

CEREAL

In this volume, we delve into the subject of **legacy**. We explore the architecture of **Gio Ponti** and **Carlo Scarpa**, the art of **Joan Miró**, and the photography of **Fan Ho**. We spend the day with **Rupi Kaur**, discuss design with **Jonathan Anderson**, and present an autumn style edit at **Kettle's Yard**.

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FAN

HO

A Memoir

East Meets West, 1963

words

Ollie Horne

photos

Fan Ho

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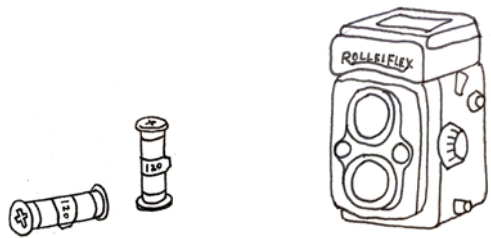
Themes + Projects





Rolleiflex

Fan Ho used one camera for his whole career: a Rolleiflex 3.5 series camera, which he bought when he was 18 years old. The Rolleiflex has a twin lens design: one to view the subject, and another to capture the image. This was before the use of SLR (single lens reflex) cameras had become widespread, where an internal mirror allows the photographer to use one lens for both image capture and viewfinder.



In his early twenties, suffering from headaches and prescribed walks in the city by doctors, as a break from his studies, Fan Ho felt too self-conscious to wander Hong Kong without a purpose. His solution was to take up photography. Rather than focus on the bustle of the main streets, he sought out intriguing settings and used to wait for up to a day, sometimes in vain, for a protagonist with whom he could empathise, whether a child, an old man, a young woman, or even a cat. Speaking in 2014 to the *South China Morning Post*, Ho said, “I must wait until there is something that touches my heart. There must be humanity in art. If you feel nothing when you click the shutter, you give the viewer nothing to respond to.”

The scenes he recorded are of a Hong Kong long since passed: moments of introspection play out in the shadows of still streets. Even in the early 1950s, when most of these images were taken, Hong Kong’s population was doubling from an influx of refugees fleeing the Communist Party’s war with the Kuomintang, yet Fan Ho was able to find quiet moments in the city, documenting traces of traditional Cantonese life as they began to disappear: hand carts pushed by tired men across tramlines in the road; barefoot children dashing

past markets and alleyways busy with hawkers and barbers. His photographs memorialise this period, but simultaneously depict an abstract, even universal, vision of human life.

Ho went on to win well over 200 awards for his photography — most before he had reached the age of 30. He was ranked best photographer in the world by the Photographic Society of America in 1958, and held his first solo exhibit in Hong Kong a year later. But, following this early success, Ho put photography to one side and pursued a career acting and directing in the Hong Kong film industry, until his retirement in 1996 when he moved to San Jose, California.

Looking back over his career from this vantage point, Ho developed a longing to revisit the images he had created as a young man. While exploring his new Bay Area neighbourhood, he started frequenting Modernbook, a bookstore and gallery in Palo Alto. “We first met Fan Ho in 2000,” recalls Bryan Yedinak, co-owner of Modernbook and its gallery counterpart, Themes + Projects. “He would come in as a customer on a weekly basis, talking about art and photography with us for hours. A few months into our friendship, he told us he was a photographer, and asked if we were interested in seeing some images he had taken 50 years ago in Hong Kong. A week later, he arrived with an IKEA plastic bag filled with vintage prints. As young gallerists at the time, we had never seen anything like it. He was thoughtful and open in telling us when and how he had made the pictures: the time of day, the angles, the film and paper type, the darkroom and cropping techniques. He asked us if we would show them to our customers, and we agreed.” That year, Modernbook and Fan Ho held a solo exhibition of his Hong Kong work. It was the first time anyone had seen the images since the 1960s.

Ho passed away in San Jose in 2016. Modernbook continues to publish three monographs of his work — *Hong Kong Yesterday*, *The Living Theatre*, and *A Hong Kong Memoir*. “Fan Ho is remembered for creating some of the most iconic images of mid-century Hong Kong,” says Yedinak. “People are just drawn to his work: there is a magic in his pictures that cannot be put into words.” •



Sun Rays, 1959



Dim Sum, 1961



Approaching Shadow, 1954



A Day's End, 1962