

Erika Kobayashi *The Life of Y*

12 April (Sat) – 31 May (Sat), 2025

Erika Kobayashi is a creative who uses a variety of material approaches, including novels, comics, drawings, photographs, videos, and installations, to create work inspired by invisible subject matter, history, family and memory, and the traces of place. Her writing is highly acclaimed, and includes publications such as *Trinity*, *Trinity*, *Trinity* (Shueisha, 2019), the novel *Breakfast with Madame Curie* (Shueisha, 2014), which was nominated for both the 27th Mishima Yukio Prize and the 151st Akutagawa Prize, and the comic *Children of Light* Volumes 1-3 (Little More, 2013-2019). In recent years, Kobayashi has been creating works focused on the history of nuclear and radioactive materials, a topic she has been researching since before the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011. Her book *Girls, Making Paper Balloon Bombs* (Bungei Shunju, 2024) features the previously untold stories of women during World War Two and won the 78th Mainichi Publishing Culture Award (Literature and Arts Category). This exhibition will feature a comprehensive installation consisting of a range of works, including new paintings that respond to the content of her books, as well as related material and other texts.

Girls, Making Paper Balloon Bombs, based on Kobayashi's meticulous research, is a novel that depicts schoolgirls who were mobilized to make balloon bombs at the Tokyo Takarazuka Theater in Yurakucho during World War Two. This exhibition held at Yutaka Kikutake Gallery entrust the voices of these girls, buried in the shadows of mainstream history, to a real person named Y, who was a student at Futaba Girls' High School at the time. Through Kobayashi's portrait of Y, as well as paintings and *Iroha* poems that Y herself made as a student, Kobayashi traces these overlooked people and histories. This exhibition itself is in dialogue with Kobayashi's *The Life of Y – A Building*, exhibited for Yurakucho Art Urbanism's Open Studio '25 (March 6-9, 2025), and features mosaic tiles and reliefs from the Yaesu Building. This building was constructed the same year the girls were born and served as a hotel for the US military during the postwar occupation. Viewers will encounter actual architectural remnants that existed at the same time as the girls, remnants may have even been passed by, observed, and considered by these same schoolgirls.

The series entitled *Cherry Blossoms* is a new body of work in which themes or places associated with the schoolgirls are depicted on the silk lining of *Furisode* (young girls' kimono.) The work spans various periods of time, from the year the Yaesu Building was completed and the year the girls were born (1928) to the end of the war (1945), as well as pre-war, post-war, and present day. Regardless of the time period, Kobayashi depicts these historical figures as ordinary schoolgirls, while also capturing the fleeting life of one of them, Y, through the symbolism of cherry blossoms.



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Kobayashi carefully unearths the voices and personal memories of the voiceless, those who have been buried in the shadows of mainstream history, and creatively weaves these narratives together with nuclear power or balloon bombs. Her artistic approach of inheriting the unspoken words from the previous generation and connecting them to the next could be something akin to a prayer. The May issue of Bungakukai (Bungeishunju), scheduled to be published in early April, will also feature Kobayashi's text *The Life of Y – A Girl*. We encourage you to take this opportunity to delve into the numerous facets of Kobayashi's latest expressive evolution, one that marks the culmination of numerous years of labor and research.