

Sometimes it is a coincidence that shapes one's life

This coincidence happened for Danish artist Steen Rasmussen (1954, Århus) in 1995 when he met a Japanese gallerist who visited an international workshop in Denmark. Rasmussen, who followed his education at the Jutland Academy of Fine Arts is most renowned for his graphic installations, prints and photographs. Next to making his own artworks, Rasmussen has also been busy on establishing international art networks as well as creating new platforms for public arts.

The meeting with the gallerist was the beginning of a longstanding relationship between the artist and Japan. The gallerist invited Rasmussen to organise a solo-exhibition in his gallery in 1998 in Nagoya, at the same time he was asked to give some lectures at the university there. Since 1998 Rasmussen has exhibited his work in Japan almost every year. During his numerous visits to the country, he got in touch with the art scene in Osaka and met fellow artists like Rikuo Ueda (with whom he is working on a joint work, *Winds visualizing the Immaterial*, that is still growing.) This meetings with other artists inspired him to start a long-term exchange project between Japanese and Danish artist, Rasmussen is still in charge of this project.

Rasmussen immediately felt at home in Japan, even though the country was very different from his home in Denmark. He came to love the Japanese behaviour that seemed strange in his eyes and got wondering about the opposing things he saw. Over the course of years, Rasmussen has established a lot of friendships and connections with the Japanese. Through conversations with both Shinto and Buddhist priests he gained a profound insight into the, for us Westerners, sometimes peculiar thinking of the Japanese people that formed the mentality of the country and that makes it so magical. This way of thinking has influenced Rasmussen in multiple ways, not only in his art, but also in his everyday life.

As long as Rasmussen can remember he has been interested in watching, studying and wondering about the behaviour of people. Therefore, he spends a lot of time during his visits to Japan walking around in the metropolises of the country, but he has also visited small villages and towns to see how life unfolds in these various communities. He became very interested in the street life of the public space in Japan. After a while he began making photographs of how tradition and modernity can clash, but how they also can melt into each other. His pictures give a view of the contrasting image that exists in the Japanese streets: on the one hand there is the ordinary life, but on the other you can experience extreme forms of self-promotion in the country. This makes for a fantastic visual interplay that Rasmussen has captured in his photographs. Making this kind of images has become a recurring part of his visits to Japan and therefore he has been able to record changes in Japanese society.

The pictures that are put on display in the exhibition show different snapshots of women and femininity in contemporary Japanese society. Rasmussen wants that his pictures makes people wonder about what they see on them. What are the hidden stories of these women? Why did they

choose this way to express themselves? Three of the pictures in the exhibition have an elaborate black frame that shows architectural elements that are regular features of the streets where the pictures were taken. The photographs are thus framed by an ornament that mimics the urban space where they were taken. In some of the photos there's an obvious clash between old and new: women in kimonos are portrayed next to men and women in modern clothing. In cities like Kyoto you can move from the past to the present in a few steps or just by turning your back to skyscrapers and look to the old buildings and bridges. Old and new go together well, in cities but also in people, and that is exactly what Rasmussen's pictures are about.

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