

**Laura Gannon**  
**Marco Godoy**  
**Nao Matsunaga**





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# Preface

After being postponed twice due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Launch Pad LaB Residency of artists Laura Gannon, Marco Godoy and Nao Matsunaga was finally set to start in the Autumn of 2021. For seven weeks, they were given the time and space to work, uninhibited, undisturbed. They also found themselves immersed in the stillness of the Charente, a rural area in stark contrast with the commotion of metropolitan life in London, where they each have their studio. The isolation brought about an intense concentration, even reorientation. The artistic output this focused work generated has been remarkable.

Although the artists have very distinct practices and they were not chosen as a necessarily coherent group, a couple of recurring questions stood out. What value does an object hold? What does it mean to make an object? Especially to physically, manually make an object? What impact does the imprint of the body have? How does that body relate to its spatial surroundings, and more particularly, to the studio? And how important is it to be present, to be in the present when making?

The texts in this publication serve as an introduction to the work the artists made during the residency. Moreover, they also contextualize these new pieces and developments in the framework of the artists' practice at large. In that sense, they are a document of a moment, set in time, yet with long-lasting significance.

It was quite special to witness this, and my sincere thanks go to Sarah & Veronique for inviting me; Laura, Marco & Nao for opening up to me; Maria for helping out practically. To the film crew and the estate staff. To the interested guests who attended the open studios in October. To everyone who had their part in making this such an enriching experience.

Eline Verstegen  
*Visiting Curator*

**LAURA  
GANNON**



# LAURA GANNON

*How do we choose our specific material, our means of communication? 'Accidentally.'*  
*Something speaks to us, a sound, a touch, hardness or softness, it catches us and*  
*asks us to be formed. We are finding our language, and as we go along*  
*we learn to obey their rules and their limits.*  
- Anni Albers

During a 1982 conference, American artist Anni Albers talked about how materials have “laws” of their own, and how artists attune themselves to these inherent guidelines. Rather than being all-deciding creators, they are in dialogue with their medium. It is the same attentive attitude that permeates the practice of Laura Gannon.

Since 2015, Gannon has been focused on making works that defy the traditional definition of painting or sculpture.

She paints and sculpts pieces of linen until they take shape as autonomous artworks, alike enough to be related to each other, but distinct enough to resonate with each other. For it is with precise dedication that Gannon has been developing a body of work in which the impact of each decision is visibly, necessarily significant for the next. In the words of Albers, Gannon is finding her language, and every choice in her making process opens up its vocabulary, contributes to its syntax, strengthens its grammar.



# LAURA GANNON

When starting a piece, Gannon does not have, or otherwise tries to lose, any preconceived idea for it. Completely committing herself to the work, she is and makes in the present. In the studio, most notably as well. Being based there nearly full-time, she relates to the space in an affectionate, almost anthropomorphic way. The studio's conditions are crucial in her practice - during the Launch Pad LaB Residency, she made her atelier resemble the one she has in London. Moreover, the studio dictates the scale of the works. Until now most of her works have been either torso-sized, full body-sized or slightly bigger, vis-à-vis the available floor space on which she works. During the residency, she made works on an even larger and somewhat squarer scale, only once done before, going well beyond two meters in width and height.

Her raw material is usually the same: a linen so fine, its grain is imperceptible. Especially after she draws on it or paints it, it looks far more solid, as if it were another material altogether. The same goes for her works in watercolour paper. In both, her strong sense of colour is key. After pieces in metallic inks - golden ochre, shimmering silver, absorbing black and delicate pink, amongst others - she chose a bold and bright colour palette to explore further during the Launch Pad LaB Residency. A rather artificial palette perhaps, with a more synthetic feel. The iridescent acrylic paints she selected are shades of endless green, statement yellow, electric blue, radiant orange and vivid reddish-pink. Their intuitive, yet thoughtful pairing adds to their intrinsic qualities. However, their luminosity is also brought about by Gannon's strenuous treatment of the linen. The way the light hits the creases, creates a dazzling dimensionality.

