

ERI IWASAKI





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(b. 1968, Hyogo, Japan)

Eri Iwasaki is a contemporary Nihonga painter who reanimates traditional Japanese materials and techniques to create quietly powerful, otherworldly portraits. Working with mineral pigments, washi paper, gold leaf, and platinum paint, she constructs luminous figures that seem to emerge from velvety, pitch-dark grounds—at once earthly and celestial. Deeply influenced by the premodern Buddhist sculpture and painted scrolls that permeate her daily life in Kyoto, her subjects recall bosatsu (bodhisattvas) in their serene, inward gazes and androgynous grace, embodying compassion without sentimentality. Yet her paintings are not devotional images; they are psychological portraits shaped by her long experience as a courtroom illustrator, where she witnessed both cruelty and resilience. This dual awareness lends her figures a striking stillness and moral gravity. Often depicting women or children poised in ambiguous, clouded spaces, Iwasaki captures what she describes as the essence of independent existence—fragile yet steadfast, vulnerable yet unyielding. Rooted in centuries-old Nihonga practice but unmistakably contemporary in sensibility, her work occupies a space between reality and imagination, intimacy and distance, offering portraits that feel timeless, enigmatic, and profoundly human.

Eri Iwasaki began studying Nihonga in high school and is a graduate of Kyoto Saga Junior College of Arts. Recognized as a leading figure among contemporary Nihonga artists, Iwasaki has exhibited widely, including at SEIZAN Gallery Tokyo, SEIZAN Gallery New York, Mitsukoshi in Tokyo, Sendai, and Osaka, Takashimaya Osaka, and KAHŌ Gallery in Kyoto, among many others. Her work is included in the Art Collection of Kyoto Prefecture as well as notable private collections in the United States and Japan. Iwasaki lives and works in Kyoto, Japan.

CURRICULUM VITAE

ERI IWASAKI

EDUCATION

1990 AA, Kyoto Saga Junior College of Arts, Kyoto, Japan

SOLO EXHIBITION (by selection)

- 2025 Eri Iwasaki: Tiny Poison (Nihombashi Mitsukoshi, Tokyo)
- 2024 Eri Iwasaki: The Light Over There (SEIZAN Gallery, New York)
Eri Iwasaki-ten: Hero (Takashimaya Osaka, Osaka)
- 2023 IWASAKI ERI STUDY WORK: Annan Konnan (Gallery Maronie, Kyoto)
- 2022 Eri Iwasaki: Nihonga-ten, Sendai Mitsukoshi, Miyagi, Japan
Eri Iwasaki-ten, KAHO Gallery, Kyoto, Japan
- 2021 Eri Iwasaki: Nihonga-ten, Nihombashi Mitsukoshi, Tokyo, Japan
- 2020 Eri Iwasaki: Tiny Light, Tiny Night, SEIZAN Gallery, New York
Eri Iwasaki: Chiisana Hikari Chiisana Yoru, Takashimaya Osaka, Osaka, Japan
- 2019 Eri Iwasaki: Nihonga-ten, KAHO Gallery, Kyoto, Japan
- 2018 Eri Iwasaki: Nihonga-ten, Nihombashi Mitsukoshi, Tokyo, Japan
- 2017 Eri Iwasaki: Hibi, Sendai Mitsukoshi, Miyagi, Japan
- 2015 Eri Iwasaki Nihonga painting: Kanata no Hikari Sekaino Hajimari, Nihombashi Mitsukoshi, Tokyo, Sendai Mitsukoshi, Miyagi, Japan
- 2013 Eri Iwasaki: Garden, SEIZAN Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
- 2011 Eri Iwasaki: Stories: Hito o Egaku, Nihombashi Mitsukoshi, Tokyo,
JR Osaka Mitsukoshi Isetan, Osaka, Sendai Mitsukoshi, Miyagi, Japan

GROUP EXHIBITION (by selection)

- 2024 ART TAIPEI, SEIZAN Gallery booth, Taipei World Trade Center, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2023 Summer Group Show, SEIZAN Gallery, New York
Kazari Uchiwa to Nihonga 6nin-ten, Osaka Takashimaya, Osaka, Japan
ART TAIPEI, SEIZAN Gallery booth, Taipei World Trade Center, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2022 Art on Paper 2022, SEIZAN Gallery booth, New York
HAKU: The Art of Gold and Silver Leafing, SEIZAN Gallery, New York

