

TOP MUSEUM

東京都写真美術館
TOKYO PHOTOGRAPHIC ART MUSEUM

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Jun. 16, 2023

Motohashi Seiichi & Robert Doisneau Chemins Croisés

Jun. 16 - Sep. 24, 2023

2F Exhibition Gallery



Motohashi Seiichi, *Haboro Coal Mine Haboro, Hokkaido* from *The Coral Mine*, 1968 ©Motohashi Seiichi



Robert Doisneau, "Four Hairpins, Saint-Sauvant," 1951 ©Atelier Robert Doisneau / Contact

This exhibition features Motohashi Seiichi (1940–), Japanese photographer and documentary filmmaker, and Robert Doisneau (1912–1994), one of France's most celebrated photographers whom Motohashi admires. While tracing their paths, the exhibition will present the gaze of the two photographers who resonate with each other beyond time and region. Born in Tokyo, Motohashi has documented the society in turmoil and the people living there through photography and film for over fifty years. On the other hand, Doisneau had always captured with his sense of humour the joy around him, using Paris and its suburbs, where he was born, as the backdrop. Although the two photographers were born in different times and places, they have coincidentally made outstanding reportages on the same subjects, such as coal mines, circuses, and markets. Having experienced the turmoil caused by World War II, they both captured the strength and richness they found in the humble but hardworking lives of people, along with the scenes that are slowly disappearing.

This exhibition, organised in special collaboration with Atelier Robert Doisneau and Pole Pole Times, features a diverse selection of Motohashi's work from his over fifty-year career and a fine selection from Doisneau's more than 450,000 photographs, including previously unpublished works and the collection of Tokyo Photographic Art Museum. This exhibition is also a result of an encounter between a similar idea from Clémentine Deroudille, Doisneau's granddaughter, Motohashi as the exhibiting artist, and the museum's program.

In today's world of neverending confrontation and conflict, we hope this exhibition will provide an opportunity for us to reflect on the richness of life through the passages created by the two photographers, as they have engaged with reality and society with their kindness, sense of humour, and gaze born out of their boundless love and curiosity towards humanity.

Works

Total: 241 works

Motohashi Seiichi 130 works, Robert Doisneau 111 works

Chapter

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- 2 | The Theatre and in Between the Acts
- 3 | Streets, Theatres, and Plazas
- 4 | Narratives of the People
- 5 | Towards a New Narrative

Chapter1 | The Origin

Since the 1930s, Robert Doisneau started to walk around the suburbs of Paris to take photographs. The suburbs then differed entirely from the glamorous Paris. In 1934, as an industrial photographer for the automobile company Renault, Doisneau discovered the dignity of labour and the pride of the sweating workers, forming a sense of camaraderie. In 1945, J magazine commissioned him to visit Lens, a city in northern France, to make a photo reportage on the unbearable working conditions of the miners.

Motohashi Seiichi, on the other hand, was working on his graduation project at the photography school and began photographing people in the coal mines after visiting the reportage writer Ueno Eishin for the first time



Motohashi,

beware of the gang at the bar counter!

These people are dangerous.

They got me through and through.

— Robert Doisneau June 1991

François Caradec & Robert Doisneau

La Compagnie des ZinCs, Seghers, 1991

in 1965. Since then, Motohashi began eating and sleeping together with the unemployed coal miners and their families — who were tossed about in the turmoil of society during the decline of coal mining — to share their experiences and capture their lives more directly, showing us their reality of working next to death and the sentiments of the family.

In their beginnings, both photographers saw the pride and brilliance in the hard-working workers who lived modestly but diligently to survive in the vortex of society. Rather than criticising the cruel realities of society, they captured the people’s dignity while remaining close to the lives and spirits of those who lived there.



Haboro Coal Mine, Haboro, Hokkaido, from 'The Coal Mine', 1968 ©Motohashi Seiichi

Mine in St. Michel, Lorriane, 1960 ©Atelier Robert Doisneau / Contact

Chapter 2 | The Theatre and in Between the Acts

Robert Doisneau’s worldview has been described by some as the “Doisneau’s little theatre” because of his extraordinary insight into the unexpected joy of walking around Paris, but for him, travelling carnivals and circuses were the ideal stage on which he could expand his imagination by seeing and experiencing them as a spectator himself. With its mix of rides, attractions, movement, light, music, and various elements, the theatre was rich in scenarios, and the audience became actors in Doisneau’s work.

