

DAIDO MORIYAMA REMIX II

6 September - 6 October 2012

Like any revolutionary, Daido Moriyama is unsettling. Before becoming a major post-war artist, he was an activist for all causes, like many in Japan in the early 70s. He kept company with a number of avant-garde photographers at the Vivo Agency, on the decline, where he met the eminent Eikoh Hosoe (and eventually became his assistant) and Shomei Tomatsu, before joining the short-lived magazine *Provoke* in 1969. Alongside other photographers and theorists such as Takuma Nakahira, Takahiko Okada, Yutaka Takanashi, Koji Taki and Nobuyoshi Araki, he continually experimented a new visual language.

Political protesters at the outset, these photographers wanted to denounce the frenzied race to consume during the rebuilding of a country that was still nursing the wounds of defeat under the eye of the Americans. *Stray Dog*, his emblematic photo of a mangy dog (1971), was taken at Misawa, right next to a very active American base, not so far, geographically, from warring Vietnam. They were also struggling against a very rigid society in which the individual is faced with the masses, the workplace acts as a substitute for the family, and tradition yields to the American way of life. Remember, too, that they were all born just before the war - Moriyama in 1938 - and that they experienced firsthand the chaos of bombardments, two nuclear bombs and the fall of the empire. Their photography was the medium for their personal and collective identity crisis.

This post-war society and its race for modernity transformed the cities, but also the Japanese mentality and its emphasis on reservedness. Suddenly modesty is no longer a moral value: women's intimacy is exposed through pornographic images, flaunted in the streets. Television invades the family space, Western imagery flourishes in magazines and advertising comes crashing head-on into a civilization that was, until then, protectionist and prudish. During his photographic promenades, Moriyama deciphers all the signs, the entire alphabet of the city (subway, crossings, crowds, signs, posters, etc.). Through his lens, Tokyo becomes a metropolis saturated with representations. Like Eugene Atget, his greatest influence along with William Klein and Andy Warhol, he captures what will disappear and seeks his identity through the soul of the city, like an eternal wanderer. Moriyama likes what reveals itself little by little: between the black (hidden) and the white (light), there is grey! Araki referred to him as a "*grey/lt photographer*".

Daido Moriyama's art is a far, far cry from any formal academic quality: images are blurred, botched, saturated, grainy black and white, film leaders and trailers can be a part of the image, frames are tilted at random... Over and above calling the nature of the representation itself into question, his photography becomes an autobiography, a means of expressing personal experiences! His life and his photography alternate between depression and addiction, calm and violence, withdrawal from the public eye and success... Constantly self-questioning his art, like his book *Bye, Bye Photography, Dear* (1972): "*This book questions the relationship between photography and the photographer, between photography and history. Who am I when I take a picture? Truth be told, in hindsight, I wonder if it is really a book of photographs. I doubt it. It's more a rough work of urges and ideas*".

Daido Moriyama is a photographer in perpetual motion, like the passenger of a runaway car that shoots the landscape racing by... Moriyama is a physical photographer who takes pictures with his body more than with his eyes. He is also an atmospheric photographer who couldn't care less about convention, a man who prefers the humanity of the here and now. And, finally, he is an artist who incessantly walks a tightrope, balancing on the fine line where the subject ends and the spirit begins.

From this constant motion comes the title: *Remix*. For the work of Moriyama is not permanent - far from it! He endlessly plunges into his contact prints, tirelessly reprints his images, re-centres them, prints them horizontally or vertically to achieve the desired format at the time, an image can exist in black and white and in colour, enough to make you lose yourself in the maelstrom of his photos. It is also a re-evaluation! He is the photographer who wants to wear his subject right out - until death? Like a DJ, he continuously reinterprets his photography: the dog in *Stray Dog* can look to the right or to the left, he has long forgotten which way it was in the original. There are seven different versions of his picture of fishnet stockings, series are constantly evolving, the *Cherry Blossoms* appeared in 1972, then in 1983 and again in 1987... the book *New York* was published in 2002 with pictures from 1971, a picture taken in 1988 can reappear in a book in 1993 with a new title, anything goes! If he is not re-examining his books with each new edition... Now he leaves others the care of arranging his books (act of faith or ultimate desire for interpretation?), to draw from this incredible mass of images, and to bring this immense oeuvre out of the shadows.

Patrick Remy

DAIDO MORIYAMA "REMIX II" is on show at galerie kamel mennour from Tuesday to Saturday, 14pm to 7pm.

At this occasion, the second edition of the «Daido Moriyama, Remix» catalogue is published by the Editions kamel mennour

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