NonakaHill

# We Like Us

**Chris Killip, Jim Mangan, Katsumi Watanabe, Karlheinz Weinberger and Frank in Rock'n'Roll**

Nonaka-Hill Kyoto is pleased to present *We Like Us*, an exhibition running from April 12 to May 24, featuring the works of four photographers—Chris Killip, Jim Mangan, Katsumi Watanabe and Karlheinz Weinberger —alongside a found private photo-album titled *Frank in Rock'n'Roll*.

The exhibition's title, *We Like Us*, gently echoes the shifting sensibilities around pronoun use in contemporary American English.

While "We like ourselves" may be grammatically standard, the chosen phrasing carries a different tone—one of affirmation without self-consciousness: we are enough as we are. It captures something of the ethos found in these images—a collective sense of self, of belonging, and of quiet pride.

Across communities, there's a familiar instinct to guard one's own world, and to hold a wary distance from those beyond it.

The artists in this exhibition have each turned their attention to individuals living in tension with mainstream society—those situated on its edges, left behind, or existing in close dialogue with unforgiving natural environments. With time, care, and quiet proximity, the photographers establish trust with their subjects, drawn to the specificity of their lifestyles, aesthetics, and expressions of self.

What emerges are portraits of communities who have opened themselves to the camera—not for spectacle, but in quiet mutual recognition. These images reflect a form of closeness made possible by shared presence and sustained engagement.

The presence of the camera both observes and affirms. It draws forth an awareness of unity within these groups, even as it documents them. Through the lens, a quiet exchange comes into view—fragile and unfolding, shaped by tentative trust and a wish, perhaps, simply to be seen—without fear.

This exhibition brings together *Seacoal* (1976–1984) by Chris Killip, *The Crick* by Jim Mangan, *Shinjuku Guntoden* (1965–1973) by Katsumi Watanabe, *Halbstarke* by Karlheinz Weinberger, and Frank's photoalbum of the Yoyogi Park Rockabilly community. Together, these works demonstrate the power of photography to record distinct communities, foster empathy and mutual understanding across cultural boundaries, and preserve these moments for future generations.

**Chris Killip (1946–2020)**
*Seacoal* (1976–1984)

Chris Killip is widely recognized for his unflinching documentation of working-class life in Britain during the 1970s and ’80s, a period marked by the collapse of traditional industries and the unraveling of once-stable communities.

In the mid-1970s, Killip arrived in the northeast of England, a region historically shaped by coalfields and sustained by heavy industries such as steel production and shipbuilding. Killip began the *Seacaoal* project in 1982, from 1983 to 1984, lived in a caravan on the seacoal camp. He spent living alongside a tight-knit group of people in Lynemouth, Northumberland, who survived by collecting coal washed up on the shore.

The origin of this coal lies in an abandoned industrial process. Once, coal extracted from the mines was cleansed with water to separate it from rock and other impurities. Over time, this costly procedure was abandoned, and untreated mining waste—still containing usable coal—was dumped into the sea. Tumbled and broken down by tides, this coal eventually reemerged in the form of small fragments along the coast. In the wake of mine closures and rising unemployment, some local residents turned to the shore, gathering these fragments and selling them as fuel—a fragile means of survival in an increasingly unforgiving world.

The community that eventually accepted Killip was insular and deeply guarded—a closed world shaped by a fierce, self-reliant spirit. It was a place where outsiders were rarely welcomed, and trust was hard-won. Many shared the values of itinerant horse-drawn life—values that seemed outdated, yet remained tenaciously alive, preserved in stubborn defiance of time. Men would bring their horse carts to the shoreline, then wade into the surf with long-handled scoops rigged with wire mesh, sifting coal from the seawater. Social bonds were a tense balance of camaraderie and competition, held together by the constant necessity of mutual dependence. This was a landscape in which the medieval and the modern coexisted in a bleak, uncanny harmony. Here, survival—it was the single, inescapable imperative.

*Seacoal* goes beyond a simple documentation of labor; it offers a profound reflection on human dignity amid decay, the resilience of communal bonds under duress, and a sharp insight into the shifting architecture of social structures. In the weary, resigned expressions of Killip’s subjects, we glimpse a quiet acceptance of loss, a stoic endurance, the imprint of what has been taken from them. Yet beneath that, something more persists, the presence of individuals cast aside as “surplus” in the name of modern progress—the quiet, unyielding weight of their existence, subtly but unmistakably seeping through.

