



Un projecte de:

FUNDACIÓ
PER —
AMOR A
— L'ART

FLESH, SKIN, GENDER, EXPRESSION: A TOUR OF 'THE GAZE OF THINGS' BY MIRYAM SAS

How many people have some experience with Japanese photography? For how many people is this your introduction to the Japanese photography world? (A few people raise hands). Laura Pastor, one of the art mediators of Bombas Gens, gave me this great idea of starting our tour over here on this wall (*On the wall we can see the names of the fifteen photographers included in this exhibition*) because it gives you a little bit of the sense of the whole exhibition, all the names here are the different photographers that we'll see. To me they're very familiar friends, but it might be hard to remember who's who if you're not used to all those names, so it helps to give a sense of the era.

Provoke is the core of this exhibition: the context around provoke. Basically you have a few generations; and the biggest movements are the VIVO group and *Provoke* group. One of the original things that Nuria Enguita and Bombas Gens is doing is including women photographers in this story. Recently in the West, the *Provoke* group is receiving some attention; people are starting to have heard of these photographers, especially Nobuyoshi Araki or Shōmei Tōmatsu, both very famous in the West. But the story almost never includes any women photographers so it's very special: only in Valencia for the first time you can see the contribution of the women photographers to this story. My theme is gender, body and skin... so you'll see the generations, you'll see the overall overview.

I think we should start over here, with **Tokiwa Toyoko** (Tokiwa's photographs are located on the front wall of the first room). So first little Japanese lesson, you say the last name first, because I took Japanese studies I have a hard time

flipping the name the other way so the first name I say is the name and the second is the surname. So her name is Tokiwa and there is this nice little thing (plastic sheets located at the side of the door containing details about Tokiwa's pictures) you can look out later that explains the different locations of these photographs, and they're all from 1954 to 1956. It's kind of cool that the very beginning of this exhibition, the center in a way, the heart begins with a woman photographer that, as far as I know, has never been shown in Europe ever before, so it's a new discovery. In fact, in Japan, she is not recognized, her photos were received by this institution from a Museum of history of Yokohama; so she is understood not so much as an artist, but as a recorder of the history of this large city. These prints were made by a photographer in Valencia whose name is Mario Rabasco, who recently made these prints specifically for this museum.

In the history of Japan, in the whole 20th Century, one of the big events is World War II. Well you probably all know about the loss by Japan of World War II. Their imperial activities in China where there were a lot of atrocities and awfulness committed by the Japanese, which they're only now beginning to acknowledge and then the U.S. bombs Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. And there's the occupation period where the allied forces, in this case the United States troupes led by MacArthur come into Japan, around the area of Yokohama. There's this sort of new culture: on the one hand the constitution that says that women should be equal to men; on the other hand there's this whole neighbourhood of women who are serving the U.S. troupes as prostitutes (similar to the red light district in Yokosuka). This was an area that had a very fraught history. But during the occupation period the U.S. censored discussion about that, the bad things the United States was doing in Japan, were not supposed to be talked about, the United States was all great. So there were some photographers who thought the United States was not all great, the G.I.s were not so great and that it was both interesting, sometimes exciting, sometimes voyeuristically, exploitatively interesting to look at them; and sometimes made them very angry to think about the ambivalent role of the United States, on the one hand jazz was exciting, so many interesting and exciting things were happening; on the other hand, what about those women?

Some people felt that those women were protecting Japanese women, because this small group of prostitutes worked for the G.I.s, protecting the rest of Japan. Tokiwa didn't think so much, she was particularly interested in all working women: her main theme were women who work. And so she took these photos, for example, in this one (NOMIER) you can see a *pan-pan* (which is the name given to the Japanese prostitutes at the time) with some G.I.s. She has a smile on her face, but the way he's holding her looks a little violent to me, although she seems interested judging by her smile, so we can feel some sort of mixed reaction from her. There were special *pan-pan* who catered to Americans, other *pan-pans* catered to Japanese men, the ones for the Americans had red lipstick and always had chewing gum, as well as they had some kind of reputation. Here Tokiwa shows us the kind of position of these women, their feeling as they're working for the Americans. I talk about this to give you some context about the situation that was taking place in these certain neighbourhoods of cities like Yokosuka or Yokohama at the time of the invasion.

