

Inhuman Transformation of New Year's Eve Decoration, Obsolete Conception or 2

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Yuki Kimura, *Inhuman Transformation of New Year's Decoration, Obsolete Conception or 2*
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In the popular imagination, New Year's Eve traffics in the spirit of renewal. Of course, it also explicitly encourages behavior to counteract such good intentions. One asserts a speculative desire for self-improvement—living healthier, learning and growing—only to begin living in the nascent world of that resolution fatigued, nursing a mild (or blistering) hangover, snagged in the depths of winter. This initial stumble may not be so severe, but its immediacy is humbling, and belies the fragility and unreliability of our convictions. In other words, one is resigned to the realization that this will be a year like any other.

Yuki Kimura specializes in the subtle interrogation of such inadequacies as they arise from or exist in materials, especially photographs. In a 2013 conversation with Andrew Maerkele, she described the incipience of her aporetic approach: “My practice began from doubts about the uniqueness of photography and the authority of the decisive moment.”¹ An exhibition of Kimura's new work at CCA Wattis, titled *Inhuman Transformation of New Year's Decoration, Obsolete Conception or 2*, follows this line of inquiry to darkly humorous effect.

The exhibition itself is relatively austere, consisting of four works—all from 2016—sparsely and elegantly placed throughout the gallery. Given the layout, a viewer first encounters *Table Stella*, a set of six C-prints of a wall-mounted sharps disposal container and an examination glove dispenser, separated into three pairs of tables of Dibond, wood and steel; atop the prints are multiple ashtrays of varying shapes and sizes, all made from natural materials (mostly what appear to be metamorphic rocks). Beyond the tables sit three other works: *Division and Revision #2*, a pair of nearly identical C-prints depicting liquor and wine bottles placed on a three-tiered table; *Table Matematica*, a granite table covered with *Jägermeister* bottles of various sizes; and *Mirrors*, a pair of tall, identical mirrors casually placed against the wall.

This doubling accounts for the many potential parallels and connections one might draw between the works, whether from the titular repetition of the table or the planar inertia evoked by *Division and Revision #2* and *Table Stella*. Then there are those exemplary, simple tools of replication: the mirrors, which show

1. Andrew Maerkele, “In Focus: Yuki Kimura,” *Frieze.com*, April 13, 2013 (accessed February 15, 2017). <https://frieze.com/article/focus-yuki-kimura>

Yuki Kimura,
Table Stella, 2016,
C-prints mounted on
Dibond, wood, chrome
plated legs, ashtrays,
detail

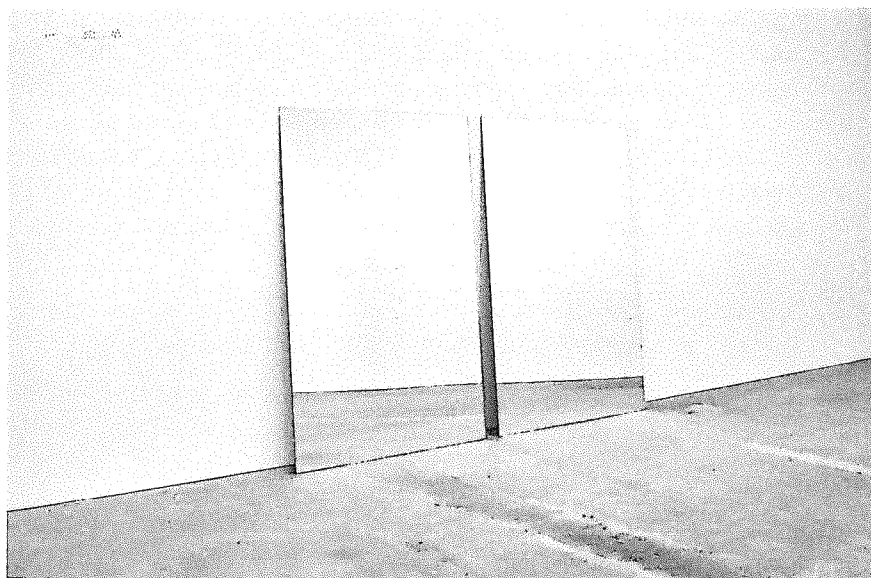


the viewer where they literally stand amidst these vestiges of festivity. When in proximity of either *Division or Revision* #2 or *Table Matematica*, one can easily scry oneself in the mirrors; on the other hand, proximity to *Table Stella* affords no such opportunity. Waste disposal, indeed.

