

Yoshinori Mizutani; Birds

28 February – 4 June 2020

Christophe Guye Galerie is thrilled to announce Yoshinori Mizutani's showroom exhibition *Birds* at the gallery. Young Japanese photographer Yoshinori Mizutani (*1987) has turned Tokyo's sky into the canvas of his colourful universe. Turning his lens skywards, he captures parakeets that colonize electrical cables and populate en masse the trees of the megalopolis. The tender, pure blue of the morning skies gives away to the cyan and deep purple produced by the city's artificial and neon lights. Drawing deeply on Japanese pictorial tradition, Mizutani plays with power and contrast using vibrant and muted colours. Bedecked with bright yellow and green feathers and orangey-red beaks, parakeets stand out against electric pink skies or among the bronze leaves of ginkgo trees. Having escaped the domestic space, the rose-ringed parakeet adds a certain touch of surrealism to the Tokyo sky.

Perfectly aligned in tight rows on electrical cables or perched next to each other, almost replacing the trees' foliage, the birds become armies, regimented colonies. The graphic lines they form redraw the urban space. Like dreams or hallucination, Yoshinori Mizutani's birds saturate the city with their presence and restore part of its mystery. Tight framing and vivid colours give these images a certain strangeness. Using forms, textures, planes, and coloured nuances, the photographer creates a visual vocabulary that is both poetic and pop, on the edge of the fantastical.

'I want to take photographs which capture something beyond my own ideas,' he says. 'The times when I do have a set theme that I want to shoot, I think about exactly what I will photograph and how I will photograph it. Once I've decided those things, I head to the location and set about earnestly taking pictures.'

His *Tokyo Parrots* series began in this way. He was fascinated by a small swarm of colorful, rose-fringed parakeets that flew in and out of a tree near his home in Shibuya. He soon found out that the birds native to India and Sri Lanka were invaders of Tokyo. Their ancestry goes back to pets released in the 1970s and 80s; thousands now live throughout Japan. 'When I actually went to the site where they were sleeping, it was an incredible scene to watch. That's when I decided to photograph it.'

Mizutani says the feeling he got from these foreboding flyers reminded him of Alfred Hitchcock's classic film, *The Birds*. They're especially fond of the ginkgo trees on the Tokyo Institute of Technology campus. All of the photos in *Tokyo Parrots* were taken there over the course of a year. The images also reveal Mizutani's preference for flash. In addition to illuminating the birds, the synchro flash creates a momentary shadow in the flapping wings, which generates an uncanny effect.

His photographs demonstrate an innate understanding of how forms, colours, textures and depth translate to the pictorial plane. He is working with a visual vocabulary that has been well established by the work of many contemporary photographers. Mizutani's work serves as a good gauge of the visual tropes and photographic styles that are prevalent among young photographers in Japan.

Yoshinori Mizutani lives and works in Tokyo. His work draws both on a conceptual approach and on elements of street photography. The winner in 2013 of the prestigious Japan Photo Award, then selected in 2014 as part of the Foam Talent Call, his series *Parrots* was presented at the Biel/Bienne Festival of Photography in Switzerland in 2015. Since 2012 he has exhibited in many international institutions in Japan, China, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy and Switzerland, and has published, among other, *Tokyo Parrots*, *Colors*, and *Yusurika*.