

Daido Moriyama

(Ikeda, Japan, 1938)

Among the most intense and original voices of contemporary Japanese photography, Daido Moriyama wanders the world with the spirit of a stray dog. The origins, as stated many times, of his real name Hiromichi, which means 'wide road', already seem to contain a foretaste of his destiny: firstly travelling from one city to the next following his father, an employee in an insurance company, and then alone, his camera around his neck, driven by the urgency to capture the moment that passes before his eyes. The Japan in which he grew up was marked by transformations as sudden as they were profound: after WWII, the country was urbanised, consumption increased and the presence of American troops led to new cultural influences which began to undermine the strict values of tradition. At the start of the 1960s, after his early experiences gained alongside various masters of photography, Moriyama moved to Tokyo to join an independent collective of young artists driven by the desire to break away from the given rules in order to develop a fresh and original style, one never seen before. This was a period of travel, experimentation and reading. Moriyama got to know the works of Warhol and the photographs of William Klein; he read the poets of the Beat Generation and Kerouac's *On the Road*. He too set off on a journey without a destination, hitching along the roads of Japan, ready to point his lens at anything that captured his attention.

1968 proved to be a turning point: indeed, he published his first book, *Nippon Gekijo Shashincho*, in which the photographs of an American military base, those of fetuses preserved in formalin in a hospital and those shot while following an experimental theatre company follow on from one another without a coherent narrative structure. He also joined *Provoke*, an avant-garde magazine which gave space to coarse and scandalous images such as those of *Eros*, the series put together inside a hotel room where he spent the night together with a woman. A new idea of photography emerged which rejected the beauty of the composition in favour of rapid visual haikus capable of capturing the unrepeatable experience of a moment. Without any more consideration for technical perfection, Moriyama produced grainy black-and-white images, often jolted, out of focus, with chance framings, wrong exposures and strong contrasts. What he was interested in were the contradictions of mass society, the frenetic rhythms of the new metropolises, the vices and freedom of the night, the thrills of his erratic life: elements which he captured without judgment or aesthetic mediation. In 1972, another major volume was published – *Kariudo* – which for the first time includes the photo of a stray dog, warily peering into his lens. Among the best known of his entire production, over the years and with the achievement of international fame, the image has become the allegorical self-portrait which fully reveals Moriyama's wandering nature, his furtive but forever curious outlook.

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