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TOKYO COLOR DAIDO MORIYAMA

By Scott Norton and Luhring Augustine Bushwick, October 8, 2017



For the past half century, renowned Japanese photographer Daido Moriyama has been capturing eerie visions of ephemeral moments, caught in grainy, saturated images that form a kaleidoscope of the modern urban environment that is Tokyo. In “Tokyo Color” at Brooklyn’s Luhring Augustine Bushwick gallery, works from Moriyama’s prolific career—with early images primarily from the 1970s, to more recent photographs taken in the past few years up to 2017—were on display. Even those that are now decades old still seem fresh, provocative and daring for their ability to pierce through the veil of privacy. For all their ephemerality, these photographs appear timeless as a distillation of the urban experience.

Moriyama got his start as a photographer in the late 1950s and early 1960s, first with Takeji Iwamiya, who is well-known for his images of architecture and Japanese gardens, and then with famed photographer and filmmaker Eikoh Hosoe. During this time, Moriyama’s work was highly influenced by his peers, including Shōmei Tōmatsu and Seiryū Inoue, both of whom captured images of Japanese society as it wrestled with rapid modernization following the crippling economic

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depression that was a consequence of the Second World War. Moriyama also looked to Western artists, including Andy Warhol and William Klein. In particular, Warhol's impact on Moriyama was profound, not only in how it shaped his views of the materiality of modern manufacturing, but also in terms of the compositions of his images—their narratives would never dominate; instead, their contents wander aimlessly. Moriyama's remarkable gaze is central to the images in "Tokyo Color," treating shop window mannequins, an empty street, a face of a woman and a slab of Cryovaced meat with introspection and voyeurism.

Some of Moriyama's images from the 1990s were set in large grids of four or nine or 24 photographs that lined three walls within Luhring Augustine Bushwick. Brought together by the nature of their content alone, the concepts behind some arrangements were tenuous. While one can make sense of how a collection of photos showing people with their backs turned to the viewer or a series of heads, both real and fake, come together on a superficial level, one wonders how flowers, a kimono and a plastic airbrushed unicorn piece are linked. Viewers are left asking whether we should take in these images as a unit, or as singular, separate entries. However, by applying that line of query to Tokyo—or any metropolis—we explore another question: Is the city a collection of random, distinct singularities, or do we share a unified experience?

Perhaps it is as how the late feminist and urban scholar Iris Marion Young noted in her essay "City Life as a Normative Ideal" (1990) that within a city, "groups do not stand in relations of inclusions and exclusion, but overlap and intermingle without becoming homogeneous." In this sense, the series of Moriyama's color images reflects his encounters with individualism in the city, specifically people's attempts to viciously guard their sense of self and private space even as they carry it with them into the public sphere. Taken in conjunction with Moriyama's monochromatic "Tights" series (1987–2017), which was strung across the fourth wall of the gallery, these images of the city still seem to be the central and inescapable feature. Capturing close-up images of the undulating flesh and folds of a woman's legs in black fishnet stockings, even within the proximity and abstraction captured in these photographs, the chance of a new discovery in an unfamiliar place is present.

Daido Moriyama's "Tokyo Color" is on view at Luhring Augustine Bushwick, New York, until October 22, 2017.