

Iwauko Murakami's Solo Exhibition *Known Unknown*

Dates: Friday, October 4 – Sunday, October 27, 2024

Hours: Tuesday - Friday 12:00 - 19:00, Saturday and Sunday 12:00 - 18:00

Closed: Mondays,

Venue: Communication Gallery Fugensha

5-3-12 Shimo-Meguro, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-0064, Japan

TEL: 03-6264-3665 MAIL: info@fugensha.jp <https://fugensha.jp>

We are pleased to announce the solo exhibition of Iwauko Murakami, *Known Unknown* at Communication Gallery Fugensha from October 4 to October 27, 2024. This exhibition commemorates the publication of her new photo book of the same title, published by Fugensha.

Iwauko Murakami was born in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture in 1986, Murakami graduated from Musashino Art University's Graduate School of Art and Design with a Master's degree in Photography in 2012. Currently based in Tokyo, she is engaged in a photographic project that intersects visible and invisible images, correlating memory and identity with social events and the environment.

This exhibition will feature approximately 30 works from her *Known Unknown* series. The series features women of roughly the same generation as the artist, photographed in their homes, workplaces, and other places where they are comfortable and natural. The photographs, taken with a medium-format camera, do not clearly show the faces of the subjects, while details of the scenery, such as the space they are in and what they are wearing, are clearly captured in the photographs.

This project traces its origins back to the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011. At the time, Murakami was living a stout life in Tokyo, which was gradually returning to normalcy, while keeping a lid on his undeniable feelings about the devastation in her hometown. When she looked back a year later on the self-portraits he had taken in her room during the rolling blackouts, she realized that the backlighting made it almost impossible to see the faces of the subjects, and that they had emerged as existences that encompassed both strength and danger, not converging in the “seeing/being seen” relationship between the viewer and the subject. These two symbolic experiences connected to the earthquake disaster were the impetus for Murakami's work on this project.

The portrait in *Known Unknown* is an image pregnant with the ambiguity of the body, as the artist states, “A person closest to you is yourself,” and “Although one's body is a subject under the person's control, it is also oneself. *Known Unknown* is a portrait of a new era, in that it depicts a woman who has long been ‘seen’ as a model in art history, but without showing her face or being conscious of being ‘seen,’ as she is. The camera between them acts like a mirror, blurring the boundaries of portrait photography and making it a fluctuating form of portrait photography.

It may be that the viewer somehow feels a sense of intimacy with these women, whose faces are not visible.

How will you interpret the portraits of these women in the face of the blurring of the boundaries between self and others and the uncertainty of existence that emerges when you look at the portraits?

The photo book includes an essay contributed by novelist Junko Takase, winner of the 167th Akutagawa Prize in 2022. During the exhibition, we will hold a gallery talk with Ms. Odawara Nodoka, who is a contemporary of the artist and researches sculpture, which is closely related to portraiture.

Biography

Iwauko Murakami

Born in Sendai city of Miyagi Prefecture in 1986. Completed master's course of photography of the Graduate School of Art and Design, Musashino Art University in Tokyo in 2012. She won the 23rd Miki Jun Award for her *Known Unknown* in 2022.

She studied under photographer Hiroshi Yamazaki who is known as a pioneer of conceptual photography. She has engaged herself in photo projects that intertwine the visible and the invisible, interpreting memory and identity as being correlated with social events and living conditions. She is currently based in Tokyo.

Her major exhibitions include *Anonymous Danes* held at Nihon Salon in 2024, *Known Unknown* held at Nikon Salon in 2021 and 2022 and also at Gallery TURNAROUND in 2022 and *HOME works 2015* at Tokyo Wonder Site Shibuya in 2015. She also showed her photographs at group shows such as “*Kotoba to Image (Words and Images) Vol.3 Shashin wa Kataru (Photography Speaks) – Takashi Kuraya & Iwauko Murakami,*” held at Kanzan Gallery in 2017.

www.murakamiiwauko.com

Statement

For the Commemoration Exhibition of the Publication of the *Known Unknown* Photo Book

In an empty hallway in the morning, I was clearing away bottles of Perrier. It was one of my unremarkable tasks when I was working in a university research laboratory. As I walked back and forth along the approximately 30-meter-long deserted corridor, my consciousness found it amusing to observe myself diligently collecting and carrying the bottles. I do not clearly remember whether I had already decided to take a photograph of that scene later.

It has been nearly three years since I presented this work, *Known Unknown*, at Nikon Salon in 2021. During that time, significant milestones in my artistic career, such as receiving the Miki Jun Award and holding my first solo exhibition in my hometown Sendai, have unfolded, culminating in the publication of the photo book and the accompanying exhibition today.

Looking back, at the art university where I enrolled to study photography, I learned various forms of expression, including painting, sculpture, project design, animation, CG, and film. Ultimately, however,

nothing captivated my heart as much as photography. Photography effortlessly satisfied my strong sense of self as an expressive subject.

The Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011 fundamentally challenged my attitude toward photography. What meaning do my acts of seeing, capturing, and presenting hold within this vast narrative? Why is it necessary for *me* to do it? I still hold various questions unanswered. Nevertheless, I will continue to explore unseen images with my own concepts.

October 2024

Iwauko Murakami