

Koji Nakazono: Soulmate

Bursting with color and life

The largest-ever exhibition of work

by a painter whose 25 years on earth were genius in motion



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2012)
Collection of
Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
Photo by Kenji Takahashi
©Koji Nakazono, Nakazono family;
courtesy Tomio Koyama Gallery

Exhibition title	Koji Nakazono: Soulmate
Date	Sat 17 June - Mon 18 September 2023
Closed	Mondays (except 17 July, 18 September), Tue 18 July

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Koji Nakazono (1989–2015) was a creator of unforgettable paintings of jewel-like chromatic variety. Based in the Kanto region following his graduation from Tokyo University of the Arts, Nakazono then found himself drawn to the climate and character of Kagawa, on the Seto Inland Sea, and in 2014 moved there, only to tragically pass away the following year at the age of twenty-five.

As well as being the products of Nakazono's own personal inner necessity, the many paintings that emerged from this young artist's sublime aesthetic sensibility evoke the torrent of images flooding the world today, and as such, speak to the depths of our consciousness with considerable force.

When I look at a thing, I need someone alongside, looking with me.

So the artist wrote in his notebook. Soulmate presents some 200 of Nakazono's paintings, making it the largest-ever exhibition of his work in Kagawa, his last home.

Doubtless that "thing" he was looking at will make itself known, through this wealth of his work.

Why "Soulmate"?

The "soulmate" of the exhibition title is a term that appears repeatedly in the thoughts and feelings that Nakazono jotted down from day to day, which we use here as he did in the sense of "someone alongside me, looking with me," in other words a familiar presence sharing his own sensibilities and view of the world. This exhibition introduces Nakazono's vast body of work expressing his craving for such a soulmate in today's chaotic world, and his remarkable ability to turn that fundamental aloneness into paintings of sublime beauty.



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2015)
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Highlights

Largest-ever showing of the artist's work

In the nine short years or so between making art his calling in 2006 as a high school sophomore, and his death at the age of just twenty-five, Koji Nakazono produced a huge number of paintings. "Soulmate" presents around 200 of these, including many previously unseen, in the largest-ever exhibition of his work.

The Kagawa connection—his final home

Captivated by the landscape of Kagawa, with its intimate connection to both mountains and sea, Nakazono moved to the prefecture at the end of 2014, and set about painting at his home and studio in Takamatsu. In July the following year however he went missing in the waters of the Seto Inland Sea, never to return, a singular talent lost to the world forever. "Soulmate" offers a comprehensive view of Nakazono's tragically truncated career, in the place closest to his heart in what were to be his final days.

Closing in on the enigma of Nakazono's creative activities

With paintings in Japanese and overseas exhibitions, and a recent biography in art magazine *Geijutsu Shincho*, the work and life of Koji Nakazono continue to command attention. The creative activities of an artist whose paintings are so varied one can scarcely believe them to be the work of the same person, remain steeped in mystery. As well as taking a close look at Nakazono's painting, "Soulmate" closes in on the enigmatic nature of his practice via a range of supplementary material including interview footage, and drawings and books that served as sources for his imagery.



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2009)
©Koji Nakazono, Nakazono family; courtesy
Tomio Koyama Gallery

Koji Nakazono

Born 1989 in Yokohama, Japan, Nakazono received his BFA in 2012 from Tokyo University of the Arts. Missing, presumed drowned in the Seto Inland Sea in 2015. Notable exhibitions include solo outings at Tomio Koyama Gallery (Tokyo, 2013) and "Koji Nakazono: On the Edge – Places I wanted to see" (YOKOSUKA MUSEUM OF ART, Kanagawa, 2018), and group shows "The Way of Painting" (Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery, 2014), NEW VISION SAITAMA 5: "The Emerging Body" (The Museum of Modern Art, Saitama, 2016), and "Japanorama: New Vision on art since 1970" (Centre Pompidou-Metz, France, 2017).

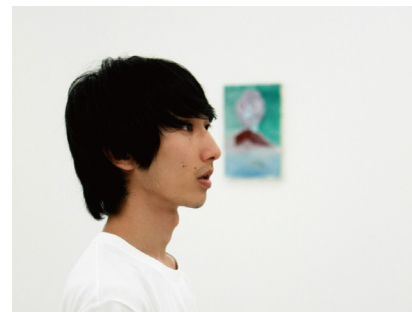


Photo by Osamu Sakamoto

Approach to the artist and his art

“Soulmate” approaches Nakazono’s works and art practice from the angles described below, unpacking the distinctive features of his diverse range of expression, and the background from which they emerged.

