

PROVOKE

Between Protest and Performance
Photography in Japan 1960 – 1975

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Press conference	28 January 2016 10 am
Opening	28 January 2016 6.30 pm
Duration	29 January to 8 May 2016
Venue	Galleries for Photography
Curators	Walter Moser (Albertina), Duncan Forbes (Fotomuseum, Winterthur), Diane Dufour (Le Bal, Paris), Matthew Witkovsky (Art Institute of Chicago)
Exhibits	200
Catalogue	The catalogue is available for sale in the Albertina's museum shop and at www.albertina.at .
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Opening hours	Daily 10 am – 6 pm, Wednesdays 10 am – 9 pm
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Provoke

Between Protest and Performance – Photography in Japan, 1960–1975

29 January – 8 May 2016

The Japanese photo magazine *Provoke*, which ran for three issues in 1968 and 1969, is regarded as a highlight of post-war photography. The Albertina, in the world's first-ever exhibition on this topic, is taking a close look at this publication's creators and its long genesis. The presentation encompasses a representative cross-section of Japanese photographic trends during the 1960s and 1970s. With around 200 objects, the exhibition *Provoke* unites works by Japan's most influential photographers - including Daidō Moriyama, Yutaka Takanashi, Shōmei Tōmatsu, and Nobuyoshi Araki. Before the backdrop of the massive protest activities in Japan during this period, they created their images out of an awareness of being at a historical turning point between societal collapse and the search for a new Japanese identity. These works thus represent both an expression of this political transformation and a renewal of prevalent aesthetic norms.

This exhibition places *Provoke* in a historical context, focussing on the dialogue between the group's photography in particular and contemporary protest photography and performance art in general.

Photography is examined as a document of - and/or a call to - protest against injustice: the period around 1960 saw numerous books published in connection with the first great wave of protests in Japan against renewal of the alliance with the USA. A few of them document the demonstrations themselves, while others deal with related themes - above all with the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The years during which *Provoke* was published saw these protests, which were staged employing great creativity, give rise to a captivating visual world of resistance to the illegal actions of large corporations and the despotism of the neoliberal Japanese state.

As the 1960s wore on, the protest movements intensified, leading to a flood of photo volumes and prints. The makers of *Provoke* - critic Kōji Taki, author Takuma Nakahira, critic and photographer Takuma Nakahira, and photographers Yutaka Takanashi and Daidō Moriyama - were of the opinion that journalistic photography had exhausted itself and that it was impossible to effect long-term change through direct political action. But even so, in their texts and their photos, they oriented themselves on the aesthetic strategies to which Japan's protest photography had given rise: their works feature strikingly innovative graphic design that employs image sequences, pithy text/image combinations, dynamic outtakes, and the interplay of specifically chosen cheap materials (rough paper, low-resolution printing) with fold-outs and unusual formats.

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The exhibition concludes by examining the Japanese photography of its chosen period as a variant of performance art and/or as documentation of live actions: Daidō Moriyama, Takuma Nakahira, and Nobuyoshi Araki are among those photographers who, around 1970, developed great interest in portraying darkroom work or other processes connected to the production of photographic prints as visible and active components of photographic creativity. They were preceded in their efforts by dance performers such as Tatsumi Hijikata, who worked with filmmakers and photographers, as well as by groups like the Hi-Red Center, which blurred the distinctions between photographic documentation and live actions in which photography and other media played a role.

But such influences worked both ways: directly inspired by the activities of the photographers of *Provoke*, Hi-Red Center member Jiro Takamatsu and Koji Enokura turned to photographic conceptual art in the early 1970s.

This exhibition is a coproduction between the Albertina, Fotomuseum Winterthur, Le Bal in Paris, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Wall texts

Provoke

The three numbers of *Provoke* were printed in small editions of only one thousand copies each. Takuma Nakahira, Yutaka Takanashi, Kōji Taki, and Takahiko Okada founded the magazine; Daidō Moriyama joined the group with the magazine's second issue. While the first two numbers were dedicated to the subjects *Summer 1968* and *Eros*, the last issue had no focal theme.

