

SOLDES

Selections from the Photographic Archive of Kosen Ohtsubo, Presented by Christian Kōun Alborz Oldham, and in cooperation with Kosen Ohtsubo, Ryusei-ha, and Empty Gallery
by Christian Kōun Alborz Oldham

ON VIEW
March 1 –
March 23, 2024

EXHIBITION OPENING
March 1, 5–8pm

For Immediate Release

“As old meanings are broken down and obliterated, new meanings attach themselves to form.”

—Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, p36

For *Selections from the Photographic Archive of Kosen Ohtsubo, Presented by Christian Kōun Alborz Oldham, and in cooperation with Kosen Ohtsubo, Ryusei-ha, and Empty Gallery*, artist Christian Kōun Alborz Oldham has carefully prepared twelve photographic prints from the photo archive of their ikebana sensei, Kosen Ohtsubo. On display at Soldes are 17” × 22” glossy reproductions depicting an unorthodox approach to the nearly 600-year-old art form of flower arrangement. Ohtsubo’s arrangements include not only flowers—but also, and in quite peculiar fashion—vegetation and refuse. Ohtsubo’s approach has earned him the colloquial nickname “The Legend of Ikebana.”

Christian Kōun Alborz Oldham’s practice often involves the re-presentation of existing bodies of cultural material. For example, Oldham’s 2018 exhibition at Veronica in Seattle, WA titled *YOHJI YAMAMOTO POUR HOMME PRINTEMPS-ETE 2000 DIMANCHE 4 JUILLET 1999 A 17:30 HEURES 155 RUE SAINT MARTIN 75003 PARIS PRESSE: TEL 01 42 78 94 12 FAX: 01 40 29 94 04* displayed an array of garments, imagery, sound, and textual resources from Yohji Yamamoto’s 1999 Paris runway fashion show. Oldham spent many years acquiring almost every piece from this particular Yamamoto collection. Instead of purchasing the garments from another collector or fashion website, they acquired the pieces rather slowly and piecemeal through eBay, Yahoo! auctions Japan, and second hand stores. These are the sort of places objects gather just before falling from the record.

**510 BERNARD STREET
LOS ANGELES, CA 90012**

**AUX@SOLDES LA
@SOLDES.LA**

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Both haute couture and ikebana share in a celebration of the ephemeral. As cultural practices they each register attempts to punctuate the present without much hope for material permanence. Throughout Oldham's practice we witness a desire to rescue the ephemeral from oblivion — and to disseminate it. Their exhibition at Soldes continues to tug on this thread. Oldham has a keen interest in the way information spreads through the networks of the art world. In fact, this is the third exhibition of its type; previous presentations by Oldham of Ohtsubo's photo archive have taken place at Paid in Seattle and Ulrik in New York (both 2022). In all iterations, Oldham has offered a run of prints for a modest fee in hopes that the prints will circulate. Additionally, essays on Oldham's work with Ohtsubo's photo archive have appeared in OSMOS and Aperture magazines.

What is not included in the exhibition at Soldes, but certainly warrants mention, is Oldham's own ikebana practice and ikebana school, Flower Planet. Both their practice and school continue the unorthodox tradition set forth by Kosen Ohtsubo. If artistic tradition may be thought of as a confluence of form, technique and style, then the student's absorption of style is certainly the most intimate of these transferences. Style is where gestures unite. In a sense, a new style is what Ohtsubo breathed into ikebana. "A style," Henri Focillon wrote,

"is a development, a coherent grouping of forms united by a reciprocal fitness, whose essential harmony is nevertheless in many ways testing itself, building itself and annihilating itself. Pauses, tensions, relaxations occur in the best defined styles." [*The Life of Forms in Art*, p46]

In October of 1971, Kosen Ohtsubo made a particularly odd submission to the annual Ikebana Ryusei Exhibition held at the Matsuzakaya department store in Ueno, Tokyo. In a custom sewn sailcloth garbage bag, Ohtsubo re-presented plant clippings and refuse discarded by other participants. The bag was labeled "1/5 The Rubbish of the Ikebana Exhibition of Ryusei School '71". This contribution made quite a splash, and was kept on display for both parts of the two-part annual exhibition. The juicy details are outlined in an article from the November 1971 issue of *Shukan Heibon* magazine, which Oldham has rescued from the rubbish bin of history and commissioned an English translation for their exhibition at Soldes. Christian Kōun Alborz Oldham has clearly received the imprint of Kosen's style and continues its development. With their recent run of exhibitions, Oldham insists that, in one form or another, new meanings will continue to attach to the Legend of Ikebana.

—Nicolas G. Miller