

2022/11/1

Noguchi Rika: Small Miracles

Oct. 7, 2022 — Jan. 22, 2023



Left:
Cucumber, 21 August, 2017,
Collection of the artist
Right:
Small Miracles #8, 2014,
the amana collection

Since being awarded first prize in the photography category at the *3.3m2 Exhibition* in 1995 and the *New Cosmos of Photography* competition in 1996, she has been considered one of Japan's foremost contemporary photographers, with her photographs and video works displayed in numerous exhibitions, both nationally and overseas. Through series such as *A Prime* (1997 on), *I Dreamt of Flying* (2003) and *The Sun* (2005–08), *To the Night Planet* (2014–15), her work has explored the relationship humans have with unknown realms such as underwater, high-altitude places, and outer space. In recent years, through an exploration of the countless tiny riddles peppering our daily lives and immediate surroundings, she has pursued a form of photographic expression that frees up the senses and imagination of the viewer.

From her early series to her most recent pieces, this exhibition brings together works from across the career of an artist who has been producing photos and video work for over thirty years. These are presented not in chronological order but rather according to a nonlinear arrangement that allows the works to better speak to one another, showing them in a fresh light. Combining photographs, video works, drawings and more, and guided by the “small miracle” of the way in which photography is able to transcend time and space, the exhibition showcases the various scenes and places that Noguchi has encountered across all her years making work, as it ranges from the early series *To Dive* (1995) to her most recent work, *A Palm Tree* (2022). Viewers encountering Noguchi's unique expressivity are given the opportunity to re-examine the significance of the various forms of life existing in this world, and ponder what the mysterious power of photographs and video consists in.

Rika Noguchi

Born in Saitama City in 1971, she began taking photographs in 1992, developing a photographic practice focused around exhibitions. She has participated in a number of international art exhibitions. In 2002, she received the 52nd Minister of Education Art Encouragement Prize for New Artists. Her major exhibitions inside Japan include a feeling of something happening (Marugame Genichiro-Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art [MIMOCA], 2001), I Dreamt of Flying (The Hara Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), and The light reaching the future (Izu Photo Museum, 2011-2012). Her works are included in the collections of the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, The National Museum of Art, Osaka, the Guggenheim Museum, and the Pompidou Centre.

Exhibited Works |

My Father's Album (2014)

My Father's Album is a series of photographs first displayed at Gallery 916 in 2014, before being released as a photograph collection in 2022. The year before the show, Noguchi had lost her father, who had been a keen photographer throughout his life and kept a good quantity of negatives. After coming into possession of her father's negatives while he was still alive, Noguchi decided to develop them herself. "The photographs started from my parents' honeymoon, and went onto document my birth, and that of my younger brother and sister ... being there in the darkroom, shining a light on the negatives and fixing the images onto photographic paper, I was surprised by how vital those images felt ... It was a strange experience, tracing my father's perspective like that ... My father's photos were a personal thing, created for himself and his family. Yet I can't help but feel that feeling of contentment I experienced developing his pictures might be passed along to someone else, through the miraculous power of photography.*" It was with this series that Noguchi began to think about the "miraculous power" of photography, which is able to overcome the separation between past and present, and to convey to others the things the photographer has experienced and felt.

*Noguchi Rika: My Father's Album, Akaaka Art Publishing Inc, 2022, n. pag.

Small Miracles (2014 / 2022)

Noguchi began capturing aspects of her daily life with the camera she inherited from her father when he died: a half-size Olympus Pen F, which can take 72 shots on a 36-exposure 35mm film. This Small Miracles series was first shown in Gallery 916 in 2014, as an accompaniment to My Father's Album. Noguchi has stated, "Our daily lives are filled with small miracles that we don't notice. Being invisible, they are difficult to capture in a photo. Things you can't see, but that are there: those are the things I want, somehow, to photograph. I wish to make an artwork that one could feel the richness of the world where we live right now, by looking at that photograph."*

*My Father's Album / Small Miracles – Noguchi Rika Exhibition Pamphlet, Gallery 916,



Small Miracles #8, 2014, the amana collection

In this series she turns her camera on phenomena that come out of actions reminiscent of science experiments: “Surface tension causes a paper coaster to stick to an upturned glass, so the water inside doesn’t fall out”; “A spoon is rubbed with a magnet so that its metal becomes temporarily magnetized”; “A raw egg sits suspended in a glass of water, neither sinking to the bottom nor floating to the surface.” This world we call daily life is brimming with the effects of those forces we can’t usually see. This series, shot on tables or in other domestic locations, draw the viewer’s attention to these curious small-scale happenings.

