

Yuki Onodera “Parcours - Between pneumatic post and homing pigeon -”

Duration : 11/2 (Sat.) - 12/8 (Sun.)

Opening Reception : 11/2 (Sat.) 6-8pm

Venue : WAITINGROOM (1F-2-14-2 Suido, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112-0005, JAPAN)

*We are open on Wed. to Sat. 12-7pm and Sun. 12-5pm

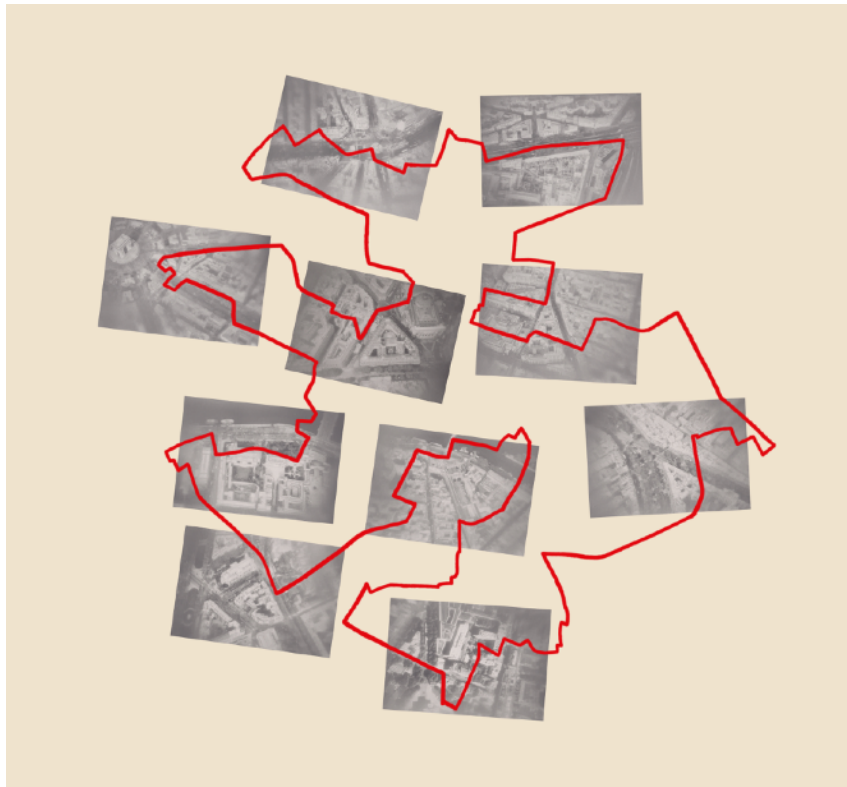
*Closed on Mon., Tue. and National Holidays (11/3 and 11/23)

*Artist will be present at the opening reception on 11/2, Sat. 6-8pm and the exhibition opens at noon before the reception.

*During Art Week Tokyo 2024, the gallery will be open on November 7 (Thu), 8 (Fri) and 9 (Sat) from 10:00-19:00 and on November 10 (Sun) from 10:00-18:00.

WAITINGROOM (Tokyo) is pleased to welcome Paris-based Yuki Onodera as guest artist to present “Parcours - Between pneumatic post and homing pigeon,” her solo exhibition with the gallery, from November 2 (Sat) to December 8 (Sun), 2024. This exhibition is a part of Art Week Tokyo 2024.

Inspired by the gallery’s location on the site of a former post office, Onodera’s new works are based on the themes of communication and the transmission of information, connecting the city of Paris where she lives to this gallery in Tokyo. These works were created in such a way that different spaces and time frames (past and present) overlap, with communication systems as the starting point. The exhibition will feature approximately 40 works on a wide variety of postal themes, ranging from large vertical prints over two meters in length to small, postcard-sized prints with stamps and postmarks, all connected by a single red line from the front of the gallery to a space further in the back.



Do pigeons fly on a full-scale map?, 2024, acrylic paint on gelatin silver print, 730 x 790 mm

About the artist, Yuki Onodera

Born in Tokyo, Yuki Onodera has maintained a studio in Paris since 1993, and continues to exhibit widely around the world.

While photography is her main medium, Onodera is an extremely conceptual artist who freely overcomes subjects and approaches considered to be taboo, such as putting marbles in her camera. She creates narrative worldviews based on various incidents and legends, while her unconventional and unique ideas have led her to create many original series of works. Onodera’s works, which include silver halide photographs measuring over two meters that she burned by herself and the application of oil paint to black-and-white photographs, are so marked with the traces of her hand that they undermine the concept of photography itself as a mechanical medium. Her experimental works created using all manner of approaches question the very nature of photography itself.

