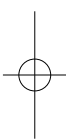
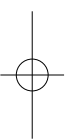


SUGIURA Kunié and Photography: Perfect Balance

Virginia HECKERT [Curator, Department of Photographs, J. Paul Getty Museum]

There is an uneasy parity between the woman who opens the door of the fourth-floor walk-up tucked in an ungentrified corner of Chinatown and the live/work space beyond. Slight of stature, thoughtful yet direct in her demeanor, and youthful despite her almost 75 years, Sugiura Kunié occupies a space that has remained largely unremodeled in the 40-plus years it has served as her studio, darkroom, and apartment. With its flow from the well-used dry darkroom near the entrance, to the large open studio that incorporates storage areas and kitchen, to the closed-off living quarters sparsely furnished with a bed, television and free-standing tub, the space is functional, enabling Sugiura to create and display works that are similarly at odds with her identity as a photographer. Printed on linen, combined with painted canvases, or made without a camera, these works do not conform with traditional ideas about photography as a medium to record the world.^[1] They nonetheless strike a perfect balance of form and expression—precisely because they combine disparate elements and disregard conventional rules.

Science/Art



That uneasy parity—or what she refers to as “hybridity”—is a leitmotif in Sugiura’s practice. Born in 1942 in Nagoya, Japan, Sugiura demonstrated sufficient artistic talent and confidence as a child to elicit her teacher’s praise for the picture of a pine tree she made during a class outing to paint cherry trees in bloom.^[2] Although she remained interested in art, she initially chose to study physics at Ochanomizu, a national university for women in Tokyo, until she realized the dearth of opportunities available to the female graduates, who could at most aspire to teach high school.^[3] After consulting with a female acquaintance who had just returned from studying art in Milwaukee, Sugiura decided to apply to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), with the intention of studying industrial design.

During her first year at SAIC (1963–64), Sugiura explored a variety of courses, including sculpture and ceramics, until she found her way to the photography division, led by Kenneth Josephson and Frank Barsotti, where she was the only undergraduate photo student.^[4] Both Josephson and Barsotti had studied with Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind in the graduate program at the Institute of Design, which had been founded by László Moholy-Nagy as the New Bauhaus in 1937 and would later merge with the Illinois Institute of Technology, and both similarly encouraged more experimental and conceptual approaches to the medium of photography, itself a hybrid of science and art. With little interest in photojournalism or using the camera as a tool for documentation, Sugiura was intrigued by the idea of pushing boundaries and questioning the essence of the photographic medium. As a student of physics, she was familiar with devising a thesis and using a methodology of trial and error to elicit new experiences and discoveries. It is this approach that continues to inform her interaction with photography a half century later.

In her third year at SAIC (1965–66), Sugiura took a course in color photography and learned to process Type-C prints with a Kodak drum processor. For an independent study class in her final year, she began using a fish-eye lens to photograph nude models. Alternating between black-and-white and color film and experimenting with solarization, bleaching, and toning, she combined photographs of nudes with those taken from nature or formalist patterns and grids. Measuring just eight-by-ten inches or eleven-by-fourteen inches, these unique multiple-exposures presented a complex layering of organic and geometric structures. Titled *Cko*, which means isolation in Japanese, they also attempted to address the loneliness that Sugiura felt as a foreigner with a limited command of English. She was reading a good deal of existentialist literature and wanted the works to reflect a similar sense of alienation; Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* was a source of inspiration, as were photographs of nudes taken by Bill Brandt with a wide-angle lens or by André Kertész’s in fun-house mirrors.^[5]


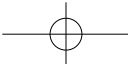

With their distorted, swirling forms and rich palette of purples, reds, golds, and greens, the *Cko* photographs placed Sugiura firmly in the tradition of experimentation that was the legacy of the New Bauhaus/Institute of Design, and of New Vision photography of the 1920s and 1930s from which it had evolved. It was with this work that Sugiura recognized that she was an artist. [6] A print from the series was included in the George Eastman House's 1969 exhibition *Vision and Expression*, which surveyed the work of a "younger" generation of photographers—defined by attitude rather than age in this context—in an effort to understand "the meaning of the limitations, as well as the possible extensions, of photography as it relates to human expression." [7] If this idea of photography's possible extensions is reworded in terms of the medium's extended possibilities, then we arrive at an incredibly apt description of the attitude underlying Sugiura's emergence and continued development as an artist.

Photography/Painting

Upon completing her Bachelor of Fine Art degree in 1967, Sugiura moved with two fellow graduates to New York, where they rented an apartment on the Upper West Side. Without access to color chemistry and processing machines, she returned to black-and-white photography, experimenting with photo emulsion on various surfaces—including wood, aluminum, and ceramic—until she settled on canvas. Like other artists who experienced a love-hate relationship with photography during this period, Sugiura remained fascinated with the unique materiality and potential of a medium defined by its light-sensitive properties, but also recognized that it was still not fully recognized as a legitimate form of artistic expression. Aware of the attention being received by artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol for their use of screen-printing to incorporate photographic images into their paintings, she was eager for her photographs to be taken as seriously as painting and logically selected canvas as the surface she would sensitize. [8] Using a product called Liquid Light that was solid at room temperature but became more fluid when heated in a bath of warm water, she applied the emulsion with gestural strokes onto raw canvas to create a surface that was textured and painterly, rather than smooth and mechanical. The coated canvas was then stretched onto wooden stretcher bars and, if small enough, placed under the enlarger to expose the negative. Larger images (measuring up to six and a half by nine feet) could be created by adjusting the enlarger to project the negative onto canvases hung on the wall. After Sugiura processed the print in her bathtub and let it dry [9], she remounted it onto a permanent stretcher and reworked specific areas of the image with graphite or acrylic paint to introduce additional texture and heightened contrast.

The subjects of these photo-canvases are details that caught Sugiura's eye as she explored New York's various neighborhoods, discovering the city and her place in it. As she has explained, although she at times felt frightened and overwhelmed, she nonetheless found New York to be beautiful and magnetic; as a foreigner still finding her footing, she often sought out details that reminded her of Japan. [10] Neither iconic nor immediately identifiable with the city, her close-up studies of pebbles, rocks, leaves, and tree bark are memorable for their merging of representational and abstract qualities, the result of their enlarged scale and reworked passages. Combining the materials and practices of both photography and painting, these works constitute Sugiura's earliest effort to create a hybrid form of image-making—critic HG Masters recently described the photo-canvases as "a kind of photograph-becoming-a-painting that never arrived at either medium-specific destination" [11]—and they met with success. One of them, *Central Park 3, 1971* [see fig. 1], was featured in the Whitney Museum's Annual 1972 Exhibition of Contemporary Painting (now known as the Whitney Biennial) curated by Marcia Tucker [12], where it hung next to paintings by contemporaries who worked in styles ranging from abstraction to photorealism.

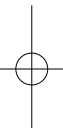
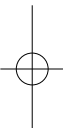
Perhaps emboldened by the success of having her work included in a paintings exhibition, Sugiura turned her attention away from photography to concentrate exclusively on painting. Two years later, however, the fortuitous act of placing one of her loosely painted monochrome canvases beside a photo-canvas convinced her to return to photography. Acknowledging her appreciation for Ellsworth Kelly's diptych paintings from this period, she realized that treating photography and painting as parallel mediums in a unified construction had the potential to result in something "more radical or original," and noted that "the juxtaposition of the monochrome abstraction next to the photographic image of a real place or thing created a dynamic tension." [13]



The canvas constructions were the second iteration of Sugiura's quest to create a hybrid form of photography and painting, one that was based on parity rather than merger. The challenge lay in establishing a relationship between the representational image and the monochrome canvas, a relationship that should not be perceived as logical, although it could be: a tree-lined road and a green canvas [see fig. 2], a nighttime view of an apartment tower and an indigo blue canvas [see fig. 3], gritty warehouses and black canvases [see fig. 4]. Sugiura hoped to evoke an unexpected or even disjunctive effect for the viewer by creating a more tentative or intuitive relationship between the photograph and the color block, as for example in her pairing of a close-up view of asphalt with a red canvas (*ASPHALT*, 1977) [see fig. 5]. She further expanded the idea of a hybrid practice by executing the photo-canvas and the painted canvas in different sizes and joining them with framing devices; the works took on sculptural qualities. Texture and finish (matte versus glossy) added subtle but tangible, tactile nuance to works that combined multiple images and canvases. Hasty application of both photo emulsion and paint heightened the materiality of the work, while the reappearance of one photographic image in a second construction—even if at a different size or with a different crop—was a reminder of the reproducibility inherent to the medium.

