



Tomokazu Matsuyama: *Come with me*

By Forrest McGarvey

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In *Come With Me*, Japanese American artist Tomokazu Matsuyama brings together an array of visual inspirations from his multinational background for his third solo show at Gallery Wendi Norris. Seemingly disparate elements collide in his acrylic paintings to create something new and unique, but they ultimately reveal how some visual resonances are more potent than others.

The bulbous canvas of *Warm Water* (2015) undulates from rounded corner to rounded corner, like a flag in the wind, or perhaps an unfurling scroll. Four figures stand among a thistle of Japanese maple leaves and orchids, as a bright red string flows throughout the composition, ending in a knotted bow floating above them. The figures' hair blows wildly in the wind, making fluid shapes that harmonize well among Matsuyama's bright patches of airbrushed gold and electric hues. They are dressed in traditional Japanese kimonos with details of Western clothes—such as shirt pockets, the lapels of a suit coat, and buttons—sewn into their patterns. As figurative forms give way to intricate patterns, a-morphic forms, and precise applications of paint, Matsuyama's work questions the line between representation and abstraction.



Tomokazu Matsuyama, *Warm Water*, 2015
Courtesy of the artist and Gallery Wendi Norris, San Francisco

In *Foresight Hindsight* (2015), neon hues and whimsical shapes blend to create a field of psychedelic camouflage. The elegant mix of line and color in tangled geometric shapes fragments smoother, speckled forms throughout the frame. Emerging from the chaos, shapes group together to resemble roosters, monsters, and other odd creatures. Discovering these hidden elements evokes a memory of Mike Kelley's collection of *sewn dolls* and children's toys, crushed together by some unknown force. The visual language in *Come with me* is more one-sided than a mixture of disparate motifs.

When Simone Legno's overtly saccharine Tokidoki characters and the menacing derangement of Takashi Murakami's murals come to mind, Matsuyama's paintings begin to speak a slick, commercialized language of logo design, or as a textile for the new fashion trend of an eclectic Tokyo neighborhood like Shibuya or Akihabara. *Come with me* attempts ample examples of how America and Japan have absorbed one another, but from a docile position without any traces of complication or conflict.

Because of my familiarity with Japanese visual culture and history, the visual language in *Come with me* seems so directly appropriated from Japanese art and folklore that even the vivid colors and flatness brings Japanese anime to mind before it does pop art or high modernism. The powerful appropriation of Japanese art styles, strengthened by the dynamic color palette, drowns out any strong markers of Western influences, proving that these two poles are not so distant after all.