

## **JAMES HARRIS GALLERY**

Akio Takamori

*Ground*

February 21 – March 30

Opening Reception:

Thursday, February 21

6 – 8pm

James Harris Gallery is pleased to announce *Ground*, an exhibition of new work by Akio Takamori. Marking the artist's third solo exhibition at the gallery, featured works include large-scale ceramic sculptures and one woodblock print. A seminal figure working in the ceramic arts for more than twenty-five years, Takamori continues to explore themes of cultural identity by engaging the history of Eastern and Western aesthetics. Bold form and color defines this body of work, which is highly expressive of human emotion and sensuality.

Five stoneware "Sleeping Women" greet the viewer in the gallery's main room, situated on an elongated pedestal with their backs to the audience. Creating the illusion of a mountainous landscape, the forms hearken to mannerist hyperbole, suggesting the curvy backside of iconic forms such as Ingres' "La Grande Odalisque" (1814) or the exaggerated features of Mesopotamian stone sculpture. This arrangement of the Sleeping Women serves to emphasize their phenomenological presence and give the impression that the onlooker may be interrupting a private psychological moment. While their eyes remain open and far away in thought, the reposed sculptures' expressions are nonetheless the laconic gazes of sleeping figures. With arms and legs pulled close to their bodies, they appear both physically and psychologically inward.

Awash in color, the Sleeping Women are characterized by their voluptuous forms, vivid hues and elegant painterliness. Takamori's signature underglaze sensually stains their hair, cheeks and lips in bright red and electric blue. His painted sculptures are vibrant cultural landscapes that invoke the open brushstroke and expressionist colorations of Matisse, the flattened silhouettes and non-realist palette of the 20th century avant-garde, as well as a rich tradition of the ceramic arts. This intense coloration represents a shift in Takamori's work.

The small gallery features yet another life sized sculpture, again facing towards the back wall. Donning a striped dress, a small girl squats with her hands folded in front. The child-like figure appears to be absorbed in a solitary game with her bright orange hair in a low bun and a soft bow tied at the back of her dress. Takamori's brushwork suggests the hard, low-relief repetitive lines found in classical sculpture of both Eastern and Western traditions with the folded drapery of her garment. Similar to the Sleeping Women, the girl's expression remains stoic and thoughtful, yet she retains an air of playful sweetness, her underpants naively showing between her knees.