

PRINT SALES GALLERY
23 FEB-14 APR 2018

**THE
PHOTOGRAPHERS'
GALLERY**



**MIHO
KAJIOKA:
UNFINISHED
SPACES**

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MIHO KAJIOKA: UNFINISHED SPACES

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BK0155, 2014 © Miho Kajioka

Miho Kajioka (b.1973, Okayama, Japan) is a fine art photographer based in Kyoto. Her ethereal, minimalist work draws on the Japanese tradition of “wabi-sabi” – the appreciation of beauty in imperfection and transience, and the Zen/Taoist belief that the essence (true nature) of an object exists rather in the empty space inside and around it.

Kajioka originally studied art in Canada and the US, before returning to Japan in the late 90s where she worked as a journalist for over a decade. It was whilst reporting from the coastal city of Kamaishi, devastated by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami, that Kajioka was struck by the unexpected sight of roses blooming beside a blasted building. The contrast of such beauty and grace in the face of mass destruction was something she recognised would be impossible, even futile, to try and convey through mainstream journalism. This recognition led her back to art as a way of expressing a different kind of truth.

“What I want to introduce to people to is not what we can see or even put into words, but rather something invisible and in-between.”

Her photographic work grew out of a drawing practice, echoing photography’s literal etymology as a way of drawing with light. She still finds the process of watching images appear from the developing bath magical, in tune with her philosophy of honouring the imperfection as well as the innate essence of things. The empty spaces in her carefully exposed, toned and hand-finished silver gelatin prints are as important as the subjects that emerge from the delicate surfaces. Her aesthetic reveals the prevailing paradoxes between the factual and the unknown, the visible and the invisible, evoking a particular style of melancholic beauty and inviting the viewer to complete the picture through their own mind’s eye view.

ARTIST CV

EDUCATION

Concordia University, Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1998
San Francisco Art Institute, Department of Painting, 1995

EXHIBITIONS

- 2017 *And, where did the peacocks go?*, Corden Potts Gallery, San Francisco
- 2016 *And, where did the peacocks go?*, Galerie VU', Paris, France
Et, où les paons sont-ils allés?, Festival La Gacilly Photo, France
Grace and Ruin, SeeLevel Gallery, Amsterdam, Netherlands
And, where did the peacocks go?, Central Colombo Americano, Bogota, Colombia
- 2015 *Renaissance Photography Prize*, Getty Images Gallery, London, UK (Group)
And, did the peacocks go?, ARTBO, Bogota, Colombia (Solo)
And, where did the peacocks go?, Twenty 14 Contemporary, Milan, Italy (Solo)
UNREAL, M2 Gallery, Sydney, Australia (Group)
- 2014 *LAYERS*, Microprisma, Rome, Italy (Solo)
as it is, Fotografika galerie, Gland, Switzerland (Solo)
Balade(s) Parcours Photographique, Galerie Le Neuf, Lodève, France (Group)
Boutographies, Montpellier, France (Group)
Catching tails, Linke., Milan, (Group)
- 2013 *as it is*, Centro Italiano della Fotografia d'Autore, Bibbiena, Italy (Group)
Reality and Emotion, Valid Foto BCN Gallery, Barcelona (Group)

ACCOLADES

- 2017 '*And, where did the peacocks go?*' book shortlisted in The Experts Selection at Kassel Photobook Award 2017, Kassel, Germany
- 2016 Longlisted for Steidl Book Award Japan 2016, Tokyo, Japan
Shortlisted for LUMA Dummy Book Award Arles, Arles, France
- 2015 The runner-up for best series, Renaissance Photo Prize, London, UK
Visitor Award, Portfolio Review, Dusseldorf Photoweekend, Dusseldorf, Germany
- 2014 Finalist, 2014 Emergentes dst 2014 at Encontros da Imagem, Braga, Portugal
Finalist, 2014 Voies Off Prize, Arles, France
Finalist, 2014 Boutographies, Montpellier, France
- 2013 Finalist, 2013 Portfolio Italia, Gran Premio Epson, Bibbiena, Italy
First place, 2013 Fotoleggendo Award, Roma, Italy



Interview with Alternative Process photographer Miho Kajioka

↳ Alternative Process, ↳ Conceptual, ↳ Interviews 6 May 2015 0

I was born in 1973 in Okayama, Japan, and at 18 moved to California, where I studied at the San Francisco Art Institute. I began there as a painting major, but little by little turned to photography. I finished by fine arts degree at Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. Upon graduation, I returned to Japan and became a journalist, producing TV news and documentary programs for foreign news outlets. After a year covering the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami, I decided to go back to photography.

