

PRESS RELEASE

NAOKI TOMITA

Suburban boy

MAY10 –JUNE11, 2016

12-7pm

Closed on SUN, MON and National Holidays

Opening Reception: Tuesday, May 10, 6-8



<Snowy Morning > 2016年 Oil on Canvas 218.2 x 291 cm ©Naoki Tomita/ MAHO KUBOTA GALLERY

MAHO KUBOTA GALLERY is delighted to announce an exhibition of new works by young painter Naoki Tomita. This exhibition, entitled “suburban boy,” features new oil paintings, both large and small, of suburban roadside scenes, and of the faces of freeters—young people without regular jobs.

Links between contemporary art in Japan and the international art scene became closer and more active in the 1980s, and works by the generation of artists born in that period are now making an impact in exhibitions worldwide. We live in times when it can look as though everything in painting, sculpture, video, conceptual art, and similar fields has been done before, so it is interesting to see how artists born in the 1980s describe their own creations. Painting in particular is a field where earlier artists have provided a vast legacy of work—virtuoso

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narrative paintings, sublime paintings that eliminate the image, or paintings that depict the toxic, challenging the darker aspects of our society. Nevertheless, the work of painters born in the 1980s seems to some extent to be lifting spells that had been cast by the weight of history and breaking the stagnation that had been affecting the field. Today, painting in Japan has no mainstream, so young painters are liberated from academic rules, and even select their subjects freely from the internet. This situation has the risk of leading to work that lacks depth, but Naoki Tomita somehow goes in the opposite direction, devoting a surprising amount of time to the simple practice of painting thickly, layer after layer.

Born in Ibaraki in 1983, Tomita spent his teens in suburban Japan, the ordinary, nondescript environment that fills the area between the urban centers and the rural satoyama. Lacking the luxuriant green of the satoyama farming communities, the suburbs had industrial highways, ubiquitous chain restaurants and large malls. Such localities were not as stimulating as city neighborhoods, and the entertainment available took the form of game machines and karaoke parlors. As a suburban boy in his mid-teens, Tomita sought excitement by shaving his hair and donning a tokko-fuku bosozoku outfit to join his mates roaring around town at night on motorbikes. After some time, however, he realized that this wild behavior never brought him a real thrill, and his interest shifted to art. Eventually he started to make paintings as a way to express himself.

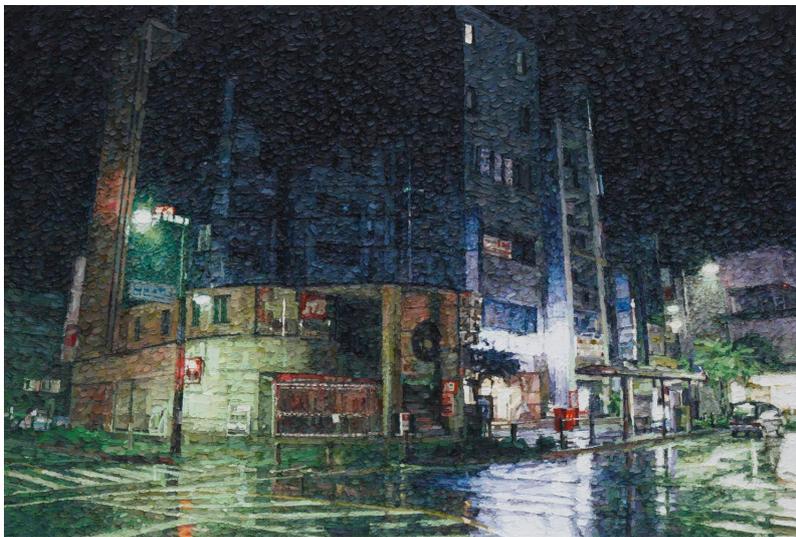
Tomita's technique of depicting his subjects on canvases with dense slabs of paint is highly distinctive, piling up layers so that the paint seems to be scraped up. The thickness of the paint enables it to pick up light and create shadows. His No job series is one of his best-known, featuring the faces of young people known as freeters, people who have no fixed employment, finding casual jobs one after another through magazine ads. Each individual is portrayed on a small 18 x 14 cm canvas. Tomita explains: "The No job paintings are portraits of freeters. The term initially gives a negative impression, but in the emptiness of a freeter's situation I sense hope and the potential for something to begin."

Tomita has also produced many paintings featuring scenes from the outskirts of major cities, the facades of empty stores, vacant rooms shown to the artist by real estate agents, and a ring without its wearer. Like the No job series, these works each present some sort of emptiness that can also be seen as depicting hope and the potential for something to begin. Instead of interpreting a neutral situation negatively as empty, Tomita is attempting to capture the light that seeps out. The artist's own aspirations can be seen here and there in these works, but perhaps the paintings can also be taken as depicting personal experiences of loss that underlie those wishes. Five years ago, the 2010s brought an unparalleled disaster, and the ongoing losses are still overbearing, affecting our day to day existence. Although presenting a world that could be fictional, by suggesting a hidden message of revitalization and hope for the 2010s from one of Japan's lost generations, Naoki Tomita's oil paintings have a reality that touches the hearts and minds of viewers. That reality is communicated by the dazzling impression that results from the thickness of the physical matière of the paint carrying shade as well as light, bringing a contrast like that between loss and hope.

