

DANZIGER

On Madison

KENJI TOMA - THE MOST BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS

For the last eight years, the Japanese photographer Kenji Toma has been photographing flowers in an ongoing project called “The Most Beautiful Flowers”. While at first his photographs may appear to be botanical illustrations, they are purely photographic, yet by Toma’s methodology they are also un-photographic. This is the point of dissonance in Toma’s work as we are presented with photographs untethered from the camera’s depth of field. We see everything at once, each detail sharp and true, impossible to view as such in three dimensions.

It is this hyper-focus that allows Toma’s work to be placed within the realm of traditional Japanese botanical paintings whose brightly colored and flattened images were made for aesthetic enjoyment rather than for scientific reasons. The photographs not only engage with beauty but bear a relationship with fashion photography as Toma does not so much photograph the flowers as pose them, if necessary, re-arranging a stem or petal to create the perfect composition.

Nothing is digitally manipulated in Toma’s photographs other than stripping out the background to silhouette each flower. In this way the work is both modern yet in harmony with Japanese history and tradition. In the end the work stands out for its depiction of beauty allowing us to take pleasure in one artist’s view of a deeply cultivated ideal.