

BERNHEIM

TOMOYA KATO

Water Land

BERNHEIM, Zurich

September 8 – October 25, 2025

Bernheim, Zurich is pleased to announce Kyoto-based artist Tomoya Kato's first solo European exhibition *Water Land*. Known for his soft, pastel-toned paintings that merge delicate figures with dreamlike settings, the works in the presentation extend beyond the canvas to include quietly expressive ceramics, clay works, and wooden assemblages. His approach defies conventional narrative and linear time, favoring instead an intuitive logic of texture and space. Guided by subtle color and form, his works—whether painted, shaped, or assembled—draw the viewer into a reverie of felt textures and spatial murmurs.

At the core of Kato's practice lies a sensibility attuned not to narrative or causality, but to texture—an instinctive way of perceiving the world through feeling rather than interpretation. The artist often speaks of "feeling" objects rather than understanding them, as he describes it: "For me painting, and the process of painting, seems to have the role of being the eyes, ears, nose, mouth, limbs and another language for touching the world, talking to myself, and touching the world again". This sensitivity and concept bring to mind Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances" and his interest in synesthesia, a concept that greatly influenced the movement of Symbolism and that we find in Kato's oeuvre, with a similar interest in a mingling of the senses. This lends his work a quiet emotional clarity, where meaning arises not from a confined flow of ordered time, but from a simultaneous presence of textures—what he considers to be stories that unfold outside the bounds of temporality, reason, or language. For Tomoya Kato, painting transcends mere visual expression to become an embodied dialogue—a tactile conversation with the world that involves listening and responding. This unique dialogue extends beyond the canvas into his ceramics and wood-based compositions, which similarly serve as extensions of the senses, forming a visual language through which he connects with the world and engages in self-reflection.

As a master of Nihonga, traditional Japanese painting, the artist utilizes techniques and materials that have evolved over centuries, including mineral pigments, animal glue (nika), and natural materials like silk and hemp paper. Kato's ability to transcend the traditions and create a world of his own is astonishing, and it is through this mastery that he is able to open a window into a different world. He sees reality as a mirror reflecting the state of his own consciousness, with each brushstroke or crafted form becoming a question: What in me is being reflected? In response, his works emerge as tactile manifestations—marble-like amalgams of the imaginary and the real, shaped and reshaped into new life. Merging both youthful innocence and the anxieties of modern life, his work invites the viewer into an imaginary world with its very own vocabulary. Kato works from his diaries, his bestiary of images, invented yet somehow anchored in reality.

In a similar way to Paul Klee, his work may appear as narrative, yet it operates as a direct resistance to linear storytelling. While they may depict flora, fauna, or familiar scenes, they instead evoke an abstract reading of space. Motifs are intentionally placed in fragmented compositions, engaging their surroundings and creating what Kato calls a "pure and authentic" expression. When created with a site-specific awareness, these works become acts of dedication—a quiet offering to the essence and memory of place.

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Water Land offers a rare glimpse into this intimate yet lyrical world. In a time increasingly driven by noise and temporal logic, Tomoya Kato invites us to pause, feel, and dwell in the textures of the present.

Tomoya Kato (b. 1980, Kyoto, Japan) lives and works in Kyoto, Japan. His recent solo and group exhibitions include 水々々水 at Gallery SU, Tokyo, Japan (2025); ひまわり at 紙片 Shihen, Hiroshima, Japan (2015); and *I Hear a New World.no3* at Museums Villa Stuck, Munich, Germany (2025). Other notable presentations include exhibitions at Kousagisha gallery, Kyoto, Japan (2024), Gallery noir/NOKTA, Shizuoka, Japan (2022), and Lothringer 13 Halle, Munich, Germany (2018). He holds a BFA in Japanese Painting from Kyoto University of the Arts, Kyoto, Japan (2006).

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