



Silas Inoue

By: **Brainard Carey** November 11, 2022



Silas Inoue was born in 1981 and graduated from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark in 2010. He currently lives and works in Copenhagen. Inoue’s work has been widely exhibited internationally; recent exhibitions include; [Barbe à Papa, Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux, France](#); [Night Bloom Central, Ulterior Gallery, New York, NY](#) (2022, solo); [Minimalism-Maximalism-Mechanissmmm, Art Sonje Center, Seoul, South Korea and Kunsthall Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark](#) (2022); [Naturen Taler #1, Sorø Kunstmuseum, Sorø, Denmark](#) (2021); [eat & becÔme, Augustiana Kunsthall, Augustiana, Denmark](#) (2020, solo); and [Altering, Lothringer 13, Munich, Germany](#) (2019). Many notable collections include his artwork, such as: Danish Arts Foundation, Bornholm Art Museum, Noma, and Horsens Kunstmuseum, where his first museum solo exhibition is

scheduled to open in 2023.



*Silas Inoue Future Friture-Turritopsis Dohrnii, 2022 Sugar, silicon and cooking oil in acrylic aquarium on concrete plinth 42 1/8 x 13 x 13 in (107 x 33 x 33 cm)
Photo Credit: Jason Mandella
Courtesy of Ulterior Gallery, New York*



*Silas Inoue Infrastructure, 2022 Acrylic cover, wood, silicon, plastic, mold, and bronze respiratory system 25 1/4 x 26 x 9 1/4 in (64.1 x 66 x 23.5 cm) Photo Credit: Jason Mandella
Courtesy of Ulterior Gallery, New York*



*Silas Inoue Mesh, 2022 Graphite and watercolor on paper 35 x 37 5/8 in (88.9 x 95.6 cm) 41 x 44 x 2 1/2 in (104.1 x 111.8 x 6.4 cm)
Framed Photo Credit: Jason Mandella
Courtesy of Ulterior Gallery, New York*

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This transcription is edited for clarity.

Intro: You're listening to Yale Radio WYBC. This is Brainard Carey with the lives of the artist, architects, curators, and more.

Brainard Carey: Today on our show, I'm talking with Silas Inoue. Silas, thank you so much for being with me today.

Silas Inoue: Thanks so much for inviting me to this. I look forward to it.

BC: Silas, we're talking about your show, or we are about to talk about your show called *Night Bloom Central* at Ulterior Gallery. It's a wonderful show and very unusual in terms of the materials you use. But to begin with, I want to go through several of the works. Can we talk about the title of it? Because the title of it is kind of evocative and even poetic. *Night Bloom Central*. Why that title?

SI: I was thinking that the title points towards my work with mold organisms because I work with living mold organisms. Like any other mushrooms, they have the ability to grow without sunlight. They don't do photosynthesis, so their ability to grow in darkness is one thing I was hoping this title could hint to. But also this central part, night bloom central, I was thinking of giving it a sci-fi vibe, like some unknown train station, or some unknown place that could also be the name of a city or something; This kind of unknown thing which I was hoping to give with that vibe.

BC: I like that. That makes sense. And so to jump right into some of the works because they're all such a variety of materials. But to go right into one of the ones that I was drawn to immediately, which is quite different than the rest, to begin with. It was called *Future Friture-Turritopsis Dohrnii*, and I'm probably mispronouncing that, but this was a sculpture that I'm not sure exactly what's in it. But it looks something like a mushroom, something like a jellyfish, something that's living. Is that correct?

SI: That's very correct. It's supposed to be a jellyfish. It's called *Future Friture*, and then *Turritopsis Dohrnii*, which is the Latin name of the small jellyfish living in the Japanese sea and Mediterranean. They're super small jellyfish. They're only half a centimeter, but they have this special ability to regenerate themselves. It happens at a certain age and then it turns into this small polyp again, before it starts growing again and then turns into a polyp again. This continuous circle is why it's perceived as immortal, which is also why there is scientific interest in this regeneration ability. The work portrays this jellyfish in a large version, but it's made out of sugar, floating in cooking oil, which is very much the opposite of eternal eternity. The work is about eternal life since this immortal jellyfish is portrayed, but sugar and oil are the cause of too much consumption. It will cause not-so-healthy things to happen. This opposition between the craving we have for immortality since the earliest religion to now with the possibilities of life. Like expanding life but on the other hand, the sugar and oil are very much the opposite.

