

University for the Creative Arts
Research Project Portfolios

Monogatari

By Karen Knorr



Project Details

Name of Researcher:	Professor Karen Knorr
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Name of Output:	Monogatari
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Output Type:	M – Exhibition; series of solo and group exhibitions
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Year and mode of dissemination:	<p>Solo exhibition: <i>Monogatari</i> (Filles du Calvaire, Paris, 30 October – 28 November 2015)</p> <p>Two-person exhibition with Yukari Sato, 'In Spring, It is Dawn that is the Most Beautiful' (White Conduit Projects, London, 16 January – 21 February 2016)</p> <p>Solo exhibition: 'Once Only, Only Once' (Obai-in Temple, Kyoto, 11 April – 15 May 2018)</p> <p>Two-person exhibition with Shiho Kito: 'Another Way of Telling' (Daitokuji temple complex, Kyoto, 12 April – 12 May 2018)</p> <p>Solo exhibition: 'Another Way of Telling' (Lacock Abbey, Fox Talbot Museum and Village, Wiltshire, UK, 26 May – 9 September 2018)</p> <p>Solo exhibition: 'Once Only, Only Once Karen Knorr Latest Works from Kyoto' (White Conduit Projects, London, 18 January 2019 – 22 February 2019)</p> <p>Two-person exhibition with Kimiko Yoshida: 'Avatars: Boundaries between Illusion and Reality' (Holden Luntz Gallery, West Palm Beach, FL, 23 February – 20 March 2019)</p>
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Project Details

UCARO link:	https://research.uca.ac.uk/view/projects/Monogatari.html
Key Words:	Photography, cultural heritage, Japan, myth
Collaborators:	<i>Once Only, Only Once, Obai-in</i> - Curated by Yuki Miyake <i>Another Way of Telling</i> - Collaborated with Shiho Kito <i>In Spring, It is Dawn that is the Most Beautiful</i> - Co-exhibited with Yukari Sato <i>Avatars: Boundaries between Illusion and Reality</i> - Co-exhibited with Kimiko Yoshida
Funding:	<i>Another Way of Telling: Karen Knorr & Shiho Kito, Zuiun-an, Kyoto</i> and <i>Once Only, Only Once, Obai-in, Kyoto</i> : Daiwa Anglo-Japanese Foundation - £6,000 The Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation - £3,000 Nomura - £2,000 Nisheida Foundation Award - £5,000 Catalogue funded by the Nisheida Foundation - £10,000

Synopsis

‘Monogatari’ is a photographic series which started in 2012 when Professor Karen Knorr began travelling to Japan to investigate its cultural heritage as a development of her work that digitally placed images of animals into her photographs of architectural heritage sites in order to explore myth, tradition, nature and culture. The series considers Japanese cultural heritage and myth and the role of animal life within it.

The research entailed on-location architectural photography of heritage sites including various Buddhist and Shinto locations in Tokyo, Nara and Kyoto. The animals that appear in the photographs were photographed at zoos in Kyoto and Tokyo. The animals chosen all appear in Japanese folktales and in Shinto temples, where they are considered as both messengers of the gods and their embodiment. The research also entailed Knorr studying Japanese screen painting at national museums in Kyoto and Tokyo. Knorr’s photography evokes the Kano painting school, and she investigated new forms of display by merging photography with traditional

standing screens so that her photographic work is contained within three-dimensional objects made of bamboo, paper and silk.

Since 2015 ‘Monogatari’ has been disseminated in Japan, France, the UK and the USA in 7 exhibitions (3 two-person exhibitions and 4 solo shows). Twenty works in the ‘Monogatari’ series were produced as framed prints, 6 as standing *byōbu* screens, and others as photographs in tray frames on wooden support structures and circular glass tables. A catalogue published by the Nisheida Foundation accompanied the two-person exhibition ‘Another Way of Telling: Karen Knorr & Shiho Kito’.

This portfolio of supporting information includes evidence of the research aims, context and processes which led to new insights. It also includes images from the exhibitions of ‘Monogatari’ and a PDF of the ‘Another Way of Telling’ catalogue.



