

# I'm So Happy You Are Here

Japanese Women Photographers from the 1950s to Now

**An exhibition collaboration between Aperture and Fotografie Forum Frankfurt**

Exhibition Duration: **24 May 2025 – 7 September 2025**

Opening: **Friday, 23 May 2025, 7.00 pm**

Press Preview: **Friday, 23 May 2025, 11.00 am**

Venue: **Fotografie Forum Frankfurt**

*Frankfurt am Main, May 23, 2025 – The influence of women in Japanese photography has been greatly underestimated. While the work of male Japanese photographers has been critically recognized internationally, their female colleagues have remained under the radar. The women artists featured in this exhibition have most often worked independently and experimentally, using their personal stories to explore the role of women, raise questions about gender and identity, and critique patriarchal norms.*

*By presenting **I'M SO HAPPY YOU ARE HERE** at the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt a revolutionary insight into Japanese photography from the 1950s to our times is highlighted. The focus is on women photographers and their perspectives on everyday life and society in Japan.*

*Co-Curator Takeuchi Mariko: "This exhibition celebrates the diversity and individuality of Japanese women photographers, and offers a fresh lens through which to rediscover Japanese photography. Importantly, it serves as a platform to amplify voices that have long been marginalized, and to imagine a more inclusive and affirming future."*

*The exhibition examines these different aspects in four distinct yet interconnected sections: **'The Pioneers'** provides an overview of the women who paved the way since the introduction of the medium to Japan. **'The Elevation of the Everyday'** brings together a look at common moments and their poetic interpretations. Through **'Critical Perspectives on Self, Gender, and Society'**, the photographers explore identity and society. **'Extensions of and Experiments with the Medium'** explores a range of expanded approaches to the photographic.*

*The wide array of intergenerational perspectives gathered together in this show attest to the resiliency and innovative power of Japanese women photographers, and allow for a fascinating examination of the medium of photography – what it is and what it can be.*

*Celina Lunsford, Artistic Director of the FFF: "This exhibition presents the velvety and the sharp edges of life and photography. The multiplicity of approaches, perceptions and environments by many Japanese women photographers, unknown to us, was so*

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*impressionable, that we knew this show would superbly compliment the concept of the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt."*

The exhibition will be accompanied by a comprehensive supporting program with workshops and lectures. Co-Curator **Takeuchi Mariko** will lead the **workshop** "The Curatorial Perspective" on Saturday, 24 May from 10.00 am to 1.00 pm, and on the same day at 4.00 pm there will be a **gallery talk** together with Ms Takeuchi and **Celina Lunsford**. Further events are planned during the exhibition period.

**I'M SO HAPPY YOU ARE HERE – Japanese Women Photographers from the 1950s to Now** was curated by Lesley A. Martin, Takeuchi Mariko and Pauline Vermare.

Fotografie Forum Frankfurt curator team: Andrea Horvay, Celina Lunsford.

## **Participating Photographers**

Hara Mikiko (1967), Hiromix (1976), Ishikawa Mao (1953), Ishiuchi Miyako (1947), Katayama Mari (1987), Kawauchi Rinko (1972), Komatsu Hiroko (1969), Kon Michiko (1955), Nagashima Yurie (1973), Narahashi Asako (1959), Ninagawa Mika (1972), Nishimura Tamiko (1948), Noguchi Rika (1971), Nomura Sakiko (1967), Okabe Momo (1981), Okanoue Toshiko (1928), Onodera Yuki (1962), Sawada Tomoko (1977), Shiga Lieko (1980), Sugiura Kunié (1942), Tawada Yuki (1978), Tokiwa Toyoko (1930–2019), Ushioda Tokuko (1940), Watanabe Hitomi (1943), Yamazawa Eiko (1899–1995) and Yanagi Miwa (1967)

## **Publication**

The exhibition is accompanied by the publication 'I'm So Happy You Are Here: Japanese Women Photographers from the 1950s to Now', edited by Lesley A. Martin and Pauline Vermare, with additional contributions by Carrie Cushman and Kelly Midori McCormick, and Takeuchi Mariko, among others. The book is published by Aperture and can be purchased at the FFF shop (English, 439 pages).

