

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

KAORU UEDA

**Nonaka-Hill Los Angeles
June 4—July 26, 2025**

NonakaHill



Ultimately, painting might be a physiological necessity for me. - Kaoru Ueda, 1971

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June 4 - July 26, 2025

Opening Reception: Wednesday, June 4, 6-8 pm

Nonaka-Hill Los Angeles is delighted to present paintings by Kaoru Ueda, a leading exponent of Japanese photorealism. Often termed a “superrealist,” Ueda is renown for his depictions of household objects and food suspended in space and time. Painted with exacting detail and concision, his works estrange the familiar through rigorous observation.

Ueda’s process is ostensibly a straightforward one in which he uses the visual information in his 35mm negatives as the basis for his hand-painted images; yet the results are paradoxical in that they are realistically unrealistic. Mirroring the “observer effect” in quantum mechanics, in which the act of observation alters the state of the object, Ueda intuitively changes what he termed the “raw and chaotic” aspects of his photographs into a new visual state based on painterly techniques of illusion. His images are therefore the result of subjective observation whose style is a cold—one might even say, surgical—act of seeing. This lends his works the feeling of sensuality colliding with clinicality, where the eros of illusion and the sobriety of reality blur.

Partly for this reason, there is a pop art sensibility subtly embedded within Ueda’s paintings. This is partly due to the estrangement of familiar objects through the marriage of photography and painting; but it’s also due to Ueda’s nod to Jasper Johns’ use of letterforms. In his paintings of soap bubbles and bottles, he renders his name in tromp l’oeil as an embossed label. Also akin to pop, Ueda tends to dispense with receding space, focusing instead on the object’s physical phenomena. As we enter its micro worlds of reflections and color shifts, Ueda gives it an iconic and spiritual dimension devoid of irony. Ueda is an artist more endeared to the power of subjective observation than to the politics of commodification.



1978/KAORU UEDA

Aspects of Ueda's work can be surely traced to his biography: born in Tokyo in 1928, he initially sought a degree in medicine when he came of age but switched to pursuing painting at Tokyo University of the Arts. He eventually had his first solo exhibition in Tokyo in 1958, at which time he had been working as a graphic designer to support himself. In 1956, he had won the grand prize in an international poster competition funded by MGM studios. His graphic design studio consequently grew to a sizable staff and his painting practice became waylaid for a decade. When he restarted his painting practice in earnest, his use of photography took hold, imbibing aspects of mass culture absent from his early work.

As a consequence, Ueda's paintings have an element of seduction that underwrites most popular advertising. But what his paintings are seducing us into is not the consumption of the object, but the physical wonderment of it. Ueda takes great pleasure in contrasting the densities, surface textures, and colors of his objects, as in his paintings of cutlery and Jell-O, sponges, or jam. We also find this in his soap bubbles and bottles, whose surfaces are stages for light and shadow through which we find another reality. Case in point: in *Soapbubble M*, 1982, we see the artist with his camera in the reflection, alluding to the handmade process of building an illusion, such as in *The Arnolfini Marriage*, 1434, by Jan Van Eyck. In it, we see the artist's reflection in a convex mirror (a soap bubble!) behind the marital pair. In this sense, Ueda nods to a tradition that long preoccupied artists before modernism, in which the painter highlighted his subjective experience as the ur-subject of the painting. Ueda's paintings, therefore, are documents of how an object can be changed by the artist's observation, reminding us of how our perceptions make and remake the world with every moment of contact.

Kaoru Ueda was born in 1928 in Yoyogi, Tokyo. Selected solo and group exhibitions include Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (2024); Takamatsu City Museum of Art (2023); Hokkaido Museum of Modern Art (2023); Ibaraki Museum of Modern Art (2021); Yokosuka Museum of Art | Saitama Prefectural Museum of Modern Art (2020); Okazaki Children's Museum of Art (2020); Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Modern Art, Hayama (2017); Mito City Museum (2014); Sagami-hara Civic Gallery (2003); Nerima Art Museum (2001); Rias Ark Museum of Art | Miyagi Prefecture (2001); Sakamoto Zenzo Museum of Art / Kumamoto (1999); Toyota Municipal Museum of Art (1998); Egyptian International Print Triennial, Cairo (1997); Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art (1997); Gwangju Museum of Art (1995); Museum of Modern Art, Shiga (1994); Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (1993); Shizuoka Prefectural Museum of Art (1990); Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art (1989); Kasama Nichido Museum of Art/Ibaraki (1988); Saitama Prefectural Museum of Modern Art (1985); The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama (1983); Korea Arts and Culture Promotion Institute Art Hall, Seoul (1981); Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (1978); Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum/Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art (1976); Seibu Museum of Art (1975); Dusseldorf Art Museum (1974); Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum (1974). Kaoru Ueda was a professor at Ibaraki University from 1985 to 1993.

Nonaka-Hill was founded in 2018 in Los Angeles by Rodney and Takayoshi Nonaka-Hill.

Recognizing that art exhibition spaces of any scale and economy will, over time, provide a community with a matrix of new and long-lasting memories, Nonaka-Hill has endeavored to keep “Japan” as a connective presence in each of its exhibitions to date. Working with emerging artists, established artists, and artist estates from Japan and its diaspora, alongside non-Japanese artists, the gallery team has enjoyed the erratic shifts in self-education, exhibition presentation, and public storytelling.

Los Angeles

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Kyoto

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