

# sculpture

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Hiroosuke Yabe, installation view of "Faithful Dog Man," 2018. Photo: Courtesy the artist and Cindy Rucker Gallery

# Hiroosuke Yabe

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New York

Cindy Rucker Gallery

Two scratchy, roughly hewn little figures emerge from uneven strips of wood mounted vertically on the wall: a man about four inches tall and a tiny girl in a dress, about an inch and a half high.

A leering monster face sits on a low pedestal nearby, its eyes a bunch of drilled-out holes and the rest of its features crudely chopped out, leaving a plethora of scars.

Groups of endearing, goofy figurines loaf around on plinths and platforms of various heights. A literally ass-backwards guy with an upside-down head stands in front of a crouching fellow attached to four wheels—whether they are extensions of his hands and feet is for the viewer to decide. Other creatures are less like people, with and without bodies between their heads and legs (like SpongeBob or the anthropomorphic pieces of candy in M&M’s ads). Though some share animal and human traits, they all have human-looking faces like the Sphinx. One group of seven certainly forms a pride of silly little lions. Most of these sculptures take the form of individual characters, but a few consist of several figures lumped together, carved from a single chunk of wood. The largest work stands several feet tall, like a wacky miniature totem pole of stacked beasts and figures bearing cute-scary countenances.

The more than 100 carved sculptures featured in “Faithful Dog Man,” Hirosuke Yabe’s first solo exhibition in the U.S., may look a bit like folk art—but humor betrays the underlying sophistication. Yabe, who resides in Kanagawa, Japan, holds a BFA in sculpture from Tokyo Zokei University. He achieves the deliberately rough appearance of his work with just a few short chops of a *nata*, a traditional hatchet. This hidden control and accuracy (sometimes accompanied by hand and electric chisels, saws, and drills) transforms mostly found scraps of Japanese elm into a menagerie of stylized human and humanoid expression. Yabe cites Eduardo Chillida, Richard Serra, Mono-ha, and African masks among his early influences. His eclectic interests have resulted in a synthesis in which abstracted formal geometry is infused with spirit to address the universality of the human experience. For Yabe, who considers the 2011 Japan earthquake and tsunami as evidence of a breakdown in the ideals of modernity, these foolish, sweet, and sometimes slightly menacing creatures are all metaphorical answers to the question of what it means to be human.