

Erik Kessels

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Erik Kessels is since 1996 Creative Director of communications agency KesselsKramer in Amsterdam.

Kessels is a photography collector and has published several books of his 'collected' images: *Missing Links* (1999), *The Instant Men* (2000), *in almost every picture* (2001-2012) and *Wonder* (2006). Since 2000, he has been an editor of the alternative photography magazine *Useful Photography*. For *BON International*, *Adformatie*, *iM* (Identity Matters) and *Vrij Nederland* Kessels has made editorials on a regular basis. He has taught communication at the Hallo Academy Amsterdam and photography at the Gerrit Rietveld Academy and the Willem de Kooning Academy and gave many international lectures. Kessels curated exhibitions such as *The European Championship of Graphic Design*, *Graphic Detour*, *Loving Your Pictures*, *Use me Abuse me and From Here On and Album Beauty*.

In 2010 Kessels was awarded with the Amsterdam Prize of the Arts.



DAIDO MORIYAMA JOURNEY FOR SOMETHING

REFLEX AMSTERDAM

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JOURNEY FOR SOMETHING

Matthias Harder

Dr. Matthias Harder has been working as the chief curator at the *Helmut Newton Foundation* in Berlin since 2004 and has been teaching at the Free University of Berlin since 2002. Prior to his current position, he was a guest curator at the Fotomuseum/Münchner Stadtmuseum for three years and a curator at the New Society of Visual Art in Berlin for four years.

Born in Kiel in 1965, Matthias Harder studied Art History, Classical Archaeology and Philosophy in Kiel and Berlin. He publishes regularly in respected international magazines and has written numerous articles for books and exhibition catalogues.

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Fast City, Fast Pictures

Essay by Matthias Harder

His photographs are characterized by their coarse grain and the sense of a passing glance at the people in the streets of Japan's cities: Daido Moriyama is a master of swiftly capturing everyday situations that occur before his camera, and which through his camera become something special. The photographs he takes of his fellow Japanese citizens are spontaneous and intuitive. They depict drunkards in suits, children in school uniforms, Kabuki actors, and time and again, beautiful women. He also selects unusual angles: some pictures are shot at hip level, pointed at the legs or the bottoms of women passing by. A documentary film portrait of Moriyama reveals how such shots are created: like Henri Cartier-Bresson before him, he walks casually and unobtrusively through the urban underbrush, holding a tiny camera in his right hand dangling by his side, ready to shoot. Many of his images are realized unconsciously, indeed uncontrollably. He also takes pictures from moving cars, often going unnoticed. In the film, Moriyama seems less like a professional photographer than a tourist in his own country. During walks through the city he records a situation in a snapshot, often without stopping, using the medium like a visual diary. During his hours-long walks, the artist takes a great deal more images than he ultimately uses; editing – the subsequent selection of the final images that transport the desired atmosphere – is thus an extension of his creative process. His photographs are stylized and simultaneously authentic. Japanese society is filled with contradictions; its thousand-year-old traditions are as intensively lived as the newest technical novelties – and this applies to all generations. Women, during the day in the streets and at night in the bars