Gannon folds and wrinkles her base material, bends and breaks it in order for its raw materiality to manifest itself. The visceral character of the works stems from this rough, labour-intensive approach. Hence, a palpable tension arises between their fragility and force. This contrast is also heightened by the last steps in Gannon's treatment. She weaves strips of linen or watercolour paper through the surface of the work; or instead cuts out abstract shapes. Each action leads up to a system of addition or subtraction. Having at least one fixed parameter (such as using the same linen), enables a certain receptiveness to let this system build itself. The resulting geometric repetition bears witness to 1960s minimalism and architectural modernism, but in a less rigid, freer fashion - all surface interventions are done by simple hand-eye coordination.

The act of adding to or taking away from the works' surface also impacts their installation. Often the artworks are suspended a bit away from the wall, hanging in front of rather than directly onto it. Especially for the cut-out pieces, this allows not only for light to come through, but also for viewers to activate the work by reading the wall behind it. The spatial context where the work is displayed undeniably functions as another layer in its experience. For example, during the Launch Pad LaB Residency, it was the first time, due to the specific studio architecture, that the back of the works were fully visible, hence exposing the construction, the weaving, the naked colour of the linen. It also demanded other movements of the audience in the space.









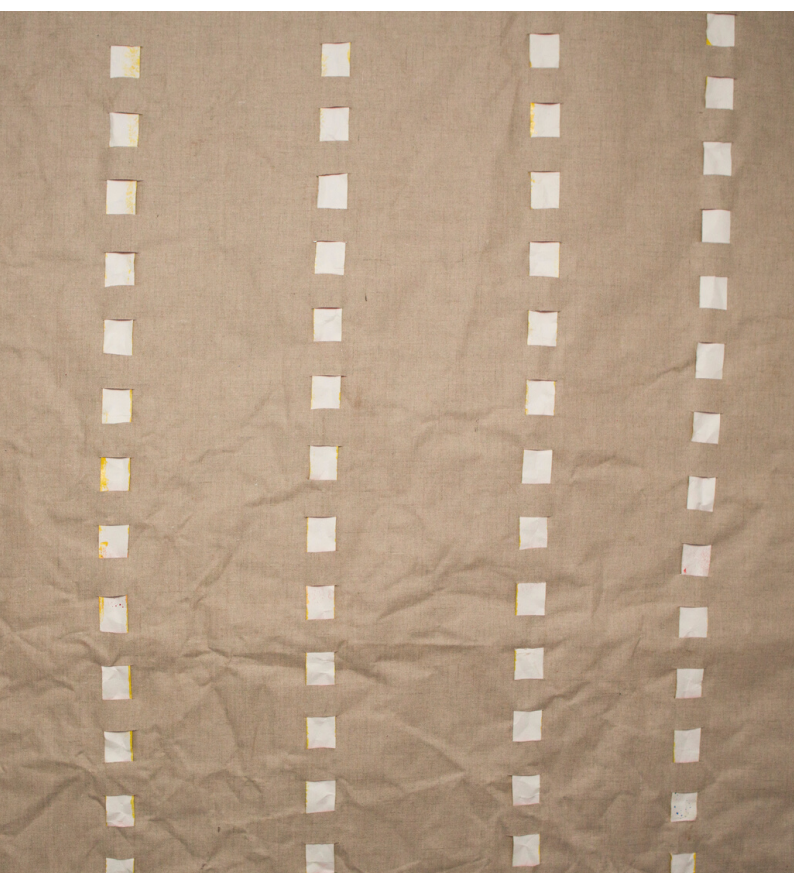


# LAURA GANNON

The corporeal response of viewers to, but also, and maybe even more so, the corporeal genesis of the work is a not to be underestimated aspect of Gannon's practice. For her, this pure physicality is attained through the abstraction in her mark-making on the materials. There is no figurative narrative to occupy the mind. The abstraction facilitates thinking from the realm of her own body. In that sense, Gannon's pieces could be understood as an expansion of the self, herself. Her psychological and bodily engagement when making is deeply embedded in them. Her practice is essentially an embodied one.

