

**AN ONTOLOGICAL
READING OF
NOJIMA YASUZŌ'S
PHOTOGRAPHS (2009)**

Mitsuda Yuri

PICTURED IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS of Nojima Yasuzō are people, still lifes and landscapes. His subjects are not particularly unusual. And yet, there is always something arresting, hitherto fore unseen, captured within the picture frame. Nojima's poignantly gripping photographs are distinctly different from contemporary photography. It begs the question: where exactly is this coming from?

Nojima's photographs also seem to have been quite different from those of his contemporaries. For example, the painter and critic Kawakami Ryōka once wrote:

“The reason why I think Nojima's works are a lot more impressive than the uninteresting works of others is because they are entirely committed to the perception of the subject itself. [...] That is where I can see his contemplative gaze. Appearing in his work is, say, the element of movement—movement of the individual's personality and physicality—which are things we hadn't seen before in photographs. Kawakami Ryōka, “Kansō” [Impression], *Shashin Geppō*, April 1920

“The perception of the subject itself” which Kawakami stated as the source of “the movement of the individual's personality and physicality”—precisely defines the refined quality of presence that Nojima's photographs exude. By employing the photographic medium, Nojima not only recorded the optical images of things, but also the core of existence behind those things.

Nojima's works have not been widely known until now. They also seem to have been recognized only by a limited few. However, Nojima's works are not just old photographs that are somehow unusual. In fact, they are, as it were, an origin that allows us to find and revisit, again and again, the things that have been lost today but should not have been forgotten. I certainly think that the photographic world of Nojima Yasuzō will take on more importance in the future.

The approximately three hundred photographs identified today as Nojima's are all monochrome, and there are no known works in color. Out of those, approximately one hundred twenty photographs have been selected and printed in more or less chronological order in this publication.¹

¹ *Nojima Yasuzō Shashinshū*, Goliga Books and AKAART ART PUBLISHING, Inc., 2009. The first major collection of Nojima Yasuzō's work, featuring 119 prints (which account for nearly half of Nojima's extant prints), published in 2009 to commemorate the 120th anniversary of his birth and 45th anniversary of his death.

Tracing the development of Nojima's works spanning from the Meiji era (1868–1912) to the years after World War II enables us to see that there were a few breakthrough moments in his career. These moments seem to have been distinctly separate stages, and I surmise that his style did not gradually change over the years, but that the photographer himself intentionally made such drastic stylistic turns. There is a great difference in the works from his early years and those of his late period, which reflects, of course, the technological advancement of the photographic medium during that time, but also the more ideological changes in photography including its role in society. The transition seen in Nojima's works reflects all of these things, and thus reveals the reality of the world in which he lived and observed as an individual, and the breadth of change his reality underwent with the passage of time.

METHODS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ART: ALTERNATING BETWEEN PIGMENT AND GELATIN SILVER

EVER SINCE TAKING UP photography in 1906, Nojima had tried out various printing methods. Some of those methods produced images that may not look like photographs at first glance. An analogue photograph is produced by using a lens and chemical sensitizers, but also required a lot of manual labor by the photographer in the photographing and printing. And photographers up until the Taishō era (1912–1926) had put a lot of effort into this manual process. It's fair to say that this was a time when expressions in photography in relation to the photographer's creativity were evaluated from various angles.

At the time, many different kinds of photographic paper had been available for gelatin silver printing. A variety of silver-halide emulsion,

textured paper, and differently toned papers were available, and those included silver bromide (bromide paper) and silver chloride (gaslight paper). Nojima had of course employed these materials, but above anything, he specialized in pigment printing (methods using pigments to produce images with painterly qualities) such as the gum bichromate print or the bromoil print. At the time, these types of hand-printing methods were popular among enthusiasts, and in Japan, they caught on especially during the Taishō era. Nojima was extremely skilled at gum bichromate printing, which is suited for accentuating images by repeated contact printing. He was equally skilled at bromoil printing methods, which created images with a soft and gradual tonal range by rubbing ink on the print with a brush. Nojima's photographs were the result of repeating such time-consuming printing processes, with much more complexity than what could be called a simple "artistic reproduction."

Most of Nojima's extant works produced until around 1923 were gum bichromate prints. This was followed by a period in which he concentrated on producing bromoil prints, which lasted until 1932. Nojima's practice in pigment printing, however, ended here. It was around this time that a radical change occurred in the public view of photography. The trend of *Neue Fotografie* (New Photography) had arisen in Germany in conjunction with avant-garde movements in film, painting, and other new technology, and by the late 1920s it had taken the world by storm. Meanwhile, as photoengraving techniques advanced, photographs came to be more frequently reproduced in printed matter than they were as individual prints. This technological advancement immediately accelerated the commoditization of photographs, often combined with graphic design, such as in advertisements. Consequently, photographs began to play a major role in mass media.

Conscious of those changes, Nojima took a drastic turn with his photographic style, concentrating solely on straightforward gelatin silver prints from 1932 onward instead of pigment printing. It was probably for this same reason that he launched the large-format magazine *Kōga* (Light pictures) in the same year. For this magazine, Nojima chose prints with high-contrast and glossy finishing touches, and researchers suspect that it was from the late 1930s that he started giving direct instructions to his assistants to do his printing. For Nojima, too, the meaning of a

photograph had changed. The transition of his style was inextricably linked to the changes in printing techniques and the public view of photography at this time.

THE QUIET SEEKER

NOJIMA YASUZŌ WAS a tall and lean man who always stood with a good posture. In group pictures, we often see him standing quietly in the back row. He maintained close friendships with a wide range of people, not only those in the field of photography, but also in genres such as fine art, craft, architecture, film, literature, *utai* (*noh* singing) and sports. And yet, he was known to be a very quiet man. He would always take the time to quietly listen to others, with either a cigarette or a pipe in his hand, and everyone saw him as an amiable gentleman. He had a close friendship with Itagaki Takaho (also referred to as Itagaki Takao), a critic who played an active role in modernist aesthetics, but whenever they spent their afternoons together, they would exchange only a few words and otherwise remain silent.

Nojima studied photography during the Meiji era (1868–1912), and built his career throughout the Taishō (1912–1926) and Shōwa (1926–1989) eras. He lived through World War II and the postwar years, and died in 1964, the year the Olympic Games were held in Tokyo for the first time. He created photographic works but was not a photographer by profession. He also successfully ran several photographic studios, but he wasn't exactly an entrepreneur either. There was a period when he concentrated on producing oil paintings, and at one point he also ran a gallery. Throughout his life he collected art, and was a good friend

and patron to many artists. Nojima would often gather people in the photographic circle and conduct study sessions with them, and was actively involved in the production of exhibitions and publications, always an eager advocate for photography. Nojima was a relative of Hōshō Shin (also referred to as Hōshō Arata), head of the Hōshō school of *noh* and *utai* teacher to the novelist Natsume Sōseki, and also occasionally held *utai* recitals with the haiku artist Takahama Kyoshi and *noh* researcher Nogami Toyoichirō.

Nojima came from a well-to-do family; his father was a successful businessman, who served as president of a private bank of the times, the Nakai Bank. Although Nojima was engaged in diverse activities, he wasn't compelled to pursue any of those professionally. Nojima had poor health and was often sick, which made it difficult for him to pursue a career in business like his father who was an exemplar self-made Meiji-era man. Undoubtedly, this had a lot to do with Nojima's ultimate pursuit of art for art's sake. He had the disposition of a seeker, and his life was guided by a certain idealism.

Perhaps this explains why the number of works he left behind as a photographer is quite small. For Nojima, his works were the pure products of his mind and interests, and most definitely he never made art as a profession, or with the purpose of display at an exhibition. During his lifetime, Nojima belonged to several photographic associations, but being the individualist that he was, always viewed them from a critical perspective and kept a careful distance from each. His creative practice was done at his own pace, either intermittently or in a concentrated manner, and occasionally he would take a break from photography altogether for several years. Looking at the body of extant works, his most productive periods were 1920–1923, 1930–1933, and 1939–1941.

Throughout his life, Nojima was most engaged in the genres of portraiture and nude photography, and produced his most distinguished works in those areas. As nude photography was conventionally considered taboo during the years he was active as a photographer, Nojima did not always have complete freedom to show his work. His nude portraits were taken down from exhibitions at times, and at others, reproductions were taken out of publications. Much of his works were likely considered unsuitable for showing at

the time.

On creating photographs, Nojima once wrote that he “wanted to be a person guided by the heart,” and that photography was “a lifelong calling” (“Shusetsu zakki” [Scarlet snow note], *Shashin Geppō*, 1920). Nojima’s work was incomparable and ingenious—what sort of artistic direction was he headed towards? Many of his acquaintances never got to see in its entirety the energetic world he created within his work—when this well-respected man passed away, much of his art work had been hidden away in a customary paulownia-wood box.

WHERE IT ALL BEGAN— TOKYO SHASHIN KENKYŪKAI (TOKYO PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDY GROUP), 1909

SHORTLY AFTER NOJIMA ENTERED Keio University, he fell ill and went to Hakone to recuperate. He seems to have started taking photographs around this time (1906). Only a few of those earliest works remain to this day, most of which are small prints of portraits or snapshots of his family. Likely a self-portrait from this period, a portrait of Nojima [fig.1], suggests an introspective young man yearning to explore his inner world.

After taking part in a photo club at his university, Nojima became more absorbed in photography and eventually joined the Tokyo Shashin Kenkyūkai (Tokyo photographic study group). The group had been founded in 1907 with the aim to pursue photography as an art form. Through its regular meetings, annual public-entry exhibitions, and publication of the monthly bulletin *Shashin Geppō*, membership had grown steadily. Here, the subject of research was not photography as commodity, as in photographs taken at photo studios, but as a form

of art—a fresh and attractive word at the time. Yet in a wider social context the group appeared to be no more than a circle of amateurs comprising wealthy individuals as well as insiders of the photography trade, who were engaged in an expensive hobby. This labeling of Nojima’s work as “amateur photography” had a lasting effect on the evaluation of his work. In reality, however, Nojima himself was hardly an amateur but a photographer with artistic determination and perspective.

In 1912, Nojima formed the Yoninkai (Group of four) with three other promising contemporary photographers that belonged to the Tokyo Shashin Kenkyūkai (Tokyo photographic study group). The four members critiqued each other’s work and conducted study sessions on their own. It was also around this time that Nojima started using the artist name Hiromasa (the *kanji* character for *hiro* means “light”). When Nojima was selected as an exhibition committee member, he questioned the screening process and insisted that there be a second, unjuried section in order to “guarantee the display of all kinds of work, paying utmost respect to the art and freedom of all artists.”

If we can set aside our current judging process, a very favorable new trend may arise, whereby artists create art freely and directly in accordance with their will.
 (“Tenrankai ni daiichibu, dainibu no kubetsu wo mōkeru ni tsuite” [A Proposal to establish an unjuried section], *Shashin Geppō*, January, 1915)

This view expressed by Nojima is in accord with Takamura Kōtarō’s statement in the essay *Midori iro no taiyō* [A green sun] (1910) that an artist’s spirit should have absolute freedom. Nojima most certainly was well aware of the institutional limitations of the photography world, and aligned himself with the idealistic image of an artist heralded by the group Shirakabaha (White birch society) with which Takamura was associated.

