Photography in Japan
Written by Mariko Takeuchi

Essay by Maryko Takeuchi
guest curator of "Spotlight on Japan" for Paris Photo 2008

Part 1  Part 2

Introduction

In Japanese, the word for “photograph” is “shashin”. It is made up of two ideograms, “sha” meaning “to reproduce” or “reflect” and “shin” which means “truth.” The Greek etymology of the word “photograph” is to write (graphein) with light (photos). Therefore, in the Japanese mind, the process itself consists in capturing the truth, or the essence of the matter and “making a copy” of it on a surface. Consequently, the result will always contain a certain element of truth. Since the advent of photography, this way of seeing things has become commonplace throughout the world, but in very few languages is the concept expressed with such clarity. If we
take as a premise the idea that Japanese photography is the fruit of a multitude of reactions, ranging from empathy to mistrust, to this process of “reproducing the truth,” it becomes easier to gain a better understanding of its astonishing diversity.

Consider Japanese photography as a whole and it becomes evident that a large number of artists tend to express feelings of incomprehension and ambiguity towards reality and the world rather than attempt to decrypt it and objectively analyze it. In his “Empire of Signs,” Roland Barthes remarked that Japanese culture gained its liberty by freeing itself from the meaning of the signs it contains. Up to a point, this can be said about photography. Photography is not a conclusion but a perpetual questioning. In that sense, Barthes got it right when he later compared photography to the art of Haiku in “La Chambre Claire.”
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With such diversity in their approach, Japanese photographers demonstrate that there is no such thing as the Truth, with a capital T. And all the while they continue to pose the fundamental question which is to know what photography is capable of reproducing and what eludes attempts at reproduction. For example, since the 1970s, Nobuyoshi Araki, one of Japan's most eminent photographers, far from focussing on the antagonism between truth and fiction, has continuously tried to demonstrate, in every way possible, that photography is both truth and fiction. Similarly, Daido Moriyama, while subscribing to Warhol's idea that a photograph is nothing more than a copy, also captures with delicate sensitivity the element of remembrance that inhabits photography. In the 1980s a number of photographers appeared, such as Naoya Hatakeyama, who saw their work as an attempt to analyze and understand the world. At the same time, the trend for "intimist" photography, such as that of Rinko Kawauchi who manages to capture beauty in daily life at its most ordinary, continues to endure in endless formal variations.
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One of the characteristics of Japanese photography is the role, increasingly important as time goes by, of printed matter. Whether generalist (magazines) or specialized (photography books), publications have been a vital vehicle for photographers and their work. In fact, no other country in the world boasts such a wealth of publications. This phenomenon is partly explained by the absence, to this day, of a network of galleries or a well-established market for photography. But it can also be attributed to the very particular history of reproduction processes in our country and the culture surrounding it. Specifically, the source can be traced back to the Edo era (1603 – 1867) with the development of unrivalled wood-block techniques, the beauty of the ukiyo-e prints and their immense popularity among the Japanese public.

In recent years, the work of a growing number of individual Japanese photographers has become known in the United States and Europe. But opportunities of presenting a panoramic vision of the history of Japanese photography in Europe are extremely rare. In this respect, the exhibition "New Japanese Photography," held in New York in 1974 was a real precursor. It was the turn of the 21st Century that brought a more holistic approach to photography, and in this context the major retrospective entitled "The History of Japanese Photography" in 2003 at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, was a significant milestone. Ever since, there have been an increasing number of exhibitions and publications in the West. The 2008 edition of Paris Photo with Japan as country of honour therefore comes as the fruit of a long process of maturing.
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“Japanism” which subjugated Europe during the second half of the 19th Century was not a matter of passing fashion. Its influence is not only evident in Western art, in particular the impressionist school, but also in terms of lifestyle. The trend was set with the presence of a Japanese pavilion at the 1867 universal exhibition. Here we are in Paris, 141 years later, to present a comprehensive overview of Japanese photography on a scale unprecedented in France. It is my dearest wish that today more than ever, at a time of transition owing to the advent of digital technology, this event will not simply be perceived as “exotic.” It is my hope that it will be a stimulant to help us rediscover all the possibilities offered by the photographic medium and that it will serve as a boost to its creative energy.

