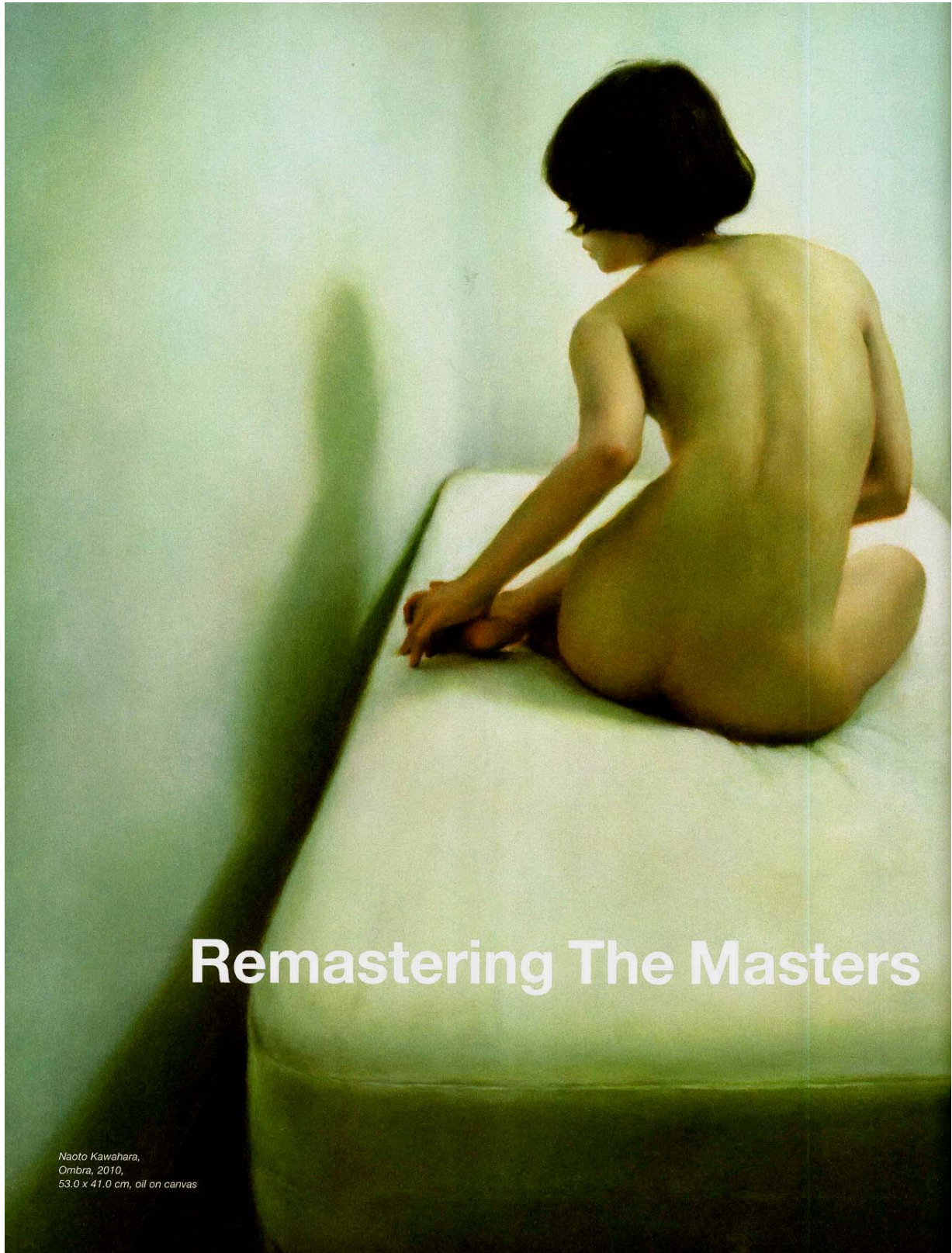


Gnyp Marta, 'Japanese painter Naoto Kawahara reinterprets Western art'. ZOO Magazine, nr.29, 2010-2011, p.82-85.