Concurrent with these large-scale canvas constructions, Sugiura made collages that combined photographs, colored paper, and swatches of applied paint on 30x22-inch sheets of etching paper. Even though the images often portray buildings or city views, these smaller paper-based works were intended less as architectural studies than as exercises in color, shape, proportion, and underlying structure.

Cameraless Photography



Sugiura's move to Chinatown in 1974—to the building in which she continues to live today—enabled her to expand her exploration of the hybrid potential of photography in combination with other media. Around 1980, she began drawing with acrylic paint on photo paper in the darkroom to create abstract images inspired by everyday objects—teacups, flowers, etc. Sometimes these objects or her hand also made their appearance in the form of photogrammed elements. When few considered these works to be photographs despite their incorporation of photographic materials and processing, Sugiura decided to engage more fully with the photogram process. This early photographic technique eliminates both camera and film, and revolves instead around the placement of objects of varying degrees of opacity directly on a sheet of sensitized photo paper. During chemical development, the areas of paper that were covered by objects remain unexposed and register as white shapes, or areas of absence, while the surrounding areas of the paper that were exposed to light darken once the paper is developed; shadows are fixed. This notion of photography as “an art of fixing shadows” harks back to the earliest days of the medium, specifically to William Henry Fox Talbot's announcement of his discovery of photogenic drawing to the Royal Society in London on January 31, 1839, as the “process by which natural objects may be made to delineate themselves without the aid of the artist's pencil.” [14] Extolling the potential applications of this new process in both the arts and sciences, Talbot used flowers and leaves in his earliest photogenic drawings or photograms.

By returning to a technique associated with the tentative, explorative beginnings of photography, Sugiura was once again acknowledging the medium's fundamental ties to both science and art. And like both Talbot and Anna Atkins, a botanist whose research on various forms of algae culminated in cyanotype impressions in the early 1840s, she similarly turned to nature for her subject matter. Sugiura featured flowers—sourced first from small markets in her neighborhood, then from New York's flower market on 27th and 28th Streets between Sixth and Seventh Avenues—in her first photograms. Whether purchased or salvaged from inventory cast off at the end of the day, chrysanthemums, daisies, irises, lilies, roses, and tulips produced the most reliable results, while exotic flowers such as birds of paradise resulted in more dramatic compositions. In arranging flowers on the photo-sensitive paper, Sugiura was less concerned with describing the essential forms and characteristics of the individual specimens than with creating narratives or patterns. Blossoms of varying species connected by lengths of string or thread could suggest organic, feminine hierarchies, while stems of the same species laid out in rows or “stacks” suggested a mathematical, masculine structure that was very much informed by the minimalist sculptures of Donald Judd executed in aluminum, plywood, and Plexiglas in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s.

Following exposure, Sugiura might choose to interrupt the process of chemical development by selectively pouring hot water onto areas of the paper to create variations in tonal range in what we read as the background; the flowers seem to be suspended mid-air or submerged underwater, as if in a dream world.^[15] Or she might use the photogram with its reversed tonalities to create a contact print of the same size, rendering negatives as positives and returning left to the absences of the original shapes. The otherworldly qualities that exists in so many of Sugiura's photograms once again suggest a hybridity of approach that allows for the suggestion or interpretation of almost painterly passages. Describing her fascination with the photogram process, Sugiura has written, "Photograms are to me photography as painting, a synergy of means. ... I explore pictorial spaces and tend toward psychological ones. The isolation of the dark room and the speed of the photographic process make me less self-conscious and more intuitive."^[16]


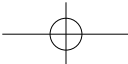

Associations with the attributes of flowers as they have been depicted in still life paintings in centuries past are inevitable, as are notions of the passage of time and fleetingness of beauty. Also unavoidable is the reference to ikebana, the ancient Japanese art of flower arranging. These associations add complexity to Sugiura's flower photograms, which she began making in 1989 and continued throughout the 1990s, gathering them under the series titles *Botanicus*, *Cut Flowers*, and *Stacks*. Selections from these series were featured in the New York Museum of Modern Art's 1997 exhibition *New Photography 13*.

Also dating to 1997 is *Premonition by Roses*, Sugiura's most ambitious photogram composition, comprising 128 prints. Sixty-four unique five-by-seven-inch gelatin-silver photograms are mounted directly on the wall in a perfect circle that measures ten feet in diameter. Each photogram depicts a variation of zero to twelve roses arranged in six rows; blossoms and stems appear as white shapes on a black ground. Inside the circle, another sixty-four photographs—contact prints of the white-on-black photograms that are now rendered as black shapes on a white ground—are arranged in a grid of eight rows of eight columns. While the title alludes to *Ba-ra-kei* (*Ordeal by Roses*), the series of collaborative portraits by Japanese photographer Hosoe Eikoh of novelist Mishima Yukio, and the varying multiples of roses that appear in each photogram suggest the progressions in Judd's minimalist sculptures, Sugiura conceived the work as an homage to Walter de Maria's *360° I Ching / 64 Sculptures* of 1981, an installation of sixty-four permutations of six rows of painted wood bars. The numbers six and sixty-four derive from the basic structural units of the I-Ching.

Shortly after beginning to make photograms of flowers, Sugiura expanded her repertory of subjects from nature to include animals. Throughout the 1990s she brought squids and octopuses (1990), kittens, salamanders, and snails (1992), goldfish and tropical fish (1995), frogs, crickets, eels, hens, and chicks (1996) into her studio and let each species enact its own choreography on photographic paper.^[17] Leaving a pair of kittens overnight in a small area lined with photo paper and repeating this experiment over the course of one week produced *The Kitten Papers*, which record the kittens' play, rest, scratching, and urination as traces, stains, and shadows on thirty-by-forty inch sheets of paper. By contrast, the works titled *Hoppings* capture a more compressed element of time: it was a matter of seconds before frogs placed on sheets of photosensitive paper leapt from their perch, leaving the silhouette of their trajectory, which Sugiura chose to print as positives from the original photograms. Each of the resulting series of photograms is unique, representing a collaboration between artist and animals. Sugiura provided the materials and situation; the animals' natural activities created the compositions. Fully cognizant of the unpredictability of these collaborations, Sugiura reveled in the idea that she could translate living nature into photographic images. If the space constraints of her studio were not an issue, she would have expanded her subjects to include dogs and horses.^[18]

Other artists have engaged animals in the photogram process in ways that are equally captivating. Adam Fuss' images of snakes slithering through water, Susan Derges' recording of frogspawn hatching to tadpoles that develop into frogs, and Michael Flomen's realization that the bioluminescence of fireflies could be used to expose paper similarly took place in the 1990s. The acceptance of unpredictable results was surely a given in each of these artists' endeavors. Sugiura's use of the titles *The Kitten Papers* and *Species* suggest that each animal required a different way of working and that each experiment resulted in a report—one that does not describe the outcome of the experiment in words, but in literal traces or markings made by the participating species.


