

Furuya, Seiichi. 2022. *First Trip to Bologna 1978 / Last Trip to Venice 1985. Marseille: Chose Commune.*

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SEIICHI FURUYA was born in Izu, Japan, in 1950. After completing his studies in photography at Tokyo Polytechnic University, he embarked on a journey to Europe via the Trans-Siberian Railway in 1973. He settled in Austria, first in Vienna, then relocating to Graz in 1975. There, in 1978, he met Christine Gössler, who would become his wife and the defining subject of his life and practice as an artist. They married that same year. Following a brief return to Japan, the couple moved back to Europe, living in Vienna, Dresden, and finally East Berlin.

On his website (<https://www.furuya.at/en/home.html>), the photographer shares that Christine began manifesting symptoms of schizophrenia in 1982. By 1983, she required hospitalization in Graz and was subsequently admitted to psychiatric facilities on a regular basis. On October 7, 1985, shortly after noon, Christine took her own life by jumping from the ninth floor of the building where she lived with her husband and their son.

While Seiichi Furuya's photographic work encompasses various subjects – notably his compelling documentary work capturing East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall through the perspective of a foreign resident – Christine Gössler remains the central figure of his creative vision. She has been the subject of numerous exhibitions and photobooks spanning the last four decades, transforming personal tragedy and the experience of mourning into a sustained meditation on love, loss, and memory.

In 1989, Furuya published his first book about Christine: *Christine Furuya-Gössler, Mémoires, 1978-1985* (Camera Austria). This seminal work established the template for subsequent publications, comprising archival photographs taken during the years Christine was alive and integral to the photographer's daily life. The images reveal an intimate world: portraits of Christine, their son, fragments of their shared domestic spaces, candid shots of family trips, portraits of friends and relatives, and the ephemeral moments of daily life.

Following the inaugural *Mémoires*, a series of books emerged that would collectively be known as the “Mémoires” series, though not all bear this title explicitly. This body of work includes *Mémoires 1995* (Scalo Books, 1995), *Christine Furuya-Gössler, Mémoires 1978-1985* (Korinsha Press, 1997), *Portrait* (Fotohof, 2000), *Last Trip to Venice* (self-published, 2002), *Alive* (Scalo, 2004), *Mémoires 1983* (Akaaka, 2006), *Mémoires 1984-1987* (Izu Photo Museum/Camera Austria, 2010), *Border* (Spector, 2014), *WHY DRESDEN 1984/2015* (Spector, 2017), *Face to Face* (Chose Commune, 2020), and *Our Pocketkamera 1985* (Camera Austria, 2023).

Alive stands out among this extensive corpus. Published by the legendary Swiss publisher Scalo in 2004, *Alive* contains work created by Furuya during the fifteen years preceding its publication. The title itself – *alive* in contrast to *dead* – immediately signals to those familiar with Furuya's work an implicit dialogue with Christine's absence. Throughout the book's many photographs, we are invited to perceive Christine's spectral presence through her very absence. *Alive*, ostensibly about “life after Christine”, paradoxically becomes a testament to a life perpetually defined in relation to her memory. Christine remains the central subject of

Furuya's photography precisely because her ghost continues to inhabit his world long after her death in 1985.

While *Alive* chronicles Furuya's life following his wife's death, he cannot resist including her photographs. The anachronism directs the viewer to the very nature of this haunting: as a photographer who devoted himself to capturing his wife's image during the most significant years of their lives, that image never dissolved, becoming instead crystallized for eternity. With her physical disappearance, her body was replaced by photography, which assumed a special status in Furuya's existence, functioning not merely as a memento of the past but as an actualization of desire *in the present*. By making Christine the enduring theme of his work, and with photography serving as both his job and way of life, Furuya succeeds in re-materializing Christine through imagery, bringing her into the now in which he continues to live, work, and love.

However, *Face to Face*, published in 2020 in France by Chose Commune, arguably became Furuya's most celebrated work to date. The book's construction is elegantly simple: divided into eight chapters corresponding to the years between 1978 and 1985, each spread presents two juxtaposed photographs – a portrait of Christine on one side, a portrait of Seiichi on the other. This symmetrical arrangement emerged from a fortuitous discovery. While cleaning his attic at the end of 2018, Furuya uncovered forgotten materials related to Christine that would subsequently provide him the foundation for three books: *Face to Face*, *First Trip to Bologna 1978 / Last Trip to Venice 1985*, and *Our Pocketcamera 1985*. The first material he chose to develop were portraits of himself taken by Christine during the same sessions in which he photographed her.