**Jim Mangan (1973)**
*The Crick* (2018-2023)

Jim Mangan's work is grounded in an ecological and sociological approach, exploring the intricate relationships between people and their environments. Over the course of nearly twenty-five years living in Colorado and Utah, Mangan immersed himself in his first years out west in the study of water rights and drought-stricken landscapes—experiences that inform his photographic and cinematic practice to this day.

*The Crick* unfolds in Short Creek, a town straddling the Utah-Arizona border, shaped by the insular and deeply religious culture of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS). This offshoot of Mormonism is known for its practice of polygamy and its strict isolation from mainstream society. For decades, Short Creek existed apart from the world, preserving its own rhythms, architecture, and way of life.

Initially drawn to the community by its peculiar and monumental domestic architecture, Mangan's focus shifted dramatically after the 2011 imprisonment of FLDS leader Warren Jeffs on charges of child sexual abuse. The community began to fracture. Mangan turned his lens toward the young men who remained—adolescents caught in the aftermath of collapse, navigating the ruins of belief, family, and identity.

*The Crick* was photographed over a period of five years, capturing a group of boys navigating the red, barren landscapes of southern Utah, northern Arizona, and southern Nevada. Channeling the spirit of frontier-era explorers, these youths attempt to reconstruct their own identities against the vast and rugged backdrop of the American West. Their engagement with both the natural world and imagined realms suggests emerging fraternal bonds, a fragile sense of freedom, and a quiet nostalgia for something irretrievably lost.

Beneath these gestures lie echoes of fractured social structures—the specter of religious inheritance, rigid patriarchal authority, and fanaticism. And throughout, there lingers the presence of those who remain unseen: women. Though absent from the frame, their silence is palpable, their exclusion a haunting reminder of the community's gendered foundations.

In *The Crick*, Mangan captures young men suspended between worlds—real and imagined, past and present—as they play out fragile narratives of identity and belonging. The work invites us to reconsider what we mean by "community," "faith," and "family," and how such concepts are both formed and fractured by the weight of history.

**Katsumi Watanabe (1941-2006)**
*Shinjuku Guntoden* (1965–1973)

In 1967, Katsumi Watanabe left his low-wage job and inherited a small patch of turf—known colloquially as a "shima" (literally, "island") —within the dense matrix of Kabukicho, Shinjuku, from a fellow street photographer. These "islands" served as informal outposts for roaming photographers, staking a claim in the ever-shifting terrain of the city's nightlife. For Watanabe, it marked not only a change in occupation but the beginning of a deeper entanglement with the blurred borders between day and night, center and fringe.

From that point on, he ventured into the streets nearly every evening, capturing portraits of those who lived and worked in the shadows of the city's pleasure district: hostesses, bartenders, nude models, members of the LGBTQ+ community, and the unhoused.

But photography was only part of his practice. As a *nagashi no shashinya*—a street photographer who sold his images on the spot—Watanabe offered his prints in sets of three for 200 yen. This act of exchange was more than livelihood. It was a form of coexistence, a way of embedding himself in the life of the street. Breathing in its air, engaging in conversation, and being accepted as one of its own allowed him to raise the camera not as an outsider but as a participant.

Since the Meiji era, Shinjuku had grown into a major urban node, with the Yamanote and Chuo lines at its core, later joined by private railways like the Odakyu, Keio, and Seibu lines. These arteries connected the district to Tokyo's expanding suburbs, fueling its evolution into a commercial powerhouse. On the southern side of the station, glitzy department stores and cinemas cultivated an atmosphere of mass consumption. To the north, however, on reclaimed land, a different ecosystem thrived—populated by *tokushu inshokuten*, literally, "special restaurants," a euphemism for venues offering sexual services.

Kabukicho emerged within this urban duality as a charged frontier where commerce and the sex industry collided and where violence, desire, and survival coexisted in uneasy proximity. For Watanabe, it was more than a backdrop. It was his emotional and creative homeland. He resonated with the gritty resilience and delicate defiance of those who lived there, gradually becoming a fixture in the very world he documented.

The people in Watanabe's photographs are acutely aware of being seen. They gaze directly into the lens—sometimes confrontational, sometimes confiding. These images are not snapshots of passive subjects but crystallized moments shaped by the tension and trust between photographer and photographed.

