



FIFTY ONE

TOMOSU

YAMAMOTO MASAO

09/09/2023 - 28/10/2023

Opening:

Saturday, September 9th, 2-6 pm

Gallery FIFTY ONE

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By Yamamoto Masao

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Gallery FIFTY ONE is pleased to present the fourth solo exhibition of Japanese photographer Yamamoto Masao (°1957). In 'Tomosu' the artist shows new work, including a selection of photographs created using the nineteenth century Ambrotype process. The title of the exhibition is Japanese for 'to illuminate, to turn on a small light in the darkness'.

"I photograph small and beautiful things that I encounter in my daily life. I would be happy if my photographs reach you and become a small light in your heart."

Yamamoto's oeuvre has undeniably evolved over the past decade. He became known for his small prints - delicate objects that fit in the palm of one's hand or wallet so they could be carried around like a talisman - but in recent years his photographs have undergone an increase in scale. Whereas in earlier exhibitions his prints were mounted directly on the wall in meandering constellations in which each image was part of a larger story, the works are now more self-contained and the physical relation between the viewer and the photographic object has somewhat shifted to the background. However, the basic thought of Yamamoto's artistic vision - the connection with nature and the attention to the subtle things that surround us and tell us more about elements of the universe that are invisible to us - have remained the same.

Yamamoto lives in the Province of Yamanashi, west of Tokyo, in a house surrounded by forests and mountains. For him, beauty and happiness derive from living in harmony with nature. In his photographs the artist invites the viewer to direct the gaze to the small things that can be found in wild nature, from which humanity is largely estranged. Human beings who, moreover, make up only a minimal part of the universe, insignificant in the face of the constant ebb and flow of time. Yamamoto translates this philosophy into his work by giving his prints an aura of timelessness. Through experiments in the dark room, but also by bathing his prints in tea and tearing, creasing and scratching their edges, he deliberately gives his photographs an old, faded look, as if they were memories from times long past. These manual interventions - as well as colouring the edges and the subtle application of paint splashes with which Yamamoto, trained as a painter, explores the boundaries between photography and painting - make each print unique.

The new work presented in 'Tomosu' follows Yamamoto's characteristic sober visual language by which he tries to evoke a wide range of emotions through mere suggestion. We see dreamlike, nostalgic and pure images of landscapes, birds, still lives, portraits and naked women. But what we're really looking at is often hard to define. Are these photographs of animals in the wild, or are we looking at stuffed specimens captured in the studio? Yamamoto likes to keep it mysterious and refuses to give an explicit explanation. The primary goal of his images is experiencing, more than understanding, and one is free to form their own interpretation.

Finally, in this exhibition Yamamoto will show a selection of Ambrotypes for the first time ever. In this process - introduced in the 1850s - a glass plate is coated with a thin layer of collodion and then dipped in a solution of silver nitrate before being mounted in a large format camera. The exposure and development of the glass plate must then be done before the plate is dry. The result is a negative that can either be printed by means of a contact print, or - as is the case in this exhibition - can be shown as a positive by presenting the original glass plate against a background of black paper or velvet. Typical of this 'wet' photographic process are the visible traces left on the final image as a result of pouring the liquid collodion and developer onto the plate. It is this element of unpredictability and chance that attracts Yamamoto to the Ambrotype process, as well as the sense of traveling back in time to the origins of photography.

About the artist:

Masao Yamamoto was born in 1957 in Gamagori, Japan and started photographing when he was 16 years old. After studying plastic arts and painting, he decided in the 1980s to focus exclusively on photography. His oeuvre is praised among an international audience, with solo exhibitions at institutions such as the Kiyosato Museum of Photographic Arts in Yamanashi (2019), the Alfred Ehrhardt Stiftung in Berlin (2018), the Museo Oscar Niemeyer in Brazil (2017), the Schloss Bonndorf in Germany (2017), the Centoro Nimeyer in Avilés (2016), the Forum für Fotografie in Cologne (2009) and The Print Center in Philadelphia (2008) and group shows in the FOMU in Antwerp (2015), la Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris (2017) and the George Eastman Museum in New York (2006). His work is included in prominent collections such as the Philadelphia Museum of Art, The National Gallery of Canada, The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, The International Center of Photography (ICP) in New York, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Sir Elton John Collection, la Maison Européenne de la Photographie in Paris and La Fondation d'entreprise Hermès in Paris. Monographs include a.o. 'Kurayami' (Ikki Books, 2023), 'Sasanami' (Ikki Books, 2020), 'Tori' (Radius Books, 2016), 'Fujsan' (Nazraeli Press, 2008), 'é' (Nazraeli Press, 2005), 'Omizuo' (Nazraeli Press, 2003), 'Nakazora' (Nazraeli Press, 2001) and 'A Box of Ku' (Nazraeli Press, 1998).

