

## **Takako Yamaguchi: Innocent Bystander** **April 11 – May 31, 2025**

Ortuzar is pleased to present “**Takako Yamaguchi: Innocent Bystander**,” the gallery’s second solo exhibition with the Los Angeles-based artist, **Takako Yamaguchi** (b. 1952). The exhibition presents five examples from Yamaguchi’s Innocent Bystander series (1987–1989), a suite of paintings on large panels of gessoed paper that feature allegorical female figures appropriated from Lucas Cranach the Elder inserted into fantasy landscapes, synthesizing styles ranging from Art Nouveau to Japanese decorative arts. One earlier, related landscape painting is also exhibited in dialogue. Attempting, in the artist’s words, to “revive the ghost of a lost style in the form of something vain and pretty,” Yamaguchi’s Innocent Bystander series doubles down on its own anachronisms, haunted by a sensibility long since displaced by twentieth-century Modernisms. This exhibition follows Yamaguchi’s inclusion in “Whitney Biennial 2024: Even Better Than the Real Thing” and precedes her forthcoming solo exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, opening June 29.

Each work bears the same title and recurring visual motifs: voluptuous female nudes that conjure a distant Art History, volcanoes erupting clouds of metallic paint, rigorously ordered architectural structures and rows of trees. Yamaguchi alternates between flat decorative surfaces, illusionistic rendering of the female form and the sensuous materiality of an underlying grid of metal leaf. While the grid traditionally imposes and signifies order, here the sheets of hammered bronze are imperfectly laid, crumpling the illusionistic surface of the rendered image. Such moments of rupture are further accentuated by spills of paint evocative of Freudian Rorschach blots favored by the Surrealists. Alongside these unruly abstract passages, wispy “spermatozoa” stretch toward each exactly rendered Renaissance figure like expressionistic gestures threatening to inseminate the past with futures then unknown.

Yamaguchi completed her Innocent Bystander series in Los Angeles after an extended period of moving back and forth between the United States, Japan and Europe, with long stretches spent in Paris where she directly encountered European art. Yamaguchi credits her inspiration for this series not to any direct experience with art but to a book on Lucas Cranach the Elder she was given in Paris and brought with her to Los Angeles where she resettled in 1987. Yamaguchi characterizes her casual embrace of Cranach “as kind of irresponsible.” But the arbitrariness she admits to in her choice of imagery—an under-investment, so to speak—stands in contrast to, and is redeemed by, the over-invested, labor-intensive painting process that gives her often whimsical notions their rich material form. Yamaguchi’s open embrace of passivity is amplified by the tongue-in-cheek title she gives the series, which suggests an observer who is not an active participant within history’s unfolding—who is oblivious, even, to the scenes of Pompeii-like disaster and chaos around her. In these paintings, the depictions of Eve and other women borrowed from Cranach are deployed allegorically to suggest a naive, romantic, feminized figure—the artist herself, perhaps—who is willfully ignorant of Modernism and nostalgic for certain possibilities contained in the past. This detachment from the present—both conceptually and in the formal separation of the figure onto another plane—marks out an equivocal position within the cultural politics of the late 1980s that anticipates the culture wars of the following decade and its attending debates about beauty. Yamaguchi’s mode of engagement is often “untimely;” which is to say, ever-so-slightly out of step with prevailing taste and action. But while this attitude may render any artistic statement only just barely legible at the moment of its enunciation it can, as here, lay the foundation for that statement to become increasingly meaningful with the passage of time.

Takako Yamaguchi (b. 1952, Okayama, Japan) lives and works in Los Angeles. She received a BA from Bates College in Lewiston, Maine in 1975 and a MFA from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1978. Yamaguchi will present her first institutional solo exhibition, “MOCA Focus: Takako Yamaguchi,” at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles from June 2025 to March 2026. She has been included in institutional surveys including “Whitney Biennial 2024: Even

Better Than the Real Thing,” Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2024); “Ordinary People: Photorealism and the Work of Art since 1968,” Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2024); “With Pleasure: Pattern and Decoration in American Art 1972-1985,” Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (2019–2021); “Transcendence: Abstraction & Symbolism in the American West,” Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Logan, Utah (2015); “California Echoes: Women Inspired by Nature,” Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, Orange County, California (2007); and “L.A. Post-Cool,” Museum of Art, San Jose, California (2002). She is the recipient of an Anonymous Was A Woman Award (2024). Her work is in the collections of the Musée d’Art Moderne, Paris; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Mohn Art Collective, Los Angeles; Nevada Museum, Reno, Nevada; Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art, Logan, Utah; Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, California, among others.