Tokiwa also took a picture of this woman called Horoku (NOMIER) and she was a woman who had a history, in fact, that neighbourhood was already a red light district in the past. In 1923 there was a very big earthquake in Tokyo, where everything burned down in a moment when there was a lot of violence against Koreans, so there was a lot of big destruction. And then there was this port neighbourhood and a lot of boats came in and the people there settled already having a red light district. First, Horoku was married but then she got tuberculosis, and their children were taken away from her so she became a hostess in that area before World War II, from the 1920s. After World War II the whole area was devastated she built her own little house and she stayed there also working as a prostitute hostess. But when Tokiwa takes this picture of her, dancing the 'Bone Dance', a kind of festival dance, I think we can see that her face is always emotionless; this is me talking but we can sort of see the history and emotion of this period in her face. When Horoku created this little space, built her own hut and decorated it. She didn't let anyone inside, except for the men sometimes, but no women were ever allowed. Horoku let Tokiwa come to see the way she built this space, put on her clothing... Tokiwa shows her as

such a creative performer, a person with agency, a person with a power, a kind of performance power, but also very sympathetic to all the history that she went through, we can see that history but there she is simply dancing. I think Tokiwa is interesting cause she gives us both the history and the women's perspective on the history, a very critical perspective and very empathetic, very respectful towards these women and what they have experienced.

Here too, she shows us the women of the red light district but not when while they're working only while they're hanging out, when they are moment of repose between themselves, where they're not looking for the men, they're looking at each other, they're just talking with each other, getting ready, putting on make-up... so that's another example for you. So let Tokiwa stand, first of all, as the radical intervention of this exhibition in the story of *Provoke* and Japanese photography. We're going to put the women's story and their act as photographers back into the history.

Kijuki Kawada is a very well-known and acclaimed photographer, and he has this work called 地図 (*chizu*), which means 'map' (pictures of these project are exhibited in the right wall of this first room). He was also reflecting on the history by taking pictures of the Hiroshima memorial dome and other places that were significant in Japanese history for their relationship with the bombing of Hiroshima. These were meant for a book, a very beautiful book that had no titles. So only in the back in very small letters you can read to what did they make reference. So it's a map without words and instead he's taking the textures and I think of it like the skin of the objects. After Hiroshima we can see he uses these dark colours, we see the way the bomb affected this landscape, and these objects... it's like as if the world itself had a skin and it has a texture he wants us to see that materiality, not the story of Hiroshima understood by captions related to immediate concepts in our minds; but experience for the first time just looking at these dark colors. There is a photograph of a dead soldier but only at the end we learn his name, and these buildings are a testimony to that history and its violence by themselves.

Now we're entering the 1960s. This is **Shomei Tomatsu** (who was part of the VIVO group, just like Kawada); maybe one of the most famous photographers of Japan, he had an exhibition in Madrid recently so it's likely there's a lot of good writing about him in Spanish. This goes in chronological order: from the end to the beginning, and you can see his politics. He took part in the exhibition *The Eyes of Ten*, in which Tokiwa participated too, but she was left out. Some of these men created this agency called VIVO, meaning 'life' in Esperanto. The main idea of it was to not just be a commercial group, but to create a movement; it had a political side. One of Tomatsu's photos of Okinawa (NOMIER), it kind of reminds me of the paintings in the other room (Referring to the neighbor exhibition dedicated to Norwegian abstract painter, Anna-Eva Bergman), in a way you don't see the story but for Tomatsu the picture embodies the politics of his feelings about the U.S. occupation of Okinawa, which at that time in the 1970s was a very big story.

Usually when we think about 1960s protests in the West we think of 1968 or 1969, during the Vietnam War. In Japan there were already some very big protest in 1952, and another round in the year 1960, so they were clearly ahead of us, this movement was already happening. The VIVO group didn't just want to document, pretending to be documenting objectively; they wanted to include a sense of movement, considering their photography should be part of a political movement, there should be subjectivity and also poetry; a mix of what's real and what's real on the interior. And I think this concept is shown very well in this particular photo from 1969 (NOMIER ABOUT PROTESTS), in which we see the protests, the flags in a blur; preceding *Provoke* (which appropriated this blurring technique) and you can see how this leads him into the *Provoke* movement. It is not an objective record, but it shows that desire to experience some sort of shifting in their world.

