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15.10.17–4.03.18 Mon → Sun, 10:00 → 17:00 museumdd.be

Maki Na Kamura

Steine legen, Äpfel lesen

EN

An artistic exploration of the importance and impact of the medium today is the basis of Maki Na Kamura's (Japan, living and working in Berlin) vibrant painting. By using an extremely individual colour palette and painting technique, Maki Na Kamura creates contemporary pictorial spaces. Based on art historical references, she relies on a long painting tradition. In her paintings, Na Kamura assimilates compositions and motifs of classical masterpieces by artists such as Giorgione, Nicolas Poussin and Jean-François Millet but also refers to oriental art history and philosophy. Rather than merely quoting, she searches doggedly for the pictorial qualities and contemporaryity of her inspiration sources.

Maki Na Kamura, *See XIX1*, 2016, oil and water on canvas, 120 x 150 cm

The exhibition shows various works from the series *Steine legen, Äpfel lesen*. In the paintings, we recognize the gleaners from the work of Jean-François Millet (1857) bearing the same name. Instead of gleaning stray stalks of wheat, the three poor peasant women collect golden apples, a motif derived from the painting *Atalanta and Hippomenes* (1625) by Guido Reni. The curved poses and free painting technique lend the figures in Na Kamura's paintings an ambiguous status as they appear to keep the middle between man and animal.

Through the fusion of Millet's social-political theme of heavy women labour with Greek myth, the paintings obtain a poetic but also ironic undertone. In the series, the artist refers to today's Western consumerism and the age-old tension between nature and culture.

The paintings of Na Kamura have the special quality of being both figurative and abstract. An abstract composition of dynamic shapes, colours and lines creates precipitately a landscape scene filled with figures and motifs — and vice versa. For example, in her *See*-paintings, our gaze wanders between a blue, flat colour spot and a desolate lake in a landscape. In this way, the artist gives an answer to the famous dictum of Clement Greenberg, who said that modern painting ought to emphasize the 'flatness' or the two-dimensionality of the canvas. However, according to Na Kamura the best paintings in the history of art are the ones in which figuration and abstraction effortlessly converge.

This play with perception is also visible in how the illusion of depth is created. The paintings consist of different transparent colour areas blurring the distinction between foreground and background. Whereas realistic landscapes often give a static impression using horizontal lines, Na Kamura multiplies and interrupts the horizon. She states that 'the horizon was invented by painters', since in nature the horizon does not exist as a physical line or zone. As in the works of Japanese print artist Hokusai (1760–1849), who was also a source of inspiration for artists like Degas and Van Gogh, Na Kamura's painting defies the long-standing linear perspective of the West.

In her work, nothing is what it seems to be. The artist approaches the world as the sum of all her potential perceptions, forcing the viewer to 'look' instead of 'see'. This is also emphasized in the titles of the works. Where the title *DL* stands for 'Depiction Lies', the abbreviation *LD* stands for 'Landschaftsdarstellung' (landscape representation). The interpretation of her works belongs to the individual imagination of the viewer. This idea is reminiscent of a passage from the essay *Never Ending Garden* (1967) of Japanese poet Yukio Mishima, describing his experience in a traditional Japanese garden: 'If you allow your gaze to wander [into the garden] just half degree, then a whole new world opens up. (...) The innumerable wandering glances allow the viewer to experience an infinite number of world views.'

Charlotte Crevits

Maki Na Kamura, *Steine legen, Äpfel lesen XII*, 2017, oil and water on canvas, 120 x 85 cm

Maki Na Kamura, *Steine legen, Äpfel lesen IV*, 2016, oil and water on canvas, 120 x 85 cm

Jean-François Millet, *Arenleessters*, 1857

Guido Reni, *Atalanta en Hippomenes*, 1625

This exhibition was realized in collaboration with Museum Osthaus.

