

PROVOCATIVE MATERIALS FOR THOUGHT

思想のための挑発的資料



Photobooks by Japanese Women: A Reading Room

11th July – 16th July

In the aftermath of WWII, the rapid changes in Japanese society provided fertile ground for the rise of an innovative style of photography which radically departed from photographic conventions at the time. This period was defined by a proliferation in the publishing of photo magazines and photobooks, including the acclaimed collective publication of Provoke magazine (1968-1969) which has become both a landmark of this era and a symbol for photographic dissent from established canons.

Borrowing from the original subtitle of this publication, Provocative Materials for Thought honours its legacy whilst reconfiguring its meaning by promoting a critical interrogation of the narratives which have popularised Japanese photography as a male-dominated genre.

Provocative Materials for Thought is part of a recent collective effort to rewrite the history of Japanese photography to include its women. The reading room functions as an effort in speculating an otherwise archive. It seeks to challenge the erasure women have faced in the canon of Japanese photography. It is not a passive acknowledgement of the lacunae, but rather an act of building towards rightful recognition.

Exhibiting 25 Japanese women photographers and their photobooks arranged into four themes, the photographers' work is situated within the genre, albeit acknowledging the fluid and sometimes arbitrary nature of these categories.

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Photographing Japan

As Japanese society rapidly changed after the Second World War, street photography gained popularity as a medium for critique, interrogation and the documentation of this era in Japanese history. Representations of postwar Japan were undoubtedly a decisive element in the notoriety of Japanese photography as a genre.

Yumiko Kiyomiya (b. 1934) captured the precariousness of living conditions of her neighbours in Fukagawa, Tokyo. Similarly, Mao Ishikawa's (b. 1953) photographs, taken while she ran a bar in a port area of Okinawa, a town heavily marked by the war and subsequent military presence, captured the routines of working men on the margins of Japanese society.

In contrast, Miyako Ishiuchi's (b. 1947) photographs taken in 2001 referencing her series with the same name shot in the 1970s, document abandoned apartments and temporary quarters customarily used for prostitution. Her close focus on decorative details highlights the lack of human presence in the photographs and the locations appear almost as if inhabited by

ghosts.



Tamiko Nishimura, 'My Journey II 1968-1989'. Courtesy of Zen Foto Gallery.

Hitomi Watanabe (b. 1939) photographed the student protests at Tokyo University in 1968-1969 from inside the anti-war movement which defined that time. Whilst the deeply personal photographs of Tamiko Nishimura (b. 1948) and Asako Narahashi (b. 1959) reflect the evolution of Japan during and after the postwar period, without

entering the realm of the photojournalistic. The photographers' gazes reflect their own position in the world, their life stages and their relationship to photography.

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Photo Diary

The 1990s were marked by the advent of what became known as “onnanoko shashin” (girls’ photography), largely popularised by Hiromix (b. 1976), Yurie Nagashima (b. 1973), and Mika Ninagawa (b. 1972) whose genre of intimate snapshots of their daily lives as young women was met with both mass acclaim and sexist prejudice in Japan. Ever since, the photo diary has become a widely favoured genre in contemporary photography. It became particularly significant in an environment where women have often been denied the agency to represent themselves.

The other photographers in this section capture feelings that at first may seem disparate. However, the digital photo collages of Chino Otsuka (b. 1972) and her younger self, the quasi-ascetic solitude of Emi Anrajuki’s (b. 1963) photoluminescent self-portraits, and the sense of loss refracted in the mundane objects of both Mayumi Suzuki (b. 1977) and Sayuri Ichida’s (b. 1985) photographs reveal a common desire to photograph the self, as it is, or as it once was. Here the camera becomes a vehicle to make sense of oneself.

Disrupting the Photographic Gaze

The photographer’s gaze is inevitably an assertion of power - the photographer controls the representation of their subject. The critical acclaim of Japanese male photographers whose work falls into the categories of erotic photography and other documentations of intimacy, signals a deeply gendered relation, with a primacy of an explicitly male gaze. The photographers in Disrupting the Photographic Gaze have challenged this dynamic, not only inherently by existing as women behind the camera, but oftentimes for being explicitly critical.



Tokyo Rumando, ‘Rest ~3000, Stay ~5000’.

Courtesy of Zen Foto Gallery

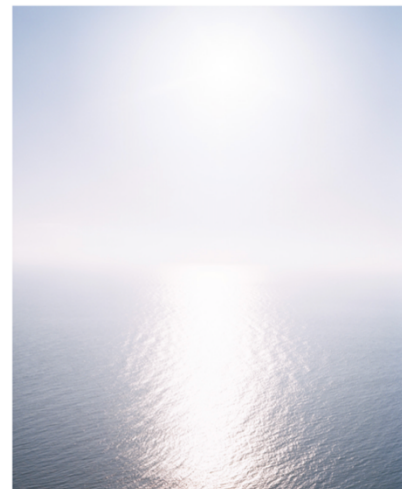
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Tokyo Rumando's (b. 1980) self-portraits in love hotels subvert a classic male photographer and female model trope typical of Japanese erotic photography, whilst Hideka Tonomura's (b. 1979) photographs of her mother's love affair center female pleasure as protest. The explorations of gender and identity of Mayumi Hosokura (b. 1979) and Momo Okabe (b. 1981), the male nudes of Sakiko Nomura (b. 1967), and Tokuko Ushioda's (b. 1940) photographs of her life with her husband, all reveal the ways in which these photographers reject the objectifying and normalising power of the camera lens.

Rhythms of Everyday Life

In the Rhythms of Everyday Life the photographers share a sensibility for finding beauty in the mundane and documenting everyday life.

Rinko Kawauchi (b. 1972) and Mikiko Hara (b. 1967) capture casual moments of intimacy. From the routines of strangers to snapshots in the privacy of their homes and the stages of raising a child, they weave these stories together into mosaics of fragments of lives as they see and experience them. Akiko Kimura's (b. 1971) photographs of changing natural landscapes reflect the impermanence and surprises of life. Often resembling mirrors in which both photographer and viewer can see themselves, the photographs' meaning is rewritten in the eyes of the beholder.



Akiko Kimura, 'i'. Courtesy of the artist.

Chieko Shiraishi (b. 1968) and Miho Kajioka's (b. 1973) emphasis on alternative processing techniques evoke fragmented memories and a sense of nostalgia and loss portrayed through urban and natural landscapes. Shot in locations which were once busy attraction sites now emptied of human life, Ai Iwane's (b. 1975) photographs of blooming cherry blossoms in deserted areas of Fukushima during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdowns recall a deeply personal journey of grief and moving on.

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