

GUILD GALLERY



SYOTATSU UBUSUNA



ROMAN AND WILLIAMS GUILD GALLERY
THREE TWO ONE CANAL ST, NEW YORK, NY 10013
646•693•0279
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SYOTATSU UBUSUNA

SEPT 13 - NOV 4, 2023

OPENING RECEPTION:
WEDNESDAY, SEPT 13
6 TO 8PM

Guild Gallery is pleased to present the first solo U.S. exhibition of Syotatsu (b. 1982, Wakayama, Japan), a Japanese artist known for drawings and paintings that engage with the natural world through both subject and medium—depicting scenes and phenomena of nature that hover between figuration and abstraction, made using a distinctive technique that mixes in local soil into the paint before application. The exhibition presents a series of 30 new works that were inspired by a return to Syotatsu's hometown of Wakayama, where the climate, topography, and spirituality of the Japanese countryside inspired a radical new direction in his craft. Titled *Ubusuna*, which means birthplace, the exhibition is on view at Guild Gallery in New York from September 13 through November 4, 2023.

Originally trained in portraiture, which he began drawing on the streets of Kyoto as a teenager, Syotatsu has spent the past two decades honing his singular method and expressive style to depict the natural world. Using the soil found just outside his home in the Wakayama mountains and local materials including indigo, sumi (charcoal), and Japanese ink, his subjects exude a spiritual essence, influenced by ancient forms, tools, and traditional arts, while both existing in and drawing inspiration from the environment. His works often incorporate items from his natural environment, including found objects and reclaimed lumber, and are executed on surfaces including Japanese paper, vintage fabric, and wood. Composed of natural elements, they also depict imaginative scenes of nature: birds crowing toward rings of light; moons bursting within torsos and spangling across the canvas; swirling figures embracing in a spray of starlight; and hands drawn together in a blessing and raised up toward the sun.

A palette of dark and light in high contrast is consistent throughout the works, which Syotatsu attributes to the observation of shadows and the patterns in which day and night flow throughout space, as though “the sun and moon are in conversation with each other.” This distinctive combination creates a textured surface and matte quality while infusing his work with the energy of the land around him: the light, the sounds of animals, wind and rain, and the hum of everyday life.

Syotatsu begins creating without a specific outcome in mind, but rather looks to the medium to reveal natural shapes over time, then connects those forms with the otherworldly visions he encounters in his dreams and in his daily exchanges with the land, binding tangible and spiritual senses into a physical work. The result is a manifestation of Syotatsu's own relationship to nature—one of wonder, appreciation and respect expressed through his subjects—abstracted to enlarge their ethereal energy and capacity for emotional transference.



THE MOUNTAINOUS LOCATION OF SYOTATSU'S STUDIO ENABLES HIM TO CONNECT WITH NATURE "FROM MORNING UNTIL WE SLEEP."

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UNIVERSE IN HANDS, 2023, 35.5" H X 19.5" W X 1" D

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

SYOTATSU

b. 1982, Wakayama, Japan

Tatsuya Kawai, or Syotatsu (b. 1982, Wakayama, Japan) makes expressive paintings guided by the climate and spirituality of the land from his studio in Wakayama. Trained at Kyoto University of the Arts, Syotatsu was first introduced to the art of portraiture at the age of nineteen on the streets of Kyoto, where he met the many people who inspired an evolution of his style. Upon moving back to Wakayama, Syotatsu became increasingly observant of the beauty and divinity of the rural landscape that would become the signature symbol of his paintings, and he has remained there as he hones and masters his practice.

Syotatsu's name was suggested to him by a friend who thought he should have a painter's name, rather than using his real name. When asked what is most important for Syotatsu when painting portraits, he answered "smiling faces" – so the friend then took "Syo" (smile) and "Tatsu" from his given name to create his painter name.



SYOTATSU'S WORK DEPICTS IMAGINATIVE SCENES OF NATURE, SUCH AS THESE HANDS RAISED UP TO THE MOON.



