

ZENO X GALLERY

Frank Demaegd

Naoto Kawahara

'Alraune'

January 27 – March 10, 2012
Wed – Sat 2-6 pm or by appointment

Preview Thursday January 26, 6-9 pm



ANTWERP – Zeno X Gallery is proud to announce a second solo show with Japanese artist Naoto Kawahara (°1971, Tokyo). For this exhibition at the gallery entitled 'Alraune', Naoto presents seven new paintings.

Although Naoto Kawahara has always been attracted to painting, he began his studies with industrial design. After finishing, he decided to leave Japan for a while to focus on painting. He lived for four years in Italy, a land known for its great history of ancient masters, where he studied at the Lorenzo de Medici Institute in Florence. During these years he became specialized in aesthetical classicism and the techniques of Renaissance masters. Painting in the Western Classical tradition was for Naoto Kawahara, as a Japanese artist, kind of a cultural clash. This confrontation made him reflect on the history of Japan and its ancient tension with the West. Before 1854 people couldn't travel abroad Japan and Western influences were forbidden. Although this situation changed due to American intervention, Western Art stayed a threat for a longtime.

This former opposition between the Japan and the West fascinates Kawahara and inspires him to bring both cultures together. In his paintings he refers to works by great Western artists. Each time he reproduces a composition of a famous work of art. For this show works by Balthus and Pierre Bonnard, photographs by Ruth Bernard, Man Ray and Horst P. Horst and drawings are part of his primary source of inspiration. Despite appropriating elements of existing works, Naoto Kawahara emphasizes there is a difference with copying:

I re-interpret 'painting as painting' by mentally re-imagining, re-picturing, the masterworks. I search for a model, photograph it in the appropriate setting and embark on the process of painting. By translating existing paintings, I try to create another image of them. I find it particularly satisfying if my works are not regarded as mere copies.

(Naoto Kawahara)

In his paintings he always interchanges the Western model for a Japanese nude. In the preparation of each painting he asks a model to reenact a pose. After having taken the photograph of the pose, he starts painting. He never paints when the model is around because he needs the silence of being alone to focus on the process of painting. During this process he is making the image his own by painting the existing composition in a technique that doesn't correspond to the one used in the original work. Naoto Kawahara paints in a classical and realistic way that supports the beauty and elegance of the female body. His works have similarities with the original one but when he also changes the original colors and small details like the texture of present textiles, a distance is emerging.

For this show Naoto Kawahara chose the title 'Alraune' for its mysterious and suggestive connotations. 'Alraune', also known as Mandrake, is a plant with a shape resembling the human figure and would have its roots in ancient magic rituals. 'Alraune' is also the name of the leading female character in a German novel from 1911 by Hans Heinz Ewers.