Motohashi began photographing popular performing arts in 1972 for actor Ozawa Shoichi’s serialisation *Shokoku Geino Tabi Kaban* in the *Taiyo* magazine (and from 1975 for the quarterly magazine *Geino Tozai* [Performance East and West], published by Ozawa). In the 1970s, when the scenery of towns and villages changed every day, the “useless” time and places disappeared as the whole country became cleaner and more convenient during this period of rapid economic growth. There is such a kind of “blank space” in Motohashi’s works, and each individual’s narrative is born from these blank spaces.

Doisneau saw Paris as a theatre, while Motohashi considered Ueno Station and Tsukiji Market a plaza. The circus and the performing arts they took were ideal motifs filled with elements that transformed the scenes of their time into theatres and plazas.



*Kinoshita Circus Futako Tamagawa-en,
Tokyo, 1980 ©Motohashi Seiichi*

*The Amar Circus, Bayonne, 1951. 8
©Atelier Robert Doisneau / Contact*

Chapter 3 | Streets, Theatres, and Plazas

Doisneau met poets Jacques Prévert and others, and he worked with them to create a playful “Doisneau’s little theatre”. Against the backdrop of the Parisian landscape and society, people who live in the city and the workers who support the food culture became actors in his works. He must have understood that Paris is composed of intertwined layers of actors, and the accumulation of their individual lives is the driving force behind the vitality and energy of the city, which is why he could not help but long for this city.

After the Bombing of Tokyo in 1945, Motohashi, who was five, found the Shinjuku Station underpass — a place he passed through when he evacuated to his grandmother’s house — an open space like a plaza where everyone could gather. In 1980 when he began photographing Ueno Station and Tsukiji Market, he also found comfort in the plaza-like place and was strongly attracted to the stories that unfolded there. For Motohashi, places he feels delightful to be in are always bustling with people and things that coexist despite their differences while the narratives of families and communities unfold.

Doisneau was trying to capture the narratives of the people by viewing the city with an accumulation of people living together as a theatre; Motohashi attempted to do so by considering the space where a diversity of people coexist as a plaza. Both photographers were fascinated by the energy of people’s activities in the disappearing scenes of Les Halles market and Tsukiji market.



Tsukiji Market, Tokyo, 1984 ©Motohashi Seiichi

“Music-Loving Butchers, Paris”, 1953 ©Atelier Robert Doisneau / Contact

Chapter 4 | Narratives of the People

In the 1950s, Robert Doisneau photographed the Roma people in the outskirts of Paris and a wedding in the village of Saint-Sauvant. The Motillons, the bride's family at the wedding, were the family who received Robert Doisneau and his family when they evacuated to escape from the German invasion during World War II. In 1951, after the war ended, Doisneau visited Saint-Sauvant for the first time in several years upon receiving the news that their daughter Annie was getting married. Although these are family photographs of the Doisneaus and Motillons, we can also experience the joy of their special day full of happiness.

In 1986, the then-largest explosion in the history of nuclear power plant development occurred at the No. 4 reactor of the Chornobyl Nuclear Power Plant in the former Soviet Republic of Ukraine. With tragic news flooding since the accident, Motohashi Seiichi struggled with what he could do. However, as he walked through the contaminated area his perspective shifted from “the land of nuclear power” to “the land of life”. His works gently tell us about the stories of the people who live with nature and the importance of the bounty of the earth.

The two photographers remind us of how enriching the experience of gathering, looking and feeling the small pieces of happiness surrounding us can be.



Kholoch'ye Village, Chechersk, Belarus,

1993 ©Motohashi Seiichi

“Four Hairpins, Saint-Sauvant”

1951 ©Atelier Robert Doisneau / Contact

Chapter 5 | Towards a New Narrative

Robert Doisneau and cellist Maurice Baquet were lifelong friends; Throughout the years, they created many humorous collaborations. In his later years, Doisneau also participated in the DATAR [the then French Industrial Development Board] project* to photograph the Paris suburbs, where he was born and raised. Most of his photographs for this project were in colour. Doisneau created a new narrative by focusing on the architecture's geometric composition; instead of melancholy, he infused humour, satire, pathos, and irony.