For this exhibition, there are new additions to this series that was originally shown in 2014 at Gallery 916. The title of the exhibition this time, “Small Miracles”, came out of the realization on Noguchi’s behalf that that she has been guided in her practice up to this point by the “miraculous power” at work in photography.

A Budworm (2019)

This video work captures the movement of a budworm caterpillar as it slowly floats through the air, blown about by the wind. It would appear to be joined to the branch of a nearby tree by a transparent thread, but when we concentrate exclusively on its movement, it comes to seem as though it were moving in utter freedom according to some mysterious principle, in defiance of gravity. The work was created by Noguchi while at the Reborn-Art Festival 2019 that was held around the Oshika Peninsula and the downtown area of Ishinomaki City in Miyagi Prefecture. It was also shown in the 2020 Overlapping Circles: 5 Artists Collaborate with the Collection exhibition at the Kawamura Memorial DIC Museum of Art.

Insects / Leaves / Songs of Birds (2020)

Like *A Budworm*, this video work also captures small lives found in the forest – baby spiders, winged insects, leaves – as they float suspended in midair. The insects and leaves drift, flap, and spin as their environment and morphology demands. In the exhibition, the videos are shown at random, so the viewer can experience the fascination of the forms and movements as a temporally located experience. This work was created in 2020 for the Nishi 2-Chome Chikahodo Video Creation Project curated by the Sapporo Cultural Arts Community Center (SCARTS) is still (as of October 2022) on display on the video screen there installed in an underground thoroughfare. Looping the kinds of small yet diverse movements of the tiny world of the forest that you wouldn’t see if you didn’t look closely and broadcasting them on a big screen to create a communal experience, this work is simple in its concept yet has a distinctively Noguchi-esque sense of the mysterious and miraculous.

Cucumber (2017)

The experience of observing a cucumber plant as it grows generates continual surprise at the way that its stems and vines change direction and shape on a daily basis. Plants that grow of their own accord are of course different to those phenomena produced through experiments, but in this work, as in the *Small Miracles* series, Noguchi focuses on the invisible forces hidden in our everyday world. The titles of the works reference the dates they were shot, so that we know that the two

images displayed here were taken a day apart, on the 21st and 22nd of August. The work is reminiscent of the kinds of observation diaries of plants that many children will keep at some point at school.

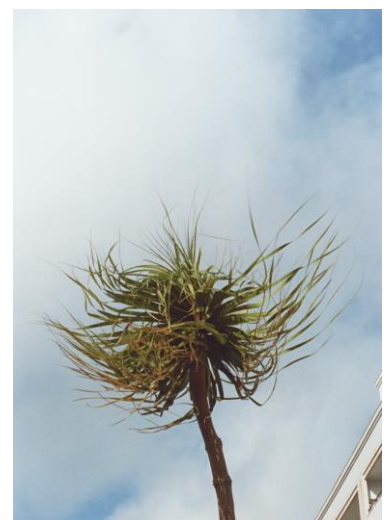
Carpenter Bee (2019)

Like *A Budworm*, this was a work produced for the Reborn-Art Festival 2019 The Oshika Peninsula where Noguchi was taking photographs was home not only to many animals such as deer and pheasants, but also insects like mosquitos, bees and leeches. “At first Noguchi was concerned by how to protect herself from those insects, and to keep her distance. But she says that one day, her attitude changed, and she decided instead to try going after them with her camera. What we see then is the carpenter bee flying away from Noguchi as she chases it, or the small creatures carrying on their lives in a meticulous way as they’re blown about by the wind.*” The *Carpenter Bee* series was the start of Noguchi turning her gaze on insects, entities that she had up until that point feared and avoided. It could in fact be argued that it was this change to her relationship with insects that formed the impetus for the video works that followed where she turns her gaze on the small world. Thinking that “the cameras used for endoscopies must be good at capturing small objects.”⁹ Noguchi began from this point to use a special camera made by refurbishing a endoscopy camera in creating her work.

*Official Record of Reborn Art Festival 2019, Art Diver, 2021, p. 106.

A Palm Tree (2022)

These three images capturing a palm tree swaying around in strong gusts of wind are Noguchi’s most recent work from 2022. The images present an everyday scene from Okinawa, where Noguchi has been based since 2017. As with the works featuring insects, we see here a fascination for swaying and other movements caused by the wind, while the way the three photographs are lined up alongside one another is suggestive of the flow of both wind and time.