In any exhibition, individuals must always present their work and critique each other. However, in the world of amateur photography, the system is such that the artists themselves judge, appreciate, and critique each other’s work within a closed circle, and hence, there



fig.1

Nojima Yasuzō, *Jigazō* (Self-Portrait), the
end of Meiji period

Collection of the Shoto Museum of Art

is no “outside world” beyond it. This is precisely what the cultural critic Kuwabara Takeo defines a “secondary art”—when a small group of artists closes itself off from the outside world, those within it are hindered from making new breakthroughs. Most certainly, Nojima would have been aware of the strong reactions at the time against the Bunten, which had just been initiated as the first official government-sponsored exhibition. While the art world at the time was beginning to open up to the general public, at least in terms of journalism and the market, exhibitions were still entrapped in their closed jurying system. Although Nojima initiated an Indépendant-style for the Tokyo Shashin Kenkyūkai (Tokyo photographic study group) as a reaction against the existing system, it was only put into practice once and discontinued thereafter.

Although making art is essentially a personal activity, so long as the art is shown within a social framework, the nature of that society will be reflected in it. Nojima did not take a particular political stand, but he was a libertarian who always remembered to critically question existing systems. Having lived through the liberal movement of the so-called Taishō Democracy, the socialist movement of the Shōwa era, and the wartime period marked by the rule of the Yokusan Taisei (Imperial rule assistance association), Nojima was consistently an advocate of institutional reform and activities for enlightenment, which worked in tandem with his creative undertakings.

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Nigoreru umi/Ninomiya nite (*Muddy sea/In Ninomiya*)
(photographed in 1910, printed in 1912) [fig.2] is a representative piece among the earliest of Nojima’s extant works.

The photograph is an ozobrome print toned in a dark brown color, and a textured medium has been applied on the surface with a brush. The somber scene shows a group of figures being washed by the waves on the sandy shore; in the foreground, children are holding baskets, and in the middle ground, young men are catching fish with nets. Rising clouds have been painted in the background, lining the rippling horizon. Hence the photograph is visually divided, with the upper half rendering stillness and the bottom half movement. The healthy looking moving



fig.2

Nojima Yasuzō, *Nigoreru umi/Ninomiya nite* (Muddy sea/In Ninomiya), 1910

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

figures spread across the composition with harmonious elegance like a symphony, evoking a romanticist ode to labor. The depiction of people full of life and in one with nature is a leitmotif that recurs in Nojima's work hereafter.

NUDE WOMAN WITH A FACE: GUM BICHROMATE PRINTS, 1915–

THERE IS A NUDE PORTRAIT by Nojima from the 1910s that deserves particular attention.

In Japan at the time, showing a nude photograph as a work of art was a very rare thing in itself. The scandal that erupted around Kuroda Seiki's oil painting of a nude figure, *Chōshō* (Toilette du matin/Morning toilette) (1893), is remembered as a famous Meiji era incident, but even in the ensuing Taishō era, it wasn't so unusual for a nude painting to be taken down from an exhibition. The age was still not ready for works of art portraying nude figures. In photography, although pornographic material saw a large underground market since the invention of the camera, there were no places, of course, to show such images publicly. Because photography explicitly discloses its subject, nude photographs are considered far more taboo than nude paintings, not just for the audience but also for the individuals portrayed. This is perhaps the reason why so many of the nude photographs from this time show anonymous individuals taking poses with their faces kept down.

Nojima's *Ki ni yoru onna* (Woman leaning on a tree) (1915) [fig.3] with the subject's piercing glance, is therefore distinguished from other art of its period. A bare-footed woman stands firmly, resting one hand on a tree trunk with a smoothly rendered outline. The top of the tree is



fig.3

Nojima Yasuzō, *Ki ni yoru onna* (Woman leaning on a tree), 1915

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

not visible in the photograph. The woman fixes her gaze on the viewer. Her exposed breasts and firmly grounded feet have been highlighted, and her elegant figure seemingly mediates the flow of energy carried upward from the ground through the tree trunk, ultimately released into the sky. We sense both innocence and candor in her strong eyes. Her sturdy body and contoured eyes have a lot to say, and together they form an unforgettable image; it is a nude given a face, or to put it another way, a portrait revealing its physicality. In this sense, Nojima's work seems to share a contemporaneity with, for example, Yorozu Tetsugorō's *Ratai bijin* (Nude beauty) (1912) or Yasui Sōtarō's nude portrait.

Ki ni yoru onna (Woman leaning on a tree) was probably taken in the garden of Nojima's house in Suidōchō. Although shooting nude photographs outdoors was a very unusual act for this time, the combination of the tree-of-life motif and a full-bodied woman can be traced back to the historical lineage of western painting. It is highly likely that Nojima drew inspiration from Saitō Yori's painting, *Kokage* (Under a tree) (1912), which was shown at the first Fyūzankai (Fusain society) exhibition. Depicting half-naked women bathing in water and resting under a tree with flattened Gauguinesque forms and a painterly touch reminiscent of Van Gogh, the work attracted much attention at the time.

Nojima had taken an interest in oil painting, and around 1915, he chose to commit to it under the guidance of Saitō. Saitō had returned to Japan from Paris in 1908 and was gaining prominence for introducing new artistic trends from abroad, mainly that of Van Gogh and Gauguin, and writing enthusiastically for magazines like *Shirakaba* (White birch). He was one of the key figures who had brought together rising artists such as Kishida Ryūsei and Yorozu Tetsugorō, who were independent from government sponsorship, to initiate the controversial Fyūzankai (Fusain society) exhibition, which ran concurrent to the government-sponsored Bunten exhibition. Saitō, who once wrote, "I have no concerns other than maintaining my physical and mental health and moving toward the artistic frontier that my life calls for" (*Fyūzankai exhibition catalogue*, 1912), must have influenced Nojima to a great degree. Nojima's attachment to the artistic view of the Fyūzankai (Fusain society) is also evident from the fact that he remained in touch

with artists of the group such as Yorozu, Kishida, Kawakami Ryōka, and Kobayashi Tokusaburō for many years thereafter.

Many of Nojima's early nude portraits show half-naked, bare-breasted figures in traditional Japanese clothing. All of these works are gum bichromate prints finished with a slightly hard-edged tone. Nojima at this time seems to have been trying to position himself vis-à-vis the subject while attempting various depiction methods, including the flattening of figures by emphasizing their outlines, the rough depiction based mainly on the expression of light and shadow, and concentration on the texture of the figures' skin and garments. He rendered sensual nude figures brimming with life. On top of that, he depicted each figure as an individual with a face and real body. Eventually, these would become the characteristic elements of his nude female portraits.

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In 1915, the twenty-six-year-old Nojima opened the Mikasa Shashinkan (Mikasa photography studio) in an elegant western-style house in Ningyōchō, the same year he created *Ki ni yoru onna* (Woman leaning on a tree) and also embarked on his painting career. Managing a photographic studio for the first time, Nojima entrusted the work on-site to Yamazaki Seison, a fellow member of the Yoninkai (Group of four). Then in 1920, Nojima gave up the studio and bought the Danjō Shashinkan (Danjō photography studio) that occupied a western-style house in Kudanshita, and opened the Nonomiya Shashinkan (Nonomiya photography studio) there. Even after this expansion, Yamazaki continued to work as chief operator.

While managing these studios, Nojima never worked on-site, but began to commit to activities to raise awareness about photography. He had felt a sense of crisis about the stagnant state of typical photographic studios where much of the work had lost its substance, and advocated reform among business photography studios, through study sessions and various other activities. Another attempt was his initiation of the Nonomiyakai in 1927, a gathering for his employees to discuss photography. Photographers such as Kimura Ihee², and Yoshikawa Tomizō, who had taken over the Mikasa Shashinkan (Mikasa photography studio) after Nojima, were invited as guests to the monthly

² “Kimura Ihei” is also often written as “Kimura Ihee” with the double ‘e’ in “Ihee.” “Ihee,” however, is hardly ever written as “Ihē” with a macron over the ‘e’. In the Art Platform texts, “Kimura Ihei” is used.

study sessions and annual exhibitions, which were held regularly until around 1940.

AT THE KABUTOYA GADŌ, 1919–1920

AROUND THE TIME Nojima turned his attention to oil painting, he also decided to start his own gallery. Nojima asked his teacher Saitō Yori to coach him, and through Yori he met up-and-coming artists. Before long, in May 1919, Nojima was able to open the Kabutoya Gadō in Kanda Jimbōchō. A fine, two-story, western-style building was newly built, where he began introducing the new works of rising artists working in a wide range of genres. To accompany the exhibitions, Nojima created catalogues with substantial content. Kabutoya Gadō was a gallery with high aspirations. There, works of painters Sekine Shōji and Murayama Kaita who both died young were shown posthumously, along with exhibitions of anarchist Hayashi Shizue, and Nakagawa Kazumasa, whose catalogue cover featured a poem by Walter Whitman. Kabutoya Gadō also featured other emerging genres such as prints and decorative arts. Within a year and a half, Kabutoya Gadō held a number of exhibitions that are now considered milestones in art history.

At the time, Kabutoya Gadō placed a magazine ad that read:

What are these times telling us?

And what are we looking for?

—Achievement and observation will ultimately yield the answer.

(*Gendai no bijutsu* [Art of today], October 1919)

There are no records to prove that Nojima drew up this provocative text himself but the idea must have been discussed among him and his colleagues. For Nojima, art was not something that happened quietly within the inner workings of his mind. Perhaps, as these words suggest, his art was about taking deliberate action to challenge the present.

Kabutoya Gadō must have been operating at a loss, for the gallery never showed *nihonga* (Japanese-style painting) artists or master artists associated with government-sponsored exhibitions. At a time when there was no flourishing art market, the gallery chose to sacrifice profitability, to instead accomplish important work at the forefront of Japanese modern art. This was a time when artists had very few places to show their work, apart from open call exhibitions that were run by established art organizations. Nojima gained the support of many artists and formed important friendships with a variety of people. Even after closing his gallery in Jimbochō, Nojima continued to host exhibitions at his house in Takehayachō, and acted as a patron and a collector to artists for many years. Every effort that Nojima made for art must have been connected to the questions that were posed in the Kabutoya Gadō advertisement.

FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION, 1920

IN 1920, AROUND THE TIME Nojima was busily running his gallery Kabutoya Gadō, he exhibited thirty-three works in one of the rooms of the Tokyo Shashin Kenkyūkai (Tokyo photographic study group) exhibition. Records indicate that for this first solo exhibition, Nojima selected those from approximately one hundred works made between

1911 and 1920. Unfortunately, many of those have since been lost. For Nojima, this was an opportunity to look back and present his artistic path to the public for the first time. The checklist shows that most of the photographs were made using pigment printing processes such as gum bichromate printing or oil printing. Among the female nude portraits, which made up over a third of this exhibition, three nude images including *Rafu buyō* (Dancing nude) (1920), were removed from the exhibition room by the police authorities.

Many reviews of the exhibition appeared in the periodical *Shashin Geppō*, which indicates how the exhibition elicited great response. Besides Kawakami's review, which I introduced at the beginning of this essay, Yamazaki Seison, a friend of Nojima, published a chronological analysis of the development seen in Nojima's style. Yamazaki stated that Nojima marked a turning point around 1913–1914 under the influence of literary naturalism, and also emphasized the impact of the Shirakabaha (White birch society).

These are photographs based on Nojima's reflection that our lives are bound by convention, our thoughts based on preconceptions, as well as awareness that he must see things anew with his eyes truly open.

(...) he has come to realize that he must see and express nature instinctively, and by doing so achieve artistic development. He certainly would not have been satisfied by simply printing the photograph as he took it.