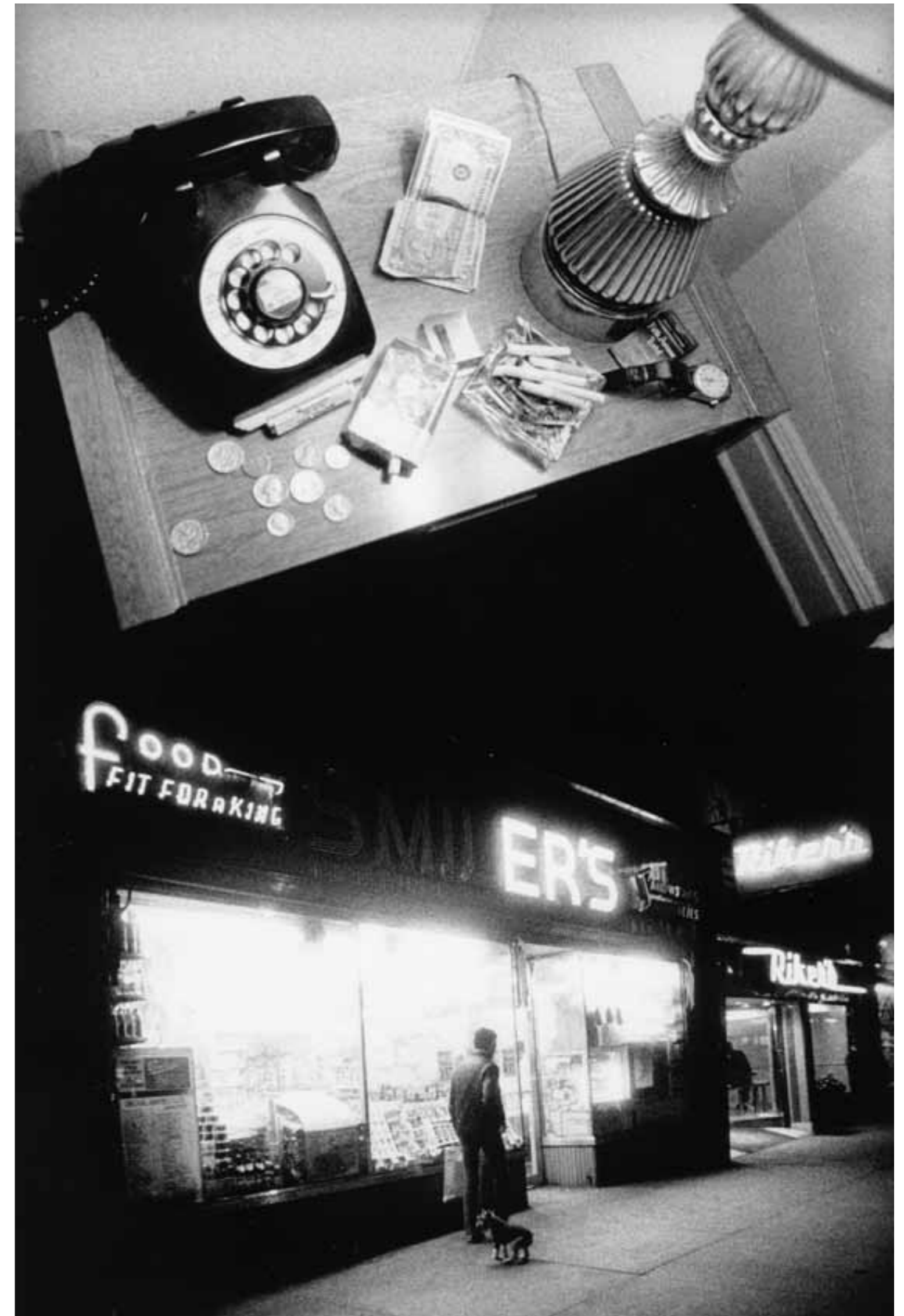
of Shinjuku, appear in Moriyama's images as a unifying element or even a leitmotif. There are close-ups of fishnet stocking-covered legs whose wearer we do not see, or the slender legs of young women, who – rendered anonymous by the picture's close framing – have caught the photographer's eye while passing by on escalators or on the street. Strolling, or rather aimlessly meandering through Tokyo's wide streets and narrow alleyways is also a symptom of an insatiable curiosity and inner restlessness. It is not surprising that a close-up from 1971 of a dog photographed at eye level – the iconic Stray Dog – comes to represent Moriyama's alter ego. One of his many photography books would later be titled *Memories of a Dog*. His visual language lives from light and darkness, under- and incorrect exposures, from smudges and oblique angles, which make the images seem incidental, at times even crude. The contrasts and shadows are often hard, the motifs partially cut off. Daido Moriyama is interested in the visual surprises of everyday life, from a fly on the windowpane looking out across the spectacular Tokyo vista, to construction sites, storefront windows or torn down posters revealing layers of history of past events and films. In his own publications he presents all his motifs as full-page images, arranged equally, alongside one another. Or his impressions become images whose context of creation one can hardly fathom, such as the circular tiles of "love hotel" bathroom whose seemingly three-dimensional surface the photographer depicts in its clearly delineated, yet chaotic rhythm. But there are not only urban stories that he tells with his camera. While he was only seldom abroad, Daido Moriyama, as we see

