

First Floor – 'Little Treasures' by Yoshikuni Koinuma

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In a few moments, you will be invited to climb these stairs and enter the electrifying latest world of young Japanese artist Yoshikuni Koinuma, here on the First Floor of the Hommes gallery. As your eyes will search out and meet the works of art while you are coming up, I suspect hardly anyone of you will not immediately feel the urge to climb faster and check this out. You already know that the title of this small exhibition is 'Little Treasures,' and that's what they are. 'Little Treasures.'

When you see them at first, you wonder: what are these collage works made of? Are they tiles? Are they solid metal? Or even glass? When you walk towards the one that caught your attention first – for there is no fixed order in which to look at them - you discover the complexity of their texture. Being interested in things Japanese, I was fascinated to hear that some time ago, Yoshi started to work on the paintings with the canvasses lying flat on the floor. This is the way traditional Japanese painters, wood block print carvers, calligraphers, and virtually all artists and craftsmen in Japan work: more bothered with staying as close as possible to the surface of the earth, from which life evolves on the rhythm of the seasons, than with the best way to transfer true perspective on the canvas, as we are in the West.

Yoshi explained to me how the materials he now uses, like those of traditional Japanese artists, demand a flat surface, instead of working on an easel or a frame hanging on the wall. By this approach, the deep play of acrylic paint that forms the background of Yoshi's 'Little Treasures' is fixed without risk of running out or dripping down by the force of gravity. Images delicately cut from magazines or newspapers are then positioned on the surface, and animated with 3 dimensional details, such as staring eyes or small, shiny and colorful gems. The composition is then covered with layers of epoxy, which give the completed work this rare, solid feel.

Over the last ten years, and even when he arrived in The Netherlands, Yoshi made much larger works - larger than life, seriously figurative paintings with far less complex materials. So why now these 'Little Treasures'...? On his web site, Yoshi ponders over these new ways in his development as an artist in The Netherlands: "I think I'm learning how to express myself by a natural style," he writes there. The method of working horizontally, too, was "a new experience for me. I am sometimes confused by the difficulty of capturing a painting as a whole by putting the painting on the floor, but I did not need to paint well for me at this point. Instead, what I really wanted to see is destroying my past and to see something new." Now, that sounds like a radical move, and when you look at the Treasures up here, you will see that they are indeed radical and unique in many ways.

Walking from one work to the other, a thought that comes to mind is the fact that every painting puts a living organism at its center: a human being, an animal, a plant, or a hard to recognize micro-organism. What happens with those living protagonists in the collages, all coming from the same source of the earth, is up to us, onlookers. Like Yoshi used his imagination while creating his works, he wants to stir our imagination while looking at them. And he does so in an ever more colourful way. The microbe turned flat and fishy with the skull, as you have already seen on the invitation of this exhibition, maybe evoked a dark, spacey, almost eerie world... But the last work you will see features so many colors it dazzles you – especially because the colors are scattered all around by butterflies.

As an artist, Yoshi is not unique in stating the following (again - from his web site): "I honestly don't have something I want to draw, and don't have a motif or concept that I need to keep drawing." According to this view, it's the artist's own, internal drive and the situation or phase he finds himself in that naturally seem to create the works of art. Accordingly, he can casually say to us: "I simply felt the wind, went for a walk, drank a cup of coffee, and drew the motif of what I felt from my heart at such time using the media of pictures etcetera." But when you look at these 'Little Treasures,' and especially when you get the chance to talk with Yoshi about what bothers him, you get a deeper picture. His inspiration is colored by the imagery of computer games, having played those adventurous roles as a kid, amidst weird monsters and evil forces - which can actually easily be translated in the world we live in today: threatened as we may feel by viruses, the media, terrorists, and bacteriological mutations. But please - don't start looking for those elements, those hints... As Yoshi beckons us: "I would be happy if you could freely see my paintings from a neutral point of view."

So this year, Yoshi lives next door, at CK12 in our colourful neighbourhood of Oud Charlois, as an Artist in Residence. Yoshi was born in Saitama, just north-west of Tokyo, in 1982. So fortunately for us, he is indeed still quite a young artist. He studied at the Musashino Art University and the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam. Since 2009, he lives in The Netherlands, and he is planning to stay a couple of years longer. The works you will see up here were created over the last month, and it is a selection from this latest production – which, I think, holds a big promise for the remaining time Yoshi will work in Oud Charlois.

Let us now conclude this introduction in a traditional Japanese way, by sharing a cup of sake (Japanese rice wine). After our toast, please come up and explore for yourself, with an empty mind. I want to congratulate Yoshi with his first exhibition in Rotterdam. He definitely made me hungry for future Treasures, large or small, and I am sure it will not be his last exhibition in The Netherlands. Kampai!