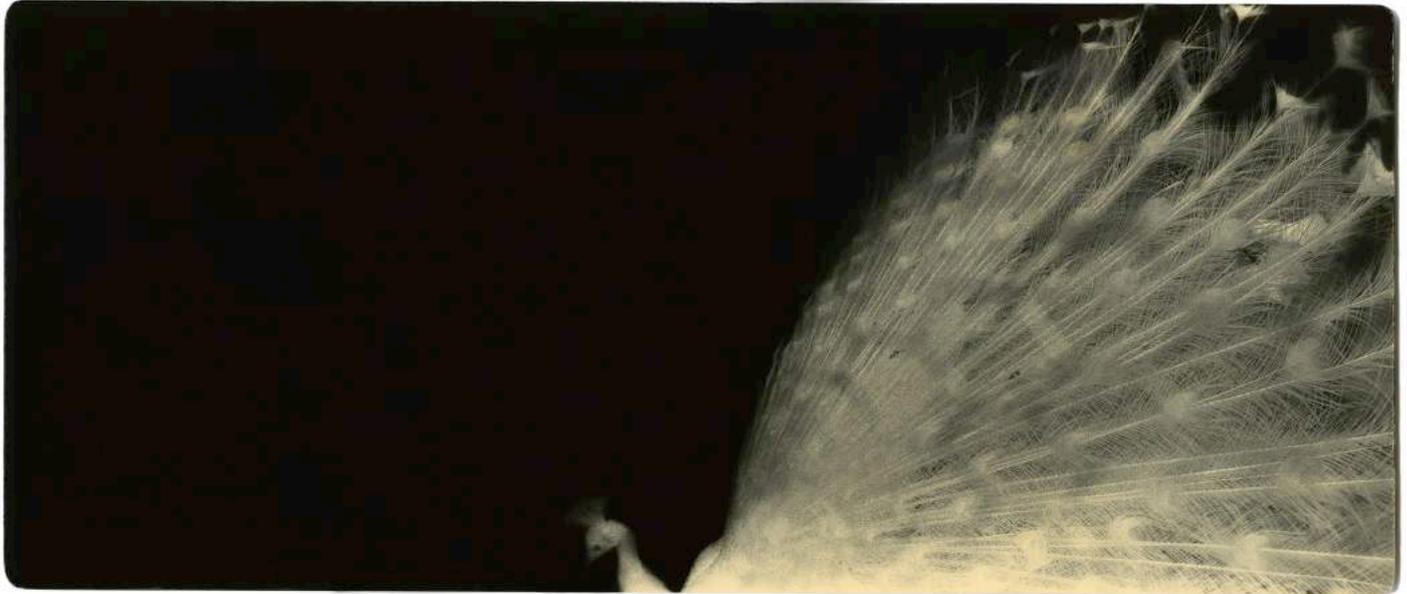
Right after the Fukushima nuclear plant accident, I found a blog about peacocks that were left in the evacuation zone, within the 20 km limit. I started imagining those peacocks, walking around the empty town with their beautiful wings spread. The image I had in my mind seemed so far away from what was going on in Fukushima. It was as if two different layers of images – the disaster scene and beautiful peacocks – were overlapping with each other without being unified.

I started to see different layers in almost everything after the disaster in 2011. The Fukushima accident had a great impact on us, and yet, most of us don't know exactly what happened, what is happening or what will happen in the future. We all have to choose the information that seems the most reliable and act accordingly. We don't even know if Japan is safe or not. Some specialists say, "There is no problem" and others say "It's seriously dangerous."

