

for LONDON INDEPENDENT PHOTOGRAPHY

**FLIP**

Arun Misra interviews:

**Rinko Kawauchi**

from: Issue 52, Summer 2022

All rights reserved. This article was published by London Independent Photography in fLIP magazine who hold the Copyright. Images published in fLIP are copyright of the photographer and articles are the copyright of the authors unless indicated otherwise. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form without the written permission from the copyright owner(s). Applications from third parties for the copyright owner's permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to London Independent Photography.

[www.londonphotography.org.uk](http://www.londonphotography.org.uk)



## Rinko Kawauchi interviewed by Arun Misra

Rinko Kawauchi is an internationally renowned Japanese artist who has received great acclaim for her photographic visions that elevate everyday scenes into expressions of life and living.

In 2001, Rinko Kawauchi launched her career with the simultaneous publication of three astonishing photobooks - *Utatane*, *Hanabi*, and *Hanako* - firmly establishing herself as one of the most innovative newcomers to contemporary photography, not just in Japan, but across the globe. In the years that followed, she published several critically acclaimed photo books, including *AILA* (2004), *the eyes, the ears*, (2005), and *Semear* (2007).

Kawauchi's work has frequently been lauded for its nuanced palette and offhand compositional mastery, as well as its ability to incite wonder via careful attention to tiny gestures and the incidental details of her everyday environment. Kawauchi visualizes the invisible, and although is not religious, Buddhist ideas of impermanence are at the root of her works.

In 2021 Aperture published the 2nd edition of *Illuminance*, Kawachi's masterful work, brimming with imagination and poetic imagery. One simply has to visit her website to get an idea of the breadth and depth of her extraordinary vision.

In April 2022 I had the privilege of interviewing Rinko for fLIP 52.



**Arun Misra** *Hello Rinko. Firstly thank you for giving an interview for fLIP magazine. Many commentators have noted that you have developed a visual language that is unique, personal and transcendental. Can you talk about how you did this?*

**Rinko Kawauchi** It is difficult to answer how, because it is something that came naturally to me.

**AM** *Were there any aspects to the environment you grew up in that particularly helped you to develop your visual language?*

**RK** I can't think of anything in particular, but I guess it was growing up in humid Japan. I am not a committed Buddhist, but my upbringing

was based on Buddhist ideas, so that may have had an influence.

**AM** *Could you say something about the Buddhist ideas that may have influenced your work?*

**RK** For example, the fundamental idea of Buddhism is that all things are impermanent, and this is at the root of all my works.

**AM** *You photograph ordinary objects and situations that most of us take for granted yet your images carry a sense of wonder, simplicity and delicacy – invoking fragility of life. How do you capture these moments? What do you feel at the time?*



above & left: from the series *A New Day*,  
© Rinko Kawauchi



above: from the series *Utatane*

left: from the series *A New Day*, both © Rinko Kawauchi

**RK** When I take photographs, I try to be as unmindful as possible and just concentrate on the subject.

**AM** What do you mean when you say being unmindful?

**RK** It means exactly what it says. When I take photographs, I try to concentrate on the subject and just be mindless.

**AM** In a 2004 article for *BJP*, Martin Parr

*said that you have a knack for photographing the simplest of objects, animal or person, revealing both a feeling of beauty and a sinister undertone. Can you talk about this? Are you conscious of this when creating your images?*

**RK** When I create my work, I try not to be biased towards only beautiful images. I believe that the world is not only about beauty, but also about obscenity and disquiet.

**AM** You once said that it is the final use of

*the image that counts, not the reason it was taken. What did you mean?*

**RK** I may have said this in the sense that the meaning of a single image is not important, because a work is not completed by a single photograph alone, but is the result of the accumulation of many images.