General Presentation
Photography arrived in Japan in 1848, exactly nine years after its birth in France and the invention of the daguerreotype. Like many other non-Western countries, Japan became the “object” of images infused with exoticism. But there was a very rapid turn-around as the Japanese transformed themselves from “objects” into “subjects” capable of taking photographs. By 1862, Japanese photographers had established portrait studios in the port cities of Nagasaki and Yokohama, and the second half of the 19th Century saw the gradual development of the Japanese camera-making industry. The turn of the 20th Century brought increasing numbers of amateur photographers throughout the country. Though inspired by traditional Japanese aesthetics, “art photography” (including pictorialism) was still feeling its way.

The 1930s marked the beginning of a clear evolution towards modern photography. The change was brought about by a symbolic event: the creation, in 1932, of “Kôga” a publication whose title is made up of two ideograms meaning “light” (Ko) and “drawing” (ga). Abandoning the term “shashin” (and the implied search for truth in the photographic act) the main figures behind the publication, notably Yasuzô Nojima, Iwata Nakayama and in particular Ihei Kimura, proclaimed their will to embrace modernity through their work on light. Kimura, a master of the Leica, and often referred to as Japan’s Cartier-Bresson, played an unstinting role during the post-war period as the leader in the country’s photography circles. But even before the war, amateur photographers such as Nakaji Yasui or Osamu Shiihara had appeared, not only in Tokyo but also around Osaka, and were tremendously active in exploring the avant-garde.
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With the desolation and chaos that followed Japan's defeat in the Second World War, photoreportage, witness to the population's desperate situation, dominated the scene for a number of years. But nevertheless, there were concurrent and completely independent efforts to seek out new forms of photographic expression. In this regard, the creation in 1959 in Tokyo by Shomei Tomatsu, Eikoh Hosoe, Ikko Narahara and Kikuji Kawada of the agency “VIVO” marked the birth of a new generation of photographers whose intent was to go beyond mere experimentation to establish a real practice. With a sharp, critical eye on reality, clear concepts, a real sense of composition and framing, coupled with heavy emphasis on the symbolic, this group exerted a tremendous influence on the generation that followed.

In the run-up to the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, Japan was undergoing a period of tremendous economic growth, which provided fertile ground for the flourishing of Japanese photographers in the fields of photo-journalism and advertising. However, in the second half of the 1960s our country, along with many others, was gripped by the turmoil of opposition to the prevailing politics, economics and culture which took the form of student activism and violent protest against the Japanese-American Security Treaty. In 1968, the emblematic year of struggle, the first issue of “PROVOKE,” the publication whose evocative subtitle was “Incendiary Documentation for New Thinking,” sent shock waves through Japanese photographic circles. Members including Takuma Nakahira and Koji Taki, along with Daido Moriyama, who joined the publication for its second issue, embarked on a process of radical deconstruction of the rules and aesthetics of classical photography, whose styles were often called “Are, Bure, Boke,” (Rough, Blurred, Out of Focus).

In that same year, 1968, a group of young photographers began to be called “Konpora,” a Japanese-style contraction of the word “contemporary.” It was grounded in a trend defined by the 1966 exhibition at George Eastman House entitled “Contemporary Photographers: Towards a Social Landscape.” At first glance, the images produced by the “Konpora” group, marked by their neutrality, composition and focus on the insignificance of daily life, appear as the antithesis of those of the “PROVOKE” group. However, and despite the disparity in terms of inspiration, these works were all a reaction against the photographic methodologies that still dominated, as well as being a reflection of the prevailing ambiguity of the period. One of those known as “Konpora,” Yutaka Takanashi, was in fact simultaneously an active contributor to “PROVOKE.”