Tokyo was chosen as the host city for 2020 Olympic games. Some evacuees have started to return home and many farmers and fishermen have started to work again. Others have started to move away – towards the west – to be further from the Fukushima plants. Seasons come and go, people fall in love, kids play.

Many different layers overlap; the visible, the invisible, what we think we should see, what we know, what we feel with our five senses and sometimes our sixth. In this layered world, I started to feel pain and sorrow more vividly, but also beauty and happiness.

In my project 'Layers,' I use text to suggest other layers floating around my images, but it is not my intention to introduce a pessimistic note or romanticize tragedy. Probably the world has been always made of many different layers – even before the disaster. And there have been always problems, and beautiful things have always remained beautiful...



1. How and when did you become interested in photography?

I was born and raised in Japan. When I was 18, I moved to San Francisco to study painting at the San Francisco Art Institute. I met photography there. My first photography teacher was Ansel Adams's former assistant, but at the time, I didn't know who he was or anything about photography. Despite this, I fell in love with the medium from the moment I put paper into the developer. I don't know how many people have the same experience, but it's like magic! I've been totally mesmerised by it since then. It's also why I'm still working with gelatin silver prints. I am like a fossil, but I just love it.

2. Is there any artist/photographer who inspired your art?

Of course there are artists I love and who've inspired me: Egon Schiele, Giacometti, Mark Rothko, Giorgio de Chirico, Marcel Duchamp and Edgar Degas, for instance. However, I think the biggest inspiration for my work is Japan, and Japanese aesthetics in particular. I remember in San Francisco I had a painting teacher who dressed like a cowboy. He said to me: "You have unfinished spaces. Fill them with paint!" I replied: "There's no need. This is complete." This was the first time I realised I unconsciously had a natural sense for Japanese aesthetics, which praises the beauty of emptiness. I love Hokusai and Sengai (a Zen Buddhist monk).

Many people comment that my work looks like that of Masao Yamamoto. Of course he is a great inspiration and I love his work. He is also a close friend of mine, and is my master as well in many ways. We've known each other for more than 15 years. He often tells me: "You will get a lot of comments and criticism saying that your work seems like mine. But that is just a style and your work is very different to mine. People who really can see the heart of your work already know that."

For him, style is just a style and it can never be the central part of a person's art. He reminds me not to listen to those who are only interested in style, and to keep pursuing what I believe to be right. Then slowly but surely I know I will find my own distinct style so people won't think about his work anymore. Yamamoto told me that the only way to reach this point is by producing work, not by planning or using my head. "So keep working!"

He also says: "Your work remind people of mine, because almost no one has this kind of style except us. Many people do large colour prints but nobody says they look like Tillman's work. People love to compare work with something familiar, but don't listen to them. Because those only see the surface."

Even before I met him, my work was mainly small black and white prints so I believe this is also my style. I appreciate and try to pursue the beauty of emptiness and wabi-sabi; rustic elegance, quiet taste, refined beauty and the belief that objects gain value through use and age. What people call 'Yamamoto style', to me, can also be called 'Japanese style', which is very different from Araki or Moriyama's work.

Not only this, but I believe that the biggest reason my work reminds people of Yamamoto's is that it's not as strong or attractive enough yet. I haven't reached the point that my photography can grab people's hearts without letting them be distracted by style or anything else. I'm constantly working on this.



3. Why do you work in black and white rather than colour?

Simply because colour images don't excite me as much as black and white ones do.

4. How much preparation do you put into taking a photograph/series of photographs?

For me, taking pictures is just a preparation process. It is rather like collecting materials. I take pictures with film, develop them, make contact sheets, and then the fun part starts. Darkroom work is my favourite part of the process. I try to manipulate the image by playing with contrast, exposure, size and composition. I do dogging a lot and sometimes, I feel like dancing in front of the enlarger. Then after printing, I start toning with chemicals, and then I trim them and finish the edges. Even though my prints are small, it takes a lot of time to complete a single image.