here at the start of the seventies, also explored Japan's more rural areas and historical sites – taking after his role model Jack Kerouac. The narrative told by his bleak, occasionally melancholic photography is very subjective. In post-war Germany it was Otto Steinert who initiated the Subjective Photography movement, which was preceded by the first Neorealist films in Italy – both are possible inspirational sources for similar approaches in Japanese photography. Moriyama is not alone in his style: in 1961 he moved to Tokyo and in the context of the Vivo group befriended Shomei Tomatsu and Eikoh Hosoe – older colleagues who were nonetheless likeminded in spirit and style. It was from around this time on that Moriyama's own images were published in various magazines, including Asahi Camera and Camera Mainichi. The 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo not only gave the world a glimpse into this island nation; it also gave the economy an unexpected boost. A number of native photographers benefitted from this, including Daido Moriyama, whose fame grew through publications as well as being named "Most Promising Photographer" by the Japanese Photo Critics Organization. Many magazines offered him a carte blanche to pick his themes for photo series as well as individual pictures, which would often be used for the cover. The now legendary magazine PROVOKE, which enjoyed only three issues between 1968 and 1970, arrived on the Japanese photo scene "like a bomb" according to his colleague Nobuyoshi Araki, and in hindsight signaled the start of a new era. In 1969 and 1970 Moriyama published several images in the magazine's second and third issues that included erotic motifs from a love hotel. In the mid-seventies, he founded together with Tomatsu and Araki a photography school in Tokyo, and a good decade later, a photography gallery. Moriyama went well beyond his own photographic pursuits to engage with the medium and its communication.

For more than five decades, Moriyama has

dedicated himself to a personally influenced portrait of Japanese society that frequently includes members of marginal groups whose existence challenges the cliché of the ultra-organized, fully employed market state. He continues to translate and reduce the cities' attention-grabbing neon into classical black and white analogue photography. He still develops his pictures in his dark room at home, using multiple exposures and other effects, along with occasional post-processing to heighten the contrast. Moriyama maintains full control over his images, from shooting the photograph to the final print, and remains true to his own style – even when the world seems to abound with ever-advancing technical discoveries. Few know that, for several years now, he also uses color film in his camera, as it is only seldom that color prints result. Also, Moriyama works with a fill flash during the day and does not always use the viewfinder of his compact camera. Although his work process seems playful and light, in the sensory overload of Tokyo his own senses are fully concentrated. He transforms people into archetypes; at the same time he preserves as well as evokes their personality. In his seismographic social portraits, the silent consent of many of his protagonists is obvious as they gaze into the camera. Other pictures are "stolen," paparazzi-style. But Moriyama, an observer who is as restless as he is precise, is not interested in celebrities, but in the normal person on the stage of everyday life, which sometimes gives the impression of a film set. Daido Moriyama is a classic. Not only will his achievements be remembered in the history of (Japanese) photography and influence many younger photographers; he also has a sure spot in contemporary photography. The fast and the happenstance is fed by his unrivalled intuition of the situation and the moment, and is the hallmark of this significant as well as radical, enduringly enigmatic oeuvre.

Matthias Harder,
Helmut Newton Foundation, Berlin





Drowning in Moriyama

Essay by Erik Kessels

It's rare nowadays that a photographer has a consistent style of working throughout his entire career. Daido Moriyama is one of the few who does. Since the seventies he produced thousands of photographs all with the same character and aesthetics. He resisted joining with the changing style of photography and although he made some beautiful colour work over the years, his approach for strong graphic black and white photography is a style that is clearly his own.

I am most fascinated by the images where he mixes light and shadow in a rhythmic, playful way. This can be seen in numerous subjects. Suddenly a traditional geisha lying on the pavement underneath a tree in Tokyo merges almost with a street scene in New York. The masses of people cutting through a pedestrian crossing in Tokyo become a rhythmic pattern of lines, shapes and spots. It's perfectly choreographed in the picture, even though it's probably taken in an instant. Daido Moriyama must be enormously influenced by the rise of all the publicity, signs and lights in the high streets of Tokyo. This subject is constantly coming back in his pictures, and travelled with him over the years to all kind of locations. With his way of looking at , he looked at New York, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo and many other cities. Travelling, in general, played a huge role in his photography.

The sum of all the works of Moriyama shows the clutter and chaos of objects and people with whom we anonymously share our lives and cities in which we inhabit. This hasn't changed in all the years Moriyama has taken pictures of them. It's his unique eye that remains constant when looking at the world. Moriyama uses his extreme black and white palette to make what can be considered as one huge image of this world, whether you're looking at Amsterdam, Tokyo or New York. Because of this abstraction we are completely focussed on the image as a total, its lights and darks. The aesthetic of his work is a result of his view to record impressions that are available. Impressions through his lens work for him as a black and white painting and only can be seen after he printed it on paper. Sometimes it takes a while before your brain connects all the different spots in the

