

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS, USA

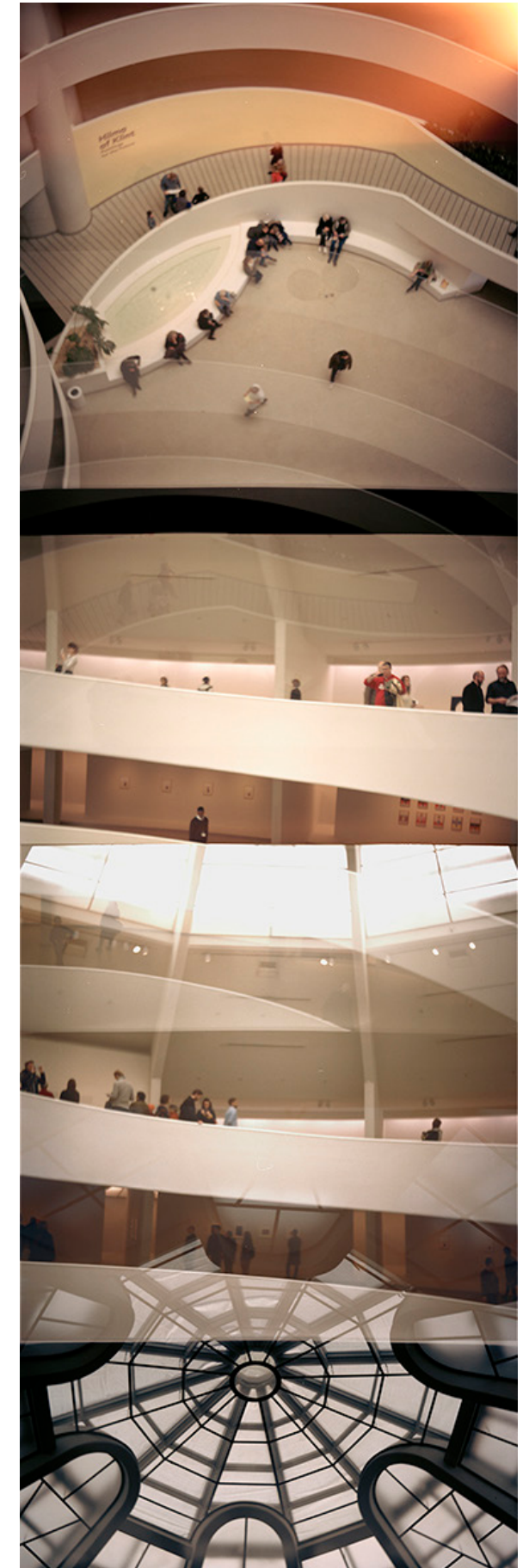
Betty Young Kim

Film Scrolls

Betty Kim is a lens-based artist who uses self-portraiture, archival materials, pop culture, and fiction and non-fiction sources to create work. She earned her B.A. in Government from the University of Texas at Austin, her M.A. in Security Policy Studies from George Washington University, and her M.F.A. in Visual Arts from the University of Chicago.



Film Scrolls, (NJ), 2018



Film Scrolls, (NYC), 2019

Film Scrolls

Film Scrolls looks at the relationship between still and moving images.

The viewer is forced into a linear approach when looking at moving images (film). There is a structured time and space where I am asked to view a film, but the experience is different when looking at a still image. The viewer can experience the image from any vantage point, and for however long they choose. I can go up to an image real close and look at the minutiae—the grain, the depth of field, subject matter, etc. I can look at the image from far away and absorb the entire scene. I can stand in front of an image for seconds to minutes to hours. I can walk away and come back to the image and experience it again and again.

Film Scrolls looks at the transgression of time and space.

I walked around and experienced these moments—fractions of a second here and there. Whether in New York, New Jersey, or Chicago, I captured chaotic moments in the city prepandemic and the strange emptiness in the suburbs post-pandemic. The upsides and downsides of living in loud places and then sudden, quiet spaces felt surreal. I was left to experience my new environment in a voyeuristic form. It was a way for me to process my experiences and my surroundings when I couldn't quite make sense of our time pre- and post-pandemic.

Film Scrolls looks at my moments in life in a succession of overlapping still images.