OSTHAUS MUSEUM HAGEN

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Steine legen, Äpfel lesen

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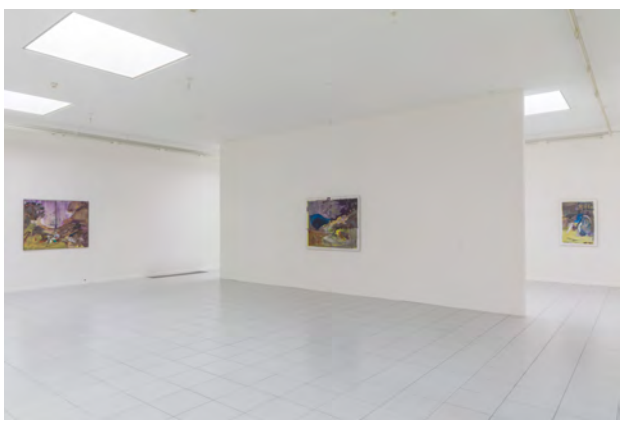
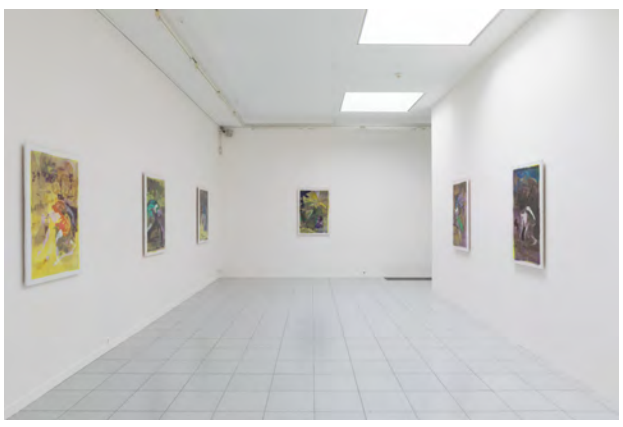
