

HAMILTONS

Nobuyoshi Araki: Hanaguruma II

4th September – 9th November 2024



Nobuyoshi Araki, Hanaguruma 39, 41 & 34, Shinjuku, c.2005 © Nobuyoshi Araki

"I've decided that I must do something different every time. If I don't keep transforming, I'll just become a master. It's no good being a maestro. I always want to work as if I'm a novice." – Nobuyoshi Araki

Following the great success of our first exhibition of Nobuyoshi Araki's sumi ink portraits, Hamiltons presents Hanaguruma II. The exhibition comprises of twenty unique and largely unseen sumi ink drawings displayed alongside a selection of important polaroid photographs that explore the centrality of the female figure in the artist's practice.

Nobuyoshi Araki is one of Japan's most renowned photographers and contemporary artists. Araki's work is often controversial, but his artistic genius is undeniable; every image reveals extreme technical mastery which influences many creative fields, including photography, film, painting, and in this case, ink drawing.

Araki's inspiration for these expressive ink drawings derives from his regular jaunts in Tokyo's Shinjuku district at a bar named Hanaguruma, which translates to 'Flower Carriage'. The artist spent many nights at Hanaguruma, where he would sketch portraits, photograph and drink into the late hours. The tiny bar, which closed its doors in 2015, consisted of a simple counter and two seats, and was frequented by an array of visual artists and performers from Nan Goldin, Robert Frank to Bjork and Lady Gaga. Those who visited were encouraged to make their mark on the walls with signatures, drawings, and Polaroids.

The portraits that Araki created in Hanaguruma were made using sumi ink which is an ancient monochrome ink derived of specific soot, ground with water and gelatine, used for calligraphy and painting. The technique of sumi ink drawing first developed in Japan around the mid-14th Century and is the embodiment of Japanese aesthetics. Using a simply made, natural black ink often applied to handmade paper, the artist is able to capture a timeless beauty and complexity of the natural world.

The focus of the art of ink drawing or sumi-e has, since its inception, been on the quality of the line; the goal of sumi drawing is not to accurately represent a subject but instead to convey a general sentiment or feeling of it. The bold or subtle use of brushstrokes allowed sumi artists to eliminate from their paintings all but the essential character of their subject. This is clear in Araki's portraits from Hanaguruma; his lightning-quick sketches barely trace the outline of his subjects' faces, sometimes with vibrant accents such as a blaze of red lips or the outline of an eye. The confidence with which Araki illustrates his sitters allows the viewer to imagine sitting next to him in Hanaguruma as his brush flashes across his sketchbook capturing the essence of everyone around him.

Both the ink drawings and polaroids explore methods of capturing an intimate moment with immediacy. Araki is recognised internationally for his prolific output and the erotic content of his photographs, which blur the line between art and pornography. He is most well-known for photographs of women bound according to the ancestral rules of Kinbaku – the Japanese art of bondage – a practice dating back to the 15th century. His interest in important Japanese cultural practices is also reflected in his use of traditional sumi ink.

ARTIST BIO

Nobuyoshi Araki, born in Tokyo in 1940, is one of Japan's most renowned photographers. He studied photography and film at Chiba University and went into commercial photography soon after graduating. In 1970, when he was a Dentsu employee he borrowed the company's printer and xeroxed his own photos in limited editions - what became his famous *Xeroxed Photo Albums*, distributed to friends, art critics, and people selected randomly from the telephone book. Over the years, his bold, unabashed photographs of his private life have been the object of a great deal of controversy and censorship (especially in his native Japan), a fact that has not fazed the artist nor diminished his influence. Araki is most well-known for photographs of women bound according to the ancestral rules of Kinbaku – the Japanese art of bondage – a practice dating back to the 15th century. Araki has divided opinion, but extreme technical mastery remains influential in many creative fields, including photography, film and fashion.

Araki has published over 450 books to date, including some of the most important photobooks of the 20th century: *Sentimental Journey*, *Tokyo Lucky Hole*, *Winter Journey* and *Shino*. Likewise, he has created films and photographed artists in the likes of Lady Gaga and Björk. Araki's photography has been exhibited internationally in both solo and group exhibitions, including the Fondation Cartier pour l'Art Contemporain, Paris and Centre National de la Photographie, Paris, and the recent *Breasts* exhibition at Palazzo Franchetti on the occasion of La Biennale in Venice, with works residing in many significant public and private collections including the Tate Modern, London and San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Pinault Collection, Bourse de Commerce, Paris, Albertina Modern Museum in Vienna and Kyoto Museum of Contemporary Art, Kyoto or the most recent Artelli's homage to the photographer on the occasion of his 84th birthday at Cement in Hong Kong.

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