

Galerie

Masako Miki: "Two Site-Specific Exhibitions at ICA San Francisco Tackle Modern Day Identity and Belonging"

By Shelby Black

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Dual exhibitions by Masako Miki and David Antonio Cruz bring new light to fighting for community and against stereotypes



Installation view of Masako Miki's exhibition "Midnight March" at ICA SF. PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

San Francisco has long been known as a city that celebrates creativity. From being one of the most pinnacle hubs of the Summer of Love movement to serving as a destination where talents flock to explore aspiring ambitions, the bustling city has grown to foster talent through open expression and impressive institutions. Now, the emergence of ICA San Francisco continues that lasting legacy, and two exciting site-specific exhibitions explore themes of identity, belonging, and the importance of inclusivity.

Standing empty for years in San Francisco's Financial District, the multi-story structure formerly served as a Bank of America flagship until its eventual closing. Fast forward to the museum's relocation to The Cube in October 2024, and now both locals and tourists alike can experience world-class exhibitions completely free of charge. Following a successful opening, Japan-born, Bay Area-based artist Masako Miki as well as New York-based artist David Antonio Cruz have crafted the first fully site responsive exhibitions at The Cube, which not only entice visitors, but celebrate the museum itself.

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TOP: Installation view of David Antonio Cruz's exhibition "stay, take your time, my love" at ICA SF. PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF



BOTTOM: Installation view of Masako Miki's exhibition "Midnight March" at ICA SF. PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

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Upon entering the museum, the left side of the top floor welcomes guests into David Antonio Cruz's showcase, where elaborate murals and specifically curated surroundings serve as the backdrop for the portrait artist's intimate "chosen family" series. Titled "stay, take your time, my love," Cruz tackles timely societal conversations concerning the LGBTQ community, specifically within themes of acceptance, inclusion, identity, and belonging. On the walls, an expansive wallpaper mural incorporating imagery specifically chosen by Cruz such as Dolores Park palm trees, handkerchiefs, excerpts of famous artworks, and more not only relate to him personally but share a journey of queer communities's struggle for acceptance and finding a path to comfort and safety. Upon the mural, a collection four large-scale canvases speak to the artist's immense connection to portraiture. For this exhibition, Cruz created a specifically commissioned piece, of the same exhibition title, where one of his personal close friends living in the Bay Area served as the main source of inspiration for the large-scale canvas.



LEFT: Installation view of David Antonio Cruz's commissioned 2025 artwork "stay, take your time, my love." PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF



RIGHT: Installation view of David Antonio Cruz's 2022 work "these secret of remaining young is never to have an emotion, that is unbecoming; those barriokids". PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

"It's incredibly meaningful to develop a new body of work centered around a chosen family from the Bay Area," Cruz tells *Galerie*. "This includes a new wallpaper that incorporates imagery of the coastline, Dolores Park, and various historical and artistic references, framed by an oversized upholstered bench area and bedazzled chandeliers. This installation reflects the landscape, love, play, and history of San Francisco and is presented in the city. I hope that audiences will take a moment to pause, relax, daydream, get lost in the layers, and see themselves within the work."

In Cruz's portraits, where each figure is depicted posing alongside close friends and their chosen family, the use of vivid color, intricate poses, and touches of non-linear elements such as differently colored body parts allow for queer individuals to be seen as they are—utterly human. This intimate portrayal of relationships and community brings new perspective into the everyday life of these communities, pushing away stereotypes and instead fostering understanding and unconditional love.

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Installation view of David Antonio Cruz's exhibition "stay, take your time, my love" at ICA SF. PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

Also embracing similar themes of acceptance and identity lies an exhibition by celebrated Bay Area artist Masako Miki. Once walking down the stairs to the lower level of the museum, guests are transported to another world and are welcomed to Miki's exhibition "Midnight March." Named after the storied folktale of Japan's "Night Parade of One Hundred Demons," where it was said demons also known as "yokai" left their places in the supernatural world to march the streets amongst humans wreaking havoc, Miki brings new perspectives to these villainized entities through a total of 30 sculptures placed throughout the bottom floor. As opposed to their historical depiction as monstrous, Miki's practice in crafting 2-D and 3-D artworks made of felt, bronze, and works on paper reimagine these figures in a more palatable and approachable lens, boasting vibrant colors and individualized shaping to honor their stories but humanize them simultaneously.



Installation view of Masako Miki's exhibition "Midnight March" at ICA SF. PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

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To bring an even more immersive experience to these creatures, dark blue walls complemented by a bespoke star-studded mural and carefully placed spotlights truly create the experience of walking amongst these rebels. While the bulk of creatures welcome guests to join them in the protest at the beginning of the exhibition, other characters are thoughtfully placed throughout the space to further cement themselves in this historic march and guide guests through the experience.

Staying true to the folktale, each sculpture holds their own story and mission in this exhibition. From the mischievous umbrella to the sibling trio of shapeshifters, Miki's reimagination of these characters stem from the importance of evolving with the ever-changing world, particularly regarding modern day tension in the United States, the importance of protest, as well as fighting for community and against propaganda.



TOP: Installation view of the Umbrella yokai as part of Masako Miki's "Midnight March" exhibition at ICA SF. Photo: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

BOTTOM: Installation view of the shapeshifter yokais as part of Masako Miki's "Midnight March" exhibition at ICA SF. Photo: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

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"We need to be very careful what kind of myths and what kind of fictions that we create and how we spread this story," Miki tells *Galerie*. "The opinions of the mass is very important. Politicians are weighing what we want to hear. We have so much power and I really believe that we as a collective have to continue reinventing ourselves because society has been changing. It's not so much about what we've done before but we need to continue to think about what would be the best way to come together, and I think that shift and change is difficult, but I think there's no other way to collaboratively live in safe society. That's why it's important for me to reinvent [these characters] so they don't look like what they're known to look like in the in the past."



Installation view of the Daruma Doll yokai as part of Masako Miki's "Midnight March" exhibition at ICA SF. PHOTO: NICHOLAS LEA BRUNO, COURTESY OF ICA SF

Masako Miki's "Midnight March" and David Antonio Cruz's "stay, take your time, my love," exhibitions are on view at ICA SF through December 7.

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