Tomokazu Matsuyama
The Best Part About Us

Tomokazu Matsuyama, *Let Him Run Wild Onyx*, 2021, Acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 54 x 54 inches

February 5 – March 26, 2022
Kavi Gupta | 219 N. Elizabeth St. Floors 1 & 2

Kavi Gupta presents *The Best Part About Us*, a solo exhibition of new paintings and sculptures by internationally acclaimed, Japanese-born, New York-based artist Tomokazu Matsuyama.

The Best Part About Us comes on the heels of the artist's landmark solo exhibitions at two of China's largest and most influential private museums, Long Museum Shanghai and Long Museum Chongqing. Founded by the former market vendor and taxi driver turned self-made billionaire art collector Liu Yiqian and his wife, Wang Wei, the Long Museums collect with an eye towards legacy, focusing on the most influential artists in the world, from Modigliani to Damian Hirst. "The mission of the Long Museum is to educate the Chinese public," Liu says, "and to present quality work that is on a par with other state-of-the-art museums around the world."

As with his Long Museum exhibitions, the visual language Matsuyama deploys in the works in *The Best Part About Us* reflects the experiences of today's nomadic diaspora—a global, intercultural community of wandering people who seek to understand their place in a world full of contrasting visual and cultural dialects.

Amalgamated from his vast mental and physical archive of iconographical material, Matsuyama's painted worlds vivify his lived experience. His fresh approach to the language of figuration creates dual references to both our contemporary realities and our multiplicitous pasts,

Tomokazu Matsuyama: The Best Part of Us, Installation view, Kavi Gupta | Elizabeth St., Chicago, USA, 2022

combining allusions to fashion models torn from the pages of glossy magazines; flora and fauna borrowed from Edo-period folding screens; open-source wallpaper patterns from the Internet; fragmented snippets of pop culture and celebrity life; frozen movements captured from the garments of centuries-old Buddhist sculptures; compositional strategies of the European Renaissance masters; aesthetic cues from Modernist art history such as shaped canvases and Abstract Expressionist techniques; and of course, those innumerable bits of branded trash ubiquitous on the streets of every city in the Western world.

Matsuyama's carefully constructed,fifictional landscapes welcome anyone inside to build their own narrative and discover their own meaning. What name should we give this aesthetic, which relates to nobody nowhere, yet is recognized by everyone everywhere?

"I call it the global us," Matsuyama says.

This is Matsuyama's mastery as an artist; by questioning what is familiar and what is foreign, he shows us pictures of others that are also reflections of ourselves.

"Adaptation is my life," Matsuyama says. "In Japan, I was brought up in Hida-Takayama City, a mountain area, a small, traditional place. Then in the mid-80s, I moved to Los Angeles. Surfing and skateboarding and young, fresh American culture were totally shocking to see. Then I came back to Tokyo and attended boarding

school, where the atmosphere was of one mood, one way of thinking. Then when I moved to New York, the first thing I noticed was the mess, the chaos. Unlike Japan, garbage was everywhere. That was something I had never seen before."

Positivity radiates from the title Matsuyama gave this exhibition. Words like "best" and "us" come pre-loaded with implications of goodness and unity. But then, who defines what's best? And who is empowered to choose who gets to be part of us? A more critical analysis of the exhibition title reveals it for what it is: a Rorschach test. As riddled with ambiguity as the works in the show, it carries whatever speculative meaning we bring to it as individuals.

The uncanny process of recognizing the unfamiliar also plays out in the presence of Matsuyama's sculptures. Simultaneously familiar and alien, they hint exquisitely at the worlds we know, not from life but from a dream. Hand welded from sheets of stainless steel and hand buffed to a mirror shine, these fragmented, labyrinthine forms are frozen in gestures that, again, relate to the "global us." One, Matsuyama says, is a runner; another, a dancer. "Jogging is part of the Western experience. Dancing originates with Eastern culture. Both keep us mentally and physically connected," he says.

In their distorted, curvilinear surfaces we see ourselves and wonder, like a glimpse into the Matrix, which side of the mirror is real.

That curiosity is essential to Matsuyama's practice, as he invites us into an ever-evolving, global cultural conversation across a complex web of memories, visual languages, histories, dreams, and expectations.

"My visual language is a community-based language," Matsuyama says. "My paintings are not intended to inform viewers of specific messages nor narratives. These little fractions of everyday culture remind the viewers of narratives in their own life. That leads to ownership. It represents them. It represents me. It represents us. What's the best part? It's subjective."

