

WHY ARE WE DOING  
WHAT WE ARE DOING?



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*10 September - 9 October 2016*

*Agan Harahap  
Angki Purbandono  
Iswanto Soerjanto  
Robert Zhao  
RongRong & Inri  
Usami Masahiro  
Yamamoto Masao*

## WHY ARE WE DOING WAHT WE ARE DOING?

### PHOTOGRAPHY AND LIFE

The title of this exhibition, “Why are we doing what we are doing?” refers to my interest and curiosity about the relationship between artists, their media of expression and their creative process. I believe a better understanding about this very basic and fundamental issue will give us a more profound awareness towards their artworks.

I have a particular interest in the medium of photography due to its unique ability to capture reality and immortalize moments of our life into still images. This unique nature of photography has been used as a tool to make documentation of various events in many aspects of our life, from the photo in our ID cards and passports, to a more complex application in the fields of medical and science. Our relationship with photography goes beyond its practical function; we also develop a meaningful and emotional relationship with it. In this case, photography could manifest as souvenirs of a particular moment in our life, such as family holidays, weddings, newborn babies, etc. Photography also plays a big role in the creation of consumerism through its use in advertising. Photojournalism opens up our view towards our society and the world we live in. It is so true that a photograph tells a thousand words. In essence, photography has great power to evoke emotions and bring a profound

awareness of our true selves as human beings.

Photography is also a medium used in fine art that has gone through a rapid development of technology. The invention of digital photography and the Internet has brought the relationship between human and photography to the next level of intensity. Not so long ago, photography was only produced by those who understood the basic principle of operating a camera. The process of sharing our photos with others was as complicated as the process of taking them. There were limitations to whom we could share our photos with, probably only with the people who were close to us. Publishing photographs in mass media or in public exhibitions was not as simple for most people.

These days, everyone are free to take as many pictures and as often as they want through their smartphone, and they can easily share their photos through the Internet, no matter how significant or how insignificant they may be. We can see limitless numbers of photographs at any time we want from our computer and smartphone. Although our relationship with photography has changed drastically, I think the basic understanding of photography remains the same: capturing reality and immortalizing moments of our life into images.

### ART AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Based on my observation, there are two basic principles on how artists use photography as the medium of expression in fine art. The classic principle in creating fine art photography can be seen in the works of Yamamoto Masao and RongRong & Inri. They use photography as the manifestation of their ideology of life. Artistic principles and values are embedded in every step of their process of creation. From selecting their subject matter or narrative, choosing the objects that best represent their subject matter, deciding on the composition, the lighting, the type of film they use to capture the photographs, down to the printing process, there are artistic considerations at every step of their method. In their works, they capture meaningful

realities and immortalize moments of their life that strongly connect to our visual and mental state of mind. Let's take a look at Yamamoto Masao's photograph of the sakura trees over the water; the work is filled with a great artistic energy that evokes our emotions, bringing the sense of serenity and beautiful feeling.

I am particularly intrigued by his work entitled “A Box of Ku”, that feels like an archive of memories of the artist's life journey. The unconventional display of the set of small-sized photographs in various dimensions lying on a pedestal covered by a transparent acrylic box creates the feeling of an archival artifact.



Yamamoto Masao  
“A Box of Ku”

2015, installation view at Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo, Japan

The works of RongRong & Inri are based on a very poetic idea of meaningful relationships. In my opinion, our existence is meaningless until we construct a meaningful relationship with another being in this world, only then will something larger than our self emerge. To begin with, they chose a very meaningful narration as the soul of their artworks. Every single step taken in the process of transforming the narration into images had gone through a very meticulous and delicate artistic consideration. As a result, the series of photographs "Tsumari Story" expresses the majestic feeling of a meaningful relationship. In particular, I am touched by their photos set in a traditional Japanese house, with them donned in traditional kimonos bowing towards each other, and in between lays their kimonos on the tatami floor. To me, this series of photographs expresses the nature of their relationship, as well as the relationship with their habitat and culture.