In order to present their work to the public, photographers at the time had few options other than to go to specialized publications such as “Asahi Camera,” or “Camera Mainichi,” or else to galleries attached to Canon, Nikon or other leading manufacturers of photographic equipment. In a bid to overcome this, a number of young photographers decided in the 1970s to open galleries of their own. Starting in Tokyo, this initiative soon took root throughout the country. One venue, the “Image Shop Camp,” has remained legendary ever since owing to the activity of photographers such as Daido Moriyama and Keizo Kitajima.
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The first gallery specializing in the sale of photographic prints, "Zeit Foto Salon," opened in 1978. But this was far from being a sufficient impetus to mobilize the domestic market, and to this day, the number of photographers under contract with galleries that are in a position to commercialize their work is singularly limited: most still exhibit with independent galleries or in spaces rented at their own expense. This remains one of the peculiar features of the Japanese photography scene.

Nevertheless, the "economic bubble" of the 1980s provided a favourable environment for Japanese photography, which underwent a period of deep transformation. In particular, a number of technological innovations (notably the AF lens and compact cameras) meant that photography became popular with the Japanese public as never before. Then in the 1990s, the young generation developed a real passion for photography, and in particular photography of a very personal nature. Around the year 1990 saw the opening of several photography museums throughout the country as well as the establishment of a system aimed at measuring the artistic and historic value of the medium. This is how, in spite of a frail market, Japanese photography has developed a physiognomy of its own, and has become institutionalized, while at the same time imposing itself as a mass phenomenon.

During this period, a number of photographers came to the fore with series that stand at the crossroads between art and photography, resting on very precise concepts. They can be roughly divided into two groups: one uses photography as a preferred means of approaching the world from an intellectual stand-point; the other works with this medium to access the imaginary and transcend time and space.

In the first group is Naoya Hatakeyama, who works using a wide variety of angles to comment on the evolution of the urban landscape; Toshio Shibata reveals the sculptural beauty of dams and other anonymous public works; Ryuji Miyamoto captures the remnants of civilization in decomposing objects and structures and Taiji Matsue uses aerial photography to highlight the topography of specific locations.

In the second group, Hiroshi Sugimoto's work can be seen as a critical comment on history and temporality while Yuki Onodera, who has published very diverse series of images, can be said to have freed the imagination and rendered it weightless. Identity, the body and sexuality – all fundamental human questions – are among the themes that dominate Japanese photography. This is certainly true of Miyako Ishiuchi, a pioneer among Japan's female photographers. For the past thirty years, she has consistently worked on the effects of the passage of time on both clothing and human skin. Ryudai Takano delves into ordinary daily existence to bring to light hidden manifestations of sexual ambiguity or eroticism. By superimposing multiple portraits of members of a given group of people, Ken Kitano attempts to identify the parameters of what constitutes individuality, what makes me "me." Meanwhile, Tomoko Sawada dresses up and transforms herself into a multitude of different personae in order to question the plurality of our identity. Finally, Asako Narahashi immerses herself in the waters of oceans and lakes to blur the image of stability we bestow upon the world, and in so doing, reveals its ephemeral and fragile qualities.
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It is difficult to assign a single stylistic label to the work of all these photographers. However, above and beyond their visual and intellectual contributions, most have the capacity to shake and put into question our convictions and prejudices on a wide variety of issues. At a time when the notions of "limits" and "values" are the subject of never-ending debate in our world, it is not surprising that these works command a great deal of interest. This is no doubt what gives particular substance to Japan's invitation as country of honour at Paris Photo this year.

