



@ Artizon Museum, Tokyo

Original dates: April 18–June 21 2020

New dates: June 23–October 25



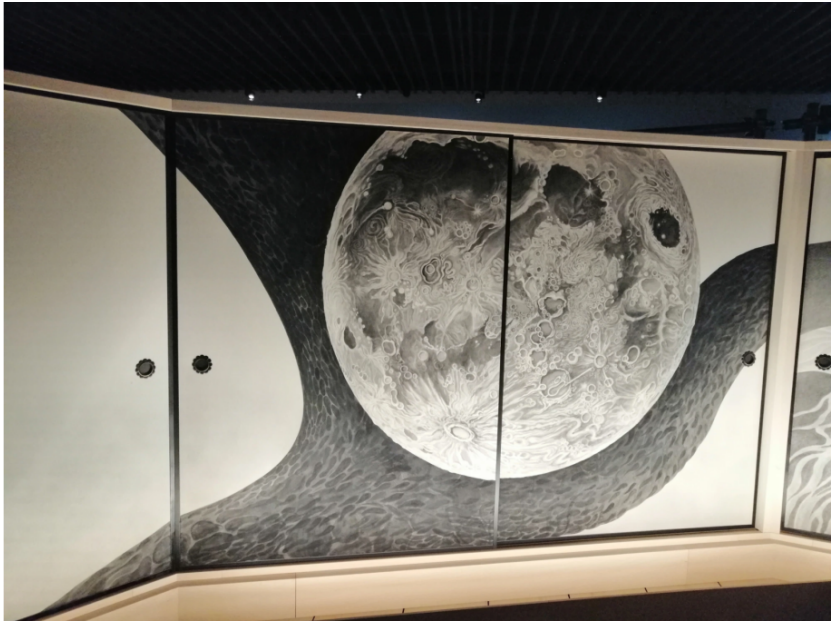
Witch Winds

As curator Kyoko Kagawa reminds us, the celebrated Bridgestone Museum in Tokyo reopened in January 2020 as the Artizon Museum, located in the Kyobashi area, near Ginza. Its three floors of exhibition space are breathtakingly 'opulent'. The presence of means is immediate, as are the skills and elegance with which they have been used.

To celebrate its opening, museum director Hiroshi Ishibashi launched the first of what will be a series of annual exhibitions entitled *Jam Session*, in which an artist is invited to engage in a dialogue with works from the Ishibashi Foundation collection. The first artist to have benefited from the invitation is Tomoko Konoike, with paintings by Courbet, Corot and Sisley selected by the curator to highlight what is at play in the artist's work, the drama of nature as represented by a hunt (not knowing who the predator could be), to the serenity of forests and village life, both constantly echoed in the exhibition.

Tomoko Konoike is by far a pioneer of the post-human in art. The exhibition offers samplings of the numerous paths her practice has taken as they also display all the mediums she has worked with, from painting and drawing to sculpture and installation, from animation to performance videos.

The scale and scope of Konoike's world is epic and constitutes a cosmogony of northern Japanese tales in which children, six-legged wolves and other mutant creatures co-exist, in which their shadows slip inside a house, hide on a wall before making their way into dreams, and in which playgrounds measure themselves against a solar system. The exhibition does not present itself as a retrospective, and the historical weight of those French paintings, the volume and golden density of their frames, does weigh down the initial eagerness to move swiftly from one piece to the next. And in hindsight the artist has done service to her work through this selection that anchors the show.

