



Taka Ishii Gallery

Photography / Film

5-17-1 2F Roppongi Minato-ku Tokyo #106-0032, Japan
tel 03 5575 5004
fax 03 5575 5016
web www.takaishiigallery.com
email tigpf@takaishiigallery.com

Ed van der Elsken "Love on the Left Bank"

Dates: Mar 19 – May 2, 2015

Location: Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film

Taka Ishii Gallery Photography / Film is pleased to present "Love on the Left Bank," a solo exhibition of photographs by street photography pioneer and one of 20th century's most important documentary photographers, Ed van der Elsken. Held in collaboration with Annet Gelink Gallery (Amsterdam), the exhibition will comprise 15 images included in Elsken's first book of the same title first published in 1956 and printed by Elsken in the 1970s and 1980s.

Elsken was born in Amsterdam, Netherlands in 1925 (he died in 1990) and began shooting photographs after World War II, when his father gave him a 9 x 12 camera. He proceeded to travel from city to city, shooting and working as a freelance photographer. Struggling from a postwar sense of emptiness and caught between the cultural poverty of the reconstruction period and hunger for a new society and culture, Elsken hitchhiked to Paris in 1950. At the time, in Paris, young bohemians from various countries gathered on the left bank of the Seine, in Saint-Germain-des-Prés and lived an aimless and rough life. Living under the same roof with these young bohemians, Elsken was strongly drawn to the raffish, existentialist, and nihilistic youth culture he saw there and continued to shoot on the Left Bank for several years. The resulting images were noticed by Edward Steichen, who was then Director of the Department of Photography at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, while he was in Paris to conduct research for the "The Family of Man" (1955) exhibition. Under Steichen's advice, Elsken edited the photographs into *Love on the Left Bank* (1956), which told a story of a young Mexican man, a stand-in for Elsken himself, and his unrequited love for Ann, who spends her life in the cafés on the Left Bank.

The strength of this book, which is structured like a story depicted in photographic images, or a photographic novel, lies in the completely convincing combination of photography as a document of time and photography as the sediment of personal involvement. (...) Van der Elsken "composed" this story out of photographs that he had taken between 1950 and 1955 while wandering through Paris. His actual subject was the feeling towards life in a generation maimed by the effects of the war and of which he was a part. In his photographs, he broke with what was in a certain sense a convention of distance in prewar documentary photography.

Hripsimé Visser, "Once Upon a Time Ed van der Elsken, photographs 1948-1988"

ONCE UPON A TIME: Exhibition of Ed van der Elsken, Asahi Shimbunsha, 1993, p.17

Upon its publication, *Love on the Left Bank* caused a sensation in the photography world with its style of "personal photography," subjectively and intuitively recording the artist's life experiences and putting his idiosyncrasies upfront in rough-around-the-corners images with strong contrast, and its "docu-drama" editorial method, in which actual documentary images are used to create a fictional narrative. The book also strongly influenced giants of postwar Japanese photography, such as Eikoh Hosoe, Kishin Shinoyama and Nobuyoshi Araki. Elsken's strong, crisp prints with pure blacks, were made with uniquely developed method. Elsken's printing technique is said to have amazed Hosoe, when he provided Elsken with a darkroom in Japan during a 1975 visit.

Elsken taught himself photography after World War II and began working as a freelance photographer in Amsterdam in 1947. The photographs he shot on his first trip to Paris and Marseille in 1949 gained passionate acclaim from the Dutch left-leaning photographers' group GKf. Elsken received an invitation to the Magnum darkroom Pictorial Service through a GKf member and returned to Paris in 1950 to work in the darkroom there for two months. He stayed in Paris and, after his work at Pictorial Service was finished, shot images capturing youth that failed to fit into society. These images were noticed by Edward Steichen, who then included Elsken's photographs in the "Post-War European Photography" (1953) and "The Family of Man" (1955) exhibitions at the MoMA, where they received great

acclaim. Elsen's first publication *Love on the Left Bank* (1956) also gained much critical attention. With the publication of subsequent books *Bagara* (1958), *Jazz* (1959), and *Sweet Life* (1966), he became one of the leading photographers of the 1950s and 1960s and worked globally. In the 1960s and after, he also began producing documentary films. In 1959, he came to Japan for the first time and built close relationships with some of the most ambitious Japanese photographers of the time including Eikoh Hosoe and other members of the photographers' group VIVO. Thus his influence on the Japanese photography world was also immense. Japan was also an important photographic subject for Elsen, who visited Japan again in the 1980s. His images of Japan can be seen in *Sweet Life, JAPAN 1959-1960* (1987), and *De ontdekking van Japan* [The Discovery of Japan] (1988). He was recipient of the International Africa Travel Association Prize and the Dutch National Film Award. In 1990, his retrospective volume *Once Upon a Time* was published and a travelling retrospective exhibition of the same title was held among others at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1990) and Bunkamura The Museum (Tokyo, 1993).

For further information please contact:

Exhibition: Yuko Kosuge / Press: Marie Okamura

5-17-1 2F Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0032

tel: 81-3-5575-5004 fax: 81-3-5575-5016

e-mail: tigpf@takaishiigallery.com website: www.takaishiigallery.com

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



Ed van der Elsen
"Paris", 1951/ca. 1980
Gelatin silver print
Image size : 27 x 26 cm
Paper size : 46 x 33 cm
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Courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery,
Amsterdam



Ed van der Elsen
"Paris 1950", 1950/ca. 1984
Gelatin silver print
Image size : 23 x 22 cm
Paper size : 31 x 24 cm
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