**RongRong & Inri**  
*"Tsumari Story Series : No 1-1, 1-2, 1-9"*  
 2012

"Manda-la" series by Usami Masahiro not only mesmerizes me with its beauty and grandeur, but also what lies beneath, that is a very complicated and time consuming process. He completed this series of 20 photographs in the span of 20 years. Beyond that, I could not imagine how he found and perused the center figure in each of his photographs from this "Manda-la" series. In Masahiro's "Ken Otsuka, Akihabara Tokyo", the center figure is manga artist Ken Otsuka lying on his hospital bed. How can we peruse someone in such condition to be present in a photo session? That is beyond what I can imagine, not to mention all of his works were not composed in Photoshop, but rather, his photos were captured in their actual setting.

In the other hand, there are artists who create their artworks by using photography or photographic method. Most artists who use these methods employ the nature of human relationship with photography to construct a sense of artistic beauty. To get a better understanding about this matter, let's take a look at Angki Purbandono's "Laser Print on My Paper". In this work, he prints photographs that he got from various sources (some are photos he gets from the internet, some are from his artworks, while others are from his daily snapshots) using a laser printer on different kinds of receipts that he has been collecting for years. Angki's method of creating his artworks is mainly derived from his habit of collecting snapshots and things that he encounters in his daily life. These items become a souvenir or monument that commemorates the very moment he found them. I think this is similar to the way we use our smartphones to take snapshots of many things we encounter daily in order to preserve certain memories. This is the new kind of relationship we have with photography. If anyone were to look at our collection of photos, they could sum up a narration that describes who we are. The same method was employed to create "Laser Print on My Paper".

Each receipt Angki used holds a special memory, and the photograph he printed over was chosen as the visual symbol of each memory. For instance, there is a receipt that Angki got when he was in prison that stated payment received from Dian (Angki's wife, though they were not married yet at that time) to Angki Purbandono for the amount of IDR 200,000,-. On that receipt, Angki printed the photograph of himself with his wife, Dian. Angki said that if he had never gone to jail, probably he would never have realized how much Dian loved him.



**Angki Purbandono**  
*"Angki Pu & Dian, from the series Laser Print on My Paper"*  
 2016



**Usami Masahiro**  
*"Otsuka Ken, Akihabara, Tokyo 2013"*  
 2013



**Agan Harahap**  
*"britney spears & christina aguilera, from the series Album of Memories"*  
 2015-2016

The series of photograph entitled "Album Kenangan" or "Album of Memories" by Agan Harahap will bring a smile to our face, as it depicts the familiar faces of world celebrities when they were young, and showing strong local identities, as though they were captured during various events in Indonesia. The way he presents his works in tacky photo frames is very typical to the way Indonesian people in the village hang their family photos in their house. None of these photographs were taken by Agan himself, as he got them from the Internet, after which he composed the images in Photoshop. With the help of technology, he gives a new and twisted meaning to reality as represented by photography.

Almost similar to Agan Harahap, Robert Zhao Renhui is also twisting the sense of reality contained in photography, although within the frameworks of zoological and natural science. Our relationship with photography in the scientific context normally contains less emotion, as

photography is mainly used to archive the evidence of some events or things. His photography installation entitled "A Guide to The Flora and Fauna of The World" is about the man-made breed of flora and fauna. The work began when he found an article about how the goldfish is actually a human-engineered breed. In the series of photographs depicting many kinds of human-engineered flora and fauna, he mixed the actual species with the ones he made in Photoshop. As we struggle to differentiate the real ones from the fake ones, our sense of reality has been blurred. This work provokes our awareness and curiosity about the existence of flora and fauna around us.



