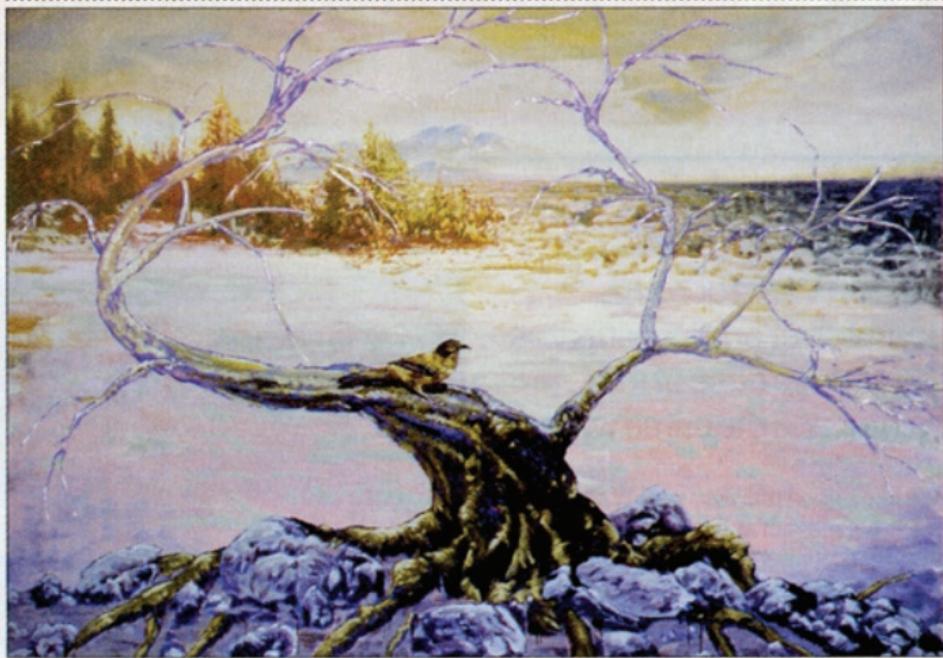


Masakatsu Kondo



'Perching Bird', oil on canvas, 2007

★★★★★

David Risley East End

Masakatsu Kondo's mythical landscapes draw on both European and Japanese influences to create a disconcerting atmosphere that both captivates and alienates the viewer. With their garish colours, the precise renderings of barren valleys, mountains and forests are reminiscent of fantasy vistas found airbrushed onto car bonnets. But on closer inspection, the dreamy sceneries – often devoid of life except for a solitary bird in the foreground – display a strange tension. Layers of pink paint drip down like thick coats of icing, juxtaposing the accurate depiction of nature with marks of deliberate painterly imperfection.

Similarly other paintings, such as the dark, small-scale 'Moth' – a naturalistic

rendering of a moth resting on a purple blossom – subvert the conventions of flower painting through the addition of a lit chandelier which looms ghostly from the black void in the background.

Disappointingly, Kondo's take on the all-too-familiar stag-in-the-forest motif turns out rather subdued, lacking the eerie attraction of the other pieces, while a painting of the night sky with shooting stars above rooftops seems merely quaint and out of place. With the bridge as both motif and metaphor for the exhibition (crossing over, transition, etc) the strength of Kondo's painting lies less in evoking a longing to 'cross into another place', as we are told, than in bridging the gap between eastern and western pictorial traditions, which at its best results in strangely arresting images.
Sandra Rehme