

Yuichi Hirako
The Nature
The Modern Institute, Aird's Lane Bricks Space
31 March 2023 – 20 May 2023
Preview: Thursday 30 March 2023, 6 – 8pm

The Nature is Tokyo-based Yuichi Hirako's first exhibition at The Modern Institute. The artist grew up in rural Okayama, Japan, and spent an introspective childhood drawing and copying scenes from his favourite manga. Both this setting and his interest in draftsmanship continue to play out in his practice.

Hirako's 'tree man' pervades the paintings and sculptures under various aliases. A self-portrait of sorts, this mythological figure has a human body and a fir or pine tree head replete with antlers. The character evolved in part from the Japanese folkloric tradition of the *kodama* or tree spirit. In Hirako's imaginings, the 'tree-man' is neither simply a nature lover nor a detached urbanite. It can be understood as a foil for any introspective viewer, underscoring our inconsistent relationship to nature.

Many of his paintings to date have focused on imaginary landscapes that address the question of coexistence with our environment – refusing to offer any dogmatic conclusions. *Lost in Thought 102* continues in this vein. Its subject is a surreal picnic in which two 'tree men' sit together on a blanket under a troubled sky. A purgatorial quality also pervades the 'Nonchooser' series, and it is unclear whether indecision is made a virtue in them. All these small paintings feature a variation on the 'tree man' character standing before an ambiguous and expressionistically painted background. Each has a bemused attitude and different attire.

The larger paintings are more cluttered with items which allude to the natural world. The figure in *Green Master 79* holds a mysterious little cat and stands before a blue hued interior of shelves and pot plants. While *Green Master 78* holds a set of juggling balls or fruit. The tree atop the body is filled with various flora and encircled by large snowflakes or stars.

Sculptures *Wooden Wood 29* and *Wooden Wood 30* also feature Hirako's central protagonist and elaborate on the cartoonlike forms in his paintings. Here the figure is surrounded by piles of books, each topped with a vessel. Again, an uncompromised encounter with the natural feels just out of reach – it is mediated through manmade objects, be those books, clothes or pots. The serious intermingles with the light-hearted in these works to produce compelling scenes which consider the relationship between society and nature.

Yuichi Hirako lives and works in Tokyo, Japan, selected solo exhibitions include: inheritance, metamorphosis, rebirth, Nerima Art Museum, Tokyo (2022), Mount Mariana, Gallery Baton, Seoul (2021), Project N 71, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, Tokyo (2018), Bark Feeder, Dai-ichi Life Gallery, Tokyo (2015), Memories of My Garden: Song, Tokyo Wonder Site Hongo, Tokyo (2011). Recent group exhibitions include: Under Current, Powerlong Museum, Shanghai (2022), Riso Is It, OIL by Bijutsutecho Gallery, Tokyo (2020), Look and Talk, Sakura City Museum of Art, Chiba (2019), Egg of Shibuya, Shibuya City Hall, Tokyo (2015), Collector's Eye, Kashiwa Public Gallery, Chiba (2014), Art Now: Memories of Body, Tenjinyama Cultural Plaza, Takahashi Historical Museum, Nagi Museum Of Contemporary, Okayama (2013), Tokyo Painting II ~ Mind-scape between interior and exterior ~, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo (2013), Arts Challenge 2011, Aichi Arts Center, Aichi (2011), The 10th Gunma Biennale for Young Artists 2010, The Museum of Modern Art, Gunma (2010), Amuse Art Jam 09, The Museum of Kyoto, Kyoto (2009).