

Naofumi Maruyama | *puddle*

Keteleer Gallery is delighted to present *puddle*, the first solo exhibition of Naofumi Maruyama (b. 1964, Niigata, Japan). Maruyama is regarded as one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary Japanese painting. Since his debut at the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo (1992), he has built a unique pictorial universe that navigates between abstraction and figuration, reality and memory, matter and light.

The exhibition features fifteen new paintings and an equal number of works on paper, in which Maruyama deepens his poetic exploration of fluidity and perception. His paintings are created on damp cotton canvases, allowing pigment to flow freely. The paint seeps into the fabric, evaporates, leaves traces, blurs again. The image emerges not through delineation but through dispersion — a process that recalls the 'Morotai' style (misty or vague), where gradations of color replaced the line drawings characteristic of traditional Japanese painting, but also the stain paintings of Morris Louis or Helen Frankenthaler from the postwar American Color Field movement.

In Maruyama's work, there are no hard lines, no fixed contours. Everything breathes and blends. Mountains dissolve into rivers, rivers into air, air into memory. His paintings seem to hover between appearing and disappearing, like reflections on a water surface that ripple and fade at the slightest touch. For Maruyama, painting is a way of being: a slow dialogue between control and surrender, between material action and the intangible nature of time. With the exhibition title *puddle* — 'Mizutamari' in Japanese — Maruyama evokes a sunken land (a place), a landscape reflected in the water collected there (time), something deeply rooted and something constantly changing — different in nature, yet coexisting clearly and harmoniously as one whole.

While painting — with water as his primary medium — Maruyama reflects on the idea that everything is in constant motion. We often try to grasp that ceaseless flow through words, diagrams and analyses, as if we could rationally comprehend the world's mutability. Yet what becomes visible through such reasoning rarely explains the irrational events or layered emotions that truly shape our existence. Maruyama's paintings are therefore not representations of the world, but places where perception, memory and time merge. They do not invite understanding, but experience — like a memory that gains meaning only at the moment it slowly fades.

The works on paper, lighter and more intimate in tone, function as fluid notes within this same universe. They show how Maruyama's imagination moves from the expansive to the small, from universal reflection to everyday moment. Together with the paintings, they form a rare equilibrium between stillness and movement.

Art historically, Maruyama may be read as a bridge between East and West: his handling of paint recalls the meditative emptiness of Japanese aesthetics, while his attitude toward the painting — as an autonomous, self-thinking organism — resonates with questions central to Western postmodernism. Yet his oeuvre escapes any label: it moves and changes, like water, constantly shifting form.

With this first solo exhibition in Belgium, Keteleer Gallery offers an exceptional insight into the work of an artist who approaches painting as a living, breathing process. Maruyama's oeuvre invites slowing down, looking without naming, allowing that which fades.

Opening 6 december; 2 – 6 pm. In presence of the artist.

The exhibition will be on view until 10 Januari, 2026.