Her works are in the collections of the Centre Pompidou, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Shanghai Art Museum, the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, the Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, and many other museums around the world. Major solo exhibitions have been held at the National Museum of Art, Osaka (2005), Shanghai Art Museum (2006), Tokyo Photographic Art Museum (2010), The Museum of Photography, Seoul (2010), and the Musée Nicéphore Niépce, France (2011).

Artist Statement

The gallery WAITINGROOM occupies a site that used to be a post office (the former Bunkyo Suido Post Office), from which these new works emerged. Above the entrance is a sign that reads "Post Office." With a past like this, the venue was an entrance leading towards an imaginary fiction. The reality of this fact inspired me to jump into action, and I came up with the idea for a series of photographic works in which I would travel through time and space in Paris, the city where I live, with "postal" as the keyword.

Some of you may be familiar with the postal service based on pneumatic tubes that operated in Paris from 1868 to 1984. *La poste pneumatique*, a high-tech communication system of its time, was a physical mail network that ran through the ground beneath Paris, conceived to take some pressure off the electric telegraph system that had become overloaded. A letter written on paper is brought to the post office and handed to a postal worker, who would place it in a cylindrical capsule and throw it into a tube that would open up next to him. When the capsule descends underground, the pressure and vacuum forces it to run toward its destination at a breakneck speed of one kilometer per minute. Under our own feet, just beneath us, was this network of steel tubes. In other words, handwritten messages were physically flying around beneath the ground at all times, in this machine-like city.

Come to think of it, the purpose of life, without even waiting for DNA, is to transmit information and communicate, along with all of human activity since time immemorial.

The process of creating these works began with mapping.

I obtained a map of the network of former pneumatic postal stations and compared it to a present-day map of Paris. After tediously copying the lines connecting each base station, I created this chimera-like map of closed lines. These lines were part of a 37-kilometer long *parcours* (circuit) that would form the basis for these new works. The fantasy did not end with this underground pneumatic postal system, however. It also extended to communication itself. Shifting my gaze from the underground to the sky, the figure of the carrier pigeon appeared. My question was, do these pigeons fly with a life-sized map?

This time, I created a *parcours* of my own design and took photographs as I moved along it. I did not take tourist photos of Paris that deviate from this circuit. Neither did I want to make a realistic documentary of this act, however. Instead of taking pictures of one street or another, I used the scenery that revealed itself when I stood somewhere along the *parcours* as a kind of springboard. Sometimes, as in a novel, I found myself desiring transcendence so badly that the viewpoint of the subject suddenly became that of a bird, or an intricately entangled underground tube.



Pneumatic post (La post pneumatique) Network



A labyrinth of metal pipes installed underground in Paris

This is why none of these works are straight photographs.

For example, in the darkroom, I would cut up the silver halide prints that I had made myself, and create a montage of multiple photographs by collaging them on a canvas. In the darkroom, I also used the photogram technique to burn an image of another dimension onto a print of a landscape. I attempted to make a *papier collé* (type of collage) using Baryta prints, and obtained two years' worth of the French scientific magazine *La Nature* from 1936 to 1938. These magazines, which filled one entire cardboard box, were crammed full of the high-tech information of the time. I cut out and collaged research papers, articles, advertisements, and other pages that I thought were interesting. It was a high-tech trip that took one back 88 years from the present. I added some surface texture in oil paint, as if to confirm the existence of these articles. Relief-like textures appeared on these photos. These "secondhand clothes" themselves, which were said to plasticize memory, were glued on top of the silver halide prints.

The first thing you see in the gallery is a *parcours* circuit painted with red lines and a collage of bird's-eye view photos that resemble "pigeon photography." The next work consists of photos of roadblocks, but it is the sky to which access is blocked. Of course, the sky is for the birds, not drones. There are two long and wide (250cm) vertical works, taken with particular attention paid to the top and bottom. These were taken at rue des Panoramas and rue Lhomond. The name "Panoramas" may recall Louis Daguerre, who was a panorama painter. Eugene Atget also took exactly the same photographs at this location in 1907 and 1913. In these prints, I applied a photogram to the ground to evoke an underground network, and a collage to the sky to trace the trajectory of a pigeon's flight.

In Paris, there are two places where the metro comes out of the underground and runs in midair (on elevated lines). I photographed the northern part (Boulevard de la Chapelle), which was built in 1900. By creating a montage of multiple photographs, the viewpoint shifts and the stable perspective collapses, revealing gaps in the image. The network of steel on the ground, with its strong presence that is neither underground nor in the sky, begins to waver.

In addition, about 30 small-sized silver halide prints will be on display. These photos were printed, sent out through the mail, and then returned to the artist. They are stamped and postmarked.

