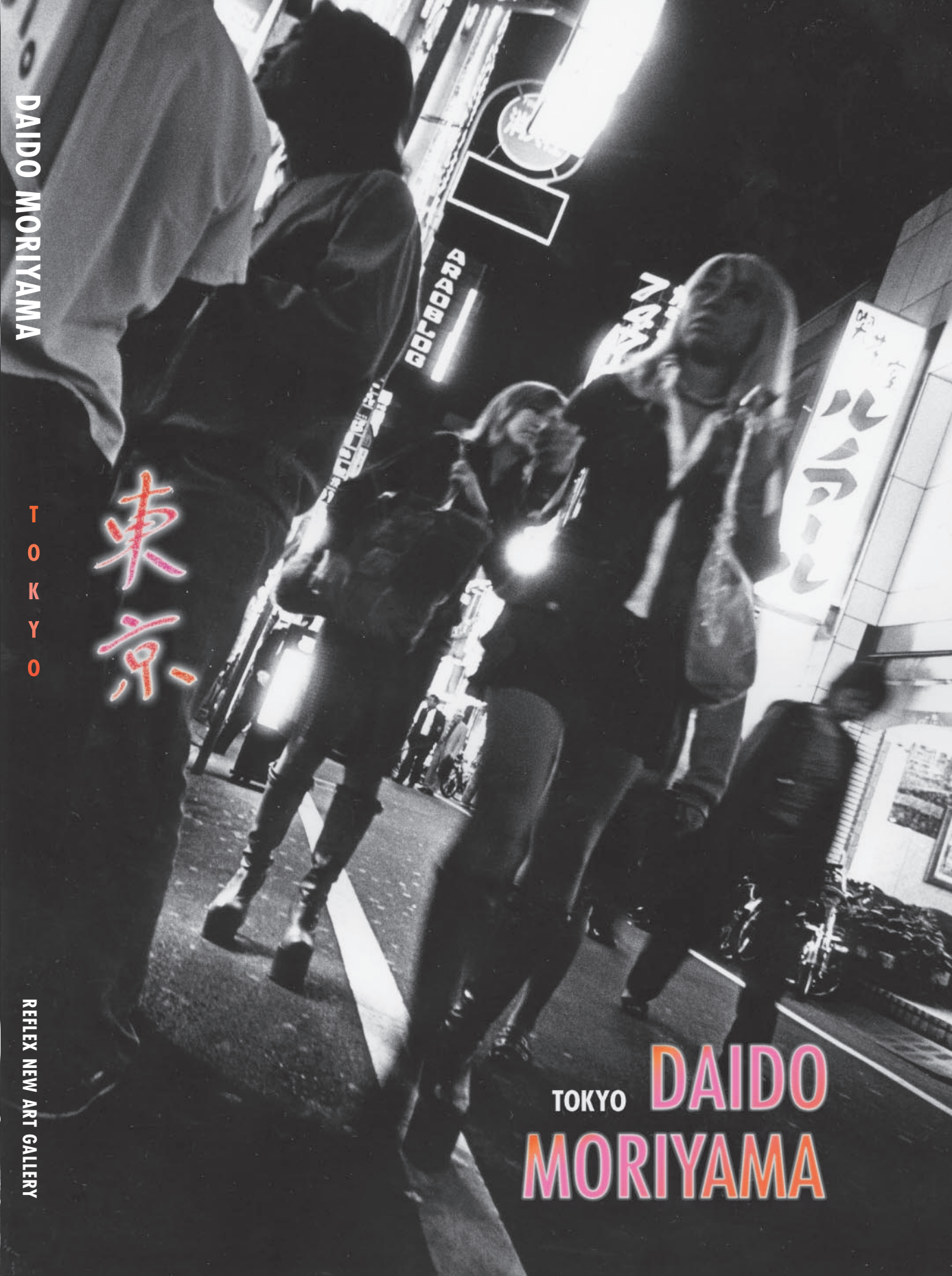




DAIDO MORIYAMA

T O K Y O

REFLEX NEW ART GALLERY



TOKYO **DAIDO**  
**MORIYAMA**



# DAIDO MORIYAMA

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A piece of calligraphy in black ink on a white background. The top part features the Japanese characters '森田大道' (Moriyama Daigo) in a bold, expressive style. Below this, the name 'Daigo' is written in a cursive, handwritten English script. A long, horizontal brushstroke extends from the end of the 'Daigo' signature.

## Tokyo Drifter

The city? An urban melting pot filled with contradictions - hissing, chaotic and vibrant, fully submerged in an everlasting process of change, metamorphoses and transformation. Faces unexpectedly pop up to disappear again in a crowd that is always on the move. Turmoil, vitality, disorder and potency are the city's hallmarks. The fascination of vibrant city life with all its extremes has not left photography untouched. The history of photography is leavened with city life. The list of photographers who have drawn on it as an inspirational source and natural habitat is unending and still expanding. Since the beginning of last century New York ranked as the archetypical metropolis where the whole world was compounded into an exciting, explosive mixture. To many the term 'street photography' was, and possibly still is, synonymous with New York. But competitors came to the rise quickly. And one of them is called Tokyo.

