

Hiroh Kikai

Tokyo Labyrinth

September 5 – October 18, 2008

Gallery hours: Tuesday – Saturday 10 am – 6pm



Yancey Richardson Gallery is pleased to present *Tokyo Labyrinth*, Hiroh Kikai's debut solo exhibition in the United States. Currently featured in the exhibition *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan* at New York's International Center of Photography, this is the first presentation of work from *Tokyo Labyrinth*, his thirty-year photographic exploration of that city's urban landscape. Comprised of photographs made between 1976 and 1989 in the suburbs and old downtown of Tokyo, the exhibition reveals a relationship to documentary photographers ranging from Eugene Atget to the New Topographics photographers of the 1970s.

Trained as a philosopher, Kikai turned to photography after encountering the work of Diane Arbus and Walker Evans. From the beginning of his career in 1976, Kikai has focused on two parallel bodies of work in his adopted city of Tokyo: *Persona*, a series of portraits of individuals encountered in the Asakusa district; and *Tokyo Labyrinth*, a portrait of the city itself in all its surreal and complicated geometry. Kikai poses his subjects against a blank wall in order to let their individual personalities reveal themselves without being informed by the environment; in *Tokyo Labyrinth*, he has chosen to photograph the urban landscape without the presence of its inhabitants. "If a portrait... is a way to grasp the interiority of a person, the same thing should be able to be embodied in the landscape... I should be able to illustrate the smells seeping out from people's lives."

In both *Tokyo Labyrinth* and *Persona*, Kikai has worked within certain self-imposed limitations. The artist explains, "The rule I adopted for *Tokyo Labyrinth* is to use only standard lenses on a medium format camera with black-and-white film. I thought I wouldn't be able to impress my scent on these cityscapes without such constraints."

Kikai's images combine a careful description of place with elegant abstraction; windows, laundry, pipes and telephone lines are reduced to lines and planes. Regardless of the rigor of his compositions, Kikai is essentially a humanist who is interested in people and how they live. He describes his work as asking the question, "What does it mean to be human?" Kikai's images describe with affection the details of human existence in one of the most cramped cities on earth, expressing the eloquence of the commonplace found in the side streets and back alleys of modest neighborhoods with formal precision and an eye for the surreal. With an economy of means, Kikai's work projects honesty and a deep respect for the evidence of time and humanity.

Hiroh Kikai's work is the subject of seven books, among them the 1999 publication *Tokyo Labyrinth*. A major monograph, *Hiroh Kikai*, was published by Steidl this month. His work has been included in exhibitions at the Neue National Galerie, Berlin; Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; Museum of Modern Art, Toyama, Japan; and Center for Creative Photography, Tucson, Arizona.

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