Maki Katayama and Hikari Ono
As a moment and as an accumulation
30 Oct – 19 Dec 2026
The Upstairs

Bortolami is pleased to present a two-person exhibition of works by Maki Katayama and Hikari Ono in The Upstairs, organized by Richard Aldrich. While working in distinct mediums—from Katayama's systematic exploration of color classification on canvas to Ono's wall sculptures, characterized by their meticulously treated surfaces—both artists approach painting as a conceptual framework rather than a set of techniques.

Maki Katayama's paintings examine systems of order, drawing on Sanzo Wada's *A Dictionary of Color Combination*s, the landmark 1930s publication that synthesized traditional Japanese color sensibilities with Western color theory. By applying Wada's color pairings across two related canvases and pressing their wet surfaces together, Katayama explores relationships of color and scale while also introducing chance. This transfer technique and its variations result in compositions that reflect on how color is conveyed and understood.

Hikari Ono's expansive body of clay sculptures, collectively titled *Object for Painting*, are conceived as a series of fundamentally tactile paintings. The raw clay, sourced from various regions across Japan, functions as both paint and canvas, while its organic colors, textures, and sculptural forms interact. Through a process of slicing, grooving, folding, and removing, the completed sculptures are air-dried and finished with varnish, allowing Ono to engage her materials as painterly surfaces while preserving their raw sensory presence.

Central to both artists' work is a shared inquiry into nature and perception. In Japan, color nomenclature is often deeply tied to site-specific environments and lived experiences: for example, moegi-iro (the yellowish-green of a sprouting tree) or nando-iro (a grayish-blue of a storage room). This intimate, highly specific categorization of the natural world recalls the work of structural anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, who wrote extensively on the rich botanical knowledge and precise vocabularies developed by Indigenous cultures. Katayama engages her chromatic heritage by hand-mixing paint to mimic the colors in Wada's book, which categorizes colors through binary oppositions (similar versus contrasting, transparent versus opaque, warm versus cool).

A refined painterly concern unifies both Ono and Katayama's work, evident in the tactile surfaces of Katayama's canvases and the supple, organic contours of Ono's clay objects. These raw, earthbound qualities evoke foundational principles of Japanese aesthetics, recalling both the material and spatial sensibilities of the Mono-ha movement alongside the conceptual, rule-based frameworks of 1960s Systems Art. Yet, both artists push these lineages forward by scaling their works down to an intimate, individualized viewing experience that prioritizes unexpected interactions between color, material, and surface.

Maki Katayama (b. 1982, Tokyo, Japan; based in Tokyo) constructs paintings though systematic investigations of color, measurement, and composition.

Drawing on Wada Sanzo's A Dictionary of Color Combinations and the standardized dimensions of Japanese canvases, she establishes rules that determine the relationships between colors, proportions, and the arrangement of individual works. Through a process of applying paint to two canvases and pressing their surfaces together, Katayama introduces variations within these predetermined structures, allowing the resulting compositions to develop through a precise, iterative process. Her work considers how relationships between color, scale, and space are shaped by the systems through which they are organized. She received a BFA in Oil Painting from Tama Art University, Tokyo, in 2006.

Selected solo and group exhibitions include two meet coffee room, Tokyo (2026, 2025, 2024); LOOP HOLE, Tokyo (2025); XYZ Collective, Tokyo (2025, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019, 2018, 2013); Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (2023); NowHere, New York (2022); second2.planningspace, Tokyo (2022); Sansho House, Niigata (2022); Pollock Gallery, Dallas (2018); Shane Campbell Gallery, Chicago (2017); Maki Fine Arts, Tokyo (2016); and HARMAS GALLERY, Tokyo (2015); The Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo (2014).

Hikari Ono (b. 1990, Lüneburg, Germany; based in Tokyo) explores fundamentally painterly concerns through sculpture, notably in her ongoing series *Object for Painting*.

Molding and forming small-scale, tactile clay sculptures through a range of physical gestures, Ono explores the inherent qualities of matter and its continual transformation through natural forces, time, and human interaction. Ono received a BFA in Oil Painting from Tama Art University, Tokyo in 2014.

Selected solo and group exhibitions include David Zwirner, New York (2026); GALERIA ALEGRIA, Barcelona (2026); Porto Arts Club, Porto (2026); Taka Ishii Gallery Maebashi, Gunma (2025); The Green Gallery, Milwaukee (2025); Adams and Ollman, Portland (2025); The Ueno Royal Museum, Tokyo (2025); XYZ Institute, Marugame (2025); XYZ Collective, Tokyo (2025, 2023); Yonkai, Kanazawa (2024); VOU, Kyoto (2024); culterim | Backshop, Berlin (2024); Union Pacific, London (2024); ADZ Gallery, Lisbon (2022); XYZ Collective, Tokyo (2020); and The STEAK HOUSE DOSKOI, Tokyo (2017).