- Art on Paper, SEIZAN Gallery booth, New York
- Summer Group Show, SEIZAN Gallery, New York
- 2021 Market Art & Design -The Hamptons, SEIZAN Gallery booth, Bridgehampton, NY
- 2020 Art on Paper, SEIZAN Gallery booth, New York
- 2019 Reimagined: Contemporary Artists Take on The Tale of Genji, SEIZAN Gallery, New York
- 2018 Nihonga: Contemporary Art of Japan, SEIZAN Gallery, New York
- 2017 The Red: Women, SEIZAN Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
Nihonga Group “Seishin” Nihonga-ten, Kyoto Takashimaya, Kyoto, Osaka, Takashimaya, Osaka, Nihombashi Takashimaya, Tokyo, Japan
- 2016 Sō to Zō 2016: Gendai Nihonkaiga Kogei Shinsaku-ten, various locations, Japan
- 2015 Something Precious, SEIZAN Gallery, Tokyo, Japan (through 2018)
- 2014 Wakate Nihonga-ten, Niigata Mitsukoshi, Niigata, Japan
- 2013 ART TAIPEI, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2012 Asia Top Gallery Hotel Art Fair HK12, Hong Kong
ART KYOTO 2012, Kyoto, Japan
ART TAIPEI, Taipei, Taiwan
- 2011 KIAF Korea International Art Fair, Soul, Korea
- 2009 Nihonga: Kyo, Nihombashi Mitsukoshi Tokyo
JR Osaka Mitsukoshi Isetan, Osaka, Japan
Art Fair Tokyo 2009, SEIZAN Gallery booth, Tokyo, Japan
KIAF Korea International Art Fair, Soul, Korea
Tokyo Contemporary Art Fair, Tokyo, Japan
Kyoto Nihonga Shin-ten, JR Kyoto Isetan, Art Museum “Eki”, Kyoto, Japan

PUBLIC COLLECTIONS

Art Collection of Kyoto Prefecture

AWARDS (by selection)

- 2010 Kyoto City Emerging Artist Award
- 2001 Kyo-ten Exhibition, Kyoto Municipal Museum of Art, Mayor’s Award
- 1998 Kyoto Nihonga Painters Association Selection Exhibition, Mainich Newspaper Award
- 1997 Aogaki 2001 Nihonga-ten, Hyogo Arts & Culture Association Award



MOTHER
FEBRUARY 12 - MARCH 14, 2026
Marina Berio
Eri Iwasaki
Miné Okubo
Yukiko Hata
Asako Tabata



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *MOTHER*
FEBRUARY 12 - MARCH 14, 2026



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *MOTHER*
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INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *MOTHER*
FEBRUARY 12 - MARCH 14, 2026



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *THE LIGHT OVER THERE*
SEPTEMBER 5 - OCTOBER 26, 2024



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *THE LIGHT OVER THERE*
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INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *THE LIGHT OVER THERE*
SEPTEMBER 5 - OCTOBER 26, 2024



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: SUMMER GROUP SHOW 2023
JUNE 29 - JULY 29, 2023



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *HAKU: THE ART OF GOLD AND SILVER LEAFING*
MARCH 3 - APRIL 30, 2022



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *TINY NIGHT, TINY LIGHT*
JANUARY 9 - FEBRUARY 22, 2020



INSTALLATION VIEW OFF: *TINY NIGHT, TINY LIGHT*
JANUARY 9 - FEBRUARY 22, 2020

TINY NIGHT, TINY LIGHT

DARIA MELNIKOVA

Murasaki had prepared the floral offerings. She chose eight of her prettiest little girls to deliver them, dressing four as birds and four as butterflies. The birds brought cherry blossoms in silver vases, the butterflies yamabuki in gold vases. In wonderfully rich and full bloom, they completed a perfect picture.

Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji*, “Butterflies”¹

“Be a good princess today,” said the king, “and write neatly in your copy book.”
 “Be a good princess today,” said the queen, “and sit straight in your chair.”
 ... All day the king was busy ruling the kingdom. The queen was busy ruling the palace. The princess was busy being good.

Anita Lobel, *A Birthday for the Princess*

Similar to the way Lady Murasaki dresses her attendants as birds and butterflies to bring cherry blossoms and yellow roses to the empress in *The Tale of Genji*’s “Butterflies” chapter, Eri Iwasaki brings theatricality to her paintings. The striking garments she creates for her characters—princesses, goddesses, young girls—and her remarkable mise en scènes result in paintings that resemble a type of performance, a spectacle that captivates

the viewer in its light.