A red line has been drawn on the wall of the exhibition space to invite visitors to the space at the back. This line is meant to indicate another, suggested circuit. Following this line leads the visitor to a pigeon in flight on the last wall, and unpublished images from the "Birds" series created in 1994. Was I able to transplant even a small part of the *parcours* that originated from the underground postal network that used to exist in Paris, to this space formerly occupied by the Bunkyo Suido Post Office? It would be my pleasure to take you on a short trip to experience this tiny portion of space-time in Paris.

Yuki Onodera, Sept 12th, 2024

↓ <NEXT PAGE> Contributed text for the exhibition

Expanding the ability to see, and its temptations

Text by Yuzu Murakami (assistant professor of visual arts, Akita University of Art)

When Félix Nadar took the world's first aerial photographs from a balloon in 1858, Parisians saw the city from above for the first time, thanks to photography. Today, at a time when aerial photography technology has become commonplace, it is difficult to really imagine the wonder and excitement felt by the people of Paris at the time. This decline in imagination is due in part to the fact that, alongside the development of flying technology, the camera has always served as an extension of the human eye, while people have always had a strong yearning to "see" beyond their own bodies.

In 1907, German Julius Neubronner invented the "pigeon camera" as an aerial photography technique. A camera with a timer was affixed to a lightweight aluminum harness that was then attached to a pigeon, which was allowed to fly around. Even today, cameras are attached to birds, marine creatures, and land animals to capture moving images for the purpose of studying animal life.

Looking back on the history of photography, the main field for this form of artistic expression was literally on the ground. In Japan, straight snapshots on the street have become a popular form of photographic expression, establishing themselves as legitimate. Even within this context, however, Yuki Onodera's practice has carved out its own niche. The works in "Parcours: Between Airmail and Carrier Pigeons" are not straight, even if their field is the street. Their objective is not to wander the streets on foot in search of encounters with their subjects. Neither do they seek to articulate a sense of the photographer's body in any way. Onodera's work is akin to a roller coaster ride: it guides and manipulates the gaze and consciousness of viewers as they float up into the sky before plummeting down to the depths of the Earth.

Speaking of roller coasters, seeing as how this gallery used to be a post office, I wanted to imagine what it would be like to experience the pneumatic postal system, one of the key elements of this work, not as a receiver or sender of such mail, but as a piece of mail itself. This is an experience that gives me an inexplicable sense of excitement while reaffirming the existence of my own body amid the violence of being swept away, which is also what I have experienced when viewing Onodera's previous works.

The photograms on the photographs of urban scenery presented in this exhibition usher the consciousness of the viewer into an underground space that is actually invisible to the eye. A photogram is a method of producing images with shadows by intentionally creating areas on the photographic paper that are not illuminated during the exposure of a silver halide print. The fact that this method of "not illuminating" causes the invisible pneumatic postal circuit hidden underground to appear on the image is something that bears a relationship to the nature of that underground network.

These works also incorporate an element of time travel, with unpublished images from Onodera's own past work, and collages from the French scientific magazine *La Nature*. Unlike animals, which move around in a limited field, such as the sky, layers of earth, or the sea, or other photographers who keep close to the ground in pursuit of the social conditions of the same era, Onodera seems to avoid being too grounded in a specific technique, style, or sense of contemporaneity.

Onodera herself often used to point out that her early body of work in particular was "all imbued with a sense of floating or levitation." According to her, "the fact that my subjects are suspended in midair is probably a reflection of my own attitude toward nomadic living. Being unstable is preferable and natural for me," and this sense of suspension can also be observed in these works.^[1] However, Onodera's sense of floating is not something that can be described as soft or airy. Rather, it is the same kind of chilling, suspended feeling that one gets when riding a roller coaster, and all of one's organs seem to become exposed.

Through her creations, Onodera seems to be trying to fulfill the longing that humans have had for "seeing" beyond their own bodies since the beginning of the history of photography in a completely unique way. This series of work might be described in terms of experiencing an expansion of one's ability to see, with an insatiable appetite for that seeing, unconstrained not only by the human body, but also by time and space. Rather than achieving a complete and unobstructed view of the world, these works seduce the viewer by inflicting an intentional kind of damage on that image, and then compensating for it with imagination.

^[1]Kazuyoshi Usui, Naruki Oshima, Yuki Onodera, Ken Kitano, Risaku Suzuki, Miki Nitadori, Yuji Hamada, *Photography? End? 7 Visions and 7 Photographic Experiences*, Magic Hour Edition, 2022, p.143



Pigeon with camera / pigeon photographer



From Yuki Onodera's Esquisse