

YUJI AGEMATSU

Day by Day

Opening January 27, 2018

6-8PM

“Time goes from present to past” - Dōgen-zenji

The Japanese word *Okimono* compounds *oku* to “put; place; set; lay out; assign; station; leave” and *mono* an “object; thing; article”. In Japan an *okimono* is a small carving, normally not larger than a few centimeters, typically displayed in a *tokonomo*, or a recessed alcove. The objects depict all sorts of animals and mythological beasts, humans, gods, fruits, and vegetables, sometimes combined to portray a scene. The history of the craft spans centuries but it was the Meiji Period (1868-1912) that solidified the form as being collectible. The vital elements are an inseparable representation of everyday life in Japan.

Since the 1980s, Yuji Agematsu uses *oku* and *mono* to *put; place; set / things; objects; articles* as a collector of a different variety. The configuration of his *okimono* uses the thin cellophane membrane from cigarette packs to compose miniature dioramas that mirror the societal consumptive urge. While each object is meticulously mapped and documented in the artist’s pocket notebook, serving to decode the location and time of the collection point, Agematsu’s daily practice of archiving street debris attentively places *things* in the readymade repository, a shrunken version of the *tokonomo*. The flimsy cellophane *vitrines* contain hair and dust, a condom, bugs, wads of chewing gum and various oddments, with each of the 365 individual arrangements that comprise Agematsu’s “zip: 01.01.14 . . . 12.31.14” corresponding to a single respective day of the 2014 calendar year.

A dense city like New York is layered in a thick blanket of grime, a bleak scene of urban detritus fueled by constant human consumption. The breeding ground for Agematsu’s objects consists of a careful selection and not a blind pursuit of *laissez-faire* picking. The eye systematically scans the urban field. The pick up is rapid and without hesitation. The object is placed into a cellophane vessel or plastic bag, sometimes left for years before being re-evaluated. The associations of filth quickly fall by the wayside as objects are elevated from the gutter to the perimeter of spiritual exaltation.

In Agematsu’s numerous “Table Work 2011–2014,” a soiled Q-tip, a bottle cap, a half-eaten lollipop and other discrete objects are pinned to surfaces of pristine white tabletops elevated to viewing level. In some instances pins raise the objects a few centimeters above the horizontal plane, allowing debris to hover in space in silent preservation. The pristine field of white is in opposition to the objects’ humble past. But through Agematsu’s lens, *Time goes from present to past*. Objects with drained use value, well past an expiry date, their ultimate destiny having likely been to be buried in a landfill or to perhaps find a secure nook or cranny in urban isolation, have been carefully secured in conservancy. The past has been extracted into the present.

This ascetic practice can be seen as an exercise in humility arising spontaneously and naturally from situations of everyday life. Taken during the course of two nights in February 2016, “2016.02.01/16, Bowery and Delancey St” is a series of photographs documenting the intersection of Bowery and Delancey Streets in New York, a transitional junction connecting the flow from downtown to uptown, and Manhattan to Brooklyn. Seen through his perspective of collecting, the documentation reflects a wet streetscape riddled with congested traffic combined with moments of silence, and littered with objects consigned to oblivion and situated somewhere between abandonment, calamity, and solitude, all of it photographically mapped by Agematsu’s camera, a device ethically charged with highly receptive and evenly calibrated powers of observation. The artist’s attention toward rhythmically collecting and archiving urban detritus is a disciplined life pursuit, affirmed *Day by Day*.

Yuji Agematsu was born in 1956 in Kanagawa, Japan. He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. Agematsu studied with Tokio Hasegawa, a member of the band Taj Mahal Travellers, and the jazz drummer and choreographer Milford Graves. He has had solo exhibitions at TZ Art & Co. (1994) and Anthology Film Archives, New York (2004), as well as at Real Fine Arts, Brooklyn (2012 & 2014), and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York (2017). In 2014, he also had a solo show at Artspeak, Vancouver, Canada and a large scale exhibition at Yale Union, Portland, OR, which was accompanied by the monograph ZIP: 01–01–14...12–31–14, published by Yale Union, Thea Westreich Wagner/Ethan Wagner Publications, and Artspeak. He was the focus in 2015 of Walk on A, B, C, organized by Jay Sanders at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Further, Agematsu was included in the 2016 New Museum, New York exhibition The Keeper, curated by Massimiliano Gioni, as well as in Looking Back / The 7th White Columns Annual, selected by Richard Birkett (2013), Speak Lokal, Kunsthalle Zurich, Switzerland, and in Serialities, organized by Olivier Renaud-Clément, Hauser & Wirth, New York. His work is currently included in Ritual at the Aspen Art Museum.

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