

KÖNIG GALERIE

AYAKO ROKKAKU | CUTE. WEIRD. FREE.

KÖNIG GALERIE | 28 JULY – 03 SEPTEMBER 2023

KÖNIG GALERIE presents the third solo exhibition by artist Ayako Rokkaku, born in Tokyo in 1982. Following solo shows in the CHAPEL, the smaller exhibition space of the Berlin gallery, in 2021, and at the gallery's London space in 2022, the show titled CUTE. WEIRD. FREE. features over 15 canvases of various formats on the almost 10-metre-high walls of the NAVE. A highlight of the exhibition is the 6-by-8-metre cloud-shaped headpiece installed on the front of the former nave of St. Agnes.

When delving into the life of the now world-famous artist, residing in both Berlin and Porto, it is astounding to learn that her journey as a painter commenced as a mere hobby in 2001. Aged only 19 at the time, she, a waitress, was driven by an innate passion to find an alternative mode of expression beyond words. Without any formal art school training or an artist studio, she began drawing and painting fearlessly, liberated from constraints, pressure, or guidelines. Her material of choice was cardboard, her tools were her own fingers, and she embraced painting in public spaces. Her artistic approach is instinctive and unrestrained, brimming with emotion, as if from a child's hand. Even today, her works maintain the free-spirited essence of a sketch, partly due to the playful inclusion of "doodle" elements.

What captivates the viewer first and foremost in her works are the distinctively stylized, figurative protagonists. With their large eyes, they draw the viewer's attention and offer a glimpse into the soul of each piece. From surprise to annoyance, restfulness to curiosity, the expressions of these perpetually cute figures evolve on every canvas. They exude both gentleness and determination, seem happy yet anxious simultaneously. It is precisely this intriguing synthesis that renders these little creatures as intricate as the spectrum of emotions they embody within and courageously convey to the outside world.

Ayako Rokkaku's work being consistently associated with the aesthetic and omnipresent "kawaii" (jpn. "adorable", "cute") concept in Japan is no coincidence. Just like her endearing figures, her art radiates innocence and playfulness. The artist delights in evoking a sense of nostalgia and transporting viewers back to their own cherished childhood memories through her creations. To her, "kawaii" represents a feeling of being at home, evoking warmth, and providing a healing touch.

The pictorial backgrounds, often described as abstract, bear the influence of the time when the artist conducted her painting sessions in the park, akin to the "en plein air" (fr. "in the open air") practice traditionally embraced by painters. Applied with her fingertips, utilizing a vibrant palette, the dots of colour are reminiscent of impressionist, almost pointillist landscapes, devoid of a defined horizon. Hints of flowers and abstracted trees invite the sunlight to playfully shine through and dance across the scenery. In her colour selection, however, Rokkaku transcends natural tones and nuances. Moreover, she expertly blends lush green and rippling blue with the fluorescent pink and yellow hues of neon-flooded city streets.

Within the exhibition's works, the iconic heroines seamlessly meld with the homogeneously heterogenous background. They immerse themselves, absorbing and reflecting the vibrant colors, creating a harmonious fusion, yet, simultaneously, float out again – all in their signature cute, weird, and free manner.

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EXHIBITIONS

ALEXANDER WERTHEIM
Sunsets
KÖNIG GALERIE
28.07 – 03.09.2023

JOSE DÁVILA
Men Catching Birds
KÖNIG SEOUL
01.07. – 05.08.2023

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Tue – Sat 11 AM – 6 PM

Ayako Rokkaku (b. 1982 in Chiba, Japan) lives between Berlin, Porto, and Amsterdam. Rokkaku creates her paintings in an intuitive, performative act in which she applies the acrylic paint with her bare hands, transferring the movement of her body onto the canvas. The artist's visual language oscillates between intangible abstract formations and figurative elements. It is clearly inspired by the style of kawaii culture and as rich and limitless as a child's vivid imagination.

Ayako Rokkaku has had solo exhibitions at international institutions including Chiba Prefectural Museum of Art, Japan (2020); Museum Jan van der Togt, Amstelveen, Netherlands (2019); Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Bratislava, Slovakia (2012); and Kunsthal, Rotterdam, Netherlands (2011). In 2015, she showed her work at the Swatch Art Pavilion at the 56th Venice Biennale. Works by the artist are part of the collections of Danubiana Meulensteen Art Museum, Slovakia; Voorlinden Museum, Netherlands; Gunma Museum of Art, Japan; Sehwa Museum of Art / Sehwa Art and Culture Foundation, South Korea; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Karuizawa, Japan.

Text: Noelia Gaité-Gallardo

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