Painting as Poetry, Nature as Metaphor

In classical Japanese *waka* poetry, the verbal forms are evocative of images and emotions. In the same way, Eri Iwasaki’s paintings, which are filled with metaphors and symbolism, are distinctly poetic.

Distant Light, the World Begins and *Tiny Light, Tiny Night*, both from 2019, portray a girl with flowers, plants, birds, and butterflies against a gold background. The flowers are applied thickly over her black dress as if merging the figure of the girl into the garment. The raised surface of the grass and flower pattern around the hem of her dress is executed with an embossing technique on gold leaf, reinforcing the effect of “dressing into nature.” Interestingly, Iwasaki learned the embossing technique when she worked on the restoration of a series of very old paintings on wood. As she likes to explore or expand what Nihonga can offer, she plays with the invisible rhythms. The flat image of the outlined figure is brought closer to the viewer through the thick impasto of flowers on the black dress, while the embossed flowers on the

background push the picture line beyond the canvas to the realm outside the adult’s reach, guarded by the child.

The brightly blooming “yellow rose” or *yamabuki* dominates the spectacle of nature. Nature as metaphor has a long tradition in *waka* poetry, and *yamabuki* is closely associated with the season of spring in the *Kokinshū* (Collection of Japanese Poems Old and New, c. 905)¹. In *Distant Light, the World Begins* and *Tiny Light, Tiny Night*, the metaphor of spring flowers expressed in the visual forms of nature is associated with life and rejuvenation. By attiring the girl in this natural scenery, Iwasaki pays homage to children, the flowers of life; however, *yamabuki* is a fragile flower, and so are children. The material world of her painting and the poetic symbolism create a visual form that expresses the fragility of a child indirectly and elegantly.

More than the Images of a Pretty Girl

The representation of a girl or a young woman is a primary motif in Eri Iwasaki’s oeuvre. In Japanese art, particularly *ukiyo-e* woodblock prints and Nihonga, paintings of women fall into the

Bijinga genre, images of female beauties. These idealized images typically treat the female subject as decorative, though with some expressive potential for portraiture. In contrast, Iwasaki is reluctant to restrict her work to the Bijinga genre. Rather, she seeks to use traditional techniques to go beyond traditional Nihonga genres.² In a series of fantastical portraits in this exhibition, the artist portrays the daughter of a close friend in extraordinary settings.

In *I Actually Have a Lot to Say* and *The Story Begins*, both from 2009, Iwasaki captures the half-length figure of a girl in three-quarter profile. Oxidized silver leaf is used as the ground in a similar fashion to the mica background of the prints; it decontextualizes the female figure from any setting and immerses her in a surreal world. The physicality of her body is concealed by a voluminous garment revealing only thin shoulders and an elongated neck. The contrast between the textured thickness of the black garment with a touch of yellow and the silky nature of the slightly peachy *gofun* pigment reinforces the girl’s dreamy pose and facial expression in these paintings.

¹ Translation by Edward G. Seidensticker, *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Knopf, 1976), 422.

¹ Haruo Shirane, *Japan and the Culture of the Four Seasons: Nature, Literature, and the Arts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 36.

² Eri Iwasaki, “In Conversation with Sayaka Toyama (Director of the SEIZAN Gallery New York),” Iwasaki’s studio in Kyoto, Japan, October 5, 2019.

What are the girl's dreams? Living up to the expectations of society and family, or even our own expectations, puts a lot of pressure on us. What if a magic spell could miraculously resolve all difficulties and grant all aspirations? Wouldn't it be marvelous? Even if it sounds naïve. As children, we believed in fairytales. In many of these stories a fairy godmother would appear and transform the girl into a princess, or a prince would rescue the princess. The heroine in Iwasaki's paintings seems to belong to a fantasy world of another kind, one in which she knows what she wants and creates her own reality. Indeed, the princess might give the impression of being a good girl, as in Anita Lobel's story *A Birthday for the Princess*. In these paintings, however, the seriousness and determination of the girl's expression reveals her strong personality.