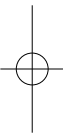
Another photogram project that exists in multiple iterations is *Rack* (1992–96), an installation



of one or more circular postcard racks filled with prints made from the x-rays of unknown patients. The idea was triggered by an accident that Sugiura had in the early 1990s, resulting in a collapsed lung that required multiple x-rays. Sugiura collected discarded x-rays, using them as negatives from which to make postcard-sized prints. She then arranged the shadowy images of skulls, chests, and spines in a vertical alignment that corresponds to the anatomical position of each part of the body.

Artists/Scientists

Sugiura started making artist portraits in 1999, once again utilizing the photogram technique in a manner she viewed as collaborative. These portraits grew out of existing friendships with artists such as Shinohara Ushio, Cheryl Donnegan, Neil Jenny, and Lawrence Weiner, as well as new relationships established for the project or through contacts she made while reviewing contemporary art exhibitions in New York for the Japanese art magazine *Bijutsu Techo*.^[19] After pinning large sheets of photo paper to the wall of her darkroom, sometimes pieced together from multiple sheets to create a floor-to-ceiling backdrop, Sugiura encouraged each artist to act out a gesture that was evocative of his or her work. Over the course of a session lasting a few hours, there might be just a moment or two when the like-minded instincts and goals of photographer and sitter merged to elicit that signature gesture, which Sugiura illuminated with flash. She had to be poised to capture the splatter of sand during Shinohara's reenactment of his "boxing painting," or the instant when Takashi Murakami's silhouette became interchangeable with the "Superflat" anime characters he was arranging on the wall. By contrast, Sugiura enlisted a model for the recreation of Japanese avant-garde Gutai artist Atsuko Tanaka's *Electric Dress* performance of 1956; the figure captured in the resulting images seems to glow from within.^[20]



Gathered under the title *Artists Series*, the portraits are life-size and often pair a silhouette with its opposite, ghost-like double. Sugiura achieved this doubling by using the initial photogram as a negative from which to contact print a positive version; the areas of void or white shapes that resulted when the artist's body blocked light from hitting the sensitized paper were reversed to black shapes, or shadow portraits. Whether conceived as diptychs or brief sequences, the paired portraits introduce the idea of time or narrative structure.

Sugiura expanded her portrait project to include scientists with funding from the Joy of Giving Something Foundation to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the discovery of the structure of DNA in 2003. She found the scientists to be more curious about her process and open to exploring ways to represent their work with a kind of visual shorthand. So, for example, she depicted James D. Watson, who together with Francis H. Crick is credited with the discovery of DNA's structure, holding a model of a double helix; biochemist James Rothman blows bubbles that appear like cell membranes growing and dividing in space; while cardiologist P.K. Shah is shown listening to the heartbeat of a mouse, an animal he used in his clinical study of the effect of a high-cholesterol diet on the prevention of heart disease.^[21]

More recently Sugiura has incorporated images from a 2008 body of work titled "Be Loved" into her *Artists and Scientists* project. Once again executed in multiple panels, these photograms capture intertwined couples during their one-hour encounters in "love hotels." Unlike the standing figures whose silhouettes are vertically oriented, the perspective in these images is from above. In terms of content they bring to mind an earlier series from 1970, in which Sugiura photographed one of her friends with her (the friend's) boyfriend making love after a long separation.

Japanese/American

After living in the United States for more than fifty years, Sugiura realized that she had become increasingly unfamiliar with her country of birth. In recent years, she has begun traveling to Japan on a regular basis to reconnect with her Japanese identity. Expressing a desire to explore the secrets of creation, she is compelled to visit ancient seaside or mountain sites that are associated with primal forces of nature. One of these sites is Sakurajima, an active volcano in Kagoshima Prefecture in Kyushu, at the southern tip of Japan; another is Shiobara, a site in the Tochigi Prefecture that features volcanoes, waterfalls, and hot springs that are believed to be 300,000 years old. Once again, it is not the beautiful, scenic views that she seeks out, but details that hint toward more powerful

underpinnings of energy and the beginning of life; minerals and fossils at these sites often find their way into her images. Although the images are related to place, they are also about time, and about timelessness.

Printed on canvas, these recent photographs have an uncanny similarity to the photo canvases she made in the late 1960s and early 1970s, not least of all because she adds painted elements that require her to re-engage with the sites once she is back in her studio. And, like the *Cko* photographs of 1967, she is using photography to address existential questions. Explaining that she experimented for a brief period (2009–13) with color photography on canvas, Sugiura says that she returned to black-and-white film and prints because she prefers the inherent references to pictograms and calligraphy.^[22]

Full Circle/Perfect Balance

Sugiura Kunié's career as an artist is defined by her exploration of unconventional practices and the extended possibilities of the photographic medium. With this retrospective exhibition, there are many instances in which one senses that she has come full circle. From her science/art beginnings, to her experimentation with photography and painting and with cameraless photographs, she has continuously pushed boundaries, whether her subject is the landscape, cityscape, flowers, animals, or people. As an artist with scientific leanings and as a Japanese woman who has lived longer in the United States than in her homeland, she has created a remarkable body of work that reflects a lifelong balancing act, one that can best be described in terms of perfect balance or equilibrium.

In Praise of the Darkroom: SUGIURA Kunié's Photograms and Primal Painting

SAWARAGI Noi [Art critic, Professor of Tama Art University]


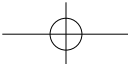

I saw Sugiura Kunié's works for the first time in 1991 when I met her at her studio in New York's Chinatown. She was already concentrating on photograms, a format she would go on to explore and develop through to the present. I had a strong impression at the time but was having some difficulty because it was my first time in New York. The city was completely new to me—the major galleries concentrated in Soho (before relocating to Chelsea), the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Empire State Building that I had seen only in Warhol's film, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center that no longer exist. It was difficult to write about Sugiura's works at first because I could not separate my impressions from the images I had of the city of New York. When I tried to grasp the sense of a single work within the context of Sugiura's overall concept, my thoughts became mixed up with my memories and this blurred my analysis. Looking back, though, it was perhaps precisely this shadowy impression that became an important element of my perspective on Sugiura's art. Because they are ever solitary, emerging only slowly to the outside world from "darkness," Sugiura's works seem as if they had been excavated from a secret passageway. They are neither reflection (mirror) nor transparency (window). I will therefore begin my discussion with that ambiguous but difficult to dismiss image that appeared to me like an illusion in the early 1990s in New York and remains strong in my mind.

What was the New York art scene in 1991? I headed straight to Sugiura's studio in Chinatown when I arrived in New York. She immediately took me to nearby Soho. We rushed to Soho because the Barbara Gladstone Gallery was holding Matthew Barney's first solo exhibition. Barney had come on the scene like a flash and was a sensation. The storm of 1980s Graffiti Art and Neo-Expressionism had given way to the rise of Neo-Geometric Conceptualism (the Neo-Geo movement) and Simulationist Art. Emerging artists such as Mike Kelley, Kiki Smith, and others had begun to hold sway. While the tendencies seemed markedly different at first glance, they shared the Post-Modern framework of attempting to cast off Value-Relativism and Anti-Historicism that faded in the 1980s. Though at the time the Berlin Wall had already collapsed, the Gulf War was ongoing, and the Soviet Union abruptly disappeared, the wave of globalization and cultural homogenization we experience today was not yet in full swing. Manhattan still had the aura of its local rhythm and the sense that danger lurked around the corner should one deviate from the main avenues. Sugiura glided through the streets, taking me to one place after another. My impressions of Sugiura's works in New York were formed in the midst of such unfamiliar territory.

