

自律速度錯誤/*Self-Slowing Error*, 2021

Multi-media installation

While traditional exhibition displays encourage visitors to “read” individually framed photographs in succession, Komatsu Hiroko’s installations continually pull us back to the totality of the environment, where the materials of photography become just as important for communication as the images. Komatsu compares the way that photographs convey meaning to the way that language functions, specifically the Japanese written language. The title for this installation, *Self-Slowing Error*, includes six characters, or kanji: 自 (oneself), 律 (rhythm), 速 (speed or velocity), 度 (an indicator of degree, or number of occurrences), 錯 (disordered), and 誤 (mistake).

Individually, each character has meaning independent of the others, but as a group they do not add up to anything familiar in the Japanese language. This is intended to generate an unstable, troubled feeling in the reader, as one is forced to pull apart the characters (and, likewise, the photographs) to consider their existence as fragments of meaning. In overriding our understanding of how photographs typically convey information, Komatsu asks us to consider the potential for multiple perspectives and indeterminate meanings for crafting a different encounter with the world.

This installation comes to the University of Hartford from the Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley, Mass., where the exhibition *Komatsu Hiroko: Creative Destruction* (February 1–June 5, 2022) was supported by a grant from the Japan–U.S. Friendship Commission.

Artist Books, 2020-2021

Handmade, multi-media artist books

Books have become a fruitful medium for Komatsu Hiroko to explore the similarities between language and photography. Of her recent work, *Black Book #1*, she has said, “When you take a picture, you frame a part of reality, and then you move the image to another place, such as an exhibition venue or bookstore. I thought the process was very similar to cutting out texts from a book and putting them in an object—in this installation, a bottle.” Notably, the texts that she cuts and relocates come from manifestos related to ecological crisis and environmental degradation—Theodore Kaczynski’s *Industrial Society and Its Future: The Unabomber Manifesto* (1995), as well as the more optimistic *No One is Too Small to Make a Difference* (2019) by Greta Thunberg.

For Komatsu, meaning is generated from the totality of the book—and the book viewing experience—rather than through a succession of individual images or snippets of text. Her artist books are entirely handmade from unexpected materials that encourage exploration. While *Instant Diary* is organized according to the calendar year, viewers can enter at any point to uncover traces of the artist’s daily life, just as one would pick through the contents of a card catalog. Meanwhile, by printing on tracing paper in corrosion, images from distinct pages merge and transform into new compositions depending on the direction in which they are viewed. Here, the opportunity for multiple (even competing) perspectives takes priority over any linear narrative that we might attempt to glean from the book.

Loans courtesy of dieFirma, New York

***Channeled Drawing*, 2022**

Frottage rubbings and photograms

In contrast to documentary traditions that uphold photography's ability to capture a "decisive moment"—a notion popularized by Henri Cartier-Bresson and revered in the world of photojournalism—Komatsu Hiroko maintains that a single photograph can never fully represent an event. Rather, photographs are only ever a trace of the world that they picture. Her new series, *Channeled Drawing*, takes that theory to its logical conclusion. A series of rubbings that she then reproduces as photograms (direct, camera-less contact prints), the side-by-side compositions appear like photographic positives and negatives. Each pair depicts the surface of the ground in the exact location where a murder has taken place.

As the author Colin Wilson once observed, the best outcome of impulsive behavior is art—the worst outcome is murder. Since its invention in the nineteenth century, photography has been a natural aid to the field of criminology, as police and detectives have tried to uncover the circumstances and motives behind man's worst impulse. Shots of crime scenes, mug shots, even optograms (the belief in images left on the retina of the eye after death) have all been put forward as photographic evidence of these senseless acts of violence. But how could these fragmentary methods ever purport to contain, let alone convey, the facts of an event so extreme as murder? They, like Komatsu's eerily mesmerizing topographic imprints, are nothing more than a trace.

Courtesy of the artist

Silent Sound, 2021

8-mm film installation and gelatin silver prints

In 1951, the composer John Cage entered an anechoic chamber at Harvard University to experience silence. Instead, he heard the high-pitched sound of his nervous system and the low thrumming of his blood flow. These unintentional and uncontrollable noises became the basis for his theory of silence, exemplified by the composition *4'33"*, in which Cage had a musician sit at a piano without playing it for 4 minutes and 33 seconds.

Here, Komatsu performs a similar move by presenting three 8-mm films that she recorded of experimental noise concerts by 3RENSA (the combined forces of Merzbow, duenn, and Nyantora)—all without sound. Focusing on silence turns the locus of the aesthetic experience from the creator to the audience. It also nudges the audience to attend to their full capacity as perceiving beings—to the sights, smells, and, yes, the sounds of their bodies that hum along with that of the projectors. Space and time are marked by the film as it moves out from the projector and loops through a series of pulleys affixed to the wall and ceiling. Running continuously over the course of the exhibition, the film will necessarily deteriorate, transforming into a mere trace, a fragment of the original.

Courtesy of the artist