

Mari Inukai - *Jungle Gym of my Mind*

Thinkspace Gallery (Los Angeles) - is pleased to present new works by artist Mari Inukai in *Jungle Gym Of My Mind*. Born in Nagoya Japan, Inukai completed her art education in California, and is currently based in Los Angeles. With a BFA in character animation, the artist has successfully pursued commercial animation in tandem with her fine art practice. The duality of Inukai's work is evident in her combination of graphic and painterly styles. At times the works are loosely rendered and portrait based, and at others they are distinctly graphic and surreal.

Inukai's paintings delve into fantasy and relate an emotive personal symbolism that is at once iconic and private. Her portraits tend to be sensual, brooding and charged with a scintillating energy, while much of the graphic work is directly inspired by animation and the whimsy of childlike fantasy. The artist's paintings are often tempered by a subtle dissonance and an interest in the coexistence of these polarities. They simultaneously evoke innocence and sexuality, play and depth, childhood and adulthood; revealing images that are beautiful, playful and at times evasive and complex.

Populated by a host of re-appearing characters, like the little creatures in Inukai's signature hats and her adorable candy colored monsters, the artist's graphic imagery suggests a developed narrative universe unto itself. A storyline always seems to underlie the images, and the viewer is left with the impression of having fallen upon a moment in a much larger train of thought. These irresistible "super-friends" are somehow united against an unseen external threat by some binding collectivity. The symbolism in Inukai's work is at times subtle, but the artist draws from both cultural references and the personal to relay her own imaginative vision with whimsy and intensity.

Influenced by the expressive figuration of Egon Schiele, and the graphic play of Nara Yoshitomo, Inukai's eclectic work is stylistically varied and draws from a variety of inspirations. Her figurative paintings are often striking personal portraits of her daughter Sena, painterly rendered to channel affect with great pathos and feeling. At other times her portraits are sensual renderings of beautiful women that remain mysteriously oblique and suggestive. A fine line between fantasy and reality pervades Inukai's imagery, particularly in these figurative works. It is as though the artist experiments with a variety of personas and fantasies to explore a human coming of age, both personally and culturally.

Her graphic work functions as a lighter counterpart to this more emotive body of portraiture, and is clearly influenced by her aesthetic love of Japanese film, print and anime. The two bodies of imagery, side by side, playfully suggest the synchronicity of human polarities: the whimsy of childhood fantasy in coexistence with the conflicted depth of an adult consciousness. As a result, Inukai is able to channel emotional intensity and whimsical play as one in her evocative works.

Ariel DeAndrea
'Dreams Of Flight'

Thinkspace Gallery (Los Angeles) - is pleased to present new works by Ariel DeAndrea in *Dreams Of Flight*. An accomplished painter and installation artist, DeAndrea's works are expressive dreamscapes developed through a personal iconography. Her paintings combine technical elements of hyperrealism with a surrealistic stylization that is distinctly her own. Looking to the crane as a symbol of hope and salvation, the artist creates hyperreal paintings of these delicate origami birds. The imagery is at once intensely poetic and strategically understated. Often staged in atmospherically shifting water, the paper talismans are refracted through light and subtle reflection. A shimmering blur of organic patterns and prismatic shifts, the serene paintings are quietly exquisite in their detail and execution. The sense of meditative calm conveyed by the work, contributes to its measured and deliberate impression of the surreal. The images are hauntingly poignant as a result; like silent suspended excerpts from a revelatory dream.

As a recurring symbol for the artist, the crane is frequently shown with figurative subjects or self-portraits, and is staged alongside the crocodile as its repeated symbolic counterpart for fear and atrophy. Drawing from the proverbial divisions of good and bad, and light and dark - binaries essential to the symbolic function of fable - the artist uses her work to polarize experiences of hope and fearfulness, salvation and damnation, bringing deeply emotive subject matter to life. Intensely personal, the works are like psychological portraits of human conflict. Looking to the uncomfortable proximity of hope and phobia, and our constant negotiation of their coexistence, DeAndrea's works are powerfully simple and stirring. Like the indelible visuals left by dreams, the imagery in her work is intimate, surreal, and beautifully vulnerable.