(Yamazaki Seison, "Nojima no sakuhin ni tsuite" [On Nojima's works], *Shashin Geppō*, April 1920)

Yamazaki wrote that the early Nojima had turned to a pictorial style in photography so as to be more intuitive. His ultimate hope was to reject conventional ways of seeing. However, according to Yamazaki, Nojima struggled with the contradiction between this intuitive direction and the "expression of texture, weight, and the actuality of things," which consequently led him to step away from photography for a while. It was at the end of 1919 that Nojima was able to resume work in photography, when his operation of the Kabutoya Gadō gave him the opportunity to contemplate the nature of paintings. And by coming to "an awareness

that he must see things with his eyes truly open,” Nojima gained in turn an awareness about the *essence of photography*.

THE BOLD FACE, PORTRAITS: GUM BICHROMATE PRINTS, 1920–

SEISON’S THEORY IS CONVINCING when we take a look at *Wai kun shōzō*/Yamazaki Seison shi zō (Portrait of Mr. Y/Portrait of Yamazaki Seison) (1920) and *Kaze no shōnen* (Boy with a cold) (1920) [fig.4], two portraits that are reflective of Nojima’s wish to “see and express nature instinctively.” These mark the beginning of the Nojima’s most representative portraits.

The latter portrait shows a boy, a relative of Yamazaki, and the former portrays Yamazaki himself. The sitters, both captured as a bust portrait and printed with heavy overtones using gum bichromate, emerge with a tangible presence as if the person is actually sitting before us. The boy’s face, looking straight out, has a soft complexion, and the woven texture of his kasuri-patterned kimono and scarf wrapped around his neck are brought out delicately. The boy, although in simple attire, has an imposing, piercing gaze of a royal figure. Yamazaki’s large eyes are not fixed on anything, but simply stare out into the void. The texture of the head is vibrantly rendered with highlights placed on the forehead and the ridge of the nose, while the clothes ultimately recede into the background. It is this contrast that forms the overall sculptural quality of the face.

These two portraits, both in square format, enact the following words by Nojima:

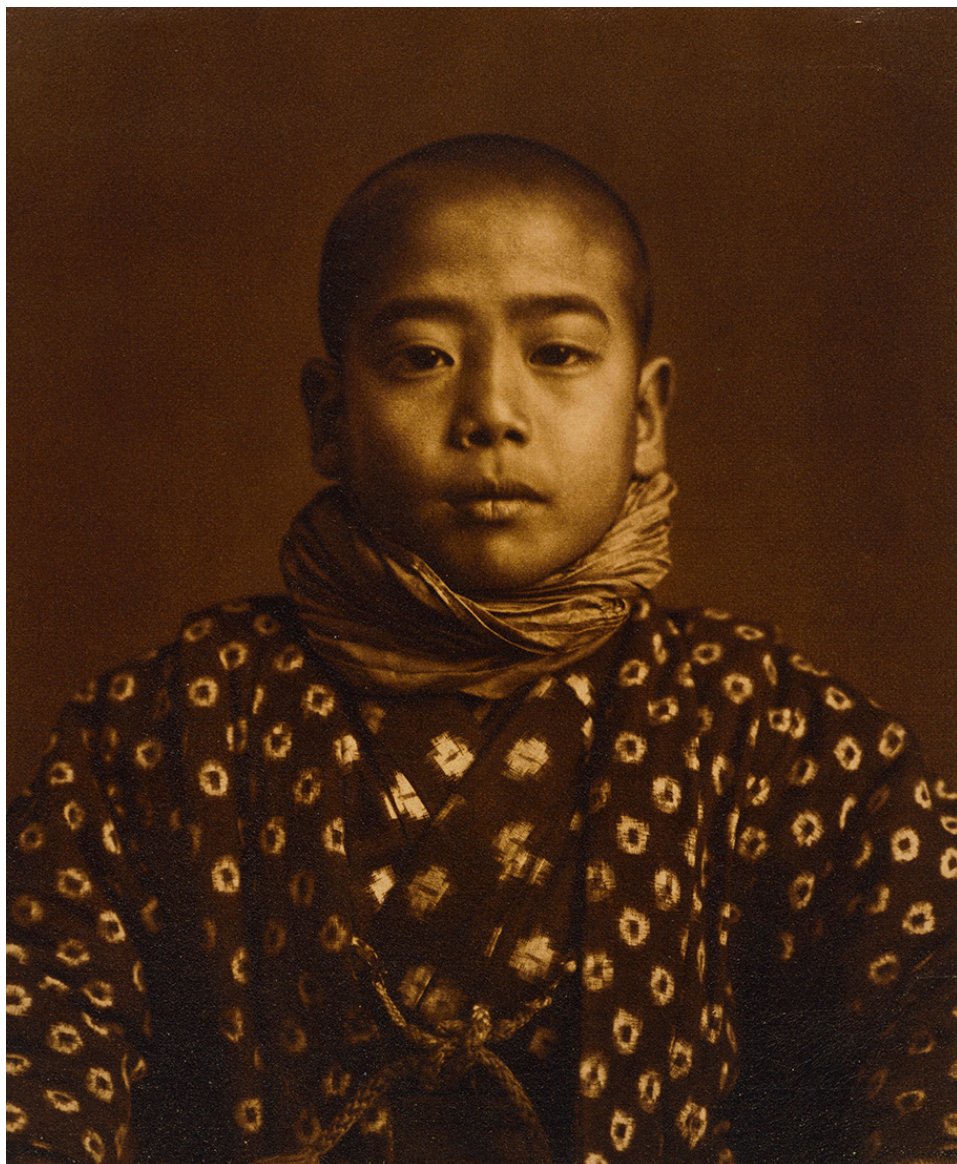


fig.4

Nojima Yasuzō, *Kaze no shōnen* (Boy with a cold), 1920

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

How do I let my works reflect my mind...the nature as I see it through my mind...essentially, the expression of my personality...) I want to ease into my work like stepping into nature and make ordinary photographs. Not to be flattered by people telling me that my photographs resemble paintings.

Photography has a world particular to itself. A photographer must live in this world.

(“Shusetsu zakki,” *Shashin Geppō*, March 1920).

Nojima’s way of describing his creative act as “making” photographs reflects his distinct view of photography. Nojima often left his negatives (glass plates) untouched for several years before printing them. Before printing a photograph, he always contemplated how he would represent the image of his subject as he saw it, or as he wanted to see it, so as to reflect his mind. Most likely, what he meant by “nature” and the “ordinary” were ideas essential to the “world of photography,” free from intentions or control. At the same time, this did not mean that he was satisfied by “simply printing the negative as he took it,” either. In order for the photographer to “live” in the photograph, he had to go beyond the narrow path between the “mind” and the “photograph.” I believe this was his way of gaining awareness of the *essence of photography*.

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Nojima then went on to create *Esu shi shōzō* (Portrait of Mr. S) and *Nakagawa Kazumasa shi* (Mr. Nakagawa Kazumasa) (1921) [fig.5, fig.6]. These were followed by portraits of artists that were friends and patrons of Nojima: *Yanagi Muneyoshi shi* (Mr. Yanagi Muneyoshi) [fig.7] and *Tomimoto Kenkichi shi shōzō* (Portrait of Tomimoto Kenkichi) (1923). This sequence of gum bichromate portraits can be counted among Nojima’s masterpieces. Shot against empty backgrounds, the focus of these portraits is solely the subject’s face. The photographs have no room for expressions caught by chance, but aim to bring out the essence of the face with exquisite form. The faces of these men, illuminated by side lighting, appear as if they have been carved out. They are completely still.

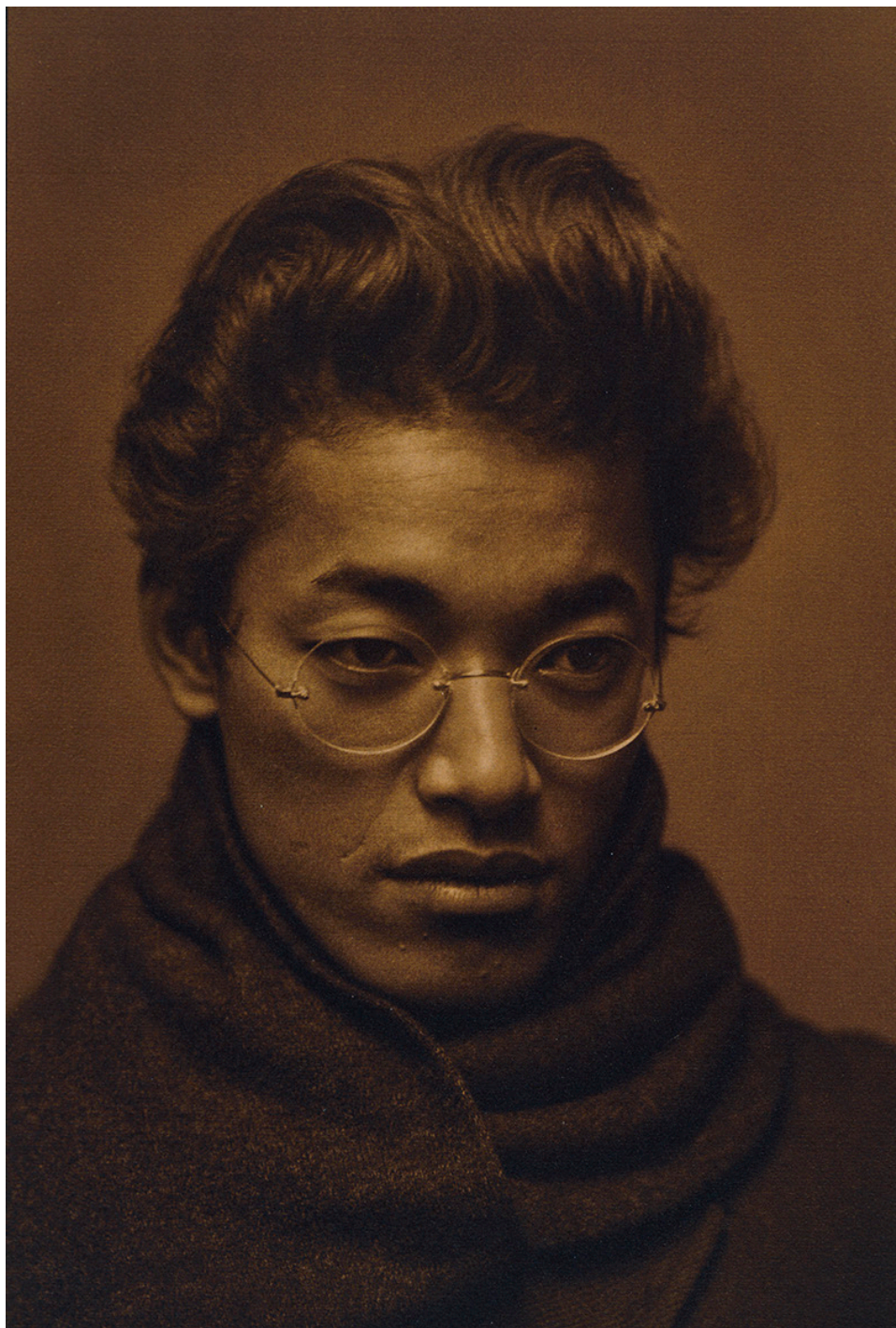


fig.5

Nojima Yasuzō, *Esu shi shōzō* (Portrait of Mr. S), 1921

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.6

Nojima Yasuzō, *Nakagawa Kazumasa shi*

(Mr. Nakagawa Kazumasa), 1923

Collection of the National Museum of

Modern Art, Kyoto



fig. 7

Nojima Yasuzō, *Yanagi Muneyoshi shi* (Mr.

