Tomoko Yoneda

I am interested in history that is constructed by accumulation of people's memory and leads to our imagination. I take photographs not just because I am attracted to the form of a subject, but also because I want to express an individually unique, hidden psychological fact...beyond the visual image.

-Tomoko Yoneda

Tomoko Yoneda's work consistently demonstrates an interest in history that is sometimes factual and other times imagined. In an early series entitled Topographical Analogy, Yoneda featured black-and-white photographs of heat marks on walls, suggesting the presence of former inhabitants of these interiors. To stir the imagination and create a fictional history of the space, Yoneda sometimes introduced other objects or clues into the picture plane.

In another series, Scene, Yoneda asked the viewer to reexamine a seemingly ordinary or mundane place that has a hidden past. Once the extraordinary history of the location is known, the space seems somehow different. In one of the images, a hotel room is revealed to be the one from which Hitler aroused the Nazis on his arrival at the Nuremberg rallies. In another photograph, a simply furnished room turns out to be the place where Stalin was born and raised.

The series on view here, Between Visible and Invisible, represents unconventional perceptions of some major intellectual figures of the late nineteenth to the middle twentieth centuries. Key objects that helped shape the work of these scholars are viewed through the scholar's actual eyeglasses, giving tiny clues to various aspects of their lives. "Between Visible and Invisible refers to the correlation between the image on the surface (the visible) and the unknown narrative beneath the surface (the invisible) which, when revealed, changes the context of the photograph," Yoneda explains.

In her Freud's glasses - viewing a text by Jung I and II (1998), Yoneda examines the relationship between the Austrian originator of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, and his follower and student of the psychoanalytic movement, Carl Gustav Jung. Freud and Jung began their professional relationship in Vienna in 1906. Freud favored Jung as his successor in the growing psychoanalytic movement and, through his efforts, Jung was appointed permanent president of the Association of Psychoanalysis in 1910. Jung and Freud both believed that the unconscious played a profound role, but they disagreed on its exact nature. This led to a painful break between the two men in 1913 after the publication of Jung's article on the psychology of the unconscious, which emphasized the role of symbolism. Freud felt betrayed by Jung's departure from his theoretical views and Jung felt betrayed by what he considered to be Freud's inflexibility and his failure to support this extension of their mutual work. The text viewed in these images is Jung's criticism of Freud's theory of the libido, which symbolizes their final conflict and the fundamental divergence of their theories.

Other historical characters and relationships represented in Between Visible and Invisible include the following:

German novelist and poet Herman Hesse (1877-1962) is known for his works examining themes of self-realization the search for identity in a
traditional society. As a pacifist, Hesse was deeply saddened by World War I (1914-18) and protested against its glorification. During this period he studied the works of Freud, underwent analysis with Jung, and committed himself to a sanatorium for a short period. Hesse later used the psychoanalytical concepts of Jung to explore the dualities of human nature in his works such as Steppenwolf (1927), the tale of a man struggling between individualism and his desire to be respected in bourgeois society. Hesse's antiwar activities branded him a traitor in Germany where his works as a writer were condemned, and he moved permanently to Switzerland. Through his glasses, Yoneda presents a photograph of the deployment of German troops during World War I from Schwaben, Hesse's home territory.

Irish author James Joyce (1882-1941) is known for his keen psychological insights and use of stream-of-consciousness techniques as demonstrated in his epic novel Ulysses (1922). Sylvia Beach, an American owner of the Shakespeare & Co. bookshop in Paris, published Ulysses when it was outlawed as obscene in England and the United States. "Beach was an important figure in the shaping of Joyce's literary career. She helped to launch Joyce, and often found herself being pressed into service to run his endless errands, to lend him pocket money, to give him a sympathetic ear. That she gave much more than she received is true enough and she is credited to have been the 'mid-wife' to Ulysses," says Yoneda. Throughout his career, Joyce meagerly supported his wife and two children with jobs as a language instructor and by accepting gifts from patrons. In 1907 he suffered an attack of iritis, the first of severe eye troubles that led to near blindness. Joyce immigrated to Switzerland when the Germans invaded France in World War II.

Austrian conductor and composer Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) was allegedly obsessed near the end of his life with trying to complete his Symphony No. 10, as it had been said that no composers manage to finish their tenth symphony before their death. Mahler was also traumatized by his wife Alma's affair with the young Walter Gropius (founder of the Bauhaus). "The autobiographical nature of the work and his scribbles on the tenth symphony clearly show his psychological struggle while executing his last piece--a fanatic scribble of farewell to the world!" Yoneda explains.

Tanizaki Junichiro (1886-1965) is a Japanese novelist whose work is characterized by irony, eroticism, and the encroachment of modern life on traditional Japanese values. In Yoneda's photograph, his glasses view a passionate letter to Matsuko, his illicit lover, and later his wife. "Tanizaki idolized and worshipped her," Yoneda explains. "His glorification of her and her sisters and their elaborate lifestyle in his writing caused him to be condemned in Japan during World War II as being unsuitable reading for a society at war."

Since graduating from art school in 1991, Tomoko Yoneda has exhibited widely in the United States, Europe, and Japan. Her solo exhibitions include Zeit-Foto Salon, Tokyo; Room, Gentilly, France; and Zelda Chetale Gallery, London. Born in Akashi-city, Japan, Yoneda earned her BFA from the University of Illinois at Chicago and her MA in photography at the Royal College of Art in London, where she currently resides.