

Naotaka Hiro at The Box

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Text by Claire de Dobay Rifelj

In my early 20s, I had one of my first primal experiences in front of an artwork. Confronted with a painting by Viennese Actionist Hermann Nitsch—trails of rich, burgundy paint pouring down a large canvas, ripe and sticky-looking—I submitted to a sudden compulsion to walk up and take a deep, exploratory whiff. Naotaka Hiro's latest exhibition at The Box may incite similar corporeal urges.

The centerpiece of the show, which also includes drawings, sculptures, and video, is a long wall of unstretched painted canvases, each pierced by grommets with a network of ropes lacing through them. The artist uses these to drape the material around him while he works, physically cocooned inside each painting as he makes marks from within. Far from a crutch or a gimmick, this process produces works that not only bear the artist's trace, in pools of saturated dyes and sinuous lines of oil pastel, but even become bodies in and of themselves, with vertebrae-like folds and ropes emerging umbilically from their center. Like skins or hides, the viewer can imagine wearing these paintings, pulling them off the wall and into the world.

Hiro's sculptures, cast from fragments of body parts and indentations, have similar origins, placing his work along a continuum that includes Nam June Paik's *Zen for Head* (1962), Bruce Nauman's early body-based sculptures, and Carolee Schneemann's visceral performances of the 1970s. Though more formally driven, Hiro's objects—with their performative execution, snippets of which are captured in a rough video shot from the artist's POV—somehow feel both imposing and approachable, stimulating physical and emotional sensitivities alike. Actionism for the 21st century, perhaps, with less violence and more compassion; a powerful, necessary thing.

Naotaka Hiro: *Peaking* runs December 10, 2016–January 28, 2017 at [The Box](#) (805 Traction Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90013)



Image courtesy of the artist and The Box, LA.