

Mary Huber, "The Uncanny Geometry of Satoshi Kojima", *Frieze*, October, 2019. <https://frieze.com/article/uncanny-geometry-satoshi-kojima>

Frieze

The Uncanny Geometry of Satoshi Kojima

The influence of op art leaves scant trace of the artist's hand, but otherworldly unease pervades his repetitions and reflections



On the hottest day of the year so far, I found myself in the cool, still air of Satoshi Kojima's latest exhibition, 'Chaste as Ice, Pure as Snow', at New York's Tramps – a gallery known as much for the controversy surrounding its role in Chinatown's gentrification as for its exhibitions. The show's title paraphrases a line from *Hamlet* (1604) – a curse the Danish prince lays on Ophelia before telling her to get to a nunnery – though no information is proffered to elucidate the connection between Shakespeare's play and the nine, mid-size paintings on display. The reference to purity, however, from a play obsessed with political (and sexual) corruption strikes a note of irony in relation to the painter's subject matter. Kojima's angular, often inscrutable scenes reference nightlife (*No Limit*, 2019, features two figures dancing on a giant disco ball) and a contemporary take on pin-up prurience (multiple canvases depict a blonde, semi-undressed woman with a provocatively open mouth). A sense of timelessness pervades, with neither the figures nor the spaces they inhabit seemingly weighted by gravity.

Satoshi Kojima,
Mort à crédit
(Death on Credit),
2019, oil on
canvas, 160 " 120
cm. Courtesy: the
artist, Tramps and
Michael Werner,
New York;
photograph: Mark
Woods



Kojima's compositions integrate figuration with op art influences through muted colours, hard edges and a moderate, uniform application of paint that leaves scant

trace of the artist's hand. *Mort à Crédit* (Death on Credit, 2019) features two female figures, one of whom sits on a ledge while gazing down with pupil-less eyes at the other lying on her back in a bathtub. They inhabit an otherwise bare architectural space built out of vertical blue and white stripes that run perpendicular to the horizontal slats of the wall on which the painting is mounted. In keeping with his op-art aesthetic, Kojima has an aptitude for manipulating rigid geometries into something uncanny. In *Alice* (2018), a blonde female figure poses on a toilet amid a semi-circle of mirrors, her multiple reflections creating a series of fractured and layered shapes.



Satoshi Kojima,
Alice, 2018, oil on
canvas, 150 " 110
cm. Courtesy: the
artist, Tramps and
Michael Werner,
New York;
photograph: Mark
Woods

The existing architecture of the exhibition space, which was formerly a shopping centre, emphasizes the paintings' op-art flair. Each canvas resides in its own glass booth – spaces originally built to house small retail concessions – on walls lined with grooves for hanging shop wares. Hung to the far side of its cubicle, *light more light* (2019) requires viewers to approach from the left at a steep angle. That movement reinforces the upward thrust of the white lines that Kojima has used in the painting to create the impression of a room superimposed on a background of concentric blue and black circles. By forcing viewers to comply with the painting's spatial construct, the installation increases the apparent distance between them and the male figure depicted at the other side of the painted room, who stands before circular bands repeating the words *Mehr Licht* (more light) around a mysterious red circle. 'Mehr licht' were supposedly Goethe's last words, and his *Theory of Colours* (1810) was once indispensable to artists and philosophers interested in colour perception. Kojima thus incorporates another literary reference, this time related to both painting and mortality.

Satoshi Kojima, *light more light*, 2019, oil on canvas, 240 " 150 cm. Courtesy: the artist, Tramps and Michael Werner, New York; photograph: Mark Woods



The glass panes and blasting air-con of the gallery's shopping-centre locale make for an icy, crystalline viewing environment. Kojima's handling of paint, however, more closely resembles snow – smooth and opaque – than ice. He restricts his palette to pastels and occasional sickly earth hues, all mixed with a significant amount of white. The result is a muted luminosity, with Kojima creating depth mainly through perspective, using only blocky shading in a limited number of tones.