This embodiment, the female body, is not neutral, but political. Gannon is highly aware of the difference in agency between genders - noticing big and small, for example how the reddish-pink acrylic she is using is named "Carmen".

Raised in a conservative, male-dominated environment in Ireland, the decorative value of women was imbued in her from a young age. However, her mother atypically worked and kindled curiosity for crafts, clothing, (mostly female) writing, buildings and politics. Combining sensuality and intellectuality, these interdisciplinary interests are ingrained in Gannon's frame of reference. Often, the titles of her works reflect this: 'Wild Money' (2019) refers to the eponymous short story in which Maeve Brennan explores artists' relationship to money and a whole series of 2021 linen works is named in reference to the practice of architect and designer Lina Bo Bardi. These suggestive titles are a means to instill storytelling in abstraction; a means for the outside world to find a place in the inner world of the works in the studio.



# LAURA GANNON

Her keen sense of architecture especially informs Gannon's films. Before concentrating on the new works, Gannon in fact built a practice around audiovisual works, often intimate portraits of distinctive buildings by female architects such as Eileen Gray. This was the case for some of her most-known projects, including 'Silver House' (2015) and 'A House in Cap-Martin' (2007). In these films, Gannon shows an intense feeling of space, an architect's attention to detail, decoration and the way design influences physical and mental behaviour. She also understands a building as a living thing - literally enlivened when occupied, deteriorating when unoccupied.

The major difference, aside from technical practicalities, between this medium and her studio practice, might be that her films revolve around existing objects, with occasionally added fictional elements, while in her sculptural paintings everything starts from her mind, her body. Nevertheless, there are similar concerns that can be discerned in both films and sculptural paintings. In her video works, Gannon manages to merge past and present or, on the contrary, to fracture time. The filmic temporality, its duration and rhythm, finds its counterpart in the sculptural, painterly marks made, each indicating a durational action, a rhythmic pattern, time passed. Additionally, as much as light is a constitutive element of film, it is also for Gannon's linen works which respond to it, are given depth by it. And in line with that, it is the spatiality that is the main character. In both, Gannon succeeds at letting the exterior and the interior spheres dissolve into each other. Arguably, in keeping with Anni Albers' language analogy, Gannon developed a perceptive vernacular in one medium, and then translated to another.

**Laura Gannon** (b. 1972, Galway, Ireland) works and lives in London. She studied Fine Arts at the University of Ulster in Belfast and at Goldsmiths College in London. She was also selected for the LUX Associate Artist Programme in London (2008-2009). Recent solo exhibitions include 'Silver House', VISUAL Carlow, Carlow (2019); 'Laura Gannon', Kate MacGarry, London (2018); 'Espace Croisé', Contemporary Arts Centre, Roubaix (2016); and 'Silver House', West Cork Arts Centre, Skibbereen (2015). Her work was included in numerous group exhibitions internationally. She has received multiple awards and scholarships, including from the Irish Arts Council, Arts Council England, Fluxus Art Projects, Outset Art Fund and The Elephant Trust. She participated in residency programmes at Untapped, Rapallo, IT (2018) and Tate Britain, London, UK (2014-15).

**MARCO  
GODOY**



# MARCO GODOY

*Sometimes a turning point fits in a minute  
Sometimes it takes years before we know  
What happened to us a lifetime ago*  
- Moya De Feyter

An unsuspecting passer-by might never notice Marco Godoy's evocative intervention in the magnificent magnolia tree that grows in front of the French manor unless the sun's blinding reflection hits the golden leaves. Godoy gilded a few magnolia leaves as a site-specific extension of his newly made video piece. In this short film, he slowly, smoothly follows the intricate process of covering some leaves of a local plant on the residency site in gold leaf. Gilding has traditionally been associated with religious and symbolic sacredness, with perceived value.

