



Taka Ishii Gallery

Photography / Film

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Katsumi Watanabe

Dates: Aug 23 – Sep 13, 2014

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film (AXIS Bldg., Roppongi)

Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Katsumi Watanabe from August 23 to September 13, 2014. The exhibition will comprise 14 works from the Shinjuku series, which Watanabe shot for many years.

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s, Katsumi Watanabe photographed bar hostesses, drag queens, and gangsters in Shinjuku as a “drifting portrait photographer.” As a drifting photographer, a very unique profession even at the time, he would walk around Shinjuku daily with a camera in hand and wait for someone to ask him to shoot a portrait. He would go home, process and print, and return the next day with prints for his customers. Watanabe’s subjects strike various poses to present themselves and their lives in Shinjuku with confidence. The photographs were quite precious to their subjects, some of whom sent their portraits to families in the country in the place of a letter.

In the 1970s, when inexpensive automatic cameras began to spread, it became difficult for Watanabe to make his living as a drifting photographer. Watanabe, however, continued to produce a massive archive of images of Shinjuku and its inhabitants. In addition to portraits, he shot children playing in back alleys, a riot in front of Koma Gekijo, and the piles of empty cans accumulating on Shinjuku’s street corners. As one of its inhabitants, Watanabe provided an insider’s view of the transformation of Shinjuku.

Katsumi Watanabe was born in 1941 in Morioka City, Iwate Prefecture, and passed in 2006. Watanabe attended a part time course at Iwate Prefectural Morioka Daiichi High School while working as an assistant at the Morioka Office of the *Mainichi Shimbun*, where he developed an interest in photography. After graduating from high school, he moved to Tokyo and worked at the Tojo Photo Studio, where he learned studio photography. In 1965, Watanabe became a “drifting photographer” and shot portraits on the street of Shinjuku. He charged 200 yen for one print with three shots. In 1973, he published *Shinjuku Guntoden 66/73*. In 1974, his work was included in the “Fifteen Photographers Today” exhibition at the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art and began receiving great acclaim. After he quit shooting as a drifting photographer, he worked various jobs such as selling roasted sweet potatoes on the street and running a portrait studio. He then became a freelance photographer and shot all over the world, but continued to shoot Shinjuku all the while.

For further information please contact:

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Gallery hours: Tue-Sat 11:00-19:00 Closed on Sun, Mon and National holidays



Katsumi Watanabe

Untitled, 1966

Gelatin silver print

53.5 x 35.5cm