

# THE METROPOLIST.



## INTERVIEW: Frieze London artist, Naotaka Hiro

Among the carousel of galleries writhing for attention at this year's Frieze London, **The Box LA** stood out with its exhibition "Men in LA, Three generations of Drawings" featuring drawings from **Naotaka Hiro**, Paul McCarthy and Benjamin Weissman. Discovering Osaka born Hiro and his metaphysical surgery of our corporeal habitat was a supreme highlight of the show. Currently on display at **La Ferme du Buisson Centre d'Art Contemporain**, we had to get in touch with the LA-based emerging artist.

**THE METROPOLIST:** What are some of the themes you are dealing with?

NAOTAKA HIRO: The foundation of my work in general is a concept of the unknown – the world of my body parts, which I am unable to see and thus unable to confirm. In all of these works the dilemma of the unknowability of my body serves as a creative point of departure: a place (unknown, blindness, awe) from which my imagination may create.



It usually starts with the body and moves more generally to “myself” of which I am essentially blind, as the subject of an unknown world. A depressing yet unavoidable fact for me is that this/ my body is only understandable when considered through the camera/ mirror and in a mediated form. Thus my works are connected through an imagination resulting from the encounter and engagement with the unknown.



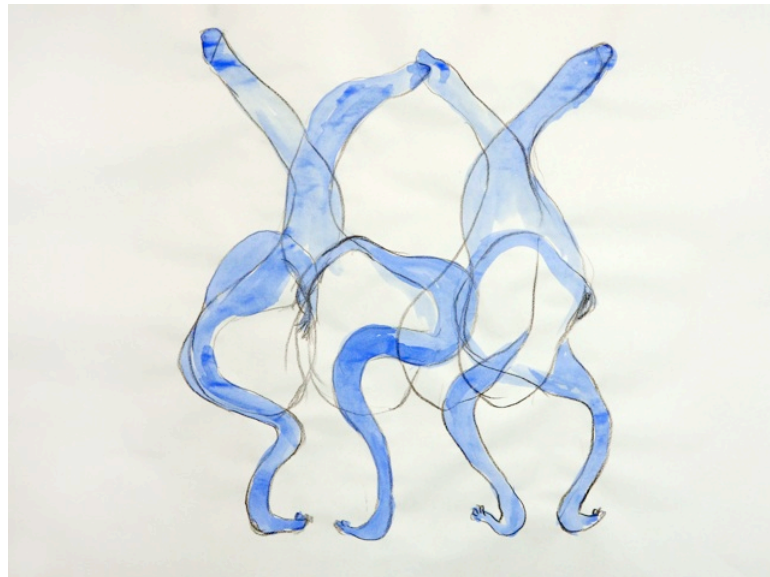
[IMAGE: Naotaka Hiro] The Log, 2013]



[IMAGE: Naotaka Hiro] The Log, 2013

**TM: You have a very strong visual language, what artists have inspired you?**

NH: I like Luis Buñuel's L'age d'Or, William Blake's watercolor drawings, Matisse, Gauguin's wood prints, Louise Bougeois writings, Gutai, Paul McCarthy's early basement videos, editing of Viennese Actionists films, Munch's lithographs, Rodin's watercolor, Valie Export, old studio of Bruce Nauman, Paul Thek, and so on.



[IMAGE: Naotaka Hiro] Drawing sample



**TM: How has your work progressed recently and have there been any major changes or trends?**

NH: I am usually inspired by abstract sequences and moving images. They often come from my dreams. To realize the “raw” idea however requires some work. I start drawing storyboards with short sequences that involve certain body movements and poses. They are usually fragmental and never really make any sense. Then I work on props, masks, sets, and so on based on the drawings. The documentation of the process/action becomes video or photographic works. Each process comes with autonomy, it stands as its own entity, storyboards become drawings, props/masks/sets become sculpture, and documentations become photo and video.

For the last 4 to 5 years I’ve been drawing everyday, like 15 to 20 drawings per day since my son was born. I work in my garage studio from 10 pm after my son goes to bed until about 12am. I cannot make large pieces due to fatigue and also I’m not able to make a lot of noise. All the frustration of not being able to make large works has led to my obsessive drawing habit. Consequently my transition between sculpture and video works has been much more fluent, with drawings bridging the gaps between productions of larger works.

(I draw everyday even when I travel. I made a bunch of drawings my hotel bathroom while I was visiting London for Frieze. I had to draw in the bathroom because my son was sleeping).



[IMAGE: Naotaka Hiro] Left: Bathroom drawings, courtesy of the artist. Right: Drawing sample

**TM: What direction do you see your work going in?**

NH: I now draw on larger sized paper, 3 feet or 6 feet tall, but always fit them to a “life-size” scale. When I draw, I stand by or on the paper often using both hands. 3-foot works are more like representations of my upper body while 6-foot ones are the whole body.





**TM: You do some really interesting things with form, how do you conceptualize the human body and do you have a specific perspective you are trying to express or does it happen organically?**

NH: All my pieces comes from an idea of representation of my body; sometimes they are more conceptual but other times they are literally what they are. I consider they are my doubles.

In all my works – videos, drawings and sculpture – you see lots of doubles and occasionally multiple body parts like 2 penises, 2 right hands, 2 heads, etc. but they don't represent any foreign body parts. They are my body doubles, interacting with and overlapping each other



[IMAGE: Naotaka Hiro] Left: FOUR-LEGGED (TOE TO HEEL),



[IMAGE: Naotaka Hiro] FOUR-LEGGED (TOE TO HEEL) detail, 2014.

**TM: The Box Gallery LA presented a series of your drawings on paper at Frieze, what appeals to you about working in this medium?**

NH: The Box exhibition was originally shown in LA in 2014, and was entitled “Men in LA, Three generations of Drawings” with Paul McCarthy, Benjamin Weissman and I. It was quite an amazing experience for me to work with these artists since I have always admired their works. We had drawings sessions twice – one in 2014 and most recently in September 2015. We sat on a large table and handed our drawings to each other once we had finished our own parts. It often got a bit crazy because we drew over each other, which occasionally led to something unexpected. And much more than what you can usually produce on your own in a studio in the middle of night.

*[COVER IMAGE: Naotaka Hiro] Four-Legged (Toe to Heel), 2014]*

