

**Press Release | New Exhibition**

1 June 2021

**Leiko Ikemura: Usagi in Wonderland**



*Trees out of Head*, Leiko Ikemura, 2015/20 © Leiko Ikemura and VG Bild-Kunst 2021

**Leiko Ikemura: Usagi in Wonderland: 18 July – 12 December 2021**

**High-resolution images available for download: <https://bit.ly/3gtiyaK>**

Japanese-Swiss artist, Leiko Ikemura, presents a selection of paintings, sculptures, drawings and photography in her first exhibition in the UK, *Leiko Ikemura: Usagi in Wonderland*. Ikemura has chosen 50 works that span three decades of her career. The exhibition's dominant theme is the connectivity of all aspects of nature, be it human, animal, plant or mineral, in an eternal circle of life. Through her fantastical figures and primeval landscapes, Ikemura explores fragility, transience and slow evolutionary change – choosing to address environmental issues from an empathetic, global perspective.

Usagi, meaning ‘rabbit’ in Japanese, is a recurrent mystical motif in Ikemura’s work, representing rebirth, fertility and renewal. Her bronze sculpture, *Usagi Kannon* (Rabbit Bodhisattva of Mercy), produced in response to the Tōhoku earthquake and Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011, emanates compassion, engendering hope rather than despair. *Usagi Kannon* will stand in the Sainsbury Centre Sculpture Park from autumn 2021, providing a place of refuge to visitors wishing to shelter beneath its generous skirt.

Opening with a section dedicated to ‘Girls’, the exhibition features the artist’s ceramic and bronze figures alongside her enigmatic paintings and drawings from the 1990s. On canvas, her spirit-like figures swoop and dive. Ikemura’s girls are non-specific, ageless, hybrid human-animals: sensitive and innocent. When sculpted in clay, their branching torsos, multiple limbs and fragmented bodies transcend the limitations of the terrestrial world. The exhibition debuts previously unseen cast glass heads and busts, created in the last year, that show Ikemura extending the range of her multi-media practice.

Her atmospheric landscape paintings are cosmic-scapes or ‘psychic maps’. They depict desolate mountain scenes, sparsely populated with otherworldly figures that emerge and disintegrate in an ongoing process of transformation. Through these images, Ikemura reiterates her view on mortality: death is not an end, but a new beginning and is present in everything.

Ikemura is informed by diverse art histories: from East Asian ‘sansuiga’ landscape paintings, religious statuary and calligraphy, to European works by Francisco Goya, Ferdinand Hodler, Odilon Redon, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Emil Nolde and Medardo Rosso. These varied stylistic traditions become melded in Ikemura’s own distinctive language.

Leiko Ikemura’s art appeals to our imagination with its childlike purity. She says: “My message is a visual and sensual one, so the viewer could feel it’s very open to interpretation... The exhibition is not just about the works but making space so people can breathe and be with the works.”

The exhibition has been developed in collaboration with the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures to coincide with the Japan-UK Season of Culture. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue co-published by the Sainsbury Institute and the Sainsbury Centre.

**Tickets are available to buy online at [sainsburycentre.ac.uk](https://sainsburycentre.ac.uk), £8/£7 concessions. Free parking subject to availability, cafe, shop.**

Booking link: [sainsburycentre.ac.uk/whats-on/leiko-ikemura-usagi-in-wonderland/](https://sainsburycentre.ac.uk/whats-on/leiko-ikemura-usagi-in-wonderland/)

– ENDS –

Exhibition supported by:

## Toshiba International Foundation



### Notes to Editors

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#### Exhibition Information

Leiko Ikemura: Usagi in Wonderland

18 July – 12 December 2021

£8 | £7 concessions

50% off for under 18s, full-time students and Art Fund Members

FREE for Sainsbury Centre Members, UEA and NUA Student Members

Visit [sainsburycentre.ac.uk](http://sainsburycentre.ac.uk) or call 01603 593199 (Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm)

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#### About Leiko Ikemura

Ikemura grew up in Japan and studied in Spain, before moving to Switzerland where she began to exhibit regularly in the 1980s. Ikemura currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany. Internationally celebrated, Ikemura's awards include the 70th Japan Ministry Award for Fine Arts in the 1st year of Reiwa (2020), the Cologne Fine Art Prize (2014) and the Ja-De Prize from the German-Japan Foundation (2013). Her work is represented in the collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the National Museum of Art, Osaka; and the Kunstmuseum Basel.

[leiko.info](http://leiko.info)

## **About the Sainsbury Centre**

The Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts is one of the most important public university art galleries in Britain. It was founded in 1973 at the University of East Anglia (UEA) with the support of one of the nation's great philanthropic families, Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury, who donated their extraordinary art collection which includes works dating from prehistory to the late 20th century from across the globe. A radical new building by Norman Foster was designed to house the collection and was his first public work.

The Sainsbury Centre holds one of the most impressive art collections outside of the national institutions. It includes a significant number of works by modern masters of European art such as Pablo Picasso, Edgar Degas, Alberto Giacometti, Henry Moore, Francis Bacon, Jacob Epstein, Jean Arp, Chaim Soutine and Amedeo Modigliani. There are major holdings from Oceania, Africa, the Americas, Asia, the ancient Mediterranean cultures of Egypt, Greece and Rome, as well as Medieval Europe. Alongside these permanent collections, it hosts a range of exhibitions in the largest suite of temporary exhibitions galleries in Eastern England.

[sainsburycentre.ac.uk](http://sainsburycentre.ac.uk)

## **About the Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures**

The Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures was founded in 1999 through the generosity of Sir Robert and Lady Sainsbury to promote knowledge and understanding of Japanese arts and cultures.

Its mission is to promote world-class research and be a leader in the study of Japanese arts and cultures from the past to the present. The Lisa Sainsbury Library in Norwich remains central to the Institute's vision, and its collections are a research resource of major importance to scholars throughout Europe.

Its institutional partners include schools of study at the University of East Anglia (UEA), the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and the British Museum. It maintains its programme of fellowships, public lectures and international workshops as well as its commitment to the web and web publications.

[sainsbury-institute.org](http://sainsbury-institute.org)