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Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University
Announces Summer 2026 Exhibition
Masako Miki: Shapeshifters, Sprites, and Spirits

*On view May 29 – August 15, 2026, Masako Miki's first solo show
in Texas brings folklore into a present-day focus*



April 14, 2026 (Houston, Texas) — The Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University announces that its summer 2026 exhibition will feature the work of Masako Miki (b. 1973, Osaka, Japan). The artist’s first solo show in Texas, this site-specific, sculptural installation is populated with spirits, shapeshifters, and other changelings animated by a longing for recognition and connection amid a rapidly changing world. Rendered through Miki’s vibrant visual language in a style informed by twentieth-century art historical movements, including European Surrealism and Japanese manga, this exhibition interprets themes from Japanese folklore and brings them into relation with the present, reflecting the artist’s interest in storytelling and myth as forces that shape how the world is understood.

“The empathetic throughline of Miki’s work draws visitors together into a space that is both entirely original and deeply familiar,” said Alison Weaver, co-curator and Suzanne Deal Booth Executive Director for the Moody Center for the Arts. “Amid global conflict and widening cultural divides, in the year following the eightieth anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, this exhibition offers a bridge across time and tradition to demonstrate how shared narratives can foster connections across seemingly insurmountable differences.”

Central to Miki’s practice, and to the folkloric traditions from which it draws, is the belief that all beings and things contain a spirit. Specifically, the influence of Shinto animism informs Miki’s sculptures of everyday objects and natural elements—gourds, dolls, trees, and others—that assume human scale and a vivid sense of character. Constructed from felt layered over wood armatures, Miki’s creatures form abstract silhouettes that feel both natural and fantastical.

Questions that inform Miki’s approach include: Why do some stories live on for generations while others are forgotten? And how do strangers relate to one another despite cultural and political divides? According to the artist, “[These] mythologies have the potential to counter past narratives such as the legacy of World War II in Japan and the history of slavery in the United States. My characters are ordinary but have extraordinary powers; they are secular but are attuned to sacred traditions. As a collective, they advocate for both individual and collective agency, and the importance of stories as unifying systems in today’s complex world.”

This exhibition is curated by Associate Curator Claudia Mattos with Suzanne Deal Booth Executive Director Alison Weaver.

Masako Miki: Shapeshifters, Sprites, and Spirits is made possible by the City of Houston through the Houston Arts Alliance, the Moody Center for the Arts Excellence Fund, the H. Russell Pitman Fund for the Moody Center for the Arts, the Tamara de Kuffner Fund, the Kilgore Endowment Fund, and the Sewell Endowment.

More About the Exhibition



Masako Miki, *Blissful One-Eyed Spirit*, Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman. Photo: Steve Ferrara

Bringing mythic and mundane worlds into contact, Masako Miki focuses her Moody presentation on *yōkai*—supernatural entities taking the form of beings, objects, and apparitions—particularly those that appear in the *Night Parade of One Hundred Demons (Hyakki Yagyō)*, a legend dating to medieval Japan. In this tale, discarded household objects, from a monk’s string of prayer beads to abandoned umbrellas, come to life and gather in an unruly procession, making themselves known to a world that has failed to recognize their presence.

“By attuning viewers to forms of life that often go overlooked, Miki raises questions about belonging, resilience, and who—or what—has been cast aside or forgotten,” said Claudia Mattos, co-curator and Associate Curator for the Moody Center for the Arts. “Mindfully arranged in our gallery, each grouping suggests companionship, conspiracy, or collectivity, allowing sculptures to assert a presence in relation to the space, the viewer, and one another.”

In tandem with the exhibition, the Moody will screen episodes of *GeGeGe no Kitarō*, a Japanese animated series based on a manga created in 1960 by artist Shigeru Mizuki (1922–2015), a World War II veteran whose work was shaped by his experiences of war. Credited with reviving interest in Japanese *yōkai* in twentieth-century popular culture, the story follows a childlike *yōkai* named Kitarō who moves between human and supernatural realms and intervenes when conflict arises between them. The episodes were influential to Miki’s development growing up, and their contemporary reimagining of folklore resonates with themes that shape her practice today.

Masako Miki: Shapeshifters, Sprites, and Spirits invites visitors to imagine how traditional stories can speak to contemporary sociopolitical realities. The exhibition makes the case that expressions of joy and the human imagination are radical acts with the potential to disrupt prevailing cultural discourse to imagine a more compassionate, harmonious, humane future.



