

## The Legacy of Issei Suda (1940-2019): Human Memory @Miyako Yoshinaga

By [Loring Knoblauch](#) / In [Galleries](#) / February 10, 2020

**JTF (just the facts):** A total of 25 black and white photographs, framed in black and matted, and hung against white walls in the main gallery space and the smaller side room. All of the works are gelatin silver prints, made between 1972 and 1992. Physical sizes range from roughly 7×5 to 9×12 inches, and no edition information was provided on the checklist. A copy of Suda's 1996 monograph *Human Memory* is also on view, in conjunction with a display of other photobooks by the photographer. (Installation shots below.)

**Comments/Context:** The death of Issei Suda early last year has created an opportunity to re-examine the Japanese photographer's aesthetic footprints. Following up on a 2014 survey of Suda's mid-1970s work (reviewed [here](#)), this show, in Miyako Yoshinaga's intimate new Upper East side brownstone space, essentially picks up where that initial exhibit left off and moves forward through the 1980s.

Suda's particular brand of street (or at least out in the world) photography consistently rubs up against the surreal, without actually crossing over into exaggeration for effect. His pictures uncover the quiet oddity and overlooked subtlety of things hiding in plain sight, forcing us to look again to recalibrate our sense of reality.

In images we might loosely call architectural, Suda shows us built environments and found details that verge on the perplexing, often focusing in on a singular feature or fact that seems slightly out of place or off-kilter when looked at more closely. A huge silver tube angles in atop a parked car. A jagged staccato walkway crosses above the train tracks. Silhouettes of a camel and a Buddha's head appear in unlikely places. And still, amid these modern incongruities, Kyoto's riverside restaurants have a timeless, almost drawn from a woodblock print feel.

Many of Suda's small discoveries read like urban still lifes, their textures and contrasts integral to their visual interest. Intrepid flowers climb vertically up a road sign, the top of a palm tree erupts in fuzziness, a single white blossom sticks out against a dark tree trunk, and floral pistils jut upward amid shiny leaves. Suda's eye is then caught by the fluffiness of layers of clouds, the tumbling leaves of greenery, the peeling shreds of a poster, and the froth of waves, each becoming the subject of an attentive study.

When Suda brings people into his frames, it isn't so much that there is a decisive moment occurring, but more that something overlooked has come into unexpected primary focus. Suda notices a white chrysanthemum underneath dark lamentation, a disembodied pair of bare legs jutting out from underneath a massive leaf, the matching hats of men on park benches, and a static-infused spray of hair in the sunlight. His pictures attest to a consistent readiness to see something more in the fleeting encounters of the city, whether that be the flash-lit ugliness of a man picking his teeth in the street or the tender loveliness of a woman's floral dress perched on a stone railing.

Suda's enduring legacy likely lies in this surreal understatement. His works don't thrum with the brash passions of politics, seduction, youthful rebellion, or social critique; instead, as seen here, he settles into a more modest register, where each frame uncovers its own sometimes dissonant harmonies. In this way, Suda bypasses the swagger adopted by many of his contemporaries, instead finding an observant aesthetic that has room for sensitivity and vulnerability.

**Collector's POV:** The prints in this show are priced between \$4000 and \$6000. Suda's work has very little secondary market history in the West, with only a handful of lots coming up for sale at auction in the past several years. As such, gallery retail likely remains the best option for those collectors interested in following up.

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