The "Statement" section for Paris Photo 2008

In 1989, the world celebrated the 150th anniversary of the birth of photography. It was a time of unequalled prosperity in Japan and it was around this year that a number of cultural institutions opened in the country, dedicated for a certain part to photography: first came the Kawasaki City Museum, then the Yokohama Museum of Art which opened a photography "department", and finally the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography. At the same time, the immense popularity of the compact camera with the general public led to a real "boom" among the country's youth. Several events aimed at young people were created, in particular two large competitions: "New Cosmos of Photography" and "Hitotsuboten." Until then, the driving force behind photography had been specialized magazines and corporate galleries, and these new events gave young people the opportunity to show their work. Another factor was the increasing number of galleries dedicated to photography which allowed experimental talent to blossom and free itself from classic constraints and conventions.
It is in this context, and over the past decade that young photographers emerged whose work is presented by not only the galleries in the Statement section, but also by others throughout the fair. Far from being confined to the criteria of what constitutes “great art,” these works explore all the possibilities offered by the photographic medium, which is seen as one among many other vehicles of creative expression.

For example, Mika Ninagawa, whose work is extremely popular among Japanese youth, does not rest on an established sense of aesthetic. The values she draws upon belong to a “sub-culture”, and it is from there that she creates her own very personal world, characterized by a palette of very bright colours. The theatrical quality of her work has been further reinforced in her most recent creations – films that are inspired by the Manga. Midori Komatsubara also finds inspiration in Manga comics, and specifically the sub-genre that deals with love between young boys: she captures the ambiguity inhabiting the bodies of young women as they hover between fascination and fantasy. Addressing the abjection of her own desires, Yumiko Utsu uses carefully arranged objects in kitsch images in which she manages to reveal elements specific to Japanese youth culture - cruelty and infantilism. Meanwhile, Masayuki Shioda moves effortlessly from one activity to another, collaborating with the music industry as well as with youth culture magazines.

By the second half of the 1990s, this young generation had gradually established itself with work that stood at the crossroads between pure photography and other forms of artistic expression. A lot of work appeared in colour at this time and was chiefly concerned with expressing the feeling of instability that came with the bursting of the economic bubble and a prevailing sense that normal daily existence was somehow under threat.

This vision of the world, which looks as though it is seen through spectacles for the short-sighted, is particularly acute in the images of Rinko Kawauchi. Infused with soft subtle light, they seem heartwarming at first glance. But they also exude an underlying sense of threat. She and Mika Ninagawa both strive to capture what is universal in people and things with a very close observation of the finest details of the immediate environment. Meanwhile, Nobuo Asada goes into the ocean to take his photographs with the intention of positioning himself as the live example of the inevitable interaction between the “photographer subject” and the “photographed object.”
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While these artists took a very close up view of the world, other works started to appear starting in the year 2000 in which perspectives are “flattened,” and even the notions of “close” and “distant” are put into question because they are given equal importance. This is a reflection of one of the characteristics of our time, dominated as it is by digital technology which processes information with no regard for the hierarchy of the data. For example, Gentaro Ishizuka chose the Alaska pipeline as a theme. It is the second longest pipeline in the world. He does not dwell on the difficulties of such an undertaking or the gigantic size of the project. His images are so neutral, it is almost discouraging. This very contemporary approach is not unlike the work of Wolfgang Tillmans in his “Concorde series,” in which the photographer views all things without a trace of value judgment.

That said, without obviously subscribing to a specific contemporary “trend,” numerous photographers continue to pose a question that remains fundamental to their chosen mode of expression: What is “photographable?” and What isn’t? Keisuke Shirota pastes small photographs onto canvas and using acrylic paint, prolongs the image beyond its original frame, highlighting the interval between the visible and the invisible, the imaginary and the real. Akiko Ikeda uses pictures of people, extracting cut-out fragments. With a humorous twist not unlike back-lighting, she transforms the two dimensional photograph into a three-dimensional object. While these two artists probe the limits of the frame from the outside, others like Takashi Suzuki, Naruki Oshima, Nobuhiro Oshima and Mamoru Tsukada work from within to seek out the tiny chinks in the boundary between the visible and the invisible.

Others address this issue specifically in relation to memory, which the eye cannot see. Working with memories and historical events linked to Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan, Nao Tsuda spins a delicate narrative made up of landscapes and stories. Tomoko Yoneda is the artist with the longest career among all those presented in the Statement section. She takes highly detailed photographs of landscapes at the scene of historic events or accidents. In this way she explores the limits of visual representation from both an ethical and aesthetic point of view. In our digital age, the image has become a product of “high speed consumption,” and these photographers are in immediate touch with world events as never before. The seriousness and consistency with which they continue their search and their aesthetic choices are such that the viewer feels the need to mark a pause and the desire to reflect.
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It is impossible to over-estimate the role of publishing or the printed page in the evolution of Japanese photography. Even before the start of World War II, there were a large number of publications dedicated to photography in Japan. But it was the post-war period and the huge popularity of locally-made cameras that brought a profusion of specialized magazines, notably “Camera,” “Photo Art” and “Asahi Camera,” amongst others, giving even greater impetus to photographic activity. Most of these magazines not only published feature articles and technical advice to amateurs, they also provided information on Western photography and the work of foreign artists. Very soon, they became springboards for Japanese professionals. In the early days, photographic books were published in collaboration with these specialized magazines. By the second half of the 1950s, though small in number, books became an independent means of expression. The 1960s and 1970s saw the birth of a series of masterpieces: Eikoh Hosoe’s “Barakei” (Ordeal by Roses) in 1963, Kikuji Kawada’s “Chizu” (The Map) in 1965 or Nobuyoshi Araki’s “Senchimentaru na tabi” (Sentimental Journey) in 1971.

In the 1980s, some of the publications that had played a predominant role in photography circles gradually ran out of steam. The magazine “Camera Mainichi” closed in 1985. Photographers increasingly turned to books as a way of disseminating their work. They were supported by very few editors such as Michitaka Ota of Sokyusha. He oversaw the publication of works by many photographers, some well-established, others yet unknown, including the legendary “Karasu” (Ravens) by Masahisa Fukase in 1986. Towards the end of the 1980s, the photographer Osamu Wataya was hired as artistic director of the fashion label “Hysteric Glamour.” In the first half of the 1990s, he oversaw the publication of the “Hysteric” series which brought Daido Moriyama back to the forefront of the photography scene. To this day, Wataya continues to bring out photography books that stand out for their inventive design.
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The five publishers presented in the Central Exhibition at Paris Photo began in the afore-mentioned context. They are today the most active partners for photographers in terms of helping them conceive and publish personal material. Far from being considered as mere copies of this or that piece of work or simply information channels, in their eyes, these books are a crucial vehicle for photography, bearing in mind of course that photography is, originally, a technique of reproduction. There are a large number of remarkable photographers in Japan today but still too few galleries willing to commercialize their work. This is why the activity of these publishers is crucial, not only in terms of supporting their work, but also for Japanese photography as a whole.

Established in 1984, Toseisha is the oldest of the five publishing houses. From the beginning, it has consistently published the work of Japanese photographers, both professional and amateur. Its President, Kunihiro Takahashi, who is also chief editor is so dedicated to his work that he personally follows, as far as humanly possible, every single step of the process, from the survey of the contact sheets to mixing the inks himself for the printing. For example, it took him ten years to perfect the refined and expanded edition of the almost mythical work by Hiromi Tsuchida, "Zokushin, Gods of the Earth", originally published in 1976.

