



Linda Fregni Nagler, Shashin no Shashin

A news report from [Milan](#)

Shashin no Shashin (in Japanese, "photography of photography") is the first solo show by the artist at Galleria Monica De Cardenas

Linda Fregni Nagler uses photography with a critical, reflective purpose, investigating tradition, iconographic conventions, the status of the photographic image. Her sources are often anonymous photographs – commercial or made by amateurs – shot in the 19th or the first half of the 20th century. She appreciates their ability to shed light, more than "authorial" photographs do, on the visual conventions to which a given era subjects the representation of reality. Time and cultural changes contribute to make these conventions seem bizarre, grotesque or poetic. Nagler proceeds in different ways with the selected images: she may conceptually appropriate them, presenting them as ready-mades; re-photograph them, creating a temporal and aesthetic shift, or even re-create them through a laborious *mise-en-scène*.

This latter working mode has given rise to the exhibition *Shashin no Shashin*, a sequence of about 20 black and white prints that revisit the typical subjects of Japanese photography in the Meiji period (1868-1912), especially those of the so-called Yokohama Shashin (Yokohama photography): scenes of traditional Japanese everyday life or images from oriental myths and legends, staged in the studio in a very stylized, artificial manner.

Section

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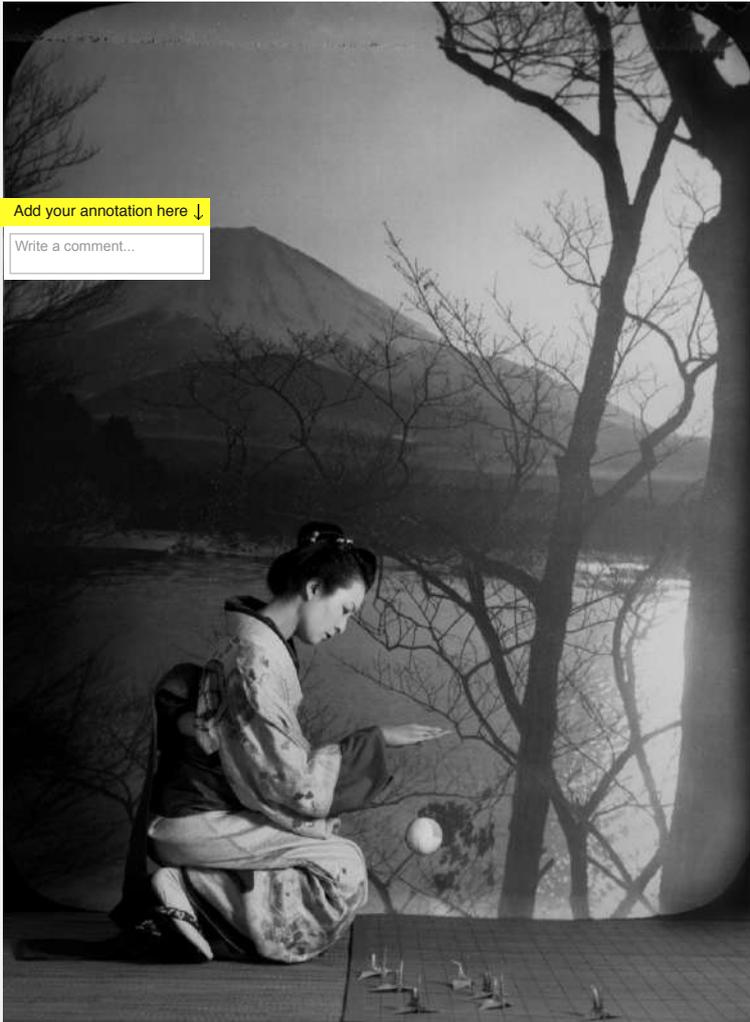
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More than a century later, Linda Fregni Nagler has restaged and photographed some of the subjects of Yokohama Shashin: *Wind Costume*, *Whispering in Parlor*, *The Street Singer*, *Life on the Ocean Wave*... She has re-created the painted backdrops and sets, reproduced garments and hairstyles, framed tableaux vivants at the same angles as the original shots. At times the reproduction of the original subject is literal, down to the smallest details; at times the artist has left herself a margin of invention and variation. In doing so, she purposefully conforms to the mentality of the Yokohama photographers themselves, for whom the originality of the subject taken from an established repertoire was not as important as the skill and efficacy of its staging.



←

Linda Fregni Nagler, *Playing at Ball*, 2009. Gelatin silver print cm 60 x 50. Courtesy Galleria Monica De Cardenas, Milano

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The photographs of the Yokohama school effectively sum up some of the characteristics Linda Fregni Nagler seeks in the period photographs she chooses as her starting points: the deliberate use of artifice, which brings out the inherently artificial nature of photography itself; the expression of creativity not at the macroscopic level of the subject and the style, but in the details, at the margins of the image; finally, the complex game of perpetuating, adapting and reinterpreting iconographic stereotypes.

The subjects of the Yokohama school were based on Ukiyo-e prints; yet the school had been founded by westerners (Felice Beato, Adolfo Farsari, Raimund von Stillfried and others) and was aimed at a market of European collectors. The images produced in the Yokohama circle, anachronistic with respect to the realities of modern Japan, conformed to a certain exotic occidental imaginary; in turn, they soon became a popular source of imagery in the West. Adding another level, another passage in this lengthy process of stratification, Linda Fregni Nagler attempts to make its complexity more evident. At the same time, she points to the cultural and temporal distance that separates us from an extinct tradition, and to the effects of aesthetic disorientation this distance can trigger. As Victor Burgin emphasized, almost thirty years ago: "The reception of photographs acts as a place of work, a structured and structuring space within which the reader deploys, and is deployed, by whatever codes he or she is familiar with in order to make sense" (Victor Burgin, "Looking at Photographs", 1982).

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Linda Fregni Nagler was born in Stockholm in 1976; she lives and works in Milan. In 2008 she was awarded a residency at the Dena Foundation in Paris and in 2007 she received the Italian New York Prize fellowship.

6 May – 30 July 2011
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