For my gender theme, I'd like to point out this photo (NOMIER TOKYO LIGHTS) from 1965. During this era, the whole landscape of Tokyo was changing: in 1964 was the Olympics, in the late 1960s the first skyscrapers were being built... Nowadays when we think of Tokyo, Shinjuku, the first thing to come up in our minds are skyscrapers, but there was a period when it was not like that

and then, all of a sudden, they come up. Suddenly the economy is booming, all men are working in companies, they start to commute, to live inside these apartment buildings outside of Tokyo having to take the train every day in and out, like they still do... I feel like Tomatsu documented something about the male subjectivity and the situation of men in that period inside the company. The companyman on his long commute. (NOMIER) He's got a long ride, maybe there's no seat, and maybe that's his snack... You see he also has an interiority, that he's not just a piece of the machine of Japanese economic growth, but that he also has a kind of poetic or pensive moment; even while he's clearly participating in this high growth economy. Here (NOMIER) you can also see the infrastructures, the subway, and the people moving around... Something the we can see when we travel to Tokyo are the massive groups of people on the subway during the rush hour and this moment right here was the beginning of that whirlwind; and I believe Takanashi captured that very well.

This person, **Koji Enokura**, is an important member of the 1960s art movement called *Mono-ha*, often translated as the School of Things. The theorist of this school is Lee Ufan and they had a lot of theoretical writings. To sum them up, they're basically interested in the materiality of things, which means that they believed the level of subjectivity from the artists should be minimal. They wanted to leave things alone; which is almost impossible for an artist, but as much as they could they wanted the object to speak for itself. They are also very interested in the 'encounter' as such, between the artist and object, in which the latter prevails and some sort of mist encounter comes as a product of this relation, seen from a very philosophical perspective. I'll try to explain this idea by giving you an example: somehow when I need my glasses, I miss their reality or their use to me, the inherent 'beingness' of the glasses for themselves; the relation between the human subject with the object. Here you can see some sort of divisions on the fabric, it's very abstract and just by its side there's this piece of wood attached to the artwork. It is very rare to have these pieces and photographs exhibited in a museum, but they're all sustained by the same principles: to make an attempt to embody this idea of materiality. I believe that for a society in the 1960s that was so rapidly transforming, having images everywhere and flashing neon signs, images, televisions, or newspapers... it

felt like everything was about images and somehow materiality was lost, it was all virtual and the 'thingness' of things was something that they wanted to try and to think about.

So here we have **Daido Moriyama** (NOMIER 2016), this is some of his recent work, as you can see he is very interested in the city and also, like many *Provoke* artists, in the image of the images; he captures not the image of things but the image of images, as opposed to Enokura. Moriyama is interested in the reproduction and reproducibility of things; and he is one of the photographers who participated in the *Provoke* movement. I think I want to start here: (NOMIER- THE GIRL CLIMBING ESCOMBROS) this image is from 1971 and you might recognize the name of the place which is Yokosuka, where those G.I's were stationed, where the American base was, so same place that Tokiwa Toyoko was photographing. Moriyama also has a lot of photographs (even whole series) focused on this area. Although he wasn't the first, his photographs became very well-known. We see a woman climbing up a pile of debris in bare feet, which is pretty unheard of a Japanese person to walk in the dirt in bare feet, she's in a nightgown, and the whole world is tipped on its side, we see the building is closed on as if it were claustrophobic. I think this is a really good depiction by Moriyama of that feeling of being encapsulated or framed by an infrastructure that is too big, having the tender, vulnerable human body being represented by a woman. This woman in Yokosuka is usually portrayed as a someone who is definitely engaged by that world.