Yanagi Muneyoshi), 1923

Collection of the National Museum of

Modern Art, Kyoto

Among these, *Esu shi shōzō* (Portrait of Mr. S) presents the sitter with utmost truth. The work, which was shown at the Tokyo Shashin Kenkyūkai (Tokyo photographic study group)'s first exhibition held in Osaka, seems to have left an impact on other photographers in the Kansai area—Kometani Kōrō wrote that it was “exceptionally good,” and the photographer Yasui Nakaji is said to have repeatedly commented, “that was a very good piece indeed” (Kometani Kōrō, “Shadan konjaku monogatari” [Old and new tales of the photographic circle], *Shashin Geppō*, November 1937). A tuft of hair can be seen on the model's head as he stares off into space, face reflecting off light, and the coarse texture of a scarf wrapped tightly around his neck. Completely motionless, he appears somewhat like a philosopher. The image pulls the viewer in by its focused composition converging around a scar etched in the model's skin near his tight-lipped expression. Nojima's way of composing the picture with density endows the figure with an unusually heavy sense of solidity. Meanwhile in other snapshots, the sitter, an employee at Nojima's photography studio, appears very natural, almost like a different person.

It is often said that a good portrait is one that reveals the inner psyche and spirituality of the subject, but are Nojima's portraits intriguing for this reason? Indeed, the portrait of Tomimoto evokes the spirit of an artist engrossed in his work, and the portrait of Nakagawa in his hat seems to echo the youthful spirit present in the famous image of the poet Nakahara Chūya. Most of all, what Nojima pursued throughout his gum bichromate printing was the rendition of robust yet equally delicate surface textures in his sitters. They were “ordinary photographs” executed without any staging nor use of props. And yet, when we see the surfaces rendered in the sitter's physique, a sense of wonder comes through. I believe this is what stirs the imagination of the viewer with the work of Nojima. This force that drives the viewer to read the portrayed image is what makes Nojima's photographs, as he would put it, alive.

★

Nojima had stepped away from photography for a while after the Great Kanto Earthquake (1923), but was invited to show work at the

Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society) exhibition in 1926. The portraits of Yanagi and Tomimoto he showed on this occasion received high acclaim.

The Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society) was founded by the photographer Fukuhara Shinzō after the Great Kanto Earthquake, and had grown to become a nationwide organization with its headquarters based in Tokyo. When Fukuhara founded the Shashin Geijutsusha (1921), predecessor of the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society), he chose to focus on straightforward gelatin silver printing as a critical gesture against pigment printing, which was considered mainstream at the time. A modernist by nature, Fukuhara advocated that photography was essentially an art of “light and its harmony.” This vision was carried over to the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society), and Fukuhara’s stylistic tendency of projecting the nostalgia of an urban dweller onto serene suburban landscapes influenced other photographers to a great degree. Fukuhara, the heir of Shiseido Corporation, had just taken over as president, but continued to provide full support to the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society). In addition to managing the group, Fukuhara also served as a philosophical leader by sharing his views through the club bulletin. As such, Fukuhara Shinzō had pervasive and undisputed influence on the world of artistic photography both in theory and practice.

After taking part in the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society) exhibition, Nojima was recruited to join the group. Once a member, however, he stood out as an anomaly; he did not always conform to the group’s artistic direction, at times openly critical. Nevertheless, it was here that he created his most remarkable portraits.

THE ETERNITY OF STILL LIFES: BROMOIL PRINTS, 1927–

FOR NOJIMA, WHO HAD concentrated on oil painting for some time after the Great Kanto Earthquake, entering the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society) provided the impetus for resuming photography. Nojima was likely inspired by the bromoil printing methods practiced by Ishida Kiichirō, which generated much attention at the time. Ishida had started photography in Sydney where he was living as a businessman, and became particularly involved in the research of bromoil printing techniques. The bromoil prints he showed at his solo exhibition after returning to Japan were typically light in tone, in contrast to the blackish, hard-edged expressions then popular in Japan. These works earned him the reputation, “high-key Ishida.” Nojima, who until then had called himself a “pigment enthusiast,” learned of Ishida who was a fellow member of the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society), and as he became familiar with Ishida’s techniques, gradually shifted his interest to bromoil printing. Among the works Nojima produced around this time, some fine bromoil portraits and landscapes are executed with delicate gradations, but particularly noteworthy are the series of still lifes produced from around 1927. In these works, Nojima has placed fruits on a wooden table combined with leaves and boxes. With such simple compositions, Nojima succeeds in performing a profound silent drama.

In *Busshukan* (Fingered citrons) (1930) [fig.8] the citrus fruits exude a kind of solemn dignity. The camera is set up close by the table, leaving less than 30 centimeters to the background wall. Within this short distance, Nojima succeeds in capturing a kind of cosmic



fig.8

Nojima Yasuzō, *Busshukan* (Fingered
citrons), 1930

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto

expanse. A plump fruit is placed against the edge of a thin paper box creating a balance between the three still objects with unlikely tension, creating an infinite space. The two fruits with an unfamiliar form are subtly illuminated from the left, and dark shadow occupies the space in between. The rich tones rendered by shadows create depth and subtlety. The photograph, while its motif being fruits, also projects somewhat abstractly, the mystery of presence as well as the profoundness of viewing a present object.

*

Earlier, Nojima had written: “What must be sought in my work? To place my heart in nature. In other words, to enlighten my inner beauty.” “Every true person must be an admirer of nature.” (“Shusetsu zakki,” *Shashin Geppō*, October 1920)

“Inner beauty” is a term that derives from the painter Kishida Ryūsei and the phrase “to place my heart in nature” also sounds Kishidaesque. One of the most outstanding exhibitions in Kishida’s career was the solo display of his works at Nojima’s residence (1922). Nojima had a number of Kishida’s works in his possession including an oil painting from the series of portraits of his daughter Reiko, and also kept Kishida’s writings and catalogues of his works in his personal library. It’s quite possible that Nojima had been influenced by Kishida to a considerable degree. The framework of closing in on the subject, for example, appears to be something common for both artists. Nojima’s bromoil still lifes and gum bichromate portraits share a commonality with Kishida’s oil paintings particularly in terms of their composition. For example, the delicate rendering of objects that are placed in line on a platform that cuts through the composition horizontally from left to right. And the portrayal of figures as elegant bust images with emphasis on texture, discernible in Nojima’s works, are techniques in the “mode of Ryūsei” that were popular during the Taishō era.

The small oil painting titled *Biwa* (Loquats) (1926) [fig.9], which precedes his bromoil series of loquats, reveals how Nojima would first tackle a theme through his oil paintings. This oil painting does not embrace much of Kishida’s style. The actual sketching process can be felt in the painting, but more so than that, we can see how Nojima



fig.9

Nojima Yasuzō, *Biwa* (Loquats), 1926

Collection of the Shoto Museum of Art

hasn't quite balanced shadows in the harmonious blend of colors. For him, a still life came to life when he focused on the monochrome photographs and rendered shadows in them. This was his unique way of "admiring nature," which had a higher sense of abstraction than Kishida's oil paintings.

On photographing fruits, Nojima wrote:

"When I photograph fruits, whether they are apples or pears, I get round blackish masses. And often they look rather ugly. / In reality, apples and pears have a completely different feel to them. One has a glossy, beautiful color, and the other a matted, sober color. / So, it would be a problem if I had the same simple black mass for both. / I don't mind the object turning out black, so long as I can express true beauty in that black. / I don't want a simple black mass but a beautiful black that has captured the beauty of the apple or pear."
(*"Shusetsu zakki,"* Shashin Geppō, May, 1920)

Nojima had hoped to create monochrome photographs that capture the beauty of fruits, and to "express true beauty" through them. I think the still life photographs with their simple compositions evidence how Nojima's hope was brought out. When Nojima produced these works, the idea that "a photographer must live in this world of photography" and the idea to "place my heart in nature" were completely in accord with each other.

A DISTINCTION BETWEEN PAINTING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

DURING THE 1920S, Nojima studied oil painting under the guidance of the painter Umehara Ryūzaburō because by this time Saitō Yori had moved to Osaka. Umehara was a celebrated colorist and Nojima seems to have been drawn to the sensuality and sense of life his paintings evoked. Nojima painted nude female figures inspired by Umehara's color scheme centered around red, and figures holding mirrors or sitting on red felt carpets. The two artists were also similar in the way that they chose as their models women with large dark eyes and sturdy figures.

During his career, Nojima moved back and forth between the practices of photography and painting. However, he was never interested in merging the two. In fact, we could even say that he wanted to make a clear distinction between the two. When he was running the Kabutoya Gadō, he had all the means to show photographic works, but he never did. The letters Nojima exchanged with his artist friends reveal that they all did not consider him an artist. Nojima interacted with these people knowing that photography was considered only a marginal field in the arts.

Pigment printing is a process that relies on the use of brushes and pigments and therefore was often called pictorial photography. Nojima, however, never aimed for “photographs that resemble paintings.” Around this time, Nojima's daily routine was to “draw paintings and make photographs, depending on the circumstance.” The fact that he made the distinction between the two practices, using the word “draw” for paintings, and “make” for photographs, evidences how he observed

and perceived both media as different disciplines. When Nojima once wrote, “photography is something that seems to, but actually does not, have freedom” (“Kounroku” [Traveling cloud notes], *Shashin Geppō*, July 1927), he must have understood the freedom of photography, or lack thereof, in comparison to painting.

As with the case of Biwa (Loquats), preceding the bromoil nude portraits are oil paintings of nude female figures with similar compositions. Here again, Nojima’s originality is more prominent in the photographs than in the paintings, which remind us of how Yamazaki Seison once touched upon Nojima’s “awareness about the essence of photography.” Yamazaki contrasted “expressing nature instinctively” with “expression of texture, weight, and the actuality of things,” while Nojima contrasted the “mind” with “nature.” If the *essence of photography* was to be found in the middle of these opposing ideas, then perhaps photography, where freedom and restraint are in a virtual tug of war, would have been ideal for Nojima to hone his artistic identity, rather than painting, in which meaning and emotion is straightforwardly expressed.

Nojima understood photography and painting as having different procedures and effects, and consciously employed them as distinctly separate disciplines. Around the time Nojima stopped making pigment prints and started concentrating on straightforward gelatin silver prints, he also began to move away from creating paintings.

I WANT TO PHOTOGRAPH THIS MODEL: NUDE PORTRAITS, 1931

IN 1931, NOJIMA PRODUCED a series of outstanding works that capture one particular female model. There are no other works where

Nojima concentrates the camera repeatedly on the same individual, and this series [figs.10–12, figs.13–21] can be counted among the highlights of his career.

The sitter was a woman known as “Model F” in the photographic circle. Nojima apparently had a few models that he assigned to his projects, and this woman was one of them. Records show that she was not a model by profession, but someone whom Nojima would especially call in for a shooting. She seems to have paid frequent visits to Nojima until the latter half of the 1930s, but nobody knows any details beyond that.

I don't get tired of shooting the face of the same model day after day. Depending on the day, and on her feelings and the condition of her body, her expressions and the texture of her skin change. The same goes for me: I too see things differently depending on the day.

(“Zatsuroku” [Records], *Kōga*, October 1932)

When writing these words, Nojima may have had this particular model in mind.

