

Maison Hermès

Kazuna Taguchi *A Quiet Sun*

Kazuna Taguchi's image-based works result from a multistep process: she paints portraits of figures based on collages of facial features and bodies sourced from mass media, such as magazines and the internet, and then photographs these photo-realistic paintings. These images create a limbo that bridges the materiality of the painting with the eeriness of these partially real figures. The various visual forms, including the original photographs and the painting, are compressed into one layer of presence: the final photograph Taguchi takes of her work.

Taguchi's latest exhibition, "A Quiet Sun" at Tokyo's Maison Hermès, added new layers in the perception of her practice by bringing together found photographs with selected works from her most recent series, *the eyes of eurydice* (2019–22), and other photographic experiments.

Displayed in vitrines, the found photographs, largely

from early to mid-1900s Europe, feature various themes, including female figures, still lifes, and most notably, optical-illusion illustrations. In these optical illusions, images of women blend into their surroundings: what appear to be waves in the ocean are maidens tossing around in the water, and what looks like a woman gazing into her vanity mirror is a skull.

Beyond providing an intimate look into the artist's collection, these found photos also evoke the weighty history of European visual culture and its emphasis on the sense of sight. Philosopher Hans Jonas describes sight as the noblest sense in part because of its "dynamic neutralization"—one can see without having to be physically affected. However, the optical illusions, which prove the limitations of this idea, seem to reach inward and cause unwitting gestalt shifts within the viewer. In effect, this hubristic belief in the omniscience and omnipotence of the eye, a product of Enlightenment and Cartesian thought, forecloses a

stance of attention, which is to witness without knowing. Multivalent ways of seeing, suggested by these found photos, create a back-and-forth space for the image to confuse and seduce the viewer.

The rest of the exhibition, consisting primarily of Taguchi's photographic series *the eyes of eurydice*, built on this tension of seeing, playing with the act of hiding while remaining visible. In some photographs, paintings of faces lightly covered in brushy paint strokes and waxy,

semi-opaque veneers hide the planes of existence that the subject, the face, is located on. In one photo, a figure sitting on a chair holds up, in a way that blocks any view of their face, an unstretched canvas of one of Taguchi's older portraits, which also depicts a seated female figure. Here, the latter work's eerie, partially real figure, which appears to be painted onto the canvas, simultaneously obscures and draws the viewer's attention to the figure behind it.

Wedge in a space between the exhibition wall and a wall of glass blocks, *Lily* (2022) comprises a pale pink gift box placed on the ground. The container holds a rectangular, photographic print cutout of painted lilies on top of sheer white gift-wrapping paper. These lilies are the very same lilies that the angel Gabriel holds in the Annunciation, but here the image has excised both the Virgin Mary and the angel, and zooms in to proclaim the lily as its visual heart. In the Western canon, the lily is a symbol of purity and the Virgin Mary's piety, but in the Japanese context, the flower symbolizes fleeting beauty. The lily hints that all positionalities can change and nothing lasts forever; but simultaneously, the repeated motif of the flower in the exhibition suggests that despite mortality, devoted attention transcends time.

The works in "A Quiet Sun" move between gestures of theatricality and obfuscation. To show oneself slowly in quiet brightness creates the conditions for the observer to reflect on the mechanics of seeing, and in doing so, their relation to attention. In this way of seeing, we practice a form of love, to experience a distance between the viewer and the subject that can never be crossed but that will always be attempted.

EMILIA WANG



KAZUNA TAGUCHI, *the eyes of eurydice* #26, 2020, gelatin silver print, 14.7 × 10.7 cm. Courtesy the artist and Fondation d'entreprise Hermès, Tokyo.