

Naotaka Hiro: *Others*

30 May – 1 August 2026

Herald St presents *Others*, our second solo exhibition of works by Naotaka Hiro (b. 1972, Osaka, Japan; lives and works in Los Angeles, USA) which takes place across our premises in Bethnal Green and Bloomsbury.

Including new paintings and bronze sculpture, *Others* will continue Hiro's motivation to uncover his notion of 'unknowability'. In his uniquely corporeal approach to making, he works as both artist and subject to map the body and its psychological depths, connecting aspects of postwar Japanese body-based practices with the performance-oriented environment of Los Angeles, where he now resides. The exhibition follows prominent recent institutional exhibitions featuring Hiro's work at the National Museum of Art, Osaka, and Mori Art Museum, Tokyo (both 2025); Whitney Museum of American Art, and MoMA, New York (both 2024) and precedes his participation in the Toronto Biennial of Art, this autumn.

Naotaka Hiro's practice is centrally concerned with the 'unknown' – the parts of the body he cannot see and therefore cannot fully confirm. As he says, the 'body is fully perceivable only through mediated forms – mirrors, cameras, recordings, shadows, or traces'. When Hiro moved from Japan to the United States to become a filmmaker, he would film himself with a camera on a tripod, assuming the role of both actor and director – a duality that held huge influence in his art-making. 'It comes from a simple dilemma. I cannot directly see my own body with my own eyes,' he says. 'There's an anxiety in this condition but also a kind of wonder, so the artwork is a way to approach the gap – which I call the unknown.' Beginning by photographing and filming himself, Hiro's practice later shifted to be more physical: casting his body, rubbing himself against unstretched canvas, and throwing himself onto wood panel to leave impact traces.

Hiro's painting practice is grounded in drawing, through which he originally traced his body and bodily movements, sometimes at scales of up to six feet. These works naturally progressed to more durable canvases, which he would wrap around himself while painting, and later to hard wooden boards, through which he became able to push his body more directly against the surface from both above and below. 'If canvas is like a full-body scanner, a wood board is like a flatbed scanner,' he says. Influenced by his original interest in film, Hiro also makes storyboard diagrams that visually communicate the movements central to his work. Some canvases, such as *Crossing, Volume 1* and *Crossing, Volume 2* (both 2026), are perforated with grommets that allow rope to weave in and out of them, enabling Hiro to create restrictive three-dimensional structures that he pulls himself into and out of while applying oil stick and spraying dye.

Hiro's paintings are produced in intense two-hour timed periods that he names 'sessions,' which take place over numerous consecutive days. 'I like to have all these kinds of rules and limitations, making obstacles intentionally so I can react to the material like it's fresh,' he says. 'I have tons of rules, you know, but then I always break the rules like in sports or games.' Although the process operates intuitively, colours, motifs and forms recur throughout the works, appearing simultaneously as 'graphics, maps, diagrams or anatomical indexing systems,' with certain colours corresponding to particular movement across the surface, stillness, or sustained physical contact. Describing works like *Untitled (Lifted)* and *Untitled (Dome)* (both 2026), Hiro observes that 'over time, scale-like patterns emerge across the surface, forming a skin-like structure that records both protection and exposure' as well as leaf-like forms but 'rather than representing natural imagery, they often emerge from concentrated points of bodily pressure and function almost like punctuation within the larger surface.' The exhibition also includes a stainless steel sculpture, *Lump 1* (2026), made by reconfiguring a previous wax-cast body mold that has been compressed, folded, and rearranged into a configuration that would be impossible for a living body to sustain, shifting from a 'document of bodily presence toward a structure shaped through intervention, distortion, and reconstruction.'

About his newest body of work, Hiro observes: 'The exhibition continues my exploration of shifting position – actor/director, inside/outside, subjective/objective, immersion/observation. Across the wood panels, canvases, and sculptures, multiple perspectives and orientations coexist within a single body of work. Rather than resolving these contradictions into a stable whole, the works preserve the tension between them. Through repetition, restriction, movement, and revision, the exhibition constructs a space where distinctions remain unstable and several positions can exist simultaneously.'

– Text by Laurie Barron