



Kunié Sugiura at Warren Benedek Gallery in 1972; pictured in front of her photocanvas *Island\_2* (1971).

Coinciding with the artist's career retrospective at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), **Alison Bradley Projects** is honored to present *Kunié Sugiura: Something Else*, an exhibition of iconic works from different periods of her long career in New York, several of which have never been on public view. *Something Else* opens on **Thursday, May 8th, 2025**, with an artist's reception from **6:00–8:00 p.m.**, remaining on view **through July 25th**.

Through six decades of constant experimentation, **Kunié Sugiura** (b. 1942, Nagoya, Japan) has always pushed the boundaries of her practice in search of new expressions. From explorations of photography's earliest form—the photogram—to the bold integration of painterly materials and techniques, Sugiura's oeuvre embodies the richness of photography as an aesthetic medium while redefining its apparent limits.

Soon after graduating from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) in 1967 and moving to New York City, Sugiura began printing photographs on canvas. Though initially inspired by the likes of Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, Sugiura's *Photocanvas* series (1968–72) showcases her singular perspective and sensitivity to the natural world. The artist often photographed botanical and geological subjects in extreme close-up, transforming them into quasi-abstraction with an enhanced textural quality.

SFMOMA's Curator and Head of Photography Erin O'Toole writes of the series: "At first glance, one might not recognize these works as photographs... Printed on a rough canvas surface, they have a dreamlike quality and often dissolve at the edges, evoking a faded memory... They are impressionistic, offering more feeling than detail" (from "Kunié Sugiura: Liquid Light" in *Aperture*, No. 258: Painting & Photography).

A highlight of *Something Else* is Sugiura's monumental 1971 work *Island\_2*, an exceptional *Photocanvas* portraying the surface of a Coney Island breakwater, which the artist has kept in her Chinatown studio since her inaugural solo exhibition at Warren Benedek Gallery in 1972.

By the mid-1970s, the *Photocanvas* series evolved into *Photopainting* (1975–81). Sugiura continued her signature printing technique of applying photo emulsion onto raw canvas, now presenting her photographs of the urban landscape side-by-side with monochromatic acrylic paintings. *Tip* (1978), on public view for the first time, features two photographs taken from a moving ferry, showing the Twin Towers glowing against the backdrop of a nocturnal New York skyline. Sugiura interrupts her shadowy nightscapes with an expanse of sky blue acrylic paint, infusing the darkness with a shock of unexpected daylight.



Kunié Sugiura, *Tip* (1978), acrylic, photo emulsion on canvas, wood, 27 x 84 in (68.6 x 213.4 cm)

Writer Will Heinrich asserts Sugiura's *Photopaintings* are "among the best surviving documents of 1970s New York and the particular downtown scene they emerged from. They aestheticize and slightly abstract the visions and textures of Sugiura's adopted home, depicting them both as they were and as she experienced them, as half-forsaken relics of industry and as monuments whose glamour draw pilgrims from around the world. Their eye-catching empty space comes out of *wabi-sabi*, but it also recapitulates the beautiful way that New York's skyline cuts narrow rectangles into its sky."

Together, her *Photocanvas* and *Photopainting* series exemplify the duality and ambiguity that characterize much of Sugiura's practice. At once photography and painting, mimetic and abstract, they defy easy categorization, letting different elements exist without opposition or hierarchy.

In the 1980s, Sugiura radically shifted her practice once again and began producing photograms. This is essentially a nod to the works of Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, whose legacy has been passed on to her through the lineage of Chicago

photographers/educators Harry Callahan and Aaron Siskind to Sugiura's mentor at SAIC, Kenneth Josephson. The botanical photograms in this exhibition, using flowers purchased at local stores around Manhattan, express the artist's continuing interest in nature despite her metropolitan surroundings. In these works, flowers are combined with geometric lines of crochet threads, further underscoring the dualism of natural and artificial elements.

From an unassuming rock to flowers from the quotidian market, the subjects of Sugiura's works come from her everyday life in New York City. Through unconventional techniques, the artist draws our attention to things that are often overlooked in our urban life, revealing the beauty in what might be, according to the artist, considered banal.

***Kunié Sugiura: Something Else*** features special programming including a screening of **Robert Palumbo's** short filmographic profile on the artist, followed by a conversation between Sugiura and her long-time collaborator **Pauline Vermare**, Phillip and Edith Leonian Curator of Photography at the Brooklyn Museum. The event will take place on May 14th with limited participation, registration required.

Accompanying Sugiura's retrospective ***Photopainting***, opening at SFMOMA on April 26, 2025, an eponymous monograph edited by Erin O'Toole has been published by MACK Books (London): ***Kunié Sugiura***.

**Contact:** Claire Foussard at [claire@alisonbradleyprojects.com](mailto:claire@alisonbradleyprojects.com) for more information.

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**Kunié Sugiura** (b. Nagoya, Japan, 1942) lives and works in New York City's dynamic Chinatown neighborhood, where the pulse of the city and its residents continue to inform her work and artistic practice. Her work has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions throughout North America, Japan, and Europe. Her works can be found in prestigious private collections, museums and cultural institutions, including the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, California; Denver Art Museum, Denver; the Harvard Art Museums, Cambridge; the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, Ithaca; the Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; the National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; the Norton Museum of Art, West Palm Beach; the Princeton University Art Museum; the Tate Modern, London; the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; the Tochigi Prefectural Museum of Fine Arts; the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and the Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven.