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***** London gives Eastleigh artist space to flourish



We have been speaking to artist Junko O'Neill from The Sorting Office about her new London group exhibition *Space Unfolding*.

Japanese fine artist Junko O'Neill spent her formative years in Tokyo yearning for education in the arts like a young girl in love.

"It was literally like waiting for the next date with your boyfriend" she said. "I could never stand waiting for that next art lesson."

This on-going love affair has seen the award-winning artist develop a strong emotional connection to the creativity around her, and has fuelled a fascination with the Japanese spatiotemporal concept of 'Ma' - a theme that reflects human emotions within the curious emptiness of open space.

Ma is one of the ideas of space and connection being explored in the new exhibition being staged at Espacio Gallery in Shoreditch from 15th to 20th May, and will feature a number of Junko's pieces alongside works by five other British and International artists: Rachele Allen-Sherwood, Jean Carabine, Caroline Hall, Gillian Holding and Jonathan Kelly Chapman.

"Ma tells us that space is actually, fundamentally, a void," explained Junko. "We all think that space is eternal, but everything that fills each landscape we see is always ever-changing and transient."

"It's interesting for me to see how the other artists in this exhibition approach this theme in their work. For instance, it was fascinating for me to discover Rachele Allen-Sherwood is influenced by Japanese notions of space too. Our individual notions complement each other well because whereas she is formally concerned with painting elements with empty space, I paint empty space itself attempting to give a space of nothingness potential."

Starting with a blank canvas, the Japanese artist builds her work around a person looking out into a vast wide open space. These figures become intriguing characters, with their emotional response to a beautiful landscape nullified into ambiguity by their facelessness.

"With a character or without, what I try to display is a space with a sense of time passing" explained the artist who is represented by Debut Contemporary in London and is supported by creative industries hub The Sorting Office in Eastleigh.

"I want to visualise the idea that we are separated from the space around us, not by a physical structure, but by our constant desire to define everything."

Her endlessly interpretable artwork includes *Beginning* which places a mother and a daughter staring into a beautiful sunrise and *On Your Marks* which sees an Olympic runner set to run into a foggy abyss.

Following on from a successful spell at The Other Art Fair, London's prestigious showcase of up and coming talent, Junko is thrilled to be returning to the capital for *Space Unfolding*.

"London has been an inspirational place for me," explained Junko, who is co-curating the event. "When I first came to England, hoping to find a more creative lifestyle, I submerged myself in the cultural world of London for a whole year. All forms of contemporary and classic art come together here, it's a fascinating and exhilarating place to share, and to find new work."

***Space Unfolding* is being staged at Espacio Gallery in Shoreditch from the 15th to 20th May. For more information visit www.espaciogallery.com.**

To find out more about the exhibition visit www.spaceunfolding.wordpress.com.

IMAGE: Junko O'Neill photographed by Violetta Lizska.

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