

Contact: Elaine Merguerian 212.327.9271

ASIA SOCIETY PRESENTS *YOSHITOMO NARA: NOBODY'S FOOL*
September 9, 2010 through January 2, 2011

Exhibition Media Preview: September 8, 10:00 a.m. to Noon



Yoshitomo Nara. *Untitled (1, 2, 3, 4 Man)*, 2008. Colored pencil on envelope. H. 14 1/2 x W. 9 in. (36.8 x 22.9 cm). Gervais Pappendick Collection, Boston.

Asia Society devotes its entire museum space to *Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody's Fool*, the first New York museum exhibition of Japanese artist Yoshitomo Nara, one of the most influential Neo Pop artists working today. More than one hundred works including drawings, paintings, sculptures, and installation works—created over the last two decades and many of which have never been exhibited in the United States—will emphasize the relationship of Nara's art to rock and punk music, an ongoing source of inspiration and prevailing reference point in his work.

Born in 1959 in Japan, where he presently lives and works, Nara is internationally recognized for his art, which has inspired an enormous cult following among youth in Japan and throughout Asia.

“For the first time in Asia Society's history, the entire Museum will be devoted to the work of one contemporary artist,” notes Asia Society Museum Director Melissa Chiu, who

curated the exhibition with the Museum's Associate Curator Miwako Tezuka. “We think this is fitting, given Nara's considerable body of work, often associated with manga and the Japanese Pop movement of the 1990s,” Chiu says. “*Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody's Fool* aims to shed new light on the artist's practice, focusing on the pervasive influence of rock and punk music on Nara, through the exhibition's content, thematic focus, and unique installations.”

Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody's Fool is accompanied by a fully illustrated 271-page catalogue including contributions from the curators and leading contemporary art critics Midori Matsui and Michael Wilson, an extensive interview with Nara, and an essay by the artist's long-time installation design collaborator Hideki Toyoshima. Published by Asia Society Museum in association with Abrams, New York, the book also includes select English translations of Nara Voice, the artist's popular former blog.



Yoshitomo Nara. *Remember Me*, 2005. Acrylic on paper. H. 55 x W. 55 1/2 in. (139.7 x 141 cm). Private collection, New York. Image courtesy of the artist and Marianne Boesky Gallery.

Exhibition organization

The exhibition is organized into three thematic sections—**Isolation**, **Rebellion** and **Music**. Each section traces, in roughly chronological fashion, the development of Nara’s recurring characters, motifs, and subject matter. Beyond his two-dimensional works, there is also a new large-scale site-specific installation and two other installations, each of which incorporates Nara’s drawings, paintings, and various objects selected by the artist.

The first section, **Isolation**, includes paintings, drawings, and sculptures, many of which depict solitary, wide-eyed girls or dogs seemingly deep in thought. Early works from the 1980s are done in a loose style of drawing and painting, and reflect a sense

of loneliness that relates to Nara’s own childhood experiences as a “latchkey” child living in the small city of Hirosaki in northern Japan. The paintings of a solitary girl—with an oversized head and large expressive eyes—are minimalistic yet emotionally intense. Another iconic character is a white dog, symbolizing feelings of alienation, a recurring theme in his work. This section includes three larger-than-life-size fiberglass dog sculptures standing on stilts.

The second section, **Rebellion**, features a number of Nara’s intimately scaled drawings with scribbled texts that speak to a range of emotions, from anger and frustration to exuberance. For Nara, drawings are not mere preparatory sketches for his paintings and sculptures; they are a significant daily conceptual exercise and a kind of revelatory diary. Included in this section are paintings depicting angry and defiant children—in different settings and with varied expressions—that may be seen as the artist’s alter egos.

The third section, **Music**, highlights the importance of music to Nara. Music permeates and animates Nara’s practice, which is characterized by the creation of an internalized world that resonates with his fans and followers around the world.



Yoshitomo Nara. *Hyper Enough (to the City)*, 1997. Acrylic on canvas. H. 49 x W. 59 in. (125 x 150 cm). Rubell Family Collection, Miami.



Yoshitomo Nara. *White Riot*, 1995. Acrylic on cotton. H. 39 3/8 x W. 47 1/4 in. (100 x 120 cm). Aomori Museum of Art, 2597. Image courtesy of the artist.

Nara's work reflects the rebellious spirit of rock and punk music, and the feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and disaffection shared by restless youth. Music lyrics provide the subtext for many works, and in some cases song names and lyrics are used as titles or are written directly on the drawings. Other references are more overt, such as a painting depicting a girl named Ramona with an air of defiance, a reference to the Ramones.

Also included in the **Music** section of the exhibition are recent painted ceramic vessels and plates, displayed alongside 12-inch record album jackets that were carefully selected by the artist from his own extensive music collection. Nara has designed album

covers for bands such as The Star Club, one of Japan's first punk bands, and the German New Wave group, The Birdy Num Nums. Nara's work was also used for the CD cover of the 2001 single "I'll Take the Rain" by R.E.M., whose animated music video was based on Nara's work.