Talking about Tokyo and photography it is impossible not to think immediately of Daigo Moriyama, one of Japan's major photographers with a great influence on the development of contemporary photography. Born in the port city of Osaka in 1938, Moriyama turned to photography at the age of twenty-one and moved to Tokyo to work with the eminent photographer Eikoh Hosoe. Some years later, in 1963, he starts working as a freelance photographer. Moriyama sets of to produce an immense oeuvre that continues to grow up to the present day.

The 1960s constituted a crucial decade in Japan's recent history. It was the era when the world began to move on from the war, and when the first post-war generation of artists made its initial impact by focusing on the contradictions within Japanese society. They started to provoke a society that lived a period of unprecedented economic growth while at the same time suffered a deeply rooted residue of guilt, shame and anger. Moriyama was one of the young artists who stepped to the front by joining the influential quarterly magazine PROVOKE from the second issue.

Japanese artistic production in these days was strongly affected by the American occupation and its conflicting messages of democracy and control, of peaceful coexistence, and of the strong American presence in Asia during the Vietnam War. Ironically, it took an American to give Japanese photography the more radical form to best render the fragmented realities of Japanese ambivalent attitude towards the outside world. The raw, visceral style of William Klein's New York struck an instant chord, especially with Moriyama. The energy and modernity Moriyama found in the emotional, even hostile pictures Klein took of his native New York intrigued the young Japanese photographer. Within a few years Klein's gritty, intuitive style had not only been absorbed by him, but taken to an extreme.

Moriyama's pictures are mostly taken in the streets of Japan's major cities. Made with a small, hand-held camera, they reveal the speed with which they were snapped. Often the frame is tilted vertiginously, the grain pronounced, and the contrast emphasized. Among his city images are those shot in underlit bars, strip clubs, on the streets or in alleyways, with the movement of the subject creating a blurred suggestion of form rather than a distinctive figure. His imagery is raw and often focuses on details that lack context constituting a feeling of fragmentation and suffocation.

Another major influence came from Andy Warhol. Around 1967 Moriyama obtained a catalogue of an Andy Warhol exhibition and became strongly interested in concepts and the perception of a voyeuristic media culture in Warhol's work. Also the concept of constantly recycling and re-interpreting existing imagery was appealing to him. For his work is far from permanent. As Patrick Remy states in the recently published book *Remix*: 'Moriyama endlessly plunges into his contact prints, tirelessly reprints his images, re-centres them, prints them horizontally or vertically to achieve the desired format at the time, an image can exist in black and white and in colour, enough to make to lose yourself in the maelstrom of his photos.' Also his most known picture, *Stray Dog* (1971), appears in different forms and prints.

The mysterious half-tone street shot shows a large black canine, piercing eyes and dropped lower jaw, seemingly reading to defend its turf. The dog is clearly taken on the run, in the midst of bustling, lively street activity. The representation of the alert, wandering, solitary, but ultimately mysterious animal is a powerful expression of the vital outsider. It is an essential reflection of Moriyama's own presence as an alert outsider in his own culture.

In the early 1980s, Moriyama's work moved away from the ambiguity and graininess of his earlier photographs towards a bleaker, more distinct vision. Greater detail and less roughness can be found in his snapshots of recent years. As if light and air finally penetrate his imagery, for example through the use of a wider angle. Nonetheless, the images he captures often show people and everyday things in a manner not to be found in the average Tokyo tourist guidebook. The people of Moriyama's work are often faceless, covered in shadow or obscured by blur. It is not unusual for a backside — a couple descending stairs, for example — to be the image's main element. His lens, frequently slanted at random angles, doesn't shy away from typically bits of urban cityscape. Building exteriors are shot in all their drabness. Webs of utility lines and mesh fencing are often in view. A storm drain can be the focus of a shot.

For Moriyama the city represents his natural habitat and ultimate playground: the specific rhythm of the traffic, the tangible dynamic, the energy, and the infinite variety of people who endlessly stream over the side walks are hard to resist. In order to capture these specific qualities in a single image Moriyama has to be constantly alert and respond intuitively to a complex, ever-changing environment. This focus on the moment and the uncontrollability of the image that presents itself to the camera means that this form of photography has often been likened to hunting. Moriyama stalks the street like a hunter, at ease but fully alert, tracking down images. His decision when to press the shutter is taken in a split second, an instant dictated by experience, intuition and luck. Hiromi Kitazawa, curator and critic, writes in an article for *Foam Magazine* on a recently

joint project with fellow photographer Nobuyoshi Araki: 'Moriyama takes pictures like a skilful sniper, a 'hunter of light'. Everything is over in just a few seconds. He is relaxed but never wastes motion. He passes through the streets like the wind, leaving nothing behind but an elusive sense of presence.'

Many of Moriyama's images, especially the selection of recently made works presented in this catalogue published with his show in the Reflex New Art Gallery in Amsterdam, imply action of some kind has happened or is about to happen - even if that is truly not the case. The feeling is that of drifting in and out of a scene: a hostess draws a cigarette from her pack as two of her colleagues watch for customers near their club's brightly lit entryway; a woman moving through a crowded street scene casts a glance over her right shoulder, the upper half of her bare backside showing a few tattoos with the rest obscured by shadow.

