

VENUS OVER MANHATTAN

Press Release

YUICHIRO UKAI

November 17, 2023 – January 13, 2024

Opening: Friday, November 17th, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

Venus Over Manhattan

39 Great Jones Street

New York, NY 10012



(New York, NY) – Beginning Friday, November 17th, **Venus Over Manhattan** will present the first solo exhibition in the United States of work by Japanese artist **Yuichiro Ukai**, organized in collaboration with the Kyoto gallerist Yukiko Koide of Yukiko Koide Presents. This presentation of 14 new works by the artist marks Ukai's first solo exhibition with the gallery, and follows a recent acquisition of his work by the American Folk Art Museum in New York. A catalogue, featuring a new text by **Kenjiro Hosaka**, Director of the Shiga Museum

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of Art, will accompany the exhibition. The presentation will be on view at the gallery's 39 Great Jones Street location through January 13, 2024.

Yuichiro Ukai is a celebrated self-taught artist, who lives and works in the Shiga prefecture of Japan. Following his graduation from high school in 2014, Ukai became a member of the distinguished Atelier Yamanami. Yamanami functions as a live-work facility that offers employment, training, and arts enrichment programs for individuals with neurodiversity or disabilities. Yamanami has provided the ideal environment and support required for Ukai's art practice to flourish.

Ukai's compositions teem with activity. His unique visual language evokes both traditions of rather contemporary subculture such as manga and anime, and of the Japanese epic. Drawn on sequential sheets of brown paper, the incredibly dense images are built from memory to create a visual assemblage of seemingly eclectic characters. The artist incorporates a broad array of forms and figures from popular Japanese culture (samurai, *yokai*-monsters, Pokémon, and skeletons), but also includes his encyclopedic explorations of insects, dinosaurs, and popular icons into each frame. These phantasmagoric drawings are done in a sequential series, but executed with what seems to be complete improvisation. The result is an impossibly rich and almost cartographic landscape of a world that pulled from Ukai's imaginative references. Melding traditional allusions—to the idiom of Ukiyo-e prints, Japanese mythology, and folklore—with more modern emblems allows these works to poetically engage Japanese Art historical and cultural references while simultaneously situating themselves in the present.

Japanese subculture and epics, two influences heavily present in Ukai's work, are both integral parts of Japan's literary and visual arts heritage. The heightened sense of drama, expansiveness of scope and rich complexity present in Ukai's drawings are very evocative of Japanese epics, which often take the form of long narrative poems or prose works that depict heroic tales, historical events, or legendary figures. Correspondingly, manga, which can trace its roots to traditional Japanese art forms like ukiyo-e woodblock prints, is a sequential art, characterized by its distinctive visual style and narrative structure – something echoed in the continuity preternaturally conjured by Ukai across his drawings.

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ABOUT ATELIER YAMANAMI

Atelier Yamanami's ethos upholds artistry and creative expression along with social impact and engagement as paramount to a healthy society. The studio, which was founded in 1986, actively participates in exhibitions, events, and workshops, both within Japan and internationally, to showcase the immense contributions and profound creative output of its clients. Through their exceptional commitment to their founding philosophy, Atelier Yamanami challenges societies ableism, underscoring the value and necessity of celebrating and honoring the creativity of all individuals.

For further information about the exhibition and availability, please contact the gallery at info@venusovermanhattan.com

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39 Great Jones Street
New York, NY 10012
55 Great Jones Street
New York, NY 10012

GALLERY HOURS

Tuesday – Saturday
11:00 am – 6:00 pm

PRESS CONTACT

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IMAGE CREDITS

Untitled (No. 62), 2023.
Untitled (No. 61), 2023.
Untitled (No. 60), 2023.
Untitled (No. 59), 2023.
Detail of *Untitled (No. 61)*, 2023.

All works by Yuichiro Ukai: Colored pencil, marker and ink on cardboard; 29 x 32 ½ in (73.7 x 82.5 cm).

All images of works by Yuichiro Ukai, courtesy the artist, Yukiko Koide Presents, Kyoto, and Venus Over Manhattan, New York.