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U.S. | NEW YORK | NY CULTURE

Capturing Beauty and Vintage Prints

Exhibitions of works by Hiroji Kubota, Edward Weston, Tina Modotti and others



'Fisherman crossing Li river' (1979), by Hiroji Kubota. PHOTO: HIROJI KUBOTA / MAGNUM

By **WILLIAM MEYERS**

Dec. 25, 2015 7:51 p.m. ET

Hiroji Kubota Photographer

Sundaram Tagore Gallery
547 W. 27th St., Ground Floor
212-677-4520
Through Jan. 2

Aperture Gallery

547 W. 27th St., Fourth Floor
212-505-5555
Through Jan. 14

Hiroji Kubota (b. Tokyo, 1939) assisted several Magnum photographers when they visited Japan in 1961; 10 years later he became a member of the great cooperative agency. This dual exhibition of over 100 images features color dye-transfer prints, at Tagore, produced from 1978 to 2003 and platinum black-and-white prints, at Aperture, made from 1963 to 1989. The pictures were taken in Asia, Europe, the U.S. and elsewhere, but wherever Mr. Kubota worked he maintained a Japanese aesthetic sensibility—and a passion to create beauty that was his reaction to growing up in devastated postwar Japan.

The dye-transfer prints use a 12-color process no longer available and

are



'Kashihara Shrine' (2002) by Hiroji Kubota. PHOTO: HIROJI KUBOTA/MAGNUM PHOTOS

exquisite. The tones of “Tsurui, ‘crane village,’ Hokkaido, Japan” (2002) are mostly shades of gray, but the red patches around the birds’ eyes bring the picture of this traditional subject to startling life. In “Kyaiktiyo, Burma” (1978), the aureate colors of the precariously balanced, gilded boulder lighted by a rising sun are played against several shades of blue in the morning sky and the bright orange robes of six monks at their devotions.

Religious sites and rituals recur in both galleries: “Greek Orthodox Christians, Old City, Jerusalem” (1970), a picture at Aperture of pilgrims with candles, is hung between one of Jewish boys at the Western Wall, “Old City, Jerusalem” (1970), and one of Muslims telling their beads in a mosque, “Amman, Jordan” (1968). In like manner, Mr. Kubota shows images of Mao in China and Kim Il Sung in North Korea functioning as religious icons.



'Doña Guadalupe/Mr. Guadalupe, Juchitán, Oaxaca, Mexico' (1988) by Graciela Iturbide. PHOTO: GRACIELA ITURBIDE

Vintage Masters: Iconic Photographs From 1853-1996

Throckmorton Fine Art Inc.

145 E. 57th St., Third Floor

212-223-1059

Through Jan. 9

Vintage prints are those made by the photographer, or under his supervision, at about the time the photograph was taken; they are considered by collectors to be more authentic, and hence more valuable, than later prints of the same negative. The 48 prints at Throckmorton are all vintage and, in some cases—such as Graciela Iturbide’s “Cementerio/Cemetery, Juchitán, Oaxaca” (1988)—the only one known to exist. Most of the pictures are by photographers who

worked in Latin America. There are four pictures by Edward Weston from his time in Mexico, including the interesting “Casa de Vecindad” (1926), a modernist composition of drying laundry, some hung on clotheslines, the rest lying on the ground. And a platinum print by Weston of his protégée and mistress, the soulful “Portrait of Tina Modotti” (1924).

Modotti has three works on display, including a portrait of her lover, the handsome “Julio Antonio Mella” (c. 1928). In the series of artists’ biographies Throckmorton has been sending to its email list, the possibility of Modotti’s involvement in Mella’s assassination is brought up; he was a Trotskyite and she a Stalinist. The subtle print of “Temple of the Warriors, Chichen Itza, Yucatan” (1932) that Laura Gilpin made for the Cranbrook Academy of Art is still in its original matting. Her delicate platinum “Navaho by Firelight” (1932) conveys a sense of nighttime quiet. Marilyn Bridges, Flor Garduño, Mario Cravo Neto, Manuel Álvarez Bravo and Lola Álvarez Bravo are among the other artists.

—Mr. Meyers writes on photography for the Journal. His photo book “Outer Boroughs: New York Beyond Manhattan” was published earlier this year by Damiani.

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