Sugiura's works seemed like damp ground. I felt a sense of moisture and that I could literally smell the earth. Her method, burning traces of objects on photosensitive paper with a flash of light in the darkroom, is based on the horizontal plane of the ground, of the floor surface. In other words, her work originates in a completely different posture from the self-sustaining well-defined vertical of architectural walls, the risings of buildings that are the foundation of civilization. Moreover, the objects Sugiura places on the horizontal floor surface are animate and vibrant. They breathe life. She might appropriate eggs, flowers, a live catfish or eel, or even kittens. What does it all mean?

Sugiura's method of creating a photogram is fundamentally different from that of producing paintings that relate to the vertical walls of a building—verticality and distance being essential conditions for a painter to render a subject. This may be the reason Sugiura's work stood out as distinctive among the spectacular diversity that defined the New York art scene in the early 1990s. While Manhattan skyscrapers rise vertically to reach abstract heights, Sugiura's photograms integrate and adhere closely to life's shadows at the horizontal line of a floor surface, indifferent to the physical competition for height from the ground. Her works on photosensitive paper are a life spring of breath captured for a brief moment from the ground, from within the earth.



Understanding Sugiura's darkroom as her creative workspace helps in comprehending, in



concrete terms, how the non-painterly characteristics of her works emanate from the ground. They do not equate with the type of photography that has for a very long time pursued the verticality of painting. This relates to John Szarkowski's symbolism in his "Mirrors and Windows" comparison of photographs. As I noted above, Sugiura's photographic work is neither mirror nor window. It is more like a tunnel or cave, or a dark hole. A chapter of *New Image Technique*, Bijutsu Shuppan's 1996 publication edited by Komoto Akira, presents Sugiura's production process step-by-step and notes that Sugiura folds or bends her body in half, sitting or leaning on the floor—in other words, facing the ground rather than the outside world, and working quietly like a mole digging the soil. Aside from the discussion of her horizontal position on the floor/ground, three additional points of her process are noted. First, the majority of Sugiura's works are produced in rooms originally without light (perhaps better described metaphorically as 'underground' rather than 'darkroom?'). Secondly, as various fluids are always involved, there is a strong connection with liquid sources. Finally, everything Sugiura does is an extension of her daily life. Let's look at each of these points in turn.

For the first point—the darkroom, the primitive quality of Sugiura's work goes beyond the unavoidable use of a darkroom to produce works on photosensitive paper. Obviously, darkness is not a welcome element in the production of a painting. Light is necessary to compensate for the imperfect sensory perception of the human eye. Sugiura seems intent on distancing herself from the world of visual arts. For her, the eye may be the final agent in the production process. Placing various objects on photosensitive paper in a darkroom, even with a safelight, gives a sense of something happening beyond what the eye can manage. More like groping, the process does not allow precise placement according to a preconceived plan. Sugiura's intention is discovery of the accidental and unpredictable resulting from such groping or fumbling. Her hand is always close to the surface of the photosensitive paper, and there is close contact with her body, not her eyes. Obviously, tactile sense is the most palpable of the senses. In fact, we could say that the hand is a tactile organ in itself. The distance between an object and the tactile sense of it is zero, decisively different from the other senses, starting with vision. It is tempting to say that distance in the case of Sugiura's works is zero, even when she is producing something other than photographs.

Sugiura may have been attracted to photography, and particularly to the photogram, because of the proximity the form offers to the visual surface. This differs markedly from photographers whose motivation is to arrest movement mechanically in order to capture the momentary as still life. Sugiura is quoted in the *New Image Technique* chapter (p. 60), cited above, as follows:



I learned how to make photograms at art school and intended to explore the format, but it wasn't until much later, around 1981, that I could do that. I was working on a print of an image of a totem-like head, and I wanted to erase a line I had drawn directly on the photosensitive paper in the darkroom. The print though retained traces not only of my attempts to erase but also the line I could not to erase. Conditions of setting, exposure, and printing under the orange light of the darkroom are by nature different from working in daylight. I noticed that each time could be a different and fresh experience, depending on time and perception.


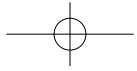

Sugiura's statement suggests clearly that she is no way attempting to create a precise analytical space, excluding mistakes and the accidental as much as possible, as would be the case for vertical painting dependant on visual perception. In total contrast to that, Sugiura's hands and eyes work in tandem as she virtually crawls close to the floor in the darkness and welcomes accidental marks to exist equally with intended ones as traces on photosensitive paper. As mentioned above, Sugiura's work is not painterly and at the same time it is not necessarily photographic, although she may use techniques of photography. In other words, though photographs generally aim for painterly effects, Sugiura is instead interested in photography's origins and the phenomenon of photosensitivity. Rather than being non-painterly in creating paintings without a brush, she is instead engaged in the origins of painting, primal painting. As such, her actions are extremely tactile, almost like dancing or cave painting in the shadows of her darkroom.

For the second point, proximity to fluid sources, Sugiura's work by definition requires an environment equipped with photosensitive solution, fixing solution, water, and drainage. Along with those, a steady flow of water to deal with debris is needed, as well as water-resistant clothing

(Sugiura relates that she for a time worked in a swimsuit). Moreover, while there is no need for the relatively affordable materials used for cleaning paintbrushes and oil paint, Sugiura's workplace requires faucets and hoses to wash developed photosensitive paper, as well as large buckets for holding liquid and flat vessels for immersing the photosensitive paper. In terms of budget, we are not really talking about equipping something as grand as a studio, but rather preparing a production space that actually doubles as studio and bathroom, darkroom and washroom. Rather than a dedicated workspace, Sugiura's production takes place in a space closely connected with the rhythm of such daily life activities as washing her face, brushing her teeth, taking a bath, and using the toilet. The Japanese word for photograph 写真 is composed of the two ideograms 'reflection' + 'reality.' Sugiura uses water, photosensitive paper and photographic processes, but her work is a far cry from the properties of reflection and reality. The multiplicity of her images owes much to the fact that her production is done in a darkroom, and that she gives allowance for accidental or unintended happenings in proximity to water and fluid materials. The extremely wide range of her images has also to do with her use of live plants and other living materials, traces of which are unpredictable and fluid, including the flow of waste and uncontrolled movement that reflects differently each time. That she almost exclusively processes in monochrome is also a large factor. As a result, the photograms Sugiura creates are close to ink paintings with their infinite graduations depending on water content. This is the polar opposite of Western style oil painting.


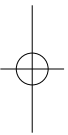
On the third point, in addition to the above mentioned proximity to water, the plants and fresh flowers, live squid and octopi, frogs and catfish Sugiura uses for her photograms are an extension of her daily life, immediately available in the nearby Chinatown market. Regarded abstractly, Sugiura's horizontally placed photosensitive paper resembles the sea, rivers, and ground that comprised the Earth's horizontal plane before the advent of buildings and their supporting walls. Our civilization is built on suppressing life by affixing a horizontal floor to that base. Art and culture are both surely part of that as well. However, Sugiura's work gives a feeling of transparency and infinite life. In fact, the creatures we eat on a daily basis are caught and transported from a base below the floor surface. Sugiura uniquely achieves transparency with food items she casually picks up at the market. She does not specifically secure them for the purpose of her production. She steps out of her studio darkroom/bathroom to get what she needs and to see what she can use, and these items connect with where she works and lives. She consumes whatever she does not use to produce her art. In other words, the darkroom and the kitchen are contiguous. We could say that Sugiura's works and her nourishment co-exist. There is a direct metabolic and life sustaining relation between the place where she eats and where she creates her work. In this respect, the darkness of Sugiura's darkroom is actually alive in her life. Rather than being dedicated to production of her works, the water source is connected to her kitchen, to the neighboring shops and houses, and moreover is part of the larger circulation having to do with food and survival in general. Sugiura slowly (in sharp contradistinction to the generally highly regarded photographic 'decisive moment') brings forth her photograms, including their chance and unexpected elements, as part of these larger processes and the broad cycle of life. Her process is like an 'experiment' with the accidental and unexpected, and not an attempt to get things to conform to plan.