Matsuyama received his MFA in Communications Design from the Pratt Institute, New York. Recent exhibitions include *Realms of Refuge*, Kavi Gupta, Chicago, IL, USA; *Tomokazu Matsuyama: Accountable Nature*, Long Museum West Bund, Shanghai, China, and Long Museum Chongqing; *Tomokazu Matsuyama: Palimpsest,* Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, USA; *Thousand Regards,* Katzen Arts Center at American University Museum, Washington, DC, USA; *Tomokazu Matsuyama: Oh Magic Night,* Hong Kong Contemporary Art (HOCA) Foundation, Repulse Bay, Hong Kong; *Tomokazu Matsuyama: No Place Like Home,* Zidoun-Bossuyt Gallery, Luxembourg; *Made in 17 hours,* Museum of Contemporary Art Museum, Sydney, Australia; and *Edo Pop: The Graphic Impact of Japanese Prints,* Japan Society, New York, NY, USA, among others.

Public displays of Matsuyama's work include a monumental, permanent sculptural installation activating Shinjuku Station East Square, Tokyo, Japan. One of the busiest urban train stations in the world, it welcomes an average of 3.5 million visitors every day. Commissioned by JR East Japan Railway Company and Lumine Department Store, the installation is crowned by Matsuyama's 26-foot-tall stainless steel sculpture *Hanao-San*, a name which suggests the birth of a flower, a theme echoed by the luminous and colorful floral forest painted on the ground surrounding the sculpture. Matsuyama has said that the work's blend of Eastern and Western, as well as pop and classical references, is intended to surprise and bewilder visitors while bringing them in touch with the dichotomies of local and global culture.

In 2021, a monumental installation including a 30m painted mural and two large-scale stainless steel sculptures by Matsuyama was commissioned by the city for the central pedestrian corridor in Tipstar Dome Chiba, a cutting edge, state-of-the-art cycling arena in Chiba, Japan. A large-scale public sculpture by Matsuyama will also be the centerpiece of the public art program for Ivy Station in Culver City, a transformative, mixed-use

Tomokazu Matsuyama, *End of a Century Park Life*, 2021, Acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 105 x 80 inches

Tomokazu Matsuyama, *So Happy Alone Abnormal,* 2021, Acrylic and mixed media on canvas, 105 x 76 inches

development project boasting global tenants such as Warner Pictures, Apple, Amazon and Sony Pictures, as well as high end retail and dining destinations, a boutique hotel, and hundreds of new luxury apartments.

Matsuyama's other recent large-scale public works include *Magic City*, a 124m x 150m LED billboard animating the facades of neighboring skyscrapers on the riverfront of downtown Chongqing, China; a large-scale, outdoor steel sculpture on the grounds of Meiji Shrine in Tokyo; a 1,300-square-foot mural in the Bowery neighborhood of Manhattan, commissioned by Goldman Global Arts; as well as *Thousand Regards/Shape of Color*, a monumental mural commissioned by the City of Beverly Hills, CA, which mobilizes Matsuyama's signature examinations of bi-culturalism and pop culture evoking the spirit of positivity and beauty.

Matsuyama's works are in the permanent collections of the Long Museum, Shanghai, China; Powerlong Art Museum, Shanghai, China; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, CA, USA; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, CA, USA; the Royal Family of Dubai; Dean Collection (Swizz Beatz and Alicia Keys), USA; the institutional collections of Microsoft, Toyota Automobile, Bank of Sharjah, NIKE Japan, and Levi's

Strauss and Co. Japan; the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, CA, USA; Pt. Leo Estate Sculpture Park, Melbourne, Australia; the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; and Xiao Museum, Suzhou, China; among others.

Recent major publications of Matsuyama's works include *Tomokazu Matsuyama: Palimpsest*, Harvard University; *Tomokazu Matsuyama: A Thousand Regards,* Katzen Art Center; Tomokazu Matsuyama, Hong Kong Contemporary Art Foundation; *Tomokazu Matsuyama: In and Out,* Culture Convenience Club Co., Ltd., Bijutsiu Shuppan-sha; *Tomokazu Matsuyama,* Panorama Publishing, Tokyo, Japan; and *Tomokazu Matsuyama*, Kavi Gupta Editions.

Matsuyama has been interviewed and written about extensively by the press, including in *The New York Times, GQ, Forbes, WWD, HYPEBEAST, Numero, Sing Tao Daily, whitewall, Yoho!,* and *Geijutsu Shincho*; he has made multiple appearances on NHK Network Japan. His work has been explored in a documentary produced by Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Toshiba. Matsuyama has served as a discussion panelist for the Asia Society Museum in New York alongside renowned Japanese artist Ushio Shinohara and Asia Society Museum cura-tor Miwako Tezuka.

Tomokazu Matsuyama: Accountable Nature, Installation view, Long Museum West Bund, Shanghai, China, 2021