MIMI KATO
ST. LOUIS

Mimi Kato's works combine traditions of her native Japan while they synthesize epochs, moods, and approaches. The exhibition *partly cloudy with a chance of scattered showers* comprises two major narrative compositions: *Four Seasons*, 2008-2011, and *One Ordinary Day of an Ordinary Town*, 2010-2011 [Good Citizen Gallery; June 10—July 22, 2011]. Both works deal with broad, often humorous aspects of the passing of time. Symbolically set in a Japanese suburb, *One Ordinary Day of an Ordinary Town* comprises nine separate panels forming three distinct triptychs: *Scene 1: Golden Sky, Golden Start*; *Scene 2: Partly Cloudy, Precipitation 30%*; and *Scene 3: Rosy Tomorrow*. As such, titling underscores both cyclicality and theatricality.

Vaguely reminiscent of the artist's hometown of Nara, Kato's raucous computer-generated urban settings are populated by scores of digitally-montaged figures. The characters act out clichés, depicting Japanese women of varied ages, classes, and types. In addition, each character is a highly choreographed and meticulously costumed self-portrait. Kato designs and sews the costumes and alters her visage into a plethora of female images—nude apartment dwellers greeting the morning, housewives in curlers, uniformed schoolgirls resting, exercising or gossiping, and elderly, cantankerous women. These women push and shove, argue, compete, and misbehave as they move around the city throughout the day. Rabbits, monkeys, and foxes are also prominent, alluding to Japanese folktales. Suggesting the influence of *Butoh* and *Kyogen* performances, Kato's theatrical animal masks intensify the dual symbolism of the rabbit—evil trickster or benign embodiment of kindness. Although photographers such as Cindy Sherman have adopted the external appearance of others, Kato's self-portraits are closer to the work of Yasumasa Morimura and the early projects of Miwa Yanagi in reflecting both typology and transformation.

One Ordinary Day of an Ordinary Town reworks late-Momoyama and Tokugawa period genre paintings. It could be based on any number of seventeenth-century works, such as the famous pair of six-panel Funaki screen paintings *Rakuchu rakugai zu* [*Scenes in and around the Capital*]. The *Rakuchu rakugai* paintings were formulated to literally represent life in the capital. They included depictions of daily court events, mercantile activities, tea service, food selling, and more. Kato's computer-generated city and landscapes masterfully embrace the genre, as vibrant yellow cloud-like formations stand in for gold leaf.

Scene 2: Partly Cloudy, Precipitation 30% features a group of figures that echoes Pieter Bruegel's *Parable of the Blind*, 1568, as five Japanese tourists clicking photographs follow a uniformed tour guide. This pointed parody of the famous painting recasts Bruegel's fallen blind man as an unwise tour guide. Will the tourists be subjected to the same fate? It remains to be seen. Moreover, *Scene 2* owes much to the recondite symbolism of Northern Renaissance genre painting: virtually every element of the work appears as a potentially coded message. Even the seemingly innocuous shop signage with commonplace Japanese names could be literally translated—the *Kaneda* hardware store as "money field," for example. Likewise, the *Kasuga* drycleaning translates as "spring day" while also evoking the famous Kasuga Taisha Shrine in Nara. Native Japanese speakers may fail to observe the unexpected word play because these are ordinary business names. Others may fail to fully grasp their potential as they simply see them as details of city signage. This ambiguity triggers heightened awareness: all systems of communication and information are closed to those who are unable to decipher the code.

—Jeffrey Hughes

SYNTAX: TEXT AND SYMBOLS FOR A NEW GENERATION
TAMPA

Working my way through *Syntax: Text and Symbols for a New Generation*, I wondered whether the exhibit's titular "new generation" referred to the show's younger artists or the young visitors whom the museum hoped to attract [Tampa Museum of Art; July 9—September 25, 2011]. In either case, what's the putative generational difference? The great thing about *Syntax*, which is drawn from the private collection of Miami-based Hadley Martin Fisher, is how good the work of a trio of influential artists associated with historical Conceptualism—John Baldessari, Mel Bochner, and Joseph Kosuth—(still) looks against that of their successors. As such, a better title might have been *Syntax: Old Text and Symbol Artists for a New Generation*.

Baldessari's *Painting for Kubler*, 1966-1968, is a case in point. Black text on a plain ground—painted by a hired sign painter—paraphrases art historian George Kubler's thought on how "new" artworks come into being. "This painting owes its existence to prior paintings," begins the text. Humor is at play here: a mischievously literal construal of Kubler's words—still read and revered—is evinced by their placement on canvas. Yet, this seemingly deadpan comic act has deeper theoretical aspirations. Baldessari's incorporation of the historian's discourse into an actual artwork invites consideration of the way in which art history—and other arts writing—shapes the conditions it claims rhetorically to describe.

Two drawings by Bochner, related to a 2004 public art project at Carnegie Mellon University, reorder the words and letters of a Wittgenstein quote on the limitations of science as a text.

Olafur Eliasson's *Daylight Map*, 2005, is *Syntax*'s only work by a younger artist to grapple as vigorously with the world-shaping power of language and symbolic systems as Baldessari's and Bochner's. Here, abstract neon bands corresponding to the globe's timezones light up to tell time. This work strikingly makes a show of displaying information in the shape of timezone borders—

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: **Mimi Kato**, *One Ordinary Day of an Ordinary Town – Scene 3: Rosy Tomorrow*, 2010, archival pigment prints, 3 panels: 78 x 129 inches; **Mimi Kato**, detail of *One Ordinary Day of an Ordinary Town – Scene 1 : Golden Sky, Golden Start*, 2010, archival pigment prints, 78 x 387 inches (courtesy of the artist and Good Citizen Gallery, St. Louis)