Does Godoy then show an act of sacralizing nature by humankind? Of artificializing nature? Commodifying it? However, the gold leaf does not destroy the plant, it does not turn the living subject into a dead object, the plant lives on. Might the gilding then be a means of shielding it from hardships, protecting it? Saving it from precisely that same humankind? These questions might arise when watching the work, but for Godoy, the essence lies beyond narrative interpretations.





# MARCO GODOY

What the video work elegantly captures is the delicate caressing of the leaves. Soft fingers stroking the leaf veins, gentle hands pressing the gold leaf on the plant's leaf. The piece speaks of something that cannot be spoken, unveils the sensorial rather than the ideological. It focuses on the power of embodied knowledge, of knowing by sensing in the moment, as a counterweight for the (predominant) power of detached analysis afterwards. Turning the camera to the intimacy of treating something with time and care, Godoy composes a sensual ode to touch. He honours the personal transferral taking place, and when a second pair of hands is introduced in the video, he adds a layer that opens up the possibilities for these experiences of exchange to be shared. He translates this in an appreciative, golden gesture.

The sculpted hand, being touched so lovingly, expresses this longing for a connection as well. The sculpture fits into a series of new works in cast and resin, created parallel to the video. Varying in scale from smaller to bigger than life-size (and perhaps begging for even more monumental dimensions), these archetypal pieces are characterized by an emotive stillness. The sculptures of heads and hands explore in a solemn manner the ways they relate to each other, being presented in isolation, in repetition or in combination. Both head and hand carry innumerable metaphorical meanings and symbolical projections; some associations also pit them against each other, with the head representing the bodiless mind, the rational, and the hand the mindless body, the physical. Maybe unintentionally, this reading resonates with Godoy's practice: instigated by an intrinsic need to do manual work, to learn from materializing objects, these pieces are Godoy's first attempts at intuitive sculptures made by hand in a very long time.

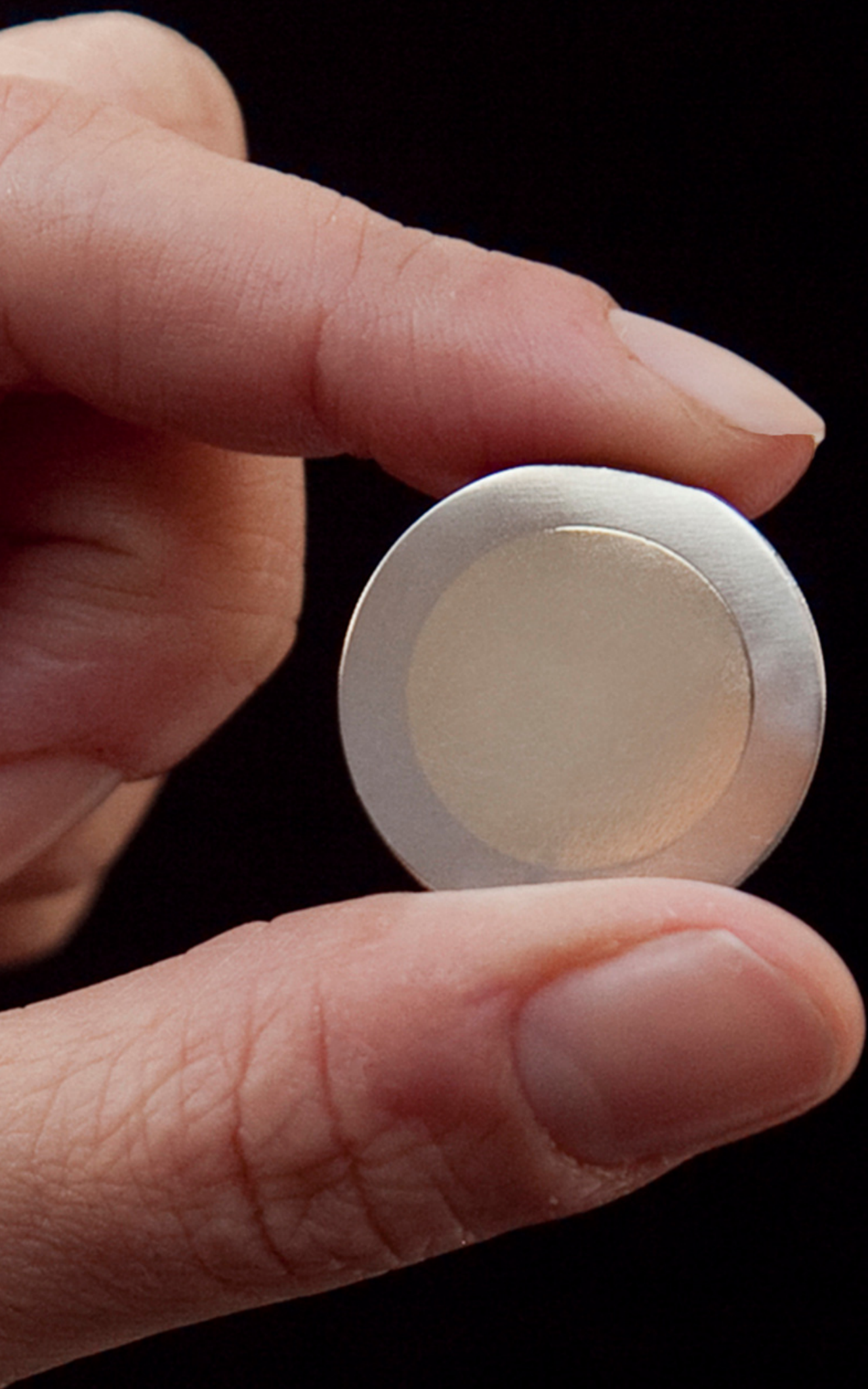
However, they have been in the making equally as long, as they are based on drawings Godoy has been doing for the last ten years. For the Launch Pad LaB Residency, he finally committed to confronting these images and ideas in depth.