The photographers of *Provoke* worked spontaneously and dynamically, often without looking through the viewfinder of their small-format cameras. This made for a rough, grainy, and blurred (“are,” “bure,” “boke”) pictorial language influenced by Ed van der Elsken and William Klein. This language broke with traditional photography defined by sophisticated compositions, perfect tonal values, and the vintage print. The tonal quality of pictures reproduced through printing differed from that of traditional photographic prints, and the pictures were regarded as independent works in their own right. Contrary to the objectives of the traditional matter-of-fact documentary photography, they mirrored their authors' subjective experience of Japan's postwar reality. The manifesto in the first *Provoke* issue defined photography as an autonomous medium independent of spoken language and aimed at “provoking” thoughts and ideas. The title of the magazine *Provoke: Provocative Materials for Thought* expresses this intention.

Shōmei Tōmatsu (1930–2012)

Shōmei Tōmatsu is seen as a key figure for *Provoke*. He photographed the sociopolitical changes in Japan from the 1950s on, depicting US military bases, the consequences of dropping a nuclear bomb on Nagasaki, and the student protests in a new, symbolic documentary style. The pictures' subjective approach revolutionized traditional documentary and reportage photography, which strove to convey a comprehensible story and a clear social message. The strategies developed by Tōmatsu are to be found in the *Provoke* artists' works in a pointed form.

Tōmatsu also supported the *Provoke* photographers as an exhibition organizer and editor. Together with Takuma Nakahira and Kōji Taki, he prepared the first major exhibition of Japanese photography in 1968, which was to stimulate the founders of the magazine to explore the medium. Tōmatsu and Nakahira edited the photo galleries *I am a King* in the magazine *Gendai no me (The Contemporary Eye)*, which for the first time assembled works by the photographers who would form the *Provoke* group.

Takuma Nakahira (1938–2015) | For a Language to Come

The photographer, theorist, and critic Takuma Nakahira and Kōji Taki were responsible for the discursive orientation of *Provoke*. Nakahira's works rejected the rules of photojournalism and its claim of rendering facts in a generally valid, objective way. They were also critical of the visual mass media which increasingly pervaded the everyday life of Japan's consumerist society. According to Nakahira, the media, having lost all relation to reality through the information explosion, were only concerned with presenting a virtual reality. Nakahira did not regard the photograph as an artist photographer's means of expression but as a mere mechanical document of his subjective perception.

It is the relationship between photography and language which is central for Nakahira's photography. This is not only evident in *Provoke* but also in his book *For a Language to Come* published in 1970. This volume assembles a non-linear and unhierarchical sequence of snapshots evoking imaginary, post-apocalyptic sceneries which not least reveal the photographer's skepsis about the US consumerist culture spreading throughout Japan.

Yutaka Takanashi (b. 1935) | Towards the City

From the mid-1960s, Yutaka Takanashi focused on the urban change of the metropolis. Tokyo's massive expansion, the modernization of its infrastructure, and its ruthless industrialization were captured in spontaneous pictures often shot from a driving car. Unlike his *Provoke* colleagues' works, Takanashi's photographs are easier to read, less pessimistic, and show a stronger affinity to classical documentary photography. He composed all his pictures by looking through the viewfinder.

In close collaboration with the book designer Kōhei Sugiura, Takanashi published the artist book *Toshi e (Towards the City)*. Embedded in a cardboard box, its two volumes comprise a number of different, partly overlapping work groups: while the smaller one, titled *Tokyo-jin (Tokyoites)* contains pictures of the city's inhabitants from 1966, the larger one explores Tokyo's new topography, documenting its outlying districts. Shot in the *Provoke* era, the pictures' blurriness and apparent exposure mistakes testify to the group's influence.

Daidō Moriyama (geb. 1938) | Accident

Daidō Moriyama's series *Accident* interlinks sociopolitical subjects, references to Western art, and media-analytical considerations. Against the background of Japan's strengthening consumerist culture, Moriyama, inspired by Andy Warhol's pop art pictures, relied on everyday mass media. Next to demonstrations and pop culture motifs, Moriyama, alluding to Warhol's work *Silver Car Crash* of 1963, photographed police posters that campaigned for safe driving with deterrent pictures of car accidents. Reflections on the material and blurs resulting from the pictures' enlargement emphasize the reproduction process. Moriyama questions the illusionary nature of photography and underlines their material quality. Regarding contents, the series investigates the conflict between the US consumerist culture's attraction and the quest for a Japanese identity.

