

Shimon Minamikawa has cited Japanese Noh theater as a touchstone for his own work, which at first feels counterintuitive. Noh is a traditional, codified performance featuring dances, masks and mythical archetypes. The slow, stately dramas subordinate naturalism and emotion to historical continuity and strict aesthetic criteria. Minamikawa's loose paintings and painted collages display the stylish dispassion of a flâneur. On their surface the two practices aren't similar. But their attention to those surfaces - to the conventions and history of their craft, to cultivated identities, to the compact energy in a prescribed set of gestures - unites them. The façades that most interest Minamikawa are the multifarious storefronts, objects and passersby of his native Tokyo. He translates the city's shifting tableaux into his own shorthand of pattern and gesture that draws equally from art history (Warhol's multiples, Johns' iconography, Halley's geometry), design, and pop culture.

The ruptures and contrasts of collage, the pastiche of styles and interpenetration of meanings are fundamental to city life and obvious throughout Minamikawa's earlier paintings, but his most recent series makes that sensibility explicit. Two photographs of the same woman are the only figurative elements in this body of work. The images, taken from a vintage fashion magazine, are reduplicated, cropped, and pasted into spare painterly compositions of black, white and gray. In one collage, the model's frilly dress floats upside down like a plume of smoke. In another, an outcropping of shadow and a sliver of hat are our only landmarks in a silver field. Anachronism, repetition, and Minamikawa's unpredictable formal inventions almost empty these pictures of their original significance, but not entirely. The spirit of that gamely smiling model and the whiff of ferocity in Minamikawa's cuts linger around the edges of these photographs and save them from becoming just another mark in his formal vocabulary. The resulting compositions hover between abstraction and haunted, fragmentary narratives.

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