

Crèveœur

Yu Nishimura in conversation with Felix Petty,
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YU NISHIMURA in conversation with FELIX PETTY
Photographs TAKASHI HOMMA
Thank you Yukika Tasaki & Shinzo Higashiyama
Artworks courtesy of Yu Nishimura, Sadie Coles HQ, London
& Crèveœur, Paris
Location Kanagawa, Japan

After a busy morning spent working on his upcoming show at David Zwirner in New York, painter Yu Nishimura relaxes in his sunny atelier in Kanagawa, Japan. Littered with oil paints and books, the space's intimate and idyllic solitude is broken suddenly by the arrival of MARFAMILY's Felix. Entering via FaceTime, he and Yu get chatting

FELIX Nice to meet you, Yu.

YU Hey. Nice to meet you too!

Yu's English is better than Felix's Japanese, but neither are great at speaking the other's language. MARFRIEND Yukika is on hand to make sure nothing gets lost in translation

YUKIKA Good morning, would you like me to start?

FELIX Yes, please!

Yukika says, «Yes, please!» in Japanese

YU Brilliant.

FELIX I guess a good place to begin would be with your early experiences with painting, could you tell me more about that?

YU My father was a painter, and he used one of the rooms in our small house as a studio, and that's when I thought, «Oh, this kind of art exists!» It's difficult to say exactly when I realised that I wanted to become a painter, but I first become aware of working with oils in elementary school. You could say it's been the only space for me ever since I was little.

FELIX What were your earliest attempts?

YU At first, I copied works from illustrated

encyclopedias and books of animals, such as insects, fishes and such. I just made them all the time, and then I made my own books.

FELIX It's quite interesting to think of this in the context of the work you make now, as your art is still very rooted in the world and place, and focused on capturing "things" - both superficially and their essence, too. Even from the very beginning, you were creating this little encyclopedia of images. You also paint a lot of cats, chairs, landscapes...

Yukika quickly interjects

YUKIKA Did you have cats growing up?

YU No, but I grew up in a town where there were a lot of stray cats, and I often draw from my memories of them.

FELIX I really love them in your work, you capture them so perfectly. But you once described that when you're painting, «A dog has to be more than a dog». I found it funny that you used a dog as an example for that when you paint so many cats. A Freudian slip perhaps?

YU I wrote that a long time ago, and I'm glad that people have actually read it! I think it's a very pure statement of my work, I spent a lot of time thinking about it. To explain though: I want to depict the dog as a dog, but I know when I am working on my paintings, that the dog will become more than just a dog. I use the analogy of a dog to say that there is always a double meaning, there's always something deeper than just what is on the surface. Maybe I need to paint more dogs again!

Felix - a cat person - is reminded of Marcel, the three legged stray moggy he adopted off the streets, and smiles



a part of the night
2024

FELIX I've noticed that your paintings have this kind of blurriness to them, a lot of the imagery feels as if it's being captured in the process of movement, like a landscape seen from a car or out of a train window, or recalled with the fuzziness of memory... maybe a bit of both.

YU I think it's trying to bring reality to something ambiguous or something that seems to be visible but isn't. It's like that moment when you wake up from a dream and don't really understand what happened, but you can still have this feeling of the dream being very real and tactile and raw. I think capturing this unnameable experience is the role of painting.

FELIX That's such a great description! Your paintings aren't hyper-realistic, or anything like that, but they get very close to the heart of something, they capture something deeper beyond appearance.

YU In terms of technique, I was never really considered a good painter, even when I was a student. I was the type of painter for whom painting took a lot of effort, especially when I tried to copy things realistically. So I started painting not just what I saw, but how I saw it, trying to capture how my feelings about a subject changed my perspective on it.

FELIX I'm also interested in some of the people in your work and whether you think of them as portraits? I guess some of them also look quite a bit like you - do you see these as self-portraits?

Yu blushes

YU I get a bit embarrassed when people say that my portraits sometimes look like me. They aren't meant to be self-portraits, but I think it is a kind of self-portrait with the

gender fluctuating, the age fluctuating. The people aren't real exactly, and I see each portrait as a representation of a fictitious character. I have a lot of group and family photos in my studio's research archives. There are graduation albums, old amateur photographs, even photos from before the war. Some photos of company executives, that kind of thing, all of which I've found in flea markets and secondhand bookstores and cut from magazines. But when it comes to making the paintings, I don't rely on the photographs, I work freehand from memory and with the hope that in the end I can bring out some humanity.