BC: That's so interesting! Talk a little more about that because the image here, there are images here so that listeners can look at this. The sugar that you are talking about, this looks like a jellyfish in a vitrine. There's the huge head of the jellyfish and the threads. This is made through, when we talk about sugar, we imagine that it's dissolved, that it's, you know, in a pile, but this is cast sugar. What does it mean exactly? Because it holds its form, is that correct? It's not going to thaw?

SI: Oh, yeah! True. So it's made the same way you make hard candy. That's actually the same way this was made. So, it's more of a sculpture, underneath the sugar, there is this plastic cap, but a lot of sugar is put on top of that with hard candy process. It keeps the shape, but also, the oil preserves the sugar. Normally if you have some hard candy, it will draw down moisture from the air, and it will be soft and disappear during time. But here, the oil actually preserves the sugar.

BC: That's fascinating. I love that too. To talk about another one, there is one that seems to be untitled or it's got a period coma, which I would love to talk about. But it's mold on oak panel that's sealed in an acrylic box frame.

SI: Right.

BC: That one looks like an abstract drawing, really, but of course, it's something else. It's something living. You're kind of co-creating with mold, in a sense, right? I would love to know, well first about, is the title of that period, what is the title of that?

SI: The title of that is ". ." it's a numbering system. It's a different way of providing the works with numbers where there are more of these to come because it is a series. They will extend so they become many dots. The more works produced, the more dots will be put on if that makes sense.

BC: This is your own kind of classification system, in a sense, right? I mean, why that language, like the one we just spoke about, *Future Fricture* that, has a title, but this is something else? There's other works in there that are mold on panel that have a similar kind of system that's yours. Is classification correct? It's your own system of numbering or titling; is that correct?

SI: I was thinking it's my own because also the mold works look a little bit like dots, it can also be like raindrops or whatever. So, it's more like a visceral numbering system than if it was, say, letters or numbers. That's the reason.

BC: So, let's talk about that piece. I mean, there's two of those that I remember from the show that were mold on panel that are sealed in a box frame. You know, I mean, at once, especially in a post-pandemic environment, a whole lot of mold growing in a frame looks dangerous. Right? It looks like something that could potentially hurt me if it wasn't sealed. Can you talk a little about that because it has at once a kind of process that's happening here, which is ongoing, right? It keeps growing and changing, I imagine. But also it must be sealed, right? Is that correct?

SI: Yes, it's sealed. On the backside of these works, there's this small hole drilled into it, and then there's a filter. When you work with molds, or you have to clean up moldy places; there's this special mask for that. It's just this filter from the mask put on the backside of the work. So, it prevents spores and microorganisms from coming out, but also it brings in air to the work because the organisms need air to live. They need air and moisture, and heat, not too much cold. But once I feel like the work looks like it's in its peak of fungal bloom, I seal it off on the backside, remove the filter, and then the organisms will die. It will be a little more brown and gray. Then the development will kind of stop, but it's hard to say because sometimes it changes further even though I've killed the organisms. Some anaerobic species, or I don't know, some species, are living a little off the leftover air still inside. I don't know. I'm not sure about it, but I've just experienced this.

BC: And so you know this will continue to grow for how long now that it is sealed, but it does; air does come into it, but not moisture, correct? Or is moisture coming in? Can it continue to live for a year?

SI: I've been working with this series for seven years now, and so I've experienced through time that it will eventually die. It will, but it depends when. Sometimes it takes one, two, or three years. Other times, it takes a lot shorter. It's also about the conditions, how much moisture is inside the work or how dry it is, so there are many different factors. How warm it is at the place, that's probably what determines how long time it will take.

BC: So that is so interesting, and in terms of the kind of being owned and cared for when a collector buys one of these, they're aware that it's going to keep changing over time to some extent. A little bit. And is there a special kind of care they have to do in order to not to destroy the work? Or to allow it to exist in the way you want it to exist?