Left: *Cucumber*, 21 August, 2017, Collection of the artist

Center: *Carpenter Bee #1*, 2019, Collection of Tokyo Photographic Art Museum

Right: *A Palm Tree #3*, 2022, Collection of the artist

To the Night Planet (2015)

The video work *To the Night Planet* is screened in a room positioned centrally to the exhibition space. The film originated from a photograph series of the same name taken in 2014, which came out of a commission for SWITCH magazine's special feature on Araki Nobuyoshi to take photographs from the window of a moving vehicle*. Noguchi used the half-size Olympus Pen F camera that she'd inherited from her late father, photographing the route from her studio to her home in Berlin where she was living at the time from the window of the bus. Looking at the contact sheet for the film, Berlin seems to twinkle like the stars in outer space. She developed the entire film and included all the photos there without any editing, to create the collection, *To the Night Planet*. This is one of the three series—along with *My Father's Album* and *Small Miracles*—that Noguchi refers to as her “Pen F Trilogy.” A year after producing the photographs, Noguchi used a digital camera to film the same journey for a solo show at the Canon Gallery S.

*SWITCH, February 2015 Issue, pp. 56-63.



To the Night Planet, 2015, Collection of the artist,
Supported by Canon Marketing Japan Inc.

To Dive (1995)

To Dive was the series with which Noguchi gained broad acclaim as a photographer, and it appears to me now like the portal into her journey into the unknown. In 1995, Noguchi was getting off at each station on the Keiyo Line train to take photos. One day, by total chance, she encountered someone wearing a diving kit and heading for the sea and, feeling her interest piqued, decided to follow him. That was the start of this series. The camera she had at the time was a panoramic camera called a Widelux, which she'd been given by a stranger who came to her first solo show. “The first time I saw a diver was on a winter's day. They looked like a person heading to the moon. They seemed so mysterious to me,*” says Noguchi. *To Dive* gives its viewer the sense that the extraordinary exists just beyond the ordinary, that the doors to the unknown are very close and can open unexpectedly at any point. Noguchi went after the “person going to the moon.” What she encountered was the bottom of the diving pool.

*New Cosmos of Photography, Vol. 5, Canon Inc., July 1996, p. 23.



To Dive #1, 1995, Collection of the artist

***At the Bottom of the Sea* (2017)**

For this work, Noguchi dived to the bottom of the sea at night for the first time. Having had the idea to capture the light moving through the sea after dark, she went down underwater with a tripod and film camera. Descending to the depths of the sea at night, she felt herself to be finally arriving at the sea floor, in a way that she hadn't been able to when creating *To Dive* twenty years previously. Her 2004 series *Color of the Planet* featured underwater photographs taken when diving off Yonaguni Island, but it was in beholding *At the Bottom of the Sea* that I first experienced a sensation as though I were on board the Apollo 11 and had just trodden on the moon's surface for the first time. In this exhibition the *To Dive* series is arranged together with one image from *At the Bottom of the Sea*, like the doorway and destination to a long journey. The *At the Bottom of the Sea* shot in question is a powerful image, where the artificial light silently illuminates the sea floor as if it were the sun or the moon.



At the Bottom of the Sea #1, 2017,
Obayashi Collection

Outline of exhibition |

- Dates: Oct. 7, 2022—Jan. 22, 2023
- Closed: Monday (except when Monday falls on a holiday, in which case the museum is open and closed the following day), New Year's holidays (Dec. 29 - Jan. 1 and Jan. 4)
- Venue: 2F Exhibition Gallery, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum
〒153-0062 Yebisu Garden Place, 1-13-3 Mita Meguro-ku Tokyo 153-0062
- Open Hours: 10:00–18:00 (20:00 on Thursdays and Fridays)
*final admission 30 minutes before closing.
- Admission : Adults ¥ 700/ College Students ¥ 560 / High School and Junior High School Students, Over 65 ¥ 350 *Admission is free for children in elementary school or younger; junior high school students living or attending schools in the Tokyo metropolitan area; holders of Japanese disability identification cards (shogaisha techo), along with up to two caregivers; and holders of the museum's annual passport.
- Organized by: Tokyo Metropolitan Government, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum operated by Tokyo Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture

For Press |

If you have any press enquiries about this Exhibition, please contact our Department of Public Relations.

High-resolution images for publication are also available by e-mail.

press-info@topmuseum.jp

<https://topmuseum.jp/e/contents/index.html>