

Over the Influence is excited to announce Hirosuke Yabe's exhibition *Playground* at the Hong Kong gallery space. The Japanese artist constantly questions 'What is it to be human?' and 'What is a human being?'. He primarily uses chisels and often natas, the Japanese hatchet, to create sculptures from discarded Japanese wood that is often over 100 years old. It is Yabe's intention to address the universality of human-nature experiences through the cute expression wooden sculptures, contrary to all aspects of human nature. This new series of sculptures on view from 14 July to 26 August 2023.

The devastating events in the recent years have had a significant impact on Yabe's practice. Each piece embodies one's complexity and contradictions, demonstrates the many facets of life that have been captivated and inspired him - the beauty, ugliness and dilemmas of life. An approach akin to a personal-watching diary, the work quietly observes and documents everyday life.

"My works may have cute expressions or be a little child-like. Yet human beings have many different sides, at times turning into "animals", or "monsters". Things that bring destruction, things that govern death, things that summon misfortune. Perhaps they blend seamlessly into the surroundings, ever-present, charming people, reeling them in with their adorable, innocent looks", he said.

The Leviathan series is inspired from the creatures mentioned in the old bible. Originally Leviathan was a monster, from the old Bible that was a kind of sea serpent. However, as a metaphor the monster can symbolize the ideology of a nation and the political desires of the governing party. The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes, who lived in the 16th and 17th centuries, wrote the book "Leviathan" where he proposed that bigger countries should rule over smaller ones, because he viewed human existence as savage. This philosophy has inspired the artist to create deceptively cute looking sculptures that belie their monster origins.

"Perhaps human society is not as benevolent or peaceful as we imagine, but possessed of an inseparable harshness that embraces evil, violence, and the absurd. Through my work I hope to contemplate such "human-ness", and express it", he further explained.

For Yabe his sculptures are characters in a greater narrative. He wishes for the viewer to engage with them and have the freedom to create stories for each one. People project their internal lives onto the external world, as their personal experiences, fears, dreams, and hidden thoughts colours their daily interaction with their environment. The sculpture *Innocence* depicts a child playing with a toy. The work questions the idea of innocence and if what is perceived is the truth. "Usually, kids are innocent so kids sometimes break toys. Sometimes they kill insects, because it's said they still don't understand what the difference is between life and a thing. However, in the world, there are such people who are like those kids even though they are no longer kids, they are adults", he said. "They might be able to feel comfortable by doing "good things" that they believe in, they might be able to feel happy by doing what they think other people will support".

The title of the exhibition references how human beings strive to follow the Golden Rule and do good to others. Like a child's playground where the purpose is to play and interact with others joyfully, there lies a silent potential for violence and manipulation, for with power play comes with it the human need for survival. Playground brings people together as a community, but humans are fickle creatures whose desire for dominance alludes to the mythological Leviathan monster where without check and figures human beings can unleash the monster within them. To err is human it is said, and yet to forgive is human too. Within this exhibition Yabe's cast of wooden figures act out their own narratives and it is the viewer's responsibility to choose if they are acting with compassion or not. All the world is a stage and art is the mirror that reflects human being's hidden beliefs and thoughts back to them.