

KYOKO HAMAGUCHI

Born in Tokyo and currently living in New York, Kyoko Hamaguchi is a mixed-media artist whose work directly engages with its surroundings. By incorporating elements such as light, time, and movement, she reinterprets the traditional notion of analog photography. Much of Hamaguchi's work is situated at the intersection of four conceptual terms: relocation, container, camera, and photography. To her, a camera is a container that records visible changes of relocation, while a photograph is always brought somewhere other than its place of origin. As Hamaguchi has said, "Photographs are meant to be relocated like tropical fish in an aquarium in a cold city."

In her ongoing exploration of analog photography, Hamaguchi often inserts an image-making process into a particular system. For a project titled *End to End* (2017-18), for example, Hamaguchi carried pinhole cameras made from cardboard boxes while riding different subway lines in New York. Longer train rides demanded longer exposures that yielded brighter photographs. Light became a measurement of travel, distance, and time.

For a work known as *Postal Summary* (2018), Hamaguchi transformed standard shipping boxes into pinhole cameras and sent them to herself, effectively turning the postal system into a nomadic darkroom. Some of the boxes traveled the globe, while others were sent a shorter distance from Hamaguchi's house to her studio. The distress and distortion of the boxes reflect the various journeys and ensure that each is a unique object. The abstract images developed inside the boxes may resemble Constructivist paintings, but they are mainly indexical records of the changing environment and duration of shipment. After the entire process, the boundaries that define a container, a camera, and a photograph are eliminated.

Kyoko Hamaguchi,
Postal Summary,
2018 shipping box,
photo emulsion
dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

Hamaguchi's work invokes numerous artists across time and space. *End to End* recalls the subway portraits made by Walker Evans in the 1940s, as well as Hiroshi Sugimoto's long exposures of entire movies playing inside theaters. More recently, Walead Beshty also utilized FedEx boxes and shipping services to create unique sculptures. Hamaguchi has cited On Kawara as a significant influence on her conceptual approach to making art. Between 1968 and 1979, Kawara continuously recorded traces of his physical existence through mailing postcards to different friends. The connections with various artists not only add layers of meaning to Hamaguchi's work, but also clarify her unique position within art discourse.

Hamaguchi's interests extend beyond experimental cameras. In ephemeral works like *God of the Day* (2015/2018/2020), she has melted ice sculptures of various deities into a single bottle of water. Refrozen and dissolved on a daily basis, this recurring sculpture explores topics such as cultural homogenization and migration of people. No matter the ultimate form of her works, material engagement has always been the foundation of Hamaguchi's art. Therefore, to help audiences better grasp the concept, she typically demonstrates the process alongside her finished work.

Hamaguchi gained her MFA from Hunter College in May 2020, but Covid-19 forced the postponement of her thesis exhibition. Even though 2020 is a challenging year for young artists, Hamaguchi has achieved some noteworthy success. Early this year, her work was featured in the SPRING/BREAK Art Show in New York, and her first solo show took place at Koki Gallery in Tokyo. While Hamaguchi is actively pursuing residency programs and gallery representation, her work has already attracted collectors around the globe.



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