**AM** In 2001 you self-published three photobooks: *Utatane* (about everyday), *Hanabi* and *Hanako* to great critical success. These

*established your international reputation as a contemporary photographer. How did you make these photobooks? What were your guiding principles?*

**RK** The three books are not self-published. All three books were published simultaneously by the Japanese publisher Little More

At first I was only going to publish one book, *Utatane*, and the following year I was going to publish a book *Hanabi*, but while I was preparing

*Utatane*, a producer from a film production company asked me to make a photo book based on a documentary film called *Hanako*. Then, the editor of Little More, the publisher at the time, suggested that if we were going to publish two books at the same time, it would be more interesting to publish three books at the same time, as they would be more topical and interesting, so we did it.

**AM** *Let's talk about AILA which you published in 2005. In this work you invoke thoughts of births, lives, deaths and fate. AILA is quite poetical so I would like to ask if you had poetry in mind when you edited the images. What kind of poetry are you attracted to?*

**RK** I think all my work, not just *AILA*, should be poetic.

I shot a lot of different animal birth scenes for *Aila*, but I tried to broaden the view of the world by mixing in photos of everyday scenes, rather than being too direct with the images.

**AM** *You have worked at a phenomenal pace publishing over 20 photobooks. Are there any titles that you feel embody your essence?*

**RK** I think *Utatane* and *Illuminance* are a condensation of my own characteristics.

**AM** *In what ways?*

**RK** I believe that the worldview that is revealed by juxtaposing seemingly unrelated images is connected to our daily lives. I believe that we exist simultaneously with countless organic and inorganic objects, and that they are linked to each other. In this respect, I think these two works can be considered my masterpieces.

**AM** *Can you talk about 'A New Day'. This book is about the experience of beginnings and endings and things that connect them? Why did you give this title?*

**RK** My experience of giving birth led me to create a photo-picture book, and I felt as if I had been reborn after giving birth and my life had





above & right: from the series *Illuminance*  
© Rinko Kawauchi

begun anew. So I put that feeling into the title.

**AM** *Illuminance* is perhaps your most poetical book. It fascinates because you are dealing with big ideas in an everyday language. You show images with compositions and aesthetics of ordinary, mundane everyday happenings, and also small details that create a sense of wonder, smallness and worry. What did you want to achieve for the viewer? What are your ideas for this work?

**RK** It is difficult to explain this work, but my motivation is that I started making this work as a confirmation of who I am. I wanted to share the work with the viewer to complete it, because the world is not only about me, but also about many others and the co-existence of nature.

**AM** Are you a spiritual person? How does this affect your work?

**RK** I am not a religious person, but I believe in the existence of the invisible. I have a desire to visualise the invisible, which is part of what keeps me making art.

**AM** Can you talk a bit more about your desire to visualise the invisible? And also the way you choose and sequence images to convey this aspect in your photo books?

**RK** Although this overlaps with my previous answer, I think that by arranging seemingly unrelated subjects, we can sense the invisible things that lie between them.



**AM** *What are the most awesome natural phenomena you have encountered? Did it affect you?*

**RK** Sometimes I need to be in the wilderness far away, but these days I find pleasure in looking at the trees and streams around my house, listening to the murmuring and birdsong.

**AM** *Is there an artist (photographer, painter or poet) that you are particularly drawn to?*

**RK** Rei Naito, James Turrell and Gabriel Orozco

**AM** *These are amazing artists with works that connect powerfully and also subliminally with viewers. What draws you to their work?*

**RK** I think that all three of these artists have something in common in that they create works that make us feel the invisible.

I am very attracted to the fact that I can feel as if I am touching the secrets of the world, and that is something I would like to aspire to as well.

**AM** *How has maturity and experience changed the way you see and express things you see?*

**RK** I'm thinking more heavily about my relationship with nature than I used to

**AM** *What do you enjoy doing besides photography?*

**RK** Eating and drinking together with loved ones.

**AM** *Rinko, it's been a real privilege talking to you and thank you so much for sharing your thoughts with us.*



above: from the series *Illuminance*

left: from the series *A New Day*, both © Rinko Kawauchi