Masako Miki, *Rising Pink Prayer Beads*, Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman. Photo: Phillip Maisel

About the Artist



Masako Miki. Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman. Photo: Francis Baker.

Masako Miki (b. 1973, Osaka, Japan) holds an MFA from San José State University, CA, and a BFA from Notre Dame de Namur University, Belmont, CA. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art, San Francisco; de Young Museum, San Francisco; Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston; Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, CA; ICA San José, CA; and KMAC Contemporary Art Museum, Louisville, KY. Her work is in the permanent collections of SFMOMA; BAMPFA; the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, CA; Colección SOLO, Madrid; Byrd Hoffman Water Mill Foundation, New York; and Tweed Museum of Art, Duluth, MN, among others. Miki lives and works in Berkeley, CA.

Special Programming



Masako Miki, *Pine Tree from Ancient Time*, Courtesy of the artist and Jessica Silverman. Photo: Steve Ferrara

All events are free and open to the public.

[Masako Miki: Shapeshifters, Sprites, and Spirits Opening Reception](#)

Friday, May 29, 2026 | 6 – 8 pm

Be the first to experience the exhibition, enjoy beverages, and hear from the curators and the artist

[ArtLab: Felted Charms](#)

Every Saturday in June, 1- 4 pm | June 6, 13, 20, and 27

Inspired by Masako Miki's shapeshifting sculptures, explore needle felting techniques under the guidance of teaching artist Lucy Carranza. All supplies are included, and guests will take home their own hand-felted charm.

[Wellness at the Moody](#)

Fridays in June at 12 - 1 pm | June 5, 12, and 26

Find relaxation during the Moody's Wellness Series. Surrounded by artwork, guests can participate in low-impact mindfulness and yoga sessions guided by staff from Rice University's Gibbs Recreation Center.

[Pride Happy Hour](#)

Thursday, June 11, 5 - 7:30

Celebrate Pride at the Moody with singer/pianist Ben Chavez with DJ Rosez. Enjoy free access to the current exhibition and complimentary drinks at this annual community event.

[Summer Jam 2026](#)

Saturday, July 18, 12 pm - 5 pm

Enjoy an indoor farmers market and an outdoor food hall; art in the galleries and art-making in our classrooms. Face painting, a live DJ, and drinks from Saint Arnold's Brewery make this summertime activation of the Moody building fun for all ages.

About the Moody Center for the Arts

Inaugurated in February 2017, the Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University is a state-of-the-art, non-collecting institution dedicated to transdisciplinary collaboration among the arts, sciences, and humanities. The 50,000-square-foot facility, designed by acclaimed Los Angeles-based architect Michael Maltzan, serves as an experimental platform for creating and presenting works in all disciplines, a flexible teaching space to encourage new modes of making, and a forum for creative partnerships with visiting national and international artists. The Moody is free and open to the public year-round.

Website: moody.rice.edu

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6100 Main Street, MS-480, Houston, TX 77005

(University Entrance 8, at University Boulevard and Stockton Street)

Hours & Admission

Exhibition spaces are open to the public and free of charge Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and closed Sundays, Mondays, and holidays. Events and programs are open to the public. For schedule, registration links, and prices as applicable, visit moody.rice.edu.

Directions & Parking

The Moody Center for the Arts is located on the campus of Rice University and is best reached by using Campus Entrance 8 at the intersection of University Boulevard and Stockton Street. As you enter campus, the building is on the right, just past the Media Center. There is a dedicated parking lot adjacent to the building. Payment for the Moody Lot is by credit card only.

For campus maps, visit www.rice.edu/maps.

About Rice University

Located on a 300-acre forested campus in Houston, Rice University is consistently ranked among the nation's top 20 universities by U.S. News & World Report. Rice has highly respected schools of Architecture, Business, Continuing Studies, Engineering, Humanities, Music, Natural Sciences and Social Sciences, and is home to the Baker Institute for Public Policy. With 3,879 undergraduates and 2,861 graduate students, Rice's undergraduate student-to-faculty ratio is 6-to-1. Its residential college system builds close-knit communities and lifelong friendships, just one reason why Rice is ranked No. 1 for quality of life and for lots of race/class interaction and No. 2 for happiest students by the Princeton Review. Rice is also rated as the best value among private universities by Kiplinger's Personal Finance.

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Moody Center for the Arts

Rice University

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