

Masao Yamamoto

Yancey Richardson

In Masao Yamamoto's nine murky and mysterious warm-toned photographs, fragments from the natural world take on a dark, glittering, sometimes disorienting cast. The subjects are not exotic—they include birds, water, insects, and flowers—but in the dark-room and studio this Japanese artist works his small gelatin silver prints to produce an unexpectedly personal vision. Some images glow with their soft grain; others manipulate contrast to puncture inky blacks with hotly burned highlights. Nature in his images is in an unsettled mood.

Some works here emphasized the boundary between black and white. A shaft of light slices through a chrysanthemum blossom in one untitled work, illuminating a wedge of petals and the tips of a few leaves while half the flower remains nearly dark, like a crescent moon. In another photo, the vertical frame is divided roughly down the center into dark and light halves, with a feathery encroachment of white on black near the top. A careful look reveals an inverted seascape, the frothy waves dripping in reverse up the face of wet rock.

The sparkle of light on water showed up in a couple of images, hitting droplets on the lacy wings of a dragonfly or glinting off the ripples on a black lake or ocean. These photographs are printed so darkly that reflected sunlight resembles a starry sky. Other works faded into shades of gray. One of the most striking shows a sharp-featured northern hawk owl up close; its softly patterned feathers echo the photograph's visible grain. In Yamamoto's work, the old-



Masao Yamamoto, *Kawa (Untitled)*, 2009, gelatin silver print, 9½" x 6¼". Yancey Richardson.



Soile Yli-Mäyry, *Captured Letter*, 2009, oil on canvas, 55" x 43". Walter Wickiser.

fashioned possibilities of film and paper transform nature into something stranger and more expansive.

—Rebecca Robertson

Soile Yli-Mäyry

Walter Wickiser

If you look hard at the recent paintings of Finnish artist Soile Yli-Mäyry, faces usually emerge. Half-buried in a ruckus of colorful squiggles, they are as small and stylized as Kewpie dolls, with pasty skin and rosebud lips. Attached to abstract, misshapen bodies, the faces are invariably topped with halos of wiry hair. They drift like balloons into the ether and exude a sense of anxiety at odds with their paint-box colors.

Those tones range from magenta and cobalt blue to chrome yellow and fluorescent orange. Combined, they radiate an energy that excites and jangles the nerves. The artist seems to have slapped on the paint, worked the wiggly lines with a palette knife, and then scraped the surface with a wire brush and stylus to achieve exceptional depth and texture.

With its black, white, and colored markings on a flat, blue ground, *Burning Shadow* (2007) at first appears to be an abstract piece. Then, slowly, a pale oval under a bird's nest of white scrapings suggests the face of a waiflike woman, while a shamrock-green outline resolves into the form of a dead animal, feet in the air. In the handsome *Captured Letter* (2009), columns of gradient color incised with obscure hieroglyphics might be a modern Rosetta Stone until one notices two heads with geometric bodies, an envelope floating in the sky, and a stick figure of a chicken pecking at the dirt. —Mona Molarsky