

A Name to Know: Ian Miyamura

Our monthly spotlight on a rising artist

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By Rococo Art Advisory

Ian Miyamura is a name to know. One part painter, one part conceptual artist, Ian works in distinct series that each have their own interesting and thoughtful underpinnings. Color block paintings presented in sets of pairs can be taken as a studies in color theory or can be understood with the deeper intent that the artist approaches the piece with — no two things are exactly alike. Tranquil imagery of seagulls can be read as environmental meditations, or strange distortions of the strange species. From the self-written press release of his most recent solo exhibition with Bureau, Ian shares, “The artist is an insect. It is an inheritor of a complex environment in which it must find a way to navigate, one among many others. Because successful navigation largely depends on when, when not, and how to be seen, insects have developed behaviors that can be looked at as strategies of defense.”



What do the beginning stages of a new work look like? What about the ending stages?

The question I ask myself when starting a new work—regardless of the series at hand—is, “In what way should I paint this?” When I feel like I’ve answered the question, or at least have some sense of a potential answer, I more or less follow that path until there is equilibrium between the idea of the painting and the way and degree to which it is realized. I know this sounds kind of dumb, but it is true for everything I make and it is why each of my series has a distinct material presence.

You work in series that seem to evolve and grow over time. What are some ways that you incorporate different formal or conceptual moves as you work through a series?

Because I tend to work on different combinations of series at any given point—I might have some of my doubles and maybe a text painting in progress while I am setting up a new still life—I find myself translating simple formal motifs, or more elusive ‘visual ideas’, from one to another. For example: I was recently working on a painting of two white seagulls converging over and into each other on a dark ground. The shape their contours made, and the way they were both one and two, interested me. I then decided to start a new Warhammer still life of two skeletal horsemen charging at each other, just beginning to overlap. The form made by the two horsemen in their painting was similar to that of the gulls, but I instead painted them on a light ground, making them dark. This loose replication of a form that seemed to me like a symbol for mirroring or doubling—being into and out of one—very much related to my overarching project. At the same time, it opened things up ever so slightly.



What's an idea you haven't yet made work about but plan to incorporate into your practice at some point?

I'd like to get my 'conceptual pricing' idea off of the ground, but I've been told it simply isn't going to happen. For my solo with Bureau this past January, I painted a ten-to-one version of one of my Warhammer still lifes. The one-to-one version was included in the install. 'Scale', in a modernist sense, is obviously something I was thinking about, and how playing with it then turns the content of the Warhammer imagery. But I was also very preoccupied with the rhetoric of an artwork's 'value' in relation to its scale. I wanted both sizes of the painting to be priced the same in order to underscore this question. I have conceded to the trickiness of the idea, at least for now. So I guess I will just keep dreaming about how I might manage to make something like a twenty-to-one Warhammer painting and get it installed in the lobby of a bank.

OUTSIDE THE STUDIO

Who is an artist you would feel star struck around?

My day job is at a frame shop, where I mainly meet with clients to determine framing specs and enter orders into production. One day—years ago—an older Asian man came in (without an appointment; the shop was and is by appointment only) and I ended up meeting with him. He shows me some statements composed by typewriter, indicating yearlong artistic intentions, as well as a long multi-image photograph of a young man jumping out of a window and ending up in pain on the pavement. I was like, “Hey! This is by Tehching Hsieh, right? I learned about his work in a course that focused on Asian artists”. The man smiled, “That’s me!”



I felt like such an idiot, obviously. I always found Tehching’s work to be inspirational in the dedication it required; in the power of its fact. I now know that was kind of missing the point. But over the years he returned to get more editions and photographs framed. Now he is gearing up for a retrospective at DIA and has done all the framing that he needs and no longer comes by. It was such a pleasure to have gotten to know him in some small way.

Another time I saw Charline von Heyl sitting alone on the couch in Petzel’s lounge, just smiling at the people outside who were walking by. She is so cool.

If you could spend the day in the life of another profession, what would it be and why?

A joke answer might be to be a really good day trader for a day. But if I am being real, I love to cook—especially for others. It's become all about the pleasure of getting everything in its place, so that when people are over and it's time to do the actual cooking, things are more performative than they are stressful. So perhaps I'd pick being a high end omakase chef. The restrained beauty of the discipline and the technicality is impressive, but it's really its rhythm and the sequencing of distilled ideas. I've never been to one of those high-end ones though, so maybe I've got it wrong.



What is one typical New York moment you've experienced since living here?

You saw one of my secret rat paintings while you were in my studio. A few years back I was waiting for a train at Delancey & Essex with my partner, sharing a falafel and rice plate, and we heard an ungodly screech. Two rats had begun to fight, down by the rails. Everyone on both platforms turned to watch. Conversations stopped. One of the rats was clearly dominant over its smaller opponent—apparently a victim to many lost battles, as it was missing a paw and patches of fur—tossing it around and biting it near the neck and face. After an eternity of squeaking and shrieking, the smaller rat lay motionless, sprawled out on its back. The larger rat hovered over the smaller rat for a moment and someone muttered, “What the fuck”. It then sauntered off into a hole and everyone uncomfortably tried to shake off the encounter. Amazingly, after a minute or so, the small rat managed to reanimate itself! It sniffed around a bit and then hobbled off in a different direction. Maybe that is not exactly typical, but it is what came to mind.