When Sugiura connects her darkroom and studio to the outside world by transferring the tremors of a living subject to a photogram, the liquid/fluid character of her works regenerate life and eventually bring the mediating human and the living object face to face. In her *Artists and Scientists* series, she attempted to capture real contemporary artists and scientists by photogram. The decisive difference between aquatic animals such as the catfish, squid and octopus, or mammals like cats and humans is that the humans are presented as upright and bipedal creatures. Sugiura for the first time affixes photosensitive paper to the vertical surface of the wall, instead of the floor, instantly transforming her darkroom to trace the shadows of the artists and scientists. Changing from a horizontal to a vertical plane, however, does not fundamentally alter her direction. What is most impressive about Sugiura's human shadows is that the character of each individual emerges from those shadows. Divested of clothing and facial expression and transformed to a contour-shape in shadow, they impress with a strong sense of the precarious nature of bipedal posture, the difficulty of managing balance (or rather, instability) in standing upright. The series in fact overturns the myth that human intellect resulted from bipedal walking that distanced the human brain from the ground. The photographs would be totally different if the figures



were to have facial expressions and highly articulated clothing indicating inherent gentleness or charisma. Sugiura's photograms of prominent artists and scientists strips them of their special accomplishments and makes them seem as though they have just emerged from their pre-human evolutionary state. Though these photograms of intellectuals differ from Sugiura's other works in that the photosensitive paper is not laid out on the horizontal surface of the floor, the individuals as contours can hardly manage to support their upright position. It seems rather that the difficulty of doing so and, accordingly, the original relation of humans to the ground is emphasized. Rather than abstractly lionizing the soaring heights of mankind's achievements, Sugiura's approach to her photograms of the human figure suggests both crawling out of the ground and the possibility of eventually reverting to the ground. Entirely different from her distinctive portraits in painting (expressing individuality, power, and a psyche independent of the ground), Sugiura's photograms emit a strong sense of transience and flux. They are perhaps closer to the cycle of nature (mortality) than to the conventional photograph.

Sugiura's grasp of constant change as a matter of course in the plant and animal worlds extends to humans, as animals. She selects and gives a glimpse of something identifying the domain of each person's fame: boxing gloves for Shinohara Ushio, traces of a hand and arm for Jasper Jones, a camera in the case of Moriyama Daido, eye icons for Takashi Murakami, ciphers for Lawrence Weiner. Again, the key to her work has more to do with her 'hand' than her 'eye.' With a minimum of tools, Sugiura emphasizes the animal nature of humans, standing upright from the ground, with only a shadow. Where does her keen observation and insight into these people come from? I touched on this at the beginning of this text, but I would like to look back on the context of my visit to Sugiura's studio my first time in New York. My comments may be somewhat subjective, but that is probably due to the shadow of analysis.



It may not be well known that while she was engaged in her work as an artist, Sugiura also contributed to a regular column ("Overseas Report: NY") that ran in *Bijutsu Techo* (art notebook), a monthly art magazine published by Bijutsu Shuppan in Japan. She wrote more than 400 reviews over a period of over 20 years. These were compiled in a Bijutsu Shuppan special edition (no. 134) published in 2013 as *New York Art/New York Artist: Bijutsu Shuppan Art Report 1986–2008*. I actually served as editor overseeing Sugiura's writing from 1987 to 1989. She would send her manuscript to me, hand written in fine point black ink, with descriptions of the exhibitions that interested her in New York every month. I would review these with red ink. (This was before email and word processors were in general use. I also remember the sound of her voice the first time we spoke in an overseas call when we were in a rush). She would send photos that she herself took on 35 mm film, and we would decide the page layout, photo size, and any necessary trimming. The editor-in-chief at the time, Ohashi Norio, assigned me to the job so I could become familiar with editing. It was a great chance for me. In this age, before the Internet, I had the advantage of learning about New York exhibitions every month before anyone else in Japan. Moreover, the timing coincided with the appearance of Neo-Geometric Conceptualism (the Neo-Geo movement) and Simulationist Art, trends that with quotes and plagiarism criticized art history conceptually. I got excited about Jeff Koons, Sherrie Levine, Haim Steinbach and Ashley Bickerton through the slides Sugiura was sending me every month. Just around that time as well, in my private life, I was immersed in the techniques of House Music sampling and remixing and was covering discussions about that as well. This became the basis for my first edited book of essays (*Simulationism House Music and Stolen Arts*, Yuizensha, 1991). When I visited Sugiura's studio in 1991, it was to experience the world I knew until then only through her photographs. I could experience the living breathing hustle and bustle around Sugiura's studio in a corner of Chinatown and through her photograms that vibrated with the constant movement of life in the city. I could feel the circulation of her darkroom and its water supply that allowed production of works resembling paintings in ink or watercolor.

While Sugiura was incorporating a photogram technique that relied on repeated trial and error to capture life movements, she was at the same time carrying out monthly surveys of the many exhibitions in New York for reports she thought would be of interest to me for *Bijutsu Techo*. Her research sometimes required her to photograph the exhibition spaces and works on display, and possibly to interact with the artists and gallerists. Through these interviews over a long period of time, she could observe what such people said they were interested in, what attracted them, and what they wished to convey. Superficially, her reports might seem to have been simply a kind of

journalism, but what she did became an important record of the times. Moreover, as she related, it was for her more than that:

(This review) moves on from painter Kondo Tatsuo to Yoda Toshihisa. I went around thinking I could take some photos. They said that because it would be finished in a few months, it would be better to search for someone else. In any case, I like this work very much because it allows me to see my own work objectively. (Sugiura Kunié, *New York Art/New York Artist: Bijutsu Shuppan Art Report 1986–2008*, p.9)

I wonder if, as an artist living in New York, Sugiura's photographs of other artists and their works that differed so much from her own might have been instrumental in her later corporeal photographs of scientists and artists. As she herself indicated, aside from the reviews she wrote, her photographs of her surroundings and life since arriving in New York in 1967 contributed to her transition and her own expression as an artist. Her view of New York is closely connected with her viewpoint as an artist:

Looking at art in New York, though it may be described as a repetition of the same people, I think there is no other place so unpredictable and new. Each month, I need to consider how to define and recognize art, particularly when I discover something new. In science, new discoveries are verified with experiments, but art needs to stand the test of time. For art, viewer intuition is crucial in identifying new directions. Humanity reveres art as culturally important because it gives shape to shapeless life and time—it gives a fleeting moment permanence. New works of art are also an indispensable guide for spiritual being and offer a tool for survival in foreseeing the future.
(Sugiura Kunié, *New York Art/New York Artist: Bijutsu Shuppan Art Report 1986–2008*, p. 11–12.)

Sugiura must have also felt quite isolated. She left Japan for the United States in 1963, and moved from Chicago to New York in 1967. She has been living in New York for half a century. Considering that she has been on her own all of the while, the passage of time has great significance. She has steadfastly used the non-painterly medium of photography to investigate the origins of painting. Her fervent intention from the beginning being, as she states it, to 'break with conventions and traditions of both painting and photography,' it was natural that she would place herself in an unknown land and dare to rely totally on herself. Only under such conditions could she gradually divest herself of 'conventions and traditions' in her search for alternatives through repeated experimentation with materials and methods. What we see now is the culmination of her pursuit. The shadows of the darkroom, transience and mutability are, however, ever-present. It is no accident that the title of Sugiura's first series is *Cko*, a designation that in Japanese carries the meaning of 'orphaned' or 'solitude.'