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## **Supporting Programme**

SAT, 24 May, 10.00 am – 1.00 pm **Workshop** 'The Curatorial Perspective' with **Takeuchi Mariko**

SAT, 24 May, 4.00 pm **Gallery Talk** 'I'm So Happy You Are Here' with the curator **Takeuchi Mariko** and **Celina Lunsford**

TUE, 10 June, 15 July, 12 August, 2 September, 3.00 pm **Curator Tours** with **Celina Lunsford** or **Andrea Horvay**

**Public Guided Tours** Wednesdays, 5.00 pm

**Opening Hours** Tue–Sun 11.00 am – 6.00 pm, MON closed

**Entry** 7 Euros, reduced 4 Euros

Press information and press photos for the exhibition **I'M SO HAPPY YOU ARE HERE** at the Fotografie Forum Frankfurt are available for download at: [www.fff Frankfurt.com/press](http://www.fff Frankfurt.com/press)

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## **About Aperture**

Aperture is a nonprofit publisher that leads conversations around photography worldwide. From its base in New York, Aperture connects global audiences and supports artists through its acclaimed quarterly magazine, books, exhibitions, digital platforms, public programs, limited-edition prints and awards. Established in 1952 to advance 'creative thinking, significantly expressed in words and photographs', Aperture champions photography's vital role in nurturing curiosity and encouraging a more just, tolerant society. For more information, visit [www.aperture.org](http://www.aperture.org).

## **Fotografie Forum Frankfurt**

The Fotografie Forum Frankfurt (FFF) is one of the leading centres of photography in Europe. As an exhibition space, institution and event forum, the FFF deals with all aspects of photography. Since its founding in 1984 it has presented over 300 exhibitions with historic and contemporary artists. Additionally, the programme of the FFF ACADEMY comprises regular workshops, talks and discussions with internationally renowned photographers, artists and experts. Fotografie Forum Frankfurt is the organizing partner of the international RAY Triennial of Photography, which takes place in various exhibition venues in Frankfurt/Rhine-Main. Further information available at [www.fff Frankfurt.org](http://www.fff Frankfurt.org).

## **Exhibition Production**

The exhibition was curated by Lesley A. Martin, Takeuchi Mariko and Pauline Vermare and is a production of Aperture, in collaboration with Rencontres d'Arles, supported by Kering – Women In Motion, the Ishibashi Foundation, the Anne Levy Charitable Trust and the 1970 Japan World's Exposition Memorial Fund. The production in Japan was coordinated by Masako Sato, Contact, Tokyo.

The exhibition at the FFF is made possible by Japan Foundation, Seiko, the Women's Department of the City of Frankfurt am Main and the Deutsche Börse Photography Foundation.

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The Fotografie Forum Frankfurt is supported by the Förderkreis Fotografie Forum Frankfurt e.V., the City of Frankfurt am Main, FUJIFILM Electronic Imaging Europe and Hauck, Aufhäuser, Lampe.

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## **PIONEERS**

*The story of women's contributions to photography in Japan is woven into the medium's earliest days. The daguerreotype was introduced to Japan in 1848. In the lead up to the Meiji era (1868 – 1912), new technologies, including photography, were enthusiastically embraced as part of Japan's path to modernization. Women were often employed behind the scenes, retouching and hand-tinting photographs, as well as taking the photos themselves.*

*In postwar Japan, women photographers have been an integral part of the story of modern and contemporary Japanese photography, even if their stories are in need of amplification today, especially for Western audiences. Their work is irreducible to any one particular statement, genre, or style. As an entry point, however, the works of Tokiwa Toyoko, Watanabe Hitomi, Okanoue Toshiko, and Yamazawa Eiko showcase a few of the multiple trajectories and lines of inquiry that can be found in this exhibition. Their practices encompass the gamut of portraiture, experimentations with colour and abstraction, subjective documentary, as well as the use of photography as a vehicle for commentary and critique.*

*The exhibited portrait of Shima Kakoku, taken by his wife Shima Ryū, is credited as the earliest known photograph made by a Japanese woman photographer. It was created just two years after the opening of the first photography studio in Japan in 1862, and less than twenty years after photography was introduced to the country. Shima Ryū initially worked alongside her husband in their family-run portrait studio, before opening her own studio in 1870 following his death.*

## **ELEVATING THE EVERYDAY**

*In Japanese, photography – shashin – translates as “imitation of reality” or the “representation of truth.” Using a variety of approaches, from the documentary to the diaristic, each photographer presented in this section conveys their sense of being present in the world. They create extraordinary images from ordinary moments, paying attention to what Noguchi Rika calls the “small miracles” of everyday life.*

*Each artist in this section brings a personal, analytical eye to the traces of lives lived, often intimate photographs with a point of view similar to the reverse shot in a film – an image made from the vantage point of those who have been seen as the subject, not the author, of images. They offer us stories of family and intimacy that have been notably absent from Western histories of Japanese photography – that of the Japanese woman. Over time,*