**Robert Zhao Renhui**  
*"World Goldfish Queen , from the series A Guide to The Flora and Fauna of the World"*  
 2013

Iswanto Soerjanto's method in creating his abstract photography works is rather unique. He disconnects the interaction between human and photography by taking out the role of camera or any other visual recording device. He only uses the chemical reaction between the photographic paper and many different substances that hold the properties of acids and bases. However, his ability to control the chemical reaction to form lines, spaces, colors and shades restores the connection between human and photography in the form of abstract images. While controlling the chemical reaction, the artist collaborates with the basic law of nature. He instigates a certain reaction to happen at the spot where he wants it to happen, and nature will do the rest for him. In his works, photography still captures reality and immortalizes moments, but what is captured and immortalized is the reality of chemical reactions in a particular moment.

**Hermanto Soerjanto**  
 Curator



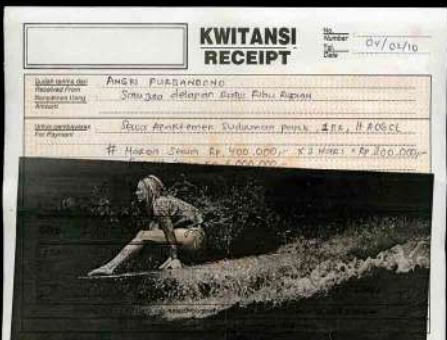
**Iswanto Soerjanto**  
*"Contemplation #4 " (detail)*  
 2016



Agan Harahap  
*"Vankantie in Indonesie"*  
 2015-2016  
 C-print on photo paper  
 dimension variable  
 edition of 3 + 1 AP



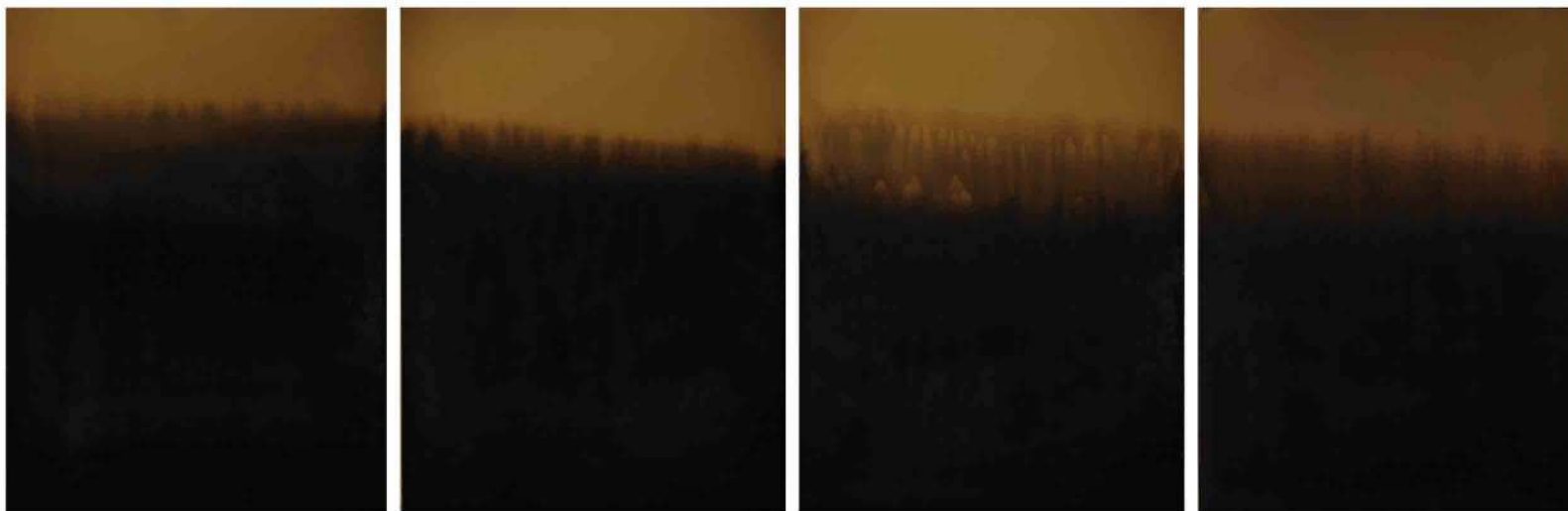
Agan Harahap  
"Album of Memories"  
2015-2016  
C-print on photo paper  
dimension variable  
edition of 3 + 1 AP