Much as our subconscious minds select from and remix reality, imposing their own order on disparate elements to create our dreams and fantasies, 'Chaste as Ice, Pure as Snow' presents recognizable objects and figures that Kojima has fractured and multiplied in ways both familiar and strange, pleasurable and chilling.

'Chaste as Ice, Pure as Snow' ran at Tramps, New York, from 20 May to 21 July 2019.

Main image: Satoshi Kojima, XO (detail), 2019, oil on canvas, 150 × 110 cm. Courtesy: the artist, Tramps and Michael Werner, New York; photograph: Mark Woods

MARY HUBER

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Peter Malone, “A Painter’s Fantasies Rendered as Cartoonish Dramas”, *Hyperallergic*, July 17, 2017.

HYPERALLERGIC

ART

A Painter’s Fantasies Rendered as Cartoonish Dramas

Satoshi Kojima’s paintings don’t examine human relationships — they fondle them like a bear fondles picnic food.

Peter Malone

Estrangement, reactive humor, the illogic of dreams — any of these descriptors could sum up Satoshi Kojima’s inaugural exhibition at Bridget Donahue, a gathering of painted tableaus featuring cartoonish figures in highly artificial settings. Standing before one, I’m faced with twin males walking in opposite directions along railroad tracks passing an elevated station platform. Both figures have their right hand raised in a hailing gesture, their left lowered as if to estimate the space between their palms and the tracks below. Though the painting’s title, “Last Dance” (2016), hints at an impending and predictably disastrous confrontation with a train, reconciling this threat with the lightness of the painting’s color, its schematic drawing, and the artist’s seeming sardonic indifference to the scene’s outcome, suggests an anesthetized sensibility.



Satoshi Kojima, “Weather Report” (2016), oil on canvas, 66.875 x 90.5 inches

For the most part, Kojima's paintings do not examine human relationships — they fondle them like a bear fondles picnic food. Understated formal elements, often mismatched to the odd events depicted, imply an emotional disconnect that is tenaciously adhered to. Ironically upbeat design patterns reflecting a party-favor aesthetic introduce energy that is then sapped by truncated dramas. Measuring, on average, six to eight feet in either direction, the size of the pieces compels a viewer to return again and again to each canvas, vainly seeking hints about the artist's feelings toward it.

The show's giddy nihilism is assembled from easily readable individual images that maintain a dark babble of disconcerting humor. "Weather Report" (2016) offers a tribal functionary holding a weathervane, pointing with neoclassical élan toward a cartoon raincloud. The Broadway-like sign on the scene's stagy plinth reads "ECLIPSE." With little effort, one can imagine it flashing in synch with a repetitive club-music thump — the generic sort one hears in shopping malls.

Kojima is both talented and visually astute. In strictly formal terms, each canvas is tightly conceived and carefully contained, but so too are his narrative restrictions. His range seems consciously limited, extending from sentimental encounters like the *Beauty and the Beast*-themed "Blue Room" (2016) to the advertising glitz of "DJ Box" (2017). What's missing from the latter is an actual feeling for music and dance. Kojima's view of the DJ in "DJ Box" feels icy and brittle.

To be fair, it is hardly unusual to feel alienated in a dance club. But on balance, most of the situations in Kojima's paintings are just plain bizarre. "Beautiful Things" (2013) leaves a viewer pondering floating female figures in red heels, presumably pantless, squatting and defecating into cartoon bubbles eagerly grasped from below by robotic males with square heads. Scenes like this suggest an affinity with the work of Peter Williams, a painter of equally odd figurative vignettes, whose big-tent theatrics present viewers with comparably crafted and similarly conjured puzzles. It bears noting that Williams took part in a group show last year at DC Moore called *Me, My, Mine* that showcased the work of artists who, like Kojima, share an oddly distant alienation from their own subject matter.