So let's go to the middle of the room, these are the *Provoke* magazines, which are just reproductions of the original ones. These are sort of the heart of the *Provoke* movement; these participants were the ones who theorized an idea that takes you even beyond the simple concept of movement or subjectivity. These artists wanted to do something different because they felt like ideas and concepts and our whole way of thinking had come to a dead end. Today maybe we'd call it 'globalization', however they didn't have the word, but they truly felt how that consumer society was homogenizing the world and everything was becoming too much the same and we couldn't see how oppressive the power structures were; there was some way in which we had lost touch with reality

itself and so they thought that photography could provoke thought, to go to a new place. So they had a very philosophical idea about thought itself, reaching this dead end. One of the ways they did it was to leave behind all beauty, they didn't want to make a beautiful photograph, they didn't want to make a photograph that we think of as objective, or the combination of objective-subjective. They wanted to refuse all conceptual ideas and instead they decided to use the camera to cut out a fragment of reality and place it on the page, and it could be ugly, grainy, blurry and rough. It could be political, like these ones about the coalmines (NOMIER) or it could be just an empty landscape. There are some many valid translations for the word 'provoke' apart from its obvious meaning, such as 'detonate', 'spark something new'... For instance, I feel like Valencia is still very present as a place with a lot of feeling, but some places in the world are filled with Starbucks and Walgreens, with no localness at all. These artists felt the beginning of that and they wanted to do something to provoke, to be able to think about those large systems that are too big for any individual mind to understand. So we can't even grasp it, but the camera can. That camera is going to grasp those things that are beyond the individual and that is their conceptual aim.

This one is my favorite piece (*Circulation: Date, Place, Events*, 1971), made by **Takuma Nakahira**. He's one of the photographers who participated in *Provoke*, Moriyama participated from the second issue and Nakahira was one of the founders and he's also a critic who wrote the manifesto, and he came up with this idea of 'provoking thought'. In 1971 he was selected to go to the Paris Biennale about Contemporary Art. He was selected, and decided to do a project. He strolled the huge exhibition of Contemporary art in *Bois de Vincennes*, and the theme was 'Interventions', which he liked very much because instead of being a dead object on the wall, it will be interacting with the people. But then, Nakahira looked at all the art and he said 'it's a desert, there's no people here', and he felt depressed all of a sudden, believing that Contemporary Art had reached a wasteland and, at that moment, he felt the surge to create something that would really respond to the world we lived in. So he came up with an idea of doing everyday photographs around Paris, it's called 'Circulation: Date, Place, Events' he's capturing the movement. He went around the city with this camera

taking pictures he borrowed a dark room (which took him a few days to find) and he printed those, then took probably the Metro to *Bois de Vincennes* ...

He then took the pictures and put them up and our exhibition includes some of the photos he took, as well as some photos from his exhibition. He put them on the wall, and when there were too many he started putting them on the floor. Pretty soon he started to make a mess on the floor. He wanted the reality of that movement to jolt him, to chance his to jolt him, to change his concept, to change his life, to change his mind... So instead of him making a project for the audience he wanted the let reality strike him and circulate in the moment. Some of them are straight up sequence of the same moment, in these pictures we can see this concept of small delay, it only takes a minute of delay and already there's a little space for you to think critically, in which we can infer the movement, where the framing changes and it's confusing but he's interested in that little moment followed by another moment and so on. Similarly here we see a little progression but he's just as interested in all the newspapers he ran across, like seeing the Japanese emperor in Paris in the newspaper or a 'Viva La Muerte' sign. The signs, the language, not just the objects, but everything he saw around him.

In fact the exhibition curators didn't like his exhibition because he didn't fill the whole space right away so there was some scandal going on and they decided to use this empty part for something else and he was very upset they said 'you're making a mess in our Biennale'. In that time the idea of art would not be a mess on the floor, these days maybe we could imagine it but they were like 'this isn't finished, this is wet, this is curly' so that's why I think it's very helpful to have some of the images of what it looked like in the time mixed with this great chance to see the images very clearly maybe more clearly than you could see it in the original exhibition.

Nakahira was very political and also had a lot of integrity; so he was very upset when the style that *Provoke* invented (*are-bure-boke*) got the attention of advertising agencies, they adopted it, they consumed and they spit it back as a new style. He felt very upset because that was not the idea. He said the

magazine had failed. He had to find a new way to do photography, so he had a long period in which he did not make any photographs. He felt like he couldn't find the way to make a photograph that would have the right integrity because everything would get munched by capitalism and become a style. So I have a lot of sympathy for him, but I wish he didn't burn most of his negatives out of a crisis.