The resulting works, or perhaps propositions, mark an arguably radical shift for Godoy. Known for tackling societal issues, Godoy has long balanced art and activism - at risk of being the artist among activists and the activist among artists. In his films, photography, and mixed media installations, he has scrutinized the visual language of ideologies. Often based on thorough-going research, collaborations with local communities and/or personal engagement, he has addressed the performativity of power and the representations of hierarchical structures in his works. Exposing the hidden vocabulary of political, institutional or social relations, he thereby offered insight in how to unhinge their very construction. If the game is not a given reality, but a chosen fiction, then the rules can be bent or broken or altogether set again. In line with this, Godoy has also been interested in the real versus symbolic value of objects - what makes a piece of a paper a passport, a decisive instrument to approve a person entering a country, and why? In these earlier works, tension arises from his desire to render visible what is invisible. Moreover, Godoy has done so in a most appealing way, luring people in in his discomfiting, threatening, sometimes even violently themed works with a refined, polished aesthetic. Referencing advertising, cinema and other clean-cut image sources, the seemingly visual pleasure of the pieces opens up common ground to get a conversation started.









# MARCO GODOY

Seeing this older body of works next to the works started during the Launch Pad LaB Residency might give the impression of incoherence. There is no overt activist engagement in these new pieces, and the formal language of the sculptures, in all their raw honesty, differs greatly from pristine looking previous works. However, the same blood runs through their veins. Whereas before Godoy might have concentrated on the mechanisms that divide, with the message of how to overcome those divisions implied, now the mechanisms that unite have explicitly taken over. The urge to connect lies at the heart of Godoy's practice. The same ideas about social relations have now merely manifested themselves in a different, abstracted appearance. How this will further pan out for Godoy's practice remains to be seen, for Belgian poet Moya De Feyter's lines could not be closer to the truth.

