



## Masakatsu Kondo

David Risley *East End*

Masakatsu Kondo begins his paintings scientifically – working predominantly from black-and-white photographs of woodland glades, urban parkland and snow-dusted mountains. By the time he has translated the images into paint, though, a feeling of unease usually sets in. This is due partly to his chilly technique; built up in single colours, layers of overlapping stipples transform trees into an all-over pattern. Close up, his autumnal silver birch forest resembles brown, orange and yellow camouflage; from further back, though, the mix of tall poles and skeins of overlapping branches recalls Jackson Pollock. Another favoured trick is to mix the stippling with slick, airbrush-like

textures. Unnaturally lit so that its surface modulates from deep grey to milky white, a woodland pool appears like an alien, metallic presence – a liquified version of the monolith in '2001'.

Paradoxically, these techniques increase the immediacy of the scenes. It's possible to believe in Kondo's image of an urban park, despite the fact that a bush bursts surreally from the ground. With the upper sides of its leaves the same blue as the sky, it communicates the dazzle of mid-afternoon sunshine when the natural world can seem dramatic, even psychedelic. It may be a small triumph but, rather than the moribund artistic strategy of emphasising one's alienation from it, Kondo's claim to individuality lies in his sense of the continuing possibility of loving nature.

*Martin Herbert*