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BOOKSHELF

Gift Books: Photography



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Shomei Tomatsu (1930-2012) was terrified as a youngster during the fire-bombing of Tokyo in 1944-45, but he also found the explosions beautiful. The postwar occupation produced a similar ambiguity, and these mixed feelings are explored in **“Chewing Gum and Chocolate”** (Aperture, 216 pages, \$80). His black and white photographs show a despair at the occupation’s impact on Japan and its people. Many were taken in the red-light districts adjacent to U.S. bases, recording the dives, the prostitutes and their customers. Images of B-52 bombers and other aircraft present them as mythological demons, both magnificent and malevolent, set in turbulent skies. Tomatsu’s photographs have the spontaneity of Zen drawings; many are dark, grainy, blurred, out of focus or taken at radical angles. In one picture, a Japanese woman carrying a child on her back is seen in the foreground with her eyes shut, while two sailors in dress

uniforms stand behind her not paying attention. In another, a young girl walks down a crowded street, her face seen through an enormous bubblegum bubble.

You have seen one of James Karales's pictures, even if you are unaware that he took it. Karales covered major news events like the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement for *Look* magazine in the 1960s. His "Selma to Montgomery March" (1965) is one of the era's best-known images; under lowering clouds, an endless line of marchers holding American flags strides purposefully along the crest of a hill. The photograph is biblical in its drama. It is on the cover of **"James Karales" (Steidl, 176 pages, \$64)**; the work inside reveals a master storyteller. Karales (1930-2002) made photo-essays of Rendville, Ohio, a depressed mining town, from 1953 to '57; of people waiting for news of survivors from the sinking liner *Andria Doria* in 1956; of Vietnam in 1963, where a somber GI holds a dead Vietnamese child in his arms; of New York's Lower East Side in 1969, when it was a sociological sinkhole. Karales worked with W. Eugene Smith for two years and learned from that master printer how to produce luxuriously dark prints.

"Minor White: Manifestations of the Spirit" (Getty Publications, 200 pages, \$39.95) was published to accompany the first major retrospective of the photographer's work since 1989. Minor White (1908-1976) was born in the Midwest and spent the last decades of his life in the Northeast, but his approach to photography was shaped in the years between when he lived on the West Coast. There he was befriended by Ansel Adams, Edward Weston, Imogen Cunningham and other Group f.64 photographers, and adopted their preference for modernist compositions and precisely observed recordings of nature. White studied the mystic traditions of several cultures and sought spiritual significance in his images. His pictures of rocks, beaches, trees, leaves, icicles, waves and clouds are rich in detail, yet ambiguous because the scale and point of view is uncertain. A White image of frost on a windowpane has deep psychological and even cosmic resonances. The 160 plates here include portraits and nudes, pictures of buildings and interiors and even some street photography.

When Eugene Richards went to the Arkansas Delta in 1969 as a VISTA volunteer, the region was still roiled by the civil-rights movement. He stayed for four years, and many of the pictures in **"Red Ball of a Sun Slipping Down" (Many Voices, 112 pages, \$50)** date from that period. Mr. Richards went back later to see people he had grown attached to, and the pictures he took on these visits are interspersed with the earlier ones; the effect is reminiscent of the way all our memories of a place or person we have known for a long time get jumbled in our minds. In "Reverend and Mrs. Landers, Hughes, AR" (1969), Landers sits at the foot of his bed, dressed in shirt and tie, with a face that

reflects a life of woe. A lone dog trails far behind a lone car down the dirt “Road to Porter Lee ’s, Hughes, AR” (1986). A young black girl in the foreground stares at the camera while an older woman behind her does yard work in “Sandra and Porter Lee, Hughes, AR” (2010).

Paul Graham ’s **“Does Yellow Run Forever?” (Mack, 96 pages, \$50)** is different from the other books on this list. It is much smaller than the usual photo book, just 5.3 by 7.5 inches. It has no essay; in fact the only text is Mr. Graham’s name and “Does Yellow Run Forever?” on the title page, and the colophon on the last. Unlike the preceding four books, its pictures are in color. And the pictures are all of only three subjects: rainbows over Western Ireland, a black woman asleep in bed with the sheets pulled up, and stores in the United States that buy and sell gold. The rainbows are quite delicate, the sheets of each bed are a different color and the pawnshops offer instant cash. There is almost certainly some connection between these three, but I am unable to articulate it. And, yet, the book works. Somehow the images complement one another, and whatever grand intention Mr. Graham has is communicated by stealth.

Photo books are now recognized as a separate art form, a subgenre of the larger universe of photography, and their importance has prompted a recent spate of books about photo books. **“10x10 Japanese Photobooks” (10x10 Photobooks, 248 pages, \$125)** is a sushi counter of information about the Japanese photo books published in the last 60 years: 20 international specialists each highlight 10 titles, one of which is then given an expanded treatment—including enough pictures to give a sense of what the work is actually like. Photo books have been an important aspect of Japanese culture since the end of World War II, documenting the country’s seismic social transformations, and most of the country’s best known photographers— Daido Moriyama, Nobuyoshi Araki, Eikoh Hosoe, Hiroshi Sugimoto —are represented. The advantage of this extensive listing is that many little known artists are also on view. The present book is the second in the “10x10” series; it follows one on America photo books and more are planned.

—Mr. Meyers writes on photography for The Wall Street Journal.