

**Tomokazu Matsuyama:
In Case You Are Lost**

Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco

By **Netane Takeda**

The Brooklyn-based Japanese artist, Tomokazu Matsuyama, makes a journey back to one of his homelands, California, in this debut show that includes two large-scale sculptures and eleven paintings, at Frey Norris Gallery in San Francisco. Dubbed *In Case You Are Lost*, the show seeks integration in a complex web of personal and public interactions. At a glance, the exhibition suggests a strong neo-pop culture influence, yet convoluted stories emerge layer by layer. As the title of the show suggests, the viewer might get lost in this colorful dream-like world of his creation.



Tomokazu Matsuyama: Kirin version Black/Pink/Purple 1 (left) Kirin version Black/Pink/Purple 2 (right), 2009. Acrylic on canvas, 27 inches diameter, each. Courtesy: Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.

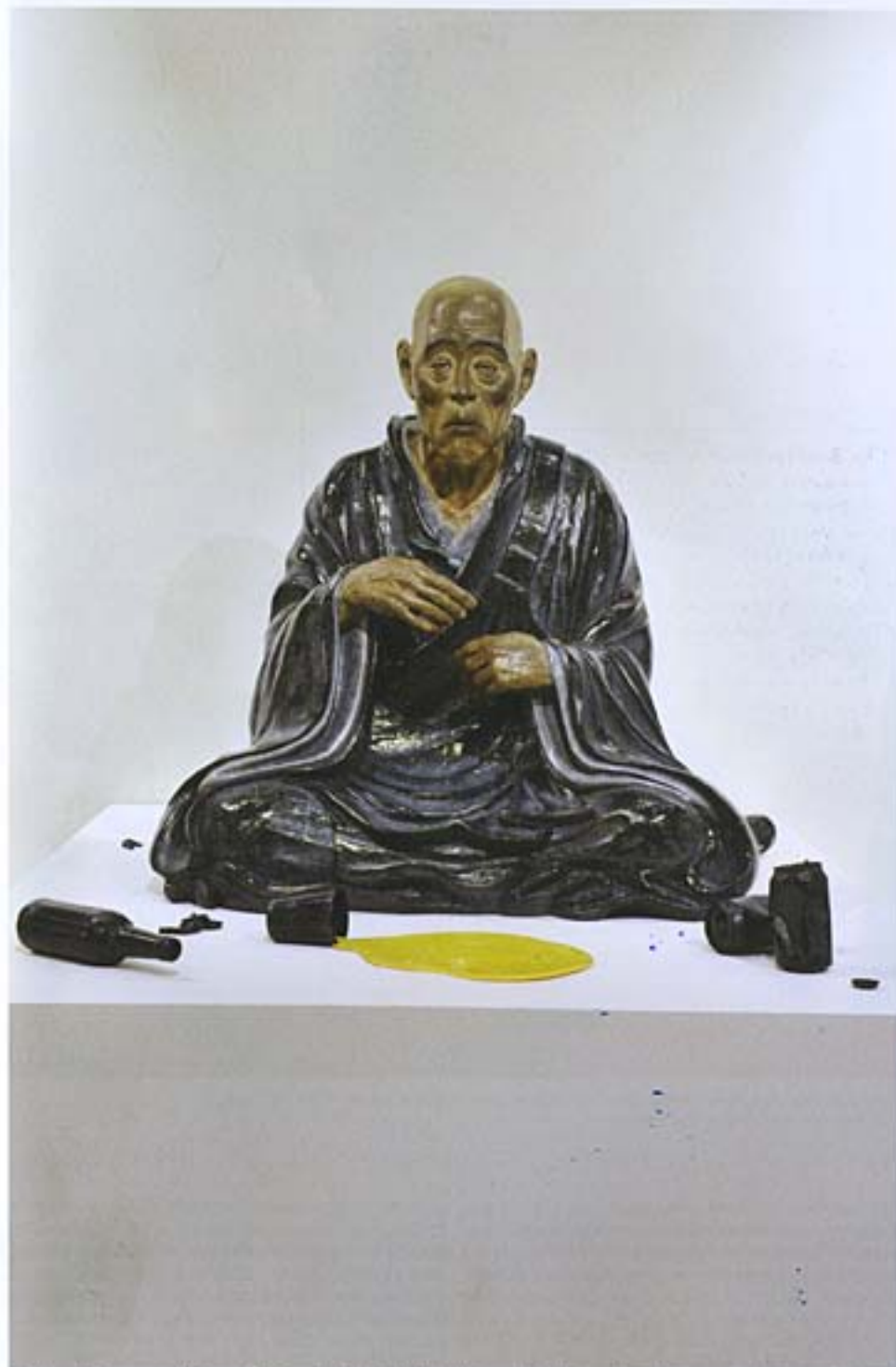
Born in Gifu, Japan, and raised in Los Angeles, London (and Japan), Matsuyama's first profession was as an international snow-boarder, yet he held a BA in Management from Sophia University, Tokyo. Eventually ending up in New York, studying art at Pratt Institute, he soon began showing his work to galleries.