Remastering The Masters

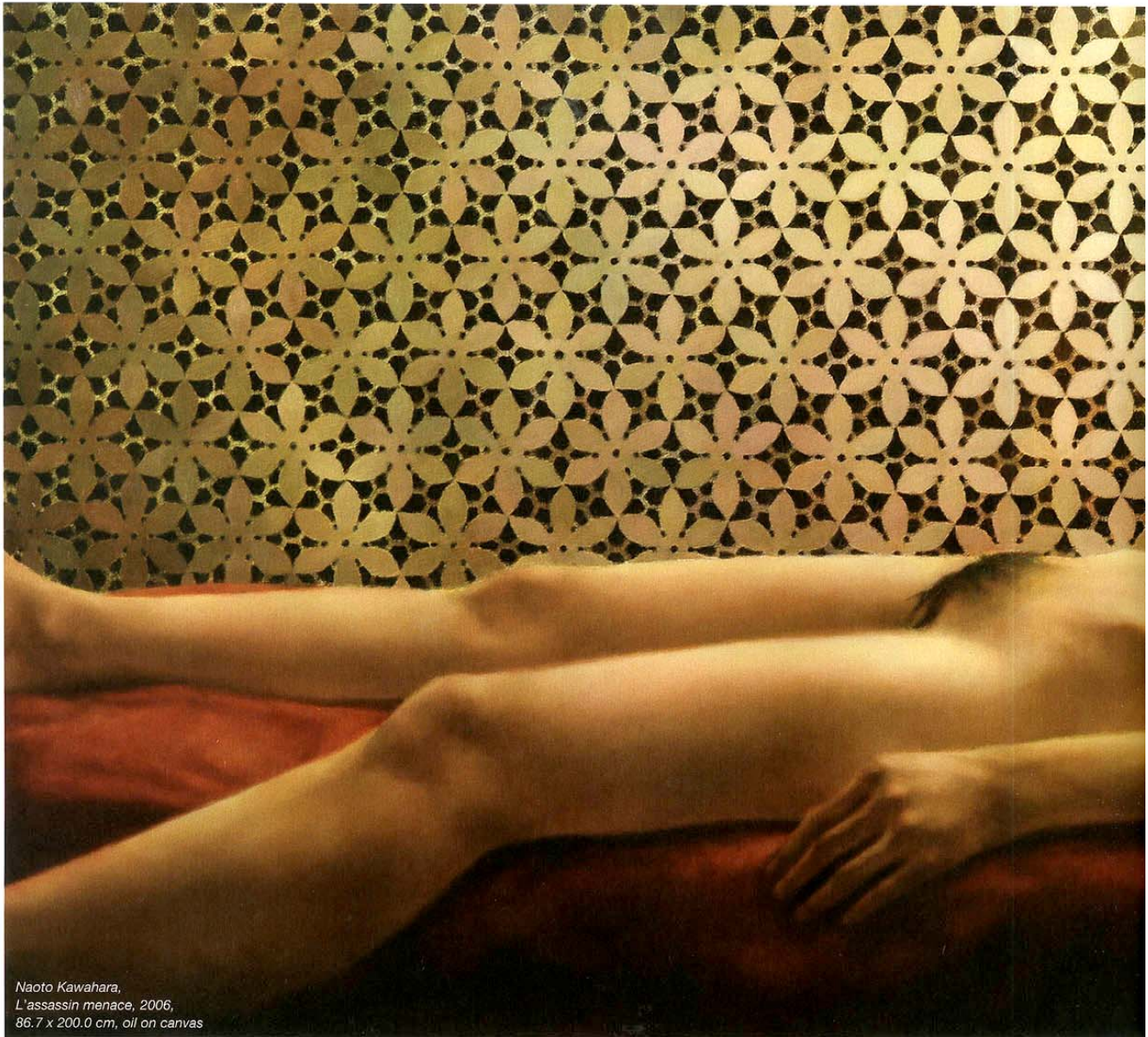
Naoto Kawahara,
Ombra, 2010,
53.0 x 41.0 cm, oil on canvas



Naoto Kawahara,
Suicide of Lucretia, 2007,
40,0 x 26,3 cm, oil on canvas

Japanese painter Naoto Kawahara reinterprets Western art

by Marta Gnyp/photography Peter Cox



Naoto Kawahara,
L'assassin menace, 2006,
86.7 x 200.0 cm, oil on canvas

Naoto Kawahara's painted women seduce the viewer with their beautiful, soft-skinned young bodies and absent-minded faces. His highly sophisticated formal language goes beyond its many hidden references to art history to reveal a rich fantasy full of strong but subtle erotic undertones. At first glance, Kawahara's paintings appear seeped in mystery and decadence.

The 39-year-old painter was educated

in industrial design, but from childhood, he was exploring painting and other artistic techniques. During Kawahara's four years in Italy, where he studied at the Lorenzo de Medici Institute in Florence, he abandoned graphic design to embrace Western painting and its universal potential. His Japanese models refer sometimes to the classical works of Degas, and sometimes to Balthus, Dürer, Magritte, Van Gogh, Munch and other

masters of historical Western art.

"I reinterpret 'painting as painting' by mentally re-imagining and re-picturing the masterworks," says Kawahara. "I search for the model, photograph it in the appropriate setting, and embark on the process of painting. By translating existing paintings, I try to create another image of them. I find it particularly satisfying if my works are not regarded as mere copies."



The combination of Japanese and Western imagery can be disturbing, or at least misleading for the viewer who views the images within the context of his own culture. In the Japanese tradition, for example, the image of a naked woman was very common because of the country's popular bath culture. At the same time, the European excitement for the nude, as shown in the visual language of the 18th and 19th centuries, was not easy

to understand in Japan. The expression of emotion—an evident and omnipresent notion in Western art—also seemed and still seems inconceivable in Japan. From this standpoint, the works created by Kawahara play with our cultural imprints, our misunderstandings and false interpretations, and with our culture-specific concepts of beauty.

Kawahara's ambition to stay timeless and universal forces him to make precise choices

in his subject matter and to apply impeccable painting techniques. This is why he produces no more than 15 paintings a year.

Naoto Kawahara is represented by Zeno X Gallery in Antwerp, Belgium.

www.zeno-x.com