

ARTFORUM

E'wao Kagoshima

ALGUS GREENSPON GALLERY

E'wao Kagoshima,
Libidoll No. 1, 1985,
oil on shaped canvas,
48 x 42 x 2 1/2".



There's nothing like a giant phallus poking out of a fruit bowl to complicate a dinner party. E'wao Kagoshima's work taps into the anxieties—the social missteps and gaucheries—that haunt the nightmares of the overly refined among us. An untitled series from 1976 presents détourned *House Beautiful* tableaux rife with priapic forms sprouting from the tastefully arranged chintz. Joining this fauna are a cast

of polymorphous cartoon figures, rendered in thin washes of pastel-colored oils, who simulate fellatio or otherwise erotically commingle with the erect penises. Lounging in negligees or sometimes tucked awkwardly into the furniture, Kagoshima's little goblins spring like a dose of raw id from the conflicted psyche of interior design. Scanning the prissy Louis Quatorze sideboards and fussy damasks, one may question at what spiritual cost such compulsive perfection was achieved. Indeed, the immaculately staged layouts possess a distinct artificiality—a strangeness—that's as uncanny as the phantasms themselves.

Kagoshima came to New York from Japan in the late 1970s, acting as a satellite figure to the budding

East Village art scene. Though he exhibited sporadically throughout the 1980s, this show marks the first presentation of material from the New York phase of his career in one venue, featuring more than fifty collages, drawings, and paintings from 1976 to the present. As the diversity of work on view demonstrates, Kagoshima's talent for animating the everyday with preternatural sexual energy reaches its clearest articulation in his paintings, which recall those of British artist Richard Hamilton before him. What if your sleek new toaster was infinitely sexier than your wife, as Hamilton's classic *She*, 1958–61, suggests? Or, what if, as Kagoshima's 2008 work *Overtime (Black Fate)* overtly shows, the train engine barreling toward you assumed a leering smiley face and from its turbulent steam emerged a luscious, disembodied, lipstick-besmirched mouth? While Hamilton foregrounds the erotics of the commodity in modernity, Kagoshima's more absurdist subjects highlight the sometimes ambiguous zone between pornography and buffoonery.

Kagoshima's work operates in the precarious space of the psychedelic experience—psychotropic drugs are a reference point for his practice—and in his brand of pop surrealism, consciousness expansion is poised at the knife-edge of druggy stupefaction and childlike wonder. The volatility of this dynamic frequently devolves into a gruesome bad trip of paranoia and self-destruction. In his *Libidoll No. 1*, 1985, a shaped canvas delineates the silhouette of a broad-shouldered, breast-baring, wildly grinning woman with a lime-green bob. Her oddly diminutive hands wield a carving knife as she cleaves her head and upper torso into a twinned couple; the painting arrests her movement as she slices her sternum, paring her breasts like fruit. The grisliness of this gesture is exacerbated by the shallow relief of the canvas, which presents her halved skull schizophrenically, in both frontal and three-quarter perspectives. The single woman becomes a pair as her cycloptic heads stare at the viewer in unblinking mania. The trope of the cheerily demented doll is a common one, from Rod Serling's Talky Tina to Chucky. Kagoshima's amps up the hallucinatory horror of his sci-fi gorgon with touches of ersatz naturalism—this is perhaps the first and only (anti)heroine clad in an iridescent tweed jacket equipped with orange elbow patches. The theme of splitting and doubling can be less frightful, however. Ask the wide-eyed blond monkey smoking two cigarettes (*Monkey Smoking*, 2007): If hypnosis doesn't work, he's going on the patch. Or, as a clown-faced figure wearing a red bowler implies (he's floating through the work in which the penis appears in the fruit bowl), the nearly identical small figure emerging from his loins may be the birth of a mirror clone, red cap and all—or merely his fetchingly attired "little friend."

—Eva Díaz