

**THIS IS A MIRROR**



**MIDORI HARIMA**



**ABBY DONOVAN: THE COLORS ARE LIKE WORDS  
THAT ARE NOT WORDS BUT COLORS**

**MIDORI HARIMA: THIS IS A MIRROR**

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# THIS IS A MIRROR

IN THIS SERIES OF WORKS THAT EMPLOY VIDEO, PHOTOGRAPHY, and sculptural constructions, Midori Harima delves into matters of identity, ephemerality, reproduction, and consumption. Throughout *This is a Mirror*, Midori challenges us to rethink how and what we see—whether the detritus generated by goods that circulate in the economy and environment; the flow of ideas; or the process of the reproduction and dissemination of images—and reconsider our understanding of modes of circulation.

During a month-long residency in South Korea in 2015, Midori started saving all the non-perishable garbage she generated each day and used it to create a sculpture each evening that she then titled and photographed. Upon returning to New York (where she resided for most of the 16 years she lived in the US before moving back to Japan), she began gathering trash from throughout the city, extending the project, which ultimately lasted an entire year. The works she created, 366 in all, coupled with daily written notations, form an illustrated diary of that year—a series of self-portraits that portray a vast array of multiple selves constructed from scattered litter. In this work, *Democracy Demonstrates*, Midori treats trash as a material just as valuable and viable as any other medium, employing a “democratic” approach to artmaking that obliges us to reconsider aesthetic and societal hierarchies. *Democracy Demonstrates* also illustrates broader patterns of human consumption through which Midori questions the ideologies, values, and contradictions at work within late-stage capitalist democracy.

A print is created through the contact between two things—a plate or a screen and a sheet of paper. Printmaking, which translates ink into a readable image on paper, is a sort of mediation between the two. For Midori, the essence of that process is also consistent with the state of being a foreigner—her identity has been formed by the contact and interaction between her lives in the US and Japan. *This is a Mirror, after Camnitzer* is a two-channel video installation in which Midori collapses printmaking and video in a conceptual framework that references the work *This is a Mirror You Are a Written Sentence* (1966-68) by Luis Camnitzer, a pioneering figure of conceptual art. Through this homage to Camnitzer's works and writing (particularly “*Printmaking: A Colony of the Arts*”), Midori rethinks the constructed image:

By using structures inherent to printmaking – invisibility, unknowability, unpredictability ... I have redefined and reformed printmaking as a conceptual translation and a technology of mediation.

In this age of AI and environmental issues such as shortages of natural resources, *This is a Mirror, after Camnitzer* is based on a thought experiment that envisions the

eventual disappearance of paper. I also used paper as a metaphor for the human body and recorded my own body doing bold, repetitive actions filmed with a digital camera from the front and an 8mm film camera from behind to create a two-channel video installation. This work de-centers the artmaking process through an act which becomes possible solely when the actor is only able to see from behind [the work].

