The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Japanese Artwork Comes to Moscow

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May 04, 2012



The largest collection of contemporary Japanese art ever displayed in Russia, a two-part exhibit called "Double Vision: Contemporary Art From Japan," is currently on display at two different Moscow venues.

The exhibit includes the works of more than two dozen Japanese artists, among them Takashi Murakami, Kenji Yanobe, Yoko Ono and Yasumasa Morimura, and manages to acknowledge cultural stereotypes while at the same time seeking to actively dismantle them.

"Double Vision" splits the works into two thematic parts. In "Reality / Ordinary World," photography, video art and found objects make up the greater part of the works on display. One of the exhibit's highlights is the work of photographer Lieko Shiga.

For her 2010 "Canary" series, Shiga traveled to unfamiliar locations, asking strangers to show her the "darkest" and "lightest" places they knew. The resulting work communicates an initial sense of disorientation that evolves into wonderment as the viewer becomes familiar with the scene before them: a man's reflection in a washing machine door, the bare

back of a bay stallion, the white belly of a snake beneath a restaurant's fluorescent lights.

In the second part of the exhibit, "Imaginary World / Phantasms," art exists in all shapes and sizes, from the traditional canvas to LED screens, and echoes a wide array of motifs and influences.

The most well-known among the artists on display is unquestionably Takashi Murakami, whose 2003 collaboration with Marc Jacobs for Louis Vuitton brought the artist international recognition.

A dozen or so pieces from Murakami's extensive body of work are on show, including both paintings and sculptural works. "Polyrhythm" features an unpainted sheet of fiber-reinforced plastic with toy soldiers on a desperate march against gravity.

"Untitled" and "And Then and Then and Then and Then" both depict DOB, a cartoon character created by Murakami, and combine classic techniques from the Rimpa school of painting with the licentiousness of modern-day pop culture.

Though he lacks Murakami's name recognition, the work of Hiraki Sawa was the one that attracted the most interest on a recent visit.

Sawa's dream-like video installation, "Dwelling," shows model airplanes taking flight in the most ordinary of household settings. Shot in black and white with a backdrop of doorknobs and dishwashers, it is an incredibly simple but visually enticing piece — whimsical but also unsettling because it seems so commonplace.

"Double Vision: Contemporary Art From Japan" runs until Tuesday. "Reality / Ordinary World" shows at the Moscow Museum of Modern Art. 17 Yermolayevsky Pereulok. Metro Mayakovskaya. "Imaginary World / Phantasms" is on at the State Museum of Modern Art. 10 Gogolevsky Bulvar. Metro Kropotkinskaya. Tel. 694-2890. www.mmoma.ru.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2012/05/04/japanese-artwork-comes-to-moscow-a14575