

# Jennings Kerr

Miho Ichise  
*Treasure Hunt*

I recall walking the halls of Nijo Castle in Kyoto, Japan. The guide lead us around the halls, explaining the various usage of the paper walled rooms. The floors creaked and history expressed itself at every corner. By the end of the tour it was revealed to us the pinging sounds from the floor were being caused by a technique of nailing under the boards. This in-built security system known as 'uguisu-bari' assisted the original inhabitants during the Samurai invasions. The sounds enabled escape and evasion but also guards were able to detect where their teams were by the rhythm of the sound generated. The design sensibility of Japan has always inspired and captured imagination. The simplicity of the tatami mat, the raked garden and bonsai, or kimono and textile culture, through to contemporary architecture. There is an attention to detail but a respect for the simple and efficient. I can't help to think of these paintings of Miho Ichise in relation to the culture from which they are born. Ichise is a mother and painter. I use this description as I think it helps explain what sways her to observe and paint the moments that she does. These works have an elegant domesticity, occurrences of the everyday in her Fukuoka home. It might be an entanglement of cables from an appliance, or light play from a curtain on a wall but the moments are simple, they are the little treasures of daily life. They speak to patience, they are intimate and captured at an appropriate small scale with a sensitive and almost sweet lens. Some people find the AV cable tangle to be a nightmare, some people dread the daily chore of making their bed, Ichise finds these daily tasks inspire and give purpose. They also allow for pause and thought and seem to be the times that stay with her and need to be captured.

Ichise has frequently observed the varying seasons we were both experiencing during the planning of this show, noting her surrounds emerging from winter and thawing out as we enter our more mild winter. I only bring up the weather as it is a noticeable subject here. Leaves turning in Autumn, foot prints in the snow, sun gleaming and wind through the trees. The time markers of our lives seem to keep Ichise in check. I think consistency, or perhaps even duty help inform this show but more importantly help Ichise understand and give purpose. Two pieces in the show that immediately express this would be 'Sunrise on the Wall', 2023 and 'Morning Wall, 2023. I look at these paintings and they bring to mind the early morning light piercing the slits in the shutters of our bedroom. A gentle reminder of the morning duties in our home. Their surfaces are predominantly subtle variances in tone to make up the wall, interrupted by the light play of curtain patterns and speckled natural light. Such a quiet moment rendered simply with elegance. They are also a subtle expression of a boundary or portal to the exteriors of the show. Windows allowing the outside in, reminding Ichise when the tasks are completed inside that the park is waiting.

Treasure hunts are fantastical and speak to child play and adventure, the feeling of searching, exploring and hiding in the home. This is the reason Ichise selected the title for these observations. I think the domesticity and the appreciation of simple moments, finding the stillness, takes Ichise back to her childhood. Exploring, hunting for hidden items and playing. A remembered time of innocence that Ichise has attempted to recreate for her own children. These interior scenes are still and serene. They are simple but not mundane in that they are the important duties of the house. This is critical in culture and the mind of the painter, mother. The exterior scenes are a little echo of the interior calm. The constant of seasonal shifts, the conversation of the 'Moon with Frosty Clouds', 2020 with the tidal sway in 'Shallow Water Fishing', 2022 expresses our interaction with exterior systems, natural phenomena and the world at large. The minute fisherman with the steady splash between his knee and waist. Pausing and waiting for the moment. The bite to come, treasure on the line.

The way these paintings arrived speaks volumes to the care and attention given. The package arrived and the little treasures found their new temporary home. Glassine paper, specialty tapes and bubble wrap, air tight bags and foam. The thought and care taken an extension of Ichise approach to painting and life. It also takes me back to Tokyo or any of the train stations in Japan. The coloured uniforms for the various staff. Such care and attention to detail. Efficiency and precision in equal parts. A uniform for rubbish, another more formal, for ushering commuters into their carriages. Everything in its place and in this case on military time. At the bottom of the box under the paintings was a thank you card from Ichise. I say thank you in return, thank you for seeing your life and home so sensitively and for sharing these experiences with us. The paintings are the treasures of her life but they transfer that same energy to those lucky enough to view them, they share her culture and heritage with the world.

James Kerr, 2023