

ARTICULATED ARTISTS

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Miho Sato talks to Alli Sharma at her studio in Bow, London E3



Russian Actress, 2012

AS: It's interesting how little detail is needed to recognize your *Moomin*. I guess that is the theme of the exhibition, *Minimal Excess*.



Moomin, 2005

MS: Yes, I have made three *Moomins*, all different sizes. The first, in 2003, was bigger and on thick paper. For *Minimal Excess* I have a new painting, *Russian Actress*, and a slightly older one, *Complexity of Adulthood 3*, 2009. I had the image for *Russian Actress* for quite a long time. The actress and actor are together in a romantic scene from an old film. I have never watched the film but I saw part of it and I wanted to use it. I just found the image again a few days ago.

She has this covering, like a Muslim lady. The focus was on the actor, so maybe she was not so important, but I just picked that up. I often choose things with a covering. I like something hidden, or hooded. I tried many times to paint a nun. I have been interested in this image since I was a child, but it is most difficult, so I keep collecting the images.

AS: Is Complexity of Adulthood 3 painted from a model you have made yourself?

MS: No, it is from a children's Ladybird book. The book was about how to make a rabbit. It had lovely illustrations. I have used one before for a girl skipping. It doesn't look like the actual illustration, but the colour is something I pick up. At the moment I use more green and grey, which is a lot of colour for me.



Complexity of Adulthood 3, 2009

AS: It looks like you build up layers in the painting. I can see in there was something quite dark underneath?

MS: I always use a dark background then paint over.

AS: Is there something in particular that you look for in images? There is blankness in the paintings, and lack of detail.

MS: Oh, they had more detail. The rabbit in the book had eyes and a pocket so I reduced it to get it how I wanted.

AS: Are these ideas for paintings?



Troll

MS: I started this a while ago when I was a student at the Royal

Academy. It is called *Troll*. It was a fire that I picked up from a Magritte painting. There was a flame and I cut it and used it and changed it to the troll. Last year I wanted to look at it again. I'm interested in the image so I keep trying it out, like with the Moomins. It is not so successful yet so I will try to do something another way.

AS: The trolls, moomins and gonks link with a Western idea of Japanese artists looking at cute, cartoon types of imagery, like anime or kawaii. Do you see any connection?



Girl with White Dress, 2008

MS: I'm sure there is a connection but not on purpose. For my generation in the 1970s and 1980s everything was Americanised. I grew up in Japan with Tom and Jerry, Sesame Street and American animation programmes. When I was a child, the bank gave you a souvenir calendar every year and I found a similar kitschy calendar in Slovakia recently. This kind of thing was given free in Japan and it gives me a nice feeling. I used to collect them. I grew up with these images, yes images with big eyes. But I don't paint eyes. It's not about that. It would become

obvious, that is why I reduce.

AS: I like these short-haired, flat brushes, are they traditional Japanese brushes?

MS: Yes, they are for DIY, for sticking glue on Japanese paper doors. When I was a child almost all families had these, so they are very comfortable for me. I think it is natural brush. It works well with acrylic and water.

AS: Do you have a regular working pattern?

MS: I draw first. Sometimes I have images for a long time that I can use, like the Russian actress. But sometimes, like the Moomin, I know that I want to paint it so then I try to find the image. Normally I use images that already exist but last year I painted *Paper Wristband*, and it was an abstract image that I took on my phone. When I go to the gym, they give you a paper wristband. I saw Man Ray's lampshade painting and I was interested in the shape.

Also, in Slovakia, I showed one, called *Ceiling*, which came from a photo from my flat and *Holes* is from my studio wall, so that kind of thing.



Paper Wristband, 2009



Holes, 2012

AS: Shape is important?

MS: I don't know what I'm interested in because each thing is different and something I want to do. I'm not interested in figure. It's more abstract, searching for what I want in paint. I think everything is related in how I paint them. The lampshade was something I wanted, so is it shape? Somehow, it is those things altogether. When I paint, there is something I want to make fit, but it

doesn't quite match, and I'm not satisfied so then I have to do it again and again. Sometimes, when I concentrate, without thinking so much, it works. When I get more logical and think back, it's not so satisfying. So it doesn't come all the time. I struggle then I try again. Sometimes I spend a lot of time, then I do the same painting with another board and it works.

AS: I wonder if it gets harder, to get into that spontaneous position, because you know so much about how you work.



Aunt, 2008

MS: That is why, when I start working on a painting, the image is always more strange, because I don't already know anything myself. I

want to have that kind of fresh spirit. I work on one painting at a time, but sometimes I struggle so then I start another and come back later. This painting is called *Aunt*. It is from a magazine photograph of an Italian grandmother, but she looks like how I imagine my grandmother.

AS: So there is a very personal connection, like the things you grew up with?

MS: Yes, definitely there is something. It is always a personal thing but there are different elements as well, mixed together. My friend gave me this old fashioned Japanese cloth when I went to Japan. The pattern is probably 900 years old. It's quite amazing, simple but good. It is probably the most Japanese thing I've done but it doesn't look very Japanese does it?