For a while he wrote essays in Japanese. We were talking about how some of them were appreciated in Spain first, so the first edition of translation is actually from Barcelona, five of his essays, but he wrote about the dilemma of the photographer but I consider that a part of his photography too, the ideas in language in relation to images to so he continued to think about that a little while and then there was like a big hiatus. I don't know the details about it, but then more recently like 2011, 2012 and 2013, he kind of came back and started doing a lot more photography (urban photography) and then he passed away in 2015. So he had a few years at the end where he was photographing again.

I wrote down all the dates of all the artists in this exhibition and most of them were born in the 1930s, a couple were born in 1947 but almost all the artists were born in the 1930s, so **Akira Sato** too was born in 1930 and he died in 2002. His work is also not very recognized in my opinion; we don't usually talk about him. He, like Takanashi, was trained and interested in fashion photography, you can see the influence of Richard Avedon here and so one of the critical ways that I think is interesting to think about the role of women in the world of photography is to think because they're so few women on this side of the camera, to think about the role of the women being photographed as also their own agency, there's a kind of power and playfulness in the relationship where even while being photographed the women are participating in the making clearly of these works. I feel like you can kind of see that here the kind of playfulness and the kind of connection with the photographer is visible even while he's making abstract forms out of the women's bodies there's a way in which you can sense that kind of connection or I feel like it's a playfulness: the models' playfulness. Also, over there when you see her eyes and nose there's some way he's also capturing the idea of her as someone who is thinking, is

feeling... has a subjectivity. Largely his photos are very playful with abstract form and the black and white image so I guess another thing that maybe should be said about the 1960s in Japan, maybe it's not fair to say it on top of Sato, is that in general this is certainly true of Moryama and Araki as well, in general there were a lot of ideas about revolution in the sixties, everybody thought society needed to be changed and male activists or male artists usually felt that in particular sexuality, liberation of sexuality was how they could kind of achieve some kind of revolution of their subjectivity through expressing their body, expressing their sexual energy. That's fine and they didn't always think about the women that were sort of the object of this, you can see it very often in Japanese cinema of this period, like the director Nagisa Oshima. He has a lot of scenes where the male rapes a woman and that's how he gets his liberation, and it's problematic from our perspective today, more than problematic... The woman had access to the body, that kind of association woman-body mean that to have access to that not-rational side they sort of try to access it through the woman but not so much with her, as on her. Anyway, it had to be said.

Mishima Yukio is a Japanese author who is known for his ambivalent ideas. One of the things that he was great at was writing literature, metaphors, explaining what happens with the body. Another thing he was good at was performing with his own body so he performed military men, now we would say queer, but they had no concept of this in the past, it was like they didn't have the concept of gay identity so much but if they did, Mishima would fit, but it's much more kind of fluid performative version. So he's interested in the baroque, he's interested in the performativity of the body, and he wrote beautifully about Butoh dance and, how it's like what I said with the glasses, how Butoh... our normal gestures in everyday life are too conventional. We walk, we say 'hi', everything is in quotation marks, you could see anybody do it. Has any of you seen Butoh dance, ever? I used to dance actually. That's how I started being interested in Japanese art. When I was 21 I went to a workshop of Butoh dance with the founder of Butoh, Kazuo Ono, which was an open workshop, anybody could go, if you take the train and then you walk, all the smoking European dancers they all walked up this big hill and he had a space where he gave the lesson but I thought 'Okay I'll watch the lesson'. No, you're not allowed to watch,

Butoh is not for spectating, you have to dance, everybody has to dance so if we were a class of Butoh I would say 'You all have to dance' and then Kazuo Ono would speak like a poem, he would say 'inside of your mother's womb there's an ancestor spirit' and you say 'thank you'. It's like a poem, like a jazz poem. He would speak for 10 minutes and then one Japanese guy would summarize it in one sentence and then he would say 'now we dance like this or like that' but not literally, I don't want to see any roses, I don't want to see any stomachs, nothing, no quotes, nothing conventional I want you to move... don't even move just dance still and let the spirit of your ancestors pull you and show you how to move and he said: 'me, no, the student from America you dance, dance' so I had to dance and I became very immersed in this idea of a non-literal dance, not representational. And you don't smile, it's not like ballet, these are all too conventional, even modern dance is too conventional. So Mishima wrote that, he expressed in language beautifully what that dance was trying to search for that's outside of representation. He worked with all the dancers and this other guy took photographs of them (they were all friends) trying to represent also in photography something Mishima is interested in mythology, he's interested in the baroque, he's quoting from older art as well, but a kind of performativity also of gender. So gender is not going to be male-female, but it's going to be... who knows? He also liked to play with things that are kind of shocking too, like in this one where she's kind of tied up. There are no limits.

