

Ishiuchi Miyako: Traces of the Future

Kasahara Michiko

Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo

How do we live with our dead? Or, as Ishiuchi Miyako might ask: How do we live with our loss?

Death is always the experience of the living. The deceased person can tell us nothing about death; it is the living, the survivors, who speak of and share their thoughts about the deceased, recount the stories of their lives, tell tales of their wisdom.

The phenomenon of death is inherently extremely difficult for most people to accept, and this difficulty manifests itself in our minds in a variety of ways. As the critic Taki Koji has noted, "Each of us has several special dead people who are part of us. This omnipresent awareness represents not so much our memories of the dead as their posthumous existence."¹ The despair at the impossibility of ever being with our dead again opens an empty space in our hearts, and it is in that interior realm that the dead live on.

Ishiuchi Miyako's *Mother's* is a series of close-up portraits of her mother immediately prior to her death and photographs of her mother's personal possessions. *Mother's* possesses a special significance in Ishiuchi's long and productive career, which spans nearly three decades. In this essay, I would like to discuss the contemporary import of Ishiuchi's work, elaborating at least partially the world embodied in *Mother's* with reference to the seminal concepts of loss and memory.

The Reality of Postwar Japan and the Photographer's Private Vision

Ishiuchi Miyako is widely regarded as one of Japan's leading contemporary photographers, following in the lineage of Tomatsu Shomei (b. 1930) and Moriyama Daido (b. 1938). Though the work of these three artists exhibit certain common visual elements, a consistent stance, and a shared general direction, they are at the same time each utterly unique.

Tomatsu has a distinctive vision that simultaneously rejects and embraces the world. His fragmentary images capturing such things as life in postwar Japan, youthful American soldiers stationed there, Nagasaki atomic bomb victims going about their daily lives, or clouds reflected in the ocean off Okinawa create an instantaneous and indelible impression on the minds of viewers. Moriyama's photographs starkly portray moments of bewildering frisson between Japan during its period of economic boom, with its sudden and massive importation of

American culture, and the changeless and unchangeable aspects of Japanese culture and society in a style that might best be described as an impassioned moodiness. And Ishiuchi's work is imbued with a sense that the subject we are looking at is a memory that has been captured and preserved in the present. By memory I mean a feeling of the many long moments of the lived past, the trace marks of history, that clings to her best-known subjects—the city of Yokosuka, abandoned brothels, close-up pictures of human skin and the men and women who are the "vessels" draped in that richly evocative covering.

What Tomatsu, Moriyama, and Ishiuchi have been depicting throughout their careers is the external reality of postwar Japan, together with social awareness that inheres in that external layer of appearances. Their subjects are not narrative or didactic; instead, they create works of the category that engage society and history as images, drawing the viewer into the larger context of the photographs.

They also each have a distinctly private vision—the personal outlook that photographers around the world arrived at after much soul-searching in the face of the collapse of the myth of documentary photography in the 1960s and the loss of a belief in the objectivity of the mass media based on a common, shared humanism and the concept of social justice. In contrast to the work of photographers of the earlier generation, such as Domon Ken (1909–90), who called for "pure snapshots without any dramatization" and Natori Yonosuke, who advocated objective photojournalism, the new generation of photographers—such as Tomatsu, Narahara Ikko (b. 1931), Kawada Kikuji (b. 1933), Hosoe Eiko (b. 1933), and Ishimoto Yasuhiro (b. 1921)—created work based on their personal interests, producing photographs that "plumbed the inner depths of the being of the photographer as an individual."² Tomatsu is a pioneer in this regard, while Moriyama and Ishiuchi developed this tendency to its inevitable culmination.

There is, however, a subtle difference in the private visions of Tomatsu and Moriyama on the one hand and that of Ishiuchi on the other—which becomes obvious when comparing the photographs these three artists have made of U.S. military bases in Japan (Page 91). The viewpoint of the former two is as far as possible from the private narrative or personal photograph redolent of inner emotional content. In order to express a personal point of view, one must first be able to view one's self objectively. In other words, the self must necessarily be objectified. But Ishiuchi's private vision, in comparison to that of Tomatsu and Moriyama, seems to adopt a somewhat more skeptical, cautious, or even depersonalized view of her self. Ishiuchi's self-concept bears a closer resemblance to the process of feminist art, which asserts that the personal *is* the political and, while exploring the nature of the self's environment, family, and friends, questions the various relationships it discovers within that larger milieu and seeks to establish an imaginative link to others. I will discuss Ishiuchi's private vision further below.

