

Snipping Apart Dollar Bills, for Art's Sake

By Hillary Moss
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The artist Yuken Teruya deals in Monopoly money and cold, hard cash. From left: a studio shot and “Untitled (Money Tree 1),” 2015-16.

The artist Yuken Teruya has sliced and diced Prada shopping bags, McDonald’s sacks, toilet-paper rolls and the front page of The New York Times into lush landscapes; for his upcoming solo exhibition at Pippy Houldsworth Gallery in London, he adds to this running list. Teruya took his X-Acto knives to vintage Monopoly boards, currency and cards, leaves that he collected in autumn and rolled-up wads of American dollar bills, citing an interest in the intersection of nature and value, “in all of its abstract levels.”



“Untitled,” 2015-16

He discusses the (real) cash as he would any material. “When making my money trees, I superimpose a picture of a branch onto the surface of the dollar where I want to cut, using the original shape as a guide whilst working,” the Okinawa, Japan-born, now Manhattan-based Teruya explains by email. “Leaving the base of the branch connected to the tube, I cut out the leaves in intricate detail, allowing the branch to unfurl and hang out from the trunk-like center.” Transforming the Monopoly boards proved more difficult. “I wanted to keep the material as untouched as possible due to its symbolic nature and what people project into playing it — the dreams you aspire towards through the game,” he says. “Despite its economic premise, it is connected to warm memories of family gatherings.”

In any case, Teruya hopes to give life back to the different forms of paper that he uses. “In a way, this talks about issues dealing with the environment and consumerism,” he says. “My role is to create a stage for people to see that nature still exists in everyday, discarded objects and to instill a moment of calm in an imbalanced, money-driven society.”