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COLLECTOR DAILY

Takahiro Kaneyama, *While Leaves Are Falling...* @Miyako Yoshinaga

By Loring Knoblauch / In Galleries / June 28, 2017

JTF (just the facts): A total of 26 color photographs, framed in white and matted, and hung against white walls in the main gallery space. All of the works are digital c-prints, made between 1999 and 2017 and printed in 2016/2017. Physical sizes range from roughly 7×10 to 14×17, and the prints are available in editions of 5+2AP. (Installation shots below.)

In the smaller side room, the show also includes a selection of 19 unframed color prints pinned directly to the wall, as well as 4 additional color prints, framed in white and matted. A monograph of this body of work was published in 2016 by AKAACA ([here](#)), and is available from the gallery.



Comments/Context: Autobiographical photography projects that are built on the photographer turning his or her camera toward a set of aging parents or family members typically follow a predictable path. With the cooperative trust of the subjects as a given, we are often shown the small details of passing time, the subtle and not so subtle frailties of aging, the physical manifestations of loss and loneliness, and sometimes the fear of or resignation to the eventual final outcome. In such pictures, we expect to find moments of authentic and sometimes surprising tenderness and love, even when a sense of dark humor begins to inhabit the proceedings, and our emotions are often overtly pulled back and forth between joy and despair.

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Takahiro Kaneyama's long term portrait of his mother (and as an adjunct, his two unmarried aunts) travels some of these same intimate psychological roads, but with the challenging addition of mental illness to further complicate matters. Their collective story begins almost two decades ago, with the death of the artist's grandmother and his subsequent more frequent return trips to Japan from his home in New York. Kaneyama's pictures started with simple documents of his mother at home, evolved to include images made on short excursions with her sisters to various tourist destinations around Japan, and later captured his mother's repeated stays in the hospital. Her schizophrenia is the unspoken presence in the pictures, creating a persistent sense of simmering uncertainty and unease, and the central questions of whether his mother is altogether aware of what is going on, is playacting in some sense, or is showing us genuine emotion are never entirely answered, making the images all the more poignant.

The earliest pictures in the series set the scene, providing some of the contrast points for what will come later. Several pictures find Kaneyama's mother resting in bed or watching television alone, seemingly lost in her thoughts amid the empty quiet. A family trip to Nikko provides the first tourist snapshots of the project, with his mother and two sisters carefully posed against an impossibly foggy vista or seen wandering with sun umbrellas amid lush gardens. More dressed up images capture his mother in an elaborate kimono and red lipstick, but her deadpan expression, her dangling cigarette and her cradled dog upend any notion of the usual trappings of cultural formality. And in these initial works, Kaneyama offers the first metaphorical signs of impending change – a stilted and unflinching portrait at the hospital, the department store trees covered and tied up, and a single cloud wandering alone through the sky.



Kaneyama's travel pictures memorialize the family's excursions to Hakone, Kinugawa, Kyoto, and other locations, consistently turning standard, everyone-stand-in-front-of-something-and-look-at-the-camera snapshots into images with far more substance and mystery. The unsmiling faces are the most surreal part of these pictures, the three women constantly frowning, scowling, or simply looking back with blank indifference, the sisters often flanking the mother, offering her a small dose of unseen support. Plausibly happy times take on an almost comic edge, with the grouchy group enveloped in

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happy floating bubbles, or the unimpressed mother framed with the child-like fun of an oversized soft-serve ice cream cone.

In other travel groupings, Kaneyama explores scale, light, and particularly visual interruption. The three women are seen from afar, tiny figures against a geometric sea of white hotel balconies, up close through a cornered window at another hotel, and at mid range, veiled by an elaborate set of hanging glass lights that evoke tumbling cherry blossoms. As time passes, we can observe the signs of aging catching up with the ladies, their hair greying and their faces becoming more distinctly etched. The world around them seems to imperceptibly close in and nature is now experienced largely from a distance – trees glow with the eerie glow of night as seen from the hotel, facemasks are worn to prevent infection, and hotel rooms become the main setting for impromptu portraits.

The most recent photographs take a decidedly downward turn, documenting the repeated hospitalization of Kaneyama's mother. His images tell a story of increasing distance, his mother drifting further away. She hovers on her bed or parks herself in a wheelchair near a window, obviously unhappy with the circumstances, her full lipped scowl never far from her face. These moments then fall deeper toward depression, where she sits inconsolable on the floor, underneath bright windows or looks away into her own head. Kaneyama's images use more compositional misdirection here, capturing her through windows, in mirrors, and near passageways, her life reduced to a series of frustrating blockages and controlled spaces. A recent shot of the three women furthers this idea, their faces veiled by a thin curtain, dissolving into both literal and metaphorical darkness.

In many ways, the initial draw in Kaneyama's story comes from the almost ridiculously vacant expressions of his mother, her dark countenance providing an unexpected splash of arch dissonance. But as his narrative unfolds, those moments of subtle black comedy become increasingly tender, his mother's anxieties and delusions transformed into something more heartbreakingly human. As the world closes in, the images from the going-through-the-motions tourist trips become treasured memoirs, even if everyone seemed to be having a terrible time. It is this nuanced topography of human experience that makes Kaneyama's photographs so resonant. Even in a scowling face, we can see the echoes of a multitude of truly felt emotions.

Collector's POV: The works in this show are priced between \$1400 and \$2400 each, based on size. Kaneyama's work has little secondary market history at this point, so gallery retail remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.

Original source

<https://collectordaily.com/takahiro-kaneyama-while-leaves-are-falling-miyako-yoshinaga/>