Ishiuchi's oeuvre can be divided into two major phases, the first consisting of her first three collections of photographs—*Yokosuka Story*, completed in 1977 and published in book form in 1979; *Apartment*, 1978; and *Endless Night*, 1980—and her photographs of the human form, starting with the group of works entitled *1·9·4·7*, published in 1990. After the latter work, which featured close-up photographs of hands and feet of women born the same year as Ishiuchi, 1947, she went on to create *Hiromi 1955* (1995), photographs of the poet Ito Hiromi (b. 1955); *1906 to the Skin* (1994), photographs of the dancer Ono Kazuo (b. 1906); *Chromosome XY* (1995), photographs of several male figures; and *Scars* (2005), close-up photographs of a variety of scars.

When these two phases are compared, it is clear that Ishiuchi's style has changed dramatically. The first phase focuses on buildings, street scenes, and other scenic subjects, and in the style so prevalent in the 1970s, the photographs make a dramatic appeal to the emotions with their saturated and grainy images and unsettled and disturbingly off-kilter compositions. From *1·9·4·7*, however, Ishiuchi shifts to human subjects, photographed from head on and revealing the textures of skin in extreme detail. Some suggest that Ishiuchi's later work is more conceptual, but I think it can be argued that the work of both phases expresses the same message. The apparent differences are merely reflections of the most appropriate ways photographing the particular subject and developing the images in question.

Ishiuchi's consistent theme has been the memory inherent in the postwar Japanese reality, as it is manifested in the tremendous changes taking place in the consciousness of contemporary Japanese women. I would like to discuss this issue of the memory Ishiuchi expresses and its relationship to women's consciousness with primarily with reference to her work *Mother's*.

A Transparent Body

Ishiuchi's *Mother's* consists of close-up photographs of her mother in the last year of her life and some of her mother's personal possessions, which she photographed after her mother died. Explaining the origin of the project, Ishiuchi wrote: "Objects that my mother had used in her daily life were suddenly rendered useless. Her old undergarments, which had lost the only value they had, as the familiar attire of their owner, seemed to me to be almost pieces of her skin. It was not a pleasant feeling to have them about the house after she was gone. Thus, just like her body, when they were no longer of any use, I thought I should burn them or put them in the trash, but I found myself unable to perform this simple act.... Feeling that it would be easier to dispose of them if I photographed them first, I began to do so."³

Among the items are various chemises and girdles, partially used tubes of lipstick in different colors, eye liner, combs (with her mother's hair still in them), false teeth, wigs, shoes—each of which Ishiuchi captures in a precise close-up shot of its own,

the object centered in and filling the frame, almost as if they were formal portraits.

The photographs defy easy categorization. Though we know that the undergarments, the false teeth, and the combs were intimate physical artifacts of an eighty-four-year-old woman who had just died, no air, of life, no aroma of personhood clings to them. The gently billowing undergarments seem to possess a transparency, as if they were dissolving into the light. And in fact in the films *Mother's Take 1 - Take 2*, the undergarments do actually sway softly in the breeze, gradually surrendering their shape, breathing faintly in the light.

This feeling of transparency is also apparent in Ishiuchi's photographs of her mother. We are aware that the subject is the photographer's mother and that she is a woman of over eighty years old, not far from death. They are genuine nude photographs, for Ishiuchi captures her mother's body—her feet, her breast, her stomach, her hands—in a caressing close-up. Her skin is crisscrossed with innumerable wrinkles. Her breasts are full and pendulous, and her nipples visible amidst a sea of the wrinkles. A large area of her upper breast and side is scarred with keloid tissue, stretched in taut contrast to the rest of her skin, like a cloth path—the results of a serious burn she had received twenty years earlier. Every photograph shows not only baggy, wrinkled skin but also scars. Surgical scars, age spots, and moles make the skin of each part of her body a distinct scene, some of the photographs resembling a finely woven tapestry, others the slick, shiny surface of an insect pupae, and still others a field of desiccated earth.

