

Michiko Itatani: Starry Night Encounter

Linda Warren Projects - Chicago

By B. David Zarley



Michiko Itatani, "Starry Night" painting from Encounter 16-B-7, 2016, oil on canvas, 78" x 96." Courtesy of the artist.

There is, above all else with *Starry Night Encounter*-with Michiko Itatani-a sense of *continuity*, an expansive, ever running and ever there cosmology, connected and demarcated with visible filaments born of a syringe and a steady but free hand, strung through by frozen ligaments, a complete concept whole and massive and intelligent and invisible, mesmerizing and unsettling in its beauty and alienness, an octopus winking through an aperture in the rock, lushly developed and wholly evolved, albeit in a singular expression, a rich novel ... of aspirational science fiction, a deeply personal portrait of a cosmological study scarcely populated by figures-what ones exist as shades, meandering around a tree in a glowing globe or ancient blemishes on a long, cold plateau like a petri dish, beneath a great Ezekiel wheel of brumal light, presented sans context but feeling seminal, a first encounter-but filled with rooms, gorgeous rooms packed to the brim with the implements of education and elation, books and computer banks, globes and models, simulacra for children and the curious, rocket ships and satellites, floating atop floors of rich oxblood beneath

chandeliers like lambent clumps of moths, doors and halls and stairs slightly *off*, an uncanny morphean pastiche of perspectives, a literary gambit glutted with POVs beneath golden paint applied like brocade, aspirational opulence dwarfed by the vast and shining void visible through the windows and skylights, an entire pulchritudinous existence throwing the vainglorious rooms into stark relief ... relief from strictures of scale and time, for Itatani's study is telescopic and microscopic both, black holes imbued with the *sumi* calligraphy ink of her youth, skeletal corpses abutting a pallid nebulae-with clenched jaw and obstinate head, streaming vapors and violent trajectory, surely the great white whale, forever being chased, finally birdlogged to the ends of the universe-and the distinctly terrestrial glow of a bank of lights, the playful geometry of a baseball field, the echoing cheers for the Hanshin Tigers reverberating from her past ... a past which haunts her work, invisible, revealed only via speculation and the sheer luck of a break in Itatani's usually silent code, a gift from the artist herself, albeit an unnecessary one, as anyone who can read can follow her story, inscrutable though it may be, because it is all of ours, the chronicling of a daisy chain throughout existence, hovering around the temples, buzzing against the occipital bone like a halo, a Catherine wheel celebratory reminder of our existence, a beautiful cry and comfort overshadowed by the brighter, bigger lights of the stars ... stars on charts, inside of us, outside of the skylights holding in their embrace laughable specks of rock and coagulated gas we named for our deities, which we in turn hold in our hands in the form of globes, globes and models and computers and books, an embrace more intimate and perhaps more important than the stars, for it is a studied one, the mind rapidly expanding, human intelligence and endeavor and hope red shifting in a desperate attempt to keep apace with the galaxy's bleeding, fleeting edge ... a noble, impossible goal Itatani reminds us of, planting, like the avant-garde science fiction author that she is, in the last painting of the exhibition, amid the warm luxe pedantry, a black, inscrutable box, fearful and alarming and attractive, unknown.

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