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Naoki Fuku

Splashes of black ink on large, white canvases depict gigantic, bold human heads: their mouths are open or distorted in silent screams, their eyes are closed, or portraying a febrile stare. The strokes of the bamboo stick, the dripping, and the marks on the surfaces suggest us that the image that we are observing was created in a rather dynamic process, and one doesn't need a deeper look to perceive that part of that movement is still there, as reverberating from the canvas.

The head is there, floating. Cut out, yet hyper conscious. In the depiction of the Naoki Fuku's head there is a latent violence, there is loneliness, alienation, climax. We look at the debris of an explosion. The condensed energy was released through the pictorial gesture of the Japanese artist, whose practice encompasses performative painting and drawing.

Fuku's artistic production is indeed the alchemic combustion between different compounds that he manage to select and combine according to their intensity, resulting in portraits of obsessively precise, meandric traits, or in expressionistic self-portraits that he paints while putting the canvas on the floor. The symmetries are inverted: Fuku doesn't reach for a confrontational relation to the object he is creating. He rather dives into the surface, liquefying himself in the black ink and transferring himself in the painting.

Despite being highly expressive, the gesture is always controlled, revealing a skilled ability in the technique of drawing. Fuku's large canvases are often realised during live performance where he is accompanied by a musician. The artist then follows the improvised music, let himself be guided by it, while simultaneously letting his deepest side emerge and fuse with the ink on the paper under him. It is then impossible not to think of the works of the Gutai Group, a major post-war avant-garde collective founded in Osaka in 1954 by the painter Jiro Yoshihara. Gutai artists aimed to integrate performative gestures, spontaneous and immediate, in their practices, in order to break through traditional visual codes. Gutai wanted the body of the artist to concretise the meaning of art production – the name itself “gutai” was a combination of the characters “gu”, which may be translated with “tool”, and “tai”, “body”. Although not openly referring to Gutai in his work, Naoki Fuku merges the limits of his body with the painting, and explores the tension

between the container and the contained, which may be his mind and his body, but also his body and the societal structure. His gigantic heads – a theme that is absent in the Japanese tradition – make us also think of the work of Georg Baselitz and of the western expressionist movements. Fuku's painting is indeed expressionistic, re-appropriating and merging together eastern and western pictorial traditions and materials.

Naoki Fuku reaches us with his powerful images, beautiful and terrifying as a dark vortex on a river, dragging us in our deepest corners. The heads we are looking at are our mirrors, exposing the suffering, the rage, the hedonistic pleasure, and the silent screams of our oppressed body in late-capitalistic, techno-dependant, contemporary societies.