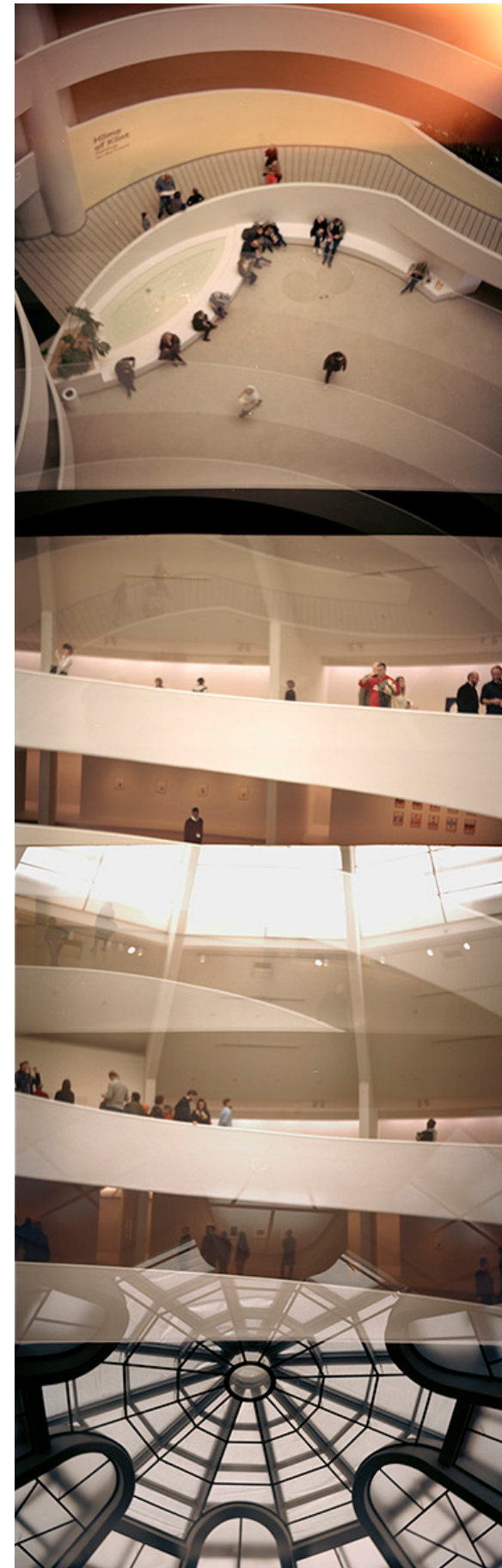


Film Scrolls, (NJ), 2018

When was your first encounter with photography? And why did you gravitate to documenting places rather than other subjects?

BYK: I first encountered photography in the 5th grade. My brother let me borrow his Kodak disc camera. This camera allowed me to capture moments of my last day of school. He showed me how to use the camera, and from then on, I was hooked.

I'm not sure if I can confidently say that I gravitate toward documenting places rather than other subjects. (In some sense, every image is of a place.) I tried street photography for a bit, but you must be at the right place, at the right time, and with a camera in your hand. And as a mother, I didn't always have the time to take a photo with my kids around. It is when I am sans kids, walking intentionally with my camera and alone, that I can take these photographs in and around the city.



Film Scrolls, (NYC), 2019

Street photography has long been associated with chance encounters and serendipity. As you created this project in the midst of world isolation, how did your understanding of your medium/photography change?

BYK: I think this is a two-part question based on technique and aesthetic. When I started the series, I wanted to explore in-camera double exposure. In-camera double exposure is built on chance encounters and serendipity. You can under and overexpose your images, compose your shots, but you still don't know how the image will turn out until you develop and print/scan your roll of film. When I work digitally, there is some rigidity in the way I work. I'm too analytical. But in analog, there is a sort of freedom, even though I know there is a finite number of shots I can take. In digital photography, I know that I can check the image right away. In analog, I can enjoy taking the shots and not worry about how they came out months after I have them developed.

Film Scrolls began as a project to “document” the chaos of big city life. To quote *Hamilton*, “the greatest city in the world.... New York,” can feel lonely and isolating—all these people around you, and yet not feeling like I quite fit in. Then, on March 11, 2020, suddenly, we were all in isolation. I didn’t have to wait for people to move out of frame to take my shots. The work shifted, and I had to wait and look for people to come into frame.

Tell us a bit more about your process when determining locations for your pieces—were there scenes in the cities and suburbs that you knew you wanted to photograph, or were scenes produced naturally?

BYK: Most of the time, I took these images when I was alone. Sometimes, it was intuitive; other times, it was pre-determined. Well, maybe not pre-determined, but more of a “I must come back with my camera and take this shot.” If



Film Scrolls, (NYC), 2018



Film Scrolls, (NYC), 2019

I had my camera on hand, that’s when I made these images. I carried a TLR camera around more, knowing that I was making these images.

Looking at this project almost five years after its completion, how has your perception of it changed? What have been some of the things that you discovered working on it that altered your practice forever?

BYK: About half of the images in the exhibition were taken to document the isolation during COVID. The other half were taken during moments of the hustle and bustle of the city. Now that I have had time to review the images, some images carry a solemnness and solitude that feels more eerie than calming. Revisiting the work has solidified my understanding of the recurrent themes in my practice: layering, hiddenness, and obfuscation are integral to my image-making process.

Of all the film scrolls, is there one that particularly pulls you in, or one that you'd like to take the opportunity to tell us more in depth about?

BYK: Hmm...it's hard to choose one, but if I had to, I think the one where you see a hand pulling a car door at the top and then your eye moves down to the clock that reads 12:32 (pm). I accompanied my partner to his office, where he needed to pick up some books. We traveled to downtown Chicago when former Mayor Lori Lightfoot raised the river bridges. The streets were empty. Cloud Gate (aka "the bean") always had a million fingerprints and people taking selfies. The magic of taking images was the reflections of people. The day we visited, the bean was barricaded. It was the first time I could take a clear shot of the work of art without a single soul in view. When I look at the image of the car door, empty halls, and the clock, I remember Chicago and the bean.

Interview by
Willow Simon

“Layering,
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Film Scrolls, (Chicago), 2020