This whole room is around 1960 and 1970. Both of these photographers are known for photographing those protests that we talked about. They take very direct photographs of those huge protest movements (more or less objective). Maybe today we think, oh well, there are a lot of protests in France now but if we think back in the 1960 when there was a lot of political engagement when people really cared and thought things were really going wrong and made a lot of noise about it. In Japan they also think back as a moment of politics but up until recently these photographers were simply thought as journalists. However today, just by realizing that the images we had of that era were taken by photographers who had a very strong perspective about what journalism should be, about how to document them; that's how we know about this protest before they were like transparent like we could see history but we didn't worry about

who were taking these photos. Now we realize that those documents were taken by people who were very close to those movements, and who really cared.

I think what **Nuboushi Araki** is famous for is for photographing desire. He photographed his honeymoon with his wife and other instances in hotels with women. He is very very famous. I think what is cool is that Bombas Gens has a hundred 514 of his flower photos and the way is laid out here is beautiful. What is interesting for him is his own 'desire gaze', whether is a flower, an object, or a woman: receiving pleasure. However if you look closely to these flowers there is both sexuality and death (there is a snake hidden). This idea is clearly shown in the series with his wife. He took something called 'sentimental journey': photographs of her wife on the honeymoon: they both signed it together which is an example of keeping the credit. When she died he worked on a series of photographs of her funeral that are very scary. All the ashes you see in the photos. She died very young, 1990.

This is the radical room in which this whole side is the women photographers. Here again we see Yokosuka, that area where the American base was located. This other side is **Ishiuchi Miyako**. She actually grew up in Yokosuka herself. She was not allowed to go to those neighbourhoods, too scary. But she went back in 1977 and after. For her it is a very haunted space. She has a little bit in common with Kijuki Kawada in that she is interested in the skin of things. She goes to these abandoned halls, dance halls, and bars, of Yokosuka where maybe today people are living their everyday lives around the broken down ruins of the after occupation period. In this wall, here, it is just a building, the windows are closed, there is a car from today... but she allows us to imagine the bodies of the women who were working in Yokosuka in the past. All that is left now is the buildings, buildings that for her contain that history. They are almost like a skin. She moved on to actually photographing skin. She did a series called '1947', that is the year she was born and she went around and photographed up close the feet of women born in 1947 (this was in the 1980s). You see their professions like hairdressers, manicurist at work... she was interested in the work that women do, the labour. Even those who were working

as manicurists their skin is thick. They don't have time to take care of their own feet. Normally no one would look at their feet but we see up close all those after effects of all that labour that they're putting in their devotion. In addition to the kind of feeling that we get, from that kind of sense of time and skin, they are also very beautiful (not in a sexy way), but there is a kind of beauty in the image she creates.

The last one I would talk about is a very new discovery, **Tamiko Nishimura**. Nobody knows about this photographer. This is new information here in Valencia, being shown for the first time. She did have a book that came out but we don't even know where all the prints are except for these three, which Bombas Gens managed to find and buy so it is now in the collection. In 1970-71 she was going around Japan and her ears and her eyes were full of the popular culture of that moment, the songs... she watched all the movies of all the avant-garde new wave directors, and those images were in her mind and she decided to take a tour around Japan and she took a tour and in her mind was just wanting to visit and experience all the places she had seen in these different films. So she shows the infrastructure, the landscape and also the body of a woman that she took from a taxi. You see a little overview of a potential famous photographer who was left out of the story, so since our topic is gender and we are recovering some of the women photographers who were not recognised but she did work as an assistant to Moryama... There were lots of women's feet and hands involved in *Provoke* and so she was one of those hands behind the photographs that we saw, but she also took her own photographs so this area gave us a big voice for the women that were contributing. There were male photographers exploring the limits of gender and also the body and flesh in general, in other words, the limits of conceptualization of social forces of many of these exhibition, including the materiality of the body. They were also male and female photographers trying to understand and express all those changes through photography.