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Carol Vogel

Cartoons Are Invading The Upper East Side

The cutesy yet devilish cartoon characters created by the Japanese neo-Pop artist Yoshitomo Nara will soon be familiar sights on the Upper East Side landscape. On Aug. 29 a pair of whimsical, 12-foot-high fiberglass dogs will stand guard like 21st-century Komainu, those mythical lionlike statues commonly placed at the entrance to Japanese shrines to ward off evil spirits.

Organized by the nonprofit Art Production Fund, which presents art around the city, the outdoor installations — one across from the entrance to the Asia Society at 725 Park Avenue, at 70th Street, and the other at 67th Street and Park Avenue just in front of the Park Avenue Armory — will give New Yorkers a hint of a much larger initiative. The Asia Society is presenting a major retrospective of the artist's work, "Yoshitomo Nara: Nobody's Fool," from Sept. 9 through Jan. 2. It will be the first time the entire museum will be filled with the work of just one artist and will include more than 100 works — drawings, paintings, sculptures, record album covers and large installations — that span the 50-year-old Mr. Nara's career.

But before the retrospective opens, the public will have a chance to see him in action. For three hours daily from Aug. 23 through 27, Mr. Nara will stage his version of an artist's studio inside the cavernous Drill Hall of the Park Avenue Armory. Visitors can watch him and Hideki Toyoshima, his longtime collaborator on installation designs and a founding member of the Japanese design collective "graf," as they create special structures that resemble an artist's studio, a stage and a carnival tent. And with the help of assistants from Japan — working as a team with the artists called YNG — the two will make new drawings and a large-scale billboard painting. Both the structures and the artworks will eventually be moved to the Asia Society as part of the retrospective.

And since the museum is hoping for a particularly young audience, it has also teamed up with students from Hunter College, which is nearby, who will help at the armory and blog about the project on the museum's Web site. The Asia Society is also developing a special iPhone app for the show that will include exhibition highlights; images from the show linked to related music clips; photographs of past installations in various cities; and an English trans-



ANDREA ROJAS/ART PRODUCTION FUND

A rendering of "White Ghost" by Yoshitomo Nara on Park Avenue. The artist will be at the Park Avenue Armory.

lation of tweets from narabot, the artist's Twitter name.