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Kosuke Kawahara
Exotic Star

February 22 - March 30, 2024



Kosuke Kawahara, *Soundless Chamber* (detail), 2023 - 2024,
Oil color, acrylic, encaustic, spray paint, ink, chalk, gesso on sutured found fabrics, 74 x 49¾ x 1¼ inches

RAINRAIN is pleased to present *Exotic Star*, a solo exhibition of new works by Kosuke Kawahara. Building upon the artist's past exploration of themes related to darkness, perception, and the (de)formation of organisms, this assembly of paintings, drawings, and installation showcases the Brooklyn-based artist's steadfast commitment to questioning modes of categorization, constructed norms, and ecological systems spanning the microscopic to the universal. Taking its name from a class of theoretical astronomical objects, this show deploys the term as a framework for understanding the cluster of works and the constellation of motifs uniting them.

Paintings

Across a suite of 9 paintings, viewers encounter a spectrum of malformed appendages and distorted conduits that seemingly reference bodily passageways, cavities, and sensory organs. The background of many of these works, rendered in oil paint, acrylic, chalk, spray paint, and other additives, is slightly disorienting and hints at alternative dimensions. This perspective plays with one's point of view and comprehension of the depicted scenes, many of which reference stages of reproduction, consumption, and decomposition. In part, Kawahara prompts us to think about how we receive, interpret, and categorize external stimuli. His works tease out how ideas of normalcy and aberration are conditioned by the environments we inhabit and travel between.

In *Do You Remember Me?* (2023-2024), a group portrait of haunting, undefined faces, the painting speaks to genotypes, phenotypes, and how aesthetic regimes are determined by subjective circumstances and criteria. Kawahara seems to draw parallels between the outward appearance and behavior of terrestrial species and exotic stars, such as pulsars and boson stars. Similar to how the subatomic composition of these strange celestial bodies

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leads to atypical appearances and behaviors, the genetic makeup of organisms on Earth dictate certain typologies and physiognomies.

Just as the artist probes conceptions of mutations, deformities, and abnormalities across ecosystems, his approach to art-making reinforces these thematic interests. Fittingly, Kawahara embraces unorthodox materials and unconventional techniques. Through materials, process, and visual forms, he injects a dual sense of growth and decay into his artworks. For instance, the canvas for *Soundless Chamber* (2023-2024) is comprised of found cloth that he has sutured together. A ridge or seam can faintly be detected, possibly suggesting a ripple in the fabric of space and time. At the same time, nearly imperceptible tears in the painting's fabric indicate the fragility of the representative image—and life more broadly. Kawahara's paintings exist in a tenuous state of equilibrium between stasis and disintegration, much like cells and stars.

Kawahara destabilizes the pictorial surface not only through the materials he uses, but also through his construction of the paintings' supports. For many of his works, he uses found frames to make ad-hoc stretchers for the paintings. The repurposing here is significant because the artist subverts the containing, boundary-enforcing effect of the frame. Therefore, his works have conceptually porous membranes, establishing a system of exchange for whatever environment they are placed within.

Drawings & Performance

The sequential drawings along the gallery's wall register the liminal debris from the creation of Kawahara's recent paintings, comparable to the recycling of cosmic matter from the Big Bang. The serialized arrangement of the works on paper suggest a sense of evolution, reiteration, or perhaps even mutation. Akin to interstellar material cast off from nascent nebulae or dying stars, *Anonymous Implants* (2024) represents life's cyclicity. During the run of the exhibition, Kawahara will expand these peripheral markings, blurring the precise boundaries between individual works. These drawings relate to an array of satellite wild postings in the immediate vicinity of 110 Lafayette Street, thereby expanding the reach of the show and symbolically drawing passersby into the gravitational pull of the works on display. Similarly, guests are invited to take editioned artist posters with them upon their departure. Instead of understanding the artist's studio, exhibition venue, and the street as three discrete spaces, the multimedia artist challenges visitors to see these different locales as parts of one interconnected system, one where art's meaning and value shifts depending on the context and forces at play.

Installation

The boundaries between art and daily life are further blurred because the artist consciously incorporates ephemeral artifacts from his quotidian routine into his artistic practice. Repurposing plastic to-go containers, drink lids, coffee grounds, found fabric, and photographs taken on the street, Kawahara manipulates these source materials in order to create dyes for his paintings, to make transitional or preparatory works, or to render these found objects as works in their own right. Some of these small-scale works are positioned near large paintings — each one indexing the other. The organic contents of one were used to fuel the creation of the other, and now the remnants of the former revolve around the latter in a stellar system. On wooden window sills in the gallery, the artist has installed a miniature ecosystem from the creative detritus from his studio and populated it with plastic sculptures.

Cryptic, articulating antennae, phalanges, and flagella recur in many of Kawahara's works—all reaching out, feeling, attempting to make sense of their immediate environs. Each painting, drawing, and sculpture can be conceived as an imagined world of its own yet intimately tied to one another. By examining these imaginary worlds, a conclusion begins to coalesce, namely that forms, appearances, and behaviors are all relative and subject to the environmental conditions of each system. Through his artistic corpus, Kawahara encourages spectators to question the taxonomic schemes governing life and aesthetics.

Text by Anthony Huffman

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About the Artist

Kosuke Kawahara is born in 1980 in Kyoto, Japan, and moved to New York in 2011. Kawahara currently lives and works in Brooklyn. He earned a BFA in Design from Okayama Prefectural University, and graduated with an MFA in Painting and Drawing from Pratt Institute. His intuitive/impromptu gesture generates site-relevant imagery through its multi-layered structure. Kawahara's works speak to notions of growth, decay, modes of communication and perception, spiritualism, interdependent relationships, and human behavior in ever-shifting environmental conditions. The whole process of creating a work from the start to its end is a process of the artist constantly exploring and (re)constructing the alternative space around darkness.

He has previously exhibited at The Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts (EFA), Trestle Gallery, Paradise Palace, Susan Eley Fine Art, and Super Dutchess Gallery. He has been awarded the Café Royal Cultural Foundation Visual Grant in 2022, the City Artist Corps Grants in 2021, and First Prize in Works on Paper by The Long Beach Island Foundation of the Arts & Sciences in 2021. He completed an artist residency at Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's Governors Island Residency Initiative, and is currently a member artist at the EFA Studio Program.

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