Nojima was a methodical person and often wrote down the date of the shooting, the type of printing paper, and his signature on the verso of many of his photographs. Unfortunately, we cannot make out much of this writing today, but the extant bromoil prints of Model F were likely made between February and November of 1931.

Model F possessed unique features that Nojima was always looking for since his early years, including her large almond-shaped eyes and heavy figure. Nojima's works feature several other female models on multiple occasions, but judging from the works, it seems that Model F was a very special person among them.

The photographs of Model F are roughly divided into regular portraits and nudes. Each of these are executed exquisitely using the bromoil printing process and are mostly uniform 14x17 inch sizes. As they are all mounted on the same washi paper, it's possible Nojima considered these photographs a series. If so, it would have been his first series. There were previous occasions where Nojima would create works with similar compositions and subjects in succession, but these

were just the result of him pursuing a particular theme, and the actual works were meant to be viewed individually. There are almost no other works from this period that capture the same individual many times over in the manner of a series.

The model is either wearing kimono or nude in the portraits. Model F is shown with many faces—the stiff expression in her kimono wear looking straight at the viewer, collar tucked closely against her neckline, differs from the expression in a photograph where she is partly undressed, or another in which a sensual smile is captured in the moment she takes a breath while posing nude with tousled hair. In fact, it almost seems as if she has blossomed into maturity during this short period of time, in the process of being photographed by Nojima. The finish of the prints and their tones are varied with subtle intention. I wonder what may be discovered if these photographs were displayed together as a series.

In the earlier gum bichromate prints of male portraits, Nojima captured the essence of the faces of the sitters, stripped of expression. They do not look toward the photographer but stare out into the void; they are all individuals lost in thought, alone in a place of nothingness. However, in 1931, when Nojima photographed Model F, he came face-to-face with her. Nojima took close notice of the subtle changes in her expression, capturing them one by one in his frame. While the gum bichromate portraits evoke timelessness, here we sense the photographer pursuing his subject in a more active manner. In a private space, Nojima was absorbed in an undefinable relationship with his model. And in the process, his creativity gradually broke through his own confines. With these works, he was no longer observing his subjects but had stepped in, and had something to gain thereby.

Model F has bold eyes, and a stately physique that seems to be charged with energy she has extracted from the earth. Her portraits are sensual yet reflect an intelligence. The warmth of her body can be felt through the shadows of her face, and her delicate empathy elevates the portrait.

A memo that Nojima probably wrote around this time reads:

Facial expression and bodily expression are inseparable. I can expect the expression of the face to change if the body changes.

(from Nojima's notes, circa 1931–1933)



fig.10

Nojima Yasuzō, Title unknown, 1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.11

Nojima Yasuzō, Title unknown, 1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.12

Nojima Yasuzō, *Rafu* (Nude), 1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.13

Nojima Yasuzō, Title unknown (Model F.),
1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.14

Nojima Yasuzō, Title unknown (Model F.),
1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.15

Nojima Yasuzō, Title unknown (Model F.),
1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.16

Nojima Yasuzō, Title unknown (Model F.),
1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.17

Nojima Yasuzō, *Shōzō (Model F.)* (Portrait (Model F.)), 1931

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.18

Nojima Yasuzō, *Shōzō (Model F.)* (Portrait (Model F.)), 1931

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.19

Nojima Yasuzō, *Shōzō (Model F.)* (Portrait (Model F.)), 1931

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.20

Nojima Yasuzō, *Shōzō* (A Young Girl), 1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto



fig.21

Nojima Yasuzō, Title unknown (Model F.),
1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto

Capturing the expressions of the face and the body as a whole—perhaps this is the idea embodied in the portraits that comprise the Model F series.

The nude photographs are, however, varied to a certain extent. In one example, the model's a centripetal form [fig.22] where the light and the subtle gradation of shadows diffused across the smallest details of the skin converge within the round form of the body. What we see is a self-sustaining body. It is an almost mystical presence ripe to its core, reminiscent of what Nojima expressed in his still lifes.

I want to draw attention to how Nojima made the decision here to include straight lines in the composition, such as the seams of folding screens and the corners of the room in the background. While he chose to shoot portraits against completely empty backgrounds, with his nude photographs, he shot his subjects along with linear forms from an early stage. As with the paper box photographed in *Busshukan* (Fingered citrons), the straight lines accentuate the soft contours of the body and bring a sense of tension to the space by creating an insecure balance within the composition. Additionally, these objects give the picture specificity, that this nude occupies a particular space.

As for the faceless nudes, we cannot identify the models, but most likely these were also of Model F from around the same time. These nudes embody a powerful dynamism. With just the slight movement of a leg, the model bursts with sensual energy that captures the space of the photograph. Nojima expresses an erotic energy, giving the otherwise subdued tone a physicality. The photographer focuses on his subject with unrestrained vigor.

What Nojima pursued was a nude with a face, or a portrait with a body, wherein the model's sturdy body and her piercing glare would together project a certain message. Meeting the ideal woman who embodied the elements he had been looking for from his early years allowed Nojima to realize this pursuit, and he was even able to go beyond that. Nojima acknowledged himself as an "admirer of nature," but at the same time he was also spiritualistic and humanitarian. With these works, Nojima was probably able to step beyond such frameworks and arrive at the depths of his very own "nature."

The nudes without faces were probably never shown in public. In



fig.22

Nojima Yasuzō, *Onna* (Woman), 1932

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto

the same year (1931), Nojima showed five works titled *Akiko* at the Nonomiyakai exhibition. It was the first time a person's name was used in a title. Possibly, this exhibition may have been the first time several works from the Model F series were shown to the public, although it is not possible to identify which ones they were.

THE LAUNCH OF *KŌGA*, 1932

IT IS MOST LIKELY THAT the productive period Nojima spent with Model F coincided with the preparatory stages for the publication of the radical coterie magazine, *Kōga*.

Kōga was launched in May 1932. The publication date for the inaugural issue was set for January of that year, so specific plans for the publication would have been made, though not definite, by the latter half of 1931. The writings in the notebooks Nojima was using around this time to draft his texts indicate that the publication had been proposed by the publisher Jurakusha, and that Nojima had invited commercial photographers to join the coterie.

In that moment, it's likely that the *Doitsu Kokusai Idō Shashinten* (German International Traveling Photography Exhibition), which kicked off from Tokyo in April 1931, was pivotal to the publication of this new magazine. This was a world tour of the photography section of the *Film und Foto* (Film and Photo) exhibition that had been held earlier in Germany, which showcased representative works of the Neue Fotografie movement among other new artistic trends from Europe and the United States. The traveling exhibition featured over one thousand works and is recognized today as one of the most important exhibitions

that triggered the Shinkō Shashin (New photography) movement. At this critical juncture for photography, Nojima must have also felt the need to publish a new photographic magazine.

Nojima chose the photographers Nakayama Iwata and Kimura Ihei to join him in the *Kōga* coterie. Nakayama was known for the elegant aesthetic world he created through his unique shooting technique and printing style, and Kimura was a master of snapshots of human drama unfolding in the downtown neighborhoods, captured through his Leica lens and executed in dynamic compositions. Nakayama was the leader of the Ashiya Camera Club (formed in 1930), which Nojima also belonged to, and excelled in the technique of photomontage. Meanwhile, Kimura was a guest member of the group Nonomiyakai. One of Kimura's photographs capturing a downtown scenery had been used in a promotional campaign for Kaō Corporation (1931), in combination with a leftist advertisement copy created by Ōta Hideshige, and was drawing much attention as a completely new type of advertisement photography. Nojima had intentionally placed himself between these two contrasting individuals who were on the verge of opening up their own creative paths, evidently very different from his. This mindset itself shows Nojima's ambition in the quest for new possibilities in photography.

Nojima also wrote in a listing of *Kōga*'s contents (*Kōga naiyōannai*):

We plan to present all that is relevant to the work we believe to be artistitically valuable, regardless of their type or school of photography they belong to. We are designing *Kōga* to be the most sophisticated photographic magazine in Japan.

Nojima's critical stance is evident in this passage. He had been critical of photography becoming an insular "secondary art," strictly adhering to the tendencies endorsed within like-minded groups. For Nojima, launching this new magazine meant to bring a public nature to art.

The "Inaugural Message" distributed to friends and colleagues read as follows:

Much of photography has regressed to conceptually art-like styles, and lost their life and appeal. There is good reason for

the recent rise in movements that awaken us to photography's specific unique capabilities.

Kōga hopes to present artistic expressions unique to photography that may contribute to people's lives and society.

To summarize, Nojima's statement that a departure from "conceptual styles" will result in the effective use of photography's capabilities in society represent his faith in art, which was the foundation of his work. Having contributed to the inaugural issue of *Kōga*, Ina Nobuo joined the coterie from the second issue, and became the first leading photo critic of Japan. According to Kimura and Ina's recollections, the magazine had a small circulation and didn't sell at all. However, it is no exaggeration to say that these two individuals who continued to lead the photographic world for many years throughout the postwar years, were trained through their work with *Kōga*. Kimura's signature style seen in his representative works and Ina's position as a writer were both established here.

KŌGA AS A MEDIUM

KŌGA, ESTABLISHED WITHIN a year of the emergence of Shinkō Shashin, placed emphasis on articles related to the movement. Among those were a translation of Franz Roh's "Mechanismus and Ausdruck" (Mechanism and Expression), the foreword of *Foto-Auge*, which served as a bible for the Neue Fotografie movement, (*Kōga* volume 1, issue 2), László Moholy-Nagy's film theory (*Kōga* volume 1, issue 4), and other in-depth commentaries and translated texts concerning photomontage.

Also noteworthy is how the magazine introduced photographers who had gained attention at the *Doitsu Kokusai Idō Shashinten* (German International Traveling Photography Exhibition) such as Germaine Krull, Edward Steichen, and Helmar Lerski. The writings appearing in *Kōga* were not mere follow-up articles of the Shinkō Shashin movement. Ina Nobuo's series of critical essays on photography starting with "Shashin ni kaere" [Return to photography] in the inaugural issue, was a novel attempt to recapture this newly trending perspective, not as technical information but in terms of its necessity.

Based heavily on Roh's texts, Ina introduced the concept that light is form in photography, as proposed by Moholy-Nagy, and what he called the unique beauty of an object as captured in the close-ups by Albert Renger-Patzsch, along with other ideas, as new achievements in photography. He also repeatedly advocated the importance of "real photo" as "a record of contemporary times and reporting of life."

After studying aesthetics at the University of Tokyo, Ina became the editor of the magazine *Sovēto no tomo* (Friends of the Soviet), and in espousing Marxist aesthetics began to study foreign magazines. He apparently took interest in photography along the way. Ina was aware that the popularity of *Neue Fotografie* would result in mass production of a superficial style around the world and that soon the movement would become obsolete. He proposed that the core of new photographic theory was not any one method alone but the attitude to "view old subjects in new ways," as well as the strong belief in "the person, the social being behind the camera, as the alpha of photographic art." Nojima would have certainly agreed with this.