BLESSING TOWARD THE MOON, 2023, 21" H X 13.5" W X .75" D



SYOTATSU MIXES LOCAL SOIL INTO HIS PAINT BEFORE APPLICATION.



SYOTATSU WASHES THE APPLIED INDIGO OFF PAPER TO REVEAL A FIGURE OF HANDS.



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CURRICULUM VITAE

EDUCATION	2005	B.A. KYOTO UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS	KYOTO, JAPAN
SOLO EXHIBITIONS	2023	MANOMA	YAMAGATA, JAPAN
	2023	REBUILDING CENTER JAPAN	NAGANO, JAPAN
	2023	EFURO KUBUNNOICHI	HOKKAIDO, JAPAN
	2022	ENS	WAKAYAMA, JAPAN
	2022	GULIGULI GALLERY	OSAKA, JAPAN
	2021	NORM	WAKAYAMA, JAPAN
	2021	EFURO KUBUNNOICHI	HOKKAIDO, JAPAN
	2020	KASI-FRIENDLY	IWATE, JAPAN
	2020	MANOMA	YAMAGATA, JAPAN
	2019	RIZM	HYOGO, JAPAN
	2019	NORM	WAKAYAMA, JAPAN
GROUP EXHIBITIONS	2022	NORM	WAKAYAMA, JAPAN
	2022	HOSHIZUKIYO	AICHI, JAPAN
	2021	HAJIMARI NO BIJUTSUKAN	FUKUSHIMA, JAPAN
	2021	DIGINNER GALLERY	TOKYO, JAPAN
	2021	UTSUSHIKI	FUKUOKA, JAPAN
	2021	RITA	IWATE, JAPAN
	2020	DIGINNER GALLERY	TOKYO, JAPAN
	2020	EFURO KUBUNNOICHI	HOKKAIDO, JAPAN
	2020	REBUILDING CENTER JAPAN	NAGANO, JAPAN



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SYOTATSU'S DISTINCTIVE COMBINATION OF MATERIALS IMPARTS A TEXTURED SURFACE WITH AN EARTHLY MATTE QUALITY.