In light of this unsettling trend, the arrangement of the pieces in this exhibition proved perhaps unintentionally poignant. The palest canvases of the group were hung near the light-flooded front windows of the gallery, while the more intensely colored pictures were placed in the rear, where warmer artificial light amplified their deeper palette. This struck me as counterintuitive. I would have expected to see the brighter pictures near the windows, as they could better withstand the full-spectrum light and thus balance the overall appearance of the installation. As installed, it appears as if Kojima's dreams are fading into the light coming in from the Bowery, where the gallery is located. I cannot imagine a more potent metaphor for the art world's habitual detachment from reality than the sight of "Candy and Whips" (2015) dissolving into actual sunlight, particularly sunlight shining on one of the most historically tragic thoroughfares in NYC. In a jarring way, it emphasizes how the Bowery's sad and squalid history has been all but erased by its opposite — luxury housing and art galleries touting expensive fantasies.



Satoshi Kojima continues at Bridget Donahue (99 Bowery) through August 4.

Nico Jacobsen, "Satoshi Kojima @ Bridget Donahue", *Totokaelo*, July 12, 2017.

Totokaelo



SATOSHI KOJIMA @ BRIDGET DONAHUE

Satoshi Kojima is not an artist whose work would normally attract me from first glance. This is due primarily to the fact that his palette is dominated by soft Easter hues. If you look beneath the rosy exterior, though, you'll find a conceptual world that is certifiably at odds with the immediate presentation. The themes of the show relate mainly to mystical sexuality, including odd depictions of various cultures' explanations for how humans came to be. These portrayals intermingle with bizarre vignettes from different types of full moon activities, from sex clubs to DJ sets. All of this is brought to life with an approach to painting that pools together a vast array of styles prominent in early-1900s America, from Realism to Precisionism. It's a truly perplexing show, and to perplex at this level in 2017 is quite an accomplishment.

NICO JACOBSEN

Yin Ho, “Critics’ Pick: Satoshi Kojima”, *Artforum*, July 7, 2017, <https://www.artforum.com/picks/id=69378>.