Apart from Ina, a superb group of writers such as Yanagi Muneyoshi, Nakai Masakazu, and Hasegawa Nyozeikan, who normally did not write for photographic magazines, contributed essays to *Kōga*. Ambitious articles by the theater and film critics Yamada Hajime and Shimizu Hikaru, as well as advocates of modernist photography such as Horino Masao and Itagaki Takaho, and the designer Hara Hiromu also appeared in its pages. Even Yanagi Ryō and Hijikata Teiichi, who later became renowned art critics, were summoned to take part. As articles on photography up until then were mostly commentaries on techniques or impressionistic criticism of works exchanged between photographers, these articles written by luminaries from the "outside" were invaluable

and they remain significant contributions to the history of photography. This critical evaluation of photography from the “outside” was exactly what Nojima had been pursuing for some time. Needless to say, Nojima invested his energy into, above anything, the reproduction of photographic works. Nakayama and Kimura both presented their most outstanding works in *Kōga*, and Kimura’s friend Iida Kōjirō, Hanaya Kanbei, Matsubara Jūzō and others from Nakayama’s Ashiya Camera Club, influential figures in the Kansai region such as Hanawa Gingo and Yasui Nakaji, as well as Nojima’s pupils Sakuma Hyōe and Hori Fusao, all contributed their best works to the magazine. For *Kōga*, the quality of the work meant everything. It’s interesting to see that rare photographic works by Nojima’s friend and ceramicist Tomimoto Kenkichi, works chosen from among public entries, and the first works published in Japan by Natori Yōnosuke who later rises in the arena of propaganda, also appear in *Kōga*.

In a listing of *Kōga*’s contents (*Kōga naiyōannai*) it was stated that the monthly coterie magazine aims to “compile the twelve issues into a complete annual of Japanese photography.” The magazine also pronounced that it would “use the most advanced printing techniques” to “reproduce the touch of the original image,” and be particular about their “methods of insertion”—in other words pay attention to the design aspects of the page—so as to promise a quality that would “be on a par with photographic magazines from Europe and the United States.”

Nojima understood that photographs had more potential in the form of reproductions than being viewed as prints like the old days. This was probably one of his motives for launching *Kōga*, the reason for producing the magazine in a large format.

He wrote:

We should not limit our ways of presentation to exhibitions; if we can make the most of the significant printing techniques available, perhaps showing works in the form of printed matter might be a better way. I think it’s best to utilize the medium as an instrument to show works, especially when ample print size is assured, like in *Kōga*.

(“Zakki,” *Kōga*, Issue 1, May 1932)

As it were, Nojima, whose consummate skill was in the expression of textures and tones by hand, never was fully satisfied with printing technology. In the “Zakki” postscript of every issue, we see him expressing lament over the flaws in the printing. His use of photogravure printing from volume 2, issue 3 was also a reflection of his wish to make *Kōga* a platform to show his own works. Nojima had already abandoned the pigment print by this time, and in making photogravure prints worked directly from negatives instead of printed photographs. Consequently, Nojima became less concerned about printing his own photographs himself.

When reproduced in the form of publication, photographs become interrelated with reproduction techniques, papers and designs. Photography at this time was at the doorstep of a new era: a photograph was now determined by its design, or could even be an element of the design. The graphic designer Hara Hiromu, who contributed a series for *Kōga*, was soon to partner with photographer Kimura Ihei and produce work that would herald a new era of graphic design.

THE INTENT TO CHANGE PHOTOGRAPHY

THE INAUGURAL ISSUE OF *Kōga* opened with Nojima’s work titled *Onna (Moderu F.)* (Woman (Model F.)) (1931) [fig.23], which captures the robustly built Model F wearing a swimming suit with linear patterns, posing pensively in a full-length, seated portrait. The model’s sharp eyes and the thick shadow on the back wall produce a striking image in this bromoil print, in which the solidity of the model’s flesh is



fig.23

Nojima Yasuzō, *Onna (Moderu F.)* (Woman (Model F.)), 1931

Collection of the National Museum of
Modern Art, Kyoto

contrasted by the sharp geometric patterns. The face is reminiscent of Nojima's earlier gum bichromate portraits. The composition stresses the diagonal line while adding layers of contrasting elements, which seems symbolic of the photographer Nojima himself who was striving to renew himself in the activities of *Kōga*.

Featured in volume 1, issue 2 is another bromoil print titled *Hosokawa Chikako shi* (Ms. Chikako Hosokawa) (1932) [fig.24], which captures a momentary expression on the face of the actress Hosokawa Chikako, cropped in a bold composition. Inscribed April 16, 1931, this was a newly made work by Nojima when the June issue was published. It embodies the change in Nojima's view of photography since the launch of *Kōga*.

Photographs of this period show women's faces in close-up, with tilted heads, and faces with the left sides cropped off. Others show flowing hair, momentary expressions of coquetry, and deep shadows eclipsing parts of the face. These are all new elements in Nojima's portraits. "Capturing beauty—that is a 'chance,'" he wrote in volume 1, issue 2 ("Omou koto" [Thoughts]). Hereafter, Nojima shifts toward capturing the fleeting expressions on the faces of living, moving people.

Nojima incorporated elements of Shinkō Shashin in his work—close-up shots, bold cropping, asymmetrical composition, and the decisive moment—in his own way. In volume 1, issue 4, he presents close-ups of Model F's face with the most bold cropping and high contrast. After this, Nojima stops showing bromoil prints and shifts to straightforward gelatin silver prints.

Nojima, forty-two at this time, wrote these words in his notebook, intent on changing himself.

My way of making work is not absolute. If a better way presents itself, I will make a change without hesitation.

Oftentimes, an artist will create a certain style of his own. I think an artist does that when he is relaxed and is having fun working. But when he needs to break from that and pursue something new, that's when he faces hardship. When that happens, the viewer will be privileged to discover what lies beyond.
(from Nojima's draft notes, circa 1931–1933)



fig.24

Nojima Yasuzō, *Hosokawa Chikako shi* (Ms. Chikako Hosokawa), 1932

Collection of the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto

When he wrote this, was Nojima facing a time of “hardship”? Often in the “Zakki” postscripts, Nojima wrote with passion on works in progress, commenting on how stimulating they were. Nojima entered a productive period from 1930, the high point of *Kōga*, and rapidly transformed his photographic vision. In 1933, he attempted double portraits (volume 2, January issue cover), and also montaged images of bodies (volume 2, issue 5), creating innovative images. It’s also possible to recognize the influence of Nakayama Iwata in these methods. Nojima had been shooting mainly in studios at that point, but had just started to experiment with snapshots outside (volume 2, issues 10–12). This may have been because he had a new Leica and was hoping to learn from Kimura Ihei. It’s quite apparent that Nojima wasn’t adept at taking snapshots, but *Onna* (Woman) (volume 2, issue 11), an outdoor snapshot of the architect Tsuchiura Kameki’s wife Nobuko, herself an architect, succeeds in capturing the image of a cosmopolitan woman.

Also around this time, Nojima became absorbed in dancing, influenced by his friend architect Tsuchiura Kameki who had recently returned from the United States, and started hosting glamorous monthly dance parties in the halls of Nojima’s house in Takehayachō or Sanbanchō. Frequent guests included people in the film industry such as the film producer and actor Okada Sōzō (stage name: Yamanouchi Hikaru), an active member of Prokino, the Proletarian Film League of Japan, and architects, painters like Noguchi Yatarō who also had just returned from abroad, the art dealer and critic Fukushima Shigetarō and his wife, and others who appreciated modern culture and an urban life-style. The philosopher Tanikawa Tetsuzō and art historian Tominaga Sōichi were also regulars at these gatherings. In a group photo, *Kōga* members appear standing with Umehara Ryūzaburō and his family and the art dealer Nishikawa Takerō. The writings in Nojima’s notebook state that alongside these elaborate salons, monthly gatherings for the *Kōga* coterie were also held at the Nojima residence. Nakayama Iwata traveled from Ashiya, Hyogo Prefecture, to attend these gatherings, and Kimura, Ina, Hara Hiromu, Okada Sōzō and others also visited frequently.

PHOTOGRAPHS AS A SERIES: ONNA NO KAO (FACES OF WOMEN), 1933

NOJIMA'S MOST IMPORTANT WORK during the period he was involved with *Kōga* is the series titled *Onna no Kao* (Faces of women). Twenty-one of these works were shown at his solo exhibition in July 1933 under the title, *Nojima Yasuzō, Onna no Kao* (Faces of women), 20 Pieces (Nojima Yasuzō saku: shashin, Onna no Kao: nijutten). The exhibition was held at the Kinokuniya Gallery in Ginza, designed by Tsuchiura Kameki, and Hara Hiromu was responsible for the exhibition design. Over one thousand visitors attended the four-day exhibition.

Hara's installation plan was innovative; he suggested the photographs be hung in aluminum frames at even intervals on a single row of white plywood that surrounded the room, and to number each of the works. It was a radical attempt, perhaps the first photography exhibition ever to design its space in a modern way, with the effect of visual presentation in mind. The exhibition was written up by magazines and other media and elicited great response.

The exhibited works were straightforward bromide prints in 18x22 inch format, with a glossy ferrotyped finish. Not all works in the exhibition can be identified, but there are several 18x22 inch prints with pin holes in the corners that remain today. The series includes bust images of various young women who stood before Nojima's camera—models that posed at the request of Nojima including Model F, Tsuchiura Nobuko, Tsuchiura's younger sister who was aspiring to be an actress, and other modern and active women who were around Nojima at this time. In these bust shots, some models are pictured clothed, while others appear to be in the nude. Many of the women return their

gaze to the camera, some posing with their hand placed against their face. Their powerful gaze is emphasized by high-contrast lighting. The exhibition, which was initially planned for November 1932, turned out to be a showcase of the female portraits Nojima had made since his stylistic turn to straight prints after the launching of *Kōga*.

When asked about the motive for the exhibition, Nojima replied that it was to “catch the ever-fleeting expressions of a woman’s face” by utilizing the properties of the photographic medium (“*Onna no kao shashin ten zatsudan*” [Conversations on the *Photographs of Women’s Faces* exhibition], Recenzo, August 1933). This makes one wonder how conscious he was of what the different expressions on the women’s faces would reveal when displayed together. The exhibition design was planned on the clear understanding that the works comprised a series. Unlike the first retrospective-style exhibition, this second solo display was essentially a theme-based exhibition.

The presentation of photographs not as individual pieces but in series was an emerging paradigm. In photojournalism, for example, the sequencing of photographs in layout was considered an editing technique, which provided context and conveyed meaning through the juxtapositions.

In the case of *Onna no Kao* (Faces of women), through the compilation of women’s faces, the series vividly showed a collective identity of modern women. Nojima saw the strength and beauty of the new age in these women who broke with convention, and captured them with intensity. Perhaps Nojima saw parallels in the state of new photography and the force of the women emerging in society. His photographs showed that portraits of contemporary women are in themselves portraits of the city, and furthermore, of the age. Hara’s presentation design was highly graphical in nature, and his decision to give each work a number and not a title reinforced this impression.

This series is characterized by faces in close-up and back-lighting. Apparent here is the influence of Helmar Lerski, whose work was shown at the *Doitsu Kokusai Idō Shashinten* (German International Traveling Photography Exhibition). Lerski had received high acclaim for his photo book titled *Nichijō no Kao* (Everyday faces) (1931), in which he captured the worn faces of working-class people under strong lighting, giving their forms a sculptural quality. He closes up on the sitter’s faces

capturing the smallest details including their facial hair, and juxtaposes strong reflection (which looks as though oil has been applied on the face) with deep shadows to create these monumental images. Lerski's photographs enjoyed the backing of leftist sympathizers. Ina had introduced Lerski twice in *Kōga*, but reproductions of his works were not included on these occasions.

Nojima's lighting for the *Onna no Kao* (Faces of women) series, then, seems to have something to do with Lerski's usage of light rays, which Ina had introduced through his translated texts for *Kōga*. Lerski, who was also a cinematographer, had arrived at a unique effect by having his sitters stand with their backs against a window so that they are back-lit, and directing light reflected off of a mirror onto parts of their faces. There are no records that indicate Nojima's usage of mirrors, but his frequent use of backlighting in combination with partial reflection on the face share a commonality with Lerski's work.

