

TOKYO

Daido Moriyama

TAKA ISHII GALLERY

Digitization has brought big changes to the memory industry. One is the demise of analog photography with instant self-developing film, aka the Polaroid camera. The Polaroid Corporation discontinued the production of its film in 2008 (Fujifilm continues its line of instant-photo systems). Among those mourning the anticipated disappearance of the medium is Daido Moriyama. "For more than half a century, Polaroid enabled the dream for instantly visible pictures to become reality," he writes. "I have to write this in the past tense because Polaroid ended the production of instant films this summer. So I thought about holding an exhibition of Polaroids to say goodbye to the medium personally." The exhibition, "bye-bye polaroid," included 504 images taken in Tokyo between April and October of 2008. It coincided with a series of shows of the artist's work at venues around

Tokyo: a two-person show at the Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo and solo shows at Ring Cube and Rat Hole Gallery, preceded by one at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

Since the 1960s, Moriyama has been well known for his dramatic black-and-whites, characterized as "*a-re, bo-ke, bu-re*"—which can be translated as "grainy, out-of-focus, blurry," a formal challenge to photographic convention. If August Sander's *Neue Sachlichkeit* pictures represent a dark yet sober vision of the maddening time between the wars, Moriyama's vision is an ominous and opaque delusion from the shady reality in the aftermath of Japanese defeat. Although compact in size and chemically toned, his Polaroids have no less impact.

As an artist born and raised outside the capital, Moriyama has long been fascinated with Tokyo's modern designs and glittering attractions. An ambitious blend of cultural sophistication and dank desires is tenaciously documented and recorded on the foggy surfaces of the Polaroids. In this set, every facet of Tokyo's streets—run-down cabarets, fashion houses, signboards, flowers—is portrayed with saturated decadence and eroticism; even the dai-kon radishes in a grocery store seem charged with sexual connotations. The captured moments seem at once densely nostalgic and helpless, like recollections of an adolescent nightmare. The winding streets with rusty fences and discolored awnings gesture toward the postwar poverty and loss of Moriyama's childhood.

The tilted view of a street with a local pub and two deserted lounge stools next to stray cats' paths or the shot of a plaster cast of a Greek goddess wearing a floral scarf inside a store window are only two examples of the piercing images that draw us into a parallel world—not Tokyo itself but the shadow that it casts, constantly receding into the past. "Most of what I want simply flows away like water slipping through a net," Moriyama has said, "and always what remains are only vague, elusive fragments of images . . . that sink into countless strata in my mind." Apparently, the frustrated and insatiate fantasy of possessing and dominating whatever he perceives still haunts the artist.

Daido Moriyama,  
*bye-bye polaroid*, 2008,  
Polaroid, 4 x 4".



—Shinyoung Chung