



SATOSHI SAÏKUSA NO-ZARASHI



This fall, the Galerie Da-End is pleased to present 'No-Zarashi', a solo exhibition by the photographer and multidisciplinary artist Satoshi Saïkusa.

Over the last decade, Satoshi Saïkusa has turned towards artistic projects in which the themes of memory and the fragility of being appear recurrently, shedding light on his own preoccupations. Developed in the form of drawings, photo-entomological compositions, video and sculptures, the Buddhist concept of impermanence seems to dialogue incessantly with that of *memento mori*.

In Japan, it is the custom not to fully explain things but rather indicate a semantic direction and let the other give his own interpretation. Fond of this spirit maieutics, Saïkusa prefers to raise questions through his art rather than delivering any message. Inspired by the short story « In a Grove » by famous Japanese writer Ryūnosuke Akutagawa (1892-1927), the artist distorts the supposedly truthful photographic medium to tell his own stories.

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Photography is the art of both life and death. What the photograph captures is a life in one still moment, but what the photograph always implies is the death of its subject. If the person in the photograph has not died, he or she eventually will. The fact of death, or the inevitability of death, is part of what gives photography its magnetic power. A remarkable photograph haunts us not only because of its composition, or lighting, or content, but also because of the tension between the mortality of what has been captured in the photograph—a person, a flower—and the immortality of the photograph.

This tension animates the oeuvre of Satoshi Saïkusa, perhaps even more so because much of his work deals with beauty. In his guise as a fashion photographer for high-end magazines, he dwells, at least some of the

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time, among certain species of the exceptional: the rich who can make themselves beautiful, the famous who are extra-alluring because of their celebrity, or the lucky who were born hyper-attractive. For those of us who see these exceptional people only in Saïkusa's photographs, they appear human and beyond human at the same time. (...)

In his artwork, Saïkusa translates this tension between life and death, beauty and decay, artifice and reality. The still life (in English), or nature morte (in French), are preoccupations for Saïkusa. The different names of the genre in two languages signal how life and death are both involved in the staging of the beautiful or memorable subject, or object. (..)

But Saïkusa's work isn't always about the spectacular, the beautiful, or even the grotesque (the skulls, the menacing, enigmatic sculptures, the freaky installation called the "Peeper Beaster" that is shrouded in a thick, shaggy mat of hair). Sometimes he fixates on the quotidian, like his hypnotic video of people crossing the famous intersection of the Shibuya district in Tokyo. Saïkusa's camera gazes silently at the hundreds of anonymous faces, as if trying to see what might lie beneath them, as if the camera could be an x-ray machine.

Most or all of these faces are presumably Japanese, and what becomes evident is that there is no such thing as a Japanese face. The viewer notices the diversity of the individual faces and the lack of conventional beauty, which would be true of any random group of faces. These faces, placed in a different context, might be read as belonging to some other nationality. They are Japanese and not Japanese.

The same might be said of Satoshi Saïkusa, for whom the face is important and not important. The face is our humanity, but we divide ourselves on the basis of our faces, into nations and races. We deny the universality of our faces by trying to discern what is beautiful or ugly, or trying to define what binds us to a smaller fraction of humanity. And by so doing, we also deny the universality of what lies behind this face—the skull. As Saïkusa's alluring work shows, the skull endures, as much as beauty does. Death, his work seems to say, give meaning not only to life but to beauty. A hard truth, but something that Saïkusa's discerning eyes notice, even if many of ours do not.

BY VIET THANH NGUYEN. *American writer, his novel «The Sympathizer» has won the Pulitzer Prize in 2016*