Angki Purbandono  
 "Laser Print on My Paper"  
 2016  
 photography and scanography,  
 monochrome laser print on paper memorabilia  
 dimension variable  
 unique edition

**Iswanto Soerjanto**  
***"Evanescence"***

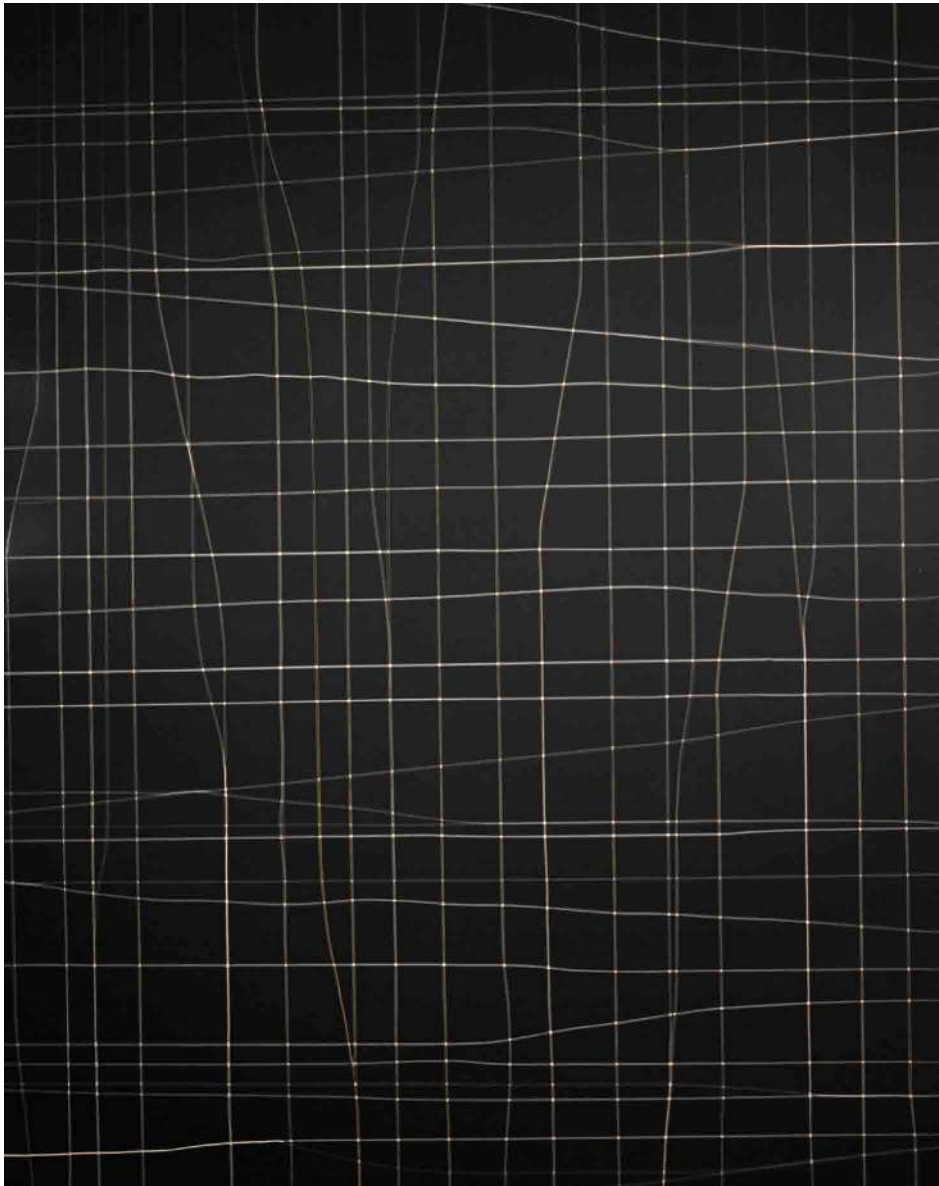
2016  
chemigram on silver gelatin paper  
40.6 x 122 cm  
unique edition



