



Chikaku.

Zeit und Erinnerung in Japan / *Time and Memory in Japan*

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SHORT TEXTS ON THE ARTISTS

Daido Moriyama

Daido Moriyama was still influenced by seminal photographers from the post-war period such as Shomei Tomatsu and Eiko Hosoe, when he attracted attention in 1968 with his series of photos entitled "Japan: A Photo Theater" (Nihon Gekijo). In this first work, he published pictures of Japanese showmen who seemed to come from the deep layers of Japan's cultural memory.

His photographs did not adhere to the aesthetic norms of traditional photography such as focus or sophisticated composition, but were rather rough, dynamic pictures in the "are, bure, boke" style (wild, blurred, out of focus), that opened up new horizons of photographic expression. The characteristic traits of Moriyama's photography – the grainy dots spread over the picture as if in a dance, the blurry, restless shots, the blown-up distortions – are immediate reflections of his lived experience. Before every conceptual reflection, he perceives through the camera the reality that is connected to his own life. The rift between this reality and his self becomes the photo. Moriyama's way of taking photos is not merely a technique or stylistic device, but is rather the direct result of his stance towards life and the world. What is more, he developed his own conception of memory in the course of his work. According to this, memory is not a representation of the past, but rather something eternal in which that which is past is imagined and reassembled with different media from the viewpoint of the present, so as to further project it into the future.

The photographs by Moriyama that are on show this time are from the series "A Farewell to Photography" (Shashinyo Sayounara, 1972), "Light and Shadow" (Hikari to Kage, 1981) and "Shinjuku" (2002), that represent three representative stages in his development.

Takuma Nakahira

Among other things, Takuma Nakahira's examination of the fundamental questions of human perception led to foundation of the avant-garde magazine *Provoke*, that he published with Daido Moriyama and others as of 1966 and that constitutes a landmark in the history of Japanese photography. As of 1970 he began producing unprecedented radical means of expression and image processing techniques and played an important role with regard to the reorientation of Japanese photography. In 1973, after a time of violent social and political unrest, he set out for the first time on a journey to Okinawa, where he entered a place completely untouched by the hectic pace of the Japanese boom. This encounter led to an existential shake-up, that Taro Okamoto had already experienced. Like him, he focused on the deep layers of Japanese memory, searching for a new view of place and time, suddenly suffering a loss of memory and speech in 1977 and abruptly being thrust into a state of mental instability.

Nevertheless, Nakahira travelled to Okinawa once more immediately on being discharged from hospital, and began to take photos there. He himself noted that there was nothing else for him to do, as he had lost everything else. In the works from recent years we can clearly see his will to gain a new memory, moment by moment, by continuing his photographic work.

The photos on show here are from the collection "For a Language to Come" (Kitarubeki kotoba no tame ni, 1971), his pictures from the period 1978 – 1989, and the "Degree Zero – Yokohama" (2003) work. This selection not only reveals Nakahira's personal development but also offers a comparison to the works of his contemporary Moriyama, who was always closely connected to Nakahira.

Taro Okamoto

Taro Okamoto is regarded as one of the founding fathers of contemporary Japanese art. In 1929 he went to Paris as a foreign student, working there as an artist, but increasingly gained an interest in ethnology and archaeology. The decisive factor was his meeting with Marcel Mauss, the pioneer of French ethnology, and his friendships with Georges Bataille and Michel Leiris. At the outbreak of World War II, Okamoto returned to Japan. As of 1950 he began his "rediscovery of Japanese art", during which he travelled all over Japan with his camera, photographing the people and their festivals, ceremonies and customs. As a result of this undertaking, he succeeded in exploring the essence of the Japanese psyche and art.

What Okamoto recorded in his field research was neither the Japanese art that was strongly influenced by western modernism at that time, art that had lost its identity, nor the art of traditional Japan with its formalistic aesthetics trained on the tea ceremony. It was the vision of a vital Japanese creativity full of enigmatic intensity. This vision became clear to him above all in the regions of Tohoku in the far north and in Okinawa in the south of Japan, in "peripheral" areas, that is, where a specific Japanese feeling for the land and the body was still unimpaired. What connected these regions at a deep level for Okamoto was the pottery from the Jomon culture, that contains the traces of millennia-old creativity.

Okamoto's photos, on show at this exhibition, were selected from three series. On the one hand, they document Okamoto's ethnological and archaeological studies, but, above and beyond this, they are also an excellent photographic expression of Okamoto's keen perception for the original forms of Japanese art. This perception revealed a force that would have long remained hidden at the mysterious points of intersection of various Japanese paths and roots, and that was to have a lasting impact on subsequent generations of Japanese artists.

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