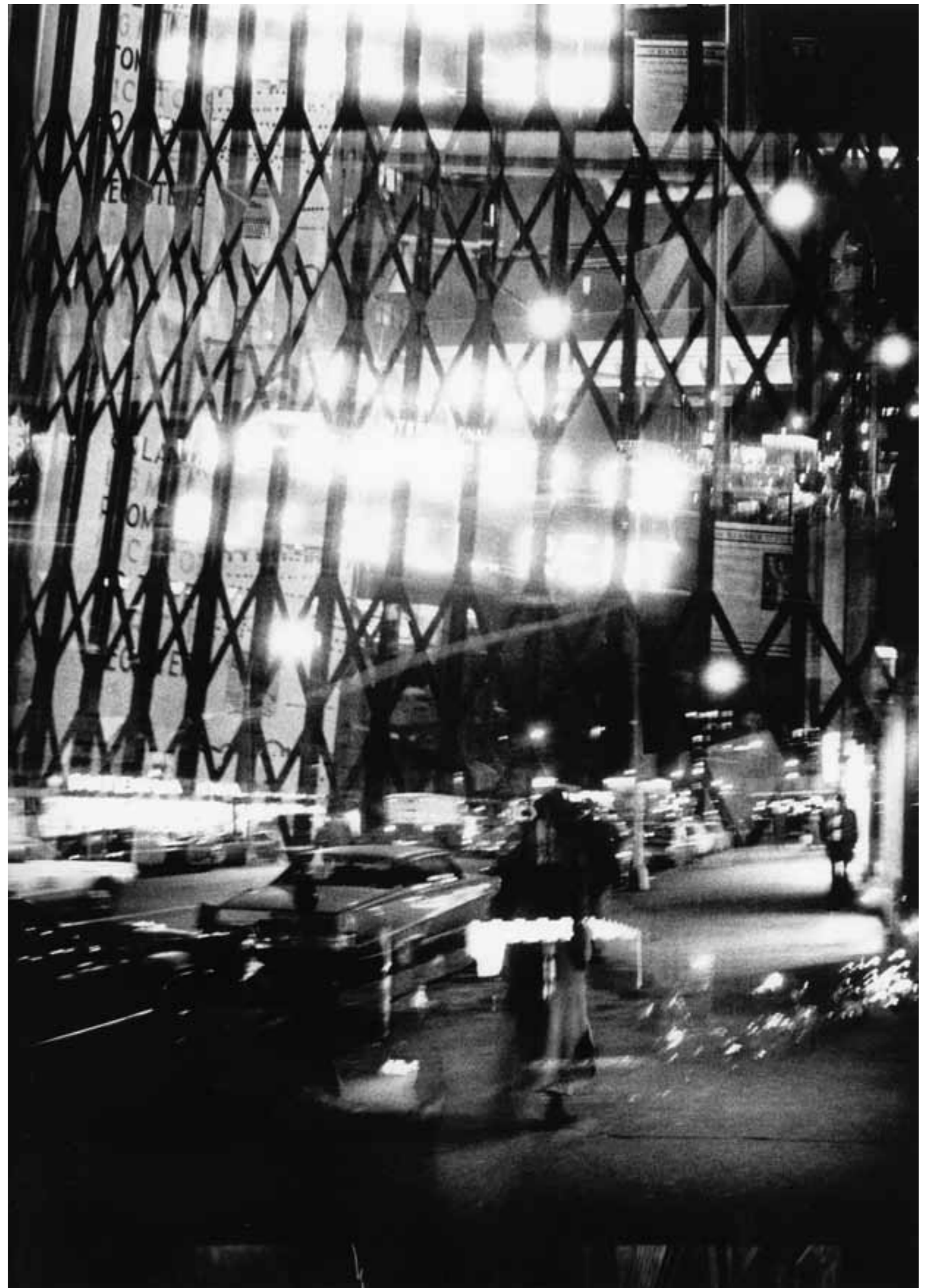
photograph and makes them into one image. Many times you see photographers taking pictures of a subject, which becomes the centre of the image. It's clear that the photographer intended to do this, as if he or she likes to say: Look here. This often leaves little room for interpretation. Moriyama mostly doesn't do this; in my view he is interested in the picture as a whole. An image that by chance has a certain size but could also live beyond this fixed size. His photographs go on beyond the borders of the paper. This is a result of extreme layouts and cropping. For example, graphic lines and patterns that you find often in his work. The lines run and jut across the page, and you can imagine them journeying on. Through this stark geometry, this capturing of the mathematical lines that form the urban landscapes and corridors of our lives, it gives us a sense of regimented order within the shambolic city life.

Intense bursts of light dominate many images, so dazzling you shield your eyes. If Moriyama takes a picture of a certain specific subject he transforms it by light. A beautiful example of this is a basket full of aubergines. You can say, not the most photogenic subject, but perfect for Moriyama. He plays with the extreme dark and light differences that result in an image of aubergines that you haven't seen yet. Making the ordinary extra-ordinary.