*Mono No Aware, Shunko-in
Temple, Kyoto, 2015*



*Akirame, Shunko-in Temple, Kyoto,
2015*



*Journey to the Great Sage, Jikko-in
Temple, Ohara, 2015*



Context

Knorr's photography draws on strategies from conceptual art and critical theory, primarily in questioning and playing with notions of authenticity and truth (Burgin, 1982: 39). That play, in terms of the mix of carefully observed reality and consciously constructed illusions, is embodied in 'Monogatari' in the use of elements of performance, staged studio photography, and 'captured' wildlife photography, with all these elements digitally inserted into traditional architectural settings.

'Monogatari' continues the approach developed in Knorr's previous work, 'Fables' (2003 - 2008) and 'India Song' (2008 - 2020), in which she constructs images that place animals into highly-symbolic (and often opulent) interior scenes. In 'Monogatari' she photographed the animals of Japanese culture. Animals appear in temple and shrine architecture in Tokyo, Nara and Kyoto, and the work also refers to the Tale of Genji, the novel written in the eleventh century by female writer Murasaki Shikibu, and to this popular tale's fantastical world. In this context, the animals pictured look like *yōkai*, ghosts and supernatural monsters which belong to folklore. *Yōkai* may possess animal-like features, but at times they can appear almost human, or take the shape of an inanimate object. The animals Knorr pictures represent both these traditional references, but also make reference to contemporary concerns over the degradation of the natural

world. The images juxtapose culture and nature, referencing fable, architecture and animal. The women wearing kimonos who sometimes accompany the animals in Knorr's stagings reinforce the constant—but questioned—presence of tradition in the series.

'Monogatari' also enters into a critical dialogue with contemporary Japanese fine-art photography as in the work of Mariko Mori, Nobuyoshi Araki and Kimiko Yoshida. All these artists investigate women's position in traditional Japanese culture. In Knorr's work, the character of the *maiko* (apprentice *geisha*) asserts her agency in the public space of the Buddhist temple and in Zen spaces. This disturbs patriarchal constraints of traditional femininity (more conventionally located in the domestic private space of the geisha house or *okiya*) which is still prevalent in contemporary Japan. The work engages here with Judith Butler's idea of the repeated ritualised actions of performed gendered identity (1990: 140).

REFERENCES

Burgin, V. (1982) *Thinking Photography*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Butler, J. (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Research Questions and Aims

Research questions:

How can a photographic investigation of fable and myth represent and question traditional sites of Japanese culture, including temples and mansions?

How can this investigation be developed through collaboration with other photographers, with the custodians of traditional sites and with craft makers?

Can Eurocentric photographic perspectives be challenged through reference to the stories and precepts underlying Shinto and Buddhist culture and, in exhibition, through off-wall installation techniques?

How can the animals and women actors in the photographs disrupt the hierarchies of the architectural setting of patriarchal Japanese culture?

Research aims:

To produce a series of photographic images that question Japanese tradition and its relationship to the 'other'.

To produce artworks for exhibition that bridge the traditional Japanese setting (temple and mansion) and contemporary gallery space.

To combine the traditional methods of Japanese screen-painting and making with contemporary photography, exploring cultural heritage, myth and story and to merge the western conventions of photography with eastern artisanal craft forms (such as *byōbu*).

To invent new methods of display for western and eastern audiences addressing the architectural and gendered space of the temple and the Japanese merchant house in Kyoto.

Research Methods and Process

Field research to location sites included in ‘Monogatari’ involved Knorr travelling to Japan 10 times between 2012 and 2018 and visiting heritage sites in Nara, Ise, Tokyo, Kyoto, Hakone and Naoshima. She travelled with photographer Shiho Kito, a graduate of UCA; as well as being a collaborating artist, Kito played the role of assistant and interpreter in the research.

