

Ichi-go ichi-e

YUKIMASA IDA *delivers* past in the *present* moment.

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Yukimasa Ida

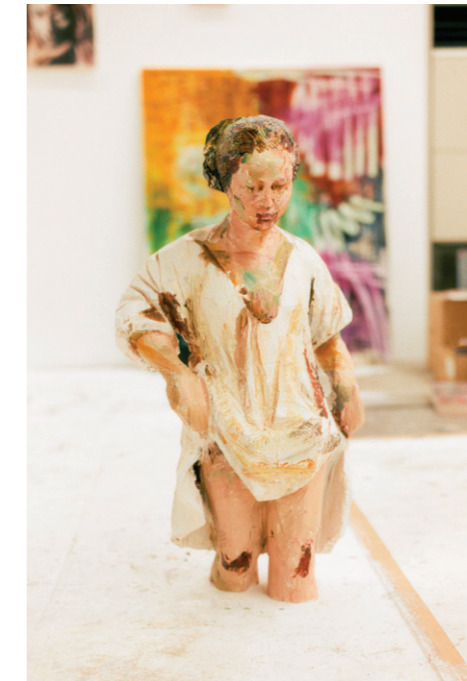
Ichigo Ichi-e is a Japanese proverb which translates to “one chance in a lifetime.” It reminds people to acknowledge the irreversible nature of time and thus treasure each moment as fleeting yet indispensable. For Yukimasa Ida, this four-character word has been a constant theme. Drawn to the complexities of human connection and the relationship between life and death, Ida examines existence through crystallized portraits.

Born in the seaside town of Tottori, Ida learned how to draw from his father, a sculptor. “The first memory [I have] was when I was three years old, my father’s sculptor studio—and ever since, it has become a habit for me to draw. I have my own studio now, but that memory never disappears. Every time I grab my brush, I feel alive, and it allows me to have a dialogue with my work,” says Ida.

His early memories infuse a sense of nostalgia in his work, which ranges from abstraction to realism. The inspiration for Ida’s art often stems from people and landscapes he encounters in foreign coun-

time limits as generative rather than restrictive. He eventually centered his creative practice around the concept of memory as a container for time. He notes, “I think memory is the origin of human creativity. It is the image in the head. I think it is real and reflects the truth. So, all the paintings I draw are realistic.”

Ida would always paint alone in his small



ule, he told me that he usually wakes up and spends about an hour reading a book or drinking tea while contemplating. He then works until the next day without any sleep.

Capturing the moment has always been something Ida has been interested in. When he showed me his works over Zoom, the flurries of vibrant color and rich impasto took my breath away, reflecting vivid snapshots in time like a photograph. He told me how *Ichigo Ichi-e* is most commonly associated with Japanese tea ceremonies and expresses the concept of life, death, time, and change. This idea especially resonated with him roughly 10 years ago when he traveled to India, which was a breathtaking experience, yet one that changed Ida’s perspective forever. “While walking on the street, people were begging in poverty, while the wealthy were just walking beside them. A festival was being held next to the corpse. I was shocked by the situation that seemed to embody the chaos of this world,” said Ida.

As sobering as the experience sounds,

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tries—or even from plants and discarded cans he finds while walking around his studio’s neighborhood. He is interested not in specific circumstances or objects but rather in the potential for everyday life to become a source of creativity. Interestingly enough, he trained himself to draw quickly at a young age. He would set strict guidelines for himself, for example, drawing a person in under 10 minutes. He created thousands of paintings this way, gradually embracing his inability to slow the passage of time and learning to view

studio in his university days. His desire for creating was insatiable; he rarely slept, choosing instead to spend almost every waking moment painting. A firm believer in the saying, “Sometimes you have to lose something to gain something greater,” Ida was able to master his artistic skills and the conceptual process by immersing himself fully in his craft.

I first met Ida virtually in January while he was finishing up for the day in the studio. When asked about his daily sched-

Ida mentioned that it was not his most intense moment of awakening yet. That would come shortly afterward: “One day, I was walking in the slums of Mumbai, and suddenly a little girl scrapping for trash in the middle of the street caught my eyes. I was looking at her for a while. She picked up something and turned to me with a big smile. She ran somewhere after smiling at me. What was held in her hand was a chicken leg that someone had eaten and with just bones left. And I started to cry.”



Mai, 2021. Oil on canvas. 194×162 cm.
All artworks: Courtesy IDA Studio Inc.



Koji, 2021. Oil on canvas. 194×162 cm.



Even after returning to Japan, Ida could not forget that little girl. “So I held a paintbrush to keep the people I had encountered in mind while withdrawing them,” he explains. “That is the beginning of my theme.” His painting *The starry night - Existence and distance*, 2021 was inspired by this trip to India. By generating a dreamlike yet gloomy setting, the work visualizes Ida’s realizations about life, death, and memory from his time there.

Despite the role of memory and place in his work, he also engages a distinct sense of ambiguity. Ida uses long strokes and heavy layers of paint, obscuring the subject yet allowing various parts to peek through. His recent work, *Koji and Mai*, 2021, clearly exemplifies this method. “People exist in the past and present, the here and now, each forging their own stories,” Ida explains. “My practice gathers

miraculous encounters of humans, and I intend to crystallize them on the canvas based on realities I capture.”

His work is unique because it is not a mere portrait of time but rather a representation of its passage. While discussing his technique, Ida stopped our conversation and shared a line in John Lennon’s song, “Watching the Wheels,” in which Lennon sings: “I’m just sitting here watching the wheels go round and round.” Ida explained how the ideas of repetition and change resonate with his practice: the earth is constantly moving, time is flowing, and values in society are shifting. In Lennon’s song, he sees the world’s beautiful cycle of life and death. As with any other work, when it leaves the artist’s studio, it eventually transforms into an independent entity, untethered from the artist’s own world.

Ida created *Montage*, 2021 after he came back from an exhibition with Mariane Ibrahim in Chicago. At first, he started to paint people he had encountered during that trip; however, he eventually decided to create a work that captures his memories of everyone he met in Chicago within a single portrait. A model is always present when he paints a portrait, yet there is always a level of distance between the finished product and the real-life subject. In this sense, he is never quite sure who he is painting; and by the end of his artistic process, it could be everyone.

As our conversation drew to a close, Ida mentioned, “This encounter is something I will hold on to and sums up our conversation of *Ichigo Ichi-e*.” He was indeed right. As soon as our conversation was over, I started the conversation we had to capture as much of the past in the present moment.





Jean-Michel Basquiat no.9, 2020. Oil on canvas. 194×162 cm.



Montage, 2021. Oil on canvas. 194×162 cm.

