

ART FOR SALE

MASAKATSU KONDO @ DAVID RISLEY GALLERY



Towards an ideal: 'Purpelerea' (2003), acrylic on canvas

If you turn down by the mosque in Kingsland Road and keep going you come to some red metal gates on the left. A business card Sellotaped to its rusty surface announces that somewhere inside is the David Risley Gallery. You have to rattle the gate loudly for attention, though there is promise of a bell.

If you want cutting-edge art, then you can't expect air conditioning and the polished mahogany of Bond Street. In fact, David Risley's gallery, shared with the Drawing Room – they hold alternate exhibitions, the Drawing Room is publicly funded whereas Risley's is a commercial gallery – is a beautiful light space on the first floor of an old warehouse and may well be a place worth watching. Masakatsu Kondo is Risley's inaugural show.

Born in Nagoya, Japan, in 1962, Kondo attended the Slade School of Fine Art and now lives and works in London. He uses scientific documentary photographs, whose primary purpose is to record rather than aestheticise, as the source of his paintings. Best known for his monochromatic mountains that owe much to traditional Japanese art, he has now introduced stronger colour into these large-scale acrylic works.

Yet despite his hyperreal style there is something uncanny about these idealised landscapes of dense forests and snow-covered mountains. The thick vegetation in *Blue Forest Stream* feels threatening and claustrophobic, and the blue tones just too blue, while in *Unreflected Pond* there is something disquieting about the depopulated dell, the pond's unyielding surface and the acid yellows and poisonous greens of the surrounding trees and distant fields, as if everything might have been subjected to

genetic modification. In *Birch Woodland* sun pours through the canopy of silver birch from a bright blue sky, gilding the bracken in the glade below. But the painting seems to be more about death than life. I was reminded of the eerie opening pages of Rachel Carson's prophetic warning, *Silent Spring*.

As Kondo has said: "I am not really interested in painting reality. Painting has to do something a bit more. I am interested in the ideal. For instance, when people think of a high mountain, deep sea, blue sky or whatever, they see an abstract image. That is what I am painting – the imagined mountain or forest."

He almost imperceptibly manipulates both colour and scale to create this idealised world that is about as "real" as a hologram or the snowy mountains of a Disney cartoon. These are landscapes that hover, full of knowing paradox, between the actual and the conceptual, the artificial and the abstract. Both paradisaical and tacky, they appeal to the kitsch sensibilities of the postmodern psyche where part of the thrill is understanding the mismatch between observable reality and the artist's interpretation.

These works nod at cultural references as disparate as German Romanticism and the sublime, the stillness of traditional Japanese woodcuts and contemporary advertising, as well as the oversaturated colour of early Technicolor film, in a pic'n'mix mode that is entirely contemporary.

Prices range from £2,200 to £6,000, excluding VAT.

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Masakatsu Kondo: *Botany – new paintings* at David Risley Gallery, Tannery Arts, Brunswick Wharf, 55 Laburnum Street, London E2, to 9 August