A SUDDEN SHIFT: THE DISCONTINUATION OF KŌGA

NOJIMA AT THIS TIME was delighted over his successful solo exhibition, and was searching further, moving on to multiple-exposure printing as well as snapshot photography, which he was still learning. Under such circumstances, how did he take the sudden shift of his fellow coterie members? In August 1933, Kimura and Ina got together with Hara Hiromu and Okada Sōzō, who were not members but associated with *Kōga* through their writings and round-table discussions, alongside Natori Yōnosuke, to establish Nippon Kōbō (Japan workshop), a group of various creators. Natori, a key individual

of propaganda photography in Japan, had traveled back to Japan from Berlin repeatedly in 1932 and 1933 during his tenure as a correspondent for Ullstein Verlag's illustrated weekly tabloid. Natori, like Nojima, had left Keiō Gijuku prematurely, and began to frequent Nojima's salon. There he met Kimura and Ina, among others.

Natori spoke of his experience in Berlin in "photo-reportage," a term that had not yet been used in Japan at the time, which Ina translated as "hōdō shashin." This marked the starting point of the news photo ideology in Japan. Nippon Kōbō (Japan workshop) became the first agency in Japan dedicated to photography, design, and editorial work, and it was here that Kimura started his career as one of the most successful photographers in the country.

Nippon Kōbō (Japan workshop) dissolved in less than a year since it was founded, but even earlier, *Kōga* suddenly ceased publication with the December issue of 1933. Kimura and the others had set up a new office for themselves, and as they were busy as the first brokers of photography, could not maintain their enthusiasm for *Kōga*, as work for the magazine was mostly unpaid. It appears that after numerous discussions, Nojima decided to discontinue its publication. In the last issue, around five works by Kimura from his exhibition *Portraits of Literary Figures Taken with the Leica Camera* (Raika ni yoru bungeika shōzō shashin) organized by Nippon Kōbō (Japan workshop) were reproduced, leaving the impression that it was a special issue of sorts on the exhibition.

CROSSROADS: THE VALUES OF “SOCIAL” AND “UTILITARIAN”

IT IS NOT CLEAR WHY *Kōga* was no longer published by Jurakusha after 1933. About six months after *Kōgasha* was newly founded to take over as the independent publisher of *Kōga*, the magazine began to feature texts that strongly criticize the works of the coterie members. Ina Nobuo, himself a coterie member, wrote:

It's fine for photographers to indulge in unrealistic photo montages or the aestheticism of photograms, to create art that speaks to a limited few. Surely, some of these efforts will produce gems. However, no progress can be expected of art that has cut itself off from the masses and has detached itself from society. Where there is no progress, all that will eventually be left is extinction and destruction.

(Ina Nobuo, “Shashinkai e no kōkaijō II” [Open letter to photographer (II)], *Kōga*, volume 2, issue 10)

The unreconcilable gap between his photographic skills and the subjective treatment of his subjects is the most critical fault of Nojima's work. When one proceeds in this subjective direction, photographic art will deviate from its essentials. That is the moment photographic art abandons its noble mission as an art of utility and becomes a pointless leisurely art.

(Ina Nobuo, “Saikin no shashin geijutsu no keikō to *Photographie* 1933-1934” [Recent trends in photographic art and *Photographie* 1933-1934], *Kōga*, volume 2, issue 12)

The former comment is obviously a criticism of Nakayama Iwata's creative world, and the latter denounces Nojima's creative direction of his *Onna no Kao* (Faces of women) exhibition. Among the three photographers that belonged to the coterie, Ina acknowledged only Kimura Ihei as the ideal photographer whose work corresponded with his theory, and disapproved of Nakayama and Nojima's works completely. For Ina, who was close to a circle of Communist thinkers, "the masses," "society," and "utility" were absolute values, and "fantasy," "aestheticism," and "subjectivity" were ideas to be rejected.

Ina's ideology would later identify with aspects of "utility" and "society" of wartime propaganda, but he had no doubts about his beliefs. Hasegawa Nyozeikan also conformed with Ina's opinions. He wrote, "Kimura Ihei's artistic attitude seems to most capture the life of photographic art." Meanwhile, he criticized Nojima severely: "He should ground himself more in society, and his views should not be guided by instinct but instead with social direction. Before bringing the lens into focus, he needs to bring his consciousness into focus." ("Shashin geijutsu ni okeru genjitsusei ni tsuite" [On reality in photographic art], *Kōga* volume 2, issue 7)

Nojima's commencement of *Kōga* as a coterie magazine where members could while taking their clearly distinct stance open up the possibilities for photographic art in a multidisciplinary way certainly may have been idealistic. Nojima states in the inaugural issue of *Kōga* his wish to create works that enliven the "attraction of sensation" ("Omou koto" [Some of my ideas], *Kōga* inaugural issue). This attraction toward sensation that Nojima pursued did not necessarily stand against the idea of being "social," but for Ina, who had been radically influenced by Natori to theorize that news photography was the ultimate path for photography, this was unacceptable. As we can see in the inaugural message "*Kōga* hopes to present artistic expressions unique to photography that may contribute to people's lives and society"—what Nojima had in mind as the social function of art differed from the concept of utilizing art in an immediate way.

Nojima's socially conscious nature is most apparent in his criticism of existing systems and his activities for enlightenment, which I have already discussed in this essay. He created Kōgakai, a space for open critique where photographers engaged in mutual

critique in the presence of invited critics (started in May 1933), which evidences his unwavering social consciousness. Neither Nojima nor Nakayama counterargued the criticisms addressed toward them in *Kōga* but even without the founding of Nippon Kōbō (Japan workshop), their difference in opinion with Ina probably could not have been avoided. When the war began, the work of Nojima and Nakayama was once again criticized for their dismissal of the “social” and their lack of “utility,” while Kimura who was at the forefront of propaganda photography received praise. I will add, however, that this positioning of photographers contains issues that need reassessment in today’s world.

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When Nojima held the *Onna no Kao* (Faces of women) exhibition, he decided that he would “put forward my hard work at least once a year in the form of an exhibition.” After a year since the discontinuation of *Kōga*, in January 1935, he held his third solo exhibition at the Sanmaidō gallery in the Ginza district. At present, we don’t know if the works from this exhibition are extant and the details remain unclear, but it is certain that a portrait of two young girls lit by a blurred light using a gauze filter was shown on this occasion. This exhibition, however, never drew much attention. Ina even wrote in retrospect: “Nojima’s creative urge in photography, once vigorous, had effectively ceased.” (Ina Nobuo, “Nippon no kindai shashin no yoake—*Kōga* to Nojima Yasuzō” [The dawn of modern Japanese photography—*Kōga* and Nojima Yasuzō], *Shashin: Shōwa gojūnenshi* [Photography: fifty years history of Shōwa], 1988). Nojima may have been disheartened. This turned out to be the last solo exhibition during his lifetime.

INTERNATIONAL STYLE: THE NONOMIYA BUILDING

THE NONOMIYA SHASHINKAN (Photography studio), which Nojima was managing in Kudanshita by the crossing on Yasukuni-dōri, was a brick western-style house with a gable roof, built in the Meiji era. The house had been repaired after it was damaged by the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923. Upon rebuilding the house, Nojima entrusted the architectural design to his friend Tsuchiura Kameki. There is no doubt that the newly built Nonomiya Building, completed in 1936, radically changed the image of photographic studios. Built in the International Style, the reinforced concrete structure with eight-floors and a basement was adorned with white and blue tiles arranged in a stripe pattern, and the linear design was striking at a distance. For Tsuchiura, who was known to have trained under Frank Lloyd Wright, the Nonomiya Building was the first project he realized after setting up his private office.

The building featured an atrium lobby carpeted with bold abstract designs, and the ground floor, as well as the mezzanine floor, were occupied by the Nonomiya photography studio labeled “Shashin Nonomiya.” The third floor and above made up the Nonomiya-apartments, equipped with cutting edge central heating systems and dust chute facilities. The apartments were furnished with modern items designed by Tsuchiura and promised its residents a completely western lifestyle. At a time when the average starting salary was about forty-five yen, the monthly rent for a room in the Nonomiya-apartments was about two hundred yen. The unusual combination of a photographic studio and a high-class rental apartment may have been suggested by

Tsuchiura and his wife who lived in the Bunka apātomento (Cultural apartment), a western-style residential complex in Ochanomizu just after their return from the United States in 1926.

The Nonomiya photography studio had three studios, each for different purposes, with newly installed lighting equipment. The studio had a reputation for their modern sophistication, and rumors spread that formal portraits taken there for arranged marriages brought success. The fact that the most modern residence on the upper floor was occupied by Okada Yoshiko, a famous film star of Shōchiku studio, as well as embassy officials of various countries, promoted the professional image of the photographic studio. The Nonomiya photography studio opened branches in the Isetan Shinjuku department store and also in Karuizawa, establishing a high-brand quite unlike any other local photographic studio.

Nojima used a room on the second floor of the Nonomiya-apartments as his study where he conducted photo shoots and made work while giving instructions to his assistants. Around this time, Nojima had come to use a Leica regularly and captured people outdoors enjoying themselves in the sun near his second home in Karuizawa and during a trip to Hawaii, on which he accompanied Fukuhara Shinzō and his wife in 1936.

THE LAST PLACE, 1939: FOUNDING THE KOKUGAKAI SHASHINBU (PHOTOGRAPHY DIVISION, NATIONAL PAINTING ASSOCIATION)

THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT of the Chuō Kōbō (Central workshop) (1934), Kimura, Hara, and Ina began to provide photographs to magazines, advertisements, publications and expositions,

particularly focusing on government-related organizations such as the Tetsudōshō Kokusai Kankōkyoku (International tourism bureau of the ministry of railways) and the Kokusai Bunka Shinkōkai (International association for cultural promotion). Distributing photographs was not the only job of the agency; it dealt comprehensively with the utilization, editing and design of photographs in a team work manner. Natori had established the second-generation Nippon Kōbō (Japan workshop) by this time, leading a similar kind of team as the Chuō Kōbō (Central workshop). With the newcomer Domon Ken as staff member, among others, Natori's Nippon Kōbō (Japan workshop) successfully launched a series of visual propaganda magazines with outstanding content and layout, including the legendary magazine *Nippon*, and in so doing paved his own path in photography.

After this, the state of the photographic world changed drastically. Conventionally, photographers had been categorized into commercial photographers and amateur artists but this structure completely changed as the two new genres of news photography and advertisement photography became established occupations. Kimura Ihei became a pioneer in both of these genres and was hugely successful, unanimously recognized as the leading expert in Japanese photography.

Nojima probably may not have been motivated to become a photographer by profession, but that didn't mean he disapproved of advertisement and news photography. His work was published in *Nippon* (Issue 2, 1935) and was also included in *Girls of Japan* (1939), a sensational photographic publication that was published by the Kokusai Hōdō Shashin Kyōkai (Japan photo service), established within Chuō Kōbō (Central workshop). Nojima provided work for various media outlets including an advertisement for Polytamin, a dietary supplement for children (1937), the English annual published by Asahi Shimbun Newspapers, and others. However, there are no extant works by Nojima that are comparable to Kimura's, for which Kimura struggled to meet the demands of his clients. Although Nojima created many female portraits during his career, there is not a single work that could be categorized as a so-called *bijinga* (portraits of beautiful women). Producing work to meet a client's needs must not have been Nojima's forte as he was the type of artist who always questioned conventional

standards of beauty.

