

# Yuichi Higashionna

## Flowers

July 15 - September 7, 2004

The “Flowerpower” exhibition in Lille, the “Flowers” show at the Mary Boone Gallery in New York City, the “Flower as image – from Monet to Jeff Koons” exhibition at the Louisiana Museum of Humlebaek in Denmark, and later at the Beyeler Foundation in Basel. Could flowers be the artists’ favorite subject in 2004? How is one to take a fresh look at this theme when using the old medium of painting and when so much has already been shown? Yuichi Higashionna takes up this challenge with panache.

Since 2002, flowers have become the main subject of his paintings. He shows us flowers, whether by night or by day, with a preference for roses, which are sometimes adorned with ferns, not as a bouquet skillfully arranged in a vase, but strewn and individualized to perfection, with upright stems pointing to space. The stems come out clearly with their contours, and the rose thorns are quite conspicuous. Each flower is the explosion of a glittering color. The whole view procures an immediate, sensuous and simple visual pleasure, a pleasure obtained by the painting of a beautiful bouquet of flowers. One could almost smell their fragrance.

A closer look at these paintings and our feelings are more ambiguous. There is the realization that the colors are detached from the stems and float into space as vivid spots around their shapes. One feels compelled to recognize that the stems no longer have a material substance: a white void encircled by a halo.

The night bouquets are much more mysterious. The whiteness of the flowers – the color of death in Japan and of ghosts in the West – certainly stands out. Their brilliance in the night astonishes and captivates. As we try to breathe in their scent, we step back in bewilderment in the absence of the image itself.

Yuichi Higashionna’s thematic quest is the decoration of the inner world of the home and the ambivalent feelings he perceives from it. His aim is to get the viewer to share a feeling he defines through the German term “*unheimlich*”. An *unheimlich* feeling conveys a relationship that is both intimate and familiar while being uncomfortable at the same time. With his new flower paintings, Yuichi Higashionna has attained an acme in his art of the *unheimlich*, that of everyday life that is disturbing.

Yuichi Higashionna lives and works in Tokyo. He has participated in numerous exhibitions held in galleries and museums in Japan, London and New York City. He took part in two exhibitions organized by Jan Hoet, Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ghent. His works can be seen at the “Officina Asia” show at the Galleria d’Arte Moderna in Bologna from June 5 to September 5, 2004.