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DAIDO MORIYAMA USES THE CAMERA TO MEDITATE LIFE IN
PURGATORY

By Miss Rosen, June 8, 2017



Japanese photographer Daido Moriyama has transformed the way we look at the world, creating a body of work that is equal parts gritty, jarring, and romantic. Carrying a compact camera everywhere he goes, he takes snapshots of the world. Each picture is a puzzle piece of our lives, like the fragments of memory we hold deep inside our mind.

“By taking photo after photo, I come closer to [...] the fragmentary nature of the world and my own personal sense of time,” Moriyama reveals. His pictures are not so much definitive statements as they are lines of poetry, evoking a spiritual realm that exists in the unknowable spaces beyond our comprehension. His pictures give us a glimpse into that which goes far beyond the photograph itself.

When taken together, one after another, frame after frame, a rhythm and energy emerge that are as abstractions of life, perceived through the eyes but felt deep within the marrow of the bones, like the hear beat going: one, two; one, two. This effect is palpable in the slide project currently on view in Artists Rooms: Daido Moriyama at the Tate Modern, London.

Curated by Sarah Allen and Simon Baker, the photographs in the slide show were shot on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. The images were made while Moriyama was going through a personal crisis, compulsively shooting 250 rolls of film. Very tellingly, he did not develop or print these pictures for 30 years. The act of making them was enough to do what he needed at that point in his career.

Shown as a slide projection, the installation mimics his process of creating the work, snap after snap. The constant, consistent, insistent image making speaks of a need to be both connected and disconnected at the same time, using the

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camera as an intermediary to move through the world. There is a keen sense of isolation and alienation in the work: a sense that Moriyama longs to rejoin the world but just can't quite.

This sensibility is something so many of us know: the feeling that we have one foot in and one foot out, and can't figure out which way to go. We belong—and we do not. We want to run away and run towards, but neither option seems right. We are stuck in limbo, living in a purgatory yet not dead, but rather trapped in a place where we are to be and not to be, at the same time.

In this way, Moriyama reminds us that our practice exists above all. The act of taking photographs to work through his crisis was all. To show the work, three decades after it was made far from his initial intent—but it is here we can see that if we keep to our path, it will lead us to a future far beyond what we could have perceived in the moment itself.

Throughout his career, Moriyama has attempted to go “to the end of photography,” defying the codas, rules, and paradigms that so many have used to fence the artist in. He pushes the medium beyond the “objective” qualities so many hold dear, transforming it from a machine to record and wielding it as a painter holds a brush, capturing both the outside world and his inner state. Moriyama describes the photograph as “a fossil of light and time,” creating an historical record that is as much a collection of memories as it is pure poetry.