Of the many sets of work by Ishiuchi in recent years focusing on the human form, the images of her mother's body in *Mother's* most closely resemble her photographs of Ono Kazuo in *1906 to the Skin*. Nevertheless, there remains a distinct difference between the two.

1906 to the Skin documents every square inch of the nude form of Ono, a renowned dancer in the modern experimental form known as Butoh. In the three years starting in 1991 during which the photography for this series took place, Ono was already over eighty-five years old, yet each photograph brims with a vital life force. Ono's body is not transparent. His skin is also delicately rippled with wrinkles and dotted with spots, but it is like a robe impressed with the marks of time, covering his firm and exquisitely toned musculature. He glows with immeasurable vitality and a rare inner beauty that creates the body in which he dwells.

Looking at the photographs in *1906 to the Skin*, one receives the impression that the dancer is offering his body to the photographer, even thrusting it at her. Or he may be completely uninterested in her. He is completely self-absorbed, as if he has forgotten the very presence of the photographer who is probing and prodding him, pressing her lens into areas of his body even he has never seen, trying to capture each hair and pore on film.

Both *1906 to the Skin* and *Mother's* are alike in having

been created on the basis of the photographers intense and thoroughgoing, almost scientific, observation. The former is an absolute vision of the dancer Ono Kazuo as seen by Ishiuchi Miyako, created from the raw material of the body—which is in itself a work of art—that he offers to the photographer. In contrast, *Mother's* is a generalized, depersonalized depiction, Ishiuchi's attempt to decipher her mother's inner being, the memory embedded in her mother's body and personal artifacts. The difference between the photographs in *1906 to the Skin* and *Mother's* is the difference in the photographer's manner of engagement with her subject. This results in an overwhelming sense of presence in the former and an ethereal transparency verging on absence in the latter.

A Meticulous, Depersonalized Gaze

Why did Ishiuchi feel compelled to photograph her mother's body and, after her death, her personal possessions? In order to answer this question, we need to consider the underlying approach that characterizes her work as a whole. She began her career rather late, at the age of twenty-eight. Describing her state of mind after having quit university following the student demonstrations that closed many Japanese universities for an extended period in the 1960s, she says: "I suppose I was feeling a kind of frustration or failure, unsure of what I should do."⁴ It was at that moment that, at the suggestion of a friend, she began to take pictures.

Her first subject was the city of Yokosuka, where she had lived from the age of six to nineteen. She did not, however, select her former hometown out of any kind of nostalgia. Her family had endured considerable economic hardship there, and she felt alienated and out of place. "It was an object of my hatred," she has said of the city.⁵ This is a clear difference between Ishiuchi and Tomatsu and Moriyama, as the latter two felt powerfully drawn to cities where U.S. military bases were located.

Her following work, *Apartment*, mercilessly records the environment of the life of poverty that she led in her teens. *1 • 9 • 4 • 7* represents a new interest in time, as she reached the age of forty, "felt there was no longer anything she wanted to take photographs of," and "considered giving up photography."⁶ The interest in the human form that emerged in that work eventually led to *Scars*, which presented close-up photos of a variety of scars and blemishes.

While her first three works had been inspired by what could be seen as her personal inner scars, her focus was now extending outward—first to the prostitutes plying their trade on the margins of society, in *Endless Night*, and then her collaborations with Ono Kazuo and Ito Hiromi, leading to her collection of photographs of men's bodies. Her work thus can be said to exhibit in some sense a gradual shift from self to others, personal interests and motivations to broader social concerns.

It is worth considering why the photographer has adopted her mother's full name (her given and maiden names) as her

professional name. When asked, Ishiuchi replies: "I wanted to use someone else's name, not my own, and I liked the sound of my mother's." No doubt there are many different reasons for adopting a different name for one's artistic work. It can symbolize your self-creation as an artist, and perhaps enable you to view your artistic production in a more objective fashion. It can distinguish your private self from your artistic persona. But none of these explains Ishiuchi taking the full name of her mother—whom, she admits, she "didn't get along with."