The catalogues of Little More, a publishing house established in 1989, offer a wide variety of books on all aspects of culture. Following the publication in the mid 1990s of work by Takashi Homma and Yurie Nagashima, this publisher started to bring out more books of work by photographers of the young generation. One of these artists, Kayo Ume was able to publish her book "Umeme" which won the Ihei Kimura Prize in 2006 and became an incredible success with over 100,000 copies sold. In her own style and design, Ume captures moments of what is apparently normal daily life, creating images rather like sidelong glances that are at times witty or slightly perfidious. Given its success, her work in many ways embodies the most "popular" aspect of Japan's photographic culture. Ume's case is far from unique. Many photographers have earned respect from amateurs and won public acclaim not through exhibiting original prints but through the publication of books.
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The first volume of Masafumi Sanai’s work “Ikite iru” (Alive) had a decisive impact on the course of Japanese photographic expression in the past ten years. It was published in 1997, by Seigensha, which was barely two years old at the time and was concerned with the visual arts as a whole. Hideki Yasuda, the director, experienced a real shock when he saw Sanai’s work and the incredible rigour that belies its apparent roughness. After discovering this artist, he went on to publish other photographers, including Jin Ohashi, in particular “Me no mae no Tsuzuki” a particularly strong piece of work in which the artist shows, in an almost carnal manner, the discontinuity between the traumatic event of his father’s failed suicide attempt and the banality of every day life.

The most powerful publisher in the field of photographic books in Japan today is Akaaka Art Publishing. It was founded in 2006 by Kimi Himeno who came from Seigensha where she worked as editor of photography from the beginning. As a consequence of her meeting both Sanai and Ohashi, Himeno realised the immense power of their work as it explores the depths of life and death. She oversaw the publication of a large number of books on the work of mostly young generation photographers. In 2007, the Ihei Kimura Prize was awarded jointly to Leiko Shiga for “Canary,” and Atsushi Okada for “I am,” both published by Akaaka. This publishing house now commands enormous respect for its influence which is at least equal to, if not greater, than that of the photography galleries.

Along with a small group of specialized critics, until the 1980s, the most important players on the Japanese photography scene were the editors of the photography magazines. In the 1990s, they were overtaken by the museum curators. With the 21st Century came the turn of art directors who are passionate about photography, such as Hideki Nakajima or Jun’ichi Tsunoda. With their capacity to spot new talent and unencumbered by institutional burdens, they have been able to rally round them the young generation of photographers.

One figure stands out among this group of discoverers of new talent: Satoshi Machiguchi who was behind the “Ikite iru” project and has since conceived and designed a whole series of art and photography books. In order to be able to work freely and make some of his dreams come true, he set up a light-weight structure in 2005 called “M Label.” The works he has published under this new label can be seen in all their diversity in “Book shop M.” Every one of these books has been very carefully thought out, down to the minutest detail, and is evidence of the close relationship between individual photographers and his or her artistic director. Machiguchi’s flexibility allows him to conduct his activities without becoming caught up in existing publishing circuits. The dynamism of the five publishers presented here and the books themselves that are the product of their efforts offer an understanding of the substance of contemporary Japanese photography and its ongoing evolution.
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Since the early 1990s a growing number of Japanese photographers have started to make films, a trend that can be partly explained by the fact that traditional distinctions between different modes of artistic expression have become increasingly meaningless. This phenomenon clearly rests to a large extent on the development of digital technology, which has greatly facilitated the manipulation of images. That being said, if we go back to the etymology of the word, a photographer is someone who "writes with light." It naturally follows that he or she can also create "moving images."

We have put together the programme of the Project Room in such a way as to offer the spectator an insight into the vision and approach emanating from the photographic work of each of the artists, developed here in greater depth or in a more experimental manner. The oldest piece being shown is "Shinjuku, 1973, 25 pm", the only film ever made by Daido Moriyama. It was shot a year after the publication of his legendary book "Sashin yo sayonara" (Bye bye Photography, 1972). What is there to say about this work, shot in 8mm and commissioned by the municipality of Tokyo's Shinjuku district, apart from the total lack of focus and the fact that from beginning to end, it reads like an aimless roaming through the streets at night, like the wandering of a stray dog? There are no points of reference, neither in space nor time, no boundaries between the figurative and the abstract. The film was turned down by the authorities and languished on the shelf for 30 years. Nevertheless, it stands as a reflection of Daido Moriyama's radical approach: flying in the face of all the rules, he deconstructs existing images, in the same way as he did in his photographic work. Moriyama never shot another film after "Shinjuku, 1973, 25 pm."