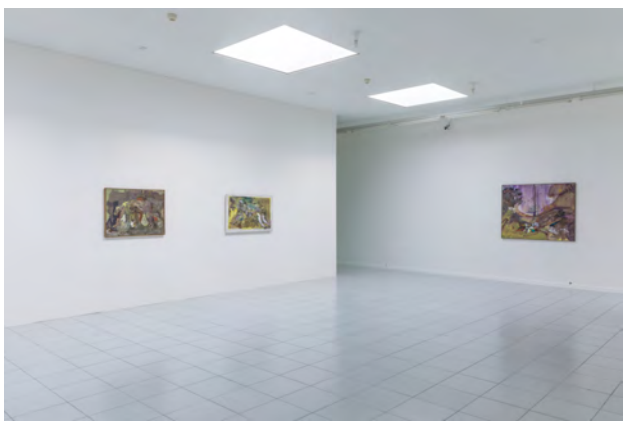
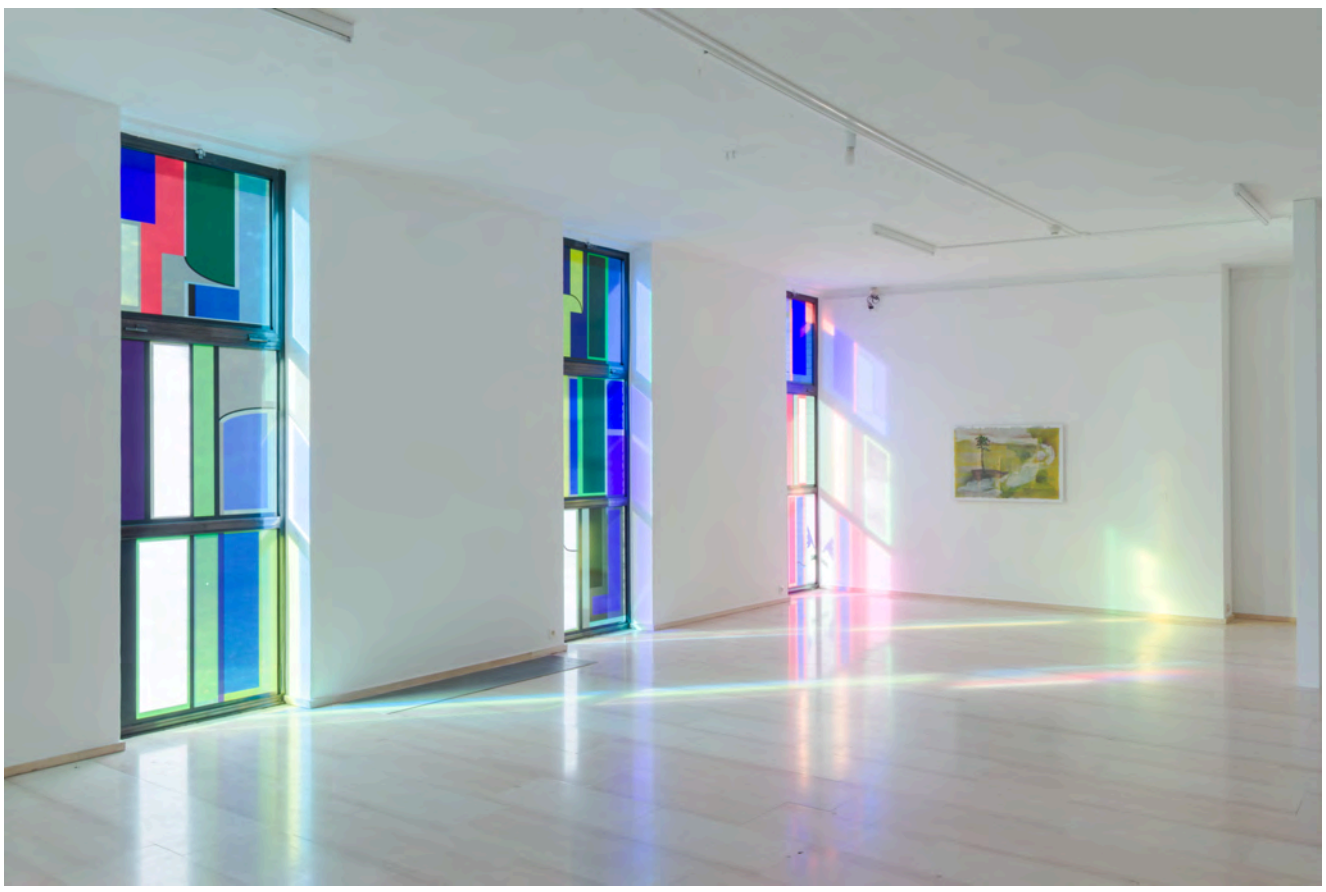
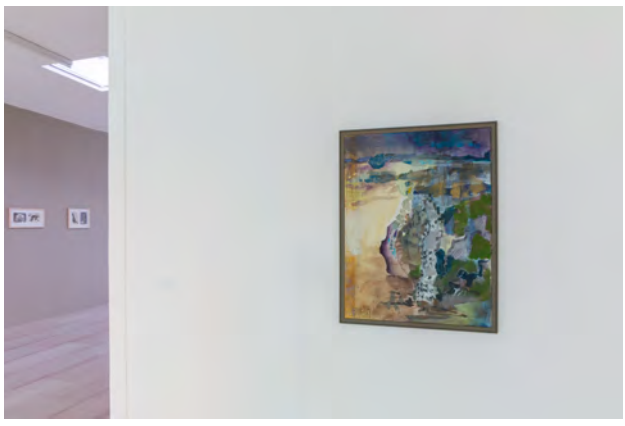
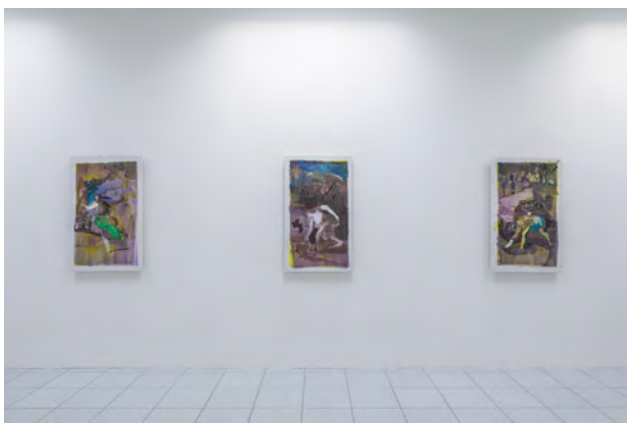

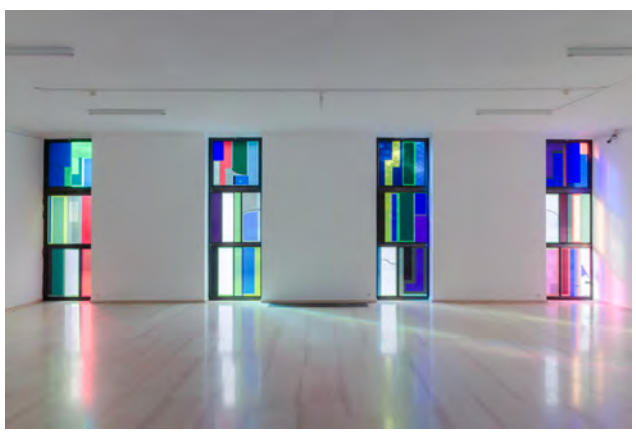

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