SI: No, the whole intention behind this work, in fact, the works, was actually to give up the human-like need to control everything. To just let nature do the work that's the main part. So it's very coincidental what expression comes out and what the expression will be later on. Even though I seal it off at some point, there is a little bit of human control; of course, the concept of the work is very much to leave it alone. Let it do its thing and develop. For example, it doesn't like minus °C, or sunlight, things like that, the organisms don't like that. In the means of preserving it, especially putting it outside in the cold is not good for it. But that's the same for other works as well, I guess.

BC: Yeah, I love how you're working in this idea. There's other work that you've done that's creating other materials and it

seems to have even a greater involvement with a number of these things. The work *Infrastructure* is also having an acrylic cover but in this one you're using wood, concrete, plastic, there is also mold in there, but something you call the bronze respiratory system. Can you tell me a little bit about this? We're talking about *Infrastructure*.

SI: Definitely. First, I want to say something about the other work, this one we just talked about, the flat mold painting. It was the first work I came up with, and *Infrastructure* is a development that came up afterward. First, when I started working with mold, was because it was more related to climate change. I had this flooding in my studio, and I got some works destroyed. After that, I had some mold on my work, and I came up with this idea of the works. Later on, I discovered how amazing they are, like the biological properties of mold organisms. The *Infrastructure* work is more of an elaboration on the properties of mold. So, I make these small structures, these structures inside made of wood and also things I collect from the streets, and things I have in my studio, just many different things assembled together. Then I pour on yogurt, seal it off again, and then when the mold starts growing, it creates millions of spores inside the work. If you seal this off, you can imagine it being like a small city where all these millions of spores compete for food, space, and resources. That's why the work is called *Infrastructure* - also because the mold organisms collaborate. They're the same species and have this complex interaction with each other. This bronze figure's respiratory system is actually an elaboration of the one behind the other works, where I give it a sculptural shape to mimic some animal that the organisms breathe through. Same way, we know that the animal world is connected, that organisms are connected in ecosystems, and that was my thought about it.

BC: Yeah, that's so interesting and really beautiful way of working with this kind of variety of elements. Yet in a very consistent way and also in a way that's collaborative, right? I want to talk about one more work called *Mesh* which is in a way much different from the rest. I know it has a strong relationship, but this is graphite on paper, pencil on paper, right? It has, it also looks like an enormously complex world. The title of the show it feels like it's something from science fiction or that it is somehow about other worlds growing in different ways. But it's a beautiful image. It feels you can move into it, and it has this tremendous amount of space and this enormous amount of activity. Can you tell me a little bit about this one?

SI: This portrays a small figure which is repeated a lot. The figure is inspired by the chrysalis state, where a larva becomes a butterfly, to symbolize the transition from one state to another. So it's this shape that is repeated both in the thing hanging from the leaves and the dew drops duplicated all over the drawing. This whole transition idea was also a metaphor for our humanness. Where we are standing now. We are transitioning; on the one end, technology is accelerating, and on the other, we have a climate crisis. It's bringing different perspectives on how our species might change. The leaves are connected through all these branches; it's also this idea of connectedness, how we connect through ecosystems, but also through technology like the internet. So, it's this imagery that point in different directions. But it's very much about connectedness and post-humanism.

BC: Thank you so much. That's so fascinating and it's such a beautiful and enigmatic show to see; listeners can review now online. I want to ask you one more question that's off-topic before we go. Which is what are you reading at the moment?

SI: Right now, I am reading *The Ministry for the Future* by Robinson; it's an amazing book. It's fiction about the future of climate change but also politics, what's going to be done to prevent things. It's fiction but also very optimistic. Both optimistic and dark.

BC: Silas, I want to thank you for talking with me today. It's been a pleasure, and thank you for making this beautiful work. Congratulations on the show.

SI: Thanks so much. It's been great.

Outro: You're listening to Yale Radio WYBC. This is Brainard Carey with the lives of the artist, architects, curators, and more.

Carey, Brainard, et al. "Silas Inoue." *Interviews from Yale University Radio WYBCX*, 11 Nov. 2022,
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