Face to Face comprises these double portraits, captured at approximately the same time. Furuya incorporates cinematic grammar into his work through the shot/reverse shot technique, transforming each spread into a screen where a “split screen” brings off-frame elements into the frame, creating the illusion that nothing exists beyond this man and this woman. Although the portraits were not taken at precisely the same moment, their juxtaposition creates a compelling illusion of simultaneity. Each spread virtually documents a moment when Seiichi Furuya and Christine Gössler looked at each other, literalizing the concept of co-presence within the materiality of the book's pages. Furuya transforms these individual portraits into “incomplete portraits” that achieve completion only within the book, where two fragmentary halves join to recreate a promised wholeness. The composition represents a unity that was lost in life with Christine's death but can continue to exist in the material form of books through the careful arrangement of photographs. *Face to Face* becomes the space where the couple can finally reunite in the same sphere of existence as images. Indeed, beginning with the work initiated in 1989, both Christine Gössler and, to some extent, Seiichi Furuya have been transformed into books, into pictures, and consequently into ghostly entities.

When *Face to Face* was published, Furuya declared it would be the final entry in his *Mémoires* series. Nevertheless, two additional books have since emerged, including *Our Pocketcamera 1985*, released in 2023 by Camera Austria. This latest work comprises photographs taken with a Kodak Instamatic, a small camera that Furuya had given to Christine, with which she used to document her daily life dur-

ing her final year. Apart from Christine's photographs, the book incorporates images taken by their son, Komyo, Furuya's mother-in-law Josefina, and Seiichi himself.

The true protagonist of *Our Pocketcamera 1985* seems to be the Kodak Instamatic itself – an object that, passing from hand to hand while Christine is always nearby (on one side of the lens or the other), served as silent witness to an approaching tragedy. By recovering these images, some of which he may never have previously examined, Furuya views the past through the machine's eyes, now able to contemplate his own history. This perspective becomes particularly poignant in photographs taken at times when Furuya was working away from his family: the Instamatic allows him to glimpse what he didn't witness in the flesh and fill the gaps in his memory, making him somehow present in those final months of Christine's life, when he wasn't there – a form of redemption, in a sense.

While previous books had already included texts authored by Furuya, writing becomes a central feature of *Our Pocketcamera*. Opening and closing texts frame the entire work, functioning not as conventional prefaces or postscripts but as first and final diary entries. In between, photographs are often accompanied by additional texts of varying lengths, all written in the first person. The diaristic dimension that has long characterized Furuya's photographic practice flows here into the quasi-literary form of the book itself.

Our Pocketcamera becomes a diary written in the present tense about images captured in a distant past. Sometimes the entries simply identify photographic content, but on other occasions the descriptions have a narrative form. In these moments – often speculative, because the author cannot recall what was occurring in the photographs – the book gains power as an object that questions the mnemonic properties of photography. His use of language is particularly revealing. At one point, he writes: "It looks like she's in the process of making tofu. We used to grow soybeans in the field behind my mother-in-law's house and make tofu from them". Elsewhere: "I do not remember if we all visited the observation deck of the Berlin Television Tower together, or if only Christine went up with Komyo". These tentative formulations – "it looks like", "I do not remember" – underscore the paradoxical relationship of photography with memory, simultaneously preserving and obscuring the past it purports to document.

Intriguingly, Furuya's own recent past makes way into the book, drawing attention to the fact that his photobooks – and the "photographic Christine" they construct – have themselves become a material outlet for his art. At one point, he writes: "In the early afternoon of May 20, 2022, I was sitting on a plane, looking out the window. The destination of my journey was Lucca. I was on my way to the opening of 2022 Photolux Festival, where I also had a solo exhibition of my work featuring for the most part photographs from my book *Face to Face*, published in 2020". This self-reflexive gesture reveals how the books have become part of Furuya's ongoing life narrative, creating recursive loops between past and present, between Christine and her photographic incarnation.