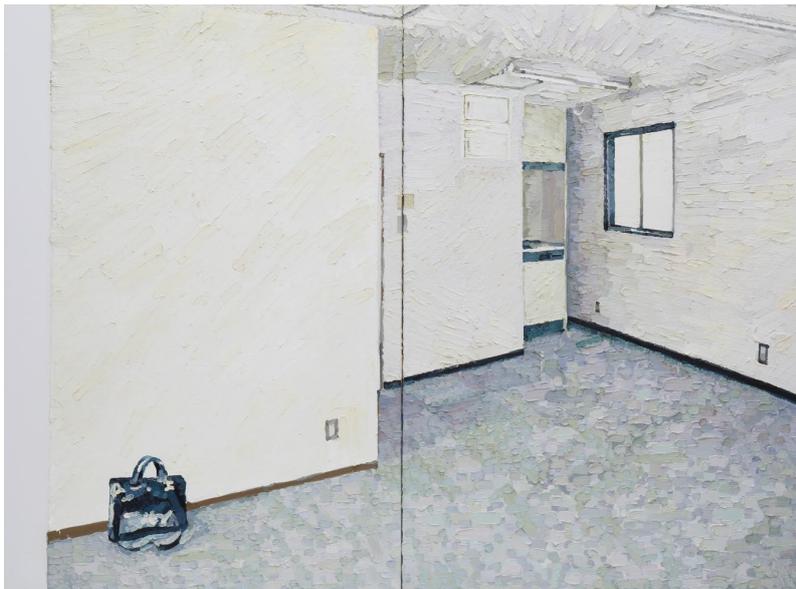
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Naoki Tomita

Born in Ibaraki prefecture, Japan in 1983, Tomita graduated in Fine and Applied Arts from the Kyoto University of Art & Design in 2012, then completed a master's degree in oil painting at Tokyo University of the Arts in 2015. Tomita has attracted attention for his paintings that use thick layers of oil paint to depict suburban scenes, the facades of stores without tenants, and young people without regular jobs. Tomita presented a solo exhibition in 2015 as part of the Project N series at Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, and the same year received the Founder's Award in the CAF Art Awards from the Contemporary Art Foundation. He is currently one of the most exciting young artists in Japan's art scene.

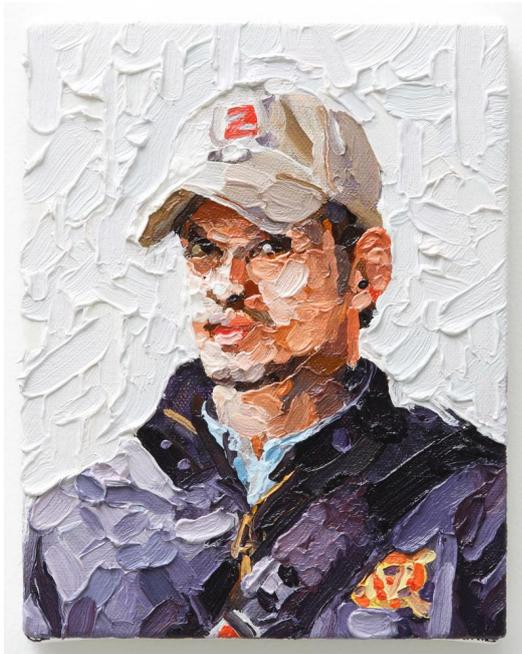


Night Rain (Yosame) 2014年 ©Naoki Tomita / MAHO KUBOTA GALLERY

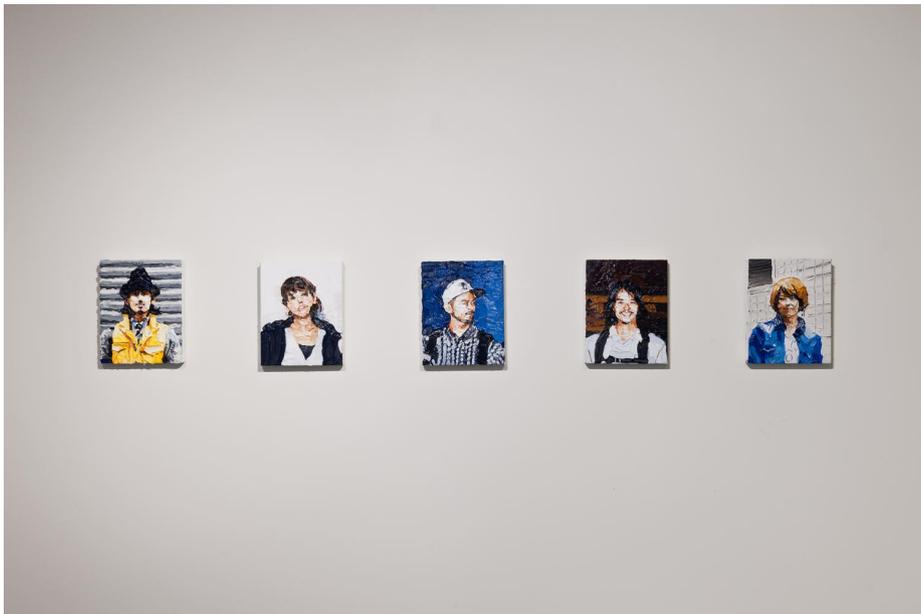


Corner #2 2012年 ©Naoki Tomita / MAHO KUBOTA GALLERY

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No Job 2015年 ©Naoki Tomita / MAHO KUBOTA GALLERY



Installation view of *No Job* ©Naoki Tomita / MAHO KUBOTA GALLERY