

Kunie Sugiura

Overview

Kunié Sugiura

(Born 1942, Nagoya, Japan. Lives and works in New York, NY)

In a practice spanning over fifty years, Kunié Sugiura has negotiated between painting and photography, discovering and expanding through continual experimentation. At Nonaka-Hill, the artist's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, Sugiura presents hand-painted photo-canvases from her current *Minerals series* interspersed with her earliest experimental *Cko series* photographs from 1966-67, and a 1994 photogram/sculpture installation dedicated to her beloved pet catfish, Namu.

After realizing the limited prospects for an art career in 1960's Japan, Sugiura enrolled at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and majored in photography under the tutelage of Kenneth Josephson, known for his conceptual photography. Josephson had studied with Aaron Siskind at Illinois Institute of Technology's Institute of Design, which stemmed from the New Bauhaus School, founded by László Maholy-Nagy. With this lineage, S.A.I.C. was a rich pedagogical ground for experimentative projects, and through her expansive engagement with the medium of photography, Kunie Sugiura has extended this legacy by another generation. While in Chicago, Sugiura produced the *Cko series* (pronounced "ko") from 1966-67. For these darkroom composited unique works, the artist used a wide-angle lens to encapsulate distorted nude body images inside ovoid embryonic bubbles, sometimes embedding humans into brick walls. "Ko" in Japanese could mean alone (孤), or it could also possess a more neutral connotation meaning, individual or arc (個). The *Cko series* reflects the artist's ongoing interest in Existentialist literature, Kafka, Camus, and Simone de Beauvoir, as evidenced by Sugiura's current *Minerals series*, also exhibited here.

Sugiura moved to New York City in 1967, arriving when Rauschenberg and Warhol were producing photo-silkscreened paintings which reflect a distinctly American popular culture point of view. Sugiura also sought to bring photography onto the same plane and scale as painting, but she worked instead from the vantage point of a recent immigrant finding a new place for herself to start from. Sugiura printed greatly enlarged close-up images of tree-trunk bark, beach pebbles and rocks in Central Park, running the image full-bleed onto canvas. These images, while expressing her solitary observations, could be seen by some as mundane, but it's the shared-experience of such ubiquitous information which makes them, for the artist, affirmative.

For her current *Mineral Series*, which recalls these large photo-canvases, from 1960s & 1970s, Sugiura returned to her homeland of Japan after more than 50 years of living in the United States, seeking to reconnect and contemplate her roots. Finding herself interested in a deeper and more mysterious sense of time, she has bypassed genealogy, cities, events and histories, instead preferring to contemplate the billions of years and physical features of

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unobstructed, always evolving nature. Sugiura researches and photographs geologic sites, prints her images at a large (yet still intimate) scale digitally onto canvas and, with a paintbrush, begins her image exploration, finding and enhancing interesting features, applying her intervening marks. All-the-while, Sugiura meditates and fantasizes on the incomprehensible depth of time and the unknowable range of events captured but superficially by photography's memorializing powers.

Something caught the artist's imagination with one of her catfish subjects of her mid-1990s *Animals* series of photograms, which includes eels, frogs, goldfish, snails, octopi, squid, chickens and kittens. This catfish, peculiar for its small scale, became a pet called Namu, a friend and a companion. This relationship is memorialized, now 25 years later, with the presentation of his tank, activated by bubbling blue water, and three blue toned photograms which immortalize the trace movements of this intriguing creature.

Throughout her photographic practice, Sugiura has explored her personal and artistic subjectivity within the wonders of the Universal arena.

Biography

Kunié Sugiura has had numerous major solo exhibitions which include, *Sugiura Kunié: Aspiring Experiments*: New York in 50 Years, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum (2018), *Time Emit*, Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, New Jersey (2008) and *Dark Matters / Light Affairs*, The University of California, Davis (2001). Sugiura was featured in *For a New World to Come: Experiments in Art and Photography*, Japan 1968-79, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2015), *New Photography 13*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (1997) and *1972 Annual Exhibition of Painting*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1972). She has received the Higashikawa Prize (2007) and the Artist's Fellowship, New York Foundation for the Arts (1998). Her works are included in the permanent collections of the Denver Art Museum; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; and the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2019 *Kunié Sugiura*, Nonaka-Hill, Los Angeles
- 2018 *Kunié SUGIURA: Aspiring Experiments, New York in 50 years*, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, Tokyo
- 2008 *Time Emit*, Visual Arts Center of New Jersey, Summit, New Jersey (curated by Charles Steinback)
Ephemera and Shadow: 1989–2006, Gallery M, Nagoya, Japan
- 2005 *The Artists Papers*, Judy Ann Goldman Fine Art, Boston
- 2003 *Artists and Scientists*, Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York
- 2001 *Dark Matters / Light Affairs*, Richard L. Nelson Gallery, University of California, Davis
- 1995 *Vestiges*, Kamakura Gallery, Tokyo
- 1989 *White Room: Kuniura Sugié*, White Columns, New York
- 1969 Portogallo Gallery, New York