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JAHRE
WESTLICHT



Press Release

NOBUYOSHI ARAKI

ARAKISS

Opening 19 May 2021

WESTLICHT SHOWS ARAKI'S LATEST WORKS AND THE EXTENSIVE PHOTOBOOK OEUVRE OF THE EXCEPTIONAL JAPANESE ARTIST.

Nobuyoshi Araki (*1940) is one of the most influential contemporary Japanese artists. His work attracts attention far beyond the classical photographic public, and time and again it is also a source of controversy.

On the occasion of his 80th birthday, Vienna's WestLicht will be showing photographs from Araki's latest series *Paradise*, created in 2020, for the first time in Austria from 19 May in the exhibition ARAKISS. The large-format still lifes, in which Araki repeatedly picks up motifs from past creative periods, will be placed in the context of his publications and his work from six decades. In this way, the exhibition course illuminates recurring thematic complexes in the artist's work: the obsessive preoccupation with sexuality and death, the blending of documentary and fictional narrative, iconoclasm and Araki's confrontation with censorship.

ARAKISS also shows the development of Araki's work over a period of more than 50 years, from his first photographs through the famous *Sentimental Journey* series and his best-known bondage photographs to his latest project.

The exhibition was conceived in close cooperation with the Tokyo-based photographer, who has been a friend of the house and WestLicht founder Peter Coeln since his first WestLicht exhibition in 2006. "I am delighted that in our anniversary year we can dedicate this comprehensive exhibition to such an important artist and close friend of our house," says Coeln, whose photography venue, founded in 2001, is celebrating its twentieth birthday this year. "The works created for the current show from his latest series *Paradise* are a truly exceptional birthday present."

The common thread of the exhibition is Araki's books, which occupy a central place in his oeuvre. Many of his masterpieces are coveted collector's items today and impressively illustrate how the medium of photography can find its congenial complement in the medium of books. With the presentation of more than 300 volumes from the OstLicht Collection, the WestLicht exhibition is the

most comprehensive retrospective to date of this oeuvre, which is unique in its scope and complexity.

Araki conceived his books from the early 1970s, printed on the then novel Xerox copying machines and bound by hand, as a statement against the establishment. With his opus magnum *Sentimental Journey*, in which he documents his own honeymoon in very direct snapshots, he created one of the most important photo books of the 20th century in 1971. His autobiographical style, apostrophised as "I-photography", is echoed in the positions of Larry Clark or Nan Goldin, for example. Araki's pseudo-reportages from the 1980s onwards question the truth of photography and are more topical than ever in times of fake news. The simultaneous increase in self-staging and Araki's manically produced output make him appear as an early protagonist of today's digital photographic practices.

In order to do justice to Araki's tireless artistic drive, ARAKISS has been conceived as a double exhibition in two venues. From 19 May, OstLicht Gallery will present further aspects of Araki's work to complement the WestLicht exhibition. This will include the monumental series *Kinbaku Shamaki*, a multi-part tableau of 53 bondage photographs painted over with acrylic, 8 metres long in total. This is Araki's largest work and, like most of the exhibits on display, is owned by the OstLicht Collection.

The exhibitions are curated by Hisako Motoo, Fabian Knierim and Michael Kollmann and will remain open until summer 2021.

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EXHIBITION DATES

WestLicht. Schauplatz für Fotografie 19.05.–01.08.2021

OstLicht. Galerie für Fotografie 19.05.–01.08.2021

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