5. Where is your photography going? What projects would you like to accomplish?

I have a lot of ideas for future projects. Since I still paint and draw, and also work as a journalist, I would like to combine those elements with my photography. I only returned to art two years ago, so I want to play with its many possibilities and try to find out which direction I want to go. •



AND, WHERE DID THE PEACOCKS GO?

Following a career in journalism and television-production, Japanese photographer Miho Kajioka (b.1973) decided to go back to fine art when a series of terrible events hit Japan in 2011: the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster caused primarily by a tsunami, following the Tohoku earthquake. She found a blog post that described peacocks that were left in the evacuation zone right after the event and she started to imagine those peacocks, walking around the empty town with their beautiful wings spread. “The image I had in my mind seemed so far away from what was going on in Fukushima,” Kajioka states. “It was as if two different layers of images – the disaster scene and beautiful peacocks – were overlapping with each other without being unified.”

Kajioka actualized her fantasy about the peacocks in a range of photographs in her series ‘And, Where Did the Peacocks Go?’. Her images, created in different sizes and tonalities, show the fragile beauty of typical Japanese objects and settings located in still, widespread areas: we see a cherry blossom tree gently reflected on the surface of a creek and geishas walking through a discoloured and faded town. The soft tones of sepia give the photographs a haunted feel, as life itself is a memory vanishing right before our eyes. Besides one image of a peacock, the dazzling birds aren’t there to be found, perhaps to imply the impact of the tragedy on the Japanese. The real protagonist in Kajioka’s series is therefore the sense of silence. But, as she says, neither as a pessimistic note or to romanticize tragedy. •

MIHO KAJIOKA'S 'AS IT IS' PHOTOGRAPHS ARE ROOTED IN JAPANESE ZEN BUDDHISM

[ART REVIEWS](#) · SEPTEMBER 22, 2014

Miho Kajioka's photographs from 'As It Is' represent all that is sublimely beautiful about Japanese aesthetics; simple, beautiful, profound and silent. Rooted in a tradition of Zen Buddhism and a spiritual connection to nature and the wholeness of the Universe.

These pictures are rooted in death, destruction and natural disaster – in particular the earthquake and Tsunami that hit Japan in 2011 – but they speak of something else, of the fatalism that accompanies us on our journey through life's mystery. It is as it is. Nothing can change the inevitability. Yet what remains true is that out of great pain comes beauty. That the cycle of life goes on, that the roses will blossom in the Spring, the birds will sing in the Summer, the leaves will fall in the Autumn and the snow will fall in the Winter. It is this singular thread that weaves its way through these quiet images. Pictures that seek to capture the fleetingness of life and the fragile beauty of every moment as we pass through it.

What's important to understand when looking at these photographs is that it took a natural disaster to bring Kajioka back to photography. Previous to this she was working as a journalist but, while reporting from the coastal city of Kamaishi, where over 800 people died, she found roses blooming beside a blasted building. This image, a mixture of grace and ruin, reminded her of a 13th Century poem by Dōgen Zenji, a Japanese Zen Buddhist teacher who wrote the following:

In the spring, cherry blossoms,
In the summer the cuckoo,
In autumn the moon, and in
Winter the snow, clear, cold.

This articulate, beautiful poem gave Kajioka the strength to begin making pictures again. 'As It Is' is the culmination of this search for meaning amongst the debris of her beloved Japan. Here's what she has to say about her work:

PRESS

MUTANT SPACE, 2014

mutantspace

The photos I am presenting here, “as it is,” span my adulthood, including pictures I took while living abroad, as well as scenes I captured in Japan after the disaster. I snapped the horizontal shot of a girl walking along the sea in Fukushima, 60 km from the nuclear plant, a year after the accident. The two almost indistinguishable photographs of a girl swinging were taken within seconds of each other, and together they show the passage of time. The little pictures of a flower, or a running boy, are scenes from daily life, as it is.

These fragments of my life, from various periods and against changing backdrops, are not so different from each other, and the differences that remain aren't important. Happiness, sadness, beauty and tragedy only exist in our minds. Things are just as they are. •