FELIX In a few of your paintings, like *orbit*, 2024 and *faces*, 2024, you use this really interesting technique where you paint an outline of a person over someone else's face, almost like a double exposure. You mentioned dreams and memories, but maybe there's also this reference to Cubism, where the objects in a still life are seen from different angles and at different points in time all at once, but refracted through a very Japanese aesthetic. I wonder what your influences are behind that?

Yukika takes a sip of water between listening and translating. The conversation pauses for a moment as the lid of her green stainless steel bottle won't screw tightly

YU Yes, I'm very influenced by the European Cubists, but I find it very difficult to follow their way of capturing light and shadows. Especially when I think about portraits, I always felt that painting the features of the face somehow deviates from my own essence. Most of those paintings you ask about, the ones where a figure is painted over a face, were initially just regarded as failures. I had a painting hanging in my

Crève-cœur





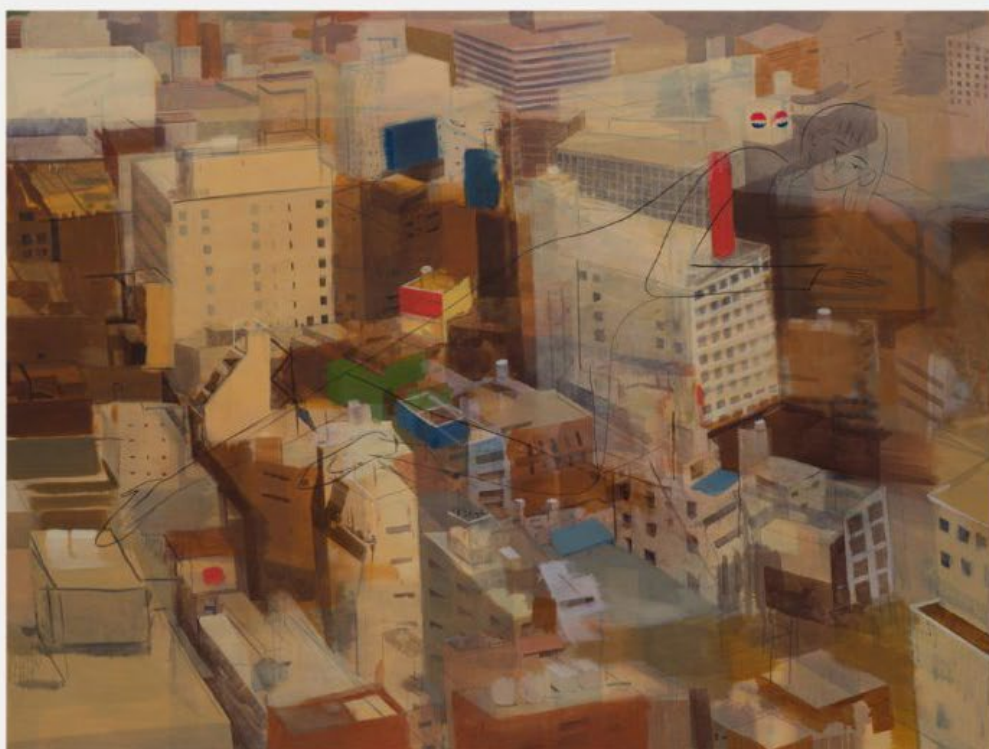
studio, and I let it sit there for a long time. And then, one day, I had a really strong urge to rework it, to make the original painting into something else while still keeping something of the original there too. Through portraits, I gradually adopted the expression of the line, which can create an inside and an outside in an instant.

FELIX You've been showing a lot in Europe in the last few years. I'm interested in this relationship between the aesthetic worlds of Europe, USA and Japan, and how it changes both how you see your work and how others see it. Are the reactions of people in Europe and the USA different from those in Japan?

YU To be honest, I was not a particularly prominent painter in Japan until recently. However, through the introduction of a painter friend, I started exhibiting at KAYO-KOYUKI in Tokyo, and my work began to be widely introduced overseas. Then by working with Crèveœur, in Paris, I have been blessed with great opportunities. Having spent the last 20 years in Japan, when I started showing in Europe, I felt encouraged by the idea that my work could speak for itself. While I'm not as accustomed to speaking English, if my work reaches the people who need it, that's all that matters. Last year's presentation at Sadie Coles HQ was the most important moment in my career, I would want to continue to focus on creating something that is uniquely my own.

FELIX I agree! Well thank you for your time this morning. It's been a pleasure to speak to you, Yu. And thank you so much Yukika for translating!

YU Likewise, and thank you, Felix, for asking very deep and thoughtful questions, it was so lovely speaking to you too. I hope you have a lovely rest of your day.



Crève-cœur





portrait
2024