

# Tsutomu Otsuka Solo Exhibition “TRANS-BODY”

Dates: Friday, May 31 - Sunday, June 23, 2024

Hours: Tuesday - Friday 12:00 - 19:00, Saturday and Sunday 12:00 - 18:00

Closed: Mondays

Venue: Communication Gallery Fugensha

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We are pleased to announce the solo exhibition of Tsutomu Otsuka, “TRANS-BODY” at Communication Gallery Fugensha from May 31 to June 23, 2024. This exhibition commemorates the publication of his new photo book of the same title, published by Fugensha.

Tsutomu Otsuka was born in 1951, the son of a fisherman in Urayasu, Chiba Prefecture, and graduated from Tokyo Polytechnic University in 1971. When landfill construction was rapidly progressing in Urayasu, which used to be a rich, shallow sea, the reclaimed land became a creative site for Otsuka, who made several experimental films with an 8mm camera from 1969 to 1972. From 1971, he also began filming landfill landscapes.

This exhibition will feature approximately 40 works from Otsuka's newly published photo book “TRANS-BODY”, a compilation of three of his best-known series, “Rootstalk”, “Earth-Time”, and “TRANS-BODY”, created using a unique technique known as “swamp development”.

This series, produced between 1991 and 1998, was created by bleaching photographic paper and then submerging it in a swamp for one week, known as “swamp developing. The swamp, a “natural darkroom”, dyes the photographic paper in unique shades of brown and blue, sometimes leaving patterns of sedimented fallen leaves or floating silver, resulting in prints with a unique sense of substance.

The images, obtained by taking close-up photographs of parts of the bodies of men and women, including himself, and of plants, and combining multiple negatives of these images, appear to be primordial life forms that have fused the boundaries of man and woman, human and plant, life and death. “Swamp Development” seems to be an attempt to return these forms of life to the amniotic fluid of the earth, the swamp.

In addition to the “swamp development” works, this exhibition will also include a work in which Otsuka visited Soma City, Fukushima Prefecture, after the Great East Japan Earthquake in 2011, copied and “silver developed” an unspecified number of album photographs that were washed away by the tsunami. The “silver development” process, in which photographic paper is boiled on a hot plate with humus to silver the

photographs, condenses the passage of 100 years into a single print, expressing the photographs as objects in which people's memories and time overlap.

The works presented in this exhibition are a sublimation of the sensations of soil and water nurtured in the zero-meter zone of Urayasu, the physical experience of performing in a film production after these original landscapes were cleared to the point of refreshing, and the experimental spirit of the photographic medium, all in harmony. We hope you will enjoy this exhibition and photo book, the culmination of Tsutomu Otsuka's work.

During the exhibition, a gallery talk will be held with Kotaro Iizawa, a photography critic who contributed to the recently published book of his work.

## Biography

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Tsutomu Otsuka

1951 Born in Chiba, Japan.

1971 Tokyo Institute of Polytechnics.

1969-72 make a Experimental film.

Solo Exhibition/Group Exhibition

1971 No End/Movie Exhibition, Shinjyuku Head Power, Tokyo.

1986 IncognitoI/Shadow of the Flower, Shibuya DOI Photo Plaza, Tokyo.

1987 IncognitoII/Shadow of the Flower, Nikon Salon, Tokyo.

1989 IncognitoIII/Seed of the water, Shibuya Seibu Art Gallery, Tokyo.

1992 Earth-Time, INAX Gallery, Tokyo.

1993 Earth-Time, INAX Gallery, Sapporo.

1994 Emulsion No. 5 · 6 · 5, Art Forum YANAKA, Tokyo.

1996 TRANS-BODY, HOKARI Fine Art Gallery, Tokyo.

TRANS-BODY, GALLERY ississ, Kyoto.

1997 body's fate, Gallery LE DECO, Tokyo.

Placebo, HOKARI Fine Art Gallery, Tokyo.

1998 TRANS-BODY II, HOKARI Fine Art Gallery, Tokyo.

LOVE'S BODY Rethinking Naked and Nnde in Photograpy,

Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo.

Entre l'eau l'air et la terre, Galerie Vrais Reves, Lyon France.

2002 Thin wall Thin body, KAIZEN, Tokyo.

Room, Gallery LE DECO, Tokyo.

2005 Body Works 1991-2005, GALLERY IMAGO, Tokyo.

- 2006 Bone,GALLERY Private,Kamakura.
- 2007 SILENT,Space Kobo & Tomo,Tokyo.
- 2013 Tyvek suit/Fukusima,Plaec M,Tokyo.
- 2014 HALF LIFE/Fukusima,Gallery Photo/synthesis,Tokyo.
- 2015 Emulsion and Memory,Gallery Photo/synthesis,Tokyo.  
The ground which was quitted,Gallery Photo/synthesis,Tokyo.  
Smell,Gallery Photo/synthesis,Tokyo.
- 2017 FUKUSHIMA2011-2017/After the Aftermath,ohrenhoch,Berlin Germany.  
one day · 16/11/2016 · Fukusima,Gallery Photo/synthesis,Tokyo.
- 2018 The day the sky split,Gallery yocto,Tokyo.  
Thin body · Room · Y,Gallery yocto,Tokyo.
- 2019 Shore Border,Gallery yocto,Tokyo.  
SITE/1971-2019 Coastal Reclaimed Area,  
Urayasu City FolkMuseum,Urayasu.
- 2020 Twinkling skin, Emission of light by life and death,  
Ashikaga Museum,Ashikaga.
- 2021 Water Vein/1971-2021 Gulf Coast,Gallery yocto,Tokyo.  
Panorama City/Tokyo · Hong Kong,Gallery yocto,Tokyo.
- 2022 Shore Border2/Coastal Reclaimed Area · 1971-2022,Gallery yocto,Tokyo.
- 2023 Kakaku, Gallery yocto,Tokyo.

