



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII AT MANOA  
ART GALLERY

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***Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood***

The Art Gallery, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), Art Building  
September 20, 2021 – April 10, 2022

The Art Gallery, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), is proud to present *Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood*. This exhibition, curated by Maika Pollack, meditates on the fraught legacy of Japanese-American history and the model minority myth in the larger contexts of American, global and continuously rewritten fragments of Asian-American history.

*Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood* focuses on ruptures and paradigm shifts that destroy not only continuity in living one's life, but the ability to think in coherent streams of thought, and conjectures that these modes of dis-formation are important central dis-organizing principles of writing American history. In *A Model Childhood*, Okiishi approaches history through the lens of family and oral history, bringing both an intimacy and complexity to official narratives of the time period. Immediately after the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, Okiishi's grandfather, following a frantic phone call from his brother, whose house had just been searched by the Honolulu police looking for connections to Japan, decided to suddenly unload all traces of the family's Japanese possessions by dumping them into Māmala Bay. This leitmotif of American identity formation haunts what ensues.

The exhibition tells this story in poetically interlocking parts, including: A display of the totality of Okiishi's childhood belongings (1978–2001), meticulously archived by his parents, who had settled in the university town of Ames, Iowa in the late 1950s; A video, projected on and through this childhood archive, which shows a view of walking through the ruins of the Topaz War Relocation Center, a concentration camp in Delta, Utah; A video showing a forensic scan of the basement of Okiishi's family home set into a desert landscape, documenting the family's basement archive before the removal of the section dedicated to Ken's childhood; A family history video for insurance purposes, made by the artist's mother, documenting every object in the Okiishi household circa 2009; A large banner made from a photograph of a Boys' Day memento from 1940—Okiishi's father as an infant, posed amid fifty Japanese dolls depicting the life of a warrior which were thrown into the ocean upon the threat of internment a year later.

Finally, a photographic slideshow of Okiishi's cross-country trip in 2018, with more than 300 photographic images, shows a process whereby the modes of landscape and road trip

photography are recorded via an eye that no longer sees the ideological function of those modes of image production as related to American expanse and freedom.

As Okiishi says of the work, “Everyone suffers from this history that has never been properly worked through and it continues to be played out on the faces and bodies of all Asian Americans up to and including in the present. Visiting the site that was held over my father’s generation (children at the time, carried through into adult subject formation) as the threat of non-compliance to strict and narrow parameters of being a good American, in the most violent form of that idea, punctured the fiction of power in the political moment when its real possibility of reinvigorated methods was becoming all too real in that inescapable sense of knowing but unable to do anything other than witness and survive.”

*Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood* is curated by Maika Pollack. Dr. Pollack is director and chief curator, John Young Museum of Art and University Galleries and assistant professor of curatorial studies and art history, University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa.

## Artist Bio

**Ken Okiishi** (Born 1978 in Ames, Iowa. Lives and works in New York and Berlin.)

Recent solo exhibitions include: *A Model Childhood*, Pilar Corrias, London (2019) and Reena Spaulings, Fine Art, Los Angeles (2018); *Being and/or Time*, Reena Spaulings, New York (2017); *gestures, data, feedback*, Take Ninagawa, Tokyo (2015); *Screen Presence*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne (2014); *List Projects: Ken Okiishi*, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Cambridge, Massachusetts (2013). Recent group exhibitions include: *Manifesta 13*, Marseille (2020); *Ice and Fire*, The Kitchen, New York (2020); *Being Modern: MoMA in Paris*, Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, France (2017); *PLEIN\_ECRAN*, La Station, Nice, France (2016); *Performing Time*, Leo Xu Projects, Shanghai (2016); *La Collection Westreich Wagner*, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2016); *Cut to Swipe*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2015); *Full of Peril and Weirdness*, M Woods, Beijing, China (2015); *Over you/you*, 31st Biennial of Graphic Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2015); *Whitney Biennial 2014*, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2014); *Speculations on Anonymous Materials*, Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany (2013); *Liebe ist Kälter als das Kapital*, Kunsthau Bregenz, Austria (2013). Okiishi’s most recent film, *Vital Behaviors*, had its US premiere at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 2021.

## Publication

A new publication, *Ken Okiishi: A Model Childhood*, made in the genre of the American photo-documentary book, features a new essay by Negar Azimi, Editor in Chief of [Bidoun](#), and an introduction written by curator Maika Pollack, UHM. 8.5 x 9.75 inches, 312 pages, 300 color ill., hardcover. Mānoa Commons Press/University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa: Honolulu, HI, 2022. Free download link will be available at the launch.

## Sponsorship

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa's [Department of Art + Art History](#) and College of Arts, Languages & Letters; the Student Activity and Program Fee Board (SAPFB) of University of Hawai'i at Mānoa; the Clifford Iwao Arinaga Memorial Fund; supported by the [Halekulani Hotel-](#) Hospitality Sponsor for the Arts at UH Mānoa; and anonymous donors. Thanks to Pilar Corrias Gallery, London and Reena Spaulings Fine Arts, New York and Los Angeles.

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Sunday – Thursday, 12 – 4 p.m. Admission is free

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