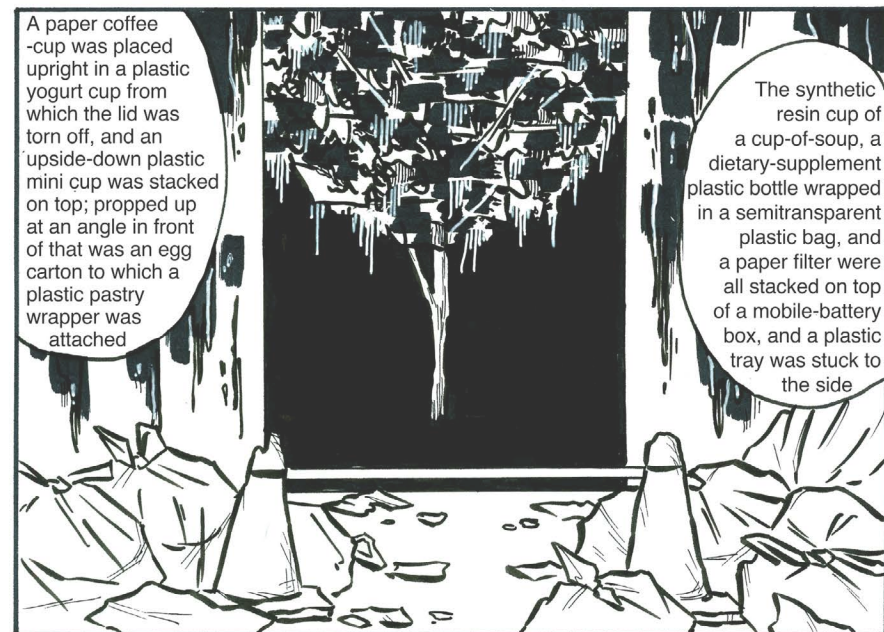
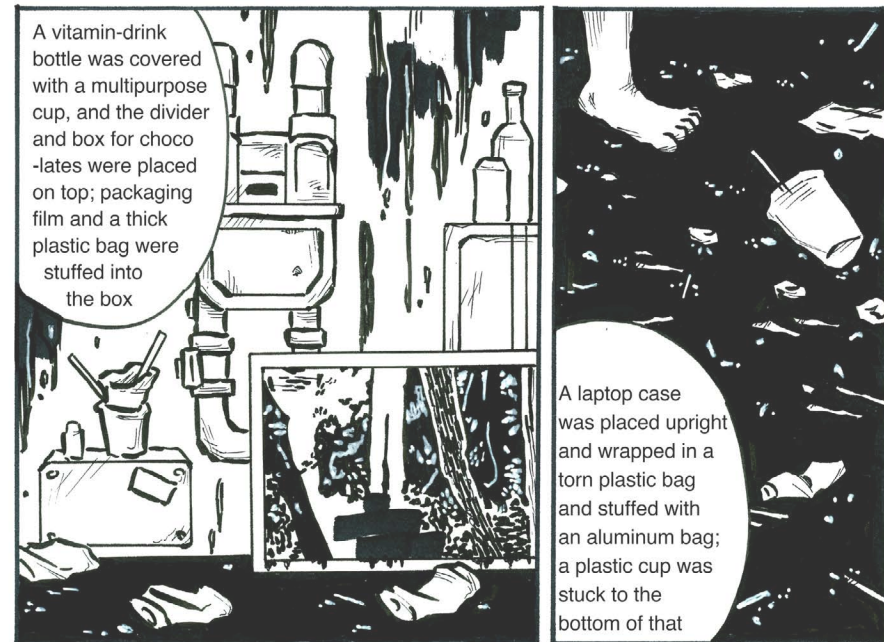
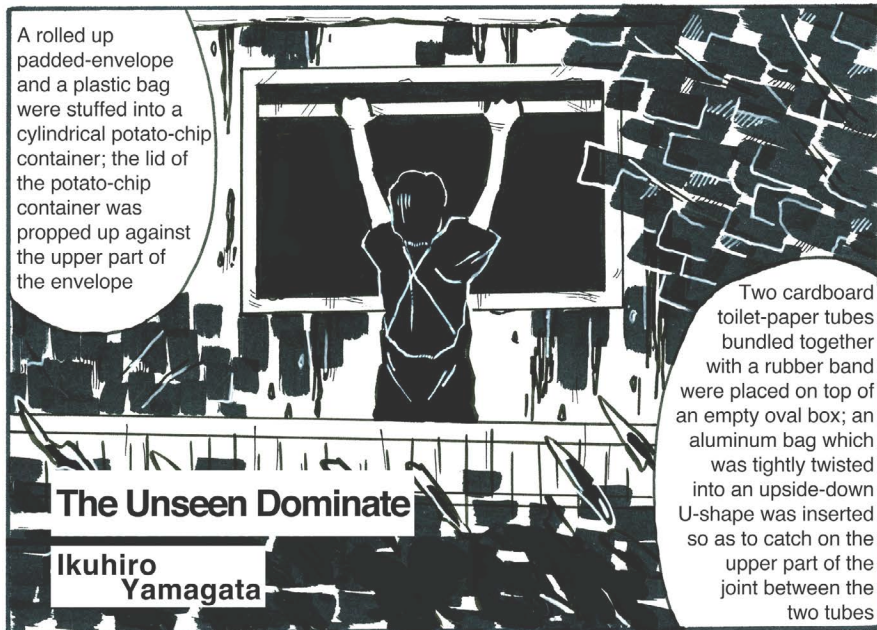
In *This is a Mirror, after Camnitzer*, Midori is filmed in her studio pulling a silkscreen print of a landscape. However, rather than lying flat on a table over a sheet of paper, the screen is held in place by wooden supports and faces out at the viewer, parallel to the picture plane, blocking our view through the window behind it. Midori creates an ephemeral reproduction by enacting the process of printing an image without printing it on paper. The making of the “print” is a performative action that leaves no physical trace, but the gesture itself is recorded, leaving us with layered questions about the construction, perception, and reproduction of images.

