

## Photography

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### Defying Gravity

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Japanese photography is doing more than simply getting noticed overseas these days. Increasingly, Japanese photographers are basing their photographic projects abroad as well. One such photographer who has earned a particularly good reputation internationally is Yuki Onodera, who lives and works in Paris. Onodera has been recognized with coveted fine art photography awards in both Japan and France. She won Japan's prestigious Kimura Ihei Memorial Photography Award in 2003 and France's similarly notable Prix Niepce in 2006.

Onodera was born in Tokyo in 1962 and taught herself the art of photography. In 1991 she was the inaugural recipient of the New Cosmos of Photography prize, an award which has come to set the standard for up-and-coming young artists. Then in 1993 she moved to Paris. Onodera does not limit herself to a single trademark style; some of her work is straightforward, while others are mosaic-like collages of negative images. Yet other images she decides to process digitally. She has chosen to feature a wide range of different subject matter as well, from used clothing and interior settings to people and landscapes.

For her *How to make a pearl* series, Onodera placed a glass bead inside her camera before taking photographs of crowds of people. In other words, she used a bead as a pearl to place inside the shell of her camera. The result was a series of unprecedented images in which a mysterious orb of light hovers over the heads of a throng of people.

In a film camera, the light passing through the camera lens creates an upside-down image on the film inside the camera body. And because gravity drew the glass bead to the bottom of Onodera's camera, the image of the bead appeared at the top of the resulting photographs. This apparent liberation from the bond of gravity -- achieved by means of a camera -- is perhaps one key to understanding Onodera's work. In fact, her subject matter quite often seems to be free of the fetters of gravity. In the series *Transvest*, human silhouettes seem to float above a floor, while the photographs in her *Watch your joint!* series

depict soccer players whose body movements have been altered to just beyond the believable.

But while Onodera may play with physical depictions of gravity, her true theme lies more in the weight of social and cultural conventions. The concepts which can be consistently observed throughout her varied work are a refusal to allow preconceptions or convention to constrain photographic potential, and a passionate curiosity for looking at the world through new eyes. The very variety of Onodera's body of work is evidence of her constant experimentation.

For example, upon hearing the word "Rome" most people would think of Italy's celebrated capital. But Onodera had a different idea. She visited a city in Sweden and a city in Spain, each named Rome. In each city she used one of the two lenses on a stereo camera to make pictures. She carefully hand-colored the resulting serendipitously paired images to create a series she named *Roma-Roma*. Thus she turned the well-known phrase "All roads lead to Rome" upside-down, and led us instead along her own path to unexpected Roman destinations.

When we look through the camera lens of Yuki Onodera, the preconceptions we hold about the world and photographs are brilliantly shattered. It turns out that there really is not a single Rome to which all roads lead. Likewise, we too see that there really is more than just one path to creating photographs.

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In addition to contributing articles on photography to domestic and overseas publications, **Mariko Takeuchi** works to uncover new photographic talent through the planning and organization of photo exhibitions.