The intertwining of books was already evident in Furuya's practice – photographs repeated across volumes, stories retold – but perhaps the most striking example of this is *First Trip to Bologna 1978 / Last Trip to Venice 1985*, published by Chose Commune in 2022. Twenty years earlier, Furuya had self-published *Last*

Trip to Venice 1985, and the text from that earlier edition, reproduced in the 2022 volume, explains the work's genesis in a characteristically diaristic form: "The destination did not matter. 'Somewhere far away'. 'Just the two of us', she suddenly said during the second night after returning home. She had been hospitalized for about a week. I, too, was in the mood to leave home, where the oppressive smell of sickness seemed to have spread". They took a midnight train to Venice, arriving the next morning to find "the lagoon spread before us flat and colorless". After two days of aimless wandering, they returned in the rain. "On an autumn day, a few months later, she ended her life by her own will in East Berlin", he concludes. "The last trip and her death."

The Venice series derives from two rolls photographed during those final days together. Christine appears with shaved hair, emaciated, with pronounced dark circles – truly the face of a woman about to be overcome by illness. Some images appear to be double exposures, which Furuya explains resulted from one roll being photographed twice: first in Venice, then months later in East Berlin, where he had moved alone to start a new job while Christine was again hospitalized. In these superimpositions, images of the last trip coexist with images from East Berlin, creating two types of hauntings. The overlap of Berlin and Christine's face suggests both a foreboding of his future "separation" from her and the impossibility of true freedom from her ghostly presence.

During the 2018 attic excavation, Furuya discovered Super 8 films and audio recordings of Christine's voice. Among the films were three reels – totalling about twenty minutes – shot in March 1978, approximately three months after the couple first met, documenting their inaugural trip together to Bologna. The idea emerged to create a book uniting their first and last journeys. *First Trip to Bologna 1978* comprises frames from these Super 8 films, while the Venice series represents their final voyage together. The book thus symbolically delimits the period of Furuya's life, from 1978 to 1985, when a living Christine was the center of his existence.

The duality recalls Nobuyoshi Araki's famous *Sentimental Journey / Winter Journey*, which begins with the photographer's honeymoon and ends with the days surrounding his wife Yoko's death. However, Furuya's structure is more complex. Rather than following a chronological order, the book features two covers – two beginnings and two endings that meet in the center. One cover reads *First Trip to Bologna 1978*, the other *Last Trip to Venice 1985*. This organization destroys the expectation of temporal progression, questioning the hierarchy between the trips while reminding us of Furuya's true subject: the strange, decidedly non-chronological temporality of memory.

With the two trips meeting at the book's center, this midpoint acquires the status of both "middle" and "whole". The center becomes equivalent to the life shared between Furuya and Gössler from the first trip to the last. This convergence point works symbolically as the entirety of Furuya's meaningful existence, as if nothing preceded the first trip and nothing followed the last except the constant return to the time spent with Christine. The years with Christine become the absent core of the book, the iceberg of which the two trips are visible tips. This differs markedly from Araki's approach, for whom "life after Yoko" remained about cele-

brating life, not merely contemplating death. Araki continued constructing the present, while Furuya seems unable to cease living in a present decisively informed by the past when Christine was still alive.

This temporal collapse becomes explicit in a reference to Chris Marker's film *La Jetée*, arguably the most influential photo-film in history. Near the end of *First Trip to Bologna 1978*, we see four frames: close-ups of Christine's face, naked, lying in bed. In the first, she looks offscreen; in the second, she faces the camera (Furuya, and by extension, the viewer); in the third, she smiles at the camera; in the fourth, she continues smiling with her eyes closed. This sequence strongly evokes the famous scene in *La Jetée* where the woman looks at the protagonist – the film's only moment of actual movement, where lovemaking becomes analogous to the desire for living. Marker's film is renowned for its meditation on love and memory while reflecting on tensions between photography and cinema.

Furuya's book addresses these same concerns in a different way, presenting photographs in one series (Venice) and film frames in the other (Bologna). While the Super 8 footage inevitably morphs into photography within the book format, it maintains an unmistakable connection to its cinematic origins. We are invited to mentally animate the presented frames, which we accomplish with relative ease, perhaps because we sense the vivid life in these images documenting a first meeting, the beginning of a relationship and a shared existence. There, Christine emerges as a healthy woman full of apparent vitality, contrasting strikingly with the ghostly figure of the last trip to Venice. By associating cinema with life and its potency, Furuya reiterates photography's connection to death – evident not only in the Venice series but throughout most of his work.

First Trip to Bologna 1978 / Last Trip to Venice 1985 may represent Furuya's most successful attempt to bridge the ontological distance between the living Christine and the photographic Christine, creating a space where both versions of her can coexist.

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