Since the Renaissance development of linear perspective, Western art has used the trope of the window as a means of depicting an illusionistic rendering of a scene. The frame of the painting mimics the frame of the window, through which we look at the world beyond. Midori's video takes up this pictorial device and then disrupts it by refusing our ability to look into the studio and through the window. The silkscreen blocks our vision, preventing us from seeing “the view.” At the same time, the screen's frame reiterates the window frame, which is reproduced by the video camera frame in a conflation of reality and representation (through various mediums). The second channel of the work looks through the window from outside into the studio depicting the view from behind, further confusing in and out, and front to back, through shifting perspectives, creating a kind of open-ended circuit.

Lisa Panzera

Director, Shirley Fiterman Art Center











WHEN I WAS 25, I FOLLOWED MY PARTNER AND MOVED TO SAN FRANCISCO because I wanted to see the world outside of Japan; before I turned 30, I moved from San Francisco to New York because I wanted to continue my art practice in a different place; at the beginning of my 40s, I decided to leave the US and move back to Japan.

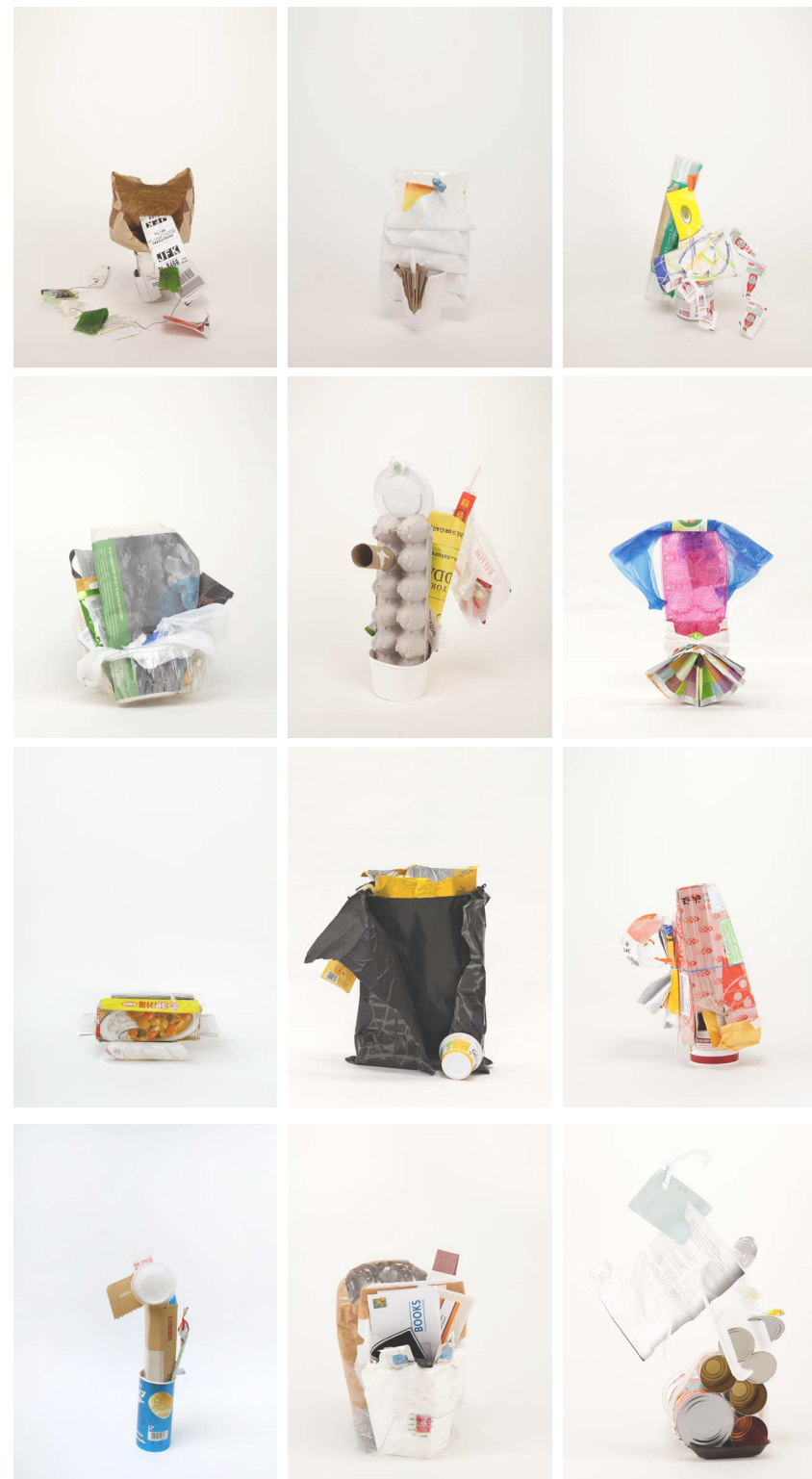
Living in a foreign country was an experience of re-examination, deconstruction, and relativization of myself in a different context. I found myself trapped in a localized regionalism. I learned a lot from people I met during my stay in the US, especially those from non-Western countries. As the years went by, my desire to re-examine myself and my practice grew and expanded with the opportunity of another move. After returning to Japan I moved to Hong Kong for a year and rediscovered printmaking, and encountered many foreigners/non-citizens living there. Again, I found the nature of relativism created possibilities for new ways of thinking and offered a means of stepping outside of hierarchical systems. I began de-centering my art practice using the process of printmaking, conceptually framing that within my experience as a foreigner living between places.