Knorr and Shiho Kito used Facebook to find the actors who would appear in the work and perform the traditional Japanese characters of *maiko* and *geisha*. They were photographed in a photographic studio in Kyoto that hired out traditional costumes for marriage ceremonies, coming-of-age ceremonies and graduation celebrations (<https://www.en-kyoto.yumeyakata.com>). Photographs were also taken in the Capitol Hotel in Tokyo, with actors in hired kimonos performing as the traditional Japanese women found in the 18th-century paintings of Kitagawa Utamaro. The animals in the images were photographed in zoos in Tokyo and Kyoto. Further photographs were taken in Obai-in temple in November 2017, by invitation from Tagen Kobayashi, priest and calligrapher. This was a significant development, as the temple usually prohibits all photography.

Knorr created the final works digitally from the images made in temples, studios and zoos, using processes of experimentation and trial-and-error to assemble the different elements in a convincing way. Her approach has a significant failure rate: when the animal looks out of place, then the work has not succeeded in creating the suspension of disbelief she aims at. One work can take months to achieve.

Knorr worked with curator Yuki Miyake, who helped her to travel widely in Japan, to become familiar with its culture and to access funding and support from the Nisheida Foundation. Her collaborative approach extended to the design of the exhibitions that disseminated the research, which were based on the combination of contemporary fine-art photography with Japanese traditional crafts. The heritage settings in which the photographs were exhibited did not allow conventional gallery approaches to hanging images. Knorr instead developed ways to show her photographs as free-standing objects, presenting them on traditional *shoji* screens, fabricated by artisan Hiro Kiwaya, with the photographs printed on rice paper and the screens constructed from coloured silk. Other photographs were displayed in lacquer trays.



*Awakened to Emptiness, Hosen-in
Temple, Ohara, 2016*



*Mono No Aware, Shinku-in Temple,
Kyoto, 2014*



*Cultivating Happiness, Chishaku
Temple, Kyoto, 2016*

Research Contribution and Recognition

Research insights and contribution:

In ‘Monogatari’, Knorr created a series of works in which nature and culture, tradition and a critique of it, are combined to achieve, from her multi-cultural perspective, an original representation of Japanese traditional myths and heritage sites. The work was based on collaboration in both its making and its dissemination, and was exhibited in ways that adapted the conventional gallery ‘hang’ to embrace traditional crafts.

The two-person exhibitions in ‘Monogatari’ brought Knorr’s work together with contemporary Japanese female photographers. In ‘Another Way of Telling: new stories from India and Japan’ her works were displayed with Shiho Kito’s photographs of Ahmedabad, India, and ‘Avatars’ (2019) brought together Knorr’s different series alongside the work of Kimiko Yoshida to present ‘a transitioning space between dreams and real life; embracing the notion of the avatar, with the subjects in each image referencing a symbolic dimension outside of the actual picture’ (Holden Luntz Gallery).

Knorr’s exhibition at the Fox Talbot Museum at Lacock Abbey (2018) was hosted by the National Trust to celebrate the work of women photographers at the site that is the British home of photography, recognising the significance of her work (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lacock-abbey-fox-talbot-museum-and-village/features/another-way-of-telling-a-photography-exhibition-by-karen-knorr>).

AWARDS

- 2018: ‘Monogatari’ nominated for the Prix Pictet, a global award in photography and sustainability
 - ‘Monogatari’ was awarded Silver in the Architecture/Interiors Category of the Tokyo International Foto Awards in 2017 and was part of KG+ in Kyotographie 2018, with over 90,000 visitors.
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Research Contribution and Recognition

Invited lectures and talks:

2019

- Cultural Migrations, Academy of Fine Arts, Xian, China
- Another Way of Telling, Martin Parr Foundation, Brighton

2018

- Another Way of Telling, Cultural Migrations, SCOP, Shanghai
- Royal Photographic Society Women in Photography Inaugural Lecture, London College of Communication,
- Another Way of Telling: Cultural Migrations, Keynote Address at Jaipur Photo 2018, Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jawahar Lal Nehru Marg, India
- Another Way of Telling, Cultural Migrations, Kyoto University, Kyoto