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*photographers like Ishiuchi, Ushioda, and many others have become poetic ethnographers and archivists of their own lives – and of the lives of others. In the 1990s many Japanese women photographers gained critical acclaim for their distinct use of colour and for their focus on representing their daily experiences, relationships, and selves. Conveying a state of being with great attention to nature and the ephemeral, these works offer moments of poetry and contemplation. Indeed, these photographs do not imitate reality: they elevate it.*

## **SELF, GENDER AND SOCIETY**

*Tokiwa Toyoko published the first photobook by a Japanese woman, Kiken na adabana (Dangerous poison flowers). In 1956 she held an exhibition titled Hataraku josei (Working women). The subjects included sex workers, wrestlers, nurses, and nude models, challenging ideals of the primarily domestic roles that women were expected to occupy. The impulse to question cultural and societal assumptions around women's ways of being is a throughline across the work of many of the artists in this show. Attention is paid to the symbolic frameworks and cultural codes. From creating constructed tableaux of women as automata, to using self-portraiture to conjure up identities, to making a fantastical archive or typology of possible selves, these works engage in a critique of the homogenizing forces that often operate within Japanese society. Photographs of the self are an invaluable tool for both articulating and deconstructing the external pressures on the individual. These photographers use the personal narrative to discuss identity and society, puncturing expectations and building self-directed narratives of what it means to be an artist, a daughter, and a mother. Some are linked directly to shishōsetsu, the Japanese I-novel, a modern genre of literature about the artist's lived experience. By focusing on themselves and on their communities, these photographers bring sharper contour to the larger systems of gender, class, and power that inform women's personal, social, and economic lives.*

## **EXTENSIONS OF AND EXPERIMENTS WITH THE MEDIUM**

*Experimental approaches to photography became prominent in Japan in the 1930s with the rise of a movement called Shinko Shashin (New Photography). Influenced in part by the German New Objectivity movement, Shinko Shashin practitioners broke away from Pictorialism in search of a uniquely photographic expression. Reflecting the male-dominated nature of Japanese society, many women were excluded from the mainstream of these movements and continued to work in relative isolation. Ironically, this hostile environment encouraged them to distance themselves from the trends of photography. It gave them the freedom to explore more daring and experimental approaches, in which the*

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*image is neither objective nor exclusively defined by its photographic properties. The photographers in this section share a commitment to rethinking the process of photographic production, and also developing, editing, printing, and finishing. Often, the materiality of the photograph is important while simultaneously reaching out fearlessly across disciplines and media. In this age of increasing dematerialization of the image, these experimental approaches to photography provokes to move the viewer, while also engaging with the assumptions and expectations placed upon the photographic image.*

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**Ishikawa Mao, Kin, Koza (present-day Okinawa City),  
Okinawa Prefecture, 1975-77;**

Form the series **Akabanaa (Red flower)**

Courtesy Nap Gallery, Tokyo and Aperture

© Ishikawa Mao 2025



**Ishiuchi Miyako, Mother's #39, 2002.**

Courtesy Third Gallery Aya, Osaka and Aperture

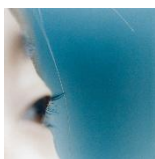
© Ishiuchi Miyako 2025



**Katayama Mari, bystander #14, 2016.**

Courtesy the artist and Aperture.

© Katayama Mari 2025



**Kawauchi Rinko, Untitled, 2004;**

Form the series **“the eyes, the ears”**

Courtesy the artist and Aperture.

© Kawauchi Rinko 2025



**Kon Michiko, Inada + Bōshi (Yellowtail and hat), 1986.**

Courtesy PGI gallery, Tokyo, and Aperture.

© Kon Michiko 2025

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**Nagashima Yurie, Full-figured, yet not full-term, 2001.**

Courtesy the artist, Maho Kubota Gallery, Tokyo, and Aperture.

© Nagashima Yurie 2025



**Narahashi Asako, Kawaguchiko, 2003;**

Form the series **“half awake and half asleep in the water.”**

Courtesy PGI gallery, Tokyo, and Aperture.

© Narahashi Asako 2025



**Noguchi Rika, Cucumber, 21 August, 2017.**

Courtesy Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo and Aperture

© Noguchi Rika 2025



**Ushioda Tokuko, Untitled, 1983;**

Form the series **“My Husband”**

Courtesy PGI gallery, Tokyo, and Aperture.

© Ushioda Tokuko 2025



**Yamazawa Eiko, What I Am Doing No. 77, 1986.**

Courtesy Third Gallery Aya, Osaka, and Aperture.

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