At the same time that I was experiencing new places, encountering discarded materials, and using old media and techniques, I was trying to reposition the act of making art within a broader context and across a wider time frame. This exhibition endeavors to connect the world around me within a one-kilometer radius to worlds that are distant both temporally and spatially.

I like printmaking especially because of its extended duration. There is a long process before lines emerge on the paper and the paper is pulled off the plate to fully view the print. The anticipation, anxiety, expectation, and excitement are all extended, delayed, and postponed. This extended duration is part of the essential process of printmaking. After I became conscious of this conceptual aspect of printmaking and the fact that this is something related to the skill of being and seeing from the outside, I felt a desire to extend this time before the image appears as long as possible, and to define this duration proactively. The waiting is essential for image making, and a kind of translation happens during that time. The artwork is not the end, nor the purpose, but it includes everything.

Midori Harima

(right) Midori Harima, *Democracy Demonstrates* (detail), 2017/2023, 367 archival pigment prints on cotton paper, wood installation. Courtesy of the artist







Midori Harima, *This is a Mirror, after Camnitzer* (video stills), 2022, two-channel video installation. Courtesy of the artist



Dear Abby,

I was thinking about your work and your text describing caesura and OM, and how they relate to printmaking. I see objects and figures, as well as myself as elements of a larger constructed landscape, not as individual existences. A certain distance is required to see something as a landscape, and this is a kind of skill I adopted from the experience of being a foreigner; standing outside of the place you are in. As you know, there are many beautiful phenomena that artists encounter during the art making process. When printmaking, my eyes catch the shadow of the screen falling on the paper; soap bubbles forming tiny letters when I wash the screen. Those unfixed moments that are a strong presence in your work. You make a physical object to obtain a shadow from it; the object itself is not at the center. I see some essence in your work which is similar to printmaking—a conceptual translation through physical touch.

This experiment uses text as a printmaking plate that, when printed, produces layers of visual overtones and

vibrations. Traditionally, Japanese text is written from top to bottom, right to left. In other words, time and space in Japanese printed matter progresses vertically from top to bottom and from right to left. English text moves from left to right, from top to bottom, repeating that horizontal motion, and Japanese texts are now often arranged in the same way, like this:

従来日本語のテキストは上から下に右から左に進む、即ち日本語の印刷物は上から下に右から左へという垂直の運動を繰り返す時間と空間の進みをとする。英語は左から右で、上から下にと水平の運動を繰り返しながら進んでいく。それに倣って日本語のテキストもそういう風にアレンジされることが多い、このテキストみたいに。

何かしらのアクションをする時、意味は保留にされている。現象や偶有性に自分を明け渡すことができたときに見えるものがある、それは見えないというプロセスや解らないという状態の向こうに存在していると思う。これは鏡であり、色としての光であり、インクの染みとしてのテキストであり、反転して方向を変えながら増殖していつ、いくつもの摩擦を引き起こし、いくつものOMを鳴らす。それは反響して聞こえない倍音となり、私たちが色と認識する光のスペクトラムの乱反射となる。聞こえない音や見えないもののどの概念的な接触はこのテキストが存在するような場所で起こっている。

I think that when you are able to surrender to phenomenon and coincidence it is possible to go beyond what you know, but this requires the courage to pass through the unknown. Text as a mirror, light as a color; foreign text as ink stains; the world multiplies, inverting and changing direction, causing multiple reflections, and sounding multiple OMs. Everything overlaps becoming an inaudible overtone, a diffuse reflection of the spectrum of light that we perceive as color, but this is a conceptual understanding and has nothing to do with the phenomenal world. There are sounds that cannot be heard and things that cannot be seen, and we make contact with them conceptually in places like this text.

*Midori Harima*

Abby

I am glad to have met you,

Where I grew up the sea was often green and always cold, and when gusts of wind touched patches of the water's surface we called them catspaws.

Midori,