*, the presentation comprises two large-scale canvases, a selection of plywood paintings, and a bronze sculpture, accompanied by a film demonstrating the artist's intimate and visceral practice.

Hiro's work is concerned above all with the unknowability of the body and its physical and psychological depths. He marries such influences as the vanguard experiments in movement and matter of the historic Gutai group from his native Osaka with the West Coast performance scene he discovered upon moving to California in 1991. Stemming from his background in filmmaking, Hiro's process involves a constant back-and-forth between instinctive gestures and careful mark-making, which he likens to the dichotomies of actor/director, subconscious/conscious, filming/editing, or dream/awake, among others. Struggling with the notion that much of one's body can only be perceived through a mediated form such as a camera or mirror, Hiro places himself as both the artist and subject, working intensely between the two states until their boundaries blur and he reaches 'a complete void'.

Hiro's paintings are recordings of a lengthy and physically demanding method consisting of several so-called 'sessions'. To create the larger works, he suspends unprimed canvases from his studio's ceiling and walls, threading his legs into a pair of holes to envelope himself, cocoon-like. In this claustrophobic arrangement, he manipulates the shape of the canvas with his body while spraying dye and drawing with oil sticks, in two-hour periods set by a timer. In contrast with the malleability of the canvas fabric, Hiro began a series of work on thick plywood, encased in a frame with removable legs that raise the tableau a foot from the floor. Lying with half his body underneath the surface, Hiro attacks the board with graphite, grease pencils, and carving knives to demarcate the positions and limits of his limbs. The incised areas in particular denote the artist's 'vital' points of strength, while each colour and pattern functions as a code to document different body parts and strains of movement. After each session of constricted bodily action comes a crucial phase of editing, during which Hiro re-examines the work from above the canvas or wood to add details with a sober hand, such as the armour-like pattern of scales visible in several paintings.

Green Door also features a bronze sculpture cast from the artist's body. To create his sculptures, Hiro starts by smearing silicon over parts of himself while attempting to remain still in an often awkward position. The final form which is subsequently cast is thus an abstracted figure reflecting the reachable areas of his body and the slight movements which occurred in the drying process. Playing in an adjacent room will be Hiro's nine-minute film, *Subterranean Drawing* (2019), which records him lying in the narrow crawl space underneath his Pasadena home and marking the floor above. This action work came about following a panicked incident when Hiro's wife heard breathing and coughing beneath their house. While on inspection no one was found, this event incited a curiosity within the artist, who went back to the space years later and documented himself drawing for hours on the aged wood subfloor inches above him – a performance which eventually inspired his paintings on wood.

The coronavirus pandemic deeply marked the artist as a time of anxiety and confusion, heightened by his own illness in March 2020 as well as the political upheavals and hate crimes in the same year. These events ensued in a renewed evaluation of his practice, an extended meditation of each sensation within his own body, and an immersion into artmaking as a form of healing, ritual, and fortification. Indeed, the exhibition title, *Green Door*, is a slang phrase suggesting a form of concealment of secrets and truths, a metaphor for something which is hidden and protected from outside forces. Through a diverse range of mediums and processes which are at once intuitive and deeply studied, Hiro thus questions and exposes the mystery, blindness, and awe which lie within the bodies we inhabit.

Naotaka Hiro (b. 1972 Osaka, Japan) lives and works in Los Angeles.

Recent exhibitions include *Green Door*, Herald St, London (2021); *Sweet Home*, organized by Kathryn Brennan and titled by COBRA, Critical Path Method, New York (2021); *Seven Stations: Selections from MOCA's Collection*, MOCA, Los Angeles (2020); *In the Meanwhile...Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary Art*, curated by Julie Joyce, Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara (2020); *50+50: A Creative Century from Chouinard to CalArts*, REDCAT, Los Angeles (2020); *Rituals of Regard and Recollection*, curated by Tricia Heuring, Law Warschaw Gallery, St. Paul (2020); *Disruptive Selection*, Popcorn Gallery, Los Angeles (2019).

Hiro's work is held in public collections including MoMA, New York; LACMA, Los Angeles; The Whitney Museum, New York; MOCA, Los Angeles; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Minneapolis Institute of Art, Minnesota; The Santa Barbara Museum of Contemporary Art, Santa Barbara.