

Toshihiro Komatsu Solo Exhibition

“Topophilia: Japanese Houses”

- Period Saturday, January 25th, 2020 - Saturday, February 15th, 2020
- Venue KANA KAWANISHI PHOTOGRAPHY
2-7-5-5F, Nishiazabu, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0031 / Tel: +81 3 5843 9128
- Hours Tuesdays through Fridays, 13:00-20:00
Saturdays, 12:00-19:00 (closed on Sundays, Mondays, and National Holidays)

▼OPENING RECEPTION

19:15-20:00

Saturday, January 25th, 2020

▼TALK EVENT

- Date & Time: 18:00-19:15 (doors 17:50) Saturday, January 25th, 2020
- Speakers: Hiromi Nakamura (Tokyo Photographic Art Museum)
Toshihiro Komatsu (artist)
- Venue: KANA KAWANISHI PHOTOGRAPHY
**Kindly note the talk will be held in Japanese only.*



Agano House, Otsu City
from the series *Japanese Houses*

2019 | lambda print | 910 × 740 mm | © Toshihiro Komatsu, courtesy KANA KAWANISHI GALLERY

KANA KAWANISHI PHOTOGRAPHY is pleased to announce the opening of Toshihiro Komatsu’s solo exhibition *Topophilia: Japanese Houses*, from Saturday, January 25th, 2020. This exhibition will introduce *Japanese Houses*, a series in which Komatsu has been continuing over two decades since 1997. It will be the first time in 17 years that the series will be exhibited in Tokyo, since its last time in the exhibition *On Happiness: Contemporary Japanese Photography* (2003, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum).

■Please contact below for any image enquiries■

Japanese Houses is a photographic work that captures “families” and “houses” in the areas Komatsu has been based in including Shizuoka, Tokyo, Shiga, and Kyoto. In the works, the “houses” are allocated as the “faces” of the residents as a photo-montage/photo-collage. The series is created with the awareness of typological photography, typified by August Sander’s portraits and photographs of water towers by Bernd & Hilla Becher. Through collecting photographs of certain kinds of subjects, Komatsu examines the distinctions among images and what the accumulation of multiple images visualizes.

The title of this exhibition “Topophilia” is a term introduced by Yi-Fu Tuan (b. 1930, Chinese-American, Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, phenomenological geography researcher), who represents the concept of “emotional relationship between humans and the environment.” The term heavily influenced researchers in Western countries as a concept to derive the “essential human-environment relation” from perspectives of architecture, urban planning, nature, and the environment, while it was also translated into Japanese as an “affection for a place,” and has become well-known within the nation as the word to express the depth of the potential consciousness people have about “places.”

Humans and families, residences and architecture, and their surrounding environment. This series, which Komatsu has worked on for more than two decades, connotes varied scales embedded within itself. We sincerely look forward to welcoming you all to this prime and first opportunity to present the series *Japanese Houses* as a solo exhibition in Tokyo.



Katagi House, Kyoto City
from the series *Japanese Houses*
2019 | lambda print | 910 × 740 mm

© Toshihiro Komatsu, courtesy KANA KAWANISHI GALLERY



Kimura House, Kyoto City
from the series *Japanese Houses*
2019 | lambda print | 910 × 740 mm

© Toshihiro Komatsu, courtesy KANA KAWANISHI GALLERY



Matsumoto House (front), Hamamatsu City
from the series *Japanese Houses*
2002 | lambda print | 910 × 740 mm

© Toshihiro Komatsu, courtesy KANA KAWANISHI GALLERY



Yokoyama House, Kyoto City
from the series *Japanese Houses*
2019 | lambda print | 910 × 740 mm

© Toshihiro Komatsu, courtesy KANA KAWANISHI GALLERY

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 Artist Statement

Japanese Houses 1997-2019

In Japan, a family member is commonly referred to as “a person in one’s house,” and the word “house” represents not only a residence (architecture) but also a group of residents = a family. In the spring of 1997, I became interested in the relationship between Japanese people and their houses when my family moved to our new house built by local carpenters. *Japanese Houses* (1997-) is a series of works commenting on family identity. This series is composed of multiple montages of Japanese family portraits and photographs of houses built for them, and the finished images represent the strong attachment and aspiration of the models towards their own houses. Images of houses cut out from backgrounds and placed on their heads become masks to conceal the identities of each family member while providing a unified identity for the entire family. In other words, a house can be a family’s face. The surreal images created by combining portraits of houses and families become “anthropomorphism” to explore similarities between architecture and the human body.