The first piece we see in this show, a large sculpture called *Wherever I Am*, confronts visitors. The idea for the large horse, painted in silver, comes from Frederic Remington's iconic work, *Broncho Buster*, 1985. However, Matsuyama replaces the cowboy with a child's doll that has Asian features. The silver color of the horse originates in the white elephant incense burner, a Buddhism ornament. Adding to that, in the back of the sculpture, Matsuyama puts a yellow excrement-like object on a board painted in a green and white pattern.

In the rear gallery space we see another large-scale sculpture, *A Portrait of a Sacred Monk*, which is a replica of Unkei's wooden sculpture, *Monk Chogen* [1216], a Japanese national treasure. Instead of wood, Matsuyama uses various material, including FRP, plastic, glass, and aluminum. He masterfully succeeds in creating an illusion of the original piece. However, walking closer to it,



Tomokazu Matsuyama: *Wherever I Am*, 2009. Hand painted FRP sculpture with metal and wood, 94 x 72 x 35 inches. Courtesy: Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.



Tomokazu Matsuyama, *A Portrait of a Sacred Monk*, 2010. Hand painted FRP, plastic, glass, aluminum and plastic coated cigarette butts, 33.5 x 32.5 x 27 inches. Courtesy: Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco



Tomokazu Matsuyama *Runnin' Further Deep*, 2009. Mixed media triptych on canvas, 100 x 180 inches.
 Courtesy: Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco

we see that the monk Chogen is just a common man, who appears to be drunk. Beer bottles and cans, spilled beer and cigarette buds are scattered around him. Instead of holding Buddhism beads, the monk looks as if he just dropped a beer bottle and his eyes are out of focus. His kimono as well as the beer bottles and cans are painted in 1970's automobile lamination paint, evoking an old American Cadillac feeling.

In both pieces there is an absurd twist, and history is swept aside with radical ideas. Expectation of familiarity is betrayed and the work straddles western and eastern culture, breaking down and reconstructing the significant works in American and Japanese art history.

Compared to the sculptures, the paintings look more straightforward. The piece, *Runnin' Further*

Deeper (2009), a large-scale triptych painting measuring 7 x 15 feet offers a narrative, which has an aspect of a Japanese byōbu (decorative freestanding room dividers or wall decorations with two, three, four, six, or eight painted panels.) Two figures with flowing hair ride horses in a forest-like snowy field, in a background of mountainous ranges in a moonlit night. The riders look back as if being chased by enemies. The faces of the fig-

ures are blank, much as in an Alex Katz's portrait painting. A tiger and some birds appear and a horse breaching is depicted on the left. The moonlight is reflected in the mountain peak in the far distance.

At first, the work looks like a patchwork quilt. The composition of the trees and the lines of the mountains and earth create a rough grid pattern. There



Tomokazu Matsuyama, *Runnin' Further Deeper, study 1, 2009*. Mixed media on canvas, 24 x 36 inches. Courtesy: Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.



Tomokazu Matsuyama, *Runnin' Further Deeper, study 2, 2009*. Mixed media on canvas, 24 x 36 inches. Courtesy: Frey Norris Gallery, San Francisco.

are two divisions in the pictorial plane — single color planes and patterns. The color contrast in the foreground and background give the work a great sense of dynamism and drama. It is somewhat overwhelming — where to focus the eye. Yet, looking closely, the powerful illusion of the work takes over, inviting us into an imaginary world.

Matsuyama made the painting as part of a series, all of which have a reference to *Dog Chasing*, [1623] by Kano Sanraku. There is a small-scale version of the series titled, *Runnin' Further Deeper Study 1 and 2*, measuring 39 x 48 inches. The

Asian features of the riders, in modern fashion, gallop off the canvas like western cowboys. Matsuyama manipulates the space, the color and the pattern in an impressive display of virtuosity.

There are seven round paintings, most depicting a mythical animal. In the series of *Kirin*, for instance, on the black colored background, an imaginary beast is portrayed. As is the case with the other paintings, it involves colors, forms and patterns. They look decorative, like the silk painting of the Japanese old master's painter, Jyakuchu Ito. At the same time, a refined design in the portrait of the animal evokes Ryan Mcginness's paintings.

Matsuyama's work represents duality — depth and flatness, tension and whimsiness, the old and new, the west and the east, the conceptual and the abstract. His intention is apparently not to blend all the components, but to symbolize them. It pretends to be spontaneous, yet without his well-calculated scheme and technique, this type of aesthetic could not be achieved. And the work itself reveals the process of reconstructing and experimentation. Like a mixed salad bowl, unique and endearing harmony comes from unmatched and unpredictable ingredients. *In Case You Are Lost* somehow encourages the viewer to identify himself in this visual journey, in this imaginary world. **M**

Ed. Note:
The Frey Norris Gallery is located at 450 Geary St., San Francisco, CA 94102. tel: 415.346.7812