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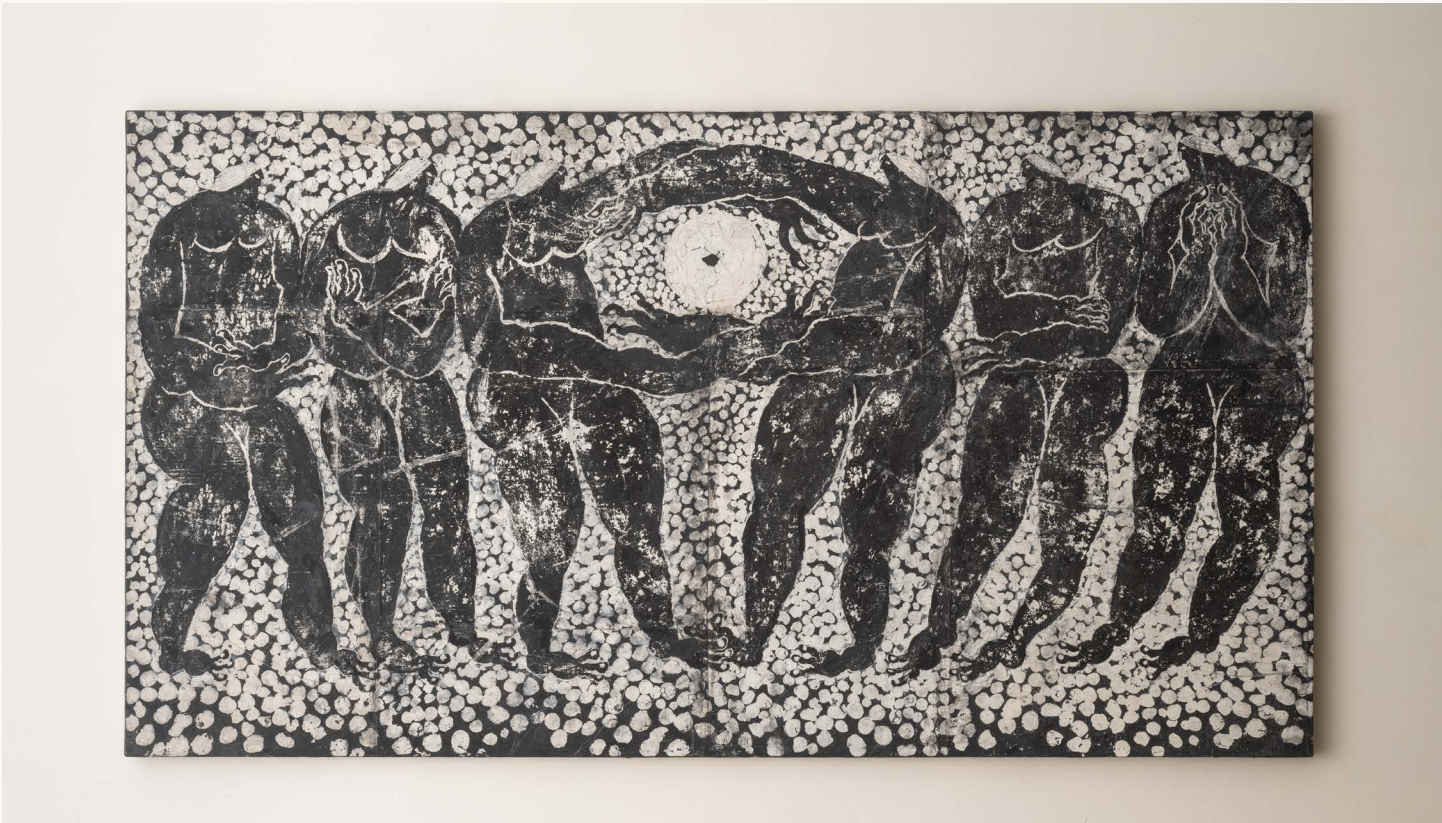
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CHORUS, 2023, 40"H X 30.75"W X 9.75"D



RELAY, 2023, 69"W X 26.75"H X 0.75"D



RELAY, 2023, 69"W X 26.75"H X 0.75"D



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PLANKS OF FOUND WOOD FROM THE LOCAL AREA ARE OFTEN USED AS CANVASES FOR SYOTATSU'S EXPRESSIVE VISIONS.



ONHASHIRA, 2023, 93"H X 12"W X 4.25"D



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MOON WITHIN HANDS, 2023, 46.75"H X 35.75"W X 1"D



SUN ON THE PALM, 2023, 46.75"H X 35"W X 1"D



GRACE, 2023, 18.75"H X 15"W X .75"D



GRACE, 2023, 18.75"H X 15.75"W X .75"D



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SEEDS, 2023, 35.75"H X 22"W X 1"D

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RAY OF HOPE, 2023, 28.5" H X 23.75" W X 1" D



SONGS OF THE TREE, 2023, 37" H X 24.75" W X 1" D



ANIMA, 2023, 49.5" H X 35.75" W X 1" D



ANIMA, 2023, 49.5" H X 35.75" W X 1" D



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SYOTATSU AT HOME IN WAKAYAMA, JAPAN.



RELAY, 2023, AT SYOTATSU'S STUDIO WITH OTHER WORKS IN PROGRESS.



WAKAYAMA'S PASTORAL LANDSCAPE IS A SIGNATURE INFLUENCE THROUGHOUT SYOTATSU'S WORKS.



HANDFUL OF SOIL FOR SYOTATSU'S PAINT MIXTURE.



