

Takako Yamaguchi

Stars, Los Angeles 15 May – 10 July

For most of the nearly five decades during which she has been active, Japanese-born Takako Yamaguchi's work has been associated with Pattern and Decoration, a United States-based movement born during the 1970s that challenged the hierarchy of art over craft within the American artworld. P&D's celebration of traditional handwork that was perceived to be feminine, and particularly of non-Western traditional craft techniques, was intended as a riposte specifically to the clinical remove of American Minimalism. And yet Yamaguchi's own relationship to both movements is complicated. Throughout her career, she has rejected the conventional distinctions between minimalist-style abstraction and figuration, sometimes oscillating between the two modes within the same painting. This artistic choice has made her challenging to categorise and may partially explain her historic underrepresentation outside her hometown of Los Angeles (itself

historically more receptive to craft traditions, most notably ceramics, and movements like Finish Fetish that revelled in the surface). Stars's new presentation of six largescale paintings on paper executed between 1998 and 2008 has already made significant progress in amplifying her visibility within the larger artworld, as evidenced by coverage of the show in national and international publications.

In contrast to the artist's 2019 exhibition, which presented spare, trompe l'oeil abstract paintings based on photographs of geometric structures, and to her 2018 show of wry 'portraits', in fact depictions of the artist's torso dressed in finely rendered fabric (both presented at as-is.la), this set of paintings hovers between abstraction and depictions of highly stylised landscape. The artist's seemingly tongue-in-cheek references to what might once have been termed Orientalism are visible in her flat renderings of pattern-work that recall

Japanese textiles, in a canny nod to the artist's biography, which critics have frequently used to categorise her work. Two untitled paintings made in 1998 and 1999 feature lotuslike flowers, as if to underscore the joke.

Intricate patterns of gold leaf are carefully applied over gradations of oil so delicately painted that they appear almost airbrushed but pointedly are not. The oil elements of these works are achieved with a single brush, often over the course of many years, lending the final paintings an obsessive quality in stark contrast to commercial airbrushing. On the surface of these stylised vistas, eddies of gold paint pool and seem to undulate. Yamaguchi suggests mountains on horizons, oceans and clouds intercut by patterns that allow these paintings to appear both flat and spatial. They sit in the interstice between the two, coyly evading our attempts to classify them while confidently holding our gaze. *Cat Kron*



Tropical Depression, 2001, oil, metal leaf on paper, 133 × 133 cm.
Courtesy the artist and Stars, Los Angeles