**Iswanto Soerjanto**  
***"Untitled #1"***

2016  
chemigram on silver gelatin paper  
90 x 127 cm  
unique edition





Iswanto Soerjanto  
*"Intersection #1"*  
 2016, chemigram on silver gelatin paper, 160 x 127 cm, unique edition



Iswanto Soerjanto  
*"Untitled #2"*  
 2016  
 chemigram on silver gelatin paper  
 90 x 127 cm  
 unique edition



Robert Zhao Renhui  
*"A Guide to The Flora and Fauna of the World"*  
2013  
mixed media installation with objects  
dimension variable  
unique edition



Robert Zhao Renhui  
*"Elephant That Has No Tusk, from the series  
 A Guide to The Flora and Fauna of the World"*  
 2013  
 archival pigment print  
 84 x 121 cm  
 edition of 5 + 1 AP



Robert Zhao Renhui  
*"Monkey That Talks , from the series A Guide  
 to The Flora and Fauna of the World"*  
 2013  
 archival pigment print  
 84 x 121 cm  
 edition of 5 + 1 AP



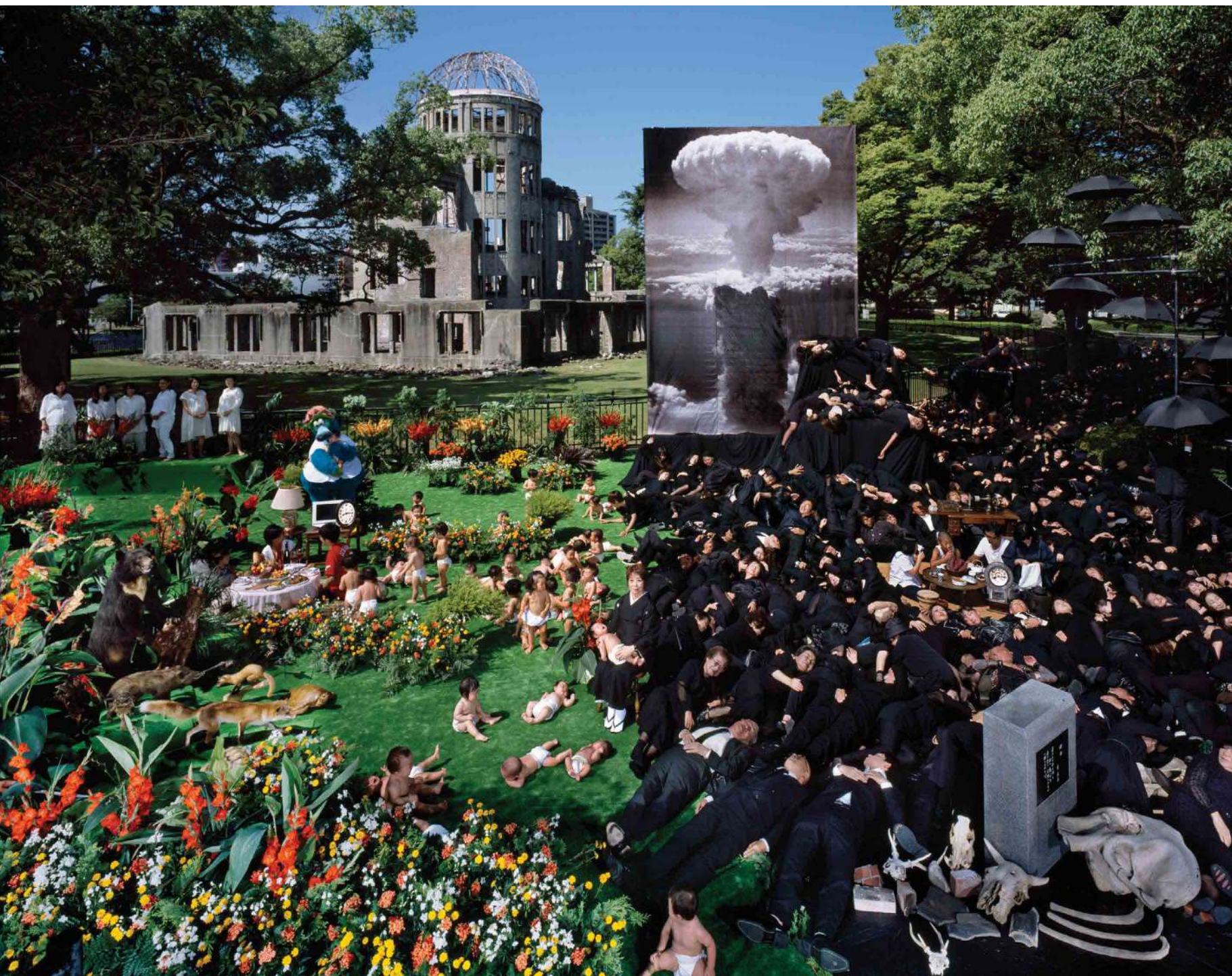
RongRong & Inri  
*"Tsumari Story : No 1-1, 1-2, 1-9"*  
2012  
gelatin silver print  
50.8 x 60.96 cm, each  
edition of 12 + 1 AP



