

# NANAKO KONO

b. 1999, Tokyo, Japan

Lives and works in Chicagoland, Illinois



Nanako Kono's paintings, drawings, prints, comics and collages investigate miscommunication. Kono is inspired by the structure of comic strips, employing intrinsic elements of that format — panels, speech balloons, animated objects, recurring characters, text — in her humorous paintings. The process of learning English as a second language sparked an interest for Kono in translations and semiotics, leading to the realization that the signs, symbols, and words we choose often fail to convey intended meanings to others. Taking visual and material cues from the Chicago Imagist tradition, Kono's work explores a playful new way of communication.

Kono's focus on multi-lingual miscommunication lead her to consider other contributing factors of this dynamic such as power imbalances and non-literal language use. Kono uses flatness, transparency, double-sidedness, and thickness of acrylic sheets in her work to convey the multifaceted nature of emotions, perceptions, and the indirect exchange of feelings with others through imaginary borders. Inspired by the Japanese concepts of "tatemae" (public façade) and "honne" (true feelings), as well as manga speech bubbles, Kono's paintings explore the dichotomy and ambiguity between the external persona and the inner self, revealing the layers of complexity in human emotions and interactions.

Nanako Kono's paintings and prints have been included in shows at LaiSun Keane in Boston, and in Chicago at Arts of Life, Patient Info, the Epiphany Center for the Arts, and will be included in "Ground Floor" at the Hyde Park Art Center in Chicago opening in August. Her [solo show](#) at Western Exhibitions in 2025 was reviewed in [NewCity](#). Kono was born in 1999 in Tokyo and moved to Chicago from Las Vegas in 2016. She received her BFA with a minor in Art History at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 2022 and a MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2025. Kono lives and works in Chicagoland.

**WESTERN EXHIBITIONS** 1709 W Chicago Ave., Chicago IL 60622 USA  
(312) 480-8390 | [westernexhibitions.com](http://westernexhibitions.com) | [scott@westernexhibitions.com](mailto:scott@westernexhibitions.com)

# NANAKO KONO

b. 1999, Tokyo, Japan

Lives and works in Chicagoland, Illinois

## Education

- 2025 Master of Fine Arts in Painting and Drawing, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- 2023 Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Painting and Drawing, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago,
- 2022 Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art, minor in Art History, University of Nevada, Las Vegas
- 2020 Associate of Arts in Art, College of Southern Nevada, Las Vegas, NV

## Solo Exhibitions

- 2025 *Doublespeak*, Western Exhibitions, Chicago, IL  
*Sentimental Representation*, Incubator Galley, The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL

## Group Exhibitions

- 2025 *Five Visions of the World*, curated by John Yau, Laisun Keane, Boston, MA  
*Parklife*, All-Star Press, Chicago, IL  
*Drown-Proofing*, Epiphany Center for the Arts, Chicago, IL  
*Graduate Exhibition One*, SAIC Galley, The School of The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
*Pamphlet Show II*, Patient Info, Chicago, IL
- 2024 *Small Stuff II*, Howling Pages  
*Experimental Portraiture*, The School of Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
*What's in the Names?*, The School of Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
- 2023 *Sentrock Studio Selects 12*, Sentrock Studio, Chicago, IL  
*Spring Invitational Exhibition*, Union Street Gallery, Chicago Heights, IL  
Post-Baccalaureate Annual Exhibition, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL
- 2022 *a generous gesture*, The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
*Yellow: Version 2022*, Winchester Dondero Cultural Center, Las Vegas NV  
Bachelor of Fine Arts Spring Thesis Exhibition, Donna Beam Gallery, Las Vegas NV  
*Eat Your Heart Out*, Winchester Dondero Cultural Center, Las Vegas NV
- 2021 *Thoughtfully*, Student Union gallery, University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
*BFA Midway Exhibition: Asbestos Exposure*, Grand Hall Gallery, Las Vegas NV  
*Back at It!*, Student Union Gallery, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, NV  
*Five Art Teachers and Their Students*, Priscilla Fowler Fine Art Gallery, Las Vegas, NV

## Bibliography

- 2025 NewCity. Schwindt, Samuel. "Nanako Kono at Western Exhibitions." June 2025