As the wartime regime grew stronger, the demand for photography became centered on news photography, particularly propaganda photography. Consequently, Kimura's and Natori's agencies became the frontline for occupational photographers. Koishi Kiyoshi, who was the flagbearer of the Shinkō Shashin (New photography) movement, and other photographers who made work for themselves, had moved on to serve the war. Meanwhile, the work of amateur photographers was stifled. Photographic material was increasingly considered valuable, and therefore disallowed for personal art without a "utilitarian" value. Every photographic organization including the Nihon shashinkai (Japan photographic society) was pressed to sustain theoretical arguments, i.e., that photography was "people's art," and that it could be used to comfort soldiers, no matter how futile their efforts.

Under such circumstances, creating a division of photography within a public art association was surely going against the current. The Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association) was established in 1939 with great difficulty, when the feeling of war was already thick in the air and photographic organizations were on the verge of dissolving. Several members of the Kokugakai (National painting association) who had visited Paris were impressed by salon style photography exhibitions and upon return, proposed to the board to set up a photography division within the association. The idea seems to have been brought to realization as Nojima and Fukuhara Shinzō were both board members at the time. According to Nojima, "For Mr. Fukuhara and for myself also, it was by chance that a photography division was made." (Nojima Yasuzō's letter addressed to Hanaya Kanbei, September 1959, collection of the Ashiya City Museum of Art and History)

The criteria for the Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association)'s open-call exhibition stated: "the work must be an artistic or decorative photograph. Other categories of applied photography such as news and advertisement are accepted only if considered artistically valuable." Here again, we see Nojima interpreting "artistic value" in the broadest sense of the term.

Ultimately, the Kokugakai (National painting association) was the only public art organization that had a photography division during the

war. Could this have been one culmination of the efforts since the Meiji era to publicly recognize the artistic value of photography?

The pursuit of artistic value in photography had always been wavering between different ideals, abound with contradictions. In the search for photography's aesthetic identity, photographers had forbidden themselves to imitate painting, and yet, the path they took was to seek "art" as it was shaped through history of fine arts. Nojima, who understood and strictly separated both painting and photography knew very well that "other categories of applied photography" had new potential. The possibilities for photography in printed media was ever expanding, and the times were calling for this expansion. Photography had found a place in mass media and no longer required a medium for presentation. And yet, knowingly, Nojima entrusted the "artistic value" of photography in the Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association), and invested a considerable amount of energy into its activities.

Nakayama Iwata and Kimura Ihei both took part from the first exhibition. Nishigori Kōji, a pupil of Nojima, Hanaya Kanbei and Matsubara Jūzō and others of the Ashiya Camera Club joined, as well as members of the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society) under Fukuhara Shinzō. The lineup of photographers was almost as if the members of *Kōga* had reunited. The three former coterie members of *Kōga*, each a noted photographer by this time, had once again come to show their work at the same venue for a number of years to follow.

FAKE STILL LIVES: *GINREIKA*, 1938–

FOR THE EXHIBITION of the Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association), Nojima showed a new series titled *Ginreika*. The gorgeous-looking plastic flowers pictured in the photographs were a rare item at this time. Nojima placed pieces of cellophane in the composition and photographed them through a gauze filter, which would make the reflecting light shimmer and create an illusory effect. He produced several variations using these fake flowers, for example, by layering an exposure of a naked torso or carpeting the background with sand and adding shells in the composition. If Nojima intended the word *ginrei* (printed in abstracted *hiragana* characters) to mean “silvery, snow-capped mountains,” perhaps he was alluding to the image of light reflecting off the surface of snow and ice quickly melting away—something a skier like him would have been familiar with.

In *Ginreika* (*ka* meaning flower), Nojima took fake flowers as his motif and employed gauze filters and lens effect to create a fake irregular reflection of light. The star-shaped reflections bouncing off the leafless fake flowers produce a fabricated sparkle. In effect, *Ginreika* is a work that generates a fictional image existing only on the photographic plane.

Up until this point, Nojima was an artist who was guided by a naturalist aesthetic. The views of the Shirakabaha (White birch society), which greatly impacted him in his youth, remained his foundation. As a self-confessed “admirer of nature,” Nojima always paid respect to his

subjects and at one time wrote in his notebook: “realism must be the true path for art.” For someone like him, turning to subjects so far from “nature” was a significant change in direction.

This only makes one recall that Nojima, before the *Ginreika* series, was making a series of female portraits (1937–1940) in which he “attempted to create an outdoor effect while shooting indoors” (Nojima Yasuzō, “Watashi no ichiban sukina shashin” [My favorite photograph], *Asahi Camera*, May 1938). For this series, Nojima photographed smiling models in swimming suits and ski wear under lighting in a studio setting. These photographs were never well received. In the case where two models are looking at one another, their poses and costumes look staged and exaggerated, and the lighting aimed to “create an outdoor effect” appears very unnatural, resulting in an incoherent image. Nojima did in fact shoot outdoors, which leaves one to question why he felt the need to “create an outdoor effect while shooting indoors.”

ANTI-“REAL PHOTO”: NAKAYAMA IWATA AND NOJIMA YASUZŌ

PERHAPS A CERTAIN ORIENTATION toward fakeness had been triggered in Nojima. This was a time when advertisement photography typically called for theatrically exaggerated styles, or manipulation through composit images. Photographs were often taken under artificial lighting and settings, reminiscent of Hollywood movie stills. News photography was also rife with images that could hardly be called “natural”— smiling soldiers and brave Japan’s Kōgun Sentai (Imperial army) squadrons were captured in dynamic angles in *Shashin Shūhō* (Weekly photographic journal), to give a few examples. The rise of

propaganda and advertisement was increasingly in discord with the trend of realism photography. There are almost no documents that reveal what was on Nojima's mind when making these new works. We should, however, remember that the Japanese photographers' enthusiasm toward Surrealism had peaked in 1938. Photographers often incorporated motifs of butterflies and shells, objects, and the surrealist *dépaysement* technique, and combined them with multiple exposure and photogram methods. The illusory effects achieved through such methods was extremely popular around this time. Nojima was particularly influenced by Nakayama Iwata, who had clearly set himself apart from the widely popular trends. Nakayama's work titled *Inochi naki mono* (Things without life)³, shown at the first Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association) exhibition, include elements that are similar to *Ginreika*.

Since the discontinuation of *Kōga*, from around 1935, Nakayama had been continuously pursuing fictional images in floating settings, created by combining shining particles made from pieces of cellophane and silver powder with shells and seahorses, and arranging them inside layered sheets of glass. Nojima regularly showed work at the Ashiya Shashin Salon (Ashiya photography salon) exhibit led by Nakayama, so he must have been well acquainted with the photographic techniques Nakayama employed to produce fictional images. *Inochi naki mono* (Things without life) was a culmination of such techniques—as the dry and hard shells and seahorses swim about in the pool of soft, artificial light, we see the inversion and intersection of images and silhouettes, life and death, fictional and real.

For Nakayama too, the discontinuation of *Kōga* must have been a disappointment. He was a master of studio photography and was hardly interested in news photography. He shot photographs for advertisement and tourism, and also made outstanding work in the new genre of photo-murals. However, what Nakayama was most interested in was the beauty of fictional spaces that could only be created through the broad use of photographic techniques: for Nakayama, photography was purely a fictional media. For him, pursuing photography as a way to communicate “reality,” or to commit to genres pertaining to its “social” and “utilitarian” aspects would have been a “unreal” ideology.

³ *Inochi Naki Mono* was shown at the exhibition of Nakayama Iwata's posthumous works at the Kobe Sogō Department Store in 1957. No English title was given in the associated catalogue.

Nakayama thus became an uncompromising anti-naturalist. No matter how hard you struggle with the lighting and try to express the sitter's presence, what you get will never be that person—it will only be a photograph.

(Nakayama Iwata, "Decoration," Camera Club, January 1938)

To think that a photograph is an unmistakable way of reproducing objects is already a mistake.

Photography is utterly delicate, subjective, and individualistic.

(Nakayama Iwata, "Shashinkai ni miru shinseimen e no taidō"

[The new frontier of the photographic world], Nihon Shashin Nenkan [Japan photo almanac], 1939)

To some extent, Nakayama's extreme anti-realism corresponded with his resistance to Ina Nobuo's photographic theory of "Real photo." He rejected the simplistic idea of capturing "reality," for example, just by turning the camera toward life on the streets.

After *Kōga*'s discontinuation Nakayama rejected the pursuit of an easily claimed "reality" and withdrew into his studio where he committed himself to constructing a "completely delicate and subjective" world within a photograph, which for him was essentially no more than a piece of paper. The direction he pursued was the antithesis of the propaganda photography Ina and Kimura engaged in, whereby the "reality" they captured existed only within the area that was permitted to them under the wartime regime, and never deviated from their client's needs.

The former *Kōga* coterie members were progressing, in a way, in two completely opposite directions, and all the while, Nojima had been involved in both directions. Having understood both sides, perhaps he abandoned the naturalism he was initially guided by, and chose to proceed in the direction of creating a fictional world that could only materialize in a photograph. If Nojima's photographs had moved on to the pure rendering of fictional light on a piece of paper, then perhaps that was the new understanding of photography at which he arrived by way of criticizing the state of photography under the political regime in wartime Japan and the ideology of the Yokusan Taisei (Imperial Rule Assistance Association). Nojima's new

photographic understanding was to invert the dignity of presence and to sublimate it into a fictional presence. That attests to the true criticality of Nojima's photographic world.

JAPAN'S DEFEAT AND THE LOSSES IN FIRE

IN THE YEAR 1944, the Nihon Shashinkai (Japan photographic society) disbanded in March, and the exhibition of the Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association) was forgone.

In May of that year, Tōhōsha (founded in 1941), which was created by Okada Sōzō to succeed Chuō Kōbō (Central workshop) and which Kimura attempted to keep running, moved into the Nonomiya Building to avoid air raids. However, Nonomiya Building, famed as the best building in Tokyo at the time, was burnt in the firebombing raid on Tokyo in March 1945. The final issue of the visual propaganda magazine *Front*, which Tōhōsha had been preparing for publication, as well as Nojima's negatives and prints that were kept in his study, were all lost in the fire.

After Japan's defeat in the war, Nojima gave up the building and dissolved the Nonomiya Corporation, and withdrew from all of his projects. After relocating several times, he built a house in Hayama Isshiki, Kanagawa Prefecture, which he designed himself, and lived a quiet life thereafter.

Nojima never let go of his camera but after the war, photography seems to have become a leisurely pursuit for him. It's fair to say that Nojima Yasuzō's activities as an artist came to an end around 1943 with

the cessation of the Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association).

Even so, Nojima remained a stalwart of the Kokugakai Shashinbu (Photography division of the national painting association) and was always compassionate toward the ensuing generations. Isshikikai, the alumni association of the Keio Camera Club, which he closely supervised over the years, and the Nonomiyakai, created by several employees of the Nonomiya Photography Studio, which he originally managed, gathered regularly with Nojima for outings and photo shoots to rekindle old friendships. These gatherings continued until Nojima's death. He was certainly a man worthy of those exchanges.

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Today, on the 120th anniversary of Nojima Yasuzō's birth, we are given the opportunity to reflect on his life and work. Needless to say, what we draw from here and how we interpret our findings are not conclusive in any way. Nojima's work can be revisited many times over and shall continue to elicit new ways of seeing.

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