**Marco Godoy** (b. 1986, Madrid, Spain) works and lives between London and Madrid. He studied Fine Arts at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and later Photography at the Royal College of Art in London. Recent solo exhibitions include 'In the service of vision', Galeria Max Estrella, Madrid (2021); 'Heterarquía: Ven, seremos', Patricia Ready, Santiago (2020); 'My we, your we, our we', Copperfield Gallery, London (2019); and 'La distancia que nos separa', Sala de Arte Joven, Madrid (2018). His work was included in numerous international group exhibitions and is held in public collections such as Stedelijk Museum, 's Hertogenbosch; the INJUVE Collection; and Centre d'Art La Panera. Godoy won the INJUVE Prize, received scholarships from Bancaja and the Letrou Family, was a resident at the British School in Rome and an international fellow at Kioska, Santa Cruz, Bolivia with Gasworks & Triangle Network.



**NAO  
MATSUNAGA**



# NAO MATSUNAGA

*I never violate an inner rhythm. I loathe to force anything. I don't know if the inner rhythm is Eastern or Western. I know it is essential for me. I listen to it and I stay with it. I have always been this way. I have regards for the inner voice.*

- Lee Krasner

Nao Matsunaga has always drawn. However, during the Launch Pad LaB Residency, he has made his most extensive foray into drawing and painting to date. His open-minded, open-ended approach manifested itself in a surprising series of abstract works on paper and linen.

It points to a pivotal moment in Matsunaga's career: a moment in which he fully embraces experimentation in this fresh medium.



# NAO MATSUNAGA

Starting from smaller-scale drawings, he translated conceptual ideas or material interventions to larger scale expressionist paintings, built up with layers of poured and then scraped off acrylic paint, spray paint and/or pencils on watercolour paper and prepped linen. Important in the genesis of these works was that Matsunaga positioned the watercolour paper flat on the floor to make the most of the specific architecture of the studio space. It proved to be a whole new way of working for him, activating different parts and muscles of his body and challenging the understanding of normal gravity. It also literally left its mark on the works, as an accidental “frottage” occurred - which he willingly accepted.

Remarkable in these pieces is also the use of colour, in contrast with his previously largely natural palette. In the drawings and paintings, however, he distills a select set of colours that communicate with each other, conscious of the power colour possesses. The deep, electric blue interacts with an energetic yellow, the soft orange with a faint green. White paint serves as a counterweight, balancing out movement and depth, but also acts as an element of control: it provides the physical, if not mental, reassurance that things could be whited out.

For years, the practice of Nao Matsunaga has mainly revolved around ceramics and wood carvings. The resulting body of work is an ever-expanding universe of individual pieces, exploring what makes a particular object more special than another. What brings the ordinary into the realm of the extraordinary? It is an essential question for Matsunaga, which harkens back to his continuing interest in ritualistic objects and ceremonial spaces.

These items and sites, charged with a suggestive power, an elusive sacredness, have been a universal part of humans' engagement with their environment throughout history. Matsunaga's works attest to his fascination for prehistoric and ancient elements and the similarities between them in cultures around the world, without overtly referencing them. Like an artist-archaeologist, he mines the multiple meanings of objects.

Moreover, in these sculptural works in clay and wood, Matsunaga challenges the properties of the materials, skillfully unskillfully - precisely because he is in complete control of the medium, he can break away from it. His pieces speak an idiosyncratic visual language, created by unconventional formal techniques (for example smacking clay materials in his palms), different surface treatments (such as “blanket glazing”, a process in which a chunk of ceramic glaze melts and moves when fired) and unexpected assemblages (occasionally forethought by drilling random holes to join parts later, for instance). Taking objects out of the kiln is hardly ever the end, but rather a beginning, without an end in mind.

The ceramic and wood practice of Matsunaga shows, however, many similarities with the “family” of paintings created. Every piece is thought of as a multilayered recording of feelings, ideas, movements, whether they are glazes on clay or paint strokes on paper. The few works he made on leftover fabrics during the residency also testify of this approach: the layering process remains, although the carrier changes. The consequent results then of course also differ greatly, especially because Matsunaga seeks ways to push the materials, to let them speak in a different tongue.









