

'Fishing as a Mole Does – Until Stone Becomes Water –'

Akiko Ueda



Akiko Ueda, *Fishing as a Mole Does*, 2025

KOTARO NUKAGA Tennoz is pleased to present 'Fishing as a Mole Does – Until Stone Becomes Water –', a solo exhibition by Akiko Ueda, from July 26 through September 13, 2025. Born in 1983, Ueda does not approach painting simply as a means of reproduction or representation, but rather as occurrences that emerge in both ephemeral moments and extended processes of transformation. The artist gained recognition early on, receiving the Tamayo Iemura Jury Prize at the Shell Art Award Exhibition in 2009 and the Ohara Museum of Art Prize at the VOCA (Vision of Contemporary Art) Exhibition in 2010. In 2018, she studied abroad in Belgium under a fellowship from the Pola Art Foundation—an experience that proved to be a turning point in her career, as she has since expanded her practice to Belgium and China. This show features work created before, during, and after Ueda's pivotal stay in Belgium, revealing a shift in her visual language marked by intricately layered imagery that illuminates the invisible elements of time, space, and memory.

The exhibition title, 'Fishing as a Mole Does – Until Stone Becomes Water –', is a symbolic interpretation of Ueda's creative process. Like a mole digging blindly underground, she begins each work without any predetermination of what or how she will paint. Fishing—waiting quietly in hopes of capturing what cannot be seen—also serves as a metaphor for this approach. Additionally, the show's subtitle, "Until Stone Becomes Water," alludes to fluidity and transformative potential while evoking the vast scale of geological time.

Before traveling to Belgium, Ueda's work embodied an attempt to anchor the sequential nature of temporality, movement, and phenomenon within static pictorial planes. Art historian Shuji Takashina observed that the artist's originality lies in how she "does not transpose a completed story onto canvas, but rather spatializes the flow of time that allows a story to emerge."¹

During her time in Belgium, Ueda devised and implemented a number of unique protocols that allowed her to observe her own painting process more objectively. One outcome of this approach is her DÉJÀ–MAIS–VU series,² in which she paints over existing brushstrokes with the same color as the background, leaving only their outlines visible. This represents the artist's attempt to navigate between what has already been seen (déjà vu) and what remains unseen (jamais vu), treating paintings as the remnants of bygone events, as well as sites for their potential activation. The introduction of lithography³ into Ueda's artistic repertoire during this period also had a profound impact on her practice. The process of superimposing plates, combined with the geological temporality evoked by lithographic limestone, introduced new perspectives to the artist's understanding of time, matter, and transformation. The act of layering transcended mere technique

to become a conceptual methodology for expressing the fluidity and ambiguity of thought. In her recent work, Ueda expands even further upon the approach she developed in Belgium, embracing unpredictability and spontaneity while exploring the stratified structure of intangible elements like temporality, memory, contemplation, and occurrence.

The site of the exhibition “Tennoz” is also imbued with layered memories that resonate deeply with Ueda’s work. Once a sandbank in the sea, Tennoz was conceived as a defensive outpost against naval attacks during the Edo period (1603 – 1868). It became a shipyard in the Taishō era (1912 – 1926), was later converted into reclaimed land in the Shōwa era (1926 – 1989), and is now known as a hub for contemporary art. It is a site where nature and artifice, memory and oblivion, and incompleteness and transformation infinitely overlap to form what can be described as “strata of emergence.” Furthermore, the subterranean path traveled by the metaphorical mole in the show’s title could be interpreted as the layered terrain of Ueda’s time before, during, and after her stay in Belgium. While both the artist’s paintings and the land of Tennoz exist as vestiges of the past, they also function as latent spaces from which new moments may emerge. Painting and cityscape, surface and strata, and vision and recollection intersect within the gallery space, where the viewer is invited to experience the immense depth of time and the movement of becoming. ‘Fishing as a Mole Does – Until Stone Becomes Water –’ employs the medium of painting to present a renewed opportunity for us to engage with the embedded memories and unfolding future of our present environment.

1. Shuji Takashina, “Akiko Ueda: Creative Power = the Triumph of Creative Imagination,” in ARKO 2012 (Ohara Museum of Art, 2012), pp4–5.
2. DÉJÀ–MAIS–VU is a portmanteau coined by Ueda that combines the French words déjà vu (“already seen”) and jamais vu (“never seen”).
3. A printmaking technique in which an image is drawn directly on a stone or metal plate. Through chemical treatment, ink adheres only to the drawn areas, allowing for a faithful transfer of the image onto paper.

【EXHIBITION DETAILS】

Akiko Ueda

‘Fishing as a Mole Does – Until Stone Becomes Water –’

July 26 to September 13, 2025

11:30 – 18:00 (Tue – Sat)

*Closed on Sun, Mon and Public Holidays

*Summer Holidays: August 10 to August 18

Opening Reception: July 26, 16:00 – 18:00

*Akiko Ueda will be present.

Opening Event: July 26, 17:00 – 17:30

*During the reception, a performance project titled 'EN ROUTE' will be presented by Ueda and percussionist Naoto Yamagishi.

VENUE: KOTARO NUKAGA Tennoz

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