

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hiroh Kikai: PERSONA

May 14 - July 2, 2009

Reception for the Artist and Book Signing
Thursday, May 14, 2008, 6 - 8 PM
Project Gallery exhibition: August Sander: Selections

Yancey Richardson Gallery is pleased to present *PERSONA*, Hiroh Kikai's second solo exhibition in the United States. Featured in the much acclaimed 2008 group exhibition, *Heavy Light: Recent Photography and Video from Japan* at New York's International Center of Photography, this is Kikai's first solo U.S. presentation of work from his Asakusa Portraits series, a more than thirty-year exploration of the photographic portrait begun in 1973. Both a humorist and a humanist, Kikai describes with affection the universality of the human condition, expressing with eloquence and formal precision the individual essence of each subject's character.



Trained as a philosopher, Kikai turned to photography after discovering the work of Diane Arbus and Walker Evans. Since then, Kikai has focused on two parallel bodies of work: the *Asakusa Portraits*, a series on individuals encountered in the Asakusa district, an urban backwater of Tokyo historically known as a center for popular entertainment; and *Tokyo Labyrinth*, a dreamlike protagonist-free portrait of the city itself. Both series are made in black and white with the same handheld square format Hasselblad given to Kikai by his university philosophy professor at the outset of his career. As Kikai explains, he sees his portraits and cityscapes as two sides of the same coin.

Photographing outside Asakusa's celebrated Sensoji Temple, Kikai poses his subjects against the plain exterior wall of the temple in order to let their individual personalities reveal themselves without being informed by the environment. Spending no more than ten minutes with each subject, Kikai exposes less than 12 frames of film, using only natural light and offering little direction. Another of what he describes as his "game rules" is to never approach strangers in recognizable designer clothes. By doing so he feels the picture would become invariably tied to a particular moment in time and interfere with the incorruptibility of the subject. Kikai generally works with what he describes as the "common folk" and even goes as far as to describe himself as a "country bumpkin." His image titles, such as "A young man who walked here from far

away”, reflect a summation of the notes made by Kikai during the very brief interaction with his subject, whether a truck driver, a nurse or a butoh dancer. Kikai’s philosophical approach to photographing his subject, stripping each character down to his essential attributes, has strong ties to the work of August Sander. Although he admires the work of earlier photographers like Evans, Arbus and Bellocq, Kikai credits his inspiration to the writers Anton Chekhov and William Faulkner and the filmmakers Andrej Wajda, Satyajit Ray and Shohei Imamura whose films he says “celebrate the instinct for survival and the appetite for life among the inhabitants of society’s lower depths.”

Hiroh Kikai’s work is the subject of eleven books, among them a major monograph, *Hiroh Kikai: Asakusa Portraits* published in 2008 by ICP/Steidl. In addition to last year’s International Center of Photography exhibition, 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.

For visuals or further information, please contact Tracey Norman at tnorman@yanceyrichardson.com