

LEIKO IKEMURA***Colors in Motion***

June 19 – July 31, 2021

Opening: June 18, 5 – 8 pm

Galerie Peter Kilchmann is pleased to present the first solo exhibition of Leiko Ikemura with the gallery in our dependence in the Rämistrasse. Leiko Ikemura was born in Tsu, Mie Prefecture, Japan and emigrated to Europe in 1973. A Japanese-Swiss dual citizen, Ikemura has been living and working between Berlin and Cologne since 1990. The exhibition will feature four groups of works that reflect and develop the artist's extensive oeuvre in both its conceptual and technical versatility. Each one of the five exhibition spaces is dedicated to a cycle of works and maintains its own intimate character, although the series refer to each other and form poetic parallels. On view are medium and small format paintings and works on paper, a new group of glass sculptures as well as a video installation.

Since the beginning of her artistic career, Leiko Ikemura's work has been closely interwoven with her personal journey and the various stations in her life. Formative memories from her native Japan find as much resonance as the impressions from her early stays in Spain and Switzerland in the 1970's and 80's, which accompany her to this day. The intimate metamorphosis of a lifelong painting process manifests itself in landscapes in which human figures and nature merge, amorphous forms and hybrid mythical creatures in continuous transformation.

Upon entering the gallery, visitors are immersed in the world of *Girls*, a series characteristic of Ikemura's painting since the mid-1990's. Each of the four paintings in the exhibition shows a female figure in an unfamiliar landscape. In *Chica & Pink* (2019, 120 x 100 cm), the monochrome colour palette of the purple background is interrupted only by the pale blue stripe of a spherical horizon in the lower third of the composition. The ethereal being in the foreground is a silhouette of transparent chromaticity that stands out from its surroundings in warm golden yellows and soft blues. This principle of contrast and transparency is repeated in works such as *Girl with Green Hair* (2019, 90 x 60 cm) or *Girl with Blue Face* (2019, 130 x 190 cm), each in a new combination of colours. The figures seem vulnerable and unreachable. As if trapped in an intermediate world, they lag in their own melancholic mind games.

In the video installation *Praise of Light* (2020), presented in the lower floor, the harmonious synthesis of a total work of art, characteristic of Ikemura's works, becomes apparent. It is an interplay of light and flowing colour. The slow movements are reminiscent of the liquid colour pigments of a watercolour that has not yet dried, that recombine anew to form ever changing shapes. The work conveys the idea of painting as a process rather than a finished product. The viewers are urged to linger in a moment of contemplation and let the gentle visual surges draw them into an alien universe. The installation was first presented in the Matthäus Church in Berlin in 2020 and was originally conceived for the church's apse. For the exhibition at the gallery, the installation was reworked by the artist in order to fit the intimate exhibition space.

Praise of Light is directly related to the series *ABC Akt* (2020, 70 x 50 cm) in the middle space of the upper floor. Never before has the artist moved so far away from figurative painting. The abstract compositions combine elements of calligraphic brush drawing with the flat watercolour aesthetic from the *Girls* series. The translucent application of paint is reduced so that the fine structure in the fabric of the support of the painting becomes visible. It is a painting technique that absorbs the natural light of the room and seems to radiate it back. The works were created during the first lockdown in Berlin in the spring of 2020 and capture a zeitgeist marked by uncertainty and elementary life questions. In a moment of social standstill, the world moves on into the unknown.

In the left wing of the upper level abstraction gives way to a universe of surreal landscapes that invites the viewers to dream. The transparent application of paint and the heavy luminosity in works such as *Yellow Scape* (2019, 110 x 180 cm) provide a bridge to other works in the exhibition. Already familiar motifs, such as the figure of a cowering girl in the triptych *Zarathustra (small)* (2014, 50 x 70 cm), are now found nestled among trees, valleys and mountains. These landscapes address issues of humankind's longing for harmony with nature and are described by the artist herself as landscapes of

the soul. The monumental triptych *Fuji Scape* (2015, each 100 x 150) is reminiscent of the landscape paintings of old Japanese masters. Dream-like sequences, such as the facial features on a volcanic mountain, play with elements of a holistic understanding of nature that assumes the spiritual animation of mountains, rocks and plants.

Similar hybrid creatures can be found in the group of glass sculptures in the right wing, with works such as *Trees out of Head* (2020, 27 x 32 x 20 cm) or *Trees on Head in Yellow Glass* (2020, 14 x 18 x 11 cm). The figure of the reclining head, from which the branches and leaves of a delicate tree grow, is a subject that had already appeared in early ceramics by the artist. For the exhibition, Ikemura worked with glass for the first time. Due to the translucency of the coloured glass, the sculptures seem like living beings that have emerged from the previously viewed landscapes, closing in this way the harmonious circle of the exhibition's narratives.

Leiko Ikemura's works have been presented in solo and group exhibitions worldwide since the early 1980s. Most recently, the Centro de Arte Caja Burgos exhibited the solo show Leiko Ikemura: *Aun más mañanas* (spring 2021). Further solo exhibitions were presented in the following institutions (selection): Kunsthalle Rostock (2020); St. Matthäuskirche, Berlin (2020); Kunstmuseum Basel (2019); Nordiska Akvarellmuseet, Skärhamn (2019); The National Art Center, Tokyo (2019); Deutsches Keramikmuseum Hetjens, Dusseldorf (2017); Nevada Museum of Art, Reno (2016); Museum of East Asian Art, Cologne (2015); The Vangi Sculpture Garden Museum, Mishima (2014); Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe (2013); Asian Art Museum, Berlin (2012) and The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2011). Most recently, Leiko Ikemura has been involved in group exhibitions at Esther Shipper, Berlin (until 27 June); Hekinan City Tatsukichi Fujii Museum of Contemporary Art, Hekinan-shi (2021); Toyota Municipal Museum of Art, Aichi (2020); Pincesshof National Museum of Ceramics, Leeuwarden (2020); The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo (2019) and Museum of the Seam, Jerusalem (2019), among others.

Works by Leiko Ikemura are represented in the collections of major institutions such as the Aargauer Kunsthhaus, Aarau; Albertina, Vienna; Bundeskunstsammlung, Berlin; Bundesamt für Kultur, Berne; Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn; Bündner Kunstmuseum Chur; Kunsthhaus Zürich; Kunstmuseum Basel; Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; MCBA-Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne; MOMAT-The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; mumok-Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna; Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen; Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: Kupferstichkabinett; Takamatsu City Museum of Art, Takamatsu; The Centre Pompidou, Paris; The National Museum of Art, Osaka, and many more.

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