

Art Criticism — *Family of this Planet*, a Solo Exhibition by Masato Kobayashi Amidst Loneliness, Finding a Light Hidden Inside

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Where does the actual location of “this planet” exist, which Kobayashi included in this exhibition title? Usually, it reminds us of the earth. Perhaps, it only exists in Kobayashi’s mind. However, if there is a possibility that this planet is not the earth, there is an unshareable perceptive field between the artist and his audience. If that is the case, although we are in front of the same painting, we are looking at it from different dimensions. Is this sense of infinite loneliness inevitable when we look at Kobayashi’s paintings?

Nonetheless, Kobayashi makes paintings while diligently chasing the light shining inside this planet. However, the light is so dim that one has to establish a special way to find the light in order to incorporate it into an art practice. Perhaps, Kobayashi’s answer was his unprecedented way of painting — applying paint directly with one hand while supporting and stretching the canvas with the other simultaneously — while using models in a classical sense.

Since this planet is not the earth, it is a place where even Kobayashi himself has not been and won’t be able to reach completely. If this planet is his paintings, it cannot be outside the earth. Thus, his paintings on earth remain incomplete. In other words, his paintings need to be incomplete in order to exist.

Kobayashi’s paintings always suggest the existence of pairs, separated and hidden. However, it does not mean that his actual works always exist in pairs. Two entities in a very close relationship — this planet and the artist, this planet and the earth, the artist and the model, the painting and the act of painting, or the painting and its audience — are in pairs that long for each other even when they are far apart.

In this exhibition, Kobayashi depicts the relationship of being simultaneously close and far, which is quintessential to his notion of pairs. He does so brilliantly to congratulate the relationship while implying loneliness more than ever. It is clearly expressed in the imbalance between the depicted image and the wooden frame. Despite the imbalance, Kobayashi manages to formulate the dichotomous relationship, contrasting the imbalance and the painted surface that releases dazzlingly bright lights.

Meanwhile, why can loneliness and brilliance coexist? Following the logic mentioned above, it is possible because Kobayashi’s “this planet” is not the earth. In order to focus on the faint light inside, the artist needs to be as lonely as possible. However, once the artist can find the light of this planet, it shines so brightly that one cannot contain it by himself and the amount of light is so brilliant.

The reason why we can experience the astonishing brightness and brilliance from his paintings is because those paintings make us realize that we all have “this planet” inside us and we have our own ways to focus on its light through loneliness. This experience cannot be realized from the act of looking at paintings in the ordinary sense.

By realizing that we can look at a painting in this way, we all become the same members of the “Family of this Planet,” while existing apart from each other. Now here is a paradox: the lonelier the audience becomes, the closer one can feel Kobayashi’s paintings.



Model of this Planet (Pair), 2021 ©Masato Kobayashi, courtesy of ShugoArts, Photo by Shigeo Muto
Its counterpart is *Model of this Planet (Running-Man) Pair*, 2021.



Masato KOBAYASHI, *Model of this Planet (Running-Man) Pair*, 2021, oil, canvas, wood, 194x296x20cm
Installation view of *Family of this Planet*, ShugoArts, 2021