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INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST SYOTATSU

BY
MACKENZIE WAGONER

To view a Syotatsu painting is to see and feel the mountain on which the artist lives and works in Wakayama, Japan. The land is as much his material as it is his subject. Since relocating to the pastoral southern region after 18 years in Kyoto, Syotatsu's oeuvre shifted radically from portraits of people to evocations of place. In his work—an intersection of earthwork, painting, and sculpture—the figurative meets the abstract, the biographical is shaped by myth, and all of it is produced through his daily commune with nature. He says this on a call on a recent summer evening, after a day spent harvesting flour. Tomorrow, the soil surrounding his studio will be brought inside, soaked, and spread across a canvas or reclaimed wood to reveal imagery. Perhaps it may be a recent sighting of the moon and sun sharing the sky at once, spirits of land that came to him in a dream, or the way light fell on his hand on a particular evening. Over the course of an hour, Syotatsu spoke here about the beauty and function of his palette of soil, lime, charcoal, ink, and indigo and his process of letting the soil speak in the paintings, all the while taking us on a mental tour of Wakayama:

MACKENZIE WAGONER: You started as a portrait artist, drawing every day on the streets of Kyoto. How did you shift from portraits to what you're making now?

SYOTATSU: I was determined to do the portraits for my entire life. I was very productive, building energy by making tons of drawings. The biggest turning point came about four years ago, just before my wife and I decided to move where we are right now in the mountain in Wakayama. I had a dream about the gods of the mountain—the area where we were moving. They were a boar and a mountain goat and they were fighting sumo. When I told my friend about the dream, he strongly suggested I should paint it. I had never done this kind of painting before, but it came very naturally—and then it just unplugged a new kind of creativity.

MW: And now that you live there, what inspiration do you draw from living on the mountain? How has it shaped your work?

S: Here, from morning until we sleep, there's always a connection to nature. Everything shapes my work: the landscape, all the suns, the animal voices, wind, soil, rain. A big part of our lifestyle means the ordinary everyday things we have to do—conveniences that we might have been able to buy in the city—require us to be in nature: cutting the grass, moving the soil, preparing wood to burn, cleaning wood from a storm. To keep a normal lifestyle in the mountain is completely different than in Kyoto. Here, there's a connection to the soil.

MW: Soil is as much of a subject as it is a tool for painting and sculpture in your pieces. When did you start bringing soil into your paintings?

S: Growing up in the countryside, I always loved the texture of the soil. When I decided to draw the dream painting, the soil was available and came to my mind. In addition to the texture, I felt the soul, some sort of protector or lucky charm from the land when I started painting with it.

MW: Where do you source the soil?

S: Usually, I use the soil in front of my studio, which is reddish brown. Once in a while, when I want a specific color like black or white, I get it from somewhere else. For example, black soil is found close to and on the beach in the west of Japan. And for white soil, I buy Lime.



SYOTATSU AT HOME IN WAKAYAMA, JAPAN.

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MW: Does your work always begin with a dream? What is your process?

S: I paint with the soil first, and in it I find a crack or some accidental pattern that I can connect to an experience in my life. If it looks like a moon, I'll remember last week's full moon, and how it hugged the tree. It becomes both the inspiration and the subject. Or maybe I'll remember a bird I saw. I paint the soil first, see the pattern, make the connection, and allow the piece to evolve.

MW: Talk to me about the spectrum of subject matter that appears in the paintings: flowers, people embracing, suns.

S: It's what I experience, like the sun and moon, the things beyond my power in nature that I appreciate, fear, and respect. That's what I express in the subjects. In the series of four, *Starry Night*, people look up at the light of the full moon. It's purely an experience that I never had in the big city. In the

more figurative works in charcoal (sumi) and soot. Can you talk to me about the connection?

S: I start all of my work with soil, and when I want to paint the core part of the subject, the abstraction, indigo [and ink] express it best. Sumi and soot are used to get detail. From studying figuration, I also learned to simplify the subject to its core to express what I want to express.

