

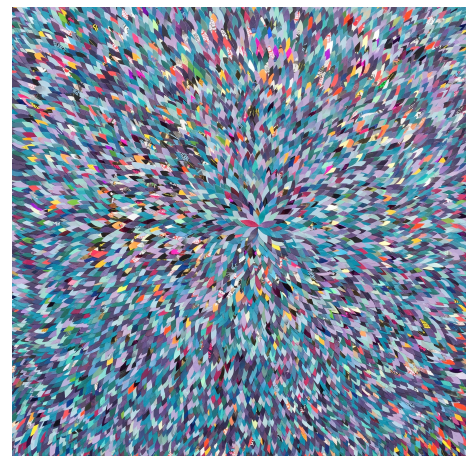
Tomoko Nagao & Robi Walters

High Chroma & High Vigour

February 10 — June 7, 2021
Le Méridien Hotel
Monte Carlo, Monaco



Tomoko Nagao, 'The Girl with Pearl Earring' (2020)



Robi Walters, 'This Town' (2018)

Espinasse31 Contemporary Gallery is pleased to present ***High Chroma & High Vigour***, a dualistic exhibition featuring works by **Tomoko Nagao and Robi Walters**, curated by Antonio and Thomas Castiglioni. The works will be on show at Le Méridien Beach Plaza Hotel in Monte Carlo, from February 10 to June 7, 2021. This exhibition will bring both leading contemporary artists to Monaco for the first time, contrasting their two unique styles while focusing on what unites them—the **vitality** of their works.

Our collective experience in the past year has brought to light the true importance of art in the larger scheme of things. In times of uncertainty, art has been a medium of expression, a vehicle for escape, an instrument for reflection, and a source of energy. For this reason, *High Chroma & High Vigour* is an exploration of fundamental properties of art —**colour, material, dimensionality, symbolism**—and how they make us **feel**. To this end, the exhibition looks at these elements (such as **chroma**) as fluid concepts that define an artwork's relationship with its viewer, rather than its identity as an object. Furthermore, the selection of works by Nagao and Walters places focus on the energy (or **vigour**) that they transmit, manifesting the *zeitgeist* of a fresh start offered by a new year.

Tomoko Nagao (b. 1976, Nagoya) is a Japanese contemporary artist based in Milan, and one of the leading international figures of the **Micropop** art movement. From the beginning of her studies, Nagao assimilated key features of the **postmodern Japanese** art movement, such as Yoshitomo Nara's stylised shapes and Takashi Murakami's Superflat style; she then attended the Chelsea College of Art in London, where her personal artistic approach was solidified. Nagao has won international acclaim, with her works being exhibited in the Victoria and Albert Museum (London) as well as multiple solo and group shows across Italy and Japan.

The imagery of Nagao's works usually **reinterprets Renaissance masterpieces**, with an overlay of the Japanese aesthetic concept of '*kawaii*'. Nagao has revisited artworks by Caravaggio, Vermeer, Velázquez, Tiziano, Botticelli, and Hokusai, among others, sometimes introducing a modern twist and the concept of **consumerism** by making reference to **global luxury brands** and corporations; this is emphasised by her use of a highly-saturated colour palette (the **high chroma** property of Nagao's work), which reminds us of the energetic brightness in symbols of capitalism, such as advertisements. This way, the artist's adaptation of Old Masters is intended as an ironic reference to the economic mechanisms of power in the production of images, where Renaissance patrons like Medici have now been replaced by the creative directors of major brands.

Following the **principles and visual language of Superflat style**, Tomoko Nagao's production is characterised by flat and emphatic images with defined outlines, existing in an **extreme two-dimensional plane**. This is unintentionally reminiscent of the way in which Japanese art of the **Edo period** was perceived in Europe during the second half of the nineteenth century, around the same time as Botticelli was rediscovered. Despite the formal characteristics of Nagao's technique, the multiple thematic meanings and layers in her work introduce the idea of **cultural and historical** multi-dimensionality. By consuming images of cultural icons from centuries past, in coexistence with symbols of consumerism and modern aesthetics, the viewer is transported to an imagined realm that exists outside of our linear perception of time. By combining the familiar and the unknown in terms of culturally-rooted styles, Nagao's works place the viewer at a **crossroads** between the East and the West, showing how globalisation has placed postmodern creativity in a fluid and diverse dimension, where geographical borders are blurred.

Robi Walters (b. 1973, London) is a leading British contemporary artist based in Soho. His mesmerising, colourful collages have captivated **celebrity collectors** including Thandie Newton, Usain Bolt, Major Lazer's Diplo and Jillionaire, among others. In 2018, 2-Michelin-Star Chef Tom Kerridge commissioned Walters to create **bespoke design work** for his restaurant "Kerridge's Bar & Grill" at the Corinthia Hotel in London. In 2020, Robi was invited by **Aston Martin** to become their **Artist in Residence**. Walters has been named by **The Telegraph** as **one of the top creatives in the UK**, before going on to win the 'Arts and Culture' category in the newspaper's 'Amazing 15'.

Over the past decade, Walters' oeuvre has encapsulated the spirit of **transformation**. By constructing mixed-media pieces with unusual materials, such as packaging from household items and broken vinyl LPs, he focuses on the practice of taking discarded objects and making them beautiful to revivify their intrinsic worth—with a creative process and product that is reminiscent of both **pop art** and **arte povera** movements. Walters' fascination to work with such materials was conceptualised when he started to think about human consumption, **sustainability** and the effects of unconscious consumerism, giving a socially-charged character to his work. In his collages, the artist arranges

fragments into **lotus**-like forms; a symbol relating to his personal interest in meditation, adding another layer of meaning to his **vibrant and highly chromatic works**, which breathe life and energy into any room.

Interacting with Robi Walters' works allows the viewer to enter an illusory dimension of their choosing. Physically, the works offer an **'out-of-canvas' experience** by taking on a **three-dimensional and dynamic form**, thus existing in the same space as the observer. The mixed and recycled materials in themselves show Walters' disregard for dimensional constraints, proving that his artworks can exist across different times and contexts. His use of prominent colours, significant titles, and symbolic references within the works evokes feelings that belong in the realm of introspection, adding **transcendence beyond their physical dimensionality**.

All in all, *High Chroma & High Vigour* creates a space in which Nagao's and Walters' creations coexist and balance each other. Despite their adherence to contrasting artistic styles, opposite approaches to dimensionality, and differing roles of materials, the two bodies of work transmit a great deal of energy and vigour through their highly-chromatic displays. With the new hope and momentum offered by 2021, Espinasse31 invites exhibition viewers to indulge in the artworks as vehicles for travel: travel to different cultures, to the past, to the future, and even travel within oneself, to the subconscious or to the soul.

***High Chroma & High Vigour* is on open at Le Méridien Beach Plaza
Hotel: 22 Av. Princess Grace, Monte Carlo, Monaco.**

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