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The period in which “contemporary art” and “photography” came into existence is the same. Despite this, photography had not been considered an artistic genre for a long period of time. One of the primary factors behind this is that photography from its initial stage has been connected with the rise of capitalism, which was unescapable even for the contemporary art world. Needless to say, since that element could not be the only attribute of photography, photographic works have come to hold a prominent position in international art exhibitions of today, as well as in sites of contemporary art activities. There have also been many specialists who saw the true artistic essence of photography and examined its attributes, such as the philosopher Walter Benjamin (*A Short History of Photography*, 1931), and critic Susan Sontag (*On Photography*, 1977). In discussing Koga Akiko’s photographic works in this essay, I will employ quotes from Roland Barthes’ book *Camera Lucida* (1980).

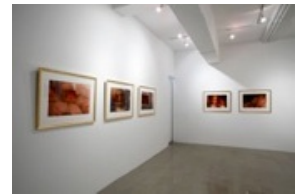
Koga was born in 1979, and graduated from the Tokyo College of Photography in 2004. She held solo shows every year up to 2009 (except 2008), and also participated in many group exhibitions. For this exhibition, which was her first solo show in four years, she photographed the dolls she played with as a child. The photos of the dolls were taken in their tucked-away positions at her parents’ house. She exhibited ten digital prints on photographic paper, each 370 x 550 mm in size. The dolls in her photos maintain the tranquil sense of the space, while also conveying a feeling as if time was still ticking. The dolls not only seem to exist in the present but also seem to have come from the future. Why is this? I will refer to Roland Barthes’ comment:

The first thing I found was this. What the Photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else.

The word “mechanically” does not refer to a photo taken with a machine, but signifies an emotionlessly repeated reproduction of a photo that derives from a one-time occurrence. Then, one may ask, why is a photo deprived of emotions? Barthes elucidates on this when he says, “Ultimately, what I am seeking in the photograph taken of me (the ‘intention’ according to which I look at it) is Death...” This means that “looking at a photo” and “what one reads from a photo” amount to death. Death has no emotions. There is no distinction between “taking” and “viewing” a photo; rather, it manifests the fact that death is unavoidable to all. Barthes also comments on this idea as follows:

Mad or tame? Photography can be one or the other: tame if its realism remains relative, tempered by aesthetic or empirical habits (...); mad if this realism is absolute and, so to speak, original, obliging the loving and terrified consciousness to return to the very letter of Time: a strictly revulsive movement which reverses the course of the thing, and which I shall call, in conclusion, the photographic ecstasy.

Koga’s photography has that ecstasy. Not only does Barthes’ quote above reflect this, but he goes so far as to say, “...it [photography] is without future...” He also indicates, “The reading of public photographs is always, at bottom, a private reading.” But this essence



does not exist in Koga's works, as the viewers are withheld from "a private reading." And the inside of her works is filled with a feeling of the future. What does this mean? Koga thoroughly individualizes her own view to the point of banishing her individual being. This is why the acts of "photographing" and "viewing" are removed from her works. What manifests through her process is the appearance of contemporary art that exists in the future.

(Translated by Taeko Nanpei)