Then there are the dark brooding masses of objects, people and atmosphere, sometimes so dense and heavy, the images buckle under their weight; but more often than not are levelled out by glistening, revealing white light. There is life within these contrasts, so much so, that you can almost see the images breathing.

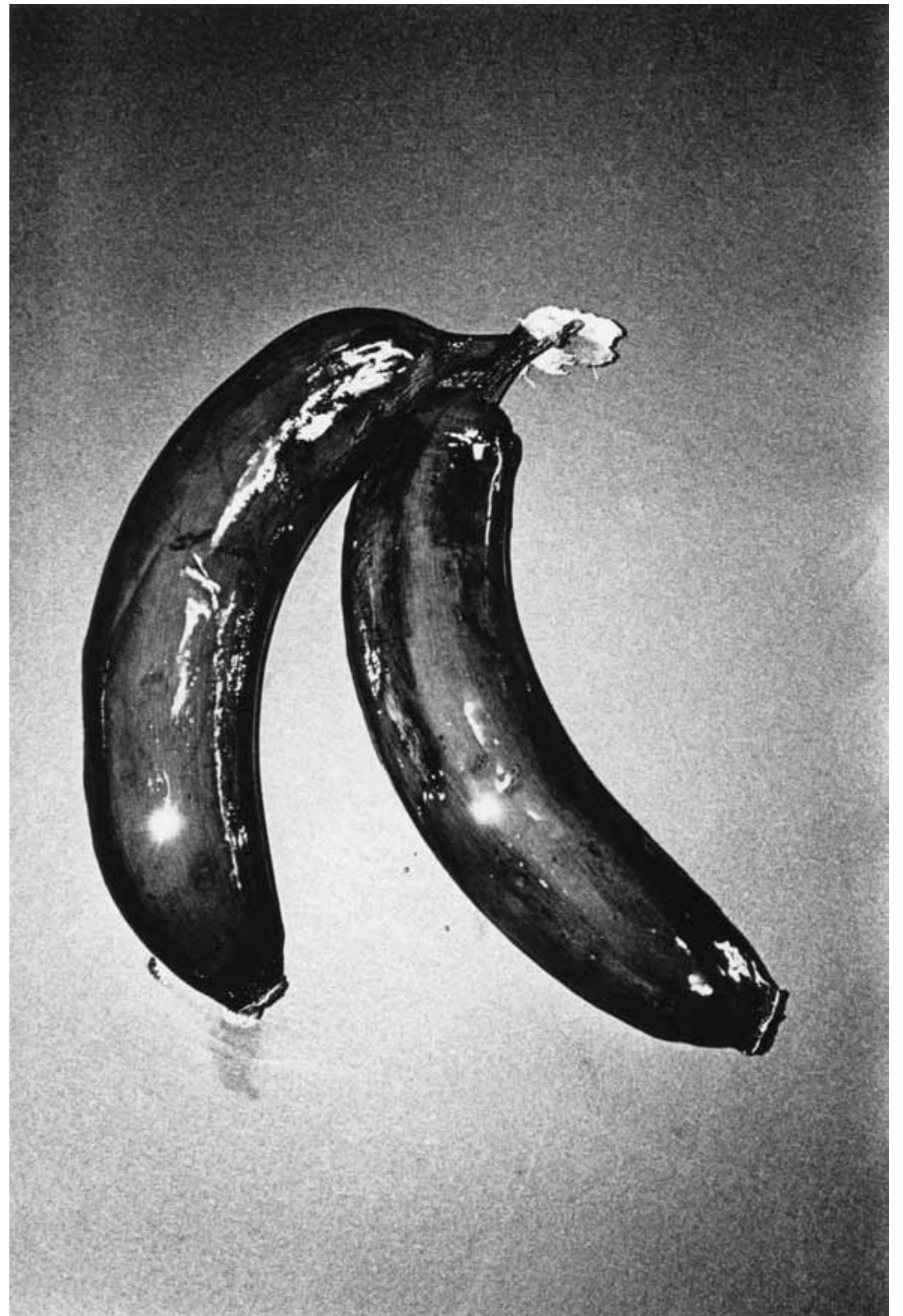
I always wondered why I fell in love with the work of Daido Moriyama. Why his work and his books are so addictive. His approach on first sight is rather classical, but when you let yourself go and you dare to get 'drowned' in his photographs, you feel the sensation of them. His search for radical spots, lines and shapes that disrupt the image seems to be a constant inspiration for him and surprises you time after time.

Erik Kessels, Amsterdam



















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