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8 MUST-SEE SOLO GALLERY SHOWS IN FEBRUARY: 6. ULALA IMAI AT KARMA | NEW YORK

by Paul Laster



Ulala Imai, *Party*, 2024. Photo: Courtesy of Karma

Although she has a degree from the doctoral program at Tama Art University, Ulala Imai looks no further than the everyday objects in her home and those in her suburban Tokyo neighborhood as the point of departure for her representational paintings. A third-generation artist who is also married to an artist, Imai paints still life, portrait, and landscape paintings of food, stuffed animals, and popular toy characters in domestic settings and rural realms. Using pop culture iconography, she breathes life into inert objects while creating colorfully autobiographical works.

The artist's entrancing "CALM" exhibition captures everyday family life and adventures through her children's toys. The avatars play and fight, get lost in nature while exploring caves and seaside areas, and gather to celebrate birthdays. In her *Party* painting, Imai captures ET, Chewbacca, a honey bear, and other toys and household objects assembled before a Hiroshi Sugito painting in the family's home. Working with subject matter and scenes that are close at hand, she focuses on light and shadow, lively brushwork and color combinations, and pictorial intrigue to invite the viewer into her enchanted domain.

Through February 22