Important to the exhibition's organization are three **installation works**, one of which is a new, large-scale, site-specific installation that represents the culmination of Nara's fascination with music, and is created through collaboration between Nara and designer Hideki Toyoshima. Nara and Toyoshima have worked together closely on installation structures all over the world since 2003. Typically, these structures are used to showcase Nara's work. For Asia Society's exhibition, Nara, Toyoshima, and several assistants from Japan—working together as a team called YNG—have created a special installation structure meant to evoke an artist's studio, a concert stage, and a carnival tent—sites that the artist finds most familiar, exciting, and inviting, respectively. Two other house-like installations from their earlier collaborations, *Untitled* (formerly *Home*) and *Doors*, are included—their first presentation in the United States.

About the exhibition's title

This exhibition title *Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody's Fool* is drawn from the title track of Dan Penn's 1973 Southern soul album. A renowned American songwriter and singer, Penn is somewhat reclusive, avoiding the limelight to maintain his creativity and independence. Nara's choice of this title, and references to Penn in his work, are his homage to the individualism of a musician he reveres.



Yoshitomo Nara. *Untitled (Nobody's Fool)*, 1998. Watercolor on paper. H. 13 3/4 x W. 10 1/8 in. (34.9 x 25.7 cm). Collection of Peter Norton. Image courtesy of the artist.

Related programs and credits

A variety of public programs have been organized in conjunction with the exhibition exploring Japanese art and culture and its connections to American and global popular culture. A conversation with the artist and Hideki Toyoshima about their continuing collaboration and shared interest in music take places on Friday, September 10 at 6:30 p.m. In addition, a series of performances, film, live music, and readings and conversations will be held. Critical support for *Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody's Fool* comes from our lead sponsor for this project, The W.L.S. Spencer Foundation. Major support provided by Mori Building Co., Ltd., and by Alex Appel in honor of her mother, Carol Appel. This project is made possible by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services. WNYC Radio is a media sponsor.

Asia Society is releasing its first iPhone app, enabled by Toura, on the occasion of the exhibition. The Yoshitomo Nara app—represented by an icon specially designed by the artist—includes background on the exhibition, highlight images not available on the exhibition website, select writings by Nara, and more.

Open Studio: Yoshitomo Nara + YNG in association with Park Avenue Armory



YNG, *Bintang House*, 2008. "KITA!!: Japanese Artists Meet Indonesia," Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Photograph by Hako Hosokawa.

Asia Society collaborated with Park Avenue Armory, where Yoshitomo Nara and designer Hideki Toyoshima's collaborative team, YNG, held a temporary Open Studio from August 23 through 27 to complete works for inclusion in Asia Society Museum's exhibition. The team rebuilt the structure of the installation work *Home*, adapting it for Asia Society's galleries, and Nara established a temporary studio to create new drawings. The YNG team is known to repurpose their past installations by modifying sizes, recycling materials, and/or incorporating additional found objects and new works by Nara, giving them a new life in

new locations. Following the five-day Open Studio, the new works and installation were moved to Asia Society Museum.

Yoshitomo Nara Sculptures on Park Avenue

Coinciding with *Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody's Fool*, Art Production Fund, in association with Asia Society, presents two large outdoor sculptures on Park Avenue, on view from September 7 through early November. The sculptures are located on the median near the entrances to Asia Society and Park Avenue Armory like *komainu*, mythical lion-like statues commonly placed as guardians at the entrance to Japanese shrines. Nara, who often uses dogs and children as subjects in his work, uniquely combines the two for *White Ghost*. For more information, visit www.artproductionfund.org.

About Asia Society Museum and Contemporary Asian Art

In the early 1990s, the Asia Society Museum was one of the first U.S. museums to establish an ongoing program of contemporary Asian art exhibitions. These exhibitions include *Traditions/Tensions: Contemporary Art in Asia* (1996); *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (1998); *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India* (2005); and *Hanging Fire: Contemporary Art from Pakistan* (2009). In addition, the Asia Society Museum was the first U.S. museum to organize solo shows of now widely recognized artists Montien Boonma, Cai Guo-Qiang, Dinh Q. Lê, Yuken Teruya, and Zhang Huan.

Asia Society and Museum is located at 725 Park Avenue (at 70th Street), New York City. The Museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 A.M.–6:00 P.M. and Friday from 11:00 A.M.–9:00 p.m. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. General admission is \$10, seniors \$7, students \$5 and free for members and persons under 16. Free admission Friday evenings, 6:00–9:00 p.m. The Museum is closed Fridays after 6:00 P.M. from Independence Day to Labor Day. www.AsiaSociety.org/museum

#