

# Nobuyoshi Araki



**Interview by Jérôme Sans**  
Abridged extract from *Araki*  
courtesy of TASCHEN

## ***Big time Araki - Size does matter!***

*"This book reveals everything about me. It's been a 60-year contract. Photography is love and death - that'll be my epitaph."*

**The first title in the new TASCHEN 'Limited' series, to celebrate their 25th year is *Araki*, an enormous and unique book with a print run of only 2,500 copies.**

**The subject is Japanese photographer Araki, a man who talks about life through photographs. His powerful oeuvre, decades' worth of images, has been pared down to about 1,000 photographs which tell the story of Araki and comprise the ultimate retrospective collection of his work.**

WHY CALL YOUR BOOK "ARAKI BY ARAKI" WHEN YOU HAVE EDITED MOST OF YOUR OWN BOOKS YOURSELF? WAS THERE SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT THIS ONE?

I turned sixty at the end of the 20th century. In Japan, a sixtieth birthday, called the Kanreki, is a specific date representing a cycle of life that finishes while another one begins. It's a passage, a renaissance. For this occasion, I thought of compiling all my works. I've kept some of the best for the end, like "Picasso's Picasso". First, I thought of publishing everything myself in Japan. But finally it seemed more interesting to do it through another person's perspective, and most particularly a foreigner's. For me, the "other person" is always a foreigner. And this time, it is indeed a foreigner, which is very fresh. Ultimately, this book is not "Araki by Araki", but "Araki by TASCHEN". I think it remains just as interesting. When a foreigner chooses my works, it can reveal unknown aspects of myself. I've had many exhibits abroad (in Austria at the Wiener Secession, in Italy at the Museo-Centro per l'arte contemporanea Pecci de Prato ...) and each time I encountered a similar experience. I had already found that things which did not seem particularly important to me were interesting to others.

HOW DOES THIS BOOK DIFFER FROM THE OTHER BOOKS?

This book shows people my life, the women, my wife, and city streets ... They're like branches of my emotions! They have been compiled as the trunk of a large tree, and I am expecting it to bloom like a flower! *Araki by Araki* is an epitaph for my sixty years. I've been taking photographs since I came into this world. I was no sooner out of my mother's womb, than I turned around and pho-

**ARAKI**



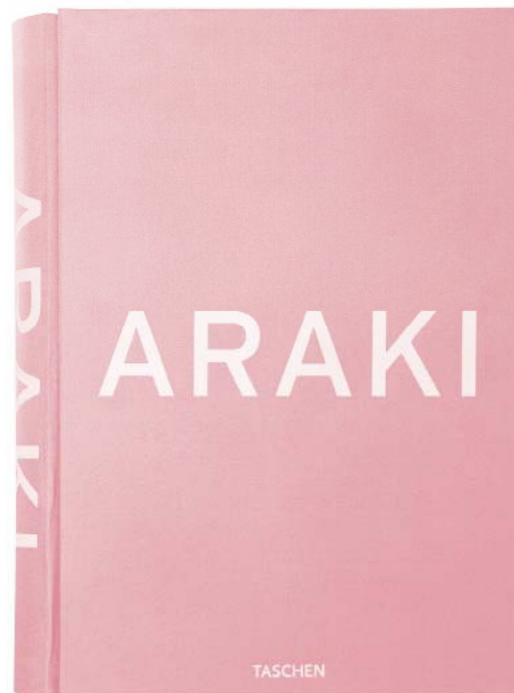
PHOTOGRAPHS: COURTESY OF TASCHEN 2005

tographed her sex! Photography is the first thing I shall do after my reincarnation! This is my dying will of sixty years. It is a testament which reads: photography is love and death ...

WHY ARE YOU OBSESSED WITH WOMEN IN YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC WORK?

I think that all the attractions in life are implied in women. There are many essential elements: beauty, disgust, obscenity, purity ... much more than one finds in nature. In woman, there is sky and sea. In woman, there is the flower and the bud ...

A photographer who doesn't photograph women is no photographer, or only a third-rate one. Meeting a woman anywhere teaches you more about the world than reading Balzac. Whether it be a wife, a woman encountered by happenstance, or a prostitute, she will teach you about the world. In fact I build my life on meeting women and I have hardly read a book since primary school.



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YOU ARE A CULT FIGURE IN JAPAN FOR YOUR ICONOGRAPHY. HOW DO YOU REACT TO THE PARADOX OF CENSORSHIP IN YOUR COUNTRY, WHICH, BEHIND ITS FAÇADE AND OFFICIAL MANNERS, OFFERS A SECOND WORLD OF "FORBIDDEN PLEASURES" AND IN PARTICULAR 'LOVE HOTELS' FOR ADULTEROUS RENDEZVOUS?

I don't intend to take photographs to expose everything to the world. I content myself with showing what I think is a good photograph to an intimate group of friends. I am neither engaged socially nor artistically ... I have no particular ideology or ideas in terms of art, or thoughts or philosophy. It's as though I were a mischievous boy doing naughty things.

WHY IS BONDAGE A RECURRENT THEME IN YOUR WORK?

Kinbaku (knots with ropes) are different from bondage. I only tie up a woman's body because I know I cannot tie up her heart. Only her physical parts can be tied up. Tying up a woman becomes an embrace.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE LOVE?

Love is hard to define. When you love a woman, she survives in a photo or a memory. And feelings survive, too. For example, I loved my wife, and traces of this remain in my feelings and my body, traces that survive in the photos. (I am mentioning my wife only because otherwise there could be a problem!) At the moment I love Chiro, my cat, and flowers. The cat represents flesh while the flowers are genital. It's the feeling of "beloving". Being at home, my feelings for Chiro grow when he just naturally comes up to me. Or waking up in the morning and looking at a flower. I photograph them not from a distance but at close range. It's a spontaneous feeling that comes to me very naturally.

These instant feelings are what I love, even if I have absolute feelings for photography.

For me love is the same thing, a question of proximity, familiarity, that one can touch. Love cannot be found on the Internet, love seems impossible to me. Love implies a proximity of smells, sensations, environment. So I photograph familiar people, my neighbourhood. That's photography. For example, I am taking a photograph of you because I met you today.

CAN YOUR PASSION FOR SEX BE CONSIDERED A CONTEMPORARY VERSION OF THE SHUNGA, THE EROTIC PAINTINGS FROM THE EDO PERIOD?

I'd like to take photos similar to Shunga, but I haven't reached that level yet. There is bashfulness in Shunga. The genitals are visible, but the rest is hidden by the kimono. In other words, they don't show everything. They are hiding a secret. Shunga doesn't just reveal sex, but a loving secret between two people, between a man and a woman. In my photographs I often appear in scenes containing bondage or sexual activity. I play the role of a midget in a Shunga painting. A secondary role as a spectator. After all, I prefer photographs to sex. Recently I have declined offers to date. Because everyone wants to have sex. They are not satisfied by only having dinner together. I won't do that any more, I prefer photography. In sex, I consider myself the second or third person. I just take advantage of sex to take good photos. I'm hard on sex the way I am on the woman I'm making love to. I am putting all this in the book because it will be published abroad and the Japanese won't see it. For me, photography's the essential thing.

From *Araki with interviews by Jérôme Sans*  
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EACH NUMBERED AND SIGNED BY ARAKI