#### Public Collection

Bibliothèque nationale de France

Urayasu City Folk Museum

Shadai Gallery

## Artist Statement

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Beyond Earth, Water and Body

Tsutomu Otsuka

Sofas, chairs and cushions --- these are important props for my photo shoot.

They are all covered by a black cloth and they are placed right there.

First, a model lies down there (it could be me sometimes) and the shooting starts.

The body slowly sinks in the set of props, moving little by little into relaxing body positions, holding a pose of almost falling off or making constrained movements.

Then, as the body would attempt to make a balance, its muscles suddenly tense up to get the body back to the original position.

The model may repeat standing on one leg and then alternately on the other, or switch one's crossed legs

while sitting on a chair. Lying down, the person may move the arms up and down, from one side to the other, or meaninglessly keep thrashing the legs.

My greatest interest here is focused on the expression of the skin and muscles at the moment when they move from stillness and motion. Such a shooting style is continuously repeated every time.

It is because external features respectively of male and female bodies would emerge to show explicitly amid the shift between tension and relaxation or in the movement of strong muscles turning to weak or vice versa.

The body images taken into photograph are all fragments of poses, which do not have any message either a provocative attitude. It is just sufficient as they are being there.

Some of the body fragments shown here are my portraits.

The arms, legs, torso and buttocks and other body parts do not, however, refer to specific individuals; they remain anonymous so that they appear to be interchangeable.

Once those parts of a body are detached from the whole, they float around and acquire a relationship of freedom of being unattached to anywhere and its danger.

These fragments repeatedly change their shapes and eventually appear on the photographic paper as a new body reshaped and reconstructed.

The photographic paper is then chemically treated and submerged in the swamp.

## Written Contribution

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Ever-Transforming Photography & Body:

Thoughts on Tsutomu Otsuka's photographs

Kotaro Iizawa (Photography Critic)

Tsutomu Otsuka is a photographer of quite a wide range of styles. He made a documentary series by photographing the transforming land reclaimed in Urayasu near his home since the 1970s. He was also engaged in producing experimental films from 1969 to 1972, the years he was studying at the Tokyo College of Photography (today renamed Tokyo Polytechnic University) and also after he graduated. But the collection of works he exhibited since the latter half of the 1980s --- starting with "Incognito" series, followed by "Earth-Time" and "TRANS-BODY"---is his masterpiece that made him known widely as an artistic photographer.

Those photographic series have outstanding characteristics. For one, they are not simple landscape or snapshot photographs. He photographed parts of plants, rocks or human bodies, emphasizing their distinct forms or materiality and then he integrated and restructured them into new images. The other characteristic is that he employs extremely unique methods in his photographic printing process.

He primarily used a method that he himself calls "swamp development" technique. After he makes prints on photographic paper, he would let the printed sheet stay deep in a pond or a swamp for a long period of

time. When they are later pulled out of the water, the image colors would have turned to brown or blue. Sometimes they ended up having traces of algae, mud, dead leaves and others in the water. It is absolutely unpredictable how the images would transform as it depends on various factors; the water quality, the temperature and the length of submersion time are all intricately entangled in the process.

Otsuka started working in such a style perhaps because the environments surrounding photography underwent dramatic changes since the latter half of the 1980s. During this period, the world of photography was having a breakthrough coming along. Photography had been traditionally meant for record making (or documenting), but a number of new photographers emerged at once then with their photographic works on the border with contemporary art. They would not only photograph subjects as they are, but they would additionally manipulate images or further process them. It became a matter of course to apply manipulation techniques to photographic work. The collage-like composition of Otsuka's photographs and "swamp development" method could have been his answer to such a trend in the times.

But that is not the only challenge he made. Produced with explicit emphasis of naked body images, his "TRANS-BODY" series appears to have engraved his unique sense of reality and physical sensation. During the same period, the static dichotomies of male and female, life and death, and the boundaries between normal and abnormal in body expressions were faltering. In the "TRANS-BODY", we mostly see the fragments of Otsuka's own body. However, someone else's nude body or a female nude also slip into the images, sometimes, fusing with his own. The process of "swamp development" further increased such variability, resulting in mysterious images emerging the way that even Otsuka, the artist, was unable to control.

Perhaps Otsuka comprehends things do not always stay in one place and they instead would repeat transforming and moving on from one place to another. Such an idea seems to reveal not only in "TRANS-BODY", but also in his other work. He visited Soma City of Fukushima Prefecture, which had been hit by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake. There, he found photographs that apparently belonged once in disaster victims' personal photo albums. He photographed them, made the prints and cooked these printed paper with humus in an electric hot plate, experimenting the "silver development" method. Keeping his distinct, unchanging stance, he proactively adopted such incidental transformation of images into his work here, too.

This photo book, "TRANS-BODY", can be called a culmination of his activities in almost 50 years as a photographer, or a collection of works that could mean one punctuation for him. However, with all his bold experimental spirit, a vigorous desire to create and the precise techniques needed to realize them in his work, Otsuka will no doubt continue his creative activities incessantly in the future. Looking at Otsuka's work, I see a great potential yet to be pursued in photography as a medium of expression. I will continue closely watching, looking forward to seeing if awaiting us at the end will be an angel or a monster.