

Thursday, February 20, 2020

# The New York Times

## ART REVIEWS

### What to See Right Now in New York Art Galleries

#### Issei Suda

Through Feb. 29. Miyako Yoshinaga, 24 East 64th Street, Manhattan; 212-268-7132, [miyakoyoshinaga.com](http://miyakoyoshinaga.com).



Issei Suda's "Takinogawa Kita-ku," 1977. @SUDA Issei Works; Miyako Yoshinaga

Americans' visions of Japan too often extend to the remarkable and the unique — temples and cherry blossoms, ultrafast trains and ultraweird nightclubs — but for [Issei Suda](#), the country was a wellspring of the ordinary. In precise yet modest photographs, he pictured the archipelago as a string of mundane details in awkward suspension that crystallized the everyday into ghostly portraits of self and nation.

This first American exhibition since his death last year, at age 78, includes two dozens prints from a series that Suda shot across Japan mostly in the 1970s and 1980s. Immediately you see a country in an economic boom: contrast a photo of a run-down, low-rent Kyoto neighborhood with a Tokyo scene of a construction site traversed by a fat concrete pouring tube.

But with their sparse, halting details, these photographs dwell more in the realm of poetry than economics. Men sit on benches, faces shadowed by wide-brimmed hats; a woman in Kyoto stares into the distance, her hair ever so slightly out of place. Flowers are everywhere: a lover in Tokyo crosses the street with a bouquet of peonies, and petals scatter on the river in Fukuoka. What blossoms, withers, and is more beautiful for that.

For fans of a grittier tradition of Japanese photography — [Daido Moriyama's grainy prints of lowlife Tokyo](#), or [Nobuyoshi Araki's louche portraits](#) of well-knotted models — Suda's informality can take some adjustment. Yet when the world's great metropolises can feel like a succession of Instagram backdrops, these pictures of lived-in cities feel not just handsome but restorative.

■ Jason Farago