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NAOKI SUTTER-SHUDO UNCOVERS BEAUTY IN TRAGEDY



“Subject matter,” Roberta Smith recently said, “is the new form.” That’s the dominant mode right now; the artist is defined by their subject matter. For Naoki Sutter-Shudo however, “Ultimately, style is more important than content.”

He makes all kinds of things—casual photographs of friends, still lifes, collages, paintings, assemblages of found objects, original woodwork—but a refined sense of style runs through all of them: not a narrow or repetitive aesthetic but rather a certain way of balancing forms, of making them look greater than the sum of their parts, that some artists are just able to pull off. Consider his sculptures made from words: take *Truth Trolley* (2017), in which the letters spelling “TRUTH” are separated out, carefully crafted in wood and made into a little wagon filled with dog toys shaped like animals. In his hands, words become something else. Their meanings now derive from their visual style rather than from the dictionary, and so they feel like the opposite of a more literal, subject-orientated mode of artmaking.

Born in Paris, Sutter-Shudo grew up in Tokyo. After high school he returned to Paris for art school and became involved in running the legendary Belleville artist-run space *Shanaynay*. He also went on a six-month exchange at ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena, drawn by a love for the Los Angeles art scene and a dream of meeting Mike Kelley, but Kelley committed suicide before he arrived. The middle of the decade was spent between Paris, Tokyo and California, during which time Naoki fell in love with his now wife, the painter Alexandra Noel, with whom he lives in LA. These days he co-directs the Chinatown gallery *Bel Ami* and the small art press *Holoholo Books*, and shows beautiful, fragile things of his own with *Bodega* in New York and *Galerie Crèvecoeur* in France—“things that are about to crumble but also to come undone.” For him, art is about doomed romance and all that can come from it. “I’m a pretty pessimistic person,” he says. “I really have a view of things that is tragic. But beauty can happen through tragedy. Depressing things can still be beautiful.”