Photo-collage and photo-montage were techniques to create subjective and complex images attempted by Bauhaus, Russian constructivists, and surrealist artists. While the *Japanese Houses* is a series of photo-collages/photo-montage in terms of its technique, its content is created with the awareness of typology presented by August Sander, the German portrait photographer in the prewar era, and Bernd & Hilla Becher, the German photographers in the post-war era. Thus, this work is composed of “Sander (people) + Becher (buildings).” The reason why I started shooting the *Japanese Houses* using monochrome films was my interest in the objective typology in monochrome photographs by Sander and the Bechers. In fact, I attempted to create a photo-montage study using photographs by Sander and the Bechers beforehand to test combinations of people and buildings for their effects.

At that time, a common photographic technique was changing rapidly from a wet (film) technique to a dry (digital) one. In the early summer of 1997, I returned from Boston, the United States, and started shooting in western Hamamatsu, where my parents’ house was located, with the thought that these might be the last works by monochrome films and silver-halide prints. In the suburbs of the United States where I lived back then, house owners wouldn’t build their residences as custom ones unless they were meant to be second houses. What the owners could do was only paint exterior walls in yellow, pink, or colors they liked, or add some decorations and those were built-for-sale houses originally developed and built with same designs by certain developers. Noticing the differences between suburban housing in Japan and that in the United States that I lived in that time, I considered Japan was a convenient location for this series since owners preferences are reflected better on their house designs and Japanese houses have a rich variety of styles such as Western, Japanese, and Japanese-Western. Above all, Japanese people have a firm attachment to a house and a place. Since the shooting started off at my parents’ house, the series has acquired diverse typology that combines houses and families thanks to a wide range of supporters: my relatives, family, friends, acquaintances, a house furnished with a store, and a temple.

Monochrome works of the series feature rich gradation and soft tone achieved by a monochrome film and a silver-halide print, houses’ outlines carefully cut out from the background with a knife, and bold collage work in which prints of houses directly stuck on the faces in family portraits. In addition to the aim at the house and family from the front angle, I also attempted shooting from an oblique side to create not only frontality but also depth in the works. This attempt led to shooting from behind in color works of the series.

When I started living in Kyoto in 2002, I restarted *Japanese Houses* with color photography. I technically shifted to the dry (digital) technique, and enlarged prints using digital silver-halide output with image data. In contrast to the works from 1997, whose shades of black and white create a classical and intimate impression, the digital color prints are more up-to-date in terms of vividness of colors, realistic depiction of details, and the enlarged format. Although I started the shooting of color works in 2002 in western Hamamatsu as in that of monochrome works, the range of shooting location ended up expanding to Tokyo. In recent years, I have photographed works in Kyoto and Otsu close to where I currently live. Compared to Hamamatsu, one of provincial towns far apart from a metropolis where many traditional country-style houses are, the houses and residents recently photographed in Kyoto are seemingly urbanized and sophisticated. Houses reflect not only families but also the natural and cultural environment of where they are built. In fact, sceneries that appear as the background behind families are gardens in the houses or their surrounding environment. I examine the relations among humans, architecture, and surrounding environment through *Japanese Houses*.

—Toshihiro Komatsu

 Artist Profile

Toshihiro Komatsu was born in Hamamatsu City, Shizuoka Prefecture, Japan in 1966. He received his M.F.A. at Tokyo University of the Arts, Graduate School in 1993, and his M.S. at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Architecture. His major solo exhibitions include *TOSHIHIRO KOMATSU* (2009, Wimbledon College of Art, London), *Sanatorium* (2006, Youkobo Art Space, Tokyo), *Clairvoyance Sept. 21, 2005* (2006, galerie 16, Kyoto, Japan), *Queens Focus 03: Adjoining Spaces* (2000-2001, Queens Museum of Art, New York), and *Special Projects* (1999, MoMA PS1, New York). Group exhibitions and art festivals include *Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale 2015* (2015, Niigata, Japan), *On the Exhibition Room* (2015, CAS, Osaka, Japan), *ISLAND VIEW—Why artists focus on islands* (2014, Tokyo Metropolitan Art Museum, Tokyo), *Setouchi Triennale 2013* (2013, Kagawa, Japan), and *On Happiness: Contemporary Japanese Photography* (2003, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo). His solo exhibition *Aperture—Penetrating a Gaze* will be held at KANA KAWANISHI GALLERY from Saturday, February 29th, 2020.

■Please contact below for any image enquiries■