

Keiichi Tanaami

“Amulet of the Tapir”

Sat 24 June – Sat 5 August, 2017
NANZUKA

NANZUKA is pleased to announce “Amulet of the Tapir,” a solo exhibition with Keiichi Tanaami, as the first time in three years of his new works to be shown at the gallery.

Keiichi Tanaami was born in Tokyo in 1936 and graduated from Musashino Art University. He has been active in graphic design, illustration, film, and fine arts since the 1960s, never heeding the boundaries of mediums or genres but instead continuing to aggressively traverse them through his unique practice.

Tanaami has recently presented solo exhibitions such as “No More War” (Schinkel Pavilion, Berlin, 2012) and “KILLER JOE’S (1965 – 1975)” (Fondation Speerstra, Switzerland, 2013), with participation in numerous group exhibitions including “Ausweitung der Kampfzone: Die Sammlung 1968 – 2000” (Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin, 2013), the large-scale pop art retrospective “International Pop” (Walker Art Center, Dallas Museum of Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art, USA, 2015-2016), “The World Goes Pop” (Tate Modern, London, 2015), and the two-person show “Oliver Payne and Keiichi Tanaami” (Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, 2017). Furthermore Tanaami continues to receive increasing international acclaim for his work, with renowned museums around the world such as MoMa (USA), the Walker Art Center (USA), The Art Institute of Chicago (USA), M+ Museum for Visual Culture (Hong Kong), the National Portrait Gallery (USA), Nationalgalerie im Hamburger Bahnhof (Germany) in recent years newly welcoming his works to their collections.

In recent years Tanaami has drawn influence from scenes that permeate within his own memories and dreams to engage in creating so-called “mandala paintings” that serve to articulate his personal history spanning over 80 years. Tanaami’s latest works, while seemingly presenting themselves as uncanny yet pop renditions of supernatural demon illustrations, convey various memories related to Tanaami’s real-life experiences. USA bomber planes referenced from American comics and the personified bombs that shed radiant rays of light, are profoundly related to the memories of war that Tanaami had actually witnessed as a child. The image of “chickens” that appear in his new masterpiece, “Realm of the Afterlife / Realm of the Living,” as previously introduced in his 1975 film “Crayon Angel,” serve as metaphors for fighter planes that plunge to low altitudes for bombing attacks. Likewise, the various skeletal monsters represent those who have been injured in the war, and implicate our very own selves who live unknowing of fear. Such creative processes often take place within Tanaami’s dreams. Tanaami has kept a dream diary from 1978, and ever since, the records of his dreams have made appearances in his various works.

For example, the pine trees depicted as if embodying an animal sense of life, are derived from images in a picture diary in which Tanaami had recorded the hallucinations he saw when he found himself hovering on the edge of life and death while suffering from tuberculosis-induced pulmonary edema at the age of 44. Naked female figures also make frequent appearances in Tanaami’s works, and in the context of his dream diaries such sexual motifs are often introduced as subjects of fear simultaneously in parallel to the fearful experiences of war. Another theme that emerges often in Tanaami’s dream is water, which brings to mind the relationship with waves that are depicted within the contours of his work.

Alongside such memories and dreams, works by Tanaami’s favored artists such as Chirico, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Jakuchu, and Escher make appearances throughout his new series of works. Such acts of citation are perhaps a natural progression that manifests as a positive efficacy for Tanaami, who continues to evolve through converting his fear towards “death” as well as traumatic experiences into energy. Tanaami enlists these works with an almost jokingly explanation that they are, “the world that he himself would live in after death.” That which is depicted here, is a solitary realm that attempts to transcend all means of art from pop, the psychedelic, to surrealism.

The exhibition will feature approximately 10 new paintings including two new masterpiece works spanning 3-meters wide. Also to be presented is Tanaami's new animation work "The Laughing Spider," which since being presented for the first time in his solo exhibition last year at New York's Sikkema Jenkins Gallery has been screened in numerous film festivals including, the St. Louise International Film Festival (officially recognized by the Academy Awards), the Geneva International Animation Film Festival in which it received the Special Jury Award, the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival, and the Sundance International Film Festival.