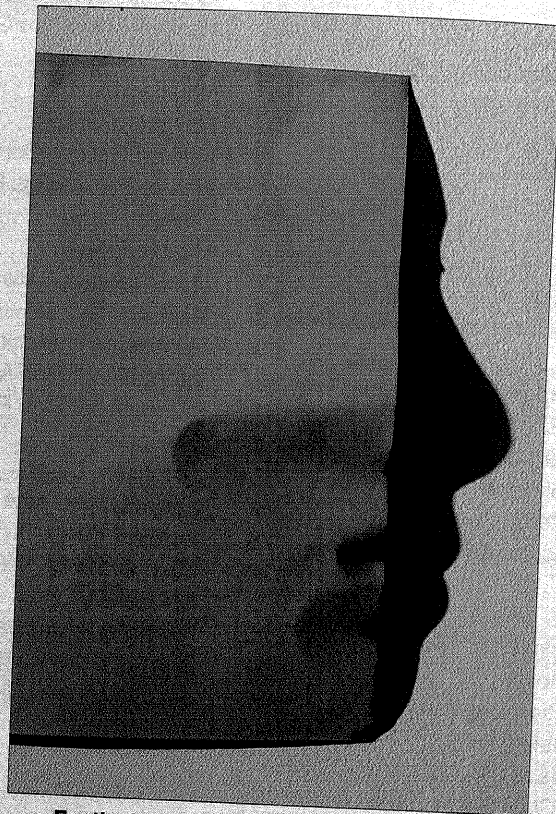




Kumi Yamashita transforms simple materials into portraits, winding thread around brads for *Constellation (Man)*, detail, 2007.



For the installation *Origami* (detail), 2005, she bent aluminum sheets so that the shadows they cast resemble faces in profile.

**K**umi Yamashita makes likenesses using the most unlikely of means. Thread, light and shadow, bits of cloth, and even impressions from credit cards are a few of the basic materials she transforms into portraits that are simultaneously subtle and magical. In *Origami* (2005) she pinches and pleats square sheets of aluminum so that, when they're hung on the wall and lit from the side, they cast shadows of human profiles. A scrap of blue and black fabric from which she has pulled out individual threads becomes a portrait of her mother. And webs of black thread twisted around brads embedded in a white board coalesce into a near-photographic likeness of her boyfriend.

Seeing images form out of hundreds of tiny fragments recalls, for the artist, how the ancient Greeks looked at the stars, connecting them to evoke mythological figures. She remembers once seeing a friend's face in the dark and using her eyes in the same active way. Without light, "it was like looking at a very grainy monochrome picture, millions of dots creating his face," says Yamashita, 40. "I could almost imagine all the dots would start to move around like a bunch of fruit flies and create a new face or something entirely different."

The artist, who was born in Japan and arrived in the United States as a high-school exchange student in 1984, sometimes bases portraits on her subjects' personal artifacts. She made four small images of the playwright Samuel Beckett, for example, by rubbing Conté crayon on paper laid over plastic plates embossed with handwritten passages from the author's notebooks. And she has depicted sitters by setting her paper over the raised numbers and letters on their credit cards—reducing them, in effect, to the raw data that underpin their lives.

Yamashita lives in Manhattan and works in a tiny studio in Long Island City. She is represented by Kent Gallery, where her works range in price from \$5,000 to \$20,000, and up to twice as much for commissions. She has led a peripatetic life—recent artist residencies have included stints in Turkey, Mexico, the Southwest, and Japan—and that's why she has made art that is light, flat, portable, easy to disassemble, and perishable. "I'm very drawn to things that do not take up space," she says, adding that she is envious of musicians, "who can fill up a room with beautiful notes and yet leave nothing behind."

—Ann Landi



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