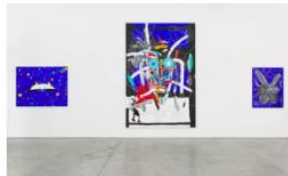


CULTIVATING A COSMOGARDEN IN NEW YORK CITY

HAPPY BOY IN MANHATTAN BY AKI KURODA



by Jenna Ferrey

Aki Kuroda is an enigmatic Japanese painter who has been living and working in France for the past 40 years. His automatic style of painting has produced some key components that are characteristic to Kuroda's work. *Happy Boy in Manhattan* at Richard Taittinger Gallery brings recognisable elements of Kuroda's oeuvre, or what he refers to as his Cosmogarden, to New York City. By employing some of his signature components including galaxies of words, fanciful characters, and self-portraits, Kuroda invites the viewer into his Cosmogarden to experience its incongruous chaos and calm.

For Kuroda, the entirety of his work and creation is his Cosmogarden. Themes of cosmos and cosmogony are present in this exhibition immediately and most prominently in the first three immense canvases the viewer encounters as they enter the gallery. In his work titled *Cosmogarden*, we see that word swirl in in the starry sliver dots that sparkle over the deep blue background. Words exist in the canvases as small, almost hidden, messages to the viewer, signalling verbally the magic Kuroda is trying to capture. In his large-scale yellow self-portrait Kuroda includes words like "passage," "good morning," and "to be or not to be." The precise message of these words is left to viewer interpretation, but we can understand that through these articulated galaxies, Kuroda is not only creating his own world or Cosmogarden, but reaching out to us and inviting us in.

Kuroda populates his paintings with characters. Some are recognizable, such as Lewis Carol's Alice, or Shakespeare's Ophelia, while others, such as Happy Boy, or his bunny are of his own creation. These characters dart from work to work. We see elephants, human figures and his bunny manages to be both cute and menacing in deferent pieces. Alice journeys through Kuroda's Cosmogarden much as she journeyed through Wonderland. We see her included as a small toy glued to the canvas in an untitled piece and her legs tumbling through at the top of Kuroda's large yellow self-portrait. The characters set the tone of each work and help to string together a larger narrative that and cosmogony that is weaved throughout Kuroda's works past and present. They bring his life to work and all to the viewer. Each of these characters can also be understood as self-portraits, small expressions of the artists subconscious self.

Kuroda's expressions of self find their most salient form in his self-portraits. Kuroda paints himself in broad, sweeping and colorful brush strokes. He captures his angular face and the

layers of paint and color that point to his internal complexity. In person, Kuroda's eyes are kind and gentle, but when he paints them they are energized and searching. Kuroda's self-portraits place him at the center of his own Cosmogarden both physically and spiritually. They allow the viewer to interact with Kuroda in a world of his own making.

*Happy Boy in Manhattan* is on view through April at [Richard Taittinger Gallery](#) and via Eazel Virtual Exhibitions at <https://eazel.net/exhibitions/533>.

<http://www.number3mag.com/aki-kuroda>