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View of “Leiko Ikemura: Before Thunder, After Dark,” 2021.

MILAN

Leiko Ikemura

BUILDING

Via Monte di Pietà 23

September 4–December 23, 2021

Japanese Swiss artist Leiko Ikemura is exhibiting for the first time in Italy with a selection of works, curated by Frank Boehm, covering roughly forty years of her activity and installed over the gallery’s four floors. Viewers

first encounter a pair of large, gloomy paintings, completed in 2017. Together, the two very similar nocturnal landscapes of mountains surrounding deep indigo lakes (or are they volcanic craters?) give the show its title: “Before Thunder, After Dark.” Following this opening salvo are several drawings from the early ’80s, as well as a large untitled pastel from the same period, shown here for the first time in three decades, depicting a large orange flame inside which a human body taking flight can be glimpsed.

The body, in fact, is Ikemura’s main theme, represented in images or alluded to in the gestural application of paint or clay. In one of the second-floor galleries, a head in yellow Murano glass, titled *Light Face* and created this year for the exhibition, rests with like Brancusi-like elegance on a black plinth. Nearby, a group of ceramics from the ’90s are lined up on their bases in front of a pink wall—half-bust figures, or rather anthropomorphic, allusive, sensual volumes, in dialogue with a series of small paintings with similar iconography in the adjoining hall.

On the next floor up, gray walls form a backdrop for charcoal portraits evocative of totemic masks and some unsettling fantastic landscapes drawn in Mexico in the 2000s. The last floor features the artist’s recent abstract paintings on raw canvas, dating from 2019 and 2020. Here, corporeality emerges through energetic but nonviolent gestures, executed in delicate chromatic harmonies.

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.

— Giorgio Verzotti