

BORTOLAMI

Naotaka Hiro

Sand-man

24 June – 26 August, 2022

Opening Friday, June 24th from 5:00 – 7:00pm

“The uncanny is that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar.” — Sigmund Freud’s analysis of E.T.A Hoffman’s novel The Sandman (1816)

Bortolami is pleased to present *Sand-man*, Naotaka Hiro’s first solo exhibition at the gallery. Exploring the unknowns and limitations of his own body, Hiro presents four types of work; paintings on wood and canvas, a video, and a bronze sculpture, which is the namesake of the exhibition.

The sculpture, *Sand-man*, 2021, is a cast of the artist’s own body. First coating himself in silicone, Hiro forces himself to remain still for hours in a durational performance while the mold dries around him, ultimately culminating in a sculpture that captures his subtle movements.

Hiro’s fascination with the unknowability of one’s own body stems from his experience as a young filmmaker. Occupying the role of both performer and director simultaneously, he found himself blurring the distinctions between perceiving and being perceived, actor and director, and the subconscious and conscious. Creating nuanced dialogues between these dualities lie at the core of Hiro’s practice, and manifest in the performative process of his artmaking.

The artist’s entire body is activated while creating his paintings. Hanging canvas from ropes that are suspended from the ceiling, the artist nestles himself inside the cocoon of fabric—which he likens to a full body scanner—painting and drawing within its confines. Holes in the canvas allow him to access different angles and surface areas as he works intensively in two-hour increments, with his arms, legs, knees, and head continuously touching the fabric’s surface. After each work session, he unfurls the canvas and begins to make adjustments to the painting in a process analogous to his earliest films—performing for himself and then stepping back to “edit” the recording.

When creating his paintings on wood, Hiro utilizes a structure that holds the panel horizontally a foot above the floor. In this space between the floor and the panel, Hiro lays on his back and draws with both hands, constantly observing the spatial limitations of his body while he works, equating this type of painting to a flatbed scanner. The ensuing colors and patterns function as a code for a particular movement of the artist’s body; asterisks mark the position of eyes, nostrils, nipples, or genitals. After drawing from this vantage point, Hiro then switches to working on the panel from above. Oscillating between the two positions, the artist deems a work complete when the “distinctions and binary system blur and abstract, merging the two personal worlds.”

Sand-man is a cumulative visual diary of Hiro’s physical and psychological fluctuations—a map of a body’s workings as it grapples with the uncanny and the unknown.

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Naotaka Hiro (b. 1972, Osaka, Japan) lives and works in Pasadena, California. Hiro received his BA from University of California, Los Angeles, in 1997, and MFA from California Institute of the Arts, in 2000. His work is in the collections of MoMA, New York; The Whitney Museum, New York; Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara; and many more. Hiro's work has also been exhibited at LAMoCA, Los Angeles; The Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Armory Center for the Arts, Pasadena; LAXART, Los Angeles; Centre d'Art Contemporain, La Ferme du Buisson, France, among others. Hiro has had solo exhibitions at Herald Street, London; The Box, Los Angeles; Misako & Rosen, Tokyo; Brennan & Griffin, New York; and Shane Campbell, Chicago. He is the recipient of grants and awards from the Art Matters Foundation and the Asian and Pacific Islander Artist Presenting Initiative.