Aspiring Experiments: Why Did They Have to Be Photographs?

SUZUKI Yoshiko [Curator, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum]

To Sugiura Kunié, the photograph is a critical means of expression. After graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (an art college attached to that institute), she moved to New York. There she resumed working in photography and, apart from one period in which she produced only paintings, has not stopped since.

Why has she continued to use photography as her medium of expression? That question arises because her photographs are somewhat different from what we might call “photograph-like photographs.” For example, Garry Winogrand’s street snapshots capture the reality before his eyes, as is, and present it without alteration (or so one would think). In that he utilizes the photograph’s characteristic as a medium to capture reality, it is quite obvious why the photograph was essential for Winogrand. No one would object to calling his photographs “photograph-like photographs.”

Sugiura adds elements of painting to her photographs. By combining a painterly style and paintings themselves with photographs, she expands the potential of photography. In doing so, she searches for her own methodologies, creating a series of new methods, casting off the old, not confining herself to the same expressive style. Yet she cherishes the photographic printing process and has not converted to other media through adopting silkscreen printing, as Andy Warhol did, or treating rephotographed photographs from magazines as her work, as Richard Prince does. Sugiura’s photographs are all taken by herself, and she uses images produced by direct photographic printing out, whether on paper or canvas, in her work.


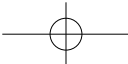

With the photograph as a consistent, strong axis, her style, applying a painterly approach to draw closer ultimately to a mode of expression that she herself imagines, is distinctive. She is an artist of high ideals, solitary in her devotion to her work, and without rivals. Yet, why does Sugiura continue to use the photograph? Examining her four years in Chicago, where she encountered photography and learned that medium’s characteristics, and the process she has gone through throughout her subsequent half century in New York may suggest an answer.

Chicago and the Encounter with Photography: 1963–1967

In 1963, at the age of twenty, Sugiura traveled to the United States, where she first lived in Chicago, Illinois. She was there to study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), one of the most distinguished art colleges in the country. The first year program there provided an orientation to what the school offered in which she studied several types of art, including painting, sculpture, and design. Photography was also part of the curriculum. In the late 1960s, photography as fine art was unknown terrain, attracting little interest. Sugiura was the only student at the time to major in fine art photography at SAIC.

When Sugiura began studying photography there, her advisor was Kenneth Josephson. Known for his conceptual photography, he was one of the driving forces in contemporary photography in America. Oddly enough, however, he encouraged Sugiura to work in documentary photography. What Josephson’s intention was is unknown, but Sugiura’s recollection is that, given the examples of Dorothea Lange or Margaret Bourke-White, he thought that a woman should aim to become a documentary photographer. For about a year, Sugiura followed Josephson’s direction and worked on photographing Japanese families living in Chicago and other subjects, but she herself was convinced that documentary photography was not for her. Ironically, her own direction was the conceptual photography focused on process that Josephson practiced.

Josephson had studied photography at the graduate school of the Institute of Design (“the New Bauhaus”), also in Chicago. The institute carried on the creative principle of an “art of light and motion” of its founder, the Hungarian Constructivist László Moholy-Nagy. The photographers Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind were members of the faculty, under his direction; its graduates included



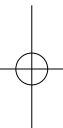
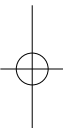
the illustrious photographer Ishimoto Yasuhiro. Moholy-Nagy had led a reassessment of photography from a new perspective in the avant-garde art movement in the first half of the twentieth century. Josephson was influenced by Moholy-Nagy's New Vision, his quest for a new way of seeing through the unique qualities of photography as a medium.

Josephson's approach as an artist was presumably reflected in his teaching of photography at SAIC. In the orientation program in photography there, what Sugiura was first shown were photograms and pinhole cameras. The photogram is a method of taking photographs without a camera. Its origins go back to the dawn of photography in the first half of the nineteenth century, when William Henry Fox Talbot created the calotype, a paper negative, for what he termed a photogenic drawing: placing an object directly on the photosensitive paper and exposing it to sunlight to produce an image. It was revived as an artistic mode of expression by the Surrealist Man Ray and by Moholy-Nagy in the first half of the twentieth century. Fascinated by those primitive techniques and by photographic equipment, Sugiura decided to major in photography.

Sugiura was especially fortunate to have begun studying photography in Chicago. Chicago was one of the places with distinctive photographic styles and where experimental photography was developing. Photographers active in the Midwest, in addition to Callahan and Siskind, mentioned above, include Nathan Lerner, Henry Holmes Smith, Arthur Siegel, György Kepes, Ray K. Metzker, and Frederick Sommer, and who were actively using photograms, multiple images, montages, solarization, and other darkroom techniques to express, in photographs, mindscapes that present, metaphorically, the inner nature of the artist.

At the same period, in New York, the influence of John Szarkowski at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) was enormous. Straight photography based on the documentary style exemplified by the work of Walker Evans, Garry Winogrand, Lee Friedlander, and Diane Arbus was overwhelmingly dominant. Meanwhile, unlike in New York, straight photography developed independently as an art form on the West Coast, where Ansel Adams and Edward Weston explored the potential of lens functions and printing techniques.

These regional differences in the development of photography's expressive styles in the United States are fascinating. In Chicago, Sugiura perhaps sensed the experimental tendency emerging from that soil; the influence of that setting on her future directions was great. And it was there that she would create her first ambitious work, the *Cko* series.



Cko 1966–1967

Sugiura created this series while a student at SAIC.

She was working in color, using experimental styles, as she aimed towards what would become her graduation work. Her motifs in this series were her photographs of male or female bodies, landscapes, and other subjects. Its title, *Cko*, indicates how English speakers should pronounce the *ko* in *kodoku*, "solitude" or "loneliness." Sugiura loved the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, which inspired her to make her theme the loneliness she felt in her daily life in a foreign country and the loneliness of human existence itself.

Her male and female subjects were models provided by the school; they were photographed at her studio or in the model's home. Following the example of Bill Brandt's *Perspective of Nudes*, she used an extremely wide-angle or fisheye lens, which caused her models' faces, limbs, and torsos to be distorted and deformed. The effect is to create a mysterious, almost hallucinatory, world. The male and female nudes call to mind Adam and Eve, symbols of the birth of humanity. The bodies tightly curled up, hugging their knees, suggest fetuses and allude to the solitary, lonely nature of humanity. The landscapes were photographed in gardens in Chicago and by Lake Michigan. Since it would have been difficult to photograph her models out of doors, she shot the settings and models separately and combined the images later. That ex post facto layering of images taken separately was connected to her use of multiple images, montage, solarization, and other techniques; Sugiura emphasized darkroom manipulation in her work.

Those darkroom techniques were used extensively by Josephson, Callahan of the Institute of Design in Chicago, and other Midwestern photographers mentioned earlier. But at the time, few of that group were working in color. Color photography began attracting interest in the 1970s after William Eggleston's solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. In the 1960s, however, while

color was used in advertising photography, and color photography had become popular among amateur photographers, black-and-white photography was dominant and color a very minor presence among serious photographers.

Sugiura's efforts in color, the results of her experimentation, were reflected in every aspect of the *Cko* series. First, the method she worked out added, in the process of developing an image from negative to print, changes that were ordinarily inconceivable. Color photography involves set procedures, including color development and bleaching. Sugiura would, for example, skip a step in the bleaching process or dilute the liquid being used. As a result, she deliberately destroyed the balance of the three primary colors in her prints, creating special effects that emphasized cyan or magenta, for example. In addition, she did not always use color negatives to create her works in color. Significantly deviating from the usual process, she used black and white negatives on color printing paper and used stencils to burn checkerboard motifs into her prints or overlapped multiple images, incorporating psychedelic elements fashionable in the 1960s. While maintaining these works consistency as a series, she added creative variations to each.