2017

- Cultural Migrations, Slade School of Fine Art Photography Research Centre
- Narrative Turns: Allegory, Palimpsest and Storylines in Contemporary Photography and Art, Kolga Tbilisi Photo, Tbilisi, Georgia

2016

- Cultural Migrations, Moscow MultiMedia Museum, Russia
- Around and Afterthoughts on Documentary Approaches in a Globalised World, University of Westminster, London
- Reinventing Documentary, Polytechnic of Porto, School of Media Arts and Design, Porto, Portugal
- Transcultural Migrations, Hybridity and Architectural Space, On the Surface, The School of Architecture, University of Porto, Portugal
- Identity and Culture, Brighton University, Brighton
- Cultural Migrations, Whitworth Gallery, Manchester

2015

- Cultural Migrations, Goa Photo Festival, One School, Goa, India
-

Another Way of Telling, New Stories from
India and Japan

Karen Knorr Shiho Kito



*Another Way of Telling, New
Stories from India and Japan,
Karen Knorr Shiho Kito, Catalogue,
2018*



*Installation of Once Only, Only
Once, at White Conduit Projects,
London, 2019
Title: Every Encounter Treasured,
Obai-in
Standing Screen Byōbu 70cm X
90cm
Photograph on Hahnemuhle rice
paper, bamboo and silk*

