

## For Immediate Release

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### SFMOMA FEATURES TWO EXHIBITIONS OF EXTRAORDINARY ASIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

From September 12 through December 20, 2009, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present two exhibitions organized by Lisa Sutcliffe, SFMOMA's assistant curator of photography: *The Provoke Era: Postwar Japanese Photography* and *Photography Now: China, Japan, Korea*. The exhibitions feature pictures from SFMOMA's extensive collection of postwar Japanese photography, one of the most highly regarded in the country, and from the museum's growing collection of contemporary photographs from China, Japan, and Korea.

*The Provoke Era: Postwar Japanese Photography*, the museum's first survey of postwar Japanese pictures, will include nearly a hundred works from the 1960s through the 1990s, as well as a number of rare books and magazines.

In the wake of its defeat in World War II, Japan sought to both forget the past and transcend it. Aligning with the American victors in an unexpected embrace, the country catapulted itself almost overnight from an historic empire to a democratic nation with a competitive economy. Although it had experienced extreme poverty immediately following the war, it now not only accepted the presence of its Western occupiers but widely appropriated the American influences of capitalism and democracy, and even elements of popular culture, such as jazz. The complicated and at times ambiguous atmosphere created by the transformation from a traditionally restrictive social structure into a new egalitarian society provided fertile material for the burgeoning artistic community. Photography was ideally suited to record this rapidly changing environment, and the medium experienced an important avant-garde development.

The exhibition title is derived from a small-press photography magazine, *Provoke: shiso no tame no chohatsuteki shiryō* (*Provoke: Provocative Materials for Thought*), founded in 1968 by a group of photographers and writers united in their pursuit of a new and more expressive visual language. The works on view provide a context for this incendiary time, and include work from the postwar period, from the *Provoke* movement itself, and from later generations of artists who have felt its impact.

Among the earliest works in the exhibition are those by photographers Shomei Tomatsu, Kikuji Kawada, Eikoh Hosoe, and Ikko Narahara, who united in 1959 to form VIVO, a collaborative group modeled on the Magnum Photos agency. The cooperative shared a common philosophy that sought to forge a new critical practice in opposition to



Eikoh Hosoe, *Kamaitachi #31 [Caped Kamaitachi running through field]*, 1968, printed 1971; gelatin silver print; 10 3/4 x 16 5/8 in.; Promised gift of Paul Sack to the Sack Photographic Trust; © Eikoh Hosoe

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established photographic conventions. Rejecting straightforward realism, this new generation of Japanese photographers projected a more personal and ambiguous vision of Japan, such as that in Hosoe's, *Kamaitachi #31* (1968), which exemplifies the violent upheaval and passionate artistic response that followed the war.



International political turmoil and increased consumerism were the catalysts for the *Provoke* movement, formed in 1968 by photographers and writers including Takuma Nakahira and, later, Daidō Moriyama. Reacting against the narrative and descriptive properties of photojournalism, the *Provoke* artists embraced a style they called *are-bure-boke* (rough, blurred, out of focus), with which they sought to deconstruct traditional photographic conventions (as can be seen in Moriyama's *Hotel, Shibuya* [1969]). *Provoke*, their self-published magazine, was conceived as both a photographic and political manifesto.

By the 1970s, Japan's economic bubble had burst and the *Provoke* era had come to an end. Photographers became interested in investigating underlying social and economic structures; Hiroshi Watanabe surveyed the underworld society of Shinjuku, and Masahisa Fukase turned inward, examining his solitude after the dissolution of his marriage in *Seikan Ferry Boat*, from the series *The Solitude of Ravens* (1976). Since that time, Japan has continued to support a diverse and flourishing photographic culture, which has transformed and grown as the country has evolved.

*Photography Now: China, Japan, Korea* features some sixty-five pictures, many newly acquired and on view for the first time. As an enhancement to its Japanese photography collection, SFMOMA acquired in 2007 and 2008 a diverse group of fifty pictures from thirteen emerging photographers in China and has also added a selection of photographs from Korea. The work in the exhibition examines the diverse approaches of photographers working in China, Japan, and Korea even as globalization has allowed for faster and more fluid cross-cultural influence. As evidenced in Japan, photography is well suited to record the rapid changes transforming modernizing nations. Amateurs and professionals alike contrast the collision of traditional customs and modern Western culture, resulting often in remarkable and occasionally unsettling pictures.

Unlike earlier generations whose work was more stylistically cohesive, contemporary Japanese photographers embrace a broad range of subject matter and approaches, as is seen in Mikio Matsuo's minimal portraits of Zen monks and Naoya Hatakeyama's examination of Osaka's evolving cityscape.

China's artistic community blossomed after the Cultural Revolution and the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. As Western influences from popular culture to philosophical theory have more freely crossed the country's borders, artists have developed a complex and self-reflexive approach to making art that often combines creative expression with political and social criticism. With the recent construction of the Three Gorges Dam, which has displaced massive populations and demolished historic cities and towns, photographers have both documented the changing face of the rapidly developing nation and staged events for the camera that reflect the effects of modernization on rural populations and the environment. One of the fathers of the performance art movement in the 1990s, Zhang Huan draws on family photographs to allude to notions of kinship and belonging and relies on the artist's body, which becomes a provocative site from which to explore sociocultural, political, and even personal conditions.

A new generation of Korean photographers is beginning to make a mark on the international photography scene. With the rise in student travel in the 1980s, new creative perspectives have filtered back into the country, prompting

vigorous artistic exploration. Often informed by traditional Korean art forms including ink painting, photographers such as Bohnchang Koo focus on the natural world and organic structures, making pictures within a minimal aesthetic.



In conjunction with the exhibitions, SFMOMA's Education Department will present two Free Tuesday programs. On Tuesday, November 3, at noon in the Phyllis Wattis Theater, Lisa Sutcliffe, assistant curator of photography, will introduce four short films related to *The Provoke Era: Postwar Japanese Photography*, and at noon on Tuesday, December 1, Sutcliffe will give a talk on *Photography Now: China, Japan, Korea*. For additional information, visit [sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org).

The exhibition is made possible in part by the Carpenter Foundation.

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**Museum hours:** Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

**Koret Visitor Education Center:** Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

**New admission prices starting May 30, 2009:** adults: \$15; seniors and students: \$9; SFMOMA members and children 12 and under: free. Admission is free the first Tuesday of each month and half-price on Thursdays after 6 p.m.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

**Visit our Web site at [sfmoma.org](http://sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.**

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