Watanabe continued to walk the streets of Kabukicho into the mid-1970s, when his work as a nagashi gradually came to a close. What remains is a body of work that distills the atmosphere, memory, and shadow of a city at night—an unflinching chronicle of Shinjuku's margins, told through the eyes of those who refused to be invisible.

**Karlheinz Weinberger (1921-2006)**
*Halbstarke*

The word Halbstarke, literally meaning "half-strong" in German, refers to a figure who postures with bravado but remains unformed—a youth caught between rebellion and becoming. It came to define a postwar subculture of unruly, defiant young people who emerged in the 1950s and '60s across Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. Viewed with disapproval by the older generation, these adolescents forged their identities under the heavy influence of American pop culture—rock'n' roll, biker gangs, and the cinematic icons of the era: Elvis Presley, Marlon Brando, James Dean.

They asserted themselves through a bold, improvised style—greased-back pompadours, denim-on-denim ensembles, biker jackets, plaid shirts, and hand-crafted belt buckles made from Swiss cowbell leather straps. These self-fashioned looks stood in stark contrast to the norms of the time, rejecting the roles society had written for them.

In an era with few diversions, these young people occupied the streets, parks, and other public spaces—idling, talking, performing youth itself. To older citizens, their presence was often seen as aimless and irritating, dismissed with the term *gammeln*, meaning to loiter or waste time. Yet for this generation, rock'n' roll wasn't just music. Unlike the saccharine *Schlager* pop songs of the previous decade, it gave voice to emotion—anger, anxiety, yearning. Condemned and excluded by the mainstream, the music only gripped them more fiercely, a pulse that tethered them to one another.

It was this world that photographer Karlheinz Weinberger entered—an office worker by day, an artist with a lens quietly drawn to the margins. Though he came from a very different life, Weinberger developed a deep trust with these self-styled outsiders. Over time, his modest Zurich apartment became a known gathering place for them—a hangout where they gathered to smoke, drank, and sought brief escape from the drudgery of everyday life. Weinberger photographed them in intimate, makeshift settings: the living room, hallway, basement, attic, or leaning against the balcony. He captured them not as curiosities or clichés but as full human beings. His portraits convey more than defiance or rage—they reveal the underlying solitude, longing, and hope etched into their faces and bodies.

**Junichi**

*Frank Rock' N' Roll*, 1982

As a playful nod within this exhibition, we present the found photo album *Frank Rock' N' Roll*, collected by Matthew, the son of renowned photographer Chris Killip. This album centers around a Kyoto Technical High School student named Junichi—known affectionately as "Frank." At the center of the album is "Frank," a standout presence within a small dance community, marked by his deep interest in art, music, and dance.

Tucked inside are handwritten letters—one from a worried grandmother fretting over her grandson's excessive hairstyling, and another, a clumsy yet sincere love letter written in the bubbly, rounded fonts popularized in 80s shojo manga like *Hachimal Pop* and *Lala Pop*. Both reveal a young man on the cusp of adulthood, caught between adolescence and aspiration. The album appears to have been assembled by Frank himself, with a clear curatorial impulse. His own drawings are slipped between photos, and the composition reveals the quiet gaze of a boy dreaming of a life in art.

A singular date appears in the album: February 21, 1982. It marks Frank's pilgrimage to Harajuku, Yoyogi Park, where rock' n' rollers gathered under a light drizzle. Other images show Frank posing with a life-size idol cutout of pop singer Marian in his bedroom or proudly beside his customized Yamaha Passola scooter. Slang of the time, words like *mabui*, meaning "hot" or "cool", pop up throughout, anchoring the album in its moment.

Frank belonged to what were called the *Roller-zoku*, young people enamored with 1950s American rock' n' roll, clad in slicked-back pompadours, denim-on-denim, and leather jackets. Every weekend, they took over Harajuku's pedestrian zones to perform high-octane twist and rockabilly routines. For many idolizing legends like Eikichi Yazawa or the cult band Cools, this wasn't just rebellion. It was ritual. It was home.

The impulse to dance, to display, to craft a version of oneself for the world resonates uncannily with our present moment. Through this album, part self-portrait, part communal scrapbook, Frank crafted an image-world of longing, a record of desires that insisted on being visible, even if they never truly were.

Poses struck without anyone in mind to see them. Love letters whose sentiments may never have found their way. Headlines and layouts are borrowed from glossy magazines. These gestures, shaped in the hope of being seen, now hang in the stillness of a private performance. This album doesn't just record what was there but gives voice to what ached—softly, stubbornly—to be seen.