But perhaps that's precisely the reason she adopted Ishiuchi Miyako as her professional name. Perhaps it represented a metaphorical removing of the scab formed over a still fresh hurt, the act of exposing the bloody wound to the air and, while experiencing the jabs and prickles of pain, examining the wound, probing it, and using the self-inflicted pain as a motivation for artistic creation, sublimating it into her work. Ishiuchi's photography is a result of exposing the pain in her memory to the light of day, and thoroughly depersonalizing and generalizing her own wounds and scars in a way that speaks imaginatively to others.

In the afterword to the edition of *Mother's* published in book form in 2002, Ishiuchi has written: "For many years I was pained by an inability to communicate with my mother, but after my father's death, just when the discord between us was finally beginning to ease, she passed away. It's so ironic. Someone who had always been there was suddenly gone and, confronted by the reality of that loss, helplessness and regret surged over me with unimaginable grief."⁷

Perhaps Ishiuchi was motivated to photograph her mother not simply to create new work but even more to find a way to communicate intimately with her for the first and last time. It is conceivable that the time they spent together during the process, their conversations during the act of photographing and being photographed, the experience of sharing and participating together in the project may well have been more important to the artist than the resulting work. A similar dynamic can be observed in the photographs that Richard Avedon (1923–2004) took of his father over the several years that he was dying, and Hannah Wilke's (1940–93) photographs and paintings of her mother dying of cancer. Avedon has said that at first his father seemed to agree grudgingly to the sessions, but gradually he came to look forward to them. It became a way to force father and son to recognize themselves and each other. Avedon added that though he photographed his father repeatedly in his last years, he never looked at the photos until after his father's death.⁸

Let's compare Ishiuchi's work in this regard to that of Hannah Wilke, who also photographed her mother. Wilke has said, without regret: "I sacrificed my art for my mother."⁹ From her mother's diagnosis of cancer in 1978 to her death in 1982, the artist took an enormous number of photographs of her mother, and also created paintings and three-dimensional works with her mother as her model. Wilke's *In Memoriam: Selma Butter*

(*Mommy*) (1979–83) is a triptych, each consisting of two rows of six black-and-white photographs. Beneath them are collages in scraps of blue, red, yellow, and black paper, and words expressing some aspect of the mother–daughter relationship: “Support,” “Foundation,” and “Comfort” under the first panel; “Form,” “Cause,” and “Make” under the second; and “Bond,” “Intimate,” and “Part” under the third. The photographs are snapshots of Wilke’s mother in bed, looking in the mirror, or relaxing on the sofa. They are painful to look at: chemotherapy has caused her hair to fall out, and she appears thin and debilitated. Nevertheless, in most of the photos she smiles into the lens.

At one exhibition, one of Wilke’s trademark ceramic renditions of a vagina was displayed near this triptych, doubly symbolic.¹⁰ In the large blow-up color photographs of her mother, Wilke’s gaze is harsher. She juxtaposes a photograph of her mother nude from the waist up, revealing the scar from her mastectomy, with a nude portrait of herself in the same pose (Page 97). Another photograph shows her mother’s aged visage staring blankly into space, intravenous tubes inserted into her nose and neck (*Selma Butter*, 1982). These color photographs bear a strong resemblance to the deeply moving series *Intravenous* (1991–92) that Wilke took of herself over a two-year period until her own death by cancer.

Hannah Wilke’s portraits of her mother reflect the warm ties and closeness of mother and daughter. They reveal Wilke’s mother’s disease-wracked body and her daily life just as they are, stripping away our cherished myths and metaphors about illness and, forgoing both dramatization and denial, showing it as a part of the reality of one woman’s existence. They also graphically demonstrate that neither age nor illness diminishes a woman’s sexuality. Juxtaposing her own image with that of her mother is Wilke’s way of saying that she sees her mother as an emanation of herself. It is a portrait not just of the woman Selma Butter but of Wilke’s mother. Just as Avedon’s photographs are an expression of the father–son relationship, Wilke’s photos are a portrait of the mother–daughter relationship.

Ishiuchi’s depictions of her mother are different. It is not merely a difference in the choice of method—Avedon and Wilke use the snapshot format while Ishiuchi opts for highly abstract close-ups—or the fact that the first two focus on faces while Ishiuchi does not. Ishiuchi took her photographs as a way of communicating with her mother, and like Avedon and Wilke, the shared process of photographing and being photographed was arguably more important than the resulting images. What separates Ishiuchi’s photographs from those of Avedon and Wilke is Ishiuchi’s gaze. She observes her mother more closely and carefully than Avedon and Wilke, and in a more meticulous and at the same time depersonalized fashion.

