

## AN HOMAGE TO SATOSHI SAÏKUSA

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Satoshi Saïkusa was utterly unique, a complete original. And, like all originals, he is unforgettable. I can still see very clearly the first time I saw him, at a nightclub in Saigon in 2004. He came into that dark room and stood out immediately with his air of being a bohemian, an artist, his face slightly grizzled and his fine black hair pulled back. Over his shoulder was slung his messenger bag, which to my eyes had something magical about it, because from within its mysterious confines he would pull out, as he did that night, his camera and his lenses. Those were the tools by which he did his magic—his photography.

I had yet to see Satoshi's photographs. I only knew of him through reputation, as told by his partner, Quynh. What impressed me the most during those early years of knowing him was not so much his photography as his aura of being a photographer, as well as his own sense of being. He was, in every second that I knew him, stylish and hip, confident and adventurous, immaculately dressed in his own unerring and seemingly effortless fashion sense. I still remember his dark blue suede shoes, his hefty silver bracelet, his camel hair overcoat. Sometimes this kind of artistic aura can be pretentious, but Satoshi was never pretentious. Instead Satoshi was always gentle and kind, as well as consummately accomplished. I admired Satoshi for all these qualities that allowed him to be fashionable and talented, yet gracious and down to earth.

Gradually, I came to learn of his life, how he left Japan and came to Paris by himself at a young age and became a fashion photographer and an artist. What courage and vision that required! Vision in more than one sense—both the vision of seeing himself in the future as what he wanted to become, as well as the vision of his talent. Satoshi had a remarkable eye for form, light, and color. His fashion photographs are art, and his art is as memorable as the images he took of movie stars and celebrated musical performers. Ultimately his art was as beautiful and unconventional as he himself was, ranging from photographs of beautiful models and a thematic motif of butterflies to a strange and haunting sculpture of human hair.

I visited his studio in Paris order to write an essay for a catalogue of his work. It was an honor and an opportunity to see how he had evolved as an artist over the years. I was also delighted when he offered me the great compliment of photographing me. I had never told him that I had always secretly wanted to be photographed by him, but I had never wanted to ask. He decided that I should pose with a human skull, an allusion to Hamlet. Of course Satoshi would have a skull in his studio. Slouching in a chair with a t-shirt under my jacket, I did my best to dress and pose with the same flair that Satoshi exhibited every day. Of course I could never be as cool as Satoshi, but at least I have the cool photo that Satoshi took of me. As I write these words, that photograph gazes down on me. He made me look good, finding within me a touch of the glamour that he extracted from so many people and objects. I keep the photo as a reminder of Satoshi's vision, of who he was as an artist and how he saw me. The photo is a great gift that Satoshi gave me, as he gave to so many people. An artist like Satoshi has a gift, and artists give to us through their art. While this photograph is a gift for which I will remain forever grateful, Satoshi's friendship and everything that it embodied about him was the most important gift of all.