Moving to New York

In 1967, having completed four years at art school, Sugiura set out, the day after graduation, for New York, with two friends from SAIC. Since then, she has continued to make New York her base.

Her years in Chicago were a period in which she explored the characteristics of the photograph as a medium and, absorbed in experimental methods, pursued through her own experiences what was possible in photography and how it differed from other media.

In New York, Sugiura's style came to be directly and significantly related to painting. Amidst a shift in art trends from Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and other artists were making extensive use of photographs in paintings and silkscreen prints, media that could be mass produced, symbolizing consumer society. Sugiura was well aware of those trends and went on to personify the fascination with new media generating new creative styles.


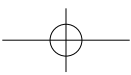

In the 1960s, when Sugiura began living in New York, the United States was still in the Cold War era, the Vietnam War was turning into a quagmire, and the country faced severe social problems. These began to cast a shadow in the country's vitality. It was also, however, a period in which distinctive new cultures were forming. A drive to criticize the establishment and seek new ways of life arose, largely among young people, and the hippy movement and other subcultures developed. Culturally, it was an extremely fascinating age.

Living with her friends and working as, for example, a photographer's assistance, Sugiura was barely able to support herself at first. After that challenging first year, however, Sugiura was at last able to work seriously on her own art.

Photocanvas 1968–1971

In this series, Sugiura changed materials: instead of printing photographic images on paper, she used canvas. She applied Rockland Liquid Light Emulsion, a photographic emulsion, to canvas herself, then printed a negative she has taken onto the canvas. This series is a shift from her use of color in her Chicago period to black-and-white photography. The change was practical: it was difficult, in her own apartment, to create color works as she had back at college in Chicago. The process for developing color film and making prints requires temperature control; in her apartment environment, in which the hot water was not kept at a consistent temperature, she had to give up on color. That, however, inspired her to think of printing black-and-white photographs on the canvas used for paintings, and also Warhol's used of canvas for printing his photographs suggested this possibility.

She began with small canvases, experimenting to figure out the right number of times to coat them with emulsion. The title of her first work in this series, *1 min* (1968; p. 026) refers to the length of exposure of the canvas. As she continued this series, she shifted to larger sizes. Taking macro photographs of rocks and tree trunks, for example, in Central Park, she greatly enlarged them so that they became abstract images and noticed the intriguing effects that appeared. Given the large size of her prints, she would use a mirror to reflect the image of the negative from the enlarger, again and again, to project it onto the canvas, which she had hung on the wall of the darkroom. She would



then use black, white, and other acrylics and pencils to correct the outlines of the details and the overall tone of the print. Through the abstract image created in this process, Sugiura's photographs came to look like paintings. Indeed, in an intriguing development, her *Central Park 3* (1971; p. 095, fig. 1) was chosen for the Whitney Museum's 1972 *Annual Exhibition of Paintings* (now the *Whitney Biennial*). That achievement symbolizes Sugiura's painterly approach to photography.

Photo-painting 1976–1981; Photocollage 1976–1981

In the early 1970s, after creating her *Photocanvas* series, Sugiura distanced herself from photography. She felt that she could express herself without it. After two or three years of creating only paintings, however, she felt that having to control everything in a painting herself, with no way out, was oppressive; she felt that she could not express what she was imagining through painting alone.

One day, when she tried placing a photocanvas she had produced earlier beside one of her paintings, she realized that a new tension and freshness were generated, and she became certain that the photograph provided inspiration and aroused her imagination. Sugiura then began working on her *Photo-painting*, in which a painting in acrylics and a photocanvas would be combined, side by side, to form one work.

What is particularly noteworthy about this series is that Sugiura deliberately used vernacular photographs in it. The photographs placed beside the paintings remind one of ordinary American scenes shot in the period when Walker Evans and Ben Shahn were taking socio-documentary photographs for the Farm Security Administration during the Depression. For example, consider *The Station* (1978; p. 096, fig. 6). It was photographed from the station platform when she was waiting for the train back to New York City from Long Island, where her mother lived. The tranquility of the simple platform, which could be anywhere in the United States, and the clouds floating above suggest an everyday scene while calling up a certain nostalgia: the photograph stirs the viewer's empathy. Moreover, the photograph is printed on canvas, not photographic paper; that reduces its sharpness, emphasizes the emotional aspect of the image, and gives the viewer a sense of *déjà vu*, of seeing an image of a memory anyone would have.

We sense Sugiura's ambition here: through the combination of a photograph and a monochromatic abstract painting, she makes the "photograph-like photograph" image, as something representational, confront the painting. Doing so shows the essential differences between a painting and photograph and, through the cross-fertilization of their different elements, brings her nearer to creating a new world and the style she sought. Photograph and painting, representational and abstract, the external world and the inner self: these aspects are incompatible at first glance, but both are of critical importance to Sugiura. They are consistent themes throughout her work.

The *Photocollage* series began as studies for the *Photo-painting* works. This series is also full of variations. After creating a work that paired a photograph and a painting, she would make miniature paper versions that resembled small photographs, starting to work out her ideas for the next work—what photograph to use, what color to combine with it. Gluing a photograph to etching paper was the trigger for a new series. She had acquired the etching paper, intending to coat it with photographic emulsion, but ended up not moving in that direction. She was thus left with stacks of etching paper. Exposing the photosensitized paper without putting anything in the film holder in the darkroom enlarger, she was able to print a plain black or gray color or achieve an impromptu abstract image. Liking the results, she combined those images with colored paper and other materials.

Photogram and installation 1980–

In the 1980s, Sugiura began her *Photogram* series. The photogram was a technique that she had long liked, since learning it at art school in Chicago, but had not used it seriously, for some reason. One day, however, when she was drawing directly on black-and-white printing paper in the darkroom, she discovered something engaging in recording, as is, a line she had mis-drawn and traces that she had intended to erase, and began making photograms. The photogram process's fascination, for Sugiura, consists of its integration of photography and painting.

Her *Photograms* are the series that Sugiura has worked on for the most extended period of time. She has developed it in many directions, changing the subject she addresses and her style.

At the start, in the 1980s, she was maintaining the photogram style that Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray had practiced while in the process of searching for her style, including applying drawings and experimenting with special methods in the developing process, such as dripping warm water on the photographic printing paper, as though drawing on it. Over time, through her characteristic bold experimentation with darkroom processes, she broke out of the traditional photogram style.

From about the end of the 1980s, Sugiura focused on living subjects, creating photograms of flora, including flowers and plants, and fauna, including frogs, catfish, eels, octopuses, squid, Hiyoko, her cat, and other small animals. Those subjects had two advantages: it was possible to place the small animals on the photosensitive paper, and they were easy to source in New York's Chinatown, where her studio is located.

Working with living subjects made a significant change in Sugiura's photograms. That experience and the addition of a method of developing colors enabled her to develop her own unique photograms. Her color process enables her, in printing on photosensitive paper, to control its color through the use of a photo tone colorant. The black and the gray neutral tones on the gelatin silver print that Sugiura uses for her photograms change depending on how long they are immersed in the colorant. The effect can be, for example, a fresh, bright blue—the blue of clear water—seen in *Hoppings D Positive 2* (1996; p. 068) or *Hoppings A Positive* (1996; p. 069), the result of that colorant process.

The photogram technique may also have stimulated Sugiura's awareness of Asian thought. In *The Kitten Papers* (1992; pp. 066–067), she let her kitten move about at will in the darkroom for a day and night. When she developed the image the next day, the trances of urine and footprints that the cat had left showed up. She felt a sense of liberation through the process of creating a work while accepting those unexpected, random happenings. It is said that if one continues working while relying on the flow of nature, enlightenment will one day arrive, out of the blue. Working in that mindset, she is able to receive greater than expected results with miraculous timing, thanks to the power that exists in photography, a presence that guides the artist.


