

for? A nuclear plant and an Olympic stadium for all.” The conspicuous gender imbalance on bank notes, as depicted through the portraits of generals, philosophers, prime ministers and royalty (all male), is made clear with “A Place Called Harem.” The artist once again collages smiling and serious faces of men into a single scene in order to contextualizes the fantasy of a house full of powerful and revered figures all gathered to serve the pleasure of a single woman – in this case, Bublesara Beyshenalieva (1926–1973), one of the founders of the Kyrgyz ballet. Of course it doesn’t really matter that it’s Beyshenalieva; it could just as easily have been the Queen of England, or now Harriet Tubman.

Each of the photographic projects described above made their way into artist books under the imprint of HOTAM and now they are once again released from their covers to make up the exhibition *Cover to Cover* at PLATFORM centre for photographic + digital arts in Winnipeg. It’s worth noting that even though his exhibition is at PLATFORM, the artist doesn’t think of himself as a photographer in the formal sense. Ho Tam identifies, at least these days, as a maker of books.

The aping of the magazine format is something Ho Tam has all but perfected. He stops at the cover, and maybe rightfully so. The checkerboard-patterned installation, *Magazine Covers* (2014), is humorous in its surreal juxtaposing of original photographs the artist has taken with real-world titles familiar to most newsstand browsers. The appropriated titles – *Artforum*, *Brides*, *Drwell*, *Interview*, *National Geographic*, *Popular Science*, *Vanity Fair* – run the gamut and the photographic pairings are jarring only when we allow our expectations to tell us what should be on these covers, instead of imagining what a little boy with a pair of scissors – now a middle-aged man with Photoshop – might make us see.

Kegan McFadden is a writer and independent curator whose research explores printed matter, recent histories and melancholy. McFadden’s curatorial investigation into magazines produced by artists in Canada during the 1990s, *Yesterday was Once Tomorrow (or, A Brick is a Tool)* will be hosted by The Banff Centre later this year.

Yuki Kimura: *Inhuman Transformation of New Year’s Decoration, Obsolete Conception or 2*
CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts,
San Francisco, CA
Dec. 13, 2016 – Feb. 25, 2017
by Jesse Birch

I hold that the formation of recollection is never posterior to the formation of perception; it is contemporaneous with it . . .

—Henri Bergson

I first encountered Yuki Kimura’s work in 2005 at her solo exhibition, *untitled puzzle*, at Kodama Gallery in Osaka. By this time, Kimura had been working with photography as her primary medium for more than 10 years. Her first solo exhibition with Taka Ishii Gallery (by whom she is still represented) was in 1995. During the 1990s and early 2000s, when the documentary point-and-shoot aesthetic of the so-called *onnanoko shashinka*, or “girl photographer,” movement was at its peak in Japan, Kimura was instead employing a conceptual approach to staged photography.

By 2005, digital photography had transitioned from specialized professional applications to global vernacular, but as images became ephemeral, Kimura celebrated their materiality. *untitled puzzle* marked a shift in the artist’s practice towards a sculptural engagement with found images. A sequence of five standard 5 × 7s, for example, involved a table breaking out of the picture plane in different ways, eventually replacing the entire image space with a rectangle of wood. Recent work explores increasingly specific cultural and historical references, but continues to embrace the unsolvable forms of entropy that occur when images are objects.

Kagami mochi (“mirror rice cake”) is an edible ornament that embodies object and image. A stack of two disks of *mochi*, one representing reality and the other its reflection, are adorned by a bitter orange called a *daidai* (“several generations”). It is also the Japanese New Year’s decoration evoked in the title of Kimura’s recent exhibition at CCA Wattis in San Francisco: *Inhuman Transformation of New Year’s Decoration, Obsolete Conception or 2*. *Kagami mochi* signifies both the passage of time, and a specific moment

in time. It remains on display in Japanese households as a decorative and symbolic object across the new year until the second Saturday or Sunday of January, when it is broken and eaten during the Shinto ritual *kagami biraki* (“mirror opening”).

Kimura’s exhibition opened on December 13, 2016, and remains on display across the new year. While there were no direct representations of *kagami mochi* in the exhibition, its stacked form, shifts in symbolic and use value, multiplicity and the commemoration of the passage of time were present throughout. Ten years had passed since I last experienced Kimura’s work in person, but arriving in the expansive main space at CCA Wattis, the works elicited the pleasure of discovery that I had felt a decade earlier. There were just four works in the exhibition, but the generous layout was necessary: not only for visitors to engage the work, but also for the works to engage each other. In Kimura’s conceptually resonant practice, all spaces are implicated.

The largest of the works, the centrally located *Table Stella* (2016), consists of six table structures scaled up by twos, and installed in a triangular formation. Each of the six surfaces is laminated with a reproduction of the same image, a photograph Kimura found in New York. The image is slightly out of focus, but it is clear that it depicts a mirror in some kind of medical office. The mirror, however, reflects nothing. Its surface is black, dense, a negation. These six dark pictures, however, don’t speak by themselves. They are adorned with constellations of ashtrays that the artist sourced on eBay. Many are lumpy and organ-like, made of polished stone in bright orange, burnt umber and olive. From rocks to ashtrays to artwork, these are objects twice removed. These receptacles may have once appeared meteoric with smoking craters full of butts, but clean air laws and Kimura’s artwork liberated them. Now, along with the six image-tables below them, these groupings of cast-offs are vessels for new ideas.

This engagement with multiplicity is reflected in *Division and Revision #2* (2016), two large seemingly identical photographs of a three-tiered stand populated with unopened wine bottles and partly consumed liquor bottles. The stand’s contents evidence celebration, but did the picture commemorate a

recent party, an event in progress, things to come? Speculating on the ontology of images is an enticing, but losing game, and even these two images are not exactly the same. Two small spots on one print suggest dust spots were touched up on the other, or perhaps Kimura came upon the image as a pair of prints in different condition and blew them both up as she found them. Either way, when noticed, this minor aesthetic shift reminds us of the latent potential of all images to be other than they are.

Across the room another table is covered in objects. For *Table Matematica* (2016), Kimura designed a long thin table in reflective black marble and chrome adorned with multiples of all 13 internationally available sized bottles of Jägermeister liquor. The myriad unopened bottles, reflected in the black marble surface of the table, were inspired by Kimura’s engagement with Bergsonian concepts of multiplicity. They also activate dialogue with the ashtrays on the image of the black mirror in *Table Stella*, and the bottles on the three-tiered table in *Division and Revision #2*. Kimura, referring to *Table Matematica*, told me that she would often find Jägermeister empties scattered on the streets where she lives in Berlin. With their sloped shoulders, the bottles reminded her of people. The associations building upon each other became dizzying, as I began to think about Kimura’s early-2000s staged photographs, many featuring consumer goods like cigarette packages in mimetic encounters with human subjects.

The multiplicities present in Kimura’s work are compounded yet clarified by the deceptively simple *Mirrors* (2016), a pair of large mirrors identical in size to the photographs *Division and Revision #2*. Unlike the other works in the exhibition, which point to potential futures and pasts, *Mirrors* indexes the precise moment it is encountered. The work directs the viewer’s gaze outward to what is happening elsewhere in the gallery: itself an object and an image that changes based on the contents within. Like other objects in the exhibition, the overall space is prone to shifts in temporal, economic, social and use value, and in the context of Kimura’s exhibition, these transformations bear reflection.

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Yuki Kimura, *Inhuman Transformation of New Year's Decoration, Obsolete Conception or 2*; installation view at Wattis Institute of Contemporary Arts; PHOTO: JOHNNA ARNOLD; IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND TAKA ISHII GALLERY