Multilayered scenes

“Soulmate” includes a number of the artist’s larger paintings, distinguished by their complex, layered construction. Changing viewpoint—moving up close, then further away—reveals multiple vistas.



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2013)
Collection of sasanao
Photo by Kenji Takahashi
©Koji Nakazono, Nakazono family;
courtesy Tomio Koyama Gallery

Countless scenes

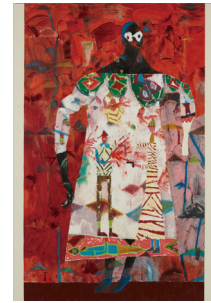
Nakazono produced many small works of an impromptu, drawing-like nature. These pictures of dazzling variety, characterized by a wonderful freedom in materials and rendering, can now be viewed in a single location.



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (year unknown)
Photo by Kenji Takahashi
©Koji Nakazono, Nakazono family; courtesy Tomio Koyama Gallery

People

The exhibition also focuses on Nakazono’s many “human” images: appearing in turn are figures lost in thought, or of lost and lonely appearance, faces seemingly shedding tears of mirth, comical beings reminiscent of game characters, faces looming in clouds or sky.



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2012)
Collection of Satoshi Shiraki and Michiyo Kamata
Photo by Kenji Takahashi
©Koji Nakazono, Nakazono family; courtesy Tomio Koyama Gallery

Sources of the artist’s imagery

Nakazono filled piles of sketchbooks and notepads with drawings and comic strips, these images that bubbled up continuously from within informing his work.



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (year unknown)
©Koji Nakazono, Nakazono family; courtesy Tomio Koyama Gallery

Promise to a place

“Soulmate” showcases Nakazono’s practice in Kagawa, presenting paintings from his time in Takamatsu, and scenes from his studio in a storehouse on the Aji Peninsula, known in Japan as the home of Aji stone.



Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2015)
Collection of TAKAMATSU ART MUSEUM
Photo by Kenji Takahashi
©Koji Nakazono, Nakazono family; courtesy Tomio Koyama Gallery

Exhibition title	Koji Nakazono: Soulmate
Organized by	Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art, The MIMOCA Foundation
Subsidized by	Japan Arts Fund, THE ASAHI SHIMBUN FOUNDATION
In Cooperation with	Tomio Koyama Gallery
Date	Sat 17 June - Mon 18 September 2023
Hours	10:00-18:00 (Admission until 30 minutes before closing time)
Closed	Mondays (except 17 July, 18 September), Tue 18 July

Concurrent exhibition from the permanent collection

Genichiro Inokuma Exhibition

Advance ticket information

Rakuten Ticket: <https://leisure.tstar.jp/event/rlikggm/>

ARTLAND_Gallery: 0877-24-0927

OKURA HOTEL marugame: 0877-23-2222

Omiyage Shop MIU: 0877-22-2400

— Related Program

Opening talk: About Koji Nakazono

Date: Sat 17 June 2023, 15:00 (doors open 14:30)

Appearing: Masakatsu and Nobuko Nakazono (family members),

Tomio Koyama (Director, Tomio Koyama Gallery), Mizuki Takezaki (the exhibition curator)

Venue: Museum Hall (2F)

Seats: 170

No booking required, admission free

*Details will be posted on the MIMOCA website as they become available.

MIMOCA Family Day

July 8 (Sat), 9 (Sun) 2023, 10:00–18:00

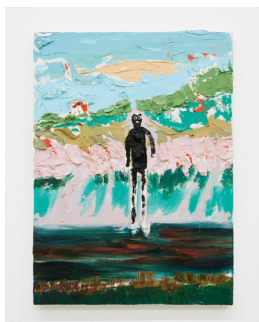
Free exhibition entry for up to two adults accompanying students (through high school) or under 18 years.

— Images for Press Use

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Collection of Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
- 2 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2015)
Collection of TAKAMATSU ART MUSEUM
- 3 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2014)
- 4 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (c.2013 or 2014)
- 5 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2013)
Collection of sasanao
- 6 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2012)
Collection of Satoshi Shiraki and Michiyo Kamata

- 7 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (2012)
Collection of Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo
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- 9 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (year unknown)
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- 12 Koji Nakazono, *Untitled* (year unknown)

Credits 1-11: Photos Kenji Takahashi

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