Protest

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Japan was shaken by massive, partly violent waves of protests. The key event was the ratification of the Security Treaty between Japan and the United States in 1960. Japan's role as a military base for the war against Vietnam, the construction of Narita Airport in Sanrizuka, and the neoliberal activities of big concerns also led to protests. The years between 1960 and 1975 saw the publication of about eighty publications on the protests and the assessment of Japan's recent history, particularly the US nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, connected with it.

Published by artist photographers, student associations, trade unions, and professional photo journalists, the protest books were produced in different ways. They were aimed at spreading information and mobilizing people for further protests. The strategies of subversive self-representation were characterized by an innovative design: appeal-like combinations of texts and images, suggestive sequences, dynamic croppings, and an interplay of inferior materials and sophisticated layouts.

Though the members of *Provoke*, excepting Moriyama, were active politically, they held the opinion that the possibilities of protest photography had been exhausted and that it could not bring about political change. Nevertheless, *Provoke* followed the models developed by it. The most striking feature next to layout and printing techniques is the protest photographers' abstract and blurry aesthetic resulting from technical shortcomings.

Three Waves of Protest Books

The protest books can be divided into three groups. From the 1960s, mainly collective publishing projects highlighted social unrest such as mass demonstrations and strikes organized by the trade unions against the ratification of the Security Treaty. The trade union publication *Rope Ladder and Iron Helmet*, for example, documents the occupation of a publishing house by its employees. The second wave saw primarily individual publications by various photographers such as Kazuo Kitai's book *Resistance*. It depicts the students' activities, and its rough and grainy pictorial language became important for *Provoke*. The third wave of protest books, generally designed by students and published from 1967 on, focused on violent street fights in Tokyo directed against the Vietnam War. The collectively produced volume *Sanrizuka – The Hokusō Plateau on Fire. Document 1966–71* deals with the protests against the construction of the airport in Sanrizuka, in which students joined forces with the local farmers.

Performance

Pictures taken in the context of performances breach the boundary between photographic documentation and live action and emphasize performative aspects of the medium like the brief act of pictorial production and the materiality of the picture. For his series *Kamaitachi*, Eikō Hosoe portrayed the butoh and performance artist Tatsumi Hijikata from 1965 on. The performer incorporated the demon Kamaitachi in scenes specifically staged for the camera, visualizing the photographer's memories of World War II. As Hosoe used his camera in a very dynamic way, the shooting may be seen as a happening involving two artists.

Competing with *Provoke*, Nobuyoshi Araki produced a number of Xerox photography books from 1970 on. Araki and his assistants xeroxed photographs and sent the copies bound between black covers to colleagues and friends. The production process resembling a happening, the use of technically inadequate means, and the preference of copies over the original defied classical photography in ways to be found in the *Provoke* magazines.

Also inspired by *Provoke*, Jirō Takamatsu turned to conceptual photography. For *Photograph of Photograph* he employed a photographer to take pictures of pictures from his family albums. The snapshot-like pictorial language manifesting itself in reflections and random image sections defamiliarizes the album pictures. Like in Daidō Moriyama's series *Accident*, processes connected with the production of prints become a visible element of work that questions the supposed factuality of the medium.

Hi Red Center | Shelter Plan

Shelter Plan is the title of a happening realized by Hi Red Center, an artist group close to the Fluxus movement. In 1965, its members, Genpei Akasegawa, Natsuyuki Nakanishi, and Jirō Takamatsu, rented a room and invited friends and artists—among them Yoko Ono and Nam June Paik—to participate in their happening. The performance parodied contemporary political fears: each guest was weighed and measured with the alleged objective to obtain the necessary details for building a nuclear shelter tailored to the respective person. Photography was an integral part of the happening: while men in suits took the guests' measurements, life-size pictures of naked male backsides on the walls reinforced the dystopian character of the event.