Aura and Memories

The self-portraits of John Coplans (1920–2003) actually bear a closer resemblance that of Ishiuchi in her photographs of her mother. Coplans completely objectified his own physical

form, creating purely abstract images that even included captions identifying his age, sex, and race. Coplans enjoyed an active career as an editor, curator, and museum director prior to taking up photography at the age of sixty-four, and summoning the highly educated and nuanced powers of observation he had acquired, he applied them to thoroughly and meticulously scrutinizing every inch of his body and recording it in photographs. In the process of objectifying his body and reassembling it with his curator’s eye, he created a unique aesthetic that often flashes with biting humor and irony (Pages 99, 111). He continued to photograph himself until his death at eighty-three in 2003.

Ishiuchi’s almost scientific, depersonalized gaze sees her mother not just as “mother” but as a woman, and seeks to establish and present her as an individual. This inclination is intensified by the photographs of her mother’s personal belongings. Why? Ishiuchi has written:

I find old kimonos scary. You don’t know who or what kind of person they belonged to, but they always carry traces of their original owner’s body odor. And not only the person’s odor, but somehow their aura clings to the kimono. You can get rid of the smell by airing or washing them, but that doesn’t take care of the aura. It’s not a tangible thing, so it may just be my imagination, but I am very strongly aware of it. I can’t wear antique kimonos until I can some way get rid of that aura. Anything that you wrap around your body like a kimono is really a second skin, so to me wearing a kimono that someone has worn before is like wearing someone else’s skin.¹¹

Ishiuchi made this observation when she was recalling creating the photographs of the former brothels and red-light districts that make up *Endless Night* (1980). Walking through one of those districts she encountered an elderly woman named Osode. Though Ishiuchi usually loses interest in a locale after she has finished photographing it, she returned repeatedly to speak with Osode, who became a friend. When Osode died, Ishiuchi attended the ceremony held seven days after her passing, where she was given a memento of her friend—a kimono Osode had worn while still actively plying her trade.

The undergarments in *Mother’s*, however, aren’t the belongings of a stranger; they are Ishiuchi’s mother’s possessions, and there’s no reason for her to fear the “aura” of an unknown person that might still cling to them. As we can see from the above, Ishiuchi referred to clothing as a skin early as 1980, when she was creating *Endless Night*. This was an idea that persisted in her work, and she seems to have felt the same way about her mother’s clothing after she died, saying that having those fragments of “skin” around the house was not a pleasant feeling.

What Ishiuchi was trying to capture in photographing these pieces of clothing and other personal artifacts was no doubt

the aura of her mother that still clung to them. She was trying to discover the reality that subsisted behind that aura. She was attempting to capture and record the aura permeating the “skin” her mother left behind, patiently spending time with, meticulously observing, appreciating, and photographing each artifact individually—the tubes of lipstick, eye liner, comb, false teeth, wig, shoes. But what is that aura, after all?

Ishiuchi is often described as a photographer of memories. Her first three major works feature the city of Yokosuka where she grew up. Ishiuchi’s Yokosuka consists of the peeling paint and cracked walls of abandoned buildings, the tiles of entryways crammed with wooden mailboxes and bicycles, a kite soaring in the sky, a cat curled up in a corner, its eyes closed into slits. The prints are grainy, and the lens may be tilted or at times held extremely close to the subject. These photographs are not in any sense an objective record or documentary of Yokosuka. Though the camera is aimed at the external, objective Yokosuka, it simultaneously transforms the subject into a Yokosuka that has never existed, a Yokosuka that only lives and breathes within Ishiuchi’s photographs. But the more personal and private this vision is as Ishiuchi Miyako’s Yokosuka, at the same time it becomes the Yokosuka where her mother worked as the U.S. base, the Yokosuka where she grew up, the Yokosuka with its unique history as a point of contact between the U.S. military and Japan—a body of images offering a “memory” that we can all share without impediment.