# NAO MATSUNAGA

But be it scraping paint or slapping clay: both are a take on material conventions. This is only possible because Matsunaga builds enormous muscle memory. In either medium, his practice consists of considerable repetition, of a methodical yet intuitive approach to making, and making again, and learning from making. Without a preconceived idea, he becomes complicit with the materials, which in turn allows things to happen in the moment. He learns to walk, whilst simultaneously installing a system to trip, to enable himself to see everything differently. Also the parameters that define the distinctive characteristics of a piece are the same: the speed with which and time during which he engages with the piece, as well as the physical distance he keeps to it. In both ceramics, sculptures and paintings there is hence an inherent tension between the rough and refined, between pause and play. Furthermore, the titles of the work are chosen in a similar vein. Words or sentences from books, music, podcasts feed into the myriad interpretations the works themselves allow for. For this another parallel: every piece is a portal to another world. It could be an uncharted inner territory or an unknown prehistoric area; a deep-sea atmosphere or a long forgotten symbol belonging to an ancient culture. In this sense, the works are invitations to surrender and feel, very much like Matsunaga himself surrenders and feels.

Matsunaga considers himself a channel, or a guide, for the work. He sets up the conditions for the piece to arise and acts on it when it does. It is a form of blind making, not knowing what it all will lead to. Of blind trust as well. But by practice, Matsunaga has developed ways to get in the zone - usually with some jazz or 1970-80s American funk - and stay there for one to two hours.

In these bursts of concentration, he walks with everything in his (sub)consciousness, he feels along, he is present. When he surrenders, his body, his hands move faster than the logical part of his brain. The bodily imprint in the works is undeniably there: perhaps even more extreme in ceramics by means of manual moulding and fingerprints left behind, but also in painting by means of dancing around the canvas, moving materials around. The final sculpture or painting is then an organization of energy on a specific surface, a recording of the little bits of transcendence Matsunaga feels when working. It sits within an art historical tradition of spontaneity, of chance, of play that cannot be analyzed until afterwards - if at all. For Matsunaga once spoke about an emotional, almost spiritual experience he had with art that he could not put into words, amazed at what paint on canvas could do to people. Surprising himself, he started to cry in front of a painting by Lee Krasner.

**Nao Matsunaga** (b. 1980, Osaka, Japan) works and lives in London. He studied Wood, Metal, Ceramic and Plastic at the University of Brighton and later Ceramic and Glass at the Royal College of Art in London. Recent solo exhibitions include 'Panta Rhei to Curtis LeMay', Token Art Centre, Tokyo (2020); 'Deepcuts', Marsden Woo Gallery, London (2020); and 'Gillian Ayres, Rachel Jones and Nao Matsunaga', New Art Centre, Salisbury (2019). His work has also been included in numerous international group exhibitions and biennials and is held in both private and public collections, including the V&A Museum, London and the York Museum and Art Gallery. In 2012, he won the Jerwood Makers Open and one year later the British Ceramics Biannual Award. He participated in many residency programmes, including Arskala Principle Studio, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; the National Academy of Art, Oslo, Norway; the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK; and the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Detroit, USA. He also is a frequent visiting lecturer at different educational institutions.







# Colophon

**Launch Pad LaB Residency**  
**Autumn 2021**

**Launch Pad LaB** Sarah Lee Elson & Veronique Parke  
**Residency Coordinator** Maria Hohmann  
**Artists** Laura Gannon, Marco Godoy & Nao Matsunaga  
**Visiting Curator** Eline Verstegen  
**Film Crew** Aidan Hobbs & Catherine Valve

**Texts** Eline Verstegen  
**Images Laura Gannon** courtesy of the artist, photographs by  
Marco Godoy  
**Images Marco Godoy** courtesy of the artist, p.12 by Eline  
Verstegen  
**Images Nao Matsunaga** courtesy of the artist

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