

Tomoo Gokita

11.09.2025

14.11.2025

MASSIMODECARLO is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Japanese artist Tomoo Gokita, featuring a recent body of work first shown in October 2024 at ICA Milano. Rooted in the visual language of the everyday, these paintings take familiar figures and gestures and subtly distort them.

Gokita began his career in the 1990s working in commercial design, book illustration, and music packaging - fields where clarity and directness were everything. But in his off hours, he made drawings that refused readability: moody, warped graphite portraits of imagined characters. These early drawings gained a cult following in Tokyo's underground art scene and eventually abroad. In 2005, he was included in the *Greater New York* show at MoMA PS1, despite never having had a solo show in the United States.

Since then, Gokita has steadily deepened his visual language, abandoning colour for years, then reintroducing it sparingly in recent paintings. He's an artist who thrives on ambiguity - not just in his images, but in his process. "In my mind, I always try to start from scratch in order to avoid lapsing into a completely pre-established harmony by creating something based on a prior intention or plan," he has said. "Surprise is a necessity when making art. I welcome unforeseen accidents that transcend my imagination and let myself go with the flow. Mistakes are also welcome: failure breeds success."

His sensibility, wry and humble, is precise in its refusal to be pinned down. Gokita has long been interested in the charged space between legibility and loss. He borrows freely from pulp sources - wrestling posters, vintage pin-ups, promotional headshots - but turns them inside out. Faces are blurred, eyes erased, limbs reduced to suggestion. Yet what might initially look like erasure reads, on closer inspection, as a kind of care. Gokita paints not what's seen, but what's slipping away, the impression left behind by an image once known, or imagined.

In this new body of work, the artist took the everyday as a starting point: ordinary gestures, banal settings, and seemingly familiar roles. In works like *Doctor and Patient* or *Ventriloquist*, Gokita reimagines these

mundane pairings with subtle absurdity, shifting them just enough to feel both recognisable and dreamlike. Even in larger canvases like *Amnesia*, the subject matter feels suspended, both personal and oddly generic, like a *déjà vu* with the edges smudged. It's here, in this register of the ordinary made strange, that Gokita is perhaps most compelling: reminding us that the everyday, too, is filled with illusion.

Gokita's paintings remain deliberately in flux, hovering between figuration and erasure, irony and sincerity. They draw the viewer into a visual freefall, where recognition slips just out of reach and meaning gives way to atmosphere and mood. The image is never fixed; it's something to be questioned, deformed, even unlearned. What endures is not the face, but the impression. Not the subject, but the trace it leaves behind.

Tomoo Gokita

Tomoo Gokita was born in 1969 in Tokyo, Japan, where he currently lives and works.

Now a leading Japanese contemporary artist on the international art scene, he started as a designer in the 90s, producing a series of newsprint books, some of which gained cult status, such as *Lingerie Wrestling* (2000). In 2000, he set aside graphic design and dedicated himself entirely to painting.

His work is inspired by 1960s and 70s Japanese and American subcultures as well as vintage magazines, film stills, pornography, and postcards. Combining abstract and expressive brushwork, deformed figures, and lowbrow imagery, Gokita's works are emotionally charged canvases. Although he is widely known for working in greyscale, colour has been a recurring feature of his practice since the beginning of his career. Whether working in greyscale or colour, Gokita's paintings have long been characterised by their psychologically charged subject matter. The subjects of his paintings are indeed uncanny portraits, disquieting still lifes, and dream-like abstractions