TOKYO SYMPHONY
東京シンフォ
Ed van der Elsken
As a street photographer Ed van der Elsken (1925-1990) is often mentioned in the same breath as international photo icons like William Klein and Robert Frank. Not just because of his style, but also because of their common contribution to the photo book as the main platform for expression, experimenting with design and narrative structures. In total, Van der Elsken produced over 30 photo books, 34 movies and about 13 audiovisual arrangements. The relationship between these media is the subject of Paradox’s travelling exhibition Long Live Me! (which has been touring since 1996).

Within the last years of his life Van der Elsken worked towards what should have become his magnum opus in audiovisual terms, Tokyo Symphony. This audiovisual installation was meant to be the ultimate tribute to Japan, the country that had embraced Van der Elsken both as a person and as an important author and photographer – a love and fascination that was mutually felt. Due to his untimely death, at the age of 60, he was never able to finish it. Only 1,600 slides remained of this ambition in the archives of the Nederlands Fotomuseum in Rotterdam. That was until researcher Frank Ortmanns (1977) discovered the audio recordings in 2007.

Fascinated by this missing piece of the puzzle, Ortmanns approached Paradox (which had successfully reconstructed the 1972 audiovisual Amsterdam) to discuss the possibility of reconstructing Van der Elsken’s Unvollendete. Given the fact that Van der Elsken had always been fascinated by the latest technology, the conclusion was drawn that even though his artistic legacy had to be respected, the most appropriate approach would be to create a contemporary interpretation of this installation. In other words: make the piece now as though Ed was still alive and well (which, artistically speaking, he most definitely is).

The immersive installation based on hundreds of unknown colour slides, now under development confronts the viewer with various traditional as well as contemporary and little known aspects of Tokyo: from demonstrations in Shibuya to tea ceremonies, weddings and memorial celebrations, from girls wrestling and karaoke in Harajuku to the Tsukiji fish market. Van der Elsken switches constantly from intimate portraits to lively street scenes. The spatial multi-screen design of the installation, which is accompanied by a soundtrack based on his original recordings, adds to the dynamic experience of the strange mixture of tradition and modernity that characterises the metropolis of Tokyo.

Through the harmonic as well as disharmonic interplay of various audiovisual elements, the installation can be seen as a true modern symphony about urbanism and eastern culture – a symphony that reflects the notion of the all-absorbing and omnipresent urban environment.

BIography Ed van der Elsken’s photographs are represented worldwide in the collections of several renowned institutions including the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), the Chicago Art Institute, the Kawasaki Modern Art Museum, the Special Collections Department of the University Leiden and the Museum of Modern Art (New York). Even before his 1956 breakthrough with Love on the Left Bank, Van der Elsken attracted attention in international exhibitions such as Edward Steichen’s The Family of Man (1955). Further important exhibitions followed, such as Sweet Life (Amsterdam, 1968), Masters of European Photography (London, 1973), Van der Elsken’s Amsterdam (Amsterdam, 1979), L’Amour à Saint Germain des Prés (Tokyo, 1986) and De ontdekking van Japan 1961-1988 (Amsterdam, 1988/1989). Also posthumously: Once Upon a Time (Amsterdam/Tokyo, 1991), Long Live Me! (Paris, Amsterdam/Porto/Mostra/Nantwerp, 1996 - 2006), and Documenta X (Kassel, 1997). His most influential photo books include Een liefdesgeschiedenis in Saint Germain des Prés (1956), Bagara (1958), Jazz (1958), Sweet Life (1966), Amsterdam! (1979), De ontdekking van Japan (1988) and Once Upon a Time (1991).

Tokyo Symphony - Ed van der Elsken • Exhibition Audiovisual installation with four synchronous channels (17 minutes), accompanied by a three-channel soundtrack • Projection in XGA, 720p or HD from HD-MPEG players or Mac mini’s to Projection screens 200 x 300 cm (minimum of three)
• Exhibition fee: € 10.000 (for 10 weeks, excluding installation and equipment) • Availability: May 2010 première at the Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, March-June 2010

Paradox creates projects in photography, video and media related arts. The interaction between social, economic and technological change is central to most thematic and monographic projects developed. Paradox activities include travelling exhibitions, film production, book and electronic publishing and organising workshops and symposiums. For further info: www.paradox.nl