

# Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, SC, Features Works by Mimi Kato and Jimmy Kuehnle

The Columbia Museum of Art in Columbia, SC, is presenting two new exhibitions including: *Mimi Kato: Ordinary Sagas* and *Wow Pop Bliss: Jimmy Kuehnle's Inflatable Art*, on view through Sept. 8, 2019.

Organized by the CMA, these exhibitions from Cleveland, OH-based artists offer visitors uniquely provocative, even downright playful, experiences with contemporary art.

"Jimmy Kuehnle and Mimi Kato are extraordinary, with incredibly smart, bold, slightly madcap exhibitions that set the tone for summer and provide unforgettable museum moments," says CMA Curator Catherine Walworth. "We are excited to debut brand-new work from these two artists and to continue the CMA's commitment to dynamic contemporary art."

Born and raised in Nara, Japan, Mimi Kato has lived in the United States since 1998. She draws on the rich history and visual traditions of Japanese culture as well as the absurd everyday elements of contemporary life and merges them in imaginary landscapes. Kato has worked in video, land art, and other media, but *Ordinary Sagas* showcases the artist's lengthy process that combines photography, performance, and computer-drawn scenery into archival digital prints.

Kato makes her own costumes, poses in broad gestures that borrow from Kyōgen theatrical comedy and contemporary Butoh dance (both highly stylized forms of Japanese performance), photographs herself as a range of characters—from everyday Japanese citizens to fantastical creatures in the forest—and embeds these images into large photomontages using landscapes she has digitally rendered. The result is a busy world of simultaneous happenings that is narratively complex and darkly humorous. The aerial perspective and multiple views in these settings relate to the historical Japanese painting styles that influence the artist.

In addition to some of Kato's works from



Work by Mimi Kato

2010 and 2012, including a 34-foot-wide series of nine hanging scrolls, *Ordinary Sagas* premieres Kato's newest body of work. This large series, titled *Wild Corporation*, pits tribes of female office workers (known in Japan as "office ladies") against each other, now in a newly Americanized landscape. Kato draws on her early work experience in corporate Japan and on her life in the US to explore the power dynamics among women in patriarchal systems. She has created a fantastical narrative that addresses themes of gender relations from a unique, brutally honest perspective.

"*Ordinary Sagas* is a colorful fantasy world where different, somewhat familiar dramas unfold, occasionally with the help of sharp pointy objects," says Kato. "I want visitors to spend time in the galleries with the narratives that my work offers."

Jimmy Kuehnle is a performance and sculpture-based artist who creates large-scale, high-tech inflatables that expand our notions of abstract art. For *Wow Pop Bliss*, Kuehnle fills four exhibition galleries with touchable, interactive environments using inflatables that combine sound, light, space, and texture to create unexpected experiences for visitors as they move under, through, and around these works.

Kuehnle has built large-scale inflatables for museums across the United States and internationally. Two of those sculptures, *Punch Bubbles* and *Wiggle Giggle Jiggle*, have been deconstructed, reconfigured, and



Work by Jimmy Kuehnle

given updated technology for this exhibition. In addition, Kuehnle has created two new inflatables, *Winking Windbags* and *Polychrome Dome*, specifically for the museum's architectural façade and featured exhibition galleries, respectively. *Polychrome Dome* is perhaps the most ambitious computer-enhanced sculpture that Kuehnle has ever built. Using thermal sensors to detect visitors, it reacts to them as much as they react to it. As the number of people moving about inside the igloo-shaped inflatable changes, the embedded music and color effects shift rhythmically.

"I see the work as a collaboration and negotiation with the audience," says Kuehnle. "The viewers are necessary for the work to be complete; otherwise it just sits in a pile of fabric in a cardboard box in my studio."

Kuehnle's sculptures take geometric abstraction to a new level, but the accusation of coldness sometimes leveled against strict modernist forms could never be applied to one of his works. Instead, his sculptures are meant to be experienced, touched, and walked through, and viewers might even be chased by lights or subwoofers. There is a sense of absurdity to everything he does and a desire to spark delight in the viewer. In the end, human experience is the central theme of Kuehnle's art.

"I want visitors to experience real delight and joy," he says. "I want them to forget where they are and what they were doing just a moment ago and experience light, sensation, space, and interaction. I want them to bump into strangers as they navigate a labyrinth with blinking LEDs, listen to sounds on loops while watching LED animations, feel the vibration of subwoofers on the fabric. I want them to enjoy the moment and enjoy the human community of others that surrounds them in something that is not necessary for survival, art, but makes survival hopefully more enjoyable."

The Columbia Museum of Art is a charitable nonprofit organization dedicated to lifelong learning and community enrichment for all. Located in the heart of downtown Columbia, SC, the CMA ranks among the leading art institutions in the country and is distinguished by its innovative exhibitions and creative educational programs. At the heart of the CMA and its programs is its collection, which encompasses 7,000 works and spans 5,000 years of art history. Established in 1950, the CMA now welcomes more than 150,000 visitors annually and is a catalyst for community creativity and education, engaging people of all ages and backgrounds. It is the recipient of a National Medal from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a National Art Education Association award for its contributions to arts education, a National Park Foundation Award, and two Elizabeth O'Neill Verner Governor's Awards for the Arts for outstanding contributions to the arts in South Carolina. In order to serve even more audiences, the CMA is undergoing a transformation funded by a successful capital campaign. In order to serve even more audiences, the CMA recently underwent a transformation. Funded by a successful capital campaign, the two-year renovation project garnered new collection galleries with a progressive thematic layout, new studios for artmaking, cutting-edge program and event spaces, an entrance on Main Street, and a revamped CMA shop. Overall, more than 20,000 square feet of functional space were added to the building's existing footprint.

For further information check our SC Institutional Gallery listings or visit ([www.columbiamuseum.org](http://www.columbiamuseum.org)).

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