Writing of the period when she was photographing *Endless Night*, Ishiuchi says:

The scene before me was the entrance to a sooty, grimy, tawdry, cheaply built apartment. The space of the entryway froze me, the intruder, in my tracks. Inhaling it, I felt ill, as if I might vomit. What was it that filled my lung so intensely? Hatred? Sorrow? Tears of fiercely suppressed suffering streamed down my cheeks. Why was I standing there, what had I come to do? The wooziness and chills I felt made me all too painfully aware of my female sex. This wasn’t what I had expected. Though I had only come to take photographs, all the women who had once inhabited this room came wafting out from the stains on the walls, the shade under the trees, the shine on the well-tread stairs.¹²

In this passage from *Endless Night*, Ishiuchi’s series of photographs of former old red-light districts, the artist describes the aura that still, after so many years, permeated this building where women once sold their bodies to earn a living. The buildings appearing in *Endless Night* had been converted into inns or apartment buildings, and the women who had once worked in them were all distinct individuals, with names, pasts, and life stories, but the pangs of sadness that these photographs stir in the viewer’s heart does not arise from the historical and social conditions of the red-light districts. These places, which

exist only in Ishiuchi’s photographs, and the auras of their former inhabitants, coming into contact with Ishiuchi’s private memories, draw the photographer/onlooker into the role of involved participant. This in turn causes disturbances in our own memories. In this manner, Ishiuchi’s photographs resurrect past memories and, through the present viewer, inscribe them on the future.

The Message of Individual Memory and Loss

Photography can be remarkably effective at depicting loss. They give shape to the dead, preserving their smiles, while simultaneously reminding us that they are gone forever. The French artist Christian Boltanski (b. 1944) has expressed the depth of loss resulting from the Holocaust in an installation consisting of a series of photographic portraits of its victims. Referring to this series, the art historian Kagawa Mayumi writes: “In Boltanski’s work, photographic portraits, given a locus in the historical past and reinforced with circumstantial evidence, are employed to confirm death.”¹³ At the monument commemorating those who died in the Kwangju Massacre of 1980, there are images of each of the dead that, together with the flickering light of the candles, emphasize to visitors the depth of the loss.

The reason that photographs are so effective in expressing loss is that, even when employed to communicate large-scale historical events such as the Holocaust or the Kwangju Massacre, the individual photographs represent specific individuals, communicating to the viewer the story of the loss of that individual and preventing that person’s death from becoming occluded or subsumed in the larger, communal history on the scale of nations, peoples, or governments. Furthermore, the depth and intensity of those many individual losses reverberate against each other, interweaving to create the larger historical memory of the Holocaust or the Kwangju Incident.

Ishiuchi’s *Mother’s* presents a portrait of a specific individual, a forerunner of today’s independent Japanese woman. It is the homage of Ishiuchi Miyako the contemporary photographer to another modern Japanese woman—her eighty-four-year-old mother, subject, and namesake.

What Ishiuchi is seeing in her mother’s skin is the physical manifestation of memory, of history. In the photographs she has captured a skin that is constantly defoliating and regenerating before our eyes, metabolizing moment by moment, without an instant’s pause. At the same time, this skin represents the accumulated traces of months and years of existence that her mother—the owner of this vessel the body—has experienced. The memories residing within it are not mere triggers for sweet, fond, nostalgic, or sentimental emotions; these inescapable memories simultaneously clothe her body and record her life.

In the same way, Ishiuchi’s intense scrutiny of her mother’s personal possessions is the unyielding gaze of an observer who refuses to permit even a single of the memories dwelling in them to escape. With a resolute determination that abjures

all preconceived notions, the daughter confronts her dead mother. Naturally, what becomes visible there is not only this person's nature as a mother but also an independent woman with a past, a life experience, a mind and heart that far exceeds her daughter's imagination. It is a process of reconstituting a mother into a woman. Anyone who has attempted this with their own parents will appreciate how challenging it can be for a child to acknowledge a parent as an autonomous individual, a woman or a man.