In *A Princess Never Sleeps*, 2015, the princess sits in the dark of night with her aspirations swirling around her black dress in thin white whirlpool lines. We sense that her mind is as clear and bright as the white swirls. In *Cotton Candy*, 2019, the girl seems rather entrapped as she balances in the swing of her thoughts. In contrast, the facial expression of the

princess of *Bibbidi-Bobbidi-Boo*, 2020, exposes a sense of disappointment in the disparity between the imagined and the real: the crown does not quite fit. And, in *I Actually Have a Lot to Say* and *The Story Begins*, the character's musings are mirrored in the scattered kana characters, which, unlike the text on traditional Japanese prints, form no particular meaning. They emerge from the top of the girl's head "like smoke rising from a chimney," as Iwasaki explains, releasing invisible "thoughts and feelings that we cannot—do not want to—give voice to."¹ These blurry words and feelings revolve around the theme of "something" that becomes lucid beyond meaning.

Divine Energy, Infinite Light

The two-panel paintings *The Wind Blows and Kau (Blessed Rain)*, both from 2014, allude to an ancient tradition in Japanese Buddhist art of pairing a dragon and a tiger as symbols of rain and thunder. For example, in his masterpiece *The Gods of Wind and Thunder*, Tawaraya Sōtatsu (fl. c. 1600–1640) reframed the representation of dragon and tiger as the God of Wind and God of Thunder that strikingly resemble the realistically executed Buddhist sculptures of Sanjūsangendō temple in Kyoto.² Iwasaki juxtaposes the

images of the fantastical creatures with two female figures that materialize the refreshing air and the blessing rain respectively.

In *Kau (Blessed Rain)*, a young woman draped in a white garment and with a rococo-style headdress sits on a voluminous white cloud decorated with gold dots of various sizes. Her graceful posture reveals her divine status as a goddess who brings good fortune through blessed rain (kau). Thin gold lines of rain fall from the cloud, promising growth and abundance. The composition of *Blessed Rain* is reminiscent of the raigo paintings showing the descent from heaven of a golden Amida Buddha on white clouds, such as *Descent of Amida and the Twenty-Five Bodhisattvas* (thirteenth century, Chion-in temple, Kyoto). The facial expression of the goddess in *Blessed Rain* bears similarities to the Buddha's face, bringing a sense of tranquility and peace to the viewer. Equally, an ethereal energy emanates from *The Wind Blows*. The young girl in a bright white dress floats in space as if the invisible wind itself is supporting her. Was it a gust of wind that touched her hair, or was it the gold dragonfly that disturbed her? In either scenario, the girl's peaceful gaze passes beyond the scene.

The influence of Buddhist art can be seen throughout Iwasaki's work, whether in the arrangement of the elements or the use of materials in the portraits. In *Tiny Light, Tiny Night* the figure's pose in the middle of the composition, facing forward, corresponds to the depictions of Amida Buddha facing the believer, as in *Amida Coming over the Mountain* (thirteenth century, Zenrin-ji temple, Kyoto). The placement of the figure in three-quarter view in *I Actually Have a Lot to Say* and *The Story Begins* echoes the flanking position of the accompanying figures of bodhisattvas in the same Amida painting.

Iwasaki does not choose a landscape or an everyday scene as the setting for her figures. Rather, she creates a extraordinary environment between the heavenly and earthly realms, with figures set against a gold, white, or black background. The works in this exhibition have a mesmerizing effect on the viewer, who can remain magnetized by their spiritual energy. They serve as a conduit to the world of feelings that the artist herself has experienced while in the presence of her favorite Buddhist paintings and sculptures.

1 Eri Iwasaki, "Artist Statement."

2 In the discussion of *Dragon and Clouds* (early 1600s, Freer Gallery of Art), a pair of six-panel

Eri Iwasaki
Fuyuichigo, 2025
Natural mineral pigment, gofun, cinnabar on washi paper (kozo),
mounted on wood panel
35.8 x 35.8 x 1.3 in (91 x 91 x 3.2 cm)





DETAIL
Eri Iwasaki
Fuyuichigo, 2025
Natural mineral pigment, gofun, cinnabar on washi paper (koso),
mounted on wood panel
35.8 x 35.8 x 1.3 in (91 x 91 x 3.2 cm)



Eri Iwasaki
Tower, 2025
Natural mineral pigment, platinum paint, gohunon on washi paper (koko),
mounted on wood panel
45.9 x 35.8 x 1.3 in (116.7 x 91 x 3.3 cm)



DETAIL

Eri Iwasaki

Tower, 2025

Natural mineral pigment, platinum paint, gohunon on washi paper (koko),
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45.9 x 35.8 x 1.3 in (116.7 x 91 x 3.3 cm)

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