

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Artist Shio Kusaka and Jonas Wood share similar creative interests

Edmund Lee



Dual purpose: Shio Kusaka (left) and Jonas Wood. Photo: Dickson Lee

BLACKWELDER Gagosian Gallery

It may be more than coincidence that painter Jonas Wood and potter Shio Kusaka presented their most significant exhibitions in the same year. Married with two children, Momo and Kiki, the couple have been sharing a studio since 2002.

Wood showed his paintings of plants, sports cards and portraits in a solo show at Los Angeles' David Kordansky Gallery, and Kusaka's expressive ceramic pots, bowls and vases were exhibited in the 2014 Whitney Biennial.

It seems fitting that the name of their studio on Blackwelder Street, Los Angeles also lends its name to their joint exhibition at Gagosian Gallery.

“People have been asking us to do this for a while, because there’s a part of our work that overlaps in a major way,” says Wood. “I think this is a way for us to introduce more of our personal story and narrative to the viewer, and to elaborate on why, or how, we’re making these things.”

The artists — who moved to Los Angeles in 2003 — have always operated as individuals. Even though they admit that the show marks the first time they thought about how their works are related and made a story out of it, Kusaka insists it is not a collaboration. “I make my work and he makes his work,” she says.

Wood adds that they do have similar interests. “I make landscapes, portraits and interiors — works about pots and plants, and things you’d find in a still-life, while she makes pots. The show’s an opportunity to show how we feed off each other as artists.”

At the Gagosian exhibition, which showcases Kusaka’s recent porcelain vessels alongside Wood’s paintings and drawings of pots, vases and plants from the past decade, the viewer is encouraged to spot the symbiotic process in which potter and painter come to share a visual vocabulary.

Born in Morioka, Japan in 1972, Kusaka was influenced by the tea cups, teapots and wooden spoons that her grandmother used in teaching tea ceremonies. Her grandfather’s mastery of calligraphy also played a part in her upbringing.

“I use simple grids, lines, stripes, dots — patterns that I see on fabrics and other simple things around me,” Kusaka says of her pottery practice, which really began after she moved to the US in 1992. “I make sure that everything I make can hold water — just in case people want to use it.”

Wood was born in Boston, US, in 1977. Unlike his wife’s pots, which are sometimes characterised by their utilitarian purposes, his paintings are regularly interpreted by critics through the modern masters he references: Matisse, Picasso, David Hockney.

“I’m attracted to representational paintings which are not photo-realist and are more imaginative,” says Wood. “Works that rely more on the artist’s mark, the artist’s shape and the artist’s colour to define space, as opposed to copying a photograph and making a painting of something that we already know exists.”

Through his supplementary activities in collage-making, drawing and, more recently, printmaking, Wood constantly rethinks his approach to painting. “I think of my work as progression,” he says.

“I deconstruct my work. When I make things that I don’t like, I repurpose them. There are different facets of my studio practice that push me in different directions. It’s like a living, breathing organism.”

By comparison, Kusaka’s process seems more precise. She started by experimenting with forms, patterns, colours and sizes, and now says she is ready to focus on the basic forms. Kusaka insists that she doesn’t see herself shifting focus any time soon. “I think it’s important for me to limit

myself to pottery, or at least clay, and see what I can do with it. I really enjoy doing that,” she says.

Now that the two have staged an elaborate exhibition to showcase their works together, Wood is ready to admit that it’s inevitable they will collaborate. “I constantly talk about painting her pots,” he says.

“She’s already made pots for me that I’m supposed to paint on. But I like the way we’ve been describing our relationship. There isn’t a lot of pressure to make it about ‘us’, because we have our own things going anyway.”

Gagosian Gallery, 7/F Pedder Building, 12 Pedder Street, Central, Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-7pm. Ends February 28. Inquiries: 2151 0555