RongRong & Inri  
*"Tsumari Story : No 6-18"*  
 2012  
 gelatin silver print  
 50.8 x 60.96 cm  
 edition of 12 + 1 AP



RongRong & Inri  
*"Tsumari Story : No 7-1"*  
 2012  
 gelatin silver print  
 50.8 x 60.96 cm  
 edition of 12 + 1 AP



Usami Masahiro  
*"Hayashi Yuriko,  
Hiroshima 2014"*

2014

C-print on photo paper

120 x 150 cm

edition of 7 + 1 AP



right:

Usami Masahiro  
*"Sasaki Michinori and  
 Sasaki Ruri, Fukushima 2013"*  
 2013  
 C-print on photo paper  
 120 x 150 cm  
 edition of 7 + 1 AP

left:

Usami Masahiro  
*"Ishibashi Norio,  
 Chiba, 2010"*  
 2010  
 C-print on photo paper  
 60 x 76 cm  
 edition of 8 + 1 AP

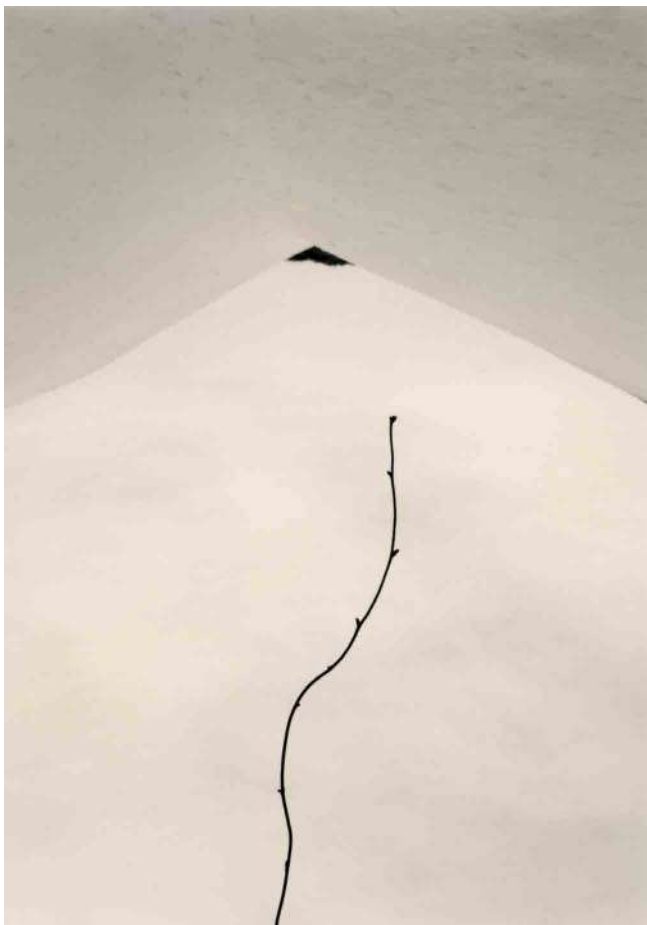
Usami Masahiro  
*"Otsuka Ken, Akihabara,  
 Tokyo 2013"*  
 2013  
 C-print on photo paper  
 120 x 150 cm  
 edition of 7 + 1 AP





