

## ART AND CAKE

A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the Los Angeles Art Scene

# Naotaka Hiro: Peaking at The Box, LA

By Shana Nys Dambrot  
Through January 28th



Shaped canvas paintings are not often emotionally expressive, favoring the precise curves and angles of custom frames over the bohemian flaunting of rough-edges and raw remnants. Instances of attacking, slicing, piercing, puncturing, and otherwise compromising the painted surface through draping, crumpling, reversing and rucking are more emotive, obscuring image and content in ways that can feel subversive, destructive, violent, but also risk seeming calculated for effect. Naotaka Hiro's current exhibition at The Box literally and figuratively turns these art historical tropes inside out, presenting a series of engaging, vivacious, visceral and absolutely disruptive carved-up canvases (and related series of frenetic works on paper, surreal bronze body-cast sculptures, and performative action-painting video) that reinvigorate these practices.

Instead of manipulating the borders and edits of expected pictorial space, these gestural abstractions result organically in direct emergence from the bodily exertions of the artist during his image-making process. About as narrative as abstract expressionism can get, these large-scale canvases enact rather than impart their stories; they are metonymical as well as lavishly metaphorical. They are in their forms that which they also represent, symbologies of



themselves, artifacts of their own genesis and development. The array of works hung flat on the wall are crazy, gorgeous, calm, and dangerous. A large elongated pod-like canvas drapes from the ceiling like a monstrous pearly cocoon which Hiro works inside of, ensconcing himself then making his way out, chronicling the process in paint and dye. While painting, Hiro films his intuitive metamorphical process using a camera from within – this is *Peaking*, the accompanying video.



The drawings on paper depict rather than embody Hiro’s dynamic approach, with a rather tell-instead-of-show quality. It’s counterintuitive but it’s the thickly rendered large-scale canvas works that possess all the immediacy and gestural impact one might expect in “faster” drawings. The deft, agile, mark-making of the works on paper nevertheless seem more pre-considered and somewhat heavier in execution by comparison to the more painterly canvases. Maybe because, as the artist articulates in both word and deed, it is of paramount importance to him that the “body and the canvas are integrated during the painting process,” even going to far at times as to attach the canvas to his own body with ropes, wrapping the canvas around himself as he works to break free from it. Whereas in the drawings (and the sculpture) singular ideas, rendered images, and even character studies preside over unmarred surfaces; it is in the theatre of the paintings that the stormy soul of existence is given free reign.