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**EXHIBITION: BY THE MOUNTAIN PATH/ LONDON**

## EMERGING JAPAN MEETS BIG BEN

Six contemporary Japanese artists & art collectives debut across seven seas

“BY THE MOUNTAIN path” at London’s White Rainbow gallery is an exhibition that celebrates Japan’s dynamic and diverse contemporary art scene through six of the most exciting Japan-based emerging artists and art collectives: Masaya Chiba, Chim Pom, Hyslom, Hidemi Nishida, Ryohei Usui, and Yui Yaegashi. These artists, none of whom has ever exhibited in London before, were selected by guest curator Ellen Mara De Wachter.

The title of the exhibition is derived from a Basho haiku. De Wachter explains: “Roland Barthes (the French literary and cultural theorist) writes about the particularity of haiku, saying that it eschews description and definition, and ‘diminishes to the point of pure and sole designation.’ It is this act of designation (rather than any attempts at definition or description) that I privilege in this exhibition. It gives me great pleasure to channel Basho and simply to invite you to see.”

To find out more about the exhibition, the participating artists, Japan’s contemporary art scene, and the inspiration behind the exhibition, BLOUIN ARTINFO asked De Wachter a few questions.

**What was the catalyst for the exhibition “By the mountain path” at White Rainbow?**

The exhibition comes out of a research trip I did with White Rainbow in September 2014. We traveled all over Japan, visiting triennials, exhibitions, artists’ studios and places of cultural interest. There was a lot of interesting and dynamic art around, from Japan and wider Asia.

**How did you select the artists in the exhibition and what criteria did you use?**

I made a selection based on the works I encountered, which I found the strongest and most expressive — the ones that touched me the most.

**What are some of the threads that link the works in the exhibition?**

There is a range of different artistic approaches represented in the show. There are two collectives: Hyslom is made up of three members who are based in Kyoto and who deal with the changing landscape and socio-economic significance of a specific tract of land outside Kyoto through performance, video and sculpture; and Chim Pom is a collective of six based in Tokyo. They are an ultra-dynamic group whose work crosses over between the environment of the ‘art world’ and social spaces in different cities and countries.

Chim Pom are transforming pieces of wall from around the world into a massive work called ‘It’s the Wall World,’ which they started in Bangladesh a few months ago and continued in Tokyo and now in London. The show also includes the work of two painters: Masaya Chiba, who paints landscapes and sculptural setups that look and feel like lucid dreams; and Yui Yaegashi, whose diminutive canvases echo the processes of weaving but also allude to the ways in which energy networks crisscross the city and our lives.

Then there is photography — or more precisely scanning — with Hidemi Nishida, an artist based in Norway and Japan, whose work is a vast scan of a post-industrial landscape on the Northern Japanese island of Hokkaido. And finally Ryohei Usui, who works in sculpture and photography, and whose project PET (Portrait of Encountered Things) will be represented with a new glass and wood sculpture and photographs.

**You say that you privilege an act of designation with this exhibition. Could you explain it and how it manifests in the exhibition?**

I wanted to make a show that honestly and accurately represented my status as a non-expert on Japanese art per se; but that conveyed the way in which I was particularly struck by some of the works I encountered on my trav-

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els. The title comes from a haiku by Basho, a 17th century Japanese poet and haiku master. It is quoted by the French literary critic Roland Barthes in "Empire of Signs," a book he wrote about Japanese aesthetics and culture.

Barthes says that the haiku is special because it does not describe or define, but rather because it simply designates a moment or experience. I was really interested in that nuance between defining and designating, because I think a lot of curatorial energy can be spent on trying to define something for an audience who is assumed to need it, whereas what people really are interested in is just experiencing an encounter with a new work of art. This idea inspired me to go ahead.

### What did you learn about the Japanese contemporary art scene during the making of this show?

Ideas around the relationship between post-industrial environments and natural ones, and how the two can mesh together in time — a kind of post-industrial entropy — come up in a lot of emerging Japanese artists' works. There is also another trend I'm interested in, which is artists who work collaboratively, and how the creative process is negotiated and shared. It's a fascinating and inspiring thing to witness or sometimes, as a curator, to be a part of. This tendency towards collaboration is alive and well in Japan, and in fact it has a long history, with many early precursors of the Japanese tradition of collective art practice, including 20th century avant-garde movements such as Mavo, Jikken Kobo, Gutai group, Hi-Red Centre, and Mono-ha. At a time when it's harder than ever to make a living as an artist, collaborating can also be a way for artists and their close ones to build a supportive life together.

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### What do the works in the exhibition reveal about the trajectory of contemporary art in Japan and its status in the global art scene?

The exhibition is eclectic, and as such it does not put forward any overarching thesis about the status of contemporary and emerging art in Japan — other than to reveal that it is rich, varied, and inspiring. This is a deliberate curatorial attitude, which I would apply to art from anywhere. I'm interested in presenting art to a public without trying to coax it into any particular meaning other than the one given by the work itself. The Japanese contemporary art scene is very energetic and exciting — as evidenced in this exhibition.

*"By The Mountain Path" is on view at White Rainbow, 47 Mortimer Street, London, W1W 8HJ through June 20*

— NICHOLAS FORREST



Above: Hidemi Nishida's "Scan\_01\_5.jul.2014\_fin (detail)," 2014; Left: "Scan\_01\_5.jul.2014\_fin (detail of London version)," 2015 as part of 'By the Mountain Path' show