

TOKYO SYMPHONY

Ed van der Elsken





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As a street photographer Ed van der Elsen (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 Elsen 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 Elsen 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 Elsen 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 Elsen's Unvollendete. Given the fact that Van der Elsen 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 Elsen 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 Elsen'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 Elsen 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 Elsen'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/Modena/Antwerp, 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 Elsen EXHIBITION: AUDIOVISUAL INSTALLATION WITH FIVE SYNCHRONOUS CHANNELS (estimated running time 15 minutes), accompanied by a multi-channel soundtrack. Projection in XGA, 720p or HD from HD-MPEG players or computer (Mac Pro). PROJECTION SCREENS 200 X 300 CM (minimum of five). PUBLICATION: to be announced EXHIBITION FEE: € 8,500 (excluding installation and equipment). AVAILABILITY: JULY 2010 première at the Nederlands Fotomuseum, Rotterdam, March-June 2010. (subject to change)



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