MW: You studied art for years. Do you look at any other artists' work or movements for inspiration?

S: I don't have one artist or a single source of influence. I'm attracted to Modigliani's work and another Japanese painter who is not necessarily world-known, Suma Maruki. She painted life. I'm influenced by ancient tools and archeological findings, but mostly I'm influenced by my wife and friends and their work and music.

“I ALWAYS LOVED THE TEXTURE OF THE SOIL... I FELT THE SOUL, SOME SORT OF PROTECTOR OR LUCKY CHARM FROM THE LAND WHEN I STARTED PAINTING WITH IT.”

mountain, I realized the full moon's brightness and strength. The world became blue, the light and shadows were so strong. For *Sun and Moon*, where we are in Wakayama at the top of the summit, there's always big open sky. When we look up, we realized we can see the sun and moon at the same time. First, my wife made a poem about the sun and moon talking to each other. I also wanted to paint the subject.

MW: Do you often collaborate with your wife?

S: Yes, not every work, but very often we collaborate—not by making things together, but by living and experiencing things together, we influence each other. She is also artist, she makes pottery, sings, and makes music. She's very creative.

MW: Your work is a balance of abstract and figurative, with many of the more abstract works created in indigo and ink, and the



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ABOUT GUILD GALLERY

Located on Canal Street, the vibrant, propulsive stretch of New York City's rising art scene, Guild Gallery celebrates the making of art objects by contemporary masters, drawing upon the millennia-long history of the decorative arts.

Guild Gallery is the natural extension of Roman and Williams Guild, on the corner of Howard and Mercer Streets. When we opened the doors of the Guild it was the realization of a decades-long dream: to create a living organism of people, objects and furnishings—an eclectic world, a modern-day guild of the senses.

We designed the Guild as a place to showcase the furniture that we make alongside the work of artisans we most admire for their skill and dedication to technique. We wanted to emphasize the everyday functionality of remarkably formed items and the significance of living with very beautiful things while valuing the utility of expert crafted pieces.

Guild Gallery is the next stage of evolution in this dialogue. We build on our commitment to help people appreciate the artistry as we celebrate individual makers. While the Guild celebrates a beauty that derives from function, the Gallery focuses purely on form. Whereas the Guild is all about an eclectic mix, the Gallery will spotlight the object, artist, and process.

We want to introduce you to artists who are working today, so that you can follow their trajectories and understand their work as an ongoing, organic narrative. We represent a group of ten remarkable artists, makers of extraordinary art objects, furniture—sculptors and other creators whose medium might be ceramic, glass or wood.

The Guild was founded on the principle that art and craft are not mutually exclusive entities. The contemporary works that we show at the Gallery experiment with line, form, and material, fusing the ancient and the modern through traditional techniques and references to a millennia-old lineage. These are living pieces, made by living artists.

They are living pieces, not just because you can—should—live with them, but also because they are made with materials that feel alive, like wood from trees or gloriously malleable clay. This is a guiding principle of everything we do in our own design practice and, by extension, at Guild Gallery.

These are pieces that are meant to be communed with, in our homes. So while key pieces by an individual artist are displayed at the Canal Street Guild Gallery to be appreciated as works of art in their own right, others will be seen at the Guild on Howard and Mercer, just a stone's throw away, interacting with other objects and furnishings, as it might in a home. Thus we hope to foster connoisseurship and demonstrate how they might be lived with.

The Gallery is a venue designed to support the rigor and discipline of the artists as they fashion their materials, to honor the human scale of their works. To that end, we designed the wooden pedestals on which we display the works; the Gallery emphasizes warmth, purity and focus. We invite you to explore Guild Gallery, to ponder the power of exchange across civilizations, countries and techniques. And investigate these objects that contain profound stories about nature, culture, craft and art.

— ROBIN STANDEFER and STEPHEN ALESCH