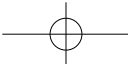

From flora to fauna, and then to installations using x-ray photographs of the human body: Sugiura's photograms have displayed a highly varied development, and she continues to create them.

Artists/Scientists/Boxing Papers and Intimate Series; 1999–

Sugiura began creating photograms in 1980. Her next challenge, an extension of the photogram, was the human subject. Taking life-sized human beings as her motif, she attached the photosensitive paper to the wall, instead of placing on the floor as she had done earlier, stood a person in front of it, and set off a flash. The subject's black shadow would be reversed, white in the negative image. If that were used as a paper negative and another layer of undeveloped photosensitive paper placed on it and exposed to light, she would produce a positive image. *Cai Qua Chang D* (2004; p. 084) and *Dr. P. K. Shah* (2003; p. 088) are negative images. The others in the series shown in this exhibition are all positives.

The negative-positive process, which William Henry Fox Talbot discovered, had been the method used to produce almost all photographs until the emergence of digital photography, which now prevails. Just as Talbot mastered the calotype, producing a paper positive image from a paper negative, Sugiura attempts to produce portraits of human subjects using large gelatin silver print photosensitive paper. Working without a camera, she captures the outlines of the human form captured as traces of light with extraordinary intensity, as though the human subject's energy were being transferred to them.

In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Swiss poet and theologian Johann Kaspar Lavater published a book on physiognomy, *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschenkenntnis und Menschenliebe*, in which he argued that it was possible to read a person's inner nature from his facial features or body structure. He regarded someone's profile, captured from a silhouette, as a critical key to learning that person's character. As Lavater suggested, there are distinctive differences in the profiles we see in *Jasper Johns Dp4* (2001; p. 082), *Yayoi Kusama Ap* (2003; p. 083), *Cai Qua Chang D* (2004; p. 084), *Takasbi Murakami Ap* (2002; p. 087), *Dr. P. K. Shah* (2003; p. 088), *Dr. James D. Watson Dp2* (2004; p. 089). These silhouette portraits highlight each subject's character, and each print as a whole emits a presence.




Sugiura also arranged items that symbolize each subject—artist, scientist, intimate—with them. For example, for the artist Shinohara Ushio, she devised a set up to indicate *Boxing Painting*, the work almost synonymous with him. For James D. Watson, who contributed to the discovery of the structure of DNA, she had him hold a model of the double helix. Her *After Electric Dress, Ap2, Yellow* (2002; p. 073) was devised in homage to the *Electric Dress* (1956) that Tanaka Atsuko, a leading member of the Japanese art group Gutai, created. The glitter of the Christmas tree lights attached to the woman's body calls to mind the cluster of colorful electric bulbs and vacuum tubes and the electric cords that Tanaka used in that performance. Also, this colorized photogram maintains the power of its model's outline, while the slight difference in the time in which the four sheets of photo paper composing it were immersed in the colorant produce yellows and browns that interweave subtle hues that seem to sparkle and give off light.


DG Photocanvas 2009–

Scan film that has been shot, then print the resulting digital file on canvas, using an inkjet printer: Sugiura began using that technique in 2009 and started shooting in Japan in 2016. She had not addressed Japan in her work since moving to the United States at the age of twenty, but recently she has begun to feel that she wants to know Japan.

Her interest in living beings—the flora, fauna, small animals, and human beings in her work thus far—has expanded to even larger life forms—the earth and the universe. As the titles—*300,000 yrs Ago, Shiobara A* (2016; p. 082) or *30,000,000 yrs ago, One Thousand Mattresses A* (2016, p. 085)—indicate, Sugiura's interest in the earth in the distant past is focused on Japan's mountains. Seeking geological strata and rocky walls, she hires a driver and goes location hunting by car. To get to those spots, she travels by bullet train or airplane from Kyushu to the northern tip of Hokkaido, covering land throughout Japan that had been unknown to her. That is a new experience for her.



Kenji Miyazawa, who was very fond of minerals, included rocks in his stories and poems. He used the name of a white stone, for example, to express the whiteness of clouds. One imagines that Sugiura may also have felt, through the image of a white stone, a desire to connect to another presence. Perhaps that presence was a natural phenomenon, something like the weather. In *Sakurajima B* (2016; p. 084), the white mineral gives a soft impression, like a cloud floating in the sky. The reef in *30,000,000 yrs ago, One Thousand Mattresses A* is like ice adrift in the Arctic Sea.



Sugiura enlarges the white rocks and crosssections of strata captured in her photographs large canvases, increasing their abstractness. She creates them using the same method as in, for example, *Central Park 3* (1971; p. 087, fig. 1) from the photocanvas series that she began in the late 1960s. Unlike those early works in which she applied the photographic emulsion by herself, however, these are inkjet prints, with a mechanical evenness, creating an impression of whiteness that is cool, refreshing, and futuristic. The color applied here and there to the surface of the photograph adds painterly elements to generate a new hybrid vision.

Why does Sugiura continue to use the photographic medium as her means of expression?

When the most photograph-like elements are sought in the realistic aspect of photography, the characteristics of the photograph are limited, and potential other than realism is overlooked. Sugiura engages with the most exceptional characteristics of the photograph, grappling with it in her own creative work, as though to test and confirm those characteristics. During her college years in Chicago, she explored the photograph by means of a variety of darkroom techniques and shooting methods, the nature of the non-realistic photograph. After moving to New York, she continued to alternate between nonrealistic and photograph-like styles, between abstraction and representation, in the relationship between photography and painting, addressing a style that only the photograph makes possible.

By fusing painterly expression with photography in the *Photocanvas* series, she posed the question of how far the photograph can maintain its presence as a photograph. In that series, by investigating a painterly style thoroughly, she arrived at a “Maybe it doesn't have to be photography” state and stopped doing photography in favor of painting. But with her *Photo-painting* series, she revived her use of photography, taking vernacular, straight photographs. With the addition of the

colors of abstract painting and of printing her photographs on canvas, the photographs Sugiura had shown until then shared the qualities of both quotidian scenes and eternal memories. They have a strong sense of presence; they are images that move us. Of course, color and canvas are essentials in this series; they amplify the splendor of the photographs. The photogram, her next challenge, is the mode in which Sugiura has continued to work the longest. With plants, fish and shellfish, reptiles, small mammals, and other living creatures as her subject, she focuses on the fundamental photographic method, developing her photograms while searching for her own distinctive style. These are works intensely conscious of the accidental and the spontaneous in photography as well as its conceptual nature. Sugiura's work makes us open our eyes in wonder as she moves forward freely, liberated, as though she has attained enlightenment of some sort. Her *Artists*, *Scientists*, *Boxing Papers* and *Intimate* series, capturing the human figure with the photogram, highlight the forms of her human subjects and clearly express their body types and outlines of their faces. In a sense, they are realistic. In her photograms as well, Sugiura tests the abstract and the representational and has an approach to a painterly style always in mind.

To Sugiura, what has made possibly her constantly new styles incorporating the singular qualities of the photograph as a medium is that the photography encourages experiments, generates unexpected results, and has the capacity to capture them. As a result, she can come and go between the abstract and the representational as she wishes. And the phenomena that the photograph causes are an ongoing inspiration for Sugiura, placing no limits on the experimental approach that is her life work. Therefore, the photograph is essential to her and will continue to be her means of expression. In Chicago at the age of four and in fifty years in New York, the path she has followed is, and will continue to be, a beautifully aspirational experiment.