

Seiichi Furuya

Interest in Japanese photography, and especially Japanese photography books, grew dramatically in the early 2000s following the publication of several anthologies, most notably Andrew Roth's *The Book of 101 Books: Seminal Photographic Books of the Twentieth Century* (2001) and the first two volumes of Martin Parr and Gerry Badger's *The Photobook: A History* (2004, 2006). These compilations enthusiastically included a number of Japanese photographers—Nobuyoshi Araki, Daido Moriyama, and Masahisa Fukase—who have subsequently become well-known in the West. Fukase's beautifully poetic book *Ravens* (1986), which mourns the death of his wife, was voted the best photography book of the past twenty-five years by the British Journal of Photography in 2010. But another, less celebrated body of work by the Japanese photographer Seiichi Furuya has also powerfully addressed the topic of mourning. Through at least half a dozen books, Furuya has poignantly explored the tragic death of his beautiful Austrian wife, Christine Gössler, who developed schizophrenia and committed suicide by throwing herself from their apartment building in East Berlin in 1985.

Christine Furuya-Gössler: Mémoires, 1978-1985, published by the great, now defunct, Japanese publisher Korinsha, is the third and most comprehensive of Furuya's elegies to his wife. Published in 1997, this chunky, landscape-format book features more than five hundred pages of chronologically sequenced images. Each photograph appears on the right side of a spread and is indexed on its verso with a location and date, along with brief commentary that appears to trigger memories for Furuya rather than insights for the viewer.

Across the project, happy snapshots transition into a compulsive documentation of his wife's decline into depression, yet Furuya's unflinching gaze remains focused and unsentimental. His photographs continue through the weeks before Gössler's suicide. After she was released from a hospital the couple took a night train bound for Venice and spent three days holed up in a hotel and aimlessly wandering the city's streets. His

chronicle of their escape to Venice and the grim reality of their lives back in East Germany reveals another aspect of Furuya's unembellished aesthetic.

The emotional register of Furuya's work is only part of what makes it appealing. The photobooks he made from this work very clearly encapsulate his intentions—and, through a synthesis of photography and design, still communicate those desires years later. The artist's language may be interpreted somewhat differently, but his vision transcends merely being a product of its time and place.

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David Strettell

David Strettell is the author of *Photobook: A History*, a photography institution and publisher located in New York.



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