Table Matematica is the most malignant instance of repetition in the exhibit. The seemingly precise arrangements of the bottles are highly suggestive both of topography in the variegation of their heights and, more obviously, commodification—bottles of different sizes for parties of different sizes. They may even suggest population density both in the microscopic (the group that hypothetically used the bottles, a population in and of itself) and macroscopic (how do these sizes relate to the distribution of Jägermeister?). Given the hauntingly celebratory aura surrounding the exhibit at large, one might construe the haphazard agglutinations as emergent groupings one finds oneself in or drifting between at a party or gathering.

Which leads to one of the most beguiling conundrums Kimura presents by the title with which she has grouped these works: why *inhuman* and not *non-human*? Anthropomorphs are entirely absent here, save from those “depicted” in *Mirrors*; such terminology would moreover resonate with the “obsolescence” in the latter half of the title. There are no discarded cigarettes lining the ashtrays or fingerprints smeared on the bottles. The bottles in *Division or Revision* #2 likewise appear independent of society, despite their obvious relation to it.

Is the “inhuman transformation” subsequently the dissolution of the human form altogether, albeit one that leaves traces of its activities, its traditions? Or is it rather a sly prank on the spectators themselves—those inhumanly transformed, caught in their proximity to (and complicity with) inebriants? Or, given the used-up bottles on *Table Matematica*, are we to be reminded, more simply,



Yuki Kimura,
Mirrors, 2016,
two mirrors

that we are our waste? In both the circulatory and stationary aspects of garbage, our habits, proclivities, and desires are inhumanly mirrored, inverted. The work as such also brings to mind Yuji Agematsu, whose collecting and cataloging of detritus from the streets of New York hints at the city dwellers behind it all.

“Inhuman” has traditionally been synonymous with the cruel, the monstrous, the freakish. However, Kimura’s work feels more akin to Reza Negarestani’s recent redefining of it as a “vector for revision” that “preserves certain invariances” of being human while “[registering] itself as a demand for construction.”² Kimura’s twinning of images and objects apparently references the *kagami mochi*, a traditional Japanese New Year’s decoration comprised of a smaller rice cake set atop a larger one, and a daidai orange with a leaf attached. *Kagami mochi* may be decorated and are usually eaten during the second weekend of the New Year. As a decoration, they symbolize the passing of time and generations, and serve to encourage reflection on one’s life. The ceremony during which they’re consumed is even called *kagami biraki*, or “mirror opening.” In this respect, Kimura’s materials are not mere placeholders for an overarching investigation of vacancy, but rather information to be analyzed and processed towards a more contemplative life that includes the recognition of one’s family and friends—a development of the human by way of inhumanism. There might be a second obsolescence; if so, then we are treated to a commodity like any other.

But if this analysis is to “elaborate,” it seems that aesthetic concerns are beside the point—what matters is what the decorations themselves do, how time speaks through them and us. As Kimura says, the intent throughout her body of work is partly “to experiment with both the functionality of the physical aspect

2. Reza Negarestani, “The Labor of the Inhuman, Part I: Human,” *e-flux Journal* 52 (accessed February 15, 2017). <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/52/59920/the-labor-of-the-inhuman-part-i-human/>

and the insubstantiality of the image.”³ The functionality of a mirror or table or bottle is self-evident—what we perceive in them, however, is subject to our own insufficiencies, the tension of perception against time. For Negarestani, inhumanism “appears as a force that stands against both the apathy of resignation and the active antihumanism.” Put another way, the party is over, but it’s still subject to transformation. Even obsolescences aren’t without their decorations, and while our resolutions are sometimes frail or overambitious, they can still come true.