

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Chaos to the Cosmos: White Road Between Two Rivers Paintings by Ken Matsubara

March 10 - April 14, 2022 | Opening Reception, March 16, 5-9 pm



Chaos, 1983, Painting, H433 x W70.86 in, H180 cm x W1100 cm

Ippodo Gallery is pleased to present *Chaos to the Cosmos*: paintings by Ken Matsubara, in conjunction with Asia Week New York 2022. The exhibition is more than a retrospective; it is a culmination of four decades of artistic exploration and personal reflection. Starting with the artist's earliest years, the result is a daring showcase that delves into the deepest corners of spirit and self, honoring the individual experience as much as the philosophical journey to serenity.

From his earliest works, the artist hovers on an aesthetic and interpersonal precipice, consciously or unconsciously awaiting his spiritual awakening. The youngest in a family of five sons, Matsubara's unanswered questions and humble origins led him to spend hours of reflection at the local Buddhist temple, where he found solace in its sounds and philosophies. From the temple echoes to the teachings of the monks who surrounded him, Matsubara developed a foundation, a grounding, in the beauty of nature.

At just nine years old, Matsubara was inspired by a scroll at the temple (now at the Nara National Museum) depicting the Niga Byakudō-zu—The White Path to Paradise Between Two Rivers of Worldly Vice.

The righthand river was full of flames and beasts representing life's darkest desires, while the left raged with turbulent waters. On the eastern bank, the voice of the Sakyamuni Shaka Nyorai says, "Go," while the Amida Buddha on the western bank says, "Come." In the middle was always the white path to serenity, where one must choose to walk the narrow white line to enlightenment.

“Only through Buddha’s guidance could one escape the sins and cross to the far bank,” Matsubara writes, “The chaos in their hearts being transformed into the harmony of cosmos.” In 1983, at 35, Matsubara’s returned to these themes with *Chaos*, a staggering twelve panels at 1100 x 180 cm (433 x 70.86 in). When Matsubara began to paint, snake-like veins of flames and spraying water fought the battle of Matsubara’s internal demons until he finally broke free and achieved the true mental harmony to which he has always aspired.

The inflection point of *Chaos* was marked by the passing of Matsubara’s teacher, Sanko Inoue, in 1981. Matsubara had only begun apprenticing at 27, in 1975, but was deeply inspired by Inoue’s evocation of impressionist and abstract masters from the West, particularly the influence of *Guernica* by Pablo Picasso.

Inoue encouraged Matsubara to prioritize wellness for his creative process, once saying to his apprentice, “If you are not ordinarily healthy, you will never be truly moved.”

The universality of both internal and external conflict has been communicated through scrolls since the times of ancient Buddhist priests but holds a timeless message of integrity and strength in the 21st century. During these COVID-19-ridden years, the gentle sounds of nature hold the power to unify and protect us from the *Chaos*, and to remind us to keep well. Matsubara himself always paints outdoors, regardless of the weather, charged by the colors of daylight. He uses materials from the honored mountains, colored earth, and flowing rainwater to bring nature to life for the later works on view.

With the *Sound* series begun in 1981, Matsubara visited his brother’s temple in Imajo, Fukui prefecture, and began working with the circle motif, marveling at its cyclical perfection. The series’s namesake draws from the mesmerizing sound he first heard in the temple, which continues to guide the work today just as it has for close to three decades. The significance of the sound presented with the circle motif is that Matsubara draws circle motifs in the background of almost all paintings.

After a fruitful meeting with Japanese ceramic historian and great teacher Seizo Hayashiya when Matsubara was a seasoned master of 62, the Matsubara designed and painted *Sound* artworks in Hayashiya’s tearoom.

The circle is also present in the *Kukai* series. Matsubara recalls the journey of a Japanese monk (the priestly name is also Kobo or Koyo Daishi) who retreated into the caves of Muroto Cape at the Southeastern tip of Shikoku, exiting to behold the breathtaking sun and moon rises in the same place every day against a rocky ocean horizon and a starry sky.

Struck by the majesty of their permanence, the monk later named himself ‘Kukai’ (774 – 835), for the ‘air (Ku) and ‘sea’ (Kai), completely synonymous with his excursions into nature. His story resonates so much with Matsubara that the artist even revisited Kukai’s exact spot to experience the same sensation.

The *Kukai* series in Ippodo’s exhibition honors sound as it represents eternity, the perfect order of the cycles. As the silver light of the moon shimmering through the darkness, waxing and waning with the sun, so too does the heart and its desires.

Matsubara’s retrospective is a great affirmation of life. Because as preoccupied as he is with the greater expanse of nature, so too is he concerned with the works’ relationship to the viewer. When encountering these otherworldly manifestations, viewers should come to realize our own truths, our own paths, and our own spiritual journeys. They should awaken our memories and echo in our souls, reminding us that nature is in perfect order no matter how chaotic our world may appear.

And like the turbulent rivers of the *Chaos*, like ourselves, like the virus we fight, nature is constantly changing.



Moon Sound 1, 2021, Painting
H66 1/8 x W48 1/8 in, H168 x W122 cm



*Kukai's View; Sun and Moon, Crescent Moon, 2017, Painting, H71 x W187 x D.79 in, H180 x W475 x D2 cm
(Set of 4 panels)*

About the Gallery

Ippodo Gallery's mission is to share empathy with the world and create global conversations through the experience of Japanese culture. We continue to showcase work that adheres to our mission to pursue the beauty of nature, with a sense of global consciousness for the fragility of the environment and the strength of quiet serenity. Ippodo expresses gratitude for nature and the silent honor of daily life, marrying the worlds of Japanese reverence and contemporary sensibility. As a result, Ippodo Gallery has worked directly with over 200 artists and has held thousands of exhibitions over the decades. Ippodo Gallery Tokyo was founded by Keiko Aono in 1996, with two locations in the heart of Ginza and the residential area of Gotenyama. Gallery spaces include tea ceremony rooms where many artists and friends gather, fostering connections. Second-generation Shoko Aono opened Ippodo Gallery in New York in 2008, continuing and expanding upon this belief overseas, and has since witnessed the impact of Japanese Kogi art in a western landscape. The result is a timeless cross-culturalism and a love for art that transcends language.

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