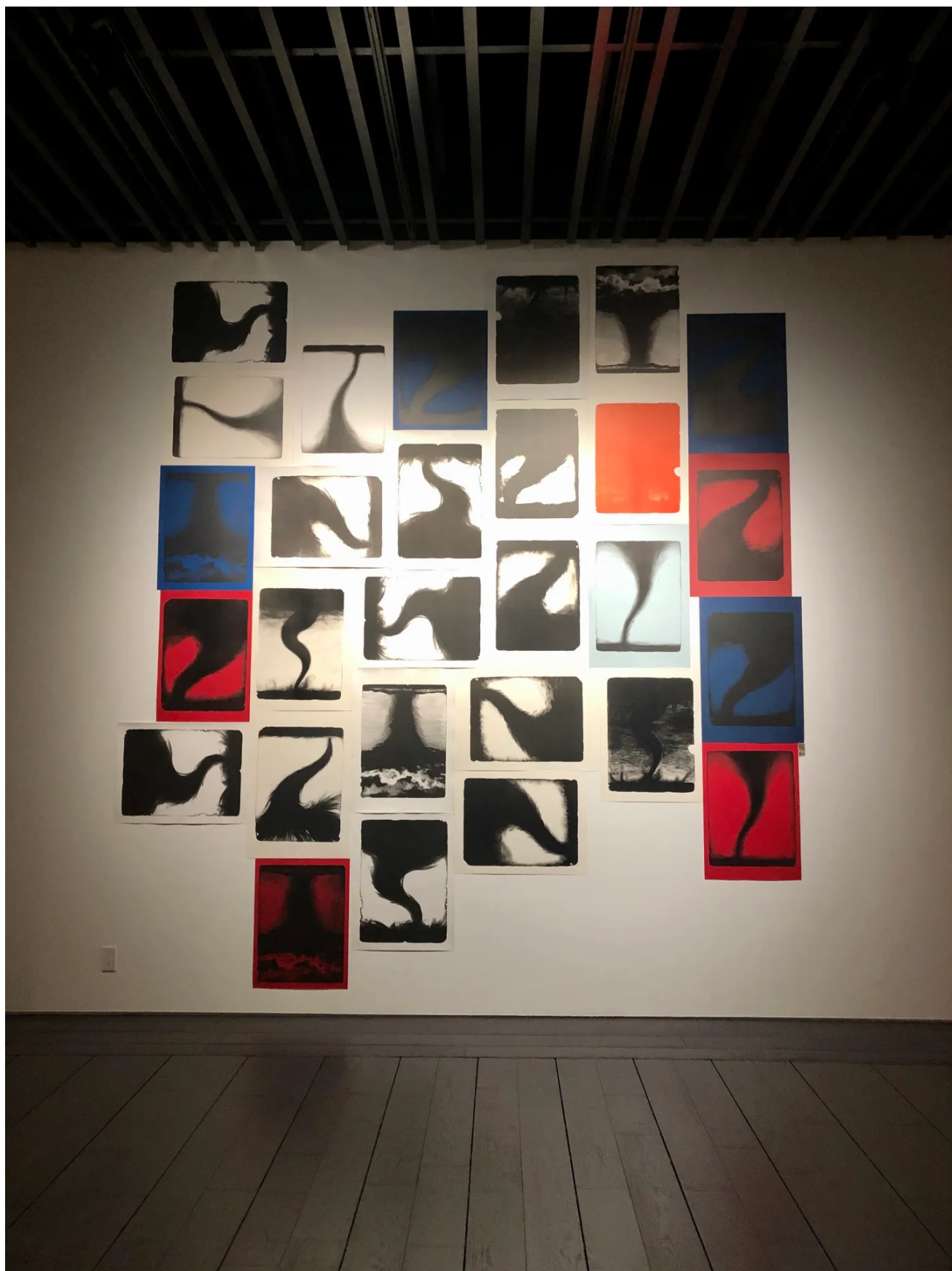


Tomoko Konoike, *Fusuma-e Installation*, 2020



Tomoko Konoike, *The Storytelling Table Runner project*, 2014–2019 |

Alfred Sisley, *Women Going to the Woods*, 1866



Tomoko Konoike, *Tornado*, 2020

The first works the spectator encounters is a series of lithographs of tornadoes whose color scheme recalls Andy Warhol's electric chair series. The exhibition, originally scheduled for two months, gets to last an extra two and closes with a series of videos in which Konoike is trekking alongside a forest, singing in the water, and performing Akita folk songs while buried in the snow. Her celebrated young female heroines have given way to the actual presence of the artist, closing the gap with the elements and embracing a more immediate anthropological connection to her subject. There are more than enough tales here to occupy all three floors of the Artizon Museum, as the truly beautiful object that is the exhibition catalogue attests to.

S.

Her Indeterministic Cosmos

Konoike is an artist of nature. Her constant curiosity leads her again and again to the countryside and the wilderness, from which she always returns with bags of great stories and wonderful inspirations. She observes, feels, and imagines, never in a patronizing attitude. Consequently, all creatures, human and non-human, real and fictional, cohabit in her work, and it's not all fairy tales. They exist in collaboration and in competition, in reciprocity and in antagonism. Unlike many contemporary artists diving in the environmentalist discussion, eager to find a way out for the human society, Konoike

doesn't turn to nature for a solution, but for nature itself. Such a link with it provides a reason for her work to interact with the early 19th century Realist paintings of the pre-industrial era, before the birth of the modern anxiety.

On the other hand, Konoike shares an earnest commitment to art creation with those earlier painters. Ever since the meticulous drawings in the early stage of her career, Konoike has always been paying careful attention to every detail in her work, whether it's some-10-meter leather kite or a placemat-size sewing piece. While doing so, she assembles the media and techniques that work best for her, from hanging dozens of animal furs to deconstructing revolving lanterns.



Tomoko Konoike, *"mimio" original drawings*, 2001 | Camille Corot, *The Toutain Farm at Honfleur*, 1845 | Tomoko Konoike, *"Booking Burning—World of Wonder" original drawings*, 2011



Tomoko Konoike, *Shadow picture lantern*, 2020

Accommodating a selection of old works and new pieces, the exhibition at Artizon Museum doesn't aim to tell a linear story or present an ordered evolution. The handout is deliberately placed near the exit instead of the entrance. Even if one successfully locates it before walking through the whole show and takes a copy with them, it is still hardly helpful, as the numbering of the works jumps here and there, refusing to follow any predictable route. This, not without a sense of innocuous prank, adds up to the idea of *flip*— encouraging glances from unexpected angles while dismissing any preset

perspectives. It doesn't matter which comes first in Konoike's cosmos, where the audience is asked to see all of them through her kaleidoscope.

Z.

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