

Text | ZHANG HUI HUI

Exhibition | Ryoki KURASAKI Solo Show : The Garden of Traces

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In the spirit of *memento mori* (a Latin idiom meaning “remember that your death is inevitable”) from the Middle Ages, Ryoki KURASAKI (b. 1995) brings us his solo exhibition *The Garden of Traces* at Hiro Hiro Art Space. Featuring oil paintings and wax, KURASAKI depicts remnants that survive the erosion from the flow of time, thereby unveiling a universality of life—humans inevitably exists in this vast garden we call “the world,” inevitably co-exist with other humans, inevitably leave behind marks of life, and inevitably meet their death.

The artistic creations stem from a simple fact—*mortality*, or “human’s inevitable death” It doesn’t matter how much attention you devote to trimming or how lovingly you shower the irrigation, all of us are plants and flowers in a garden—abiding by the order of time, blossoming and fading, until all that grows must inevitably extinguish. This is an iron law in Nature’s control over all living things; it is a fundamental formula of how the world operates, also the keyword that runs through KURASAKI’s artistic creation.

After graduating from Kyushi Designer Gakuin, KURASAKI first worked as an unorthodox commercial illustrator who would use oil paint in his commercial designs; after devoting himself to artistic work in 2017, in the following year, he developed his iconic form of expression—*burning*. At first, he applied the flame to cauterize eyes on his painting’s subjects; the blank spaces and burn marks in his *Blindness* series create an unsettling actualization of modern people *blindly* escaping death. Following that, in the *Mortality* series, he ignites tinder to melt the wax, taking a step further in giving time flow a form. He lets the flow of time trickle through pale skeletons, beautifully colorful butterflies, as well as ripe fruit and delicate fresh flowers. Thermal flow’s one-way irreversible process serves as a reminder to the viewers—that while time can give rise to life, it can also wash it away towards nothingness.

The death motif encompassed by the melted wax serves as a metaphor—by melting the seemingly solid frames into a fluid state, the artist formulates an image wherein reality is ambiguous and uncertain,

symbolizing life's ever-changing moments and its conformity to the inevitable—that is the order of time.

KURASAKI's first name, Ryoki, was partly named after a perished close relative; as a teenager, he had, on multiple occasions, witnessed suicide on sight, prompting in him a deep understanding towards human beings—how they truly are “being-towards-death” as described by German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Only when bearing profound awareness towards our inevitable death will human beings develop complete comprehension towards life. The precocious young KURASAKI also observed early on how “in modern society, life and death have effectively become remotely existent in people's daily lives while death is considered a taboo topic.” He states that, “It is meaningless to try and describe death to us—people who still stand far away from death—so, in my opinion, what we need is to realize our current status, that is, that the concept of death is still far ahead.”

KURASAKI is distinctly aware of his place as “the farthest insider.” What he strives to explore isn't the nature of death, because there is no way out but to accept it. What fascinates him even more is “life in the moment,” which is encompassed by death; meanwhile, by illustrating life's inevitable perish, the artist further presses his doubts towards the Creator through questions such as “Is art truly immortal?” and “Do artworks perish as well?” KURASAKI was inspired into reflection: “Death of an artwork depends on its concept and not material.”

The nature of time is, perhaps, the most mythical among all unsolved mysteries. On life, on death, on existence—the artist brings together these essential issues in *The Garden of Traces*, guiding us back to the essence of time to trigger in each of us our awareness towards life.