During his four-decade career Moriyama has produced dozens of photo books, many of them considered an instant classic. Although Moriyama's works is well known in Japan, it is only during the last decade or so that his photography has been regularly and completely (if possible) exhibited outside Japan. Finally his work receives the full attention it so richly deserves. In 1999 the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art organized a major exhibition that featured nearly two-hundred black-and-white images and a major Polaroid piece that travelled to other North American and European venues. Since then his work featured in numerous group shows. Recent solo exhibitions were held in the White Cube Gallery in London and the Foundation Cartier in Paris. In 2003 Daido Moriyama Complete Works vol.1 was published, an impressive white book that looks like a telephone book of an average contemporary metropolis. In 2003 three evenly impressive volumes followed. At that time his complete works listed 5.758 references. The moment you read this the number will probably exceed 6.000. 'My work is endless,' Moriyama says, 'As long as the world exists, I want to take snapshots.'

Marcel Feil - Curator Foam\_Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam

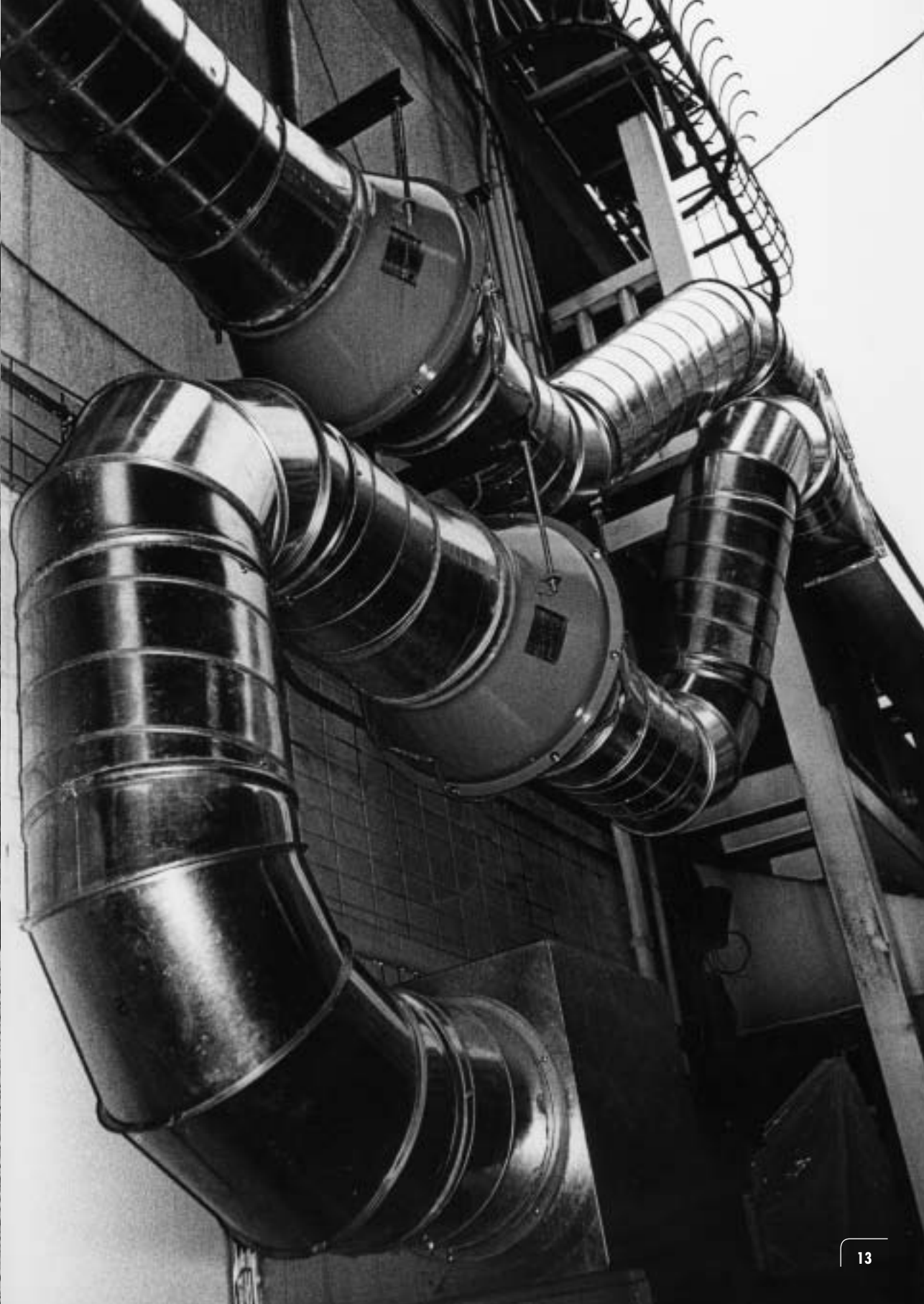










































































































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## COLOFON

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