

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS: NEW YORK
By Chloe Wyma — October 22, 2016



Aki Sasamoto, *Shoelightbox*, 2016, shoe boxes, LEDs, ink-jet prints on tissue paper, dimensions variable.

Aki Sasamoto
SculptureCenter
19 September 2016 – 2 January 2017

Lodged in the cavity of a commercial-grade washing machine in **Aki Sasamoto's** installation *Washer* (all works cited, 2016) is a copy of the *Book of Insects* (1921) by nineteenth-century entomologist **John-Henri Fabre**. The volume is open to a passage on the life and labors of the dung beetle, which is recited off-camera by the artist in the single-channel video *Birds, Dung Beetles, the Washer* looping overhead. "The peasant of Ancient Egypt," it reads, "as he watered his patch of onions in the spring, would see from time to time a fat black insect pass close by, hurriedly trundling a ball backwards."

This humble creature, which folds its filth and food into a spherical mobile home, provides the central parable for *Delicate Cycle*, Sasamoto's solo exhibition here. In the installation *Shoelightbox*, viewers reencounter Fabre's text, this time printed on wadded-up sheets of tissue paper visible through peepholes cut into a wall of designer shoe boxes. Through shifts in color and scale, the beetle's fecal loaf becomes something immaculate in *The Ball*, an enormous boulder of white cotton bedsheets blockading a vaulted corridor. Laundry motifs continue upstairs, where crisp white sheets hang ethereally from a clothesline in the courtyard (*Laundry Line*) and an old-time washboard, suspended by a leather harness, doubles as a kinky surrealist object (*Washboard Belt-Maidrite*). **On some level, these works are about the cyclic, mundane labor of maintaining and reproducing the self—the compulsory hygiene of our bodies, clothing, and habitats. But there's also an obdurate materiality to Sasamoto's sculpture that resists metaphorical elevation.** According to Fabre, once celebrated as the "Homer of insects," the ancient Egyptians believed the dung beetle's ball to be "a symbol of the earth" and that the beetle's actions "were prompted by the movements of the heavenly bodies." Be that as it may, it's also an animal that makes things out of shit, and that logic of agglutination is what drives Sasamoto's earthy pleasures.