Among the Japanese photographers who have truly embraced film-making, Yasumasa Morimura stands out as a pioneer. His first work in this field was "Cometman" (1991), in which he himself features with a shaven head wandering around haphazardly in the streets of Kyoto and admiring a painting by Marcel Duchamp, to whom he dedicated this video. He pays tribute to another artist, the founder of the Factory, in "Me holding a Gun: for Andy Warhol." Morimura is known for presenting himself in the guise of chosen figures in great masterpieces of the history of art. He pursues this methodology here, albeit in a more theatrical manner.

Tomoko Sawada takes a similar approach: although she deals with more intimate issues than Morimura, she too transforms herself and is known for her highly colourful renderings of hundreds if not thousands of different characters. In "Mask" she plays on the confusion between the mask and her own face, taking the viewer clearly into the very essence of her body of work.
Another star of the young generation of Japanese photographers that came to the fore at the turn of the 21st Century, Rinko Kawauchi, started out by studying film at university. "Semear" is her first film since she rose to prominence as a photographer. The video was commissioned by the Sao Paulo Museum of Modern Art and is shot in locations throughout Brazil, but in particular in areas inhabited by communities of Japanese origin. The subtle combination of colour, sound and light confers to this work the fragile quality of a soap bubble containing the whole world.

Meanwhile, in "They're still stuck on your wall – Gifu version" Akiko Ikeda uses an apparently very simple device – diminutive earthenware aeroplanes stuck on the windows of a train – to create a humorous sensation of a "little journey" and explore the imagination as it occurs in everyday life.

By its very nature, photography as a medium is not limited to being a way of producing prints from negative film on photographic paper. Far from it. It can take a wide variety of forms: it can be printed on a page or projected onto a screen. A number of photographers have capitalized on some of the characteristics of their chosen medium and have produced films that are not "moving images", but are made up of a combination of still images. Lieko Shiga is one of Japan's most acclaimed young artists of today. Using notably images she did not include in her book "Canary," (Winner of the Ihei Kimura Prize in 2007) she has created an extremely powerful slide-show which plays on an intense alternation between dark and light. Meanwhile, Taisuke Koyama uses a digital camera to produce city scenes of tremendous graphic precision. He has put them together in "Boundary X", a slide-show made up of thousands of images projected at the head-spinning rate of one image per tenth of a second. Above and beyond the visual pleasure they procure, both works have the capacity to provide the spectator with a very intense overall sensory experience.

Other photographers reject the very principle of editing and take the risk of tackling another issue: continuity versus discontinuity of the images. Osamu Kanemura uses a video camera to take snapshots in the chaos of the city or along suburban streets. Rather like a contact sheet, in "Earth Bop Bound," he strings fragments of them together randomly in an infinite loop. This video is indicative of this artist's particular approach which looks for the "cracks" by which he can reveal the discrepancies between the world, the image and man.

Finally, in "Tokyo Bay Ban-Ban", Ryudai Takano who is known to seek out of the erotic that is at work in daily life at its most humdrum, working from fixed angles that appear to have been chosen indiscriminately, shoots a seemingly endless journey through Tokyo's streets and buildings at night. The spectator eventually realises that the din emanating from the dark recesses is in fact the sound of fireworks going off in the distance. Whether we like it or not, these explosions are reminders of the canons of war that are being fired in some part of the world. In that sense, the work of Kanemura and Takano are silent warnings to us all in our tendency to consider the images simply as a novel, easy spectacle.

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Translated from the French by Philippa Neave.

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