Yamamoto Masao  
*Kawa=Flow #1508*

gelatin silver print, 14.1 x 21 cm, edition of 20 + 1 AP



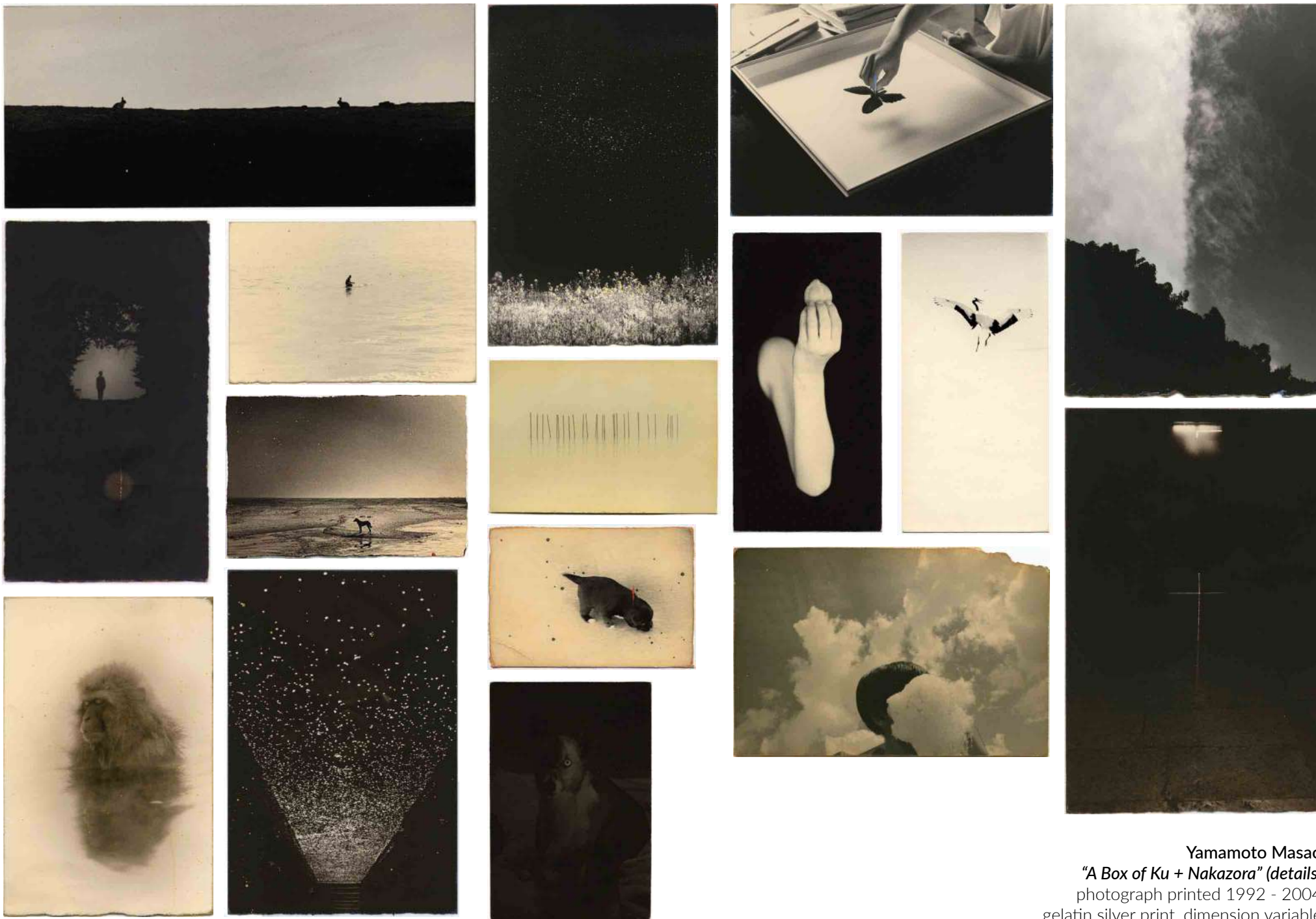
Yamamoto Masao  
*Kawa=Flow* #1529

platinum print, 23.7 x 16.6 cm, edition of 10 + 1 AP



Yamamoto Masao  
*Kawa=Flow* #1531

gelatin silver print, 15 x 22.1 cm, edition of 20 + 1 AP



Yamamoto Masao  
*"A Box of Ku + Nakazora" (details)*  
 photograph printed 1992 - 2004  
 gelatin silver print, dimension variable

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Gallery and the artists.

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Cover : RongRong & Inri *"Tsumari Story : No 1-1,  
1-2" (details)*. 2012, © RongRong & Inri, courtesy  
Mizuma Art Gallery.

## GILLMAN BARRACKS

Mizuma Gallery is a part of Gillman  
Barracks (GB) is Asia's up-and-coming  
destination for contemporary art.  
It is distinguished as a vibrant centre in  
Asia for the creation, exhibition and  
discussion of contemporary art.  
Named after the late British General Sir  
Webb Gillman, GB is now home to 11  
international art galleries, three restaurants,  
as well as the NTU Centre for  
Contemporary Art (CCA) Singapore. For  
more information, please visit  
www.gillmanbarracks.com



Mizuma Gallery was established in  
Singapore's new art cluster Gillman  
Barracks in September 2012 by director  
Sueo Mizuma. The gallery was established  
in 1994 in Tokyo, and since its opening  
in Singapore aims for the promotion of  
Japanese artists in the region as well as the  
introduction of new and promising young  
talents from South East Asia to the  
international art scene. The gallery creates  
a new vector of dialogue within Asia, by  
exchanging art projects between East Asia  
and South East Asia.

Mizuma Gallery has featured the works of  
Japanese artists including Aida Makoto,  
Amano Yoshitaka, Tenmyouya Hisashi, Ikeda  
Manabu, Aiko Miyanaga, and Yamaguchi  
Akira. Moreover, it has showcased the work  
of renowned East Asian artists such as Ken  
and Julia Yonetani, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba,  
Susan Philipsz, Ai Weiwei, and Du Kun.  
The gallery also organises exhibitions  
featuring the creations of Indonesia's  
forerunner artists including Heri Dono,  
Nasirun, Made Wianta, indieguerillas, Albert  
Yonathan Setyawan, Agung Prabowo, and  
Angki Purbandono. Mizuma Gallery also  
participates yearly in Art Stage Singapore  
and Art Basel Hong Kong.

