

Ted Riederer

Toyo Tsuchiya is an artist and photographer who was born in Japan, but has lived and worked in New York City since 1980. Disenchanted with the academic art world and the dearth of underground artist communities in Tokyo during the late 70's, Toyo began taking construction jobs that would take him to the Japanese countryside for months at a time. During one of these sojourns, Toyo purchased an inexpensive camera and began his lifelong practice of documenting street life. He was compelled to document culture outside of the mainstream, as he himself always felt like an outsider.

Drawn to the New York art scene by enticing reports in the Japanese art magazine *Bijutsu Techo*, Toyo traveled to New York City on an extended vacation with a friend in 1980. When his friend had to return to Japan due to visa requirements, Toyo decided to stay and fell in love with the Lower East Side, which was experiencing a renaissance of street art, artist collectives, and artist-run galleries. As Toyo describes, "There was something in the air."

The 32-year-old painter/photographer was welcomed to New York by a community of Japanese artists on the Lower East Side, among them choreographer and dancer Yoshiko Chuma, who started her company *The School of Hard Knocks* in 1980. He was also embraced by Kazuko Miyamoto, the owner of *Gallery Onetwentyeight*, a locus of the artistic community. His new friends introduced him to other downtown artists like Justen Ladda, who took him to the seminal Times Square Show, as well as Colab member and contributor to the *East Village Eye*, Christof Kohlhofer.

Toyo had found the community of underground artists that he sought. Inspired by the fecund scene of the Lower East Side, he began to compulsively photograph street scenes, nightclubs like the *Limbo Lounge* and the *Pyramid Cocktail Lounge*, as well as performance art at St. Mark's Church.

In 1983 he was asked to participate in a show called *99 Nights* at *No Se No*, a former Puerto Rican social club located at 42 Rivington Street. Toyo photographed every performance of the summer of 1983, 8 p.m. to midnight, 7 days a week. When *No Se No* closed, he would rush home, develop the pictures in his bathroom darkroom, and hang the prints the next day in the bar. It was around these photographs that the *Rivington School* coalesced.

As Toyo said in an interview at *How! Happening: An Arturo Vega Project*, "I wanted people to have my view of the performances, to see them through my eyes." This essential body of work is not simply documentation of the Lower East Side scene, rather it is the vision of an outsider who found a home amidst the outsiders of New York's underground. Through his eyes, the *Rivington School* could be seen, as the vital and prolific movement it would become.