Ishiuchi Miyako's mother was born in a small village in the northern Kanto area in 1916. At eighteen she received her driver's license and emigrated to Japanese-occupied Manchuria in search of employment. She married in Manchuria, but her husband was drafted and sent to the front, leaving her on her own again. Assuming that he had been killed in action—official reporting of war casualties was sporadic and often delayed for many years—she returned to her home town, where she found a job driving a truck delivering military goods. At that time she met a young man who was part of a student labor force at a nearby aeronautics plant. When the war ended, he returned to university, and Ishiuchi's mother worked to support him. They lived together in her home town until one day her husband, who had not in fact been killed, made his appearance. By this time she was pregnant by her new partner, and her husband agreed to an amicable dissolution of their marriage—though Ishiuchi's mother was forced to pay a financial settlement to him. The photo series *Mother's* begins with an old photograph of the woman who lived this turbulent life. A petite, stylish young woman wearing a long skirt and a belt tightly cinched over her blouse smiles brilliantly as she stands by the open driver's-side door of a large, apparently American-made car. This photograph is followed by the objects that same woman left behind when she died decades later.

The series begins with a statement of intense, almost desperate, emotion: "Someone who had always been there was suddenly gone and, confronted by the reality of that loss, helplessness and regret surged over me with unimaginable grief." The only way for Ishiuchi to grapple with her sense of overpowering loss must have been to confront her mother's personal artifacts. Scrutinizing them was a way of facing up to her loss and, at the same time, understanding her mother, and enabling her to create what is simultaneously a portrait of her mother, the portrait of a complex and multifaceted woman, and the physical manifestation of the photographer's own feeling of profound loss.

Employing a meticulously observant and thoroughly depersonalized gaze, Ishiuchi Miyako is able to capture something invisible and intangible—what she calls "aura" and I refer to as "memory." This aura or memory is not simply the individual qualities of her mother but an indefinable something that, playing out against the social, political, and cultural backdrop

of her times, went into creating her essence as a person and a woman. As such, the microcosm of her life story, the individual memory that is Ishiuchi's mother, captured in the photographer's portrait, is at the same a direct reflection of tremendous changes taking place in the consciousness of contemporary Japanese women. By depicting her personal loss, Ishiuchi Miyako the photographer enables us to share this story, this memory, which not reverberates rigorously and sharply with our memories today but also sows the seeds of future memories. In this manner, the memories of a woman who lived through the turbulent period of postwar Japan and struggled mightily with the countless transformations in consciousness and awareness of that time become a template for the memories of the women of the future.

(Translated by Jeffrey Hunter)

Notes

1. Taki Koji, *Shi no Kagami—Ichimai no Shashin kara Kangaeta Koto* (Mirror of Death: Thoughts from a Single Photograph) (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2004), p. 85.
2. Oshima Hiroshi, "Reanu to Shukan no Kyori" (The Gap Between the Real and the Subjective), in *Bijutsu Techo*, December 2004, vol. 56, no. 858, p. 77.
3. Ishiuchi Miyako, *Kizuato* (Scars) (Osaka: Nihon Bunkyo Shuppan, 2005), p. 57.
4. Ueno Osamu and Ishiuchi Miyako, "Taidan: Gendai Shashinka ni Kiku Dai Nijukai, Ueno Osamu and Ishiuchi Miyako," *Nikkor Club*, Spring 2005, No. 192, p. 27.
5. Masuda Rei, "Jikan no Shitsukan: Ishiuchi Miyako no Shashin ni Tsuite" (The Texture of Time: Photographic Works by Miyako Ishiuchi, in *Ishiuchi Miyako Ten: Monokuromu—Toki no Utsuwa* (Miyako Ishiuchi: Time Textured in Monochrome) (exhibition catalogue), (Tokyo: The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 1999), p.11.
6. Ueno Osamu— and Ishiuchi Miyako, "Taidan," p. 28.
7. Ishiuchi Miyako, *Mother's* (Tokyo: Sokyusha, 2002), p. 54.
8. Taki, pp. 27–28.
9. Frueh, Joanna "Hannah Wilke," *Hannah Wilke, A Retrospective* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1989), p. 79.
10. *Support Foundation Comfort* installation, Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, Inc., December 1–29, 1984.
11. Ishiuchi Miyako, *Monokuromu* (Monochrome) (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1993), pp. 83–84.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
13. Kagawa Mayumi, "Futatsu no Hondana kara: Doitsu Gendai Bijutsu ni Miru Kioku no Gensho to Jenda" (From Two Bookshelves: The Phenomenon of Memory and Gender in Contemporary German Art), *Imeji ando Jenda* (Image and Gender) 2002, vol. 3, p. 98.