

KEI ITO

Japanese American, b. 1991, Tokyo, Japan
Lives and works in Baltimore, MD

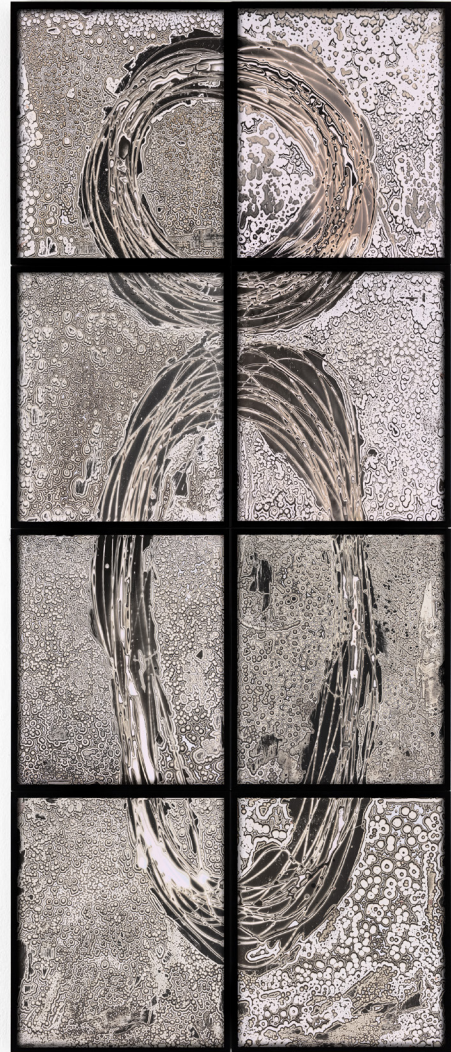
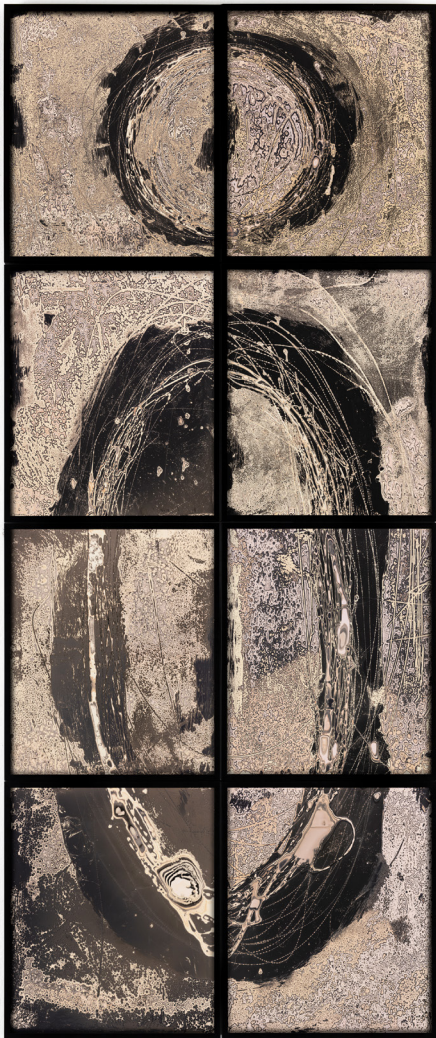
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Over the last century, technological change has proceeded at a scale that has scarred both the physical landscape and human history. In his work, Kei Ito uses photographic processes to call attention to such a scar—the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan,—commemorate its victims, and continue healing in its aftermath. The artist’s “chemigrams” are large scale photograms, camera-less images made as energy in the form of sunlight passes through a thick liquid medium of honey, oil, and syrup that Ito paints onto photosensitive paper. This viscous application alters the way that the light interacts with the paper’s light-sensitive chemicals causing an array of bubbles, drips, and lines to appear after exposure.

All of the many works in this series are characterized by a small circle topping an oval, a seemingly universal distillation of the human figure into head and body—fundamental aspects that people share and which filter and link our experience of being alive. Simultaneously, the imagery can be read as an aerial view of the earth’s topography, evoking targets or areas of distress and destruction that arise when people come into conflict with one another. Ito employs honey and various oils not only to give rise to striking visual effects, but also because they are materials known for their healing properties. The artist asserts that only by continuing to give a presence to the traumas of the past can we continue the process of healing and improve our abilities to address and avert future catastrophe and pain.

Kei Ito is an interdisciplinary installation artist and immigrant, navigating themes entrenched in trauma and inheritance within the context of his identity and heritage. His artistic practice is deeply rooted in the profound legacy passed down from his late grandfather, a resilient survivor of the harrowing atomic bombing of Hiroshima. This familial narrative, coupled with the loss of numerous family members to the explosion’s aftermath and radiation poisoning, serves as the cornerstone of Ito’s creative exploration.

Ito's artistic contributions have been widely recognized and exhibited in both solo and group exhibitions, including a major solo exhibition this year at the Georgia Museum of Art. His works have garnered attention in esteemed publications such as the Washington Post Magazine, Hyperallergic, BBC Culture & Art, BmoreArt, ArtMaze Magazine, ESSE Magazine, and various newspapers worldwide. Notably, his pieces are held in esteemed institutional collections, including the Museum of Contemporary Photography (Chicago, IL), the Norton Museum of Art (West Palm Beach, FL), the Gregory Allicar Museum of Art (Fort Collins, CO), En Foco (NYC, NY), and the Eskenazi Museum of Art (Bloomington, IN).



Left: Kei Ito, *Burning Away #22*, 2023, silver gelatin chemigram (sunlight, honey, various oils, and syrup)

Right: Kei Ito, *Burning Away #7*, 2022, silver gelatin chemigram (sunlight, honey, various oils, and syrup)