

# BLUM

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Hiroka Yamashita

こをろこをろ *koworo-koworo*

### BLUM Los Angeles

July 13–August 30, 2024

Opening Reception: Saturday, July 13, 6–8pm

Los Angeles, CA, June 29, 2024—BLUM is pleased to present *こをろこをろ koworo-koworo*, Okayama-based artist Hiroka Yamashita's first solo exhibition with the gallery, and the artist's first in Los Angeles.

The paintings that Yamashita presents in *こをろこをろ koworo-koworo* exist within adjoining transitional spaces: between the otherworldly forces of myth and everyday reality or between the knowledge cultivated in times past and instances of historical amnesia in the present. Placing ghostly figures in serene landscapes, the artist reconsiders and gives harmonious form to these stark contrasts. Through her painting style—which straddles abstraction and figuration—and subject matter, Yamashita examines a core concept of animism by exposing the seraphic in the everyday. The exhibition title, an onomatopoeia that sounds like the stirring of the ocean and refers to the origin myth of the Japanese archipelago, insinuates the mining of ancestral customs, giving these intentionally forgotten tales a fresh embodiment. Conveying pervasive folklore anew, Yamashita's works on linen refashion long-established parables in dazzling tones and strokes.

The ethereal or hazy quality of Yamashita's brushwork further characterizes the worlds that she's building—emphasizing the fantastical elements inherent to each vignette. With delicate marks made with oil paint, the artist alternates filling portions of her canvas with either airy translucency or sharp opacity—through these finishes effectively discerning between what belongs to the terrain of reality or the imagination. In 《戸開》 *Tobiraki* (2024), for instance, a spectral figure hovers outside of a sepia-toned cave, its form marked only by the sheerest application of white pigment.

Like much of the imagery in Yamashita's recent work, the scene depicted in 《戸開》 *Tobiraki* is taken from Japanese mythology. Separate works depict portions of the well-known story of Amano-Iwato wherein the Sun Goddess Amaterasu secluded herself in a cave, discouraged by the violence she saw from her own brother, thus plunging the world into darkness. To coax the goddess out of hiding, the other gods gathered outside of the cave to dance and celebrate—as shown in Yamashita's painting 《ウズメ》 *UZUME* (2024). Amaterasu, curious about the laughter she heard, peered outside of the cave and was captivated by her reflection in a mirror that had been placed there for this purpose. This scene is depicted in Yamashita's 《鏡 (アマテラス)》 *Mirror (Amaterasu)* (2024).

“This exhibition mainly features works related to *Bitchū kagura*, a traditional dance practice rooted in Shinto rituals that has been passed down for generations in the Okayama, Bitchū area,” Yamashita says. Thought to derive from the event of luring Amaterasu from her cave, *kagura* is a type of Shinto ritual ceremonial dance. In most *kagura* performances in Japan, there is a portion dedicated to the story of Amano-Iwato. Yamashita's painting 《猿田彦》 *Sarutahiko* (2023) depicts the jovial movement of this choreography through a frenzy of brush strokes and dripping paint, as a subtle outline of a tree emerges from a pool of blade-like grass. The custom's connection to the unearthly is also referenced in

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the upper left of the painting, where a dark figure appears to hover.

These traditional Japanese myths have not often been referenced within Japan in the wake of World War II. Deployed as propaganda during the war, mythology in the country was then associated with toxic nationalism. Cut off from elements of their history, Yamashita and others of her generation have begun to revisit these stories, parsing them from their negative usage to better understand the currently overlooked pillars of the society in which they live. Yamashita says of the exhibition, “Rather than depicting a typical mythological scene, I wanted to create works that touch upon forgotten deities and the hidden history that has vanished from the center stage... Just as the title refers to the beginning of the country, I hope these paintings also signify the new beginning of a better world.”

Hiroka Yamashita (b. 1991, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan) received her BFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York, NY and MFA from Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. She currently lives and works in Okayama, Japan. Recent solo exhibitions include *project N 84*, Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (2021). Her work has been shown in group exhibitions including *YES YOU CAN: The Strength of Life through Art*, WHAT Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2022).

## About BLUM

BLUM represents more than sixty artists and estates from seventeen countries worldwide, nurturing a diverse roster of artists at all stages of their practices with a range of global perspectives. Originally opened as Blum & Poe in Santa Monica in 1994, the gallery has been a pioneer in its early commitment to Los Angeles as an international arts capital.

The gallery has been acclaimed for its groundbreaking work in championing international artists of postwar and contemporary movements, such as CoBrA, Dansaekhwa, Mono-ha, and Superflat, and for organizing museum-caliber solo presentations and historical survey exhibitions across its spaces in Los Angeles, Tokyo, and New York. Often partnering with celebrated curators and scholars such as Cecilia Alemani, Alison M. Gingeras, Sofia Gotti, Joan Kee, and Mika Yoshitake, the gallery has produced large-scale exhibitions focusing on the Japanese Mono-ha school (2012); the Korean Dansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); the European postwar movement CoBrA (2015); Japanese art of the 1980s and 1990s (2019); a rereading of Brazilian Modernism (2019); a revisionist take on the 1959 MoMA exhibition, *New Images of Man* (2020); and a survey of portraiture through a democratic and humanist lens (2023); among others.

BLUM’s wide-reaching program includes exhibitions, lectures, performance series, screenings, video series, and an annual art book fair at its base in Los Angeles. BLUM Books, the gallery’s publishing division, democratically circulates its program through original scholarship and accessible media ranging from academic monographs, audio series, magazines, to artists’ books.

Across the three global locations, BLUM prioritizes environmental and community stewardship in all operations. In 2015, it was certified as an Arts:Earth Partnership (AEP) green art gallery in Los Angeles and consequently became one of the first green certified galleries in the United States. The gallery is also a member of the Gallery Climate Coalition, which works to facilitate a more sustainable commercial art world and reduce the industry’s collective carbon footprint. BLUM is committed to fostering inclusive and equitable communities both in its physical and online spaces and believes that everybody should have equal access to creating and engaging with contemporary art.

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