



KEN KITANO: OUR FACE

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One Day: Katase-Enoshima Seaside Beach, Morning to Evening, Kanagawa, 2007, 2007. C-print, 107 x 132 cm.

interconnected artistic exploration. During Kitano's recent trip to Beijing, he exhibited all of his works from the past twenty years, and also enlisted the help of Three Shadows' darkroom resources to create the life-size portrait series, "Our Face." At work in the dark room, Kitano precisely calculated the processing of photos, overlapping negatives as he worked to develop them so that the point of convergence for the merged short-exposure photos was formed by subjects' pairs of eyes. Ultimately, the portrait born from this process is both a combination of everyone who has been photographed and a face that does not itself possess the features of any one identifiable subject.

In the wake of the two major disasters to hit Japan in 1995 (the Kobe earthquake and the Tokyo subway gas incident), Ken Kitano went traveling in Mexico, where he experienced the longing found in the distance between those that survive and those that fade away after social and natural catastrophes. This experience spurred the emergence of a new kind of spatial structure in his creations. Kitano added to his pictures superimposed images of the spaces specific to each of his photographic subjects, creating a state of chaos, quietly infiltrating and watering down the various objects on which people depend, objects that actually serve to clutter their existence. The indistinguishability Kitano devotes himself to expressing is also something he embodies individually as a creator; in his work, he voluntarily has encounters with large numbers of people who are different from him, and as a result of this social fusion, he is able to transcend the differences and oppositions existing between individuals. On the one hand, this idealized self-image carries with it a certain placidity that is Buddhist in its tone (and because of this, the Kōyasan monks of esoteric Shingon Buddhism have also allowed him to take their picture); on the other hand, the function of communicating meaning inherent in the art of taking photographs is also present in the act of closing the distance between people inside and outside of the photo.

By contrast, in Ken Kitano's series in the early nineties, "Flow and Fusion," followed by his recent landscape series, "One Day," he plays even more with exposure length. The former series transforms the city's bustling crowds into vaguely outlined tidal floods of movement; the existence of humans and the difference between individuals (or lack thereof) are evaluated from a more macro perspective. During the creation of the "One Day" series, this went even further: exposure time was extended all the way to twenty-four hours, and human existence was almost wiped out. Kitano shows us here that with the help of the tool of the camera, we are able to go beyond the limits of the fragmentary way in which the naked eye takes in images. In a way that was once impossible, Kitano can take each and every person who has passed through a space over the course of a long period time, and gather them all together in one moment.

From certain points of view, Ken Kitano's works also have a certain kind of "anti-photography" edge: photography is typically the craft of capturing specific moments, but in his work, this typical characteristic is missing to a large extent. The artist's persistence is intimately related to his romantic understanding of art as something that connects people; art is a link that is manifested within and without the surface of a picture, existing among all of the people that have been photographed, and even among everyone who plays a role in the production of art, from subjects and photographers to viewers and collectors. This kind of consciousness has imperceptibly influenced each of the artist's works. **Yan Xiaoxiao**

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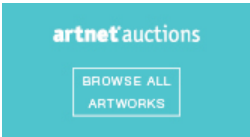
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