ARTFORUM

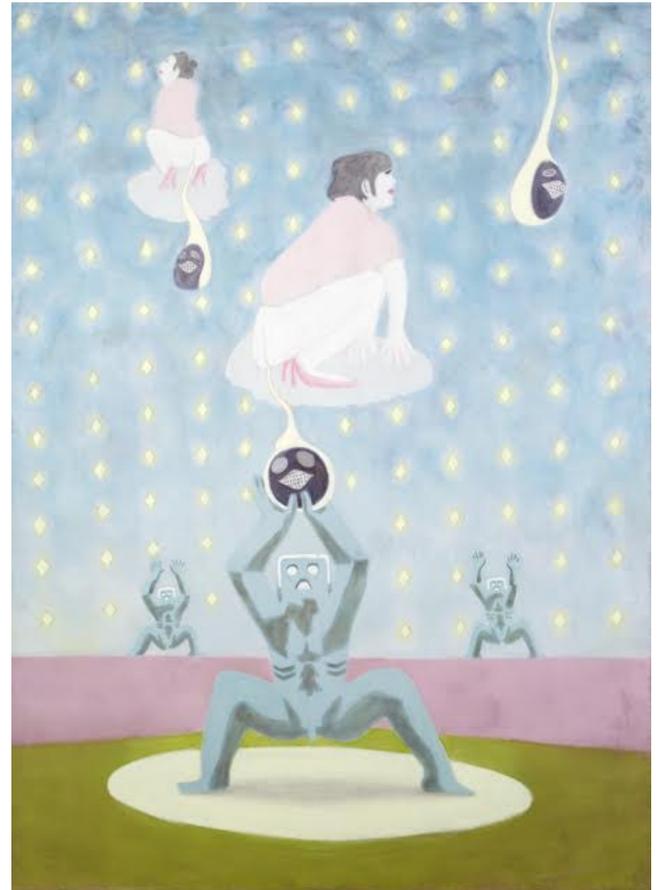
New York

Satoshi Kojima

BRIDGET DONAHUE
99 Bowery, 2nd Floor
June 7–August 4

Satoshi Kojima’s exhibition of pastel-drenched, otherworldly oil paintings here—his first show in New York—speaks of being a stranger in a strange land and liking it. The artist moved from Japan to Germany to study art, and found in Düsseldorf a city where “it’s quite normal for numbered women in lingerie to strike poses in windows,” according to Peter Doig and Parinaz Mogadassi’s text for the show. Pleasure-seeking, primal instincts and a trippy search for self are the subjects of these pieces.

The settings, futuristic-looking and Op-inspired, are hallucinatory. In *Last Dance*, 2016, a pair of groovy figures wave their hands against a disco-glitter landmass—or is it a sky?—while posing on a train track that leads to nowhere. *Beautiful Things*, 2013, gives us blue-skinned aliens catching smiling, sperm-like objects being shat out by floating women—Lucys defecating from a sky full of yellow diamonds. The kaleidoscopic galaxy space in which the shirtless, jorts-clad disc jockey moves in *DJ Box*, 2017, vibrates. The anal-retentive construction of the background in this work is lightened by the painter’s soft-edged sensibilities. With *ONO*, 2014, the phrase “OH . . . NO . . .” appears as a pattern behind a man embarrassed by his hard-on, likely caused by the pretty male sylph reclining seductively on the grass in a thought bubble. Among all the negatives is one “OH . . . YES . . .”—a crack in the brittle armor of sexual frustration, a moment of giving in to lust’s supple embrace. Oh yes, yes . . . YES.



Satoshi Kojima, *Beautiful Things*, 2013, oil on canvas, 98 1/2 x 62 1/2"

— Yin Ho

“Satoshi Kojima”, *The New Yorker*, July 3, 2017.

THE NEW YORKER

ART GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Satoshi Kojima

The ten large oil paintings in this Düsseldorf-based Japanese painter’s solo début in New York have soft edges and a palette of washed-out pastel. They mix the opacity of half-remembered dreams, the weirdness of New Wave science fiction, and the gleeful bawdiness of old-fashioned smut. In “Rondo,” three figures in yellow jackets and hats vamp on a Golden Gate Bridge to nowhere. In “Weather Report,” a cartoon riff on an Aztec priest holds a staff topped with a weathervane and points at a form that’s either two disco balls crushing a rain cloud or a pair of disembodied, postcoital buttocks.

Michael Wilson, “Satoshi Kojima”, *TimeOut New York*, June 9, 2017.



Photograph: © Satoshi Kojima, courtesy the artist and Bridget Donahue, NYC

The fact that my five-year-old son adored the paintings in this exhibition is telling, and not just because he’s ordinarily more of a sculpture guy. A Tokyo-born artist who lives and works in Düsseldorf, Germany, Satoshi Kojima employs a pale, dusty palette to conjure a gentler world than the one we inhabit as grown-ups. His oneiric scenarios have an appeal that seems to bypass verbal language and narrative logic in the manner of classic Surrealism. There’s also the occasional touch of oddball scatology, like the floating, stiletto-shod women defecating masklike faces in *Beautiful Things*. Then there’s his depiction of Eden, in which Eve has been supplanted by the second Adam with a snake for a penis.

The fact that Kojima needs to distinguish himself from a famous Japanese wrestler with the same name (“even though on occasion, there is some crossover,” as he ambiguously puts it) suggests a healthy sense of the absurd, and indeed, his work manages to combine a focus on sexual dread, isolation and death, with an unpredictable wit.

These are images that are both of this world and beyond it, often rooted in the spaces of everyday activity but forever shooting off on weird tangents. Like a kindergartner, Kojima innately understands that our surroundings can be reimagined as a playground.

BY: MICHAEL WILSON
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