Motohashi's photographs of the fisherman Itokazu Shigeru and his wife on Yonaguni Island, Okinawa, and the people who live in Maki Kyodo Gakusha in Otari Village, Nagano Prefecture, tell us about the narratives of families. Everyone has their own sense of time there, but they share the same community as a family. In this works, his experience of living an ordinary life with his family overlaps with the people's lives at Maki Kyodo Gakusha.

While Doisneau's narratives are about the charm of Paris and its suburbs and the humour and energy of their people, Motohashi's narratives are about the preciousness of people from different backgrounds who coexist as a family and a community. They gently show us the happiness hidden in the presence of the people and sceneries, no matter their era or region.

*DATAR organised a large-scale project to photograph and document the landscapes of France; In 1984, they sent some photographers to various regions of the country, and Doisneau was one of them.



From *Family Album*, 1994 ©Motohashi Seiichi

Grigny la Grande Borne, 1984 ©Atelier Robert Doisneau / Contact

About the artists

Motohashi Seiichi | 1940-

Born 1940 in Tokyo. Motohashi was awarded the Taiyo Prize in 1968 for his series Yama (The Coal Mine), after which he would spend his days in and document such settings as the circus, Ueno Station, and Tsukiji Fish Market. In 1998 he received the Domon Ken Award for Nadya's Village, one of several works chronicling the aftermath of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster; and in 2017, the Higashikawa Award for his solo exhibition Sense of Place (Izu Photo Museum, 2016). His documentary films include Alexei and the Spring" (2002), A Thousand-Year Song of Baobab (2009), and Take Your Time Arayashiki (2015), his filmmaking recognized with the Berliner Zeitung Readers' Prize and the International Cine Club Prize at the Berlin International Film Festival, and Best Film at the Saint Petersburg International Film Festival. Recent releases: Belarus Revisited 2017 (2018) and Ningen no yogoshita tochi darou, doko e ike to iu no ka (2021).

Robert Doisneau | 1912-1994

Born 1912 in the suburban Paris commune of Gently, Doisneau studied lithography at the École Estienne, later becoming an assistant to the photographer André Vigneau. After working as a photographer for the automobile manufacturer Renault, he launched his practice as a freelance photographer in 1939. Lauded in particular for his images capturing everyday life in Paris, he was featured in the 1951 exhibition *Five French Photographers*, along with Henri Cartier-Bresson and Brassai, held at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Among his many awards are the Niépce Prix (1956) and Grand Prix National de la Photographie (1983). He passed away in 1994 at the age of 82. His recent exhibitions of his work include *Robert Doisneau / La Musique / Paris* (Bunkamura The Museum, 2021).

Catalog

Motohashi Seiichi & Robert Doisneau Chemins Croisés

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Outline

Title | Motohashi Seiichi & Robert Doisneau *Chemins Croisés*

Date | Jun. 2 – Sep. 24, 2023

Venue | Tokyo Photographic Art Museum 2F Exhibition Gallery

Closed | Mondays (Except when Monday falls on a holiday, in which case the museum is open and closed the following day)

Open Hours | 10:00–18:00 (20:00 on Thursdays and Fridays). Last entry 30 minutes before closing.

Admission | Adults ¥ 800 / College Students ¥ 650 / High School and Junior High School Students, Over 65 ¥ 400.

* Admission is free for grade school children or younger; junior high school students living or attending schools in the Tokyo metropolitan area, holders of Japan's disability identification cards (shogaisha techo) together with two caregivers, and holders of the museum's annual passport.

* **The schedule is subject to change. Any further changes will be announced.**

Curated by Yamada Yuri (Curator, Tokyo Photographic Art Museum)

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For Press

If you have any press enquiries about this Exhibition, please contact our Department of Public Relations.

High-resolution images for publication are also available by e-mail. press-info@topmuseum.jp

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