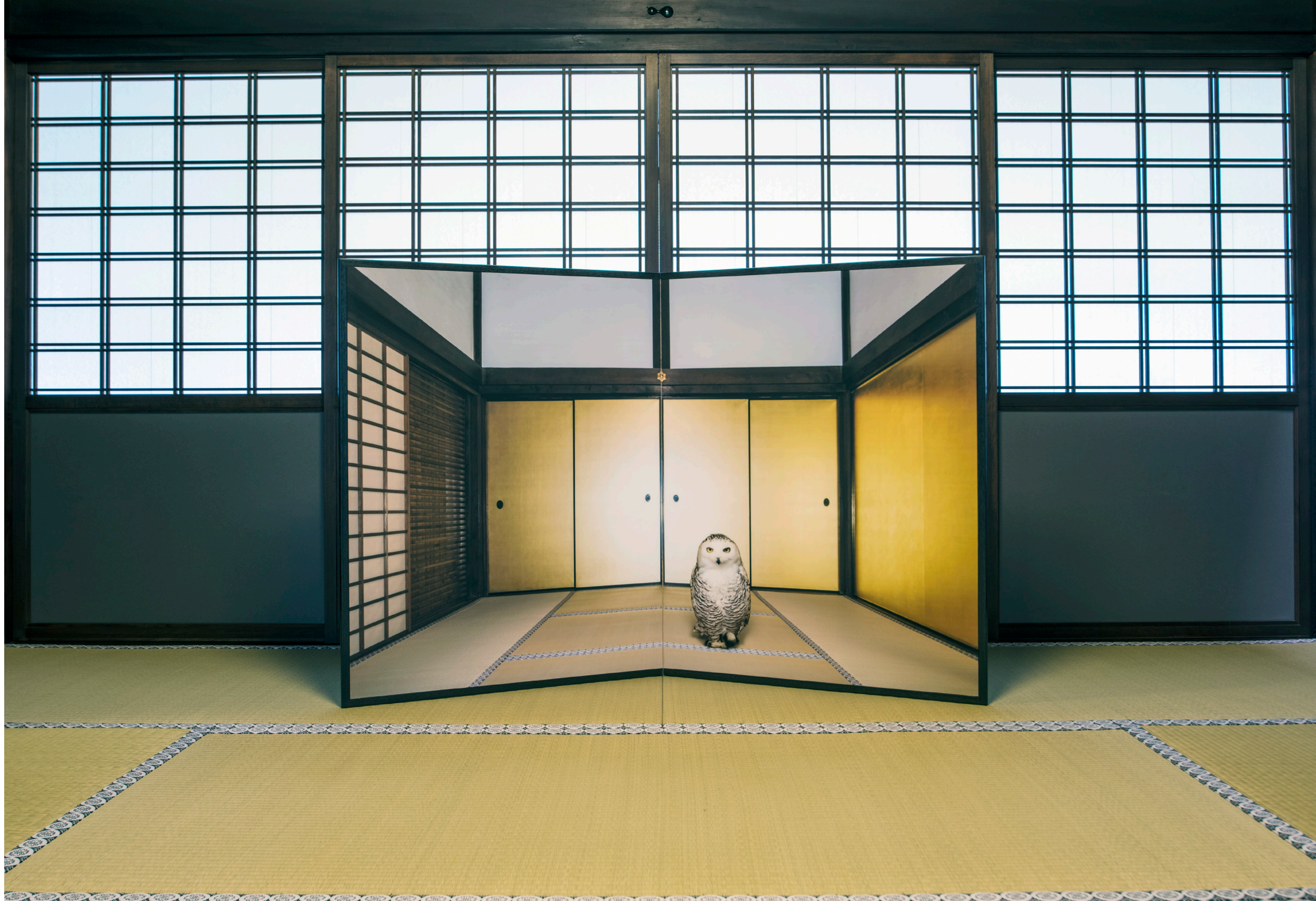


*Installation of Avatars: Boundaries
between Illusion and Reality at
Holden Luntz gallery, Palm Beach,
2019*

*2 standing byōbu screens from
Monogatari: Guardian of the
Temple, Nazen-ji Temple, Kyoto,
2015 and Emptiness No Other than
Form, Obai-in, Kyoto, 2017*

Obai-in Installation





*Installation of Once Only, Only
Once at Obai-in Temple, 2018
Title: Emptiness No Other Than
Form, Obai-in
Standing Screen Byōbu 80cm X
100cm
Photograph on Hahnemuhle rice
paper, bamboo and silk*



*Installation of Once Only, Only
Once at Obai-in Temple, 2018
Title: Form No Other Than
Emptiness, Obai-in
Standing Screen Byōbu 70cm X
90cm
Photograph on Hahnemuhle rice
paper, bamboo and silk*



*Installation of Once Only, Only
Once at Obai-in Temple, 2018
Title: Every Encounter Treasured,
Obai-in
Standing Screen Byōbu 70cm X
90cm
Photograph on Hahnemuhle rice
paper, bamboo and silk*



*Installation of Once Only, Only
Once at Obai-in Temple, 2018
Title: Once Only, Obai-in
Standing Screen Byōbu 70cm X
90cm
Photograph on Hahnemuhle rice
paper, bamboo and silk*

Zuiun-an Installation





Installation of Another Way of Telling: New Stories from India and Japan, Karen Knorr Shiho Kito, Nisheida Foundation, Zuiun-an, Kyoto, 2018



*Installation of Another Way of
Telling: New Stories from India and
Japan, Karen Knorr Shiho Kito,
Nisheida Foundation, Zuiun-an
Kyoto, 2018*

*Title: Fukurou, Jikko-in Temple,
Ohara*

*110cm X 73.5cm Ink jet on
Hahnemuhle Fine Art Pearl
mounted on dibond*



*Installation of Another Way of
Telling: New Stories from India and
Japan, Karen Knorr Shiho Kito,
Nisheida Foundation, Zuiun-an
Kyoto, 2018*

*Title: Journey to the Great Sage,
Jikko-in Temple, Ohara
110cm X 73.5cm Ink jet on
Hahnemuhle Fine Art Pearl
mounted on dibond*



*Installation of Another Way of Telling: New Stories from India and Japan,
Karen Knorr Shiho Kito, Nisheida Foundation, Zuiun-an Kyoto, 2018
Title: Guardian of the Temple, Nazen-ji Temple, Kyoto
Byōbu screen installation*



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COVER IMAGE
Intoxicated by Moonlight, Obai-in,
Kyoto, 2018

BACK COVER IMAGE
The Landing, Horyuji Temple, Nara,
2015

