

profile masakatsu kondo



Masakatsu Kondo

Show Masakatsu Kondo
Location Zwemmer Gallery,
Litchfield Street, London WC2
(020 7240 4158)
Dates 8 Dec-10 Jan
Contact Zwemmer Gallery,
paintings from £2,500

Interview Gemma de Cruz
Photograph Dave Bennett

Masakatsu Kondo makes landscape paintings that are enhanced with an artificial beauty. Using photographs chosen from geology books and magazines as a starting point, Kondo's paintings are made with an emphasis on the stereotyped notions that we have about the natural world: "The idea came from the associations we have when we think of certain things; high mountain, deep sea, blue sky. I want to use that power, exaggerating the way we automatically think of things so the mood becomes strange without me making anything about the painting strange." In his earlier work, Kondo made a series of mountain paintings using a limited palette of blue-grey, distorting the proportions of the original image to make his version taller and higher, testing how far he could go with the idea that the viewer would not question the "height" of a mountain.

Kondo's tree-landscapes are rendered with meticulous attention to detail, creating seductive areas of sunlight or lush foliage. What initially seems to be a leaning towards hyperreality has a darker side to it. Peeking through the tops of trees is a dull sky and areas of light are not in accordance with how they should be. "When I switched to the tree landscapes, I wanted to carry over that idea that there is beauty in nature but there is also a negative side to it," Kondo says. "I'm not following the reality of nature, I'm using the power of it which in itself is artificial. Once I had chosen the photo that I used for *Lime Trees*, I decided to paint it just in green. Similarly to the way I changed the image of the mountains, it's very artificial but our brain accepts it."

In some paintings there is a strong graphic style of drawing, heightened colour and contrasts which Kondo puts down to his interest in the way that scenic details are presented through computer games. "I think that computer graphics are really poor, especially in comparison to photographs, but it seems that once we get used to that we begin to like it. All the elements from nature are there but are stylized. It's accepted now that the artificial world affects our view of nature, which I don't see as a particularly bad thing. You can



Nature or artifice? Top, Masakatsu Kondo in his studio; above, *Hornbeam*, 2000, acrylic and canvas

travel the world through the internet which isn't real, but it offers something real in a different way."

This interest in computers is evident in areas of Kondo's paintings which he feels are mixed in with influences from contemporary artists such as Gerhard Richter, Peter Doig and 19th-century Japanese artists such as Hokusai. "I find an artist like Hokusai really similar to computer graphics. Both use very simple colour and structure, although the medium is completely different" 