

ARTFORUM Januar 2009

REVIEWS



View of "Klaus Weber," 2008.

known as the "devil's interval." Used in Baroque music to signify transgression, Weber's use of this conceit is just one more example of the refinement with which the artist links classical approaches to art with visionary deformation.

—Brigitte Huck

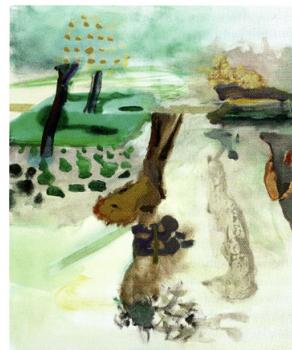
*Translated from German by Oliver E. Dryfuss.*

**PRAGUE**

**Maki Na Kamura**

JIRI SVESTKA GALLERY

The longer you look at Maki Na Kamura's paintings, the better they become—but also the more puzzling and even alienating. This is because the works are always somewhere in between: between dream and reality; memory and future; gravity and lightness; exuberance and timidity; but above all between Western painting and that of Asia, distinct painterly traditions that these pieces synthesize with a natu-



Maki Na Kamura,  
*PML VII. Le Printemps  
(Der Weg) (Spring (The  
Path))*, 2008, oil on  
canvas, 67 x 55 1/2".

ralness and facility that do not disguise the work's enigmatic quality.

Na Kamura was born in Osaka, as she tells it, in the Year of the Dog. She studied painting in Japan and at the Kunstabakademie in Düsseldorf and today lives there and in Berlin. In Prague, she showed paintings made between 2001 and 2008 in a wide range of formats. Her large horizontal canvases recall East Asian landscape scrolls. She makes oil paint daubed translucently on plaster-white undercoats look like colorful ink painting, although the medium is applied with a vehemence that recalls European expressionism. Greens and blues, the hues of nature, but also reds and purples and black, the color of darkness and night, dominate.

What is astonishing in Na Kamura's paintings is the figuration of space. It invites immersion and lingering: With each viewing, new depths emerge; there is no fixed viewpoint. This construction of space is achieved through principles of traditional Chinese painting, which refuse any central perspective, favoring a construction of numerous planes that can be grasped from different vantage points.

This method is most evident in the horizontal canvas *PLM XIV*, 2008. In the foreground, a river flows, framed on the right by shrubs and steeply rising rocks. In the middle plane, a woman dressed in red sits on a stone or perhaps a boat. She is too large to be seen from the same perspective as the river, the shrubs, or the rocks. The third plane offers the suggestion of mountains, which, as so often in Chinese painting, are blanketed in clouds. The distribution of the empty and the full is highly refined. Such compositions create spaces for artistic imagination, which was also a central aim of traditional Chinese painting. One thinks of the critic and theorist Huang Yue (1750–1841), who required above all else "the rhythm of inner energy." Na Kamura herself has said, "It is my secret desire to drag the observer inside the painting; to even make him/her feel like they had been dragged in and they got lost inside it. In my opinion, this is what a good painting should be. Two worlds: Hell and heaven. Up and down. The idyll and civilization. Yesterday and today. The monarch and the masses. Life and death. And there we are, somewhere in between."

In a side room of the exhibition, Na Kamura spread out photographs, posters, books—the source material that has inspired her paintings. But one was not allowed to enter the room, only to look from the outside. The origins of her work are supposed to remain, if not entirely hidden, a little mysterious—after all, they are themselves a skillfully portrayed puzzle of life.

—Noemi Smolik

*Translated from German by Emily Speers Mears.*

**TEL AVIV**

**Art TLV, "Open Plan Living"**

HELENA RUBENSTEIN PAVILION

A great deal was at stake in the launch of Art TLV, a multifocal event aimed at raising awareness of Israel's up-and-coming contemporary art scene and inserting Tel Aviv into the global biennial circuit. In 2009, this coastal city will join with Athens and Istanbul to form a