
*MIXED MEDIA*
Tabaimo

**TABAIMO**

ONE OF JAPANESE ART’S RISING STARS BRINGS HER SURREAL WORLD OF FRIGID OFFICE WORKERS AND COMMUTER CANNIBALISM TO PARIS’S FONDATION CARTIER

text SKYE SHERWIN
A BOUQUET OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS rests in the arms of a Japanese woman sitting in the corner of a train carriage. Slowly, the flowers fill the foreground, the carriage dissolves into an irky blue background and a disembodied hand snips off the blooms, which dance freely against the darkness. This sequence, from Japanese Commuter Train (2001), an animated work by the artist Tabaimo, collapses the distance between the two stereotypical poles of Japanese art—executed in a style that is strikingly reminiscent of ukiyo-e woodblock prints, her images are brought to life by an imagination raised on anime and manga cartoons. Explaining her unique fusion of art-historical past and present, Tabaimo has said that she animates her drawings because she cannot express herself in a single image; she needs hundreds. Likewise, it is not enough for her simply to project the animations onto a wall; it is necessary to screen her work in an installation that engages the viewer in a participatory rather than passive manner.

Though only thirty-one, Tabaimo through her mix of surreal beauty, social comment and an invenient attitude to cultural signifiers, has established a notable presence within the Japanese artworld. This winter she brings that presence to Europe. Her first solo show...
in France, at the Fondation Cartier in Paris, features three works that chronicle her development over the last five years: Japanese Commute Train (her first major work after graduating), Haunted House (2003) and this year's Midnight Sea. Visitors accustomed to the better known Japanese animators are in for a surprise: hers is not simply the Japan of cute, kooky, schoolgirls or manga cartoon violence with which the country's culture is often glibly associated. While Tabaimo's installations recreate familiar environments - a bathroom with a wet floor, or a house interior with mats to kneel upon and hand-